

GLORY BOUND

Glory Bound

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Although this novel is based on true events all characters are portrayed in a fictitious manner and any likeness to names, characters, locations, situations or events portrayed within this work are not intended to reflect actual real life persons, situations or events and any similarities are purely coincidental.

I would like to thank my wife Karen Tosoff for her dedication in editing my work.

Reference to the official accounts and invaluable records of the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada is acknowledged in the writing of this novel.

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GLORY BOUND

GLORY BOUND

One man's experience of WW2 and the backstory of a
lost heritage.

GLORY BOUND

Dedicated to the memory of all those who served in the many wars that have plagued this planet.

“Some men do, and some men don’t,
Some men will, and some men won’t,

GLORY BOUND

Stand and fight for freedom's ground,
With bullets flying all around.
What would you do if it were you?
Would you give it all?
Glory Bound.”

~Lloyd Tosoff

“From across the North Atlantic,
Sailing on a ship of dreams,
Came the humble immigrants,
Of simple means.
The Motherland had given up,
Her daughters and her sons,
For a future that lay waiting down,
Pier 21.

They lined the decks on the port side,
As the ship pulled into dock,
Reached their port of entry,
At six bells by the clock.
It was sunrise over Halifax,
And a new day had begun,
As they saw their future waiting there down,
Pier 21.”

~Lloyd Tosoff and John Hough

GLORY BOUND

A novel based on true events

Author's Note

GLORY BOUND

The characters in this work are modeled after the lives of real people, some whose names have been changed to respect their individual privacy as well as to reflect the fictional nature of the story. Although the events portrayed within this work are for the most part, true, in certain cases they have been embellished by the author. It was the depth and courage of those men and women—our valued immigrants—who came to Canada under the most difficult of circumstances that defines who we are as a people and whose real story goes beyond words. Those men and women who fought in the name of freedom against the bloody evil regimes of dictators across history are the embodiment of selfless courage. To take the life you are given and raise it up to a higher purpose against all odds is to define the term, “Glory Bound.”

Born and raised with neither means nor opportunity to go beyond the humble beginnings of his heritage, Ted Dimitroff was a man of courage that defied the odds against him. It was the spring of 1941 when the 17-year-old walked into the Canadian Army recruiting office in Prince George, Canada and lied about his age to join in the war effort against Nazi Germany. Many like Ted, had forefathers who fled their homelands and left behind an unspoken past. This is the story of a father and a son, both of whom shared life circumstances that required them to reclaim their lost years.

It was an unusually balmy day on March 5th, 1941 when 17-year-old Ted Dimitroff and his friend Stan Gordon walked along the shoreline of the Fraser River near their home in Shelley, British Columbia. The skies were clear except for a few puffy clouds as the afternoon sun cast shadows on the ground below the tall cottonwood trees still barren from the long and cold northern winter. As they walked the two young men left their footprints on the muddy slope of the riverbank, a sign that heralded the coming of spring breakup.

The small community was a CNR railway stop 10 miles east of Prince George, a rough and tumble city in the northern reaches of the Canadian west. Originally a trading post for the Hudson's Bay Company established during the gold rush of the 1800s, Fort George became known as a depot for fur trading and a place where hearty frontiersmen gave birth to the logging industry in the north. Incorporated in 1915 when the CNR rail bridge was built across the Fraser River, Prince George was developing into one of the youngest and bustling cities in Canada.

The spring thaw had begun to break up the ice on the river that remained completely frozen over during much of the bitterly cold winter season. Ice floes drifted downstream where they would slowly melt, before the glacial fed river would eventually reach the warmer temperate climate of the Fraser Valley 600 miles to the south. The Fraser River was one of the longest rivers in Canada and ran from the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains to the coastal metropolis of Vancouver where it eventually merged with the waters of the Strait of Georgia. Ted stopped, picked up a stone and threw it into the river where it bounced off a large chunk of ice. He turned to his curly haired friend Stan.

"Do you think Mr. Wallace is running his speeder today?" Ted asked, referring to the maintenance foreman responsible for the CNR rails around Shelley.

