

MAKE SURE OUR VETERANS' SACRIFICES WERE NOT IN VAIN

WE MUST REVISIT THOSE STORIES AND KEEP THEIR MEMORIES ALIVE, WRITES BROWN



TED BROWN
Column

Throughout my career as a journalist, I always looked forward to interviewing veterans, and in doing so, giving them recognition of their contribution to our freedom.

I interviewed some who were hesitant to share their stories, and others who maintained "the real heroes never came home." But I never truly believed that. All those who served willingly potentially put themselves in harm's way - whether they actually saw action or not.

I learned a lot during those interviews, how the most ordinary person could accomplish the most extraordinary actions in the heat of battle.

And I learned so much about war.

Bruce O'Connor told how the tail gunner in a Lancaster would knock all the glass out of the windows so they wouldn't frost up during battle. He also explained how machine gun ammo belts were load-

ed with variations of different shells - a tracer shell, an incendiary, armour piercing and so many other combinations to suit the fighting conditions. I just assumed they were all the same rounds in the ammo belt.

O'Connor flew several night missions over Germany and returned unscathed.

I wrote about the valour of Walter (Red) Asseltine, who single-handedly faced hundreds of enemy troops with a flame thrower April 16, 1945, in the town of Otterloo in Holland, coming through it seemingly unscathed.

I wrote that story at the request of his kids. Red had died a month before, and his kids had no idea why he was decorated with the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

I learned that his story didn't end with the war. Red's injuries showed up later, with the images of that battle keeping him awake all night and wearing on his mind for the rest of his life.

Red wasn't the only one. Georgetown resident John Wemyss spent five years as a prisoner of war, marching across Europe in a winter death march which saw hundreds die in their tracks. John's scars ran very deep from that experience.

A longtime personal friend of mine, Tom Given, told of a September 20, 1944,

action in a northern French seaside town called Le Portel, that would change his life.

Tom had spent five years overseas fighting the enemy when he took a spray from an enemy machine gun. He had his ticket home.

Georgetown veteran Tom Clapham's story was one of those that made one realize how isolating war can be. Tom and his group of 17 paratroopers, jumped out of a plane into the darkness as tracer bullets streaked up from the ground below, 12 hours before the Allied troops landed at Juno Beach in June 1944. In the dark, he located a half dozen of his colleagues, near the village of Varaville in France, not far from Caen, and they set up a barrier, preventing the enemy from advancing on troops landing at Juno Beach.

I also told Gilbert English's fascinating story, the only First World War vet I was honoured to interview. I sat in disbelief, listening to hear his descriptions of the hell of mud, death and no man's land.

I knew Trevor Williams and Bob McMenemy well, both of the Highland Light Infantry, who landed on Juno Beach together on D-Day, June 1944.

Like most who fought in the many wars, they remained best friends for life - all from mutually experi-

THE WAY WE WERE



Submitted by Heritage Halton Hills

Theophilus Norton, principal of SS#11, Glen Williams, stands outside his school in this 1911 photo. As the third school building to have been built in the village, it was the first constructed in brick. Originally a large single-storey five-bay brick schoolhouse, it featured a chimney at each end, a projecting central gabled entrance, plus a prominent cupola containing the school bell. Featuring characteristics of the Gothic Revival style of architecture, it was used for school purposes from 1873 to 1949. It is now a private residence and is designated under the Ontario Heritage Act.

encing hell on the battlefields of Europe.

There are countless other stories I've written over the decades, and they always make the shivers run up my spine when I reread

them.

But that's something we must continue to do. We must revisit those stories, and in doing so, keep their memories alive.

Because, if we don't,

their sacrifice will all be in vain.

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