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THE LATE ERNEST CÔTÉ

Statement by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, March 10, 2015

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[Translation]

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Hon. Claudette Tardif: Honourable senators, it was with deep sadness that I learned of the passing on February 25 of Franco-Albertan veteran Ernest Côté. He was 101.

He was one of the most famous veterans in the country. He was a true hero who leaves behind many medals and insignia and the memory of a man who showed exemplary heroism and great generosity.

He was recognized for playing a major role in the historic event that led to the fall of Nazi Germany during the Second World War. In fact, he was named a member of the Order of the British Empire by King George VI.

The lieutenant-colonel was in charge of logistics for the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division during the famous Normandy landing on Juno Beach on June 6, 1944. Seventy years later to the day, I had the immense pleasure of attending the official international ceremony commemorating the 70th anniversary of the allied landing in Ouistreham, Normandy.

The next day, I had the honour of speaking with Mr. Côté at the Bretteville-sur-Laize Canadian military cemetery in Cintheaux during a ceremony to pay tribute to the Canadian soldiers buried there. Mr. Côté delivered a memorable speech in both official languages, without notes and with remarkable coherence and clarity.

I had the privilege of knowing Mr. Côté when I was the dean of the University of Alberta's Campus Saint-Jean. He came to meet with me to honour the contribution his father had made to Alberta's francophone community by creating the Jean-Léon Côté bursary for francophone students pursuing their studies at the Campus Saint-Jean. Jean-Léon Côté, Ernest's father, was a surveyor, engineer, miner and Alberta MLA before being appointed to the Senate of Canada in 1923.

After studying law at the University of Alberta, Ernest Côté joined the Royal 22^e Régiment in 1939 as a lieutenant. He landed in Normandy on June 6, 1944 as the logistics coordinator for the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division.

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After the war, Mr. Côté had a distinguished career in the federal public service as a diplomat and a public servant. He participated in the first meetings of the United Nations General Assembly. He was appointed as Canadian ambassador to Finland by Pierre Elliott Trudeau before retiring in 1975.

Honourable senators, we have lost a dignified and humble man who lived an impressive life and demonstrated extraordinary courage. I will never forget how much he truly cared about Alberta's francophone community, as demonstrated by the fact that when I met with him here in Ottawa just a few weeks ago, he wanted to know how he could continue to support the Campus Saint-Jean.

Ernest Côté is a hero who must always be remembered.

Well done.
