

When old warriors fade away

It's been a sad week.

After struggling with ailing health and the ravages of age, two of my old friends died last week. Both veterans of the Second World War, John Wemyss and Tom Given saw action in different parts of Europe, and both returned to tell the tale.

I was privileged—they allowed me to tell their stories as part of my Remembrance Day features.

John's was a story of sheer human endurance. A private in the Gordon Highlanders, his outfit was left behind to hold off the German advance as the rescue of Dunkirk was taking place in May 1940. Consequently, more than 10,000 Allied soldiers were captured and sent off to POW camps. John was held for five years, living on starvation rations.

As the war drew to a close, John then faced his ultimate physical challenge—to be marched across Europe, in the dead of winter, for hundreds of miles. During that death march, hundreds of his comrades died, freezing to death, or dropping in their tracks from sheer exhaustion and starvation.

John was hesitant to tell his story—he was a private man who didn't feel right talking of the atrocities of war. It just wasn't "appropriate". After months of reassuring him his story would be told in his own words, he cautiously agreed.

When published, John showed up at the office in his typical serious manner. I half-expected him to tear a strip off me for some detail he didn't like.

Instead he smiled.

"I want to shake your hand, Ted," he said, "For so long I was angry with young people who had no regard for veterans, but now I realize, if we don't tell the stories, how in hell will they ever know?"

Tom also recounted how he spent five years overseas, until September 1944, when he was wounded by machine-gun fire in Le Portel, France.

I loved to hear Tom tell stories—always with his dry sense of humour. When I first asked about telling his war story, he said "Sure, I can tell you about some of the funny things that happened."

I told him, yes I was looking for the funny things—but also the not-so-funny. He looked at me and said,

Ted Brown



"Okay, can we say it in nice words?"

After more than two hours, Tom had presented me with his story. Keeping with his request, I wrote it in 'nice words.'

Hearing of their deaths last week filled me with sadness. Not only had I lost two old friends, but the country has lost two warriors, so brave and unselfish, helping make this country what it is.

They say old warriors never die, they just fade away. Two good ones have 'faded away'—part of a dying breed.

There's a song by Eric Bogle entitled *And the band played Waltzing Matilda*. It's about First World War Australian soldiers slaughtered at Gallipoli, but the message is universal.

*'So now every April I sit on my porch,
And I watch the parade pass before me,
I see my old comrades how proudly they march,
Renewing their dreams of past glories,
I see the old men all tired, stiff and sore,
Those weary old heroes of a forgotten war,
The young people ask what are they marching for,
And I ask myself the same question.
And the band plays Waltzing Matilda,
And the old men still answer the call,
But year after year their numbers get fewer,
Some day none will march there at all.'*

I salute the memory of John and Tommy, two old friends—and warriors, who have 'faded away.'

—Ted Brown can be reached at tbrown@independentfreepress.com

Letter to the editor

Hornby resident pleased with work of town council

Dear editor,

I am writing you concerning the letter to the editor titled, Change in town council needed, as printed in your paper on Friday, February 24, by Mr. Jim Marshall, of Georgetown.

I, too, am a longtime Georgetownian born and raised here and also proud to admit it. I could not agree more with Mr. Marshall on his comments on our great town and tax hikes over the past 5-6 years. However, that is where the agreement ends.

A little research would clearly show Mr. Marshall that outside influences such as the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) and provincial downloading have influenced our budget. The Region of Halton, together with Provincial Greenbelt and Places to Grow legislation, are the factors in "the progress and growth of this beautiful town". Legislated provincial pooling has also added to the burden of our taxes. Our council and regional councillors have objected to this taxation for Toronto's social programs.

These additional taxes are the major factors in our tax hikes that he seemed to have missed in the Feb. 24 letter, and are out of

control of our Town council. Another fact is that Town treasurer Ed DeSousa is not a member of council, he is town staff.

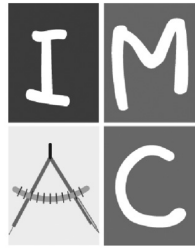
I do recall reading in your paper about this council being opposed to the GTA pooling (tax-sharing scheme), and how we now are finally getting our roads repaired through careful budgeting. I do not want anything for nothing, as I would also expect fair reimbursement for my services and/or products.

How soon we forget about the accomplishments of this council such as the hospital for one good example.

In short, speaking from a Ward 2 perspective, we have never had such a great council as this one for some time. Our Ward 2 representatives have been hands on all rural issues. Our mayor is the best in a long time; he is there for us fighting for the average guy and for what Mr. Marshall and I feel is a wonderful community.

We should be thankful for the dedication that (some) of these people put into their jobs at council. Instead of criticizing this council, how about a "well done", every once and while?

Erik Kowal,
Hornby



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