

NOTL REMEMBERS



Top: Hundreds of people gathered in the rain to observe the Remembrance Day ceremony at the Old Town cenotaph. Below: Cadet Emily Abt leads her group. Bottom below: Flight Sgt. Mia Redeye guards the cenotaph during the ceremony, unmoving as rain pours down relentlessly. RICHARD HARLEY PHOTOS



Old Town ceremony draws hundreds of people in rain

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century ago might have been laid to rest in Flanders Fields.

Cadets, Mounties, firefighters and police officers were among the many who stood in uniform for Remembrance Day in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

By the end of the first ceremony downtown on Queen Street, most of them were soaked to the bone.

Later, glancing around Queenston through fogged-up glasses, Abt reflected on the soldiers who fought in two world wars.

They would have been through “much worse,” she said.

“Remembrance Day is one of the things that you can’t postpone and you can’t skip,” she added.

After spending hours on silent guard in rain-soaked garb at the town’s two cenotaphs, back at the Legion she and the other cadets were ready for a warm bowl of chili to chase out the cold.

Abt was joined by fellow

cadet Shay Vidal, who shared her sense of honour.

The two young people saw themselves as lucky because they never had to go through what their ancestors did.

“War is war and hell is hell,” Vidal said, paraphrasing a line from “M.A.S.H.” – once his father’s favourite TV show.

Vidal thinks war is probably a lot worse than hell.

Standing guard, he said, is “the least we can do.”

He knows his grandfather was a pilot. It’s one of the reasons he joined cadets. He doesn’t know if his granddad went to war.

Many of the people who came out for Remembrance Day were honouring family who could not or would not speak of the things they had seen in war.

Allison McCaughey showed up for the ceremony in Old Town late with her sick daughter in hand.

After seeing so many people in uniform saluting the cenotaph from home on TV, four-year-old Wilamina wanted to come out

and meet one.

Al Howse, the president of Niagara-on-the-Lake’s Legion branch, wore a wet smile when he met the little girl in rain boots downtown between the ceremonies.

McCaughey remembers her grandfather and great-grandfather at this time of year.

Her grandfather, Sgt. Earl Alexander McCaughey, didn’t share much with her, but she remembers seeing him at Remembrance Day parades when she was little.

“I think he was proud. I think it was emotional for him, though,” she said.

“But he always showed up.” Her grandfather was 17 when he enlisted with the Toronto Scottish Regiment.

He served in France, Holland, Belgium and Germany throughout the Second World War.

McCaughey said her grandfather almost served in the Battle of Normandy, but lucked out at the last minute.

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Top left: Legion president Al Howse helps set up in the pouring rain. Top right: Flight Sgt. Elias Dau guards the Queenston cenotaph during the ceremony, as water runs off his nose. Middle left: Mountie Evan Malcolm's hat vigorously drips water as the steady rain continues. Right: NOTL fire chief Jay Plato shakes hands with firefighters in attendance. Bottom left: A drenched, cold Flight Sgt. Dylan Critchley stands guard during the ceremony at the Queenston cenotaph. SOMER SLOBODIAN PHOTOS

Steady pool of water pours down over Queenston ceremony

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He and his regiment were on leave in Scotland only to be called back into combat for the siege of Normandy, but by the time he and his companions got back to London, the soldiers had already shipped out.

She'll always remember the Sunday night drives with him and her dad when returning home from college classes.

"It's important to honour people who fight for their country," she said under the canopy of a black umbrella.

McCaughey's great-grandfather, Pte. Jack McCaughey served in the First World War with the 12th Regiment York Rangers.

She is proud of her grandfathers, but said it's "sickening" to see the cycle of war repeat itself over and over.

"It just doesn't seem to ever end," she said.

Sometimes when she thinks about what her grandparents went through she wishes and hopes that her daughter can one day live in a world without war.

At the cenotaph in Queenston, Elizabeth Richards recited "In Flanders Fields" by Canadian soldier John McCrae.

The day's rain is "nothing compared to what

(the soldiers) had to go through," Richards said.

She also thinks about her grandfather at this time of year, referring to him as "Pops."

"My Pop's main thing was he proposed to my Nan and they got married the day before (he shipped out)."

Richards' grandfather, Morgan Albert Richards, served in the navy during the Second World War.

He was one of the lucky ones. He came home.

He didn't talk much about his time in the service, though, so Richards remembers him more for the life he lived than for the war he fought in.

"He was definitely like the rock of our family," she told The Lake Report between mouthfuls of warm chilli at the Legion hall in the afternoon.

She also recalls her fam-

ily spent less time together after he died.

Back in Queenston, MPP Wayne Gates watched the ceremony from under an umbrella.

"I start thinking of my dad," he said.

"And then I think of the veterans that gave their lives for this country to allow me to be free," he added.

The living stood bowed on Friday and the rain continued to fall. No one complained.