



Don Upham  
*FREEDOM* by SPSC

## Don Upham: why I went to war 1939–1945

For young people in the future I say that to understand WWII you need to know what it was like for young people of that day living in Canada. Times

change and with that how countries relate to one another and what they think of one another. You may find it difficult to understand the loyalty to the British Commonwealth during the years of my youth, but, do you understand the loyalties you and your country have now?

I was born and raised in Vancouver, B.C. before World War II. Prior to World War II people of Vancouver were very proud to be part of the British Empire, after all they were mostly British emigrants who had settled in Vancouver following World War I and they remained faithful to The King of England who was then George VI.

The British Empire was an important part of our life. We knew that the British Empire consisted of countries around the World who had joined together to be partners in war and peace. The following are some of the countries who had voluntarily banded together to form The British Commonwealth. Members of the Commonwealth each offered help and assistance to one and other as members of the British Empire, Canada, India, Hong Kong, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and the British Isle. The King of Great Britain was the revered Head of our Commonwealth.

So it is not surprising that I felt a need to assist Britain, our motherland, when it became obvious that they were going to be involved in another World War. In 1939, Hitler of Germany, was making many demands and had started with his plan to conquer the world. His first move was to conquer the various countries of Europe, starting with Poland. Great Britain had met with Hitler and told him to cease and desist. But Hitler paid no attention to Britain's demands and continued to invade countries of Europe. In September of 1939 Great Britain declared war on Germany in an effort to stop Hitler with his plans for the world. Britain's decla-



ration was quickly followed by Canada also declaring War on Germany.

Meanwhile, Hitler had formed an alliance with Italy and Japan to assist in his plan of conquering the world. Hitler was having a measure of success with his plan in Europe until Britain declared War. To assist Britain, the various parts of the British Empire joined Britain by also declaring war on Germany and turned each of the countries into manufacturing entities for the war efforts and to supply manpower in the way of Armies, Navies and Air Forces.

In June of 1944, I graduated from High School and immediately joined the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and was sent to Toronto and #1 Manning depot where I started training as an airman destined to be a Wireless Navigator. By December of 1944 the war was going very well for the allies and the RCAF told me that they had all of the Aircrew they needed to complete the war. And so the RCAF sent me back to Vancouver and discharged me. I immediately joined the Canadian Army and was sent to Wetaskewan, Alberta where I started training as an Infantry man. After a month or so I was sent to Camp Borden in Ontario to train with the #2 Armoured Corps as a Tank Crew Commander.

By May of 1945 Hitler had surrendered and the war ended in Europe, but the war was still raging in the Pacific and so I volunteered and was sent to a newly formed Canadian Sixth Division. Before the Sixth Division could be completed The United States dropped the Atom Bomb on Japan. This ended the War in the Pacific.

Now, I was no longer needed for the Canadian war effort so I was discharged and returned to Vancouver to resume my life and education. I finally graduated in Chemical Engineering from U.B.C. in 1950 with the help of the *Veterans Rehabilitation Act* of 1945 which encouraged young veterans to pursue further education.

I am looking back in a time now in 2012 to 1939. Seventy-three years is a lot of time to reflect. I see now that volunteering for war and for different postings during war prepared me for a life of volunteering. I still enjoy my work as a volunteer in a major hospital in Scarborough, Ontario.

When I speak forward to you in 2039 I ask you to reflect on the positive power of volunteering. War is not something you wish to see in your time, but, if you do, realize that even from war positive things may result.