



Don Stewart



Canadian War Hero



Special thanks to Valorie Flynn,
Director of the Royal Regiment of Canada
Association, Royal Canadian Legion
Branch 266/046 for all the years of support she
continues to give to Don; for looking after him,
taking him to events and so much more.

Thanks also to Her Excellency,
the Right Honourable Julie Payette;
Larry Rose, historian and author and to
Con Di Nino, former Canadian Senator.

Author and Editor: John Stapleton

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THIS MOMENTO WAS PRESENTED TO
DON STEWART ON DECEMBER 7th, 2020,
ON THE OCCASION OF HIS 96th BIRTHDAY.



Don Stewart, Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR), Defensive Equipped Merchant Ships (DEMS).

While at Sunnybrook, Don, for almost ten years, was President of the Sunnybrook Veterans Council.

Don takes an active role with the Royal Regiment of Canada in the presentation of earned awards to cadets and in special ceremonies. He is always a special guest of the Regiment and is very well know to the troops.

Don Stewart

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I first met Don Stewart in 2014 as part of the official Canadian delegation to Italy to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the invasion of Sicily and Italy. I was there with my father and Don was there with his friend, Valorie Flynn.

There were about 30 Veterans, 9 of whom had been part of the invasion of Sicily in July 1943.

Five years later, there was another official delegation to celebrate the 75th anniversary. It was much smaller. My father and I had been chosen to attend. He was 99 but just weeks before the trip, he passed away just 9 weeks before his 100th birthday .

The government of Canada graciously permitted me to attend the celebration and I was fortunately in a position to help with the accommodation of the 15 Veterans that were able to travel in 2019. It was my particular privilege to assist with Don and help Valorie with the task.

Don signed up in 1942 as a 16 year old and is now 96 and living at Sunnybrook.

After the war, Don drove steam locomotives out west but largely gave it up when the diesels were introduced in the 1960's.



Here is Don in his own words:

"I was just 17 and there was a, naval personnel from the [HMCS] Discovery in Vancouver [recruiting] in Penticton at the time, at the old Incola hotel. And I said to my friend, Alan Moore, I says, let's go. He said, we're not old enough. I says, there's no problem, we'll be able to get in. So we went down there, we got the application and they got it filled out and I said, well, I have to take it up to my mother to sign. My mother was a nurse at the time at the hospital in Penticton. So I told her I was buying an old car, so she signed.

Well, she didn't find out until I made sure that I was down at Discovery in Vancouver and I knew I was in the Navy for sure, then I told her. She kind of blew her top but I says, there's nothing you can do. I says, this is what the younger generation is doing now, they're volunteering, so I'll be okay, don't worry."

"We were naval gunners on merchant ships and we had a 4.7 [inch] gun fore and aft, and we had Oerlikons [naval guns] on mid-ship, which are a 20-millimetre cannon, and then we had .50 [calibre] machine guns on the wings and that was our armament. Not much armament against a submarine, I can tell you that.

We went to Montreal, got a ship, then it was, that was the [SS] Chippewa Park, which was a 10,000-ton merchant ship. And it was one of the original ones; it was still a coal burner. And we took off from there, went to Quebec City, put on the mine nets and torpedo nets, went to Bedford Basin in Halifax, picked up our convoy there, went down the East River to New York; we anchored right off the Statue of Liberty until things were ready, we were probably there three or four days. Then went to Norfolk, Virginia, picked up the remainder of the convoy and we were escorted to the Mediterranean.

But we left with 64 ships and when we got to Port Said in Egypt, where you'll see on the photo, there was only six of us; six ships. And I went from Port Said in Egypt and that's when we took supplies over from there to Italy and then we came back to Port Said, went down the Suez Canal, crossed the Indian Ocean to Bombay [now Mumbai], India. And then I caught malaria and I was off the ship, missed my ship and that's when I took the additional gunnery course. And then the next ship that came in was the [SS] Dunlop Park, I caught it and went from there to Dar Es Salaam [Tanzania] in East Africa, which was Portuguese Africa in those days, down to Durban in South Africa, Cape Town in South Africa, then across the Atlantic, up the coast through the Panama [Canal], down to Santiago, Chile, then to Lima, Peru. And then we were told that we were going to Pearl Harbour, but

the war was over [by the time we got to] Pearl Harbour. So we went to Pearl Harbour and when we got to Pearl Harbour, we were told that the Germans had surrendered.

