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LEST WE FORGET: Georgetown piper Iris Irwin led an honour party, including flag-bearing members of the Acton branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, into the gym at St. Joseph School last Thursday for a Remembrance Day ceremony. — Frances Niblock photo



NO GLORY: Georgetown Royal Canadian Legion member Robert McNeilly told students at a Remembrance Day service at Acton's St. Joseph School last Thursday that there was no glory in Dieppe, France, where 907 Canadians died. — Frances Niblock photo

No glory in war – Legionnaire

BY FRANCES NIBLOCK
The New Tanner

There was no talk of the glory of war from the Royal Canadian Legion member who held students spellbound in the gym during the St. Joseph Catholic School Remembrance Day ceremonies on Thursday afternoon.

Georgetown Legion member Bob McNeilly was the guest of honour at the solemn ceremony, which began when a colour party, including members of the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 197 Acton, and Acton Sparks, Beavers, Brownies, Cubs, Guides and a Cadet who attend St. Joseph, were led into the gym by Georgetown piper Iris Irwin.

McNeilly, whose grandfather served in WWI, and father served in WWII, told the assembled students, teachers, staff and some parents that they need to remember more than the successes like Vimy Ridge in WWI and D-Day in WWII, because the real cost of freedom was the tremendous loss of life, including 907 Canadians at Dieppe, France.

While some see the raid on Dieppe as a useless slaughter, others insist it led to

the successful invasion of the continent two years later on D-Day. McNeilly said there were lessons to be learned, but they came at a horrid price.

Of the 4,963 Canadians involved in the raid on the French coast in August 1942, only 2,210 returned to England, and many of these were wounded. There were 3,367 casualties, including 1,946 prisoners of war and 907 Canadians lost their lives.

Reading from a poem, McNeilly summed up the cost of war.

*5,000 young lads began the attack
907 never came back
907 died for thee
907 that we might be free
907 not 14
907 but mere teens
The spiral of hate is so obscene.*

After the ceremony, McNeilly said he was impressed with the attentiveness and politeness of the students and those who stopped him in the hall to say "thank you."

McNeilly said he was invited to the Acton school because of his involvement with the annual Candlelight Tribute, when local school children mark Holland's Liberation Day by silently marching to local cenotaphs and

placing candles in honour of those who died in service to their country.

The students also heard another poem called "Thank You Soldier" written by the wife of a soldier.

In part, it reads...

Have you stopped to thank a veteran today for the price of freedom they had to pay

Did you gaze into those distant eyes, did you see the ghosts he can't deny

Do you think a soldier's heart is made of steel, because he was trained to kill he wouldn't feel

Did you know he mourns the lives he could not save, and walks with comrades in their graves

Do you remember the boy with innocence lost

Do you really know war's ultimate cost?

During the ceremony, the school's choir sang songs of peace and hope, and the Grade five class recited In Flanders Fields, before the students, staff and some parents, stood for a moment's silence.

The choir performed again the next day (last Friday) during Remembrance Day ceremonies at the Acton Cenotaph.

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