

MY SOAPBOX
BY
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Hi Fellow Seniors:

Life in a retirement Community is quiet, the pace is slow and the excitement is limited. The loudest noise to be heard would be a truck or bus passing by. However this was not always the case for veterans Lesley Garen and Robert Gillin. I interviewed these elderly veterans at the Chelsey Park Retirement Complex and the following is their stories.

LESLEY GAREN joined the R.C.A.S.C. in 1930 and was stationed at Camp Borden. He had the rank of Captain and kept the rank throughout the war. In 1941, after the declaration of War, Lesley was sent to England and was stationed on the English coast outside of Brighton.

He traveled all around England training troops to use the LST's (Landing Ship Tanks) for the landing at Dieppe. He helped load the troops for the trip to Dieppe and was at the coast to receive the returning soldiers. In 1943, he was sent to the Isle of Butte in Scotland to help train more soldiers in the use of the LST's for the invasion of Europe. He was also assigned to monitor and check all small arms to make sure they were ready for use.

In 1944, he was assigned to General Montgomery's staff to check Canadian troops that had been assigned to the General were present and accounted for. He was then sent to the South Pacific where he was attached to General McArthur's troops on Okinawa where he watched for five hours, a battle between Japanese bakus and kamikazes and American battleships take place. He said it was like watching television is was so unbelievable.

On August 6, the Atom Bomb was dropped on Hiroshama and August 16 on Nagasaki which brought the war to a quick end. He saw the results of the brutal Japanese prison camps when the Canadian and British prisoners were released.

Lesley was a 'career' soldier and stayed in the Army when W.W. 11 ended but he saw more action in Korea and other places. Lesley is now 91 years old.

ROBERT GILLAN – joined the Air Force in 1941 and trained in Canada as 2nd Pilot and Navigator and was attached to the British Air Force. He was sent to Silloth in England where he trained in plane and ship recognition, plotting courses, and attack procedures.

In 1941, all 28 crews were called together as volunteers were needed to be stationed in Africa. With the flip of a coin, his Captain and crew were sent to Freetown and Sierra Leone, Africa. They were attached to the British Air Force there to search for Japanese ships that were in and out of the area. One day, the one engine on his plane quit working

and they had to 'ditch' in the sea. When the plane touched the water it exploded and two of the crew were killed immediately. The remaining crew got out and were picked up five hours later.

In 1942, he was transferred to Ceylon's Coastal Command looking for Japanese ships and also for downed planes, and in 1943 he was transferred to India where his Captain had to learn how to fly the newest plane "The Dakota". This plane was used for dropping supplies to troops that had infiltrated Japanese held territory in Burma. The DZ north of Tiddam was known as "Death Valley" because of the treacherous downdrafts which swirled over the mountains and down the valley like water down a funnel. The plane had to descend to 200 feet to drop the load which left little time to recover if one of these currents caught the aircraft.

We had a cargo of 7500 pounds of rice. That was the standard load. Sacks left the aircraft traveling at 125 knots and fell 200 feet before hitting the ground. In 1943, 31 Squadron had supplied 5,000 men of the First Chindit Expedition with everything soldiers needed, food, ammunition, toilet paper, letters from home and more.

One of the most important 'drops' made was a delivery of water to a British Hospital surrounded by Japanese soldiers.. The water containers held five gallons each and were stacked in a jute bag or canvas sack. These were attached to parachutes In the Burma campaign, Hurricane escorts were usual, but not this day. We were attacked by ground fire and also by two zeros but we managed to get most of the water 'dropped' and pull the aircraft around on its starboard wing and skimmed the tops of the trees. Heading into the clouds we finally lost the zeros.

After the War, Robert left the Army and went back to teaching. He has two daughters Allison and Jennifer and two grandsons Andrew & Jeffrey. He is 87 years old.

My very personal thanks to Lesley and Robert for sharing their experiences with me and with my readers. These men and others deserve to have a NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE and if you want to help make this happen, please send a note or e-mail to your M.P. or M.P.P. or to the Primes Minister's Office. Don't let the Federal Government tell you it's not a Federal Affair which is what they told me. It most definitely is a Federal Affair and shame on them for trying to sidestep this issue.

Bye for now.