



Kate Skye photo

NEVER FORGOTTEN: B.C. author Silvia Crooks stopped in Trail last week with copies of her new book, *Homefront and Battlefront*, and gave complimentary copies to Peter Dewdney and his sister Dee Dee McBride, who she said were important contributors to the work.

Nelson author profiles West Kootenay war vets

By Kate Skye
Times Correspondent

Silvia Crooks has spent the past two years researching and writing the stories of the West Kootenay men who gave up their lives in the Second World War.

"I was taught how to skate when I was three by a young man who joined the air force," said the Vancouver-based writer.

"He was killed in the war. Up until then the war was everywhere but it didn't hit home for me. When he was killed, it was almost a trauma to me because it meant

that people I knew could be killed."

Born and raised in Nelson, Crooks decided after she retired from a 16-year career as faculty member of the UBC School of Library Studies that she would research the life of the young man she remembered so fondly.

"I thought about him over the years," she said. "After I retired I was curious about what happened to him and I ended up looking into all the men listed on the Nelson cenotaph and then I got interested in the community. I wasn't planning to write a book, I was just

curious."

But after two years of research, a well-indexed book surfaced. Crooks stopped by Trail last week, on her way to promote the book in Nelson, to visit with Peter Dewdney and his sister Dee Dee.

"I'm giving complimentary copies of the book to people who have helped me with the book or had very close connections with people profiled in the book," she said.

"Dee Dee had a brother-in-law who was killed in the war and her husband (Leigh) was a prisoner of war. See DEWDNEY, Page 2

Dewdney, Gray, Diamond called 'Three Musketeers'

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war who lost an eye. There's quite a lot about him in the book."

In the Second World War, the small city of Nelson sent 1,300 of its 7,000 citizens off to war and 70 of those men didn't come back. Hampton Gray, who the Trail Armories are named after, was one of those men. He received the Victoria Cross and was the last Canadian serviceman to die in combat during the war.

"Peter was a very close friend of Hammy's," Crooks said. "Peter, Hammy and Jack Diamond, whose father was general manager of Cominco, were called the 'Three Musketeers.' They borrowed Hammy's father's car to drive to Calgary to sign up for the navy."

Neither Hammy or Jack came back after the war.

Peter, after serving 5-1/2 years, returned from his duties as a lieutenant in the Royal Navy and joined the law department of Cominco. Now at the age of 88, he and his wife Maxine continue to reside in Tadanac.

Crooks admits that Trail has as many wonderfully inspiring stories as Nelson when it comes to effort and energy given to the war.

"As I started to assemble all this information I realized this was a story that was happening all across the country," she said. "This could be Trail I was

writing about."

As well as writing about the men themselves, Crooks tells the inspiring story of how Nelson citizens of all ages helped marshal their resources and devoted their civic life for six years to help make victory possible.

"Nelson was called by one of the senior Red Cross officials in Victoria during the war, 'The most patriotic town in B.C.,'" she said, "because everybody was doing something, all the knitting and the fundraising and the making of jam."

As well as the stories of the men and the community, the book has 51 photographs, cartoons, advertisements and announcements.

Crooks, who once worked as a junior reporter for the Nelson Daily News, said she used newspapers, including the Trail Daily Times, along with many other resources to collect her material.

She was also delighted to find a local publishing company that agreed to publish the book. Granville Island Publishing has printed 1,000 copies in soft cover.

Hoping to be back in the Trail area around Nov. 11, Crooks said she feels she has accomplished something important.

"I was trying to bring to life those names on the cenotaph so they would mean something," she said. "So we would know who these people were and the sacrifices they made and also this was an opportunity for me to pay back to my home town, Nelson, which I'm very fond of."

Dewdney said he was looking forward to reading the book, which, according to reviewers, is written in lucid prose.

"I think the book is wonderful; all those names almost forgotten. I knew them as boys, in the book they come to life," he said. "When you get old and you look back at the war years, remembering them is important."

His sister agreed. "I'm very glad she wrote this book," she said. "Those poor boys, most of them, lost their lives. The least we can do is honour them and thank them."

For more information about the book see www.granvilleislandpublishing.com

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