

Some interesting war time stories told to historical society

By Bill Rea

The Second World War was a grim time, but even in that, there was room for interesting and even amusing stories.

That's what Bolton resident Doris Porter had to share recently when she addressed the Caledon East and District Historical Society. 'This is not about fighting,' Porter told the packed room. She said it was about joining the Women's Army Corps so a man could be freed up, 'so he could go out and get shot at.'

War was declared in September 1939. Porter said she was 15 at the time, and remembered adults being depressed at the thought of war, but teens were feeling excitement.

'Girls thought about guys in uniform,' she said, adding guys thought of guns.

Things were slow to develop on the war front in Canada, Porter recalled. The Battle of Britain took place, involving the Royal Air Force and personnel from the Commonwealth, but it was over by the end of 1940. The war didn't have a lot of impact on Canadian life, although Porter recalled the Red Cross lining up volunteers to knit socks, mitts and scarves. She also remembered these items were made from a waterproof type of wool, that was harder to work with. These were also the days of rationing, with limited supplies of things like butter, sugar, tea, etc. And gasoline was restricted to three gallons per week. 'So there was a lot of car pooling and forget about Sunday drives.' There were also no new tires, so people carried patching kits in their cars.

Porter said her family moved to a farm on what is now Innis Lake Road in June 1940.

She recalled going to dances at the Innis Lake Hall, and she and her friend would be looking for rides home, and they saw three men in uniform walk in. She said her father was not pleased about that.

'I know all about soldiers,' he thundered. 'I was one myself,' she recalled the scene.

Graduating high school with honours in June 1941, Porter recalled that was the year the government decided to enlist women, with positions being available in the Women's Army Corps or through the Air Force. She said she didn't like the Air Force uniforms.

There were a few problems getting in. Porter said her eyesight was an issue, but she was able to memorize parts of the eye chart.

She enlisted July 1, 1942, and was sent to the Montreal area for training. She and her three roommates were chaperoned.

Porter said she was in town and encountered a man who struck up a conversation, asking where she was from.

'I come from a little place in Ontario you never heard of,' she told him, adding it was Caledon East.

'Do you know anyone there named Evans?' he asked. Evans was Porter's maiden name, and it turned out this man had known her uncle during the First World War.

Trained to be an office clerk, Porter found herself posted to Kingston, and she remembered seeing Fort Henry. At the time, it was housing German prisoner of war, and she said after the war, about half of them returned as immigrants.

She also remembered the room in which she was staying had no curtains. She went out to buy material to make some, and the store owner had an old Singer sewing machine he let her use. The result was they had the 'snazziest' room in the place.

Porter was later assigned to military headquarters in St. John, New Brunswick.

She also recalled they really had no information on how the war was going. 'We lived in a vacuum with no end in sight,' she commented.

There was no compulsory education in New Brunswick until 1937. There were a lot of men early in the war who couldn't read, and they would be sent to the headquarters, staying there until they could write letters home and read daily orders.

Porter was reporting to an office supervisor who wanted her to be transferred. It turned out a major determined the problem was with their respective scores of aptitude tests (known as M Tests). Porter scored 181 and the supervisor only got 168. She said she encountered that sergeant a couple of years later, and he even offered her a job.

An overseas posting was something Porter said she had been hoping for, and in December 1944, she got her chance, actually being picked to make the trip VE Day (May 8, 1945).

'I had a dream posting in England,' she said, adding they had worked out a system through which men could start studying post-secondary courses while waiting for transportation home.

Porter was secretary to the adjutant, and there were a number of predictable issues.

'We had to deal with boys-will-be-boys problems,' she said, adding that meant pregnancies.

Porter said she was discharged in July 1946, after being in uniform four years, which she said was roughly the time it takes to get an honours BA.

There were still some interesting stories to come, and one of them took place a little more than a year ago.

Porter had an ID card that was issued to her in June 1943. The card had gone missing about 17 years before, and it turned out she

had left it in a pouch in the CIBC branch in Bolton.
Staff there never threw it out, and Porter eventually got it back.



Doris Porter recently told some stories about memories of the Second World War to members of the Caledon East and District Historical Society.