

NORMANDY NEWSLETTER

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT - SPRING 2003

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL CHARLES H. BELZILE

By the time you receive this Newsletter, our student Tour 2003 to Italy will already be back in Canada. As has been the case each year since this programme started, we have had a very strong response from competing candidates for selection to one of our Bursaries. As usual, their selection was a difficult task confirming that the word is out there, not only demonstrated by the large number of applications, but also by the caliber of the applicants. Look for their reports in the Fall Newsletter, and our Web site.



in 2002. You will understand why we are hoping to grow this programme, with the assistance of VAC.

Belvédère in St-Lambert-sur-Dives

As you know, your Foundation seeks to assist Regimental Associations, veterans and service organizations in commemorating various battlefields of

interest to them and in support of our own programmes. One such programme, that of St-Lambert-sur-Dives, is a particularly significant one and deserves a little background story.

Our commemorative activities in Normandy in will take place as usual on 7 June, the day following the official opening, on D Day, of the Juno Beach Centre in Courseulles-sur-Mer. I am sure I speak on behalf of all of you when I offer our congratulations to Garth Webb, President of the Juno Beach Centre Association, and his very able team, for having brought to success such an ambitious and worthwhile project. We, at the Foundation, look forward to working with them.

In 2001, Mrs Patti Cleghorn approached Professor Terry Copp, who usually oversees those projects, and sought his advice on a birthday gift for her husband John, then CEO of the Royal Bank of Canada. As Chancellor of Wilfrid Laurier University,

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As mentioned in our treasurer's report in this Newsletter, our guide programme at Le Mémorial in Caen is in place for this year and our selectees, under the leadership of Céline Garbay from Regina, Sask. will be in place well before you receive this Newsletter. As an indication of the great success of this programme, I draw your attention to the report in this issue, by Marie-Eve Vaillancourt's, head guide

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Mr Cleghorn had continued his passionate interest in Canadian history and especially battlefield tours.

Professor Copp suggested that a new battlefield viewing area, or belvédère, constructed above the village of St-Lambert-sur-Dives, would offer Canadians and others an opportunity to visit and understand the battlefield where the battle of Normandy ended. Mrs Cleghorn agreed and a plan with photos and maps was presented to John on his 60th birthday.

The land for the belvédère was donated by Monsieur Longuet de Diguères and costs associated with parking areas and accessibility were met by the Département de l'Orne. Informally opened in August 2002 in the presence of the Cleghorn family, it will be officially inaugurated on 8 June 2003.

The site, which overlooks the village where David Currie earned his VC, includes a three dimensional full colour map of the battlefield plus descriptive plaques allowing visitors to orient themselves as they view the battlefield.

The Future

Several of our members have indicated to us that our name The Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation is restrictive and does not accurately describe our activities. There is a feeling that those not involved in the Battle of Normandy but very much somewhere

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else during WWII such as Italy, the Atlantic, Africa and the Far East, are therefore under represented. The issue keeps coming up as we send our bursary recipients (as is the case this year) to other areas, including the Scheldt, as well as the United Kingdom for RCAF and Naval Deployment areas and the battlefields of the Great War etc.

Our Strategic Planning Committee and our Communications Committee feel that our name should therefore be more inclusive of battlefields other than Normandy. Your Directors, at their meeting of 21 March agreed that we should look at it again with the intent to recommend a change to our general membership later this year.

Another item of concerns involves our annual fees, from which along with donations, we obtain our operating money. We feel that the expenses incurred are such (particularly since our Trust Fund is to be used strictly to fund our bursary activities) that we will need to recommend an increase from \$25.00 to \$40.00 at the next AGM to be held in the fall.

Charles H Belzile

LOST TRAILS

If anyone can give us a current address for any of the following, we would be grateful.

Mr. F. A. Clift (Goderich ON)
 Mrs. Marjorie Kemp (Nanaimo BC)
 MGen M. Scott Eichel (Victoria BC)
 MGen Phil A. Neatby (Ottawa ON)
 Old Boys – Lake Superior Regiment (Motor)
 Association (Thunder Bay ON)

LAST POST

We regret to announce the passing of the following members of the Foundation:

Mr. Allan E. McConney (Uxbridge ON)
 The Honourable Hartland de M. Molson (Montréal QC)
 Mr. Elmo Thibault (Alymer QC)

Notice of Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation will take place on Thursday, 16 October 2003 at 1330 Hrs in the Infantry Room of the Army Ottawa Officers Mess, 149 Somerset St. West, Ottawa, Ontario.

TREASURER'S REPORT

More members than ever before have prepaid their memberships for 2003. This is more than ever appreciated, as we are now at the low point of our fiscal year. This is due to several things.