The biggest memory of all was when I was taken off the ship sick in Bombay - there's no place to mail

letters, there's no, you know what I mean. So apparently, some fellow with the same name as mine, his ship was torpedoed, and so my parents were notified that I was lost at sea.

So consequently when I got home, in 1946, I didn't tell them I was coming home because my dad had been transferred from Penticton then to

Copper Mountain, which is just outside of Princeton, B.C. So I took the train to Princeton, caught the bus in Princeton and went to Copper Mountain. My father being the policeman there, he had to meet the buses, because it was a company town. And the old man looked at me and he said, you're dead. I said, what the hell do you mean, I'm dead? He says, we were notified, we've had your memorial service for you and all. So I said, well, how is mom taking it? Well, go home right away. So I went home to see mom. She grabbed a hold of me, I thought she was never going to let loose. And I can still feel this today."



It was very dangerous work on the "Park" ships because the merchant ships were the real targets of the U-boats. The guns on board were no defence during a torpedo attack at night which is mainly what the U-boats did. Also there were many underage men in the Navy and there were many more among the merchant ship crews. The merchant ships were so short of people that there were no questions asked for anyone who would go aboard.

- Larry Rose

Don Stewart was supposed to be dead.

By Erica Vella Global News, Posted November 11, 2015 3:31 pm

He hadn't even told his family he'd joined the navy when they got word that he was lost at sea.

They didn't learn the truth until he returned home in 1945.

"They received notice that I had been lost at sea and when I came home they were really shook up, but they were glad to see me," Stewart said.

Stewart was just 16 when he enlisted in 1941.

"I had to lie about my age, because you had to be 17-and-a-half to 18 [years old]," the now-91 year-old Veteran recalls.

"I went up to see my mother - she was working a night shift at the hospital - told her I was buying an old car, she signed the papers."

Stewart joined his friends and was recruited as a seaman on the HMCS Discovery and served in the Atlantic, Pacific, Mediterranean and Indian Ocean.

"My friends were all joining and it was a different era... I wanted to be in the navy and that was it. I was in the navy," he said.

At the time of his discharge in 1945, Stewart rose the ranks as an acting petty officer.



Don Stewart was just 16 years old when he joined the navy in 1941

"I saw my dad when I got off the bus and he grabbed a hold of me and said 'you're supposed to be dead', and he hugged me like you wouldn't believe."

Stewart said it was years before he told his own children he served in the navy, but he has one memory that he remembers vividly.

“When I found out the war was over in Japan, I was in the Pacific at the time, I think that was the most momentous time of all because I figured I was on my way home,” he said.

“It was four months later before I got home, but I was sure glad to hear it was over.”

