

Family remembers great grandpa on Warriors Day



By Jim Eadie

For local woman Lois McCaw and her family, a visit to the recently held Warriors Day in Coe Hill brings back important good memories of her father, and his life that included overseas wartime service.

Living in Ancaster in 1942, Robert Bruce Ionson went overseas with the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, and became an armourer with the Royal Canadian Ordnance Corp. just in time for the Dieppe Raid, and the subsequent Canadian Army advance and liberation of France, Belgium, Holland and eventually into Germany.

The role of armourer is to maintain and repair guns and other armed weapons including cannons on the famous new Sherman tanks that spearheaded many of the allied advances during this phase of World War Two. This is very important work for a soldier.

Late in the war, a photograph was published in the Hamilton Spectator newspaper showing Ionson and a number of comrades straddling a captured German cannon. This was one of the few pictures of her dad during wartime that McCaw has to treasure.

Sitting on the Sherman tank at Warriors Day with representatives of three subsequent generations of the family, McCaw recalled the old newspaper picture, the tank type they were sitting on that her father likely worked on, and her father.

‘He was not big, but a very robust man, and a kind helper,’ she said. ‘He built his own guns after the war, and was a very good competitive shooter. Dad didn’t talk about the war, and even when he met up with his buddies they would talk about remembering so and so, and the pranks they pulled but not about the war.’

Following the war Ionson married, and operated a small farm operation while working for Studebaker. In 1967 he retired, and with his family of six and a dog moved to a small home on Steenburg Lake.

‘He was not happy that the old farmhouse was getting swallowed up by subdivisions, so they had been looking,’ said McCaw. ‘As soon as he saw the place on Steenburg Lake he said: this is where I’ll die .. and he did.’

Ionson was a member of the Coe Hill Legion for many years, and until his death continued his competitive shooting hobby.