

Bowermann, Violet

● City woman helped fill desperate need during war

Violet Camken Bowerman does not get out much anymore. Her back problems — a legacy from her contributions to the Second World War — have grown worse over the years. She may not even be able to attend the Remembrance Day ceremony at the Belleville Cenotaph today.

Bowerman, 84, enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force Women's Division in 1941, two years after the Great War began in Europe.

Recalling the war effort of the time, she explained the desperate need for new recruits.

"Men went to war first and they ran out of people. The war got so bad that they had to hire us women who were just washing dishes at home before that. The men went off to do something else and the women had to fill in for the men who used to pack those parachutes and all those things. I was one of the first

500 women in the Air Force. It became the greatest adventure of my life."

But then again she did not have much choice. Times were such that she and others like her were faced with the choice of joining the army and get a job or face starvation.

"It was very difficult times. See we didn't have jobs in those days.

There was that Great Depression and so when the war broke out, you got a job by joining the Air Force, Army or the Navy. We had a place to live, wonderful meals to eat and you're also paid. But there was no job outside of the Forces," she recalled.

She remembered working at the farm near Brighton where she had lived before the war started. Like many other people living in farms, her chores included picking apples and berries amongst many others.

Soon after joining the RCAF, Bowerman, along with others, was sent to the training camp

in the outskirts of Toronto. Having received her basic training here, Bowerman left for Rockcliffe, Ottawa for further training before moving on to a tour of duty at Trenton RCAF, 6RD.

She was assigned to the job of sewing parachutes and later graduated to the position of packing them.

"You had to learn how to make parachutes. I knew how to sew so I got that job. Making parachutes was not that easy. They're big and slippery because the fabric we used were nylon. You had to have help. There were usually three people — men and women combined," said Bowerman, chuckling at the thought.

The design for the parachutes was imported from Europe but that was unimportant to Bowerman.

"The only important thing was to make those parachutes right because if you didn't, someone could die and because all the parachutes have the names of those who had made them, you could be held responsible," she said.

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**— WAR VETERAN
VIOLET BOWERMAN**