

The Canadian Battlefields Foundation

La Fondation canadienne des champs de bataille



2008 Battle Study Tours Les Voyages D'études 2008

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CBF Annual University Students' Study Tour

Again this year we chose 12 keen university students from across the country to study the Canadian battlefields in Northwest Europe. As 2008 marked the 90th anniversary of the end of the First World War, we spent five eventful days following the Canadians from Ypres to the Somme and Vimy and the Final Hundred Days. Then we headed to the Channel ports in Northern France and the Scheldt to see how First Canadian Army overcame its many challenges a generation later. With stays in Brugges and Arnhem, we followed the Maple Leaf Route into the Rhineland, then explored how the Canadians helped liberate so much of Northwest Europe. A final visit to Westerbork, from where so many Dutch Jews were deported to the death camps, was profoundly moving. The students 'read' many books, but they also 'read' the ground over which the Canadians fought, as well as the many cemeteries, monuments and rituals through which we have come to remember these events. There were many powerful moments.

The excerpts that follow are taken from the students' journals in which they recorded their impressions about the tour. As you will see, the Canadian Battlefield Foundation tour will have a lasting impact on their careers, their lives, and their identity as Canadians.

Dr. Geoffrey Hayes, Tour Director

Michael Barrett (MA, University of Western Ontario) Reichswald Cemetery, the Rhineland

Visiting the Reichswald Cemetery was definitely a memorable part of the trip. This cemetery holds approximately 7600 Allied war dead, of which about 700 are Canadian. . . . General Crerar demanded that none of his men (in First Canadian Army) be buried in Germany. As a result, all of the Canadians in Reichswald are airmen, who were shot down in enemy territory... It struck me as the ideal set up for a war cemetery, located in the middle of the secluded Reichswald forest. It helps one better appreciate the solemnity of the site: a very natural and dignified atmosphere which I found fitting for these heroes. There is no doubt that they are resting in peace.



Michael Barrett

Kim Unruh (University College of the Fraser Valley), Moerbrugge, Belgium

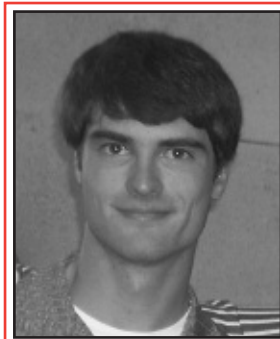
When we visited the canals and saw Algonquin Straat [named for men of the Algonquin Regiment for their costly attack in Moerkerke in September 1944] it was a proud moment to know that Canada's soldiers had such an impact on the lives of individuals and the country as a whole that they are commemorated in ordinary places such as street names.



Kim Unruh

Michael Swanberg, (University of Calgary) Reflections on the Liberation of Holland

For the tour, I was tasked with preparing a presentation on the Liberation of Holland by Canadian forces in the Second World War. My presentation was predominantly focused on the military operations surrounding the Liberation, but my experience on the tour allowed me to contemplate the other side of the equation – namely, the people themselves. In general, I was impressed by the great deal of importance that was accorded to remembering the experience of the Second World War in Holland. In several museums that we visited, children's school projects were displayed illustrating different elements of the Liberation It was somewhat



Michael Swanberg

peculiar to see hand-drawn Canadian flags adorning the school projects of children from a country on another side of the planet, although this made me appreciate how much gratitude the Dutch people still have for the sacrifices that Canada made in liberating them from their German occupiers.

