

?Solutions don?t come as a result of war?



By Brock Weir

Second World War Veteran Carl Bedal often spends this time of year in schools sharing his wartime experiences with students. This Remembrance Day was no exception as he joined fellow veterans Jack Crone and Peggy Strange, all residents of the Hollandview Trail Retirement Community, at Rick Hansen Public School on Friday for a morning of Remembrance. Greeted and farewelled with a flurry of handshakes from excited and thankful students, the veterans listened intently as the students paid tribute to the fallen through spoken word, interpretive dance, and stirring video.

?It is very important for those of us who are veterans to be a part of youth celebrations such as this,? said Mr. Bedal. ?I feel a responsibility as a veteran to do this sort of thing on a regular basis as long as I am able.?

These were sentiments echoed by Sergeant Carl Coney, a currently serving member of the RCAF who made his second Remembrance Day visit to the school.

?My experience has reinforced the value of veterans,? Sgt. Coney told the attentive group of youngsters. ?It reminds me of the critical roles the Canadian uniform has played ? and continues to play ? in our country.?

Paying tribute to his forebears, Sgt. Coney shared with students the experiences of First World War veterans at Hill 70, Passchendaele and Vimy Ridge in the First World War, as well as the latter day battles, victories and losses in Dieppe, Hong Kong, the Battle of the Atlantic, D-Day, the Italian Campaign and more.

?More than one million Canadian and Newfoundlanders served during the war, and that is incredible when you think we had a population of only 11 million at the time,? he said. ?We must never forget the sailors, soldiers, and air crews who fought in the past, whether a century ago or a decade ago. On any given day, thousands of servicemen and women are deployed on missions or exercise, leaving behind the comfort of their civilian life.

?That is the fundamental link between the Canadian military men and women, and those who came before us who served to defend the safety of Canadians. We often ask what people can do to thank us for our service. A ?thank you? is enough. It is an honour and privilege to put on the uniform every day to defend our country and those we are remembering this week.?

Veterans received more than a simple thank you, however, the following morning as more than 1,000 Aurorans joined scores of currently serving military personnel, veterans, cadets, and dignitaries at the Aurora Cenotaph for the traditional and moving Remembrance Day service.

This year's service had an extra layer of pomp and circumstance as Afghanistan veterans Corporal Gordon Pompeil and Warrant Officer Nemeth, accompanied by a flypast of a Hercules aircraft from the RCAF, officially dedicated the latest addition to the Peace Park: A decommissioned Light Armoured Vehicle (LAV) which will serve as a permanent tribute to the men and women who served in Canada's most recent international conflict.

Before the parade and ceremony began on Saturday, the vehicle was a focal point for dozens of observers who came into the park for a closer look.

Among them was Master Corporal Kelsey McGregor of the Queen's York Rangers, along with her son Ethan. Master Corporal

McGregor and her husband both trained in LAVs like the one now in place just north of the Cenotaph.

‘It is very cool,’ she said. ‘Both Ethan’s dad and I both qualified in this vehicle and it is shocking to see it up as a monument considering we are still using them! I think it is a very fitting tribute. This is what people think of [when they hear about] the armoured corps, especially what we do, and as a monument I think it is very nice.’

Following the students’ poignant tribute to the veterans in their presence, tributes filtered through lenses thankfully far removed from the very real experiences that were commonplace for Mr. Bedal, Mr. Crone, and Mrs. Strange, Mr. Bedal said events like these provide a number of valuable learning opportunities for the up and coming generation.

‘I hope they realise war is not a very nice thing,’ he said. ‘It is terrible and solutions don’t come as a result of war. It is important that they see us at this time of year, realise what our contributions were, and what the result of our contributions were as far as Canada is concerned.’