

Howes, Dorothy

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'Germans tried to sink our ship' *Intel April 25/94 p.10*

Dorothy's dream to join 'sisters' came true in 1943

Bel-Bury (writer)

By Henry Bury
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It wasn't the Second World War itself — but getting there — that still causes an uneasiness in 76-year-old Dorothy Howes.

There was Howes, aboard the Queen Elizabeth luxury liner, along with hundreds of other Canadian nurses, doctors and soldiers, heading across the Atlantic Ocean for England. That was in the summer of 1943.

"All of a sudden, the Germans tried to sink our ship. We all prayed for hours that we wouldn't get hit," the Thurlow Township resident recalled Sunday.

"We didn't get hit. Wasn't that nice of the Germans?" Howes quipped.

After that episode, nothing came close to scaring Howes as she went about her duties as a registered nurse with No. 12 Canadian General Hospital — first in England, then France and finally near the war front in Belgium.

"That was my closest call...I was never scared otherwise because I was there to do a job. It was my own darned fault for being there. I could have stayed in Canada."

As a young teenager, Howes knew she wanted to be a registered nurse. Little did she know her career would take her overseas — to a war.

Born in England, Howes came to Belleville at the tender age of five. After leaving Prince of Wales School, she entered Belleville Collegiate Institute. In her fourth year of studies, she



Dorothy Howes

began her nursing training.

She got her nursing diploma from Belleville General Hospital in May of 1937 — two weeks before she turned 20.

She practiced her trade at BGH when war broke out in the fall of 1939.

"Immediately, I knew I wanted to go into the army and join everyone going overseas," she recalled.

Her road overseas got stalled with stints at the Kingston Military Hospital and the Canadian military headquarters in Ottawa.

She was finally allowed to go overseas in the summer of 1943.

"That was my dream come true...I was determined to go and I did, joining the rest of my nursing 'sisters,'" Howes said.

Her first stint was in a 1,200-bed hospital in Surrey, England, then on to France.

"They then decided we had to move closer to the front and here was this large convoy of trucks and equipment headed for Belgium," she said.

Howes was in Belgium for a year and vividly remembers May 8, 1945, the day the announcement came over radio that the war has ended.

"I was walking in the ward, looking after 72 patients when the radio played the special news bulletin that 'hostilities had ceased and the war is over'. Then the radio played God Save the King. Every patient who could stand got up and stood to attention."

Howes was elated with the news.

"I knew then and there that no more people would be killed."

To this day, Howes is grateful for the opportunity of serving in the Second World War.

"All us nurses were a happy type. We did a lot of talking to patients to keep their minds off the war, to keep them from panicking. Without the sisters, I don't know what they would have done."

Her two-year nursing stint in the war is something Howes will always treasure.

"I've never regretted the experience."

Besides, she said, her nursing sisters deserve some credit for their role in the Second World War.

"Hopefully, we've made a difference in some people's lives."

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