Kara Edwards (University of Ottawa), Groesbeek Cemetery, the Netherlands

At Groesbeek cemetery both Eric (Boate) and Ian (Haight) did their soldier presentations. Both pre-



Kara Edwards

sentations were very well done. I thought the epitaph of Eric's uncle's headstone was quite moving and very patriotic for the time. It said, "O Canada, we stand on guard for thee." I read this and was very moved

Angela Richardson, (Trent University), Holten Canadian War Cemetery, the Netherlands

Holten Cemetery was beautiful. . . . I was amazed by it. I placed flags on the graves of three soldiers: a 29-year-old, a 21-year old and an unknown. My brother is 29. I could not imagine losing him. He has a wife and baby. What if that man did as well? I am 21 and am amazed by the bravery of the youth, the way that they enlisted, knowing their duty. Would I have had the confidence to do the same? To fight for my loved ones at home? To fight against the horrors abroad? . . . I realized that whole families were lost during the war. At Holten, I took the time to remember this fact. This trip has been phenomenal. . . . In September I am heading to work on my Bachelor's of Education degree. Hopefully I am able to inspire students to learn about our history and respect it. I could not have asked for a better experience.



Angela Richardson

Ian Haight, (University of New Brunswick) The Battlefields of the Somme

I was moved by trying to comprehend the loss that had occurred on these grounds. Canadians on the Somme – 15 September to 8 November 1916 – moved forward five miles. Eight thousand dead. No text book can convey the emotion you feel standing at the starting point of the Somme offensive, seeing the end line of the battle in the distance, while at the same time trying to comprehend the scale of the human loss. It is very difficult to understand the level of destruction and death that occurred within these few miles. Thankfully, Canada is

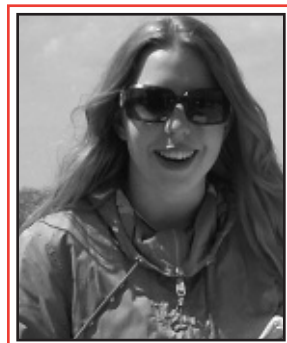


Ian Haight

very fortunate to have many dignified memorials throughout the countryside that provide a place for our generation to pay tribute to those lost. The generations of Canadians who travel to these locations, including me, will be able to appreciate the awesome scale of the First World War and to honour those who remained.

Monica White, (University of Calgary) Westerbork, the Netherlands

While I ended the tour with a greater respect and admiration for the Canadian effort, I also walked away with a greater appreciation for the effect of the war upon those left behind on the homefront, those citizens affected by wartime occupation and, troublingly, I learned much more about the Holocaust and the treatment of European Jews in the Second World War. While one could certainly read of these experiences in textbooks and memoirs, the places that we visited, particularly Camp Westerbork, brought the real experience of those who lived through the war to the fore and lent a visceral and emotional air to our understanding of wartime experiences. Camp Westerbork was, for me, the most moving of our destinations. Walking the grounds where thousands of Dutch Jews laboured, where trains arrived and departed filled with human cargo, bound for concentration camps, helped deepen my appreciation for what exactly was at stake in the Second World War.



Monica White

Chelsea Clarke (University of Calgary), The Menin Gate The soldier presentations that each student had to make were all very memorable and distinct in their own way. However one in particular stood out for me. Kim [Unruh] presented on a Canadian soldier who has no known grave and is commemorated on the Menin Gate. The 40-year-old soldier fought with the 4th Battalion and was a single father of two upon enlistment. Kim chose this soldier completely at random. He seemed like an ordinary enlisted man who died while defending the trenches on a day when no major battle occurred. On this 'routine' day in, for one soldier of the 4th Battalion it was to be his last day in the trenches. Although he was not killed fighting in a famous battle, his death represents the anonymity of so many Canadian soldiers in the First World War. Kim's soldier may not have won a Victoria Cross or a Military Medal, yet his story is just as important as those soldiers who did. Kim's presentation provided the personal and moving story of one of the thousands of faceless names on the Menin Gate.