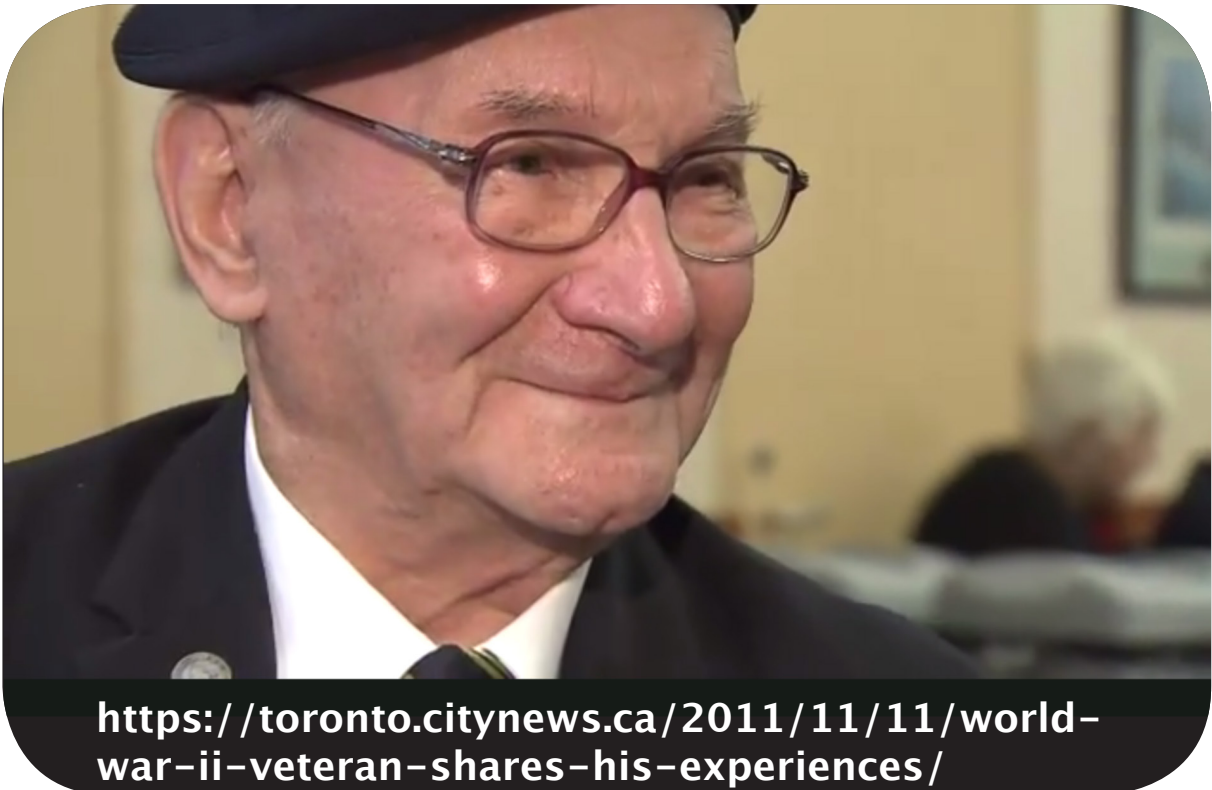
The Veteran is paying his respects to his comrades at the Sunnybrook Veterans centre, where 475 Veterans currently live.

Sunnybrook is the largest Veterans care facility in the country.

In honour of Remembrance Day, over 30,000 flags were planted in the ground outside of the centre.

“It’s a momentous occasion when you look out and see all this and you think about your friends who never made it home,” said Stewart.

“You’re kind of bleary-eyed when you look out and see all these things. It brings back memories of your buddies that never came home and they are paying honour to all the Veterans.”



<https://toronto.citynews.ca/2011/11/11/world-war-ii-veteran-shares-his-experiences/>

'I didn't want to throw them overboard': Veteran sailor recalls WWII

By Toronto Sun, Post Media

During the summer of 1943, deep into the Second World War, Canadian Navy man Donald Stewart found himself stranded in a life raft with two dead fellow sailors.

"I didn't want to throw them overboard,"

Stewart, 92, recalled Friday at Sunnybrook hospital's Veterans care centre. The trio had been aboard an armed supply ship crossing the Mediterranean Sea when it was bombed. When she started to sink, they scrambled to one of the ship's life rafts and were lowered into the water.

Only Stewart survived the raft's seven days adrift at sea.

On day five, the second of his two mates died, and Stewart spent two days alone and stranded before being plucked from the water by a British minesweeper.

"There were three of us altogether... I was the only one that made it ... For two days, I was on that raft with two corpses."

During Sunnybrook's Remembrance Day ceremony and wreath laying, he thought frequently of those two fallen sailors, and of the ultimate sacrifice they made.

"My most vivid memory is (of being on) that life raft," he said.

"There were three of us altogether ... I was the only one that made it ... For two days, I was on that raft with two corpses."

Before the start of the ceremony, Premier Kathleen Wynne greeted the Centre's Veterans.

"(Sunnybrook) draws people from all over the country," she said. "It is a very special place. It is a home where the service of the people who live here is recognized every single day." - TDavidson@postmedia.com

Finding a new career after the war.

When Don got back from the War very late in 1945, he needed to find a new career. He had always been attracted to the railroad and knew how steam engines worked. He signed on and quickly became an engineer. Over the next decade and right up until diesel replaced steam, Don drove many of the great and historic steam engines including:

CPR - Rob Engines: 565 - 3216 - 3447 - 3500 - 3636 - 5100 - 5200 - 5700 (5400)

Geared Engines: 90 Ton Shay, 110 Ton Shay
Climax - Vancouver

The engineer controls the locomotive using the throttle, reverse gear, and brake. The engineer also trains the fireman in becoming an engineer. The engineer calls the signals to the fireman and blows the whistle. The engineer has the ultimate responsibility in the operation of the train. One of the highlights of his 'days of steam' occurred when he invited Victoria Cross recipient Smokey Smith to join him in the engine cab on a run.