"I think so. I heard him go by as I was feeding my pigs, earlier," Stan replied.

The station foreman was the father of Ted's good friend Ted Wallace and made several daily runs between Shelley and Prince George to inspect and repair the tracks and switches. Riding the speeder was the fastest way for local boys like Ted and Stan to get to town. They would wait at the tiny station at Shelley and hold out their thumbs as the speeder approached and most of the time Mr. Wallace would gladly pick them up. However, it was a long walk back if they missed the last return trip at the end of Mr. Wallace's shift.

"Have you seen the newspapers lately? They say the war is starting against the Japs now," Ted said as he skipped another stone off the slow moving waters in front of his parents' house.

"No, I haven't," red-headed Stan replied.

"I think I'm gonna join up," Ted continued.

"You're not old enough, Fleet," Stan said as he stopped his friend by grabbing his arm. "Seventeen is too young, you won't get in."

"Maybe, but I'm tired of cooking slop for the loggers and besides there's no future for us here," Ted continued.

Once the local children completed grade eight in primary school, their only option was to go to Prince George to continue their education. The Great Depression had devastated the local economy and for a boy with a Slavic name there was little opportunity to get ahead, except in logging or as a timber handler in the mills. Those with English and Scottish last names enjoyed an advantage, ending up with the good government jobs.

“What will your mom and dad say?”

“I’m not gonna tell ’em,” Ted said. “I’m gonna join up today.”

“Well, I can’t. Since my dad died last year, I gotta help mom look after the young ones,” Stan said as they walked up towards the train station.

John Gordon had been the ferryman operating the reaction ferry across the Fraser River until it was taken out of service in 1935. He died in 1940 of a sudden heart attack leaving behind a widow and four children.

“All the best my friend. I gotta go, Ted.”

“Alright. Well I guess I’ll see you around Stan,” Ted said as the two went their separate ways.

It was about an hour later when the CNR speeder came around the bend north of the little station. Ted held out his thumb and the tiny speeder slowed down, eventually coming to a stop abreast of where Ted was standing.

“Hop in Fleet,” Mr. Wallace said as he motioned for Ted to sit beside him.

“Thanks! How’s the maestro doing?” Ted asked about his good friend as they got underway.

“Oh, alright I s’pose. He’s playing piano here and there, making a few bucks,” Mr. Wallace answered.

“That’s good,” Ted replied.

Mr. Wallace knew Ted well and sensed that something was on his mind.

“Where are you off to?”

Ted turned and looked at Mr. Wallace for a moment.

“I’m joining up!”

“The army?”

“That’s right,” Ted replied.

As they crossed the big steel bridge over the Fraser River, Ted felt a surge of anxiety at having disclosed his plan.

“Don’t tell my dad. He’s against war,” Ted stated as his hair blew around with the wind coming through the open side panels.

“Well, where he came from it was pretty rough with all the wars going on,” Mr. Wallace said as they pulled up to the railyard. “There you go lad.”

“Thanks, and say goodbye to Ted for me,” he said after jumping off the speeder.

“I will and good luck, my boy,” Mr. Wallace replied as he got underway again towards the track exchange for the return trip.

Unsure of where the Canadian Army Recruiting office was located, Ted walked towards downtown Prince George. He spotted a Mountie walking along 1st Avenue, looking at the Nechako cut banks across the river with a pair of binoculars. Ted strained to see if he could make out what the big cop was looking at to no avail.

“Excuse me officer, do you know where the recruiting office is?” he asked.

The policeman lowered the binoculars and looked over at Ted.

“Sure, just keep going. There are lots of signs that will lead you there, son,” the officer replied.

“Thanks.”

The late afternoon had turned cool and Ted was glad he had on the Indian sweater Mary Sampson from the reservation across the river knitted for him. Everyone in Shelley knew each other as it was a close knit community between the natives and the whites who lived in Shelley and the neighbouring settlements.

Sure enough, Ted ended up at the door of the recruitment office in a lineup of young men, none of whom he recognized. He queued up and waited his turn to talk to the administrative officer.