First, we have expended a good deal of money on the "belvedere" at St. Lambert sur Dives and we are only now starting to receive the contributions of the various "partners" in France and from Canadian regiments. Without the large "up front" contribution of Mr. John Cleghorn, retired Chairman of RBC, we would not be opening the new belvedere this spring.

Second, we have already paid out much of the costs for this year's study tour which, on a per capita basis, will be more expensive than usual, as it will take place in Italy, commemorating the 60 anniversary of the Italian Campaign.

Finally, I have just sent cheques to our three guides who will be based in Caen this year. These are larger cheques than usual, as we are extending their period of service in

France from eight to twelve weeks, are providing Céline Garbay, our Senior Guide, an "up-front" cheque for the guides' administrative expenses in France and, also, giving the guides a long-overdue salary increase. This programme is heavily subsidized by a grant from Veterans' Affairs Canada and we are hoping for an increased amount this year from VAC.

Last fall, I mentioned that many of our members were in the habit of paying their dues only every two or three years and that, as our programmes and costs have grown, that's not enough to support our daily operations.

I am very pleased to say that a number of members, from whom we have not heard in some time, have answered the call and pitched in with a contribution. Thank you! Please keep it up! At the same time, I'd like to recognize all the individuals and organizations that have provided regular support, often well above the minimum \$25 we ask, which is no longer enough to cover our costs. More about that in the

President's message!

Showing the year to which your membership is paid up on the mailing label has proven to be a great idea and has saved members a number of letters and phone calls.

PLEASE check your label and, if you have fallen behind, send us a cheque TODAY for your membership and help keep our programs not just alive, but growing.

Thanks to all of you who call or write. I always enjoy talking to you. Please note that I will be in Western Australia doing some lecturing from 19 May through 6 June, 2003. If you send in a donation at that time, it will take a bit more time to get out your receipt, for which I apologize. A tough job, going to the old Oz at someone else's expense, but someone's got to do it!

WITH OUR GUIDES IN FRANCE

Marie-Eve Vaillancourt, Senior Guide

The following is a slightly abridged version of the report by Senior Guide Marie-Eve Vaillancourt on the guide program at Caen in 2002. As many as possible of her recommendations are being implemented in 2003.

The fourth annual summer guide programme at Le Memorial de Caen has proved to be a worthwhile and rewarding experience yet again. Celine Garbay, Kelli Fraser, Maryanne Lewell, and I provided the Canadian presence on behalf of the Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation from May 27th to July 22th 2002 inclusively. Within these fifty days, we gave over sixty guided tours of the Garden to a variety of visitors and we spoke to well over five hundred visitors in total. Beyond these numbers much was achieved in terms of disseminating historical knowledge about the Canadians' role in the battle of Normandy, and this proved rewarding to visitors and guides alike.

The fact that we were all completely new to the experience and tasks at hand gave us a fresh perspective that was a defining factor throughout the term. This year's team was different in the sense that it was not led by Kate Fitzpatrick, who had performed the role of head guide for the last three years. Without her experience to guide us in the beginning we felt in many ways that we were breaking new ground.

As in other years, we spent the bulk of our time in the hall of the Memorial and our Canadian presence was always a reassuring sight to fellow travellers. We clearly had an impact on these Canadian visitors, as the tour log document will attest. We made the most of every opportunity to not only inform visitors about the Canadian military's role in Normandy, but more importantly, to offer human contact. Our ability to foster and strengthen both historical and emotional links to Canadian memorial sites, cemeteries, and above all, the garden space proved to be appreciated by everyone. This added dimension is clearly one of the most important strengths of the CBNF guide program, as Canadians -young and old alike- leave with impressions and experiences (emotional and personal) often far more memorable than regular museum visits.

The Canadian presence always attracted a lot of attention from Dutch, English, Scots, Australians, and Americans. We had many opportunities to give these visitors a perspective on Canada's participation in Normandy and the Second World War. These 'out-reach' opportunities are of great value and render the CBNF an informal 'embassy' and provide a unique Canadian perspective within the international profile of the Memorial, thereby fostering a broader understanding of Canadian military history.

Our presence at the kiosk often provided many French civilians, with stark memories of our soldiers, an opportunity to shake hands with us and say a heartfelt thank you. To experience this first hand was tremendous. The links between Canada and France formed in 1944 are very much alive. For the community to see us, a young generation of Canadians so actively involved in remembrance, was an integral part our experiences here; very rewarding and especially motivating. Additional reports provided by the rest of our team will offer more information about some of these experiences.