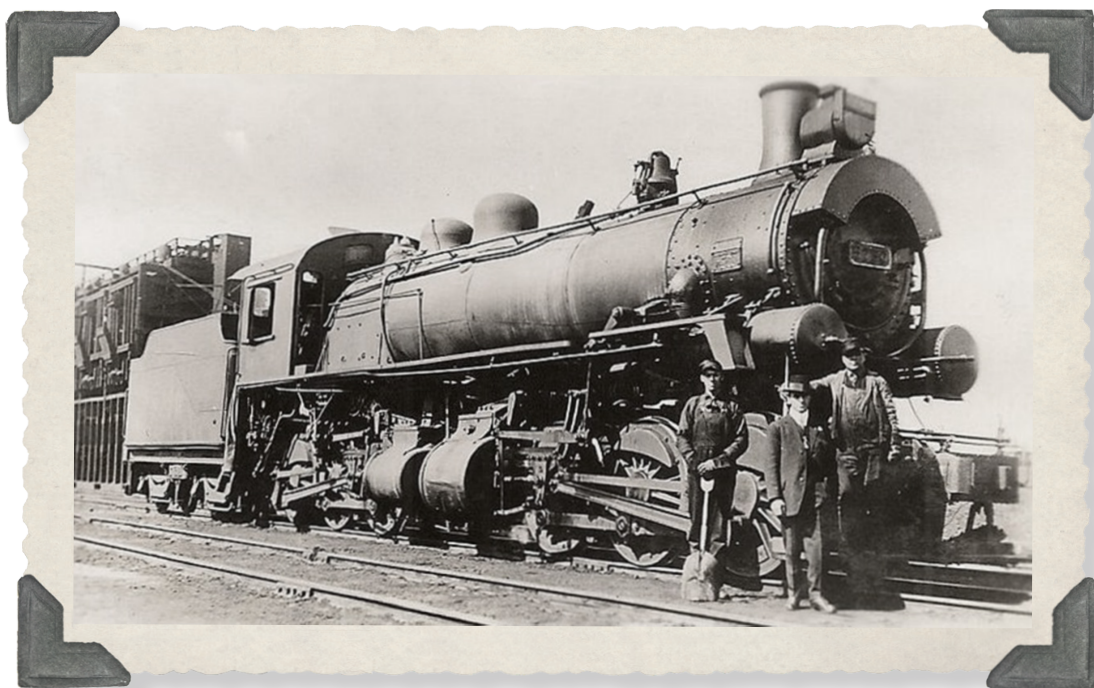
Don loved the steam locomotive and decided not to move over to either electric or diesel trains and moved on to other things throughout his colourful life.



Shay geared steam locomotive



CLIMAX is the last steam engine to travel in BC in 1968



Veteran gives special pin to Toronto girl as Poppy campaign begins

– News staff

The Toronto Royal Canadian Legion launched its annual TTC Poppy campaign at Davisville station on Friday morning. Watch as Veteran Don Stewart gave a special pin to an 11-year-old student. The pair became instant friends and said they will never forget each other.



Don Stewart gives special pin to Toronto girl as Poppy campaign begins

Operation Raise a Flag Returns to Salute Canadian Veterans with 47,500 Canadian Flags on November 11th.



Toronto's Remembrance Day tradition kicks off Sunnybrook Veterans Centre's annual fundraising campaign

By Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Oct. 23, 2018

Toronto's Remembrance Day tradition, **Operation Raise a Flag**, returns to Sunnybrook Veterans Centre on Sunday, November 11th. On the eve of Remembrance Day, the country's largest Veterans' care facility will have hundreds of volunteers planting a patriotic sea of 47,500 Canadian flags all around the hospital campus. On the morning of November 11th, the Centre's 475 Veterans will wake up to a sea of red and white flags in their honour and know that their sacrifice is remembered.

Second World War Veteran Don Stewart (92) surrounded by a patriotic sea of Canadian flags at the Sunnybrook Veterans Centre. **Operation Raise a Flag** returns to the country's largest Veterans' care facility with 47,500 Canadian flags planted around the campus in honour of Remembrance Day. All Canadians are encouraged to send a note of thanks and a donation to support the war heroes living at the Sunnybrook Veterans Centre. (CNW Group/Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre).



