



Top Left: (L-R) Sir Henry Stevens and Henry Smid hold up a map that shows the route that was taken by Henry's Armoured Brigade.

Bottom Left: Henry Smid is at the far right in this family passport photo shortly after the war and before their immigration to Canada.

Above: Henry Stevens is seen barbering the hair of one of his comrades in front of their armoured vehicle.

Far Right: Sir Henry with his war medals

A TRIBUTE to a Special WWII Veteran

By Sally Smid

Henry Stevens is one of the few surviving WWII veterans in our area. Turning 98 this November 29th, he recalls his time of enlistment. "I had to do it," he explained. "We had to stop them and keep our freedom!"

Stevens was trained as a radio operator and was assigned to be a tank commander. He trained others to operate the radio and eventually moved to the rank of Lance Corporal. "Before going into the invasion, we were told that most of us would either be killed or captured," he recalls.

He was part of the 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade and landed on the shores of Normandy on July 26th 1944 as the commander of a Canadian armoured tank. "If we ever got hit we knew that we only had minutes to get out before the tank would explode," he explained. Several of the tanks that he commanded in fact were lost but more tragically was the loss of some of his comrades. He recalls the grueling days that ensued, witnessing much of the horrors of war. His brigade saw service in Belgium, Holland, and Germany before being disbanded in Henglo in the Netherlands in 1946. Stevens has many memories of his time in Holland especially.

Henry Smid was another survivor of that war. He and his family lived on a farm in Leeuwarden in the Netherlands at the time of Nazi rule. At 5 years old, he remembers the high stepping German soldiers marching in the street. He also recalls how his family feared their sudden visits as they looked to capture his father or uncles who often hid under a haystack on their farm. One uncle was in fact taken to a concentration camp. The Smid family also harbored several Jewish children from the city during the war, as did many other families. There was less scarcity of food on the farms than in the urban areas.

Stevens recalls his travels through Holland. "No one could cook potatoes like those Dutch women," he recalls. "Those folks there were very nice to us." Near the end of the war he recalls securing some meat and returning to share it with a grateful Dutch family. The day of Liberation was a joyous time and Smid recalls that the Dutch people were overwhelmed with gratitude to the Canadians who rescued them. This was perhaps one reason why many Dutch families made the choice to move to Canada after the war, as the Smids did, 70 years ago.

Upon leaving the military, Stevens worked in construction and became a minister with

the Independent Assemblies of God. He now resides in Athens where he helps care for his wife. Several years ago, he was recognized with the Knight of the National Order of the Legion Honour by decree of the President of France in a special ceremony in Ottawa. Today "Sir Henry" is often seen touring the streets of Athens on his motorized scooter and is always eager to joke and visit with anyone he may see.

Smid's family has gone on to farm, find employment, raise families, and give back to the country that gave so much to them at a time when their freedom and lives were in jeopardy.

Remembrance Day has a special meaning for these two Henrys. Stevens recalls his comrades who lost their lives and faithfully attends the ceremony at the Athens Cenotaph as perhaps the last living WWII veteran in the area. Last year he laid the wreath that honoured the servicemen who sacrificed so much.

Smid continues to honour them in displays provided by the local Athen's Museum where he is an active member. He speaks perhaps for so many others when he says, "We have to remember them. Without men like Sir Henry, we would not be here!" **LH**