

## The Memory Project: [www.thememoryproject.com](http://www.thememoryproject.com)

### **Before the Reading:**

- Survey your peers to find out if anyone has a living grandparent or friend of the family who fought in World War II. Try to generate a list of veterans with whom you could talk.
- How are oral histories different from other writings about war?
- List some examples of the differences of language use among generations. Note the language usage of the veterans in the following readings. How are their expressions slightly different from your own?

The Memory Project is a Canadian internet site developed by the Dominion Institute and funded by various government agencies. The Veteran's Archive captures oral histories by veterans. The Speakers' Bureau on the site allows you to bring veterans to your school so that you may hear of their war experiences first hand.

### **The Veteran's Archive – Tony from Whitby.**

My parents were immigrants from Europe who settled in the small mining town Waterford on Cape Breton Island. At present, I am the third oldest remaining from a family of 16 ...

My two years in the seminary from 1936-38 were brief but fulfilling ... a change was when I enlisted in the Royal Canadian Engineers in Montreal.

Basic training included route marches, parades, commando exercises, small arms training on Lee Enfield 303 Rifle, booby traps and hand grenade safety. Then we were prepared to embark in Halifax for England with more route marches, parades and commando training while VI and VII rockets were bombing London and other cities. Then came D-Day on June 6, 1944. Our unit was D-Day Plus, but it was also our birth through fire. Going through mine fields in Caen, France, my comrade and I jumped into a fox hole while German planes were bombing our battalion, and when I spoke to him he was disintegrating from a phosphorous bomb, one of the many disasters we would encounter on our march to Berlin.

*The real heroes were our comrades who never returned with us.* At the Leopold Belgium I was wounded while our unit was erecting a Bailey Bridge. While Germans were strafing our battalion, I was buried under a Bailey Bridge abutment where there were no stretcher-bearers, but, I was assisted on the shoulders of two veterans to the British hospital in Brussels. On discharge, I was posted to a British Unit, then an American unit until rejoining my unit around Christmas, 1944. I was in Germany on V.E. Day.

Then I went back to Canada with a younger brother, sister and mother to support. My acceptance at McGill (pre-med) was put on hold as rehab and re-establishment credits were not enough to support a family. I resolved this dilemma and went to Toronto where I spent 32 years at Dunlop Tire and retired in 1980.



## An E-mail Story by Robert Lavack and Ted Neale – World War II Veterans

Hi Robbie,

I understand that you wanted to hear from me so here goes. Pleased to hear from you, for a start. My crew arrived from Quastria with the 37<sup>th</sup> squadron about June 1944. The pilot was an Australian from Brisbane, a pineapple farmer as I recall. The crew consisted of 4 Londoners. The pilot went on this experience trip with a South African crew who were on their ultimate trip, their 40<sup>th</sup>. They collided over Milan with a Wimpy flying across the stream; everyone died. The Londoner crew was headless so on to odd boding\*—not too pleasant. Then Roy put in an appearance and took over the crew and as there was a shortage of experienced people due to losses, Roy became a flight commander. Johnny Hain became Navigational leader but ‘went west’\* at Pardubice in Czechoslovakia while he was odd boding. So it went on with crews going missing. One second tour crew hit the top of the Manfredonian range. The food was diabolical and we had an arrangement to invite some of the Flying Fortress aircrew to our mess for a drink; they reciprocated with various goodies in return. And this is where you burst in on the scene, literally. On the way over to the Americans I passed the end of the runway. Hearing a Wimpy approaching to land, I didn’t cross at the center of the field because I knew that there was at least one butterfly bomb lurking there. Standing still, I saw the Wimpy coming in for touch down. I saw and heard the Wimpy explode in a big dull red flame. Within seconds the port undercart collapsed; then the wing and engine came off. The Wimpy continued along on its port side. It was well alight within seconds. As it came to rest, it came to pieces. It stuck straight up in the air. Within seconds the place was full of fire engines and ambulances, mostly American. I understood that you and the Bomb Aimer were virtually unharmed. The navigator who died later in hospital had been my screen navigator at Quastina. His name was Trenwick. Anyway, as I recall you had purloined an American leather jacket and, if my memory is correct, you had your name sewn on a tab above the left breast pocket.

