

WWII Tank Memorial

The telephone rang in the small house in Markdale, Ontario. It was summer, 1979. Mrs. Mac Dixon answered the phone and heard a gruff voice ask "Is this the residence of Mac Dixon."

Mrs. Dixon replied a bit tentatively, "Why yes, who is calling?"

"This is Major Stan Huntley, Canadian Forces Ottawa. Is Mr. Dixon there, please?"

"Why do you ask? Is something wrong? He is at work, should be home about supper time. Can you tell me what this is about?"

"Ma'am, we just need to speak to Mr. Dixon directly, please have him call me at this number, I will be here until seven."

Mrs. Dixon fretted about this call for the remainder of the day, and waited anxiously for Mac to return home. As soon as he walked in the door, she burst out all the details of the strange conversation, and then gave Mac the number in Ottawa.

Mac went to the phone immediately, and called Major Huntley. "What can I do for you, Major?"

"Are you the Mac Dixon, rank Sergeant, tank commander, Royal Regiment, served in D-Day and Normandy?" asked Huntley.

"Yes, Sir," replied Mac in a formal way. He immediately wondered why he had done that, it was 34 years since he had been in the Canadian Forces.

The Major then asked "Did your tank flounder at Juno Beach off the Normandy coast?"

Mac replied "My tank sank right to the bottom as soon as I drove off the LST (Landing Ship Tank) and went straight down into a hole about 20 feet deep. My crew and I all escaped, except for poor Charlie, who drowned. The rest of us made it to shore and were immediately assigned another tank. We all made it through the rest of the war and returned home safely in summer 1945. What is all this about? Why all the questions about this tank and me?"

"Sergeant Dixon, was your tank serial number 4354666?"

"How the hell should I remember that, it was a long time ago and we were scared silly? It might have been, but I don't know."

"Our records indicate that you were the driver of that tank. It has just been dredged from the river bed off the village of Courseulles-sur-mer in Normandy. The town folk wish to make this tank a memorial. We have agreed and we want you and Mrs. Dixon, along with the rest of your tank crew and their wives to attend the memorial service. We will cover all expenses and handle all the details. Are you prepared to do this?"

Mac was totally stunned; he had worked hard to forget all those awful experiences, but as he thought more and more about it, he realized it would help with closure. "I need to think about it and discuss it with my wife. I will call you tomorrow."

After a lot of agonizing and talking with his wife, Mac agreed and a couple of months later they were on Juno Beach in Normandy once more. The memories came flooding back, but

the revitalized, rebuilt village and the outpouring of admiration from the locals made them all feel welcome. The French residents along this coast viewed the Canadian Forces and the brave soldiers as their saviours, and welcomed them with open arms.

Hence, the village of Courseulles-sur-mer proudly unveiled Mac Dixon's tank, and it has become the centre-piece of the WWII museum complex. I was fortunate to visit it this past May. It had special significance, as I knew Mac and his wife quite well, they were pillars of the small town where I grew up, and I delivered papers and groceries to them for many years.

To think that someone I knew well was commemorated in Normandy.

Walt Lemon – November 13, 2014 (636 words)

