

The indefatigable veteran who epitomized Remembrance Day

Sgt. Jamieson was Mississauga's Remembrance Day mentor, says John Stewart







Opinion

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When you went to a Remembrance Day ceremony featuring Dorothy Jamieson, you never knew which extraordinary story you'd hear.

She might recall the day British Prime Minister Winston Churchill came to the Women's Auxiliary Airforce operations centre in Digby, Lincolnshire, where Dorothy was the sergeant running the place, where women plotted the paths of approaching enemy aircraft.

Dorothy Jones, who had heeded Churchill's call to "let the women come forward," was on loan to the RCAF, which operated the facility. She'd meet future husband, Canadian fighter pilot Ronald Jamieson, there.

In its usual officious way, the military assigned a squadron leader, who knew nothing of the daily operation, to guide Churchill.

It was clear to Churchill, as it would later become clear to so many others, that Sgt. Jones was an extraordinarily engaged leader, with a firm grasp on the place.

“Sergeant, you are dismissed,” the squadron leader told Dorothy.

“Squadron leader, you are dismissed,” replied Churchill. “The sergeant will show me around the ops room.”

Dorothy rose quickly and was chosen to lead an elite group of women dropped near enemy lines in Europe to support front-line troops.

In Normandy, German paratroopers in American uniforms landed on the rooftop where the women were billeted. Jamieson advised the unarmed women to prepare to beat them back “with your tin hats” if necessary.

Jamieson took Churchill’s advice to “never give up” to heart. She fought numerous battles for others.

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The 30-year employee of Johns Mansville in Port Credit organized a decade-long legal battle across Canada against the American giant. She secured 50 per cent of pensions for employees.

The one-time commodore of Mississauga Canoe Club (a Mississauga Sports Hall of Fame member who was the first Canadian female canoeing official at an Olympics) also went to bat for British war pensioners abroad who had their pensions arbitrarily frozen.

She nominated younger friend Hazel McCallion for the Order of Canada.

She travelled to Britain, lobbying successfully for a war memorial to women opened by the Queen in 2005.

Among those raising funds were students at Fairwind Public School, where Jamieson's annual Remembrance Day appearance was a ritual for nearly two decades.

One man she forcefully recruited to [join her there](#), RCMP Cpl. Howard Adams, was stunned this frail-looking senior could so quickly win the hearts of 300 students. Her message: "Freedom is not free. Freedom is kept for us by the men and women who put their lives on the line every day so we can live in freedom."

In her Village of Erin Meadows retirement home, she retrieved her commission. She was called "Sergeant."

Jamieson, who died at 97 in September 2015, left an indelible impression on generations of Fairwind students. "She's so unique," student Dulasi Vasudevan told me in 2011. Listening to her stories was "like becoming part of history."

As we mark another out-of-sync Remembrance Day without the usual large gatherings, the loss of the first-hand accounts that pass the torch through generations is felt more keenly.

In my last chat with Dorothy, she recalled eight Fairwinds students waiting for her one Nov. 11. "Mrs. Jamieson, we just wanted to shake your hand. We'll never forget you."

She was touched. "That's what children are all about. The impression you make on them at the start, they remember it all their lives."

No veteran left a more resounding impression.

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