

Honouring our Heroes

BY SANDRA BOLAN
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Combat wasn't in cards for this Scot

School evacuation drills and learning how to duck under the kitchen table, as fast as his young legs would take him, became part of 13-year-old Walter Maitland's daily life in 1939.

Mr. Maitland, who is one of the Stouffville Legion's Second World War veterans, had one task during the early days of the war. He rode his bike around the village of Ballater, a borough in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, notifying residents of a German raid "which, they did quite often near the city where we lived".

Another youngster cycled the village ringing the all-clear bell.

"The guy I used to feel sorry for in the village was the telegram boy, because he used to cycle and have to tell people, hand them a letter, say their husband or somebody had passed away. That was a difficult job, sad

sight," Mr. Maitland recalled while talking to The Sun-Tribune about what life was like for him during the Second World War.

Mr. Maitland was too young to take part in combat missions, but he knew he wanted to be an air gunner. At 14, he joined the air cadets and at 17 had passed all the required tests for when the British National Service came calling.

At 18, he got the call, reported to the Gordon Highlanders' infantry and trained for combat.

"The Canadian war ended after D-Day (June 6, 1944) but the U.K. went on to Japan," he said.

While making their way to Japan by train and ship, the soldiers learned the Japanese surrendered and the war was over.

The troops were taken off the Japan-bound ship in Alexandria, Egypt, and sent to Palestine to take on security duties.

"It was a British mandate, so British troops

had to be there," he said.

Following his short stint in the army, Mr. Maitland spent eight years as a reservist, as per British law.

As a reservist, Mr. Maitland took part in the Suez Crisis in 1956. After that, he retired from active duty.

However, between the Second World War and the Suez Crisis, Mr. Maitland took part in a childhood dream.

He was a member of the royal guard at Balmoral Castle's Gillies Ball in 1947, which had in attendance, then-Princess Elizabeth and her date Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

Mr. Maitland also became heavily involved in the pipe bands.

As a member of the Ontario Mass Pipes and Drums, he played at the opening of the Juno Beach Centre in 2003. He also played in France and Germany and is still a member of the Richmond Hill Centennial Pipe Band.

War is a mean thing to be in, veteran says

BY ADAM MARTIN-ROBBINS
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When he enlisted with the Canadian army in 1951 at the height of the Korean War, Roland Robinson was just looking for a change of pace.

But the terrifying experiences he suffered during his time fighting overseas still haunt him.

"You can't really explain what it's like," said the affable 82-year-old Woodbridge resident. "You don't want to be there, let's put it that way."

Born and raised in a farming community outside Ottawa, Mr. Robinson was working for Ontario Hydro when he decided at age 20 to volunteer for the army.

"I just got a little tired of doing construction work and I wanted something new," he said. "It was a hell of a way to get it. They say Korea's pretty nice now, but I sure don't want to go back."

A year later, he was on the front lines of a fierce war, totally unprepared for the horrors he would witness over the next 14 months.

"You were always engaged with the enemy," he said. "The music used to start at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. But at 7 o'clock at night, when they quit, that's when they hit you. And you didn't know which company they were going to barrage. And, boy, when they threw a barrage in, they threw a barrage in — they didn't fool around."

Much of his time as an infantryman was spent out on patrol.

To this day, he doesn't really like talking about it.

But last week, sitting at a large round table

at the Woodbridge legion hall — his wife, Naida Chantler, by his side — Mr. Robinson recounted a few stories.

He clearly recalls a day out on patrol with his company when their lieutenant told the men to stay put while he went ahead to scout things out.

"(The enemy) threw a concussion grenade over and it landed right between his (lieutenant) feet," Mr. Robinson said.

He and another soldier had to carry the badly wounded officer back to safety on a stretcher.

"She was a long stretch carrying 160 some-odd pounds," he said. "It was a long procedure. I can tell you."

Another memory that still upsets him is of poor Korean women pressing themselves against razor-sharp barbed wire fencing, risking serious cuts, to grab scraps of food for their starving children.

"They leaned into that (barbed wire) just to try to get what came out of our mess tins; what we were throwing in the garbage," Mr. Robinson said, tears welling up in his eyes.

These experiences took a heavy toll.

"He's a wreck now," Ms Chantler said. "You touch him on the shoulder and he doesn't know whether there's someone there ready to shoot him or not. I think most of the guys that were in the war are like that."

The Korean War began June 25, 1950, and ended with a ceasefire three years later, on July 27, 1953.

In total, more than 26,000 Canadians served in the war and 516 of them died — making it the third deadliest conflict in our country's history.



STAFF PHOTO/ADAM MARTIN-ROBBINS

Roland Robinson fought in the Korean War and describes the experience as something "you can't really explain".

It wasn't all bad, of course.

Mr. Robinson made some lifelong friends during the war.

"There's quite a few buddies out there (I see) every so often," he said. "They were young guys like myself. I had more laughs on them."

After the war ended, Mr. Robinson returned home and, eventually, went back to work at Ontario Hydro.

He remained a bachelor until 1989, when

he surprised Ms Chantler, the widow of a close friend from work, by proposing during a trip to Las Vegas with her brother and sister-in-law.

Heading into Remembrance Day, Mr. Robinson hopes future generations won't forget the sacrifices Canadian soldiers made — and continue to make.

"That is the No. 1 issue," he said. "Remember the veterans, what they did and what they went through. War is a mean thing to be in."