

PEOPLE: Dutch war survivor accompanies veterans, soldiers

Memories of death haunt trip home

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Marinus Jansen sat on the rooftop of his family's home with one of his brothers and watched paratroopers fall out of the sky as the Battle of Arnhem got underway in 1944.

"At first I thought it was fun, but it (wasn't)," Mr. Jansen said as he recalled a Second World War clash that took place just a few kilometres from his home in Holland 67 years ago.

"My brother and I actually (sat) on the roof watching it until shrapnel and stuff started flying around and dad says that's it, come down," the Vandorf Road resident said.

Mr. Jansen immigrated to Canada less than 10 years later because he knew here is where he would one day be able to own his own horticultural business.

Throughout the decades, Mr. Jansen has returned home to visit family and witness the rebuilding of his hometown, which was about 80 per cent destroyed during the Battle of Arnhem, he said.

Earlier this year, Mr. Jansen, 82, returned for perhaps his last time, but with veterans and members of the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment.

COULD NOT ENLIST

Mr. Jansen connected with the group earlier this spring when a fellow Dutch immigrant, Ralph DeGroot, invited him on the overseas trip that took them to Holland, Vimy Ridge and Juno Beach.

Although Mr. Jansen was able to avoid participating in combat in the Second World War, "the military has always held an interest to me," he said. "I think if I would have gone in the army, I would have made the army my career."

Mr. Jansen avoided combat because, he said, back then if a family member died during the war, then the next in line was exempt. He lost a brother.

Going to Vimy Ridge was an "eye opener", Mr. Jansen said.

"You read about it, but I never realized what these guys went through. It was just unbelievable," he said. "It was, of course, more like



STAFF PHOTO/SUSIE KOCKERSCHIEDT

Marinus Jansen looks at photographs from his trip to Europe to visit cemeteries and other war sites with veterans and soldiers. The Stouffville man saw people killed in his native Holland during the Second World War. "You read about it, but I never realized what these guys went through. It was just unbelievable," he said.

a man-to-man fight. The trenches are still there, so you walk through the trenches. The underground tunnels are there. I didn't even know the Canadian Army was digging underground tunnels to get to the Germans and the Germans are digging tunnels to get to them."

When the group of about 40 men made their way to Arnhem, it was Mr. Jansen's turn to tell them what he experienced.

The Gestapo and Nazis ruled by fear, according to Mr. Jansen, who vividly recalled the day all available men aged 18 to 80 were told to report to the train station. They were to head off to the front lines to dig trenches, he said.

Only about eight or nine pro-Germans showed up, according to Mr. Jansen.

"So the next day a platoon of German soldiers came to the village

and they arrested six prominent citizens and three of them were the principals of the schools," he said. "They shot them, three principals, right in the middle of the village. Then what came around 'if you don't show up tomorrow, we'll shoot the other three.'"

Shortly thereafter, the Jansen family went from witnessing incidents of violent death, to being directly threatened.

The risk of imminent death came to the Jansen household when officers arrived looking for one of his brothers who failed to report for duty.

"My dad wasn't home. I was home ... I said I don't know where he went. ... And so they kept harassing (my mother) kind of and asking whatever and he put a revolver to my mother's head and he said: 'where is your son?' Mr. Jansen recalled.

No one in the family knew where Ryk was, according to Mr. Jansen, who brought his brother to the train station a few weeks earlier for his deployment. The two even discussed the possibility of Ryk not going.

'You cannot forget. You will never forget. But there comes a time that you have to start to forgive.'

"He says no, no. He says I'm going to go," Mr. Jansen recalled.

But Ryk apparently already had a plan in place. He ended up living four kilometres away from his family's home with one of their sisters as part of the underground. When the family found this out, years later, it was also revealed for the first time that this sister and her husband were part of the resistance.

BROTHER IN HIDING

The war created a hatred of Germans for Mr. Jansen and his family. But over the years, that contempt has subsided, somewhat.

"You cannot forget. You will never forget. But there comes a time that you have to start to forgive," he said.

Prior to this trip, Mr. Jansen was never a member of any legion, but he wanted to participate in all the official ceremonies, so he joined the Stouffville Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 459.

"I feel stupid. Why I didn't do that 10 years ago, because I've always had a weak spot for the military," he said.

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