

# Andy Mulcahy

## *A Voice for Reason*

1922-2019

### **Gary Bauslaugh**

**J**une 6, 1944: D Day. I don't remember anything about that day – I was only three at the time, lucky to be born too late to fight in the War. Many others – still kids, but old enough to be recruited into the armed forces – do not remember it either. They are long dead, killed in the invasion of France of the Allied forces. But those who survived remember the occasion vividly.

One of the survivors was young Andy Mulcahy, already a six-year veteran with the Canadian Scottish Regiment at the age of 23. He was among the 150,000 Allied soldiers who landed at

Normandy that day and started their grim trek across northern Europe. Somehow, for most of the journey, Andy avoided being seriously wounded. He wrote:

“Late on June 8, we were rushed into battle positions as a reserve battalion. The 12<sup>th</sup> Panzer Armored Division had broken through the Winnipeg Rifles (forty-five of the Winnipeggers captured were executed the next day). As a counterattack, we began the long walk into a rain of enemy fire. I braced myself to take the bullets. The air was full of tracers... In the first six days after we landed, one thousand and

seventeen men were killed in our Canadian Division alone... I used to pray to live for one half-hour more. I don't know why a half-hour, but maybe I felt that it was the best deal any god could give me under the circumstances. I lost that talisman...”

Later Andy was to say, “Every day since D-Day has been a beautiful bonus, like winning a daily lottery.”

Eventually, after about 8 months of this fighting, Andy was wounded near the German border and his days in the trenches were over. He was taken back to Britain and then, after the War, returned to

Canada, where he worked as a seaman and engineer. Living mostly in Victoria, Andy became one of Canada's most voluble humanists, writing and distributing a secular newsletter and frequently contributing letters to local and national newspapers.

They say there are no atheists in foxholes, but that is not true. For soldiers like Andy, the horrors of war were brutal testimony against the idea of a benevolent higher presence in our midst. How could any god allow such depravities?

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“Out of the blue it occurred to me that there was no such thing as a god,” Andy wrote. “I didn’t mention it to anyone at the time because I thought they already knew.”

Andy’s first marriage was something of a harmony of opposites, as Pearl never gave up her religious views throughout their 53 years together. She died in 2002. Andy is survived by his second wife, Joanne Manley, a member of the Victoria Secular Humanist Association which Andy had helped to found. Joanne is a courageous environmental activist, recently being arrested (at the age of 85) while protesting the Kinder Morgan pipeline.

Andy was a window to both the past and the future, reminding us not only of the terrible realities of past wars but also

of the need for reason and rationality in building a better society. Andy was unrelenting in his efforts to question blind faith and to support humanist points of view, and he never failed to acknowledge any of us who also spoke out on such matters.

Andy’s was a powerful voice, a good and decent voice, and he believed, in spite of his wartime experiences, in the fundamental goodness of human beings. There is no need, he would argue, to invoke the fear of god in order to encourage better behaviour. We fail not from ignoring divine guidance but, instead, when reason leaves us.

Andy Mulcahy, soldier in more than one war, pursued such convictions with vigour and eloquence. His example will be his legacy. •

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Left to right: Madeline Weld, Ron Tomlinson, Sophie Dulesh and Andy Mulcahy in Victoria, BC, in July of 2017. Photo by Richard Thain.