

## French Legion of Honour ceremony held at Legion



Veteran Bill Cooper is provided with a Quilt of Valour by Sean Cook, president of the Wilberforce Legion, as part of his award of the French Legion of Honour recognizing his efforts to liberate that country during the Second World War. SARAH VANCE Special to This Week

### By Sarah Vance

Local veteran Bill Cooper was made a Knight of the French National Order of the Legion of Honour on Sunday afternoon, at the Bancroft branch of the Royal Canadian Legion.

The medal presentation was part of a French government initiative in 2014, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of D-Day and the Liberation of France from the German occupation during the Second World War. The decision was made to recognize all those who helped in this effort, and France worked with Veterans Affairs Canada to identify the eligible survivors. To date, more than 1,000 Canadian veterans have received Legion medals.

Cooper served as an artilleryman in Normandy in 1944, reported Bob Brown, a member of the Legion who helped facilitate the ceremony.

Larry Shattraw, president of the Bancroft Legion branch, began by extending his congratulations to all service people who have contributed to Canadian military efforts.

Cooper's granddaughter Jennifer joined him in uniform, in her role as a fire prevention and public education officer at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Fire and Emergency Services. The uniform is a way for emergency responders to show respect at these ceremonies, said Jennifer.

I do not remember my grandfather speaking about the war very often when I was growing up, she said. His service was important to him, but he kept his memories largely private.

The Town of Bancroft's acting Deputy Mayor Mary Kavanagh stressed the importance of continuing to share Canada's wartime contributions, and identified how medal ceremonies help communities connect to this history. Canada's wartime contributions were important in shaping our local community, even today, said Kavanagh.

Sean Cook, president of the Wilberforce Legion, wrapped Cooper in a colourful handmade quilt, created and registered with the Quilts of Valour Canada Society.

This charitable organization, which has set a goal of sewing 10,000 quilts of valour by 2018, distributes the handmade blankets to service people and veterans free of charge, as a gesture of solidarity and in the spirit of comfort.

Provincial MP Todd Smith spoke at length about Cooper's volunteerism in the town of Bancroft, service that he continues today despite the fact that he is now 94.

?I am overwhelmed by this praise and so honoured by this ceremony,? said Cooper as he posed for photographs with fellow service people and his family.

Sunday's ceremony for Bill Cooper follows a presentation of this same honour to veteran Ewart Wannamaker, a resident of the North Hastings Centennial Manor, who was presented with his medal by the French Embassy's Lt. Col. Vandomme in 2015.