Italy 2019



Now in its eighth year, **Operation Raise a Flag** encourages all Canadians to send a personal note of thanks and a donation to support Veterans



Italy 2019

residing at the Sunnybrook Veterans Centre. The 47,500 flags will be a powerful symbol of our gratitude, support and respect for the Veterans who fought to make Canada the strong and free country it is today.

“All of us at Sunnybrook consider it an honour and a privilege to care for the courageous men and women who served our country in the name of peace and freedom.” says Dr. Jocelyn Charles, Medical Director of the Veterans Centre. “Operation Raise a Flag has become a wonderful tradition and an important way for Canadians to remember and honour the service and sacrifices of a generation

that fought in the Second World War and the Korean War.”

Proceeds from the campaign will provide Veterans with special ‘extras’, enabling Veterans to achieve their best quality of life through community outings, continued learning opportunities, innovative equipment and unique programming. Donations will also be used to support enhancements to outdoor spaces such as the Veterans Therapeutic Garden.

Flags are available online at www.raiseaflag.ca with in increments of \$25 donation by calling the Sunnybrook Foundation at 1-866-696-2008.

“Seeing the sea of red and white is a spectacular sight, very emotional and a real indication of the community’s gratitude. The courage and sacrifices of Canada’s war Veterans must never be forgotten.”

What Operation Raise a Flag means to our Veterans

Seeing the sea of red and white is a spectacular sight, very emotional and a real indication of the community's gratitude. The courage and sacrifices of Canada's war Veterans must never be forgotten.

– Don Stewart, Royal Canadian Navy, Second World War

We lost so many brave men and women fighting for this country – it means so much to all of us to have Canadians remember the sacrifice.

– Mel Storrier, Royal Canadian Corps of Signals Second World War

Remembrance Day has a personal meaning to each and every Veteran. Operation Raise a Flag is a sign that the rest of the country remembers with us. It is truly heartwarming.

– Mary Prescott, Canadian Women's Army Corp, Second World War

About Sunnybrook Veterans Centre

Working in close partnership with Veterans Affairs Canada, the Sunnybrook Veterans Centre is the largest Veterans care facility in

Canada and a recognized leader in the care of Veterans who are no longer able to live at home independently. No other facility provides such a high level of specialized, compassionate, resident-centered care through a dedicated inter-professional team.

For further information:
Sally Fur, Communications & Stakeholder Relations, 416-408-5057 or cell 416-786-6402,
Sally.fur@sunnybrook.ca

<http://www.sunnybrook.ca/foundation>

Operation Raise a Flag' campaign supports Canada's war Veterans

Order your flag today at
raiseaflag.ca
and be a hero to our heroes



They answered the call when our country needed heroes. This November, Canadians can honour, thank and support our Veterans by joining Operation Raise a Flag.

Through the campaign, people can purchase a Canadian flag online for \$25 or \$50. On Remembrance Day, the flags will be planted on the lawn of the Sunnybrook Veterans Centre, the largest Veterans care facility in Canada. It's a powerful way to honour the courage and sacrifice of our country's heroes.

Money raised through the campaign will benefit the Sunnybrook Veterans Centre and the Veterans Comfort Fund. The fund helps ensure that Veterans enjoy the best possible life experience by providing innovative equipment, continued learning opportunities, special outings and events, along with social and arts activities.

"Moving across the Atlantic Ocean, at only eight knots, we were sitting ducks, for the German U-boats."

Don Stewart is a resident of the Sunnybrook Veterans Centre, which is home to 500 Canadian Veterans of the Second World War and Korean War.

In the spring of 1942 and just shy of 17, Don enlisted in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve. Thanks to a phony letter of signed permission from his mother, he made it past the recruiting officer. Despite the fact that his parents were not on board with the idea, he ventured off to sea.

"Moving across the Atlantic Ocean, at only eight knots, we were sitting ducks, for the German U-boats," says Don.

In one 1944 convoy, an allied ship sank with another man named Donald Stewart on board, and Don's parents were notified that their son had died at sea. With no mail delivery, Don did not keep in touch with his parents and so they were unaware of this error.

At the end of the war, he came home unannounced and shocked his parents.