Beyond the realm of the Memorial, we had the chance to participate in commemorative ceremonies, revisit battlefields, meet locals and officials, as well as assist local school groups in their tours of the Canadian sector, thereby increasing CBNF visibility in the community. We set out to retrace the Canadian battlefields on many occasions and were able to mingle with French civilians, who were always thrilled to welcome us warmly and come to visit with their relatives at our kiosk.

There are also a variety of commemorative events throughout the season and we tried to attend as many as possible. It could be very valuable for next year's term and the CBNF senior staff to further investigate ways to increase our active participation in such events, and thereby solidify our presence in the community. Our presence at official ceremonies has been very much appreciated by the community, and we often

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felt the attendees appreciated seeing a new generation standing among their ranks. Clearly, to see us among their generation gives them hope.

Once set up at the desk we established the schedule, usually two weeks at a time, taking personal preferences into consideration. Every attempt was made to allow for special opportunities such as day trips to Canadian Sites with the CBNF study tour or invitations for meals... Motivation seemed to fluctuate with visitor flow, especially towards the end of the term, when things quieted down quite a bit. D-Day weekend was definitely the peak period, as the three of us were often all busy helping different parties and there was no shortage of customers at the kiosk.

We also set out our daily statistics sheets right away and were able to keep a close account of the nationalities of visitors with whom we talked and to whom we provided garden tours. We tried to maintain a daily presence at the kiosk as much as possible, especially over the weekends, where visitor flow seemed to increase. Ideally we kept two people on schedule at all times while the third team member enjoyed a day off, but there were certainly days every week where everyone was working. There was rarely a shortage of work and often we would all be busy carrying conversations with different groups.

Also, in keeping with Terry Copp's recommendations, we shifted our attention more to the Garden and the presence at the Memorial, and less on the surrounding Canadian sites. Kate Fitzpatrick's report from last year seemed to imply that a strong emphasis should be put on the beaches and battlefields tours, and that candidates were selected largely because of their historical knowledge - which would enable them to carry out these duties. Given that we had a team with good historical background and willingness to help any eager Canadians, we did take a few tours out to the beaches, using the regional bus system. The option of using visitors' transportation raised security questions, and it was decided that no one should be put in a position where she felt uncomfortable. While taking interested visitors to sites like Carpiquet or Point 67 and engaging them in much needed historical discussions is very important, keeping in mind our primary functions at the Memorial is also crucial. A balance of both can certainly be achieved and we strove to stay flexible.

The most popular sites however remain the beaches and cemeteries. Engaging people in deep battlefield analyses, as much as we all love getting into that, being the Copp-Patterson protégés that we are, is not always easy. In general, most visitors do not have a strong background in military history and concepts of terrain and army structure are often difficult to convey. Some aspects however, are really easy to convey, especially using the Garden space and its elements as a starting point to introduce some basic Copp mantras such as the famous "decision-making-process-based-on-information-available-at-the-time." Focusing more on the ground soldier experience and our own knowledge of certain veterans or regimental stories often made a strong impression on our visitors.

The terrain in Normandy is not the primary focus of the Garden, apart from the subtle hints of concealment and exposure evoked by the path and the open field leading to the reflective pool. However, as guides we strove to impress on people how complex, difficult and costly these operations were. Before sending our visitors to the beaches and cemeteries we would often offer them helpful hints regarding terrain, reminding them that this country side, however flat and peaceful it may look, presented many difficulties for an advancing brigade or company. To simply remind visitors to pay attention to rises, gullies and high ground is a good start in getting them that much closer to the terrain for which our countrymen fought and died.

It would be very useful for future guides to have a 'messages and themes' document included in the regular info package

Such lessons were included in our presentations on our own initiative. It would be very useful for future guides to have a 'messages and themes' document included in the regular info package. Such a document would help steer the guides in the right interpretative direction and ensure that the main messages of the CBNF are communicated accurately and consistently. CBNF guides are the Foundation's mouthpieces in France and this position should be exploited to the maximum. Small summaries of specific battles, or a general overview of the Normandy campaign could be developed in support of these main messages and themes.

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VISIBILITY-

We soon realised we needed a large banner indicating exactly who and what we are. Something like “CBNF –Information Kiosk” would help identify ourselves to our visitors, and avoid having visitors pass by us unsure or confused as to what our purpose was. Quite a few visitors made this suggestion as well. Many French-Canadians and Quebecois also suggested including a Quebec flag in order to show our ability to speak French. A simple “English/Français” sign – the ones you see in government offices back home - would serve the same purpose.

