

Veterans, families, students gather on the eleventh day of the eleventh month



By Brock Weir

When Laurie Cook pinned on her grandmother's silver cross and her own mother's silver cross pendant on Wednesday morning, she did so with pride.

This was once an exercise which filled her with sadness. But, over the passage of time, this sadness gave way to a very unique sense of pride, a torch Ms. Cook hopes is carried by future generations.

And there she stood, ramrod straight in a vivid blue coat, her grandmother's silver cross catching the briefest glimpse of sunlight on an otherwise dreary day, standing tall among those who surrounded her ? students from nearby schools.

?This is in memory of my father who was killed in December, 1944, in a Lancaster aircraft over Germany,? she said. ?At that time, the mothers of the airmen or soldiers were given the Memorial Cross on a bar and the wives were given the pendant. Each have the name, rank and number of [my father] Frank Coulson.?

Ms. Cook had just turned eight when her father was killed. She still remembers military brass knocking on her family's front door to tell them Coulson was missing in action, but she remembers little about the man himself, as her father left to fight when she was six and meetings were very limited after that.

?He was apparently a daredevil in his younger days,? she said with a smile. ?My husband, who also served in the Air Force, happened to meet up at the cemetery in Germany a few years ago with the brother of the pilot in my dad's crew. He just happened to be there at the same time. He told us ?although some of the crew would say, Oh, I can't fly today, or I have a cold, Frank Coulson never said he couldn't fly.' It was really good to hear that from somebody else.

?[On Remembrance Day] there is a sense of loss, but a sense of pride that because of him, and many, many more, that we have the freedom we have in Canada today. At ceremonies like this, there is a sense of pride. I don't feel much sadness anymore, but it took many years for it to go away.?

Veterans as venerable as 102 attended Wednesday's ceremonies at the Aurora Cenotaph, alongside politicians from every level of government, including newly-minted Aurora-Oak Ridges-Newmarket Member of Parliament Leona Alleslev, herself a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force, and representatives from a multitude of community organizations.

?We have lots left to do as countries and nations,? said Dave Franklin, President of the Aurora Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion. ?At our Veterans' Dinner on Saturday night, I made a short speech extracted from our Legion Magazine. We heard the outcry of Never Again, but it is happening again. We have hundreds of thousands of innocent people being slaughtered and millions on the run. We cannot fail to answer the signals that are being called out to us. It is an obligation and a duty for us to protect the innocent and the weak, and we have done so in the past and I am sure we will do so as and when we are needed.

?I would like to thank all of you for coming out on this day that reminds all of us how the weather can impact on how we feel. Imagine being surrounded by cannon fire, exploding mortars and bullets whizzing by our bodies as we are experiencing bad weather on top of it. Fortunately, we do not and we are not in our country subject to that kind of an environment.?