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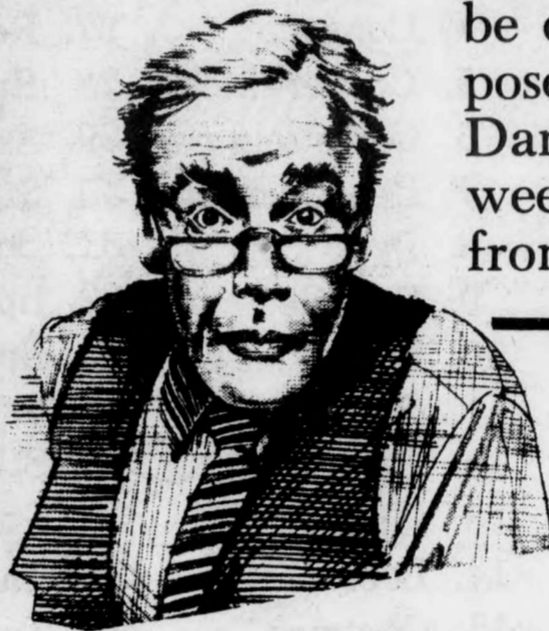
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OPINION...

...on the last day of the war, when everything was supposed to be over and the guns were supposed to be silenced, some God Damn sniper got him right between the eyes. Killed him right in front of me...



It never fails to amaze me how short-lived some person's memories are. This past week Canadians marked the forty-first anniversary of the end of the second world war and more than one person whom I spoke with had nothing but criticism to flail at the literally thousands of veterans who mark this day with pride and pain. To forget or to dismiss their sacrifices during times of war is to denigrate their past, smething which I believe we of the younger generation, virtually untouched by war, have no right to do.

At the same time, I do not condone war, or raise it beyond some lofty ideal. War is a bitch as any veteran will tell you.

Yet, over this past summer, I came to know men and women who put their lives on the line, in Italy, Holland, Germany and France. At Cassino, St. Aubin Sur Mer, Zutphen, and Calaise, they distinguished themselves not only for their fighting abilities, although that is often what preserved their hides, but for the defense of an idea that was in real danger of extinction; Freedom.

I remember one time this summer when an older man, a former member of the Le Chaudiers Regiment (Quebec) came into the museum where I worked to look around and to pass some time before the Legion bar opened upstairs.

It was around six o'clock in the evening on a warm summer night, and he looked like he already had a few drinks under his belt as he strolled around looking at the faded photographs and various other things which a museum will have.

We spoke as he walked around. He was a former Chaudiere, he told me, fought with the North Shore Regiment and the York Carleton Regiment as part of the second division to land on the shores of Normandy.

He signed up when he was seventeen...wanted to see the world and fight Nazis in Europe he said. The conversation dragged on. I had heard it a million other times from every veteran who felt he had a story to tell, but this man was different. There was something he wanted to say, and I was starting to feel uncomfortable as he searched for the words that hadn't been spoken in a long time.

Then I saw a tear roll down this old man's cheek, a great big droplet that turned into a stream as he began to tell me his story, a story that he had probably never told anyone except me, a lone museum curator in a room filled with vivid memories.

"I joined when I was seventeen. Me and my next door neighbour; we went down to the recruiting office in my home town in quebec. We were together the whole way through the war to England, then Italy, and then back up to Holland where we fought on the Scheldt. Yeah, we were best friends and our families were so glad we were together fighting in Europe. They thought we were safer or something. Then on the last day of the war, when everything was supposed to be over and the guns were supposed to be silenced, some God Damn sniper got him right between the eyes. Killed him right in front of me. Don't laugh at me little girl, he said, I'm a big man and I know I'm not supposed to cry but my tears aren't only for my friend. They are for everyone who died, and for my friend so he knows it wasn't for nothing. I cry because I'm human and I know I didn't go over there for nothing. Today we are free because people like him gave it all."

Melynda Jarratt, News Editor