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REMEMBRANCE DAY

Artillery equipment new addition to Acton Legion



The new M-109 sits behind the jetplane trainer at the Acton Legion.

Photo by Wes Kutasienski

Kathryn Boyle
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A new artillery piece has made its home at Acton Legion Branch 197.

On Oct. 22, after three years of asking and hoping, the legion received the M-109 self-propelled 150-millimeter howitzer. At the head of the process was Wes Kutasienski, who's been a member of the legion for over 20 years, and the task of receiving the equipment proved to be quite painful.

"Dealing with the different levels of our government, there had to be clearance from the U.S. Department of State because the machine was built in the U.S. in 1975," he explained. "It took a while to work through that and the DND (Department of Defense) and the Armed Forces to get the monument here in Acton."

"It's been a long, slow process."

As soon as Kutasienski received security clearance, the M-109 became available and he accepted the offer immediately. He then dis-

closed where the monument would be located and what type of environment it would reside.

"They had to ensure it wasn't going to be stuck in a corner somewhere where no one would ever see it, because it is a monument," he said.

Finally, the monument arrived and settled upon its new home behind the Legion's jet plane trainer.

"It was a bit frustrating of times, but on the 22nd of October, it showed up at the branch," Kutasienski said. "We had a crane ready and we unloaded it, and it's now sitting on a permanent pad."

Now, Kutasienski is working towards obtaining a naval anchor from the Navy to complete the collection and strengthen the legion's presence in the community.

"It's important not only to myself but to all legion members to have items at our branch that remind everyone visiting of our Armed Forces in the past, present and of the future," he said. "It's a monument to the Armed Forces of Canada."

Memories of war still ring today

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Many lives were lost during the war, but a couple names still haunt Gerda.

"The worst thing I remember though was there were two Jewish families on our street. I played with one of the little girls and the men were very friendly with my dad," Gerda says. "When they were taken away, they took my friend, too."

"She never came back."

The girl's name was Clara Haagens. She lived with her mother and father and her toddler brother. On the way to the train that would take their family to a concentration camp, Clara's mother handed her baby boy to a stranger to take care of. He would make it through the war, but he would die in a car accident in 1946.

After the war ended, cargo planes hanging low in the sky dropped enormous amounts of food. Gerda's sister Beatrix would be introduced for the first time to bananas and chocolate. Her eldest cousin and youngest uncle would return from a work camp not physically scarred, but scarred in the places you couldn't see.

In 1954, Gerda moved to Winnipeg with her husband, Marius, and their two sons, Colby and Jack. Here, they would start a life with five more children, but the memories of the war would never quite wither away.

"There are always things that remind you again," Gerda says, as she sits in her chair with one hand on her walking cane. "The sound of boots still give me goosebumps."