

63 November 2018

SUSTAINING REMEMBRANCE DAY

By HMHS Historian, Robert Williamson

Our aging veterans are now in their final battle, a battle against time. I notice that almost every day there is a veteran's picture in the newspaper obituary column. A decade ago, Veteran's Affairs reported that across Canada, our veterans were disappearing at a rate of 2,000 a month. The question arises; will there be a remembrance day when they are all gone? Will their memories be lost too?

I received an email recently that gave me a great deal of encouragement in answering this question. It was in response to a story I submitted to this Mountain News column for Remembrance Day 2015. Entitled, **Remembering a Mountain Veteran**, it was about the war experiences of a naval veteran, Alex Tennant, who participated in some of the most dangerous sea battles of World War II. Although he passed away in 2002, he was part of a school memory project that I had undertaken a decade earlier, as a Vice Principal at MacNab Secondary School. The intent was to capture the stories of several Hamilton veterans before they were lost forever. The following email makes that effort well worthwhile.

Dear Commander Williamson,

"I would like to thank you for an article that you wrote in the Mountain News a couple of years ago about my Dad, Alex Tennant. My sons are away at Queen's University in Kingston so we don't get to attend Remembrance Day ceremonies together as a family any more.

However, my oldest son reminded me today that he likes to pull up the Mountain News article that you wrote about his grandfather and reread it at this time of year. My children were young when my father passed away so they don't have a lot of memories about him. Consequently they really appreciate the story that you wrote and the reflection of the man that their grandfather was. Thank you so very much, we all greatly appreciate it.

"Sincerely,

Colleen Evans (nee Tennant)



Alex Tennant is shown here with his 1945 Murmansk Medal that was presented to Canadian naval veterans by the Soviet government in 1988 for their service in the Royal Canadian Navy protecting convoys delivering food and material to northern Russia during World War II. It was one of the most hazardous naval assignments of the entire war. The medal presentation by Russian Ambassador Alexei Rodinov, took place at a Hamilton City Hall ceremony to demonstrate that the Russian people would never forget the help they received from Canadian sailors like Alex Tennant.

Now, over a quarter of a century later, the Canadian Government has belatedly accepted a new medal, the ARCTIC STAR, created by the British government in 2012, into the Canadian Order of Precedence. Finally, the Governor General has taken a step toward sustaining remembrance by recognizing the less than 200 veterans still living who served in the most acutely severe conditions of arctic convoys during the Second World War.

Email <awards-citations@vac-acc.gc.ca>