

Does York need its own military museum?

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As Remembrance Day dawns on York Region, we honour Canadian members of the armed forces who died in the line of duty. Beyond Nov. 11, most of our surviving veterans, unless in uniform, remain anonymous.

The names of York Region's fallen warriors since the first World War through to Korea are etched in 10 regional cenotaphs,

including a proud monument on Georgina Island. Since the death in 2010 of John Henry Foster Babcock at age 109, there are no surviving veterans of the Canadian military to have served in the First World War.

There's no single, public repository of living veterans of the second World War through to recent Middle East conflicts. Remaining incognito, their military service and names shielded, is a personal preference for some, a result of suspect record keeping for others and a dictate of federal law for all.

Listing and recognizing patriots is a delicate, even vexing, issue for our veterans, historians and Royal Canadian Legion members and administrators.

Royal Canadian Legion Branch 414 in Woodbridge has 230 members, 60 of whom are veterans, president Jane Lowe said. The legion is busy preparing its Remembrance Day parade with ceremonies at the town's cenotaph where fallen hometown warriors are named and commemorated.

The names of the dead are publicly etched in the monument. Their living comrades remain unnamed, protected by the 1983 Privacy Act, a Canadian statute outlining how our federal government must handle the personal information of

Canadian citizens, permanent residents, and foreign nationals.

Ms Lowe, not unlike the region's eight legions and the Royal Canadian Legion Ontario Provincial Command in Aurora, cites the statute for declining requests for the names of living veterans.

A public homage to living veterans is unlikely, Provincial Command executive director Dave Gordon said. Privacy laws preclude naming citizens and, with 1,700 Canadian veterans of the Second World War and Korea dying monthly per Statistics Canada tallies, keeping track is increasing difficult.

"No one can give out information," Mr. Gordon, whose membership totals 135,000, said. "Even Veterans Affairs can't identify people. Since the Privacy Act everyone's gun shy."

A Veterans Affairs spokesperson confirmed that those who receive federal services and benefits are insulated from disclosure.

King resident Len Whines, 82, served as a British Forces Staff Sgt. and as Canadian Forces Lt.-Col. Mustering at the Aurora Legion 385 this week prior to "going popping", selling the iconic red emblems, Mr. Whines said he remains active with the legion and dialogues with regional officials.

"As far as I'm concerned, veterans are well respected in York Region," he said.

"Councils and mayors consult with me."

His concern is updating cenotaphs with the names of military personnel killed in more recent war zones, such as Afghanistan.

"Personally, veterans' names, if killed in battle, should be on the cenotaphs," he said.

One of his projects is to determine if memorial stones can be added to honour recently fallen soldiers.

Our legions are more than social centres, he said. Support programs, including Operation Leave The Streets Behind ensures that every veteran who is homeless or near homeless finds support.

"Those who need help aren't always easy to find," he said. "That's an issue. If we don't know who they are, we can't help."

Mr. Whines endorses the work of the Georgina Military Museum and its cofounder, Phil Craig.

A non-profit, community-based organization the museum provides school tours and the public with a highly textured multi-dimensional presentation of the involvement of members of our society in Canadian wartime conflicts of past and present.

Local veteran records are thin because of changes in technology and the insufficient parameters and abilities of local organizations to create and maintain the lists, Mr.

See **NEED**, page 9.



SYLVIA MORRIS

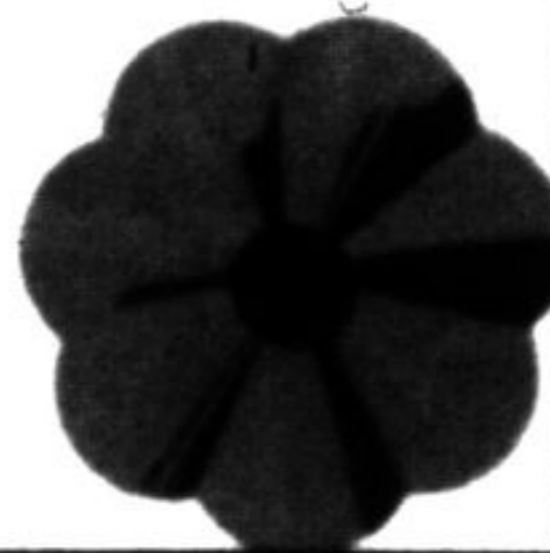
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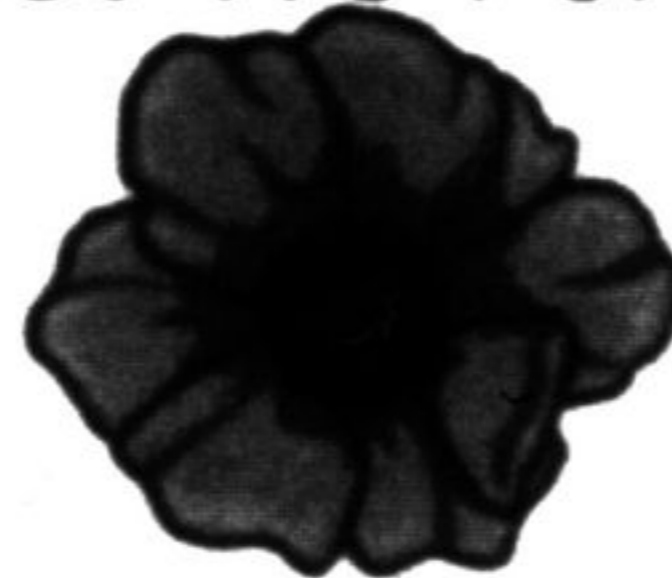
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