



`Community champion' Bob Fyfe was active in veterans' community

Former firefighter was a major presence at Remembrance Day service

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Bob Fyfe was so revered in the veterans' community he was honoured with a special commendation from Veterans Affairs in 2016 for his service.

The former member of the Royal Canadian Navy was also a firefighter for three decades, working at such fires as the 1976 Christmas blaze at the Wentworth Arms Hotel at Main Street East and Hughson Street South, that killed six people.

Fyfe, who died Jan. 7 at age 90, was a member of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry Veterans Association — he played bugle in its band — as well as the United Council of Veterans in Hamilton, the Hamilton Veterans Committee, the Royal Canadian Legion and the Toronto Signals Trumpet Band.

He oversaw and was a presence at many Remembrance Day services and served on the advisory committee for Veterans' Place in Gore Park. He performed “The Last Post” at the 50th anniversary of the Dieppe landings in France in 1992, and the 55th anniversary in 1997.

He attended the 2024 Remembrance Day service in Gore Park, even though his health was failing, where he read a poem.

As a member and chair of the Hamilton Veterans Committee, he helped, among other things, revise the city's facility naming policy to recognize military personnel and give James Street North the commemorative name Veterans Way.

While his daughter Debbie Vallee said her father was a funny and opinionated man “who had something to say about everyone,” she also described him as a man of action.

“Instead of just sitting there talking about or complaining about something, my father just felt being involved was his opinion,” said the retired office worker.

“He thought if you're not involved, you shouldn't have an opinion. He stayed involved in so many things.”

She said the wall beside his desk in his Mount Hope home was covered with awards presented to him during his life. More than 100 people attended his Jan. 16 funeral service, including an honour guard from the fire department.

Hamilton Mayor Andrea Horwath called Fyfe “a dedicated servant of his community and country.”

“Robert was a respected and dedicated community champion,” the mayor said in a statement. “Robert Fyfe holds a special place in Hamiltonians' hearts.”

Former Hamilton Mountain MPP Monique Taylor said Fyfe “was a true Hamiltonian, dedicating decades of his life to our city and country. I cannot recall a veterans' event where I did not encounter Bob and his welcoming smile.”

Tim Fletcher knew Fyfe for three decades through RHLI and Remembrance Day events.

“Bob's reputation was a guy who was straight up,” he said. “He didn't sugar-coat anything. He was a gentleman, but when he ran the Remembrance Day event, he ran a tight ship.”

Robert William Fyfe was born June, 2, 1934, in Hamilton. He attended Central Secondary School and joined the RCN in 1954. He served five years in Halifax and left as a leading seaman. He worked at Stelco for about six months before he joined the Hamilton Fire Department in 1960. He retired in 1991 as a first-class firefighter and served in the department's drum corps.

His love of playing the bugle got him in trouble one year, his daughter recalled. He booked off sick one day to march in a parade and the chief saw a photo of him in the parade.

“He loved his band,” said Vallee. She said he went to New York City to help out after 911, but probably his toughest time was when he came back from working at the Wentworth Arms Hotel blaze.

“He was sitting out on the back porch crying,” she recalled. “He had to carry out a dead child. That broke him.”

Fyfe served as the chief's assistant and driver in his final years with the department. He typed reports with two fingers.

Fyfe is survived by his partner Maureen Clements, children Debbie, Judy and Robert, two grandchildren and four greatgrandchildren. He was predeceased by his wife Yvonne in 2004