Another point: I had brought CWM and DND pamphlets over with me, which proved to be extremely popular and a good way to lure people over with freebies. After a few weeks of numerous questions regarding other sites of interests like Vimy Ridge, Beaumont-Hamel and Dieppe we realised we should have had those brochures available from the beginning. Another useful hand out could be NAC pamphlets, especially considering the various demands about obtaining personnel records. The new “Canadian Virtual Memorial” brochure and other VAC publications could definitely be of use as well. And most importantly, a donation/membership form or simple info brochure about the CBNF is much needed as we received numerous inquiries about that as well.

There was much interest in the Foundation, its aims, its goals and its members

There was much interest in the Foundation, its aims, its goals and its members, and it was awkward to start jotting down the address and email on a piece of scrap paper. A quick and easy way to fix this next season would be to print off a few dozen business cards, leaving a spot for the ever-changing mobile phone number.

If any brochure should be available however, it should be a take-away guide to the garden’s interpretation. Because guided tours are only available for a short time during the summer months, a brochure left at the Memorial would provide access to the explanations year-round. If kept in a protective case in the garden itself, the message would also reach the visitors we miss; in particular those who access the garden upon

exiting the new exhibit. Although the text panels convey some information, visitors consistently found that guided tours revealed so much more, and that without them the experience of visiting the garden is entirely different. A brochure could also touch on the Foundation’s annual battlefield study tour and explain its mandate more fully.

Should these two suggestions be carried over to next year’s guide season, contacts should be made in early spring in order to arrange for shipping and ensure a generous portion of leftovers for following season. In the event that senior guide is in charge of this, (such as for poppies and Canadian pins, to contact various institutions and ensure delivery to the Memorial.) he/she should be informed well in advance, in order to allow enough time for mail delivery. Details like shipping costs should be arranged as well.

Other suggestions to be put on the wish list... Mike Bechtold’s famous maps have proved to be invaluable once again. Unfortunately we did not get them until half way through the season. One suggestion however: the maps came with no reference such as the Foundation’s logo, the website or mailing address or how to make donations or obtain a membership. This could be a worthwhile addition for next year. The maps and any brochures the Foundation would like to make available should be printed and shipped to the senior guide in advance of the term and ideally the senior guide should also receive a copy of the previous year’s report in order to follow up on these issues well in advance of departure time.

I had also brought a large laminated map of contemporary Caen and the surrounding beaches, which also shows the Canadian axis of advance of June and July 1944. It has proven to be a great discussion piece and icebreaker. Although the resolution was not that great, it proved to be very popular and quite a few people were willing to purchase it as a souvenir. I have left this map behind with the CBNF marked boxes for next year’s crew.

Another potential gold mine for the Foundation is our shirts! On many occasions, young and old alike wanted to purchase our shirts and were very disappointed to find they are not for sale. Still on the topic of shirts, it was brought to our attention that a less casual shirt

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(like a button oxford navy or red shirt with the logo on the left) with a more classic style would make us look a bit more professional when we attend ceremonies and events.

Other small kitchen items suggestions: a CBNF fleece or wind jacket, as Kate Fitzpatrick had mentioned last year; a high bench or bar-style stools for our desk, so that we can look tall behind the desk; and finally a laptop would be great!

The senior guide format worked out perfectly and I must say that team dynamics really made the experience truly outstanding. The rapport we quickly established amongst ourselves proved to be an inspiration throughout the entire term. The fact that we all care so much about military history made us really devoted to our duties, and from there grew the respect for one another and our working environment that makes a team really proud and cohesive. Leadership for the senior guide was very casual, all decisions were taken as a group and we kept an open atmosphere. As senior guide I co-ordinated certain issues, such as scheduling or co-ordinating special events, as well as acting as liaison to other organizations and the Memorial. As

a team we discussed the senior guide's role and set out our expectations for each other.

I would like to thank the Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation and Veterans Affairs Canada for giving us this opportunity. The emotional aspect of this experience was unforgettable. I had not anticipated the extent to which visitors, Canadians of all ages and provinces, veterans, French Civilians, would feel compelled and willing to share their stories. Listening attentively to these on a daily basis was a great learning opportunity and very rewarding.

On our end, I cannot recount the times our team said to Canadians and other nationalities, "There are close to 6000 Canadians buried here...this city was liberated by the Canadians... or you can take the D-79 to Bernieres, then D-35 for the Beny Sur Mer cemetery." These two brief months were all about watching fellow Canadians' reactions to seeing 'their' Garden space, have a Canadian veteran walk up to the desk and just chat, explain how we wear poppies to French school kids or have hoards of French, British, Dutch groups gather around us, and say, "Oh Canada, yes, we remember the Canadians!"



Canadian cemetery, Beny-sur-Mer, 6 June 2001



"To our beloved son...."



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