

For Insert October 27, 2004

MY SOAPBOX
BY
DOROTHY WILSON

Hi Fellow Seniors:

Over the next few weeks you will be reading my interviews with veterans as well as my own thoughts as to why November 11th should be a Statutory Holiday in Ontario. The Prime Minister's Office has notified me that this is a Provincial matter and should be handled through the Province. Ontario and Quebec are the only Provinces that do not have November 11th as a Statutory Holiday. Our Government should be ashamed that we do not honour our veterans with a 'special day', but more on that later.

Their days are quieter now, the only loud noises they hear are cars and trucks passing by and the quality of their food has improved dramatically. But this was not always the case for the three veterans I interviewed at Waverley Mansion. Their stories are varied but because of space limitations I am only printing a paragraph for each of them.

Robert G.I. Patterson (known as Dick), Royal New Zealand Navy, South Pacific. Dick joined the navy when he was 18 years old in Wellington, N.Z. One year later he joined the crew of the H.M.S. Mati, which was a merchant ship converted to mine sweeping and anti-submarine duties. Their mine sweeper escorted American supply ships en route to Guadalcanal during the offensive to take back the islands in the South Pacific. They helped to train Americans in anti-submarine detection. During the offensive Dick's commanding officer had a meeting with Admiral Nimitz because a Japanese air gunner was spotted shooting down American planes when they came in for a landing on Guadalcanal. Three British ships were sent to bombard the location, but once they started shooting they received a message that the American Marines had taken the location the night before. Dick also told me of the time when American dive bombers attacked their ship because they thought it was a Japanese ship. He and his wife immigrated to Canada in 1962 where he worked as an ex-ray technician at Victoria Hospital until he retired.

Fred McCullagh joined the Hamilton Light Infantry and was later transferred to the Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps. He was sent to Halifax and processed overseas where his training continued. He eventually boarded an American warship leaving from Scotland and zig-zagged through the Atlantic and Mediterranean to be landed in Sicily. Fred said the day they landed it was pouring rain and they had no tents and no raincoats. His unit crossed into Italy and proceeded north and east to Ortona where they engaged the Germans. Fred said they suffered very heavy casualties and he lost his best friend in this engagement. The Germans held one side of the river and the Canadians held the other. They were finally pulled out of the area and proceeded through France up north to Holland where they joined other parts of the Canadian Army.

The war was ended but Fred decided to stay in the Army for another 27 years and at the end of the interview showed me his eleven medals which include five from World War II as well as one from NATO, one from United Nations Expeditionary Force, Civil Defense Medal and a Firefighters Medal. Fred married Peggy, an English girl and has one daughter, two grandsons and a great grandson.

Merle Tingley, Royal Canadian Corp of Signals (better known as Ting whose cartoons are famous) Merle told me he came in on the tail end of the war and was sent to Germany in 1945 where he printed the Army Newspaper called "The Maple Leaf". While in Germany he made trips to Berlin and Hamburg where he encountered massive destruction. He saw Canadians setting up food distribution areas to help the hungry. He was a war correspondent and after World War II ended he was sent on assignment to Korea, Vietnam and Congo.

My time with these three veterans seemed go quickly and I wish I could have stayed longer. If I have made any errors, I apologize in advance. I very much appreciate their sharing their experiences with me and would like to say THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES.

Bye for now.

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