“Next,” the man said as he motioned to Ted.

“I’m here to do my duty,” Ted replied as he stood at the counter.

“So, you’re joining up, are you,” the moustached older man said as he pushed an application form across the counter.

“I am.”

“You’ll have to confirm your age before I let you fill out the form,” he said officiously.

“I’m 18,” Ted shot back, unsure what the official age requirement was.

“You’re too young then. You have to be 19 to go overseas for combat,” the officer replied as he pulled away the application form.

Ted slapped his hand onto the form to prevent him from withdrawing it.

“Then I’m 19!”

The two of them locked eyes for a moment.

“Alright, then fill out the form and take it over to the intake booth for processing,” the man stated as he let go of the application document.

“When should I come back once I’m accepted?”

“You won’t be coming back, son. The army has requisitioned that train out there and you ship out within the hour,” the official said as he pointed towards the intake booth. “Go over there.”

Realizing that this was it, and there was no turning back once he signed his name, Ted hesitated.

“Aw, to hell with it,” he said as he found a pen and began to fill out the details.

A large crowd of men looking more like boys than soldiers stood at the boarding area where the special CNR passenger train sat waiting to take on the new recruits. Ted was pushed from behind as they all piled onto the overloaded train car. Without anything to his name, not even a toothbrush, Ted was a bit shocked at the sudden turn of events. There was little small talk as the new recruits took in the weight of their decision to join in the war effort. As the train lurched forward, the butterflies in Ted’s stomach made him feel like he was going to be sick. The wet behind the ears country boy had never been away from home.

As they crossed the CNR bridge, Ted looked southward downstream wondering what it was going to be like to see Vancouver for the first time. Except for hockey games in Prince George he had never been outside of Shelley before. Ten minutes later the Pullman car approached the Shelley station.

“Will we stop at Shelley?” Ted asked the conductor who happened to pass by.

“No, son, we are now non-stop until we get to Harvey Station at Tête Jaune Cache where we will have a short break before we head south to Kamloops,” he replied. “There’s a toilet at the head of the coach if anyone needs one.”

Ted had never seen, let alone used a flush toilet.

“Hey, let me hang my head out the window, would you,” Ted said as he muscled his way to the open left side window.

As the train passed the Shelley station, there was his family; his dad and mom, brothers and sisters waving furiously at the passing train, hoping to get a glance of their son and brother. Standing behind them was his friend Stan with a silly grin on his face as he too waved at Ted.

“You sonofabitch,” Ted said as he waved back at them, realizing that Stan had told on him.

“Good luck Fleet,” Ted heard them yell out over the sound of the train.

He was glad that he had been able to wave goodbye to his family.

“Are you the first to enlist?” one of the boys on the train asked.

“No, my older brother Don is already in training,” Ted replied. “He’s a good driver and hopes to make the transport division.”

It was dark by the time they reached Harvey Station and Ted was tired, so he didn’t disembark. He soon fell fast asleep and didn’t wake up till morning with the sun on his face. The train was travelling through the famous Fraser Canyon and Ted had a view of the deep gorge at Hell’s Gate through the window of the Pullman car. The river that was so slow and wide at Shelley narrowed to a torrent of white water as they passed by the controversial landmark. Being close to the natives had made Ted and his family aware of the uproar caused when the construction of the CNR caused a rockslide that prevented migrating salmon from making their way up the Fraser, resulting in a decrease in natural fish stock along the waterway.

By late afternoon the train pulled into the huge station in Vancouver where they disembarked and waited for a troop carrier to transport them to their first taste of military life. Ted could see the skyline of downtown Vancouver and the excitement of being in such a big city was overwhelming to the youngster from the bush of Northern BC.

They were transported to the Seaforth Armory at the south foot of the Burrard Street bridge and as Ted jumped to the pavement he looked up at the monolithic concrete structure. It was astonishing. Its 50’ high walls and turrets made the recently constructed building look like a medieval castle from the history books Ted remembered studying during his school days.

