

War veteran gets his BA on anniversary of D-Day

Even heart bypass surgery in 1984 didn't stop Keith Zahn, formerly of the Royal Canadian Air Force, from completing his studies and earning his degree.

By Anita Dubey
The London Free Press

Keith Zahn had two reasons to celebrate at the University of Western Ontario's convocation ceremonies.

Years ago, he was part of Canada's effort to win the Second World War, helping transport North American soldiers to European shores to battle.

Monday, on the 50th anniversary of D-Day, he received his bachelor of arts in English from Huron College, 12 years after he started it.

"I've accomplished my main purpose — to get a degree," said Zahn, a tall, trim 78 year old, as he waited in the basement of Alumni Hall with hundreds of other social science graduates just before convocation.

OCEAN CROSSINGS: During the war, Zahn helped organize ocean crossings for soldiers as part of his duties with the Royal Canadian Air Force. He made 48 Atlantic Ocean crossings with about 500,000 men in 2½ years on the Queen Elizabeth I.

Each trip transported about 12,000 soldiers, and took six or seven days.

He stayed with the air force for about 24 years, and then worked as a courtroom clerk in London for the attorney-general's ministry.

After retirement, he decided to enrol in courses at Western.

As a first-time university student in 1982, Zahn didn't intend to complete a degree.

But he changed his mind after he saw all the courses he wanted to take and plunged into the routine of essays and exams.

"It was difficult, but there are so many people to help you," he said. "The young people are very nice."

THREE COURSES: Through Huron College's part-time and continuing education studies, Zahn took about three courses a year.

His studies included anthropology, political science

“
It was difficult but there are so many people to help you. The young people are very nice.
”

”
Keith Zahn
UWO graduate



SUSAN BRADNAM / The London Free Press

Keith Zahn, 78, gets a kiss from his wife, Anna, after receiving his bachelor of arts degree from the University of Western Ontario. During the Second World War, Zahn worked on the Queen Elizabeth I as a troop conductor. He left Europe the day before D-Day to transport troops and those in need of medical attention back home.

and geology as well as English.

He had to stop in 1984 when he had heart bypass surgery and returned to the classroom in 1990, determined to complete his bachelor of arts.

His son, Gary, followed his father's lead and started taking sociology courses at Western two years ago, after a 22-year break from academics.

Now that he's finished his BA, Zahn already has plans for the fall.

He was impressed by the Eastern philosophy he learned about in some courses and will be back at Western taking Mandarin courses.

"I want to read, write, and speak Chinese," he said.