



We Will Not Forget

Canada's War Veterans

By Lorraine Payette

And the Brave keep falling to honour the names
Of the ones who have gone before...
Gordon Lightfoot, "Leaves of Grass"

For one day a year, we all remember. For that one morning, at 11:00 a.m., we stand at the roadsides, cenotaphs, cairns and assorted monuments to bow our heads and hear the reading of the roll – all those who gave their lives that we might live in peace and plenty. We sing our hymns, recite our prayers, bow our heads in gratitude, and then we walk away to rejoin the craziness we call our lives, quickly forgetting until we see the blood red poppy come out again.

But the vets remember. They forgive us our foolishness because we are young, we were never there, we cannot possibly understand. These are old people's stories, tales to be shared among themselves over a drink or in the warmth and near darkness of a quiet corner somewhere as children recant favourite ghost stories over a campfire. They can tell each other of the horrors, smile sadly and nod over the memories, then straighten quickly and change the subject as someone else approaches.

Wars are fought by children striving to become adults, young people whose sense of honour overcomes all fears and sends them into the heart of battle. It can be hard to remember that these now frail figures in wheelchairs or using walkers, many living in assorted residential facilities reserved for the

elderly, were once young and vibrant. They went to high school, had sweethearts and best buddies, played hockey and curled, did everything teenagers and young adults still do today. Yet, when their nation called, they went without flinching to face whatever might befall them.

Young Tom Tindall landed with his comrades in Ghent, Belgium, Not so far from Flanders Fields in 1945. He was just 18, one of the many man-boys who had joined forces to fight the "Hun" and save the world from Nazi tyranny. After the appointment of Adolf Hitler as Chancellor of Germany in 1933, the rapid deterioration of socio-economic conditions in Germany (and into Europe) soon grew into a conflict which, in 1939, exploded into the nightmare known as World War II.

A Junior A hockey player in Hamilton, "Tommy" Tindall (as he was best known) was playing against Ted Lindsay and other notables of the day. But the needs of his country came first.

"I was asked if I would go with the Leafs or Detroit," he says. "You know what I said? I'm going home to see mother and join up. It was during the war and they were hard up for players. I was down at the Montreal training camp in 1943, a 17-year-old kid."



In May of 1944, just as soon as he was old enough to get in, he joined up.

"I tried the Air Force in Ottawa at 17, but you had to be 17 and a half with a parent's consent, so I came home and went and played Junior A hockey," he said. "I had a birthday in January but it was May when they finally took me up to Kingston. They took me on the train. A guy says to me, 'Where are you going?' and I said to join up, so he says, 'Then come with us.'"

Shipping to the east coast, he received some quick training. Then in February, 1945, he was shipped overseas.

"I got into the last part of the action," he said. "I started up at Ghent, Belgium, and on into Germany."

Tindall was with the Algonquin Regiment, Fourth Division, whose appointed task was to precede the main body of infantry and prepare the way. This was extremely perilous duty, resulting in many losses due to sniper fire.

"The last ten months of the war from Normandy in June 1944 to the German surrender in early May 1945 were very costly," said historian Bill Beswetherick of the Royal Canadian Legion Colonel Russel H. Britton Branch 92 in Gananoque. "Tom's battalion had a normal establishment of 1,000 officers and men – 65 officers and 1,235 soldiers were killed in ten months of fighting and over 3,000 were wounded. Only constant replacements such as Tom Tindall kept the unit up to strength."

Tindall's unit fought their way from Belgium, through the Netherlands and on into Germany. Amongst those killed in the final days of the War were two men from Gananoque - Private Bernard Sanders (Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada) and Lieutenant Paul Sampson (Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada).

In recent times, Tindall has celebrated both his 65th wedding anniversary and 65 years of membership in the Legion. On September 14, 2010, he was recognized and presented with a medal by Tony Steinburgen on behalf of the government of the Netherlands to mark his participation in the liberation of the Netherlands in 1945.

Tindall is only one of the remaining vets in Leeds-Grenville. Not all were as fortunate as he, but all remember every day what it was like and are thankful for what they were able to help preserve. They remember their fallen comrades, and honour them in their own way. And almost every day we lose another one to time, their bodies failing, their names too often becoming only words carved into stones in memorial parks and gardens.

We need to change that. As a collective body, we need to remember our vets, not only on November 11, not only when the poppies are in bloom, but every day. When the good things in life happen, thank the veterans who made this all possible. We must teach not only the children but ourselves to remember and honour.

We must never forget that in Flanders fields, the poppies still blow. **LH**



Clockwise: Saluting the cairn; Marching in Remembrance; "Tommy" Tindall not long after turning 18; Tom Tindall today

For more ideas on how to remember the Canadian veterans every day, please go to <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/youth-educators/grade-7-12/crtimes/2013> and read the Canada Remembers Times.

Please check in your community with your local legion where Remembrance Day Services will be held and please honour our vets by attending the service. Also, ask your legion about joining as an associate/affiliate or non-voting member and help financially to keep your local legion in your community.)