\*‘went west’ is a euphemism for dying

\*odd boding is slang for being an odd body or odd man out. Those who were left as odd bodies by the deaths of their original crews, joined crews where there were gaps.

### During the Reading:

- These men shared the same experiences and as a result use ‘insiders talk’. What references do they make for which you would need more information?
- Based on these first hand accounts, what did these young men in war have to get used to very quickly?
- The incident of the plane exploding upon landing had a lasting impact on Ted. What memory tricks does it show you about what sticks in your mind?

I continued on with Roy who was only allowed to fly once a fortnight. And so I odd boded with crew for the rest of my tour-- which finished around Christmas when the 37<sup>th</sup> squadron converted to liberators. My last trip with Roy was trooping to Greece during the ELAS uprising that sounded simple enough but which it definitely wasn’t.

I hope I haven’t bored you. I know that my brother’s typing with one finger will have caused him grief but being younger than me he does as he is told (ONE HOPES).

All the best. Ted.

Dear Ted,

It was great to receive your email and the memories of youth that it brought back. When observing the happenings in today's world, *I often wonder whether our comrades who stepped off this world during WW-2 were the lucky ones.* You mentioned John Hahn (Hain) the Navigational leader in 37 Squadron. John was with me on a raid, listed in my semi-destroyed logbook, as 'Uzice". He was standing beside me and wounded quite badly on the lower right side when we were hit by flak by a night fighter from the Herman Goring group that 'briefing' had reported were operating in the area at that time. His injury resulted in John being repatriated back to South Africa where he had a troubled recovery until a swab they had left inside him during the Foggia hospital operation was removed. He was a lecturer in chemistry at Jo'Burg University prior to joining the SAAF and he continued in that profession until he developed a chemical and electrolytic process to extract manganese and a range of noble metals from the huge piles of slag one sees outside the mines in South Africa. We kept in contact over the years. I did a couple of contracts for him in Chile when he was preparing a hedge against losing his investments in South Africa, Mozambique and Swaziland due to the political changes he anticipated. I had graduated as a geologist by then and specialized in airborne geophysics. The Chilean contract was to determine the feasibility of constructing a 15 meter in diameter pipeline to direct lake water down a slope along a 26 km route to an electrical generating plant to be build on a fjord on the Chilean coast at 52 degrees southerly latitude. The purpose of this was to provide power to refine large deposits of low grade mineral ore. There had been a scale 7 earth quake in the area in 1962 that hadn't been mapped in a structural sense. John wanted to determine whether to ease the pipeline around a mountain on the route or to drill through this obstruction. \*\*\*I remember F.S. Trenwick well. I tried to help the squadron doctor to get him out of the burning aircraft. I don't remember much about that event because I was somewhat shaken up. I think we likely had had a primed 250 pound 'hang-up' bomb balancing on the bomb bay doors. It fell through when we landed. The Bomb Aimer, W.O. Stanford, was on his third tour and was a little twitched. He had checked out the bomb bay and reported it clear. But, we were treading through some flak at the time and he didn't like to be too far from his parachute pack. He may have hurried the job and not seen the 'hang-up'. There were a lot of things happening then and we were flying some rather outdated equipment.

We should continue to swap old memories because I have taken up a writing hobby over the past few years—something I have always wanted to do. Don't worry about the one finger typing routine. It soon develops into two and more fingers and is really a lot of fun. Cheers and all the best, Robbie

### After the Reading:

- 1) The experiences in war for Tony, Ted and Robbie are not just about death and dying. What other themes surface in their reminiscing?
- 2) The World War II veterans met people from far-flung allied countries and saw parts of the world with which they would not normally have had contact. What parts of the world do they experience or touch upon? How would this WWII global experience impact on the later lives of these men?
- 3) Both Tony and Robbie make comments that maybe those who died are better off What do they mean by these comments? Response Journal
- 4) How is the style of writing in the oral history and in the e-mails different from other writings about war?
- 5) Find examples of generational and specialized use of language. Does this use of language interfere with your appreciation of the stories the veterans tell? Would a generational gap exist in the way you would tell your stories to an older generation?
- 6) What new information or insights have you gained by reading the oral histories of the veterans above? What are the benefits of gathering the oral histories from the remaining veterans in your communities?