The new recruits were processed and given uniforms and crew cuts before they were assembled for their first briefing. Ted was now among hundreds of new soldiers who would soon be put into the rigorous training that would prepare them for military life.

“Good afternoon. I am Master Warrant Officer, Sergeant-Major James Hathaway otherwise known as your MWO. Welcome to the first day of basic training. From now on you are part of the 2nd Brigade, 1st Canadian Infantry Division of the Seaforth Highlanders. You will be subjected to physically taxing training designed to prepare you as foot soldiers for the rigours of hand to hand combat in the battle against Adolf Hitler,” the officious man said, as he addressed the ranks of new soldiers.

Ted had cast aside his civilian clothes including his precious knit sweater and was now wearing black combat boots and a green woolen uniform that identified him as a recruit within the Seaforth Highlanders.

“You will always reply in unison any time I address you, with the words, yes sir! Am I understood?”

“Yes sir,” the one hundred man congregation replied loosely.

“Louder, I can’t hear you,” he said in a booming voice that commanded immediate respect.

“YES SIR,” they replied in unison.

“Further, you will always salute a superior officer’s uniform each and every time you happen to meet or pass him,” the MWO continued. “A salute looks like this!”

The MWO held his hand to his temple and stood at attention.

“Do it, now!”

All one hundred men raised their hands in a salute to their new Sergeant-Major.

“Alright, at ease. You are welcome to stay here or to wander the streets of Vancouver, but you must be back by 2100 hours. Anyone who is late will be subjected to the first taste of military discipline. Understood?”

“YES SIR,” came the exuberant reply.

“Any questions?”

Ted held up his hand

“Soldier?”

“Sir, what time is 2100 hours?” Ted asked.

“Where are you from, boy?”

“Shelley,” Ted replied.

“That is Shelley, SIR!” the MWO shot back.

“Shelley, SIR!” Ted replied.

“What is your name?”

“Private Ted Dimitroff, SIR!” he replied.

“What kind of name is that?”

Ted turned beet red.

“Bulgarian, SIR!”

“We can overlook your ignorance, but you had better be a quick study if you hope to survive as a Highlander,” the MWO said scathingly.

Ted wished he’d never asked the question. The other soldiers chuckled.

“Quiet!” the MWO’s voice boomed.

“YES SIR!” came the resounding reply.

“Now listen up. The clock goes around twice. Midnight is 0000 hours, noon is 1200 hours and 11 PM is 2300 hours and so on. Understood soldier?”

“YES SIR!” Ted replied.

“That’s all. Go have some fun!”

Ted was in culture shock, away from home for the first time in a big strange city subject to exacting military discipline. However, as the group dispersed, Ted settled his nerves and was excited to see the sights of Vancouver.

He ambled onto Burrard Street and walked northward across the bridge towards downtown. Afraid he would become lost and attract the ire of the MWO again, he did not venture off Burrard Street and continued walking towards the tall buildings ahead of him. It was Saturday evening and there were lots of people milling around and traffic like he had never seen before.

As he walked along the sidewalk in the downtown core of Vancouver, a black Cadillac convertible passed by, going in the same direction. Ted was astonished at how modern and beautiful the brand new automobile was, having only ever seen a Model A Ford owned by the local storekeeper in Shelley. The Cadillac pulled into a massive portico where a sign read, “The Hotel Vancouver.” A uniformed man helped a well-dressed young woman out of the passenger side while at the same time the driver got out and handed some money to the man as the young woman walked through the entrance doors to the hotel.

Mesmerized, Ted kept walking until he spotted a man also wearing a uniform standing at the main entrance of the huge hotel. When he looked over, Ted raised his hand in a formal military salute. Surprised that the man did not return a salute, Ted was perplexed and stopped dead in his tracks staring at the man and his uniform.

“I’m a doorman, kid,” the man said sarcastically as he rolled his eyes.

Realizing his blunder, Ted skulked away red-faced, before turning back towards the Burrard Street bridge and the Seaforth Armory. It was his first taste of the big city and the start of his military career.