Battle of Ortona Veterans raise a glass to celebrate 75th anniversary of Canadian victory in Second World War

By Brendan Kennedy, Staff Reporter, Dec. 17, 2018

Donald Stewart, who turned 94 this month, recalled the moment 75 years ago when he learned his compatriots in the Canadian army had won the Battle of Ortona.

"I'll never forget it... In those days you had to take the good with the bad."

Stewart, then still a teenager, was at the Canadian headquarters in the Italian coastal town after delivering supplies from the port. As news of the victory arrived, so too did word that two of his brothers had been killed in the fighting.

"I'll never forget it," he said. "In those days you had to take the good with the bad."

Stewart was among the Second World War Veterans who gathered at Sunnybrook hospital Sunday afternoon for a small event to mark the 75th anniversary of the Canadian victory in the Battle of Ortona, regarded as one of the toughest battles of the Canadian campaign in Italy.

A.E. “Al” Stapleton and Ed Stafford, 99 and 97 years old, respectively, were also in attendance. Like Stewart, Stapleton and Stafford were at the Canadian headquarters during the battle and not involved in the actual fighting. “Which is, of course, one of the reasons why I’m still here,” Stapleton said.

As part of Sunday’s commemoration, the Veterans drank from a bottle of red wine given to them five years ago by the mayor of Ortona to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Canadian victory and the town’s liberation.

The battle took place over eight days from Dec. 20 to 28, 1943, pitting the Canadian 1st Infantry Division against two battalions of elite German paratroopers.

Ortona’s position overlooking the Adriatic Sea was of strategic importance because it was one of the few deep-water ports on the east coast. German troops had been ordered to “fight for every last house and tree,” according to historian Mark Zuehlke.

Canadian casualties in Ortona totaled 650, including more than 200 killed. Since the town had not been evacuated before the fighting started, it’s estimated that more than 1,300 civilians were killed. The battle was fought in close quarters in the town’s rubble-filled streets, amid booby-trapped houses and the constant threat of exploding landmines.

The street fighting was so intense that the battle earned the nickname “Little Stalingrad” or “Italian Stalingrad” among those who fought in it. In order to avoid walking through the streets, where they would be vulnerable to German fire, Canadian troops in Ortona developed a technique called “mouse-holing,” in which they would blast holes through adjoining houses in order to advance on German troops.

“The Battle of Ortona was an eight-day nightmare,” said Larry Rose, author of two books on Canada’s role in the Second World War. “It was one of the grimmest and most brutal battles of the war for the Canadian army.”

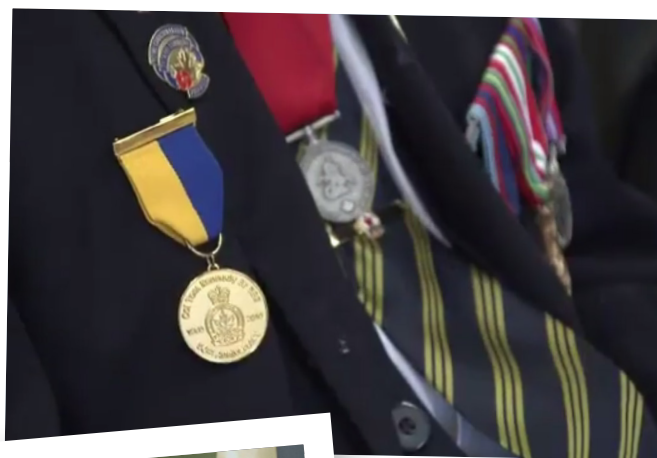
Rose, who also spoke at Sunday’s event, said Ortona was not one of the biggest battles of the war for Canadians and it did not shift the strategic balance of power. But the conditions in which it was fought made it remarkable.

“It’s remembered for the iron determination, the resolute will power and the shining character of the Canadian soldiers in the battle,” he said. “They simply would not quit in the face of dire adversity.”

In June 2016, a charity representing the Italian-Canadian community donated to the City of Toronto a bronze sculpture depicting a 3D topographical map of Ortona, illustrating the destruction of the town following the battle.

The sculpture, titled *“Peace Through Valour,”* commemorates all of the Canadian soldiers who fought in Italy in the Second World War. It is located outside City Hall, near the statue of Winston Churchill.





Above: Veteran Don Stewart, second from the right, pictured here wearing his badges.





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