Chelsea Clarke

The Cleghorn, U of Montreal Tour

By Professor Desmond Morton

Through the initiative of Michel Fortmann, a professor of International Relations in the Political Science department at the University of Montreal, students in his department have been able for the past three years to enroll in a course on Canada's experience in two world wars, enriched by a two-week visit to France and Flanders in May and June each year. The foreign part of the course has been evolved with the aid of Professor Terry Copp in conjunction with colleagues and students from Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario. The benefits of a bilingual exposure to Canada in both world wars need hardly be underlined. Students from both universities prepare a presentation on some aspect of war, such as the challenges of armoured warfare or the treatment of front-line casualties. Students also select a soldier from one of the many Commonwealth cemeteries visited during a tour that extends from Ypres, the Somme, Vimy Ridge and (this year) Passchendaele to Dieppe and to Normandy, and from the beaches to Falaise.

Costs for the tour are shared by students and by the funds granted by the Department of National Defence for strategic studies and, in the case of Wilfrid Laurier, by the generosity of their Chancellor emeritus, John Cleghorn.

Prudent cost-constraints govern the itinerary. Staying at the Moulin Morin outside Bayeux for our week in Normandy is a major saving. A hard-working English couple has made the Moulin available as a beautiful and hospitable home-away-from-home for battlefield visitors. Students prepare their own meals and do their own light housekeeping.

The itinerary has changed a little in each year. In 2008, we landed at Charles de Gaulle Airport outside Paris, drove to the new EU-sponsored Historiale at Peronne for an orientation to the Great War, and spent the night in Amiens. The next day took us to Ypres and, all too briefly, to reflect on Passchendaele. We also visited the German war cemetery at Langemarck and reflected on some of the patriotic mythology associated with the early months of the war in Flanders. We returned to Amiens and saw the battlefields and some of the cemeteries that commemorate the Somme. As in previous years, the battlefield at Beaumont Hamel had a special impact and so, too, did Courcellette, where Quebec's 22e régiment had distinguished itself at enormous cost. Vimy Ridge was next day's central feature, with a journey past the Polish war memorial and the huge French necropolis. Even patriotic Canadian students would have to recognize that victory at Vimy Ridge in 1917 was a co-operative enterprise.

While the Last Hundred Days had to be covered in less than half a day, students did see the Canal du Nord and could reflect on the challenges to the Canadian Corps and how they were met by amateurs who had become disciplined professionals. From the Canal, we headed to Dieppe, arriving at dusk to stay in a hotel looking over the city's main beaches. The next day, students saw the city and neighbouring beaches for themselves. They also visited the Canadian cemetery where, in 1946, a visiting Paul Martin, M.P. for a Windsor constituency, conceived the idea of a Canadian citizenship.

From Dieppe, the tour headed for Normandy, reaching Bayeux and the Moulin Morin late in the day. The ensuing days involved visits to the Canadian centre at Courseulles and other allied sectors, from Omaha Beach and Pointe du Hoc, the British airborne landing north of Caen and to Caen itself to see what had survived of the allied bombardment of the Norman capital. Our 2008 visit coincided with commemorative celebrations of D-Day, June 6th. Students from both universities returned to Caen to participate in a public memorial ceremony. Access to beach sites was restricted by large numbers of visitors and the opportunity was taken to show students Mont-St-Michel in Brittany.

The last days in Normandy took students back to Caen and the critical battles that allowed British and Canadian divisions to break the German line and surge southward to Falaise. Time was found for a valuable learning experience. Twice students joined in TEWTS, "tactical exercises without troops," replaying controversial battles on the same ground as in 1944. As described by later historians, it had been easy to blame inexperienced commanders for errors of tactics or even foresight. When students found themselves directing deployments that frequently echoed those predecessors in 1944, useful lessons were quietly absorbed.

As an English-speaking military history specialist from McGill, I have been privileged to attend all the Montreal-Wilfrid Laurier Normandy tours to date. Each has been an inspiring reminder of how students of different languages and divergent politics live, work and play together in impressive harmony and creativity. Having a father who commanded the Fort Garry Horse on D-Day, the Normandy campaign has had a special interest for me, particularly since I first visited Caen in 1990 when Canada's presence was, indeed, exiguous. Today's Normandy is the creation of a number of highly deserving Canadians, and I hope that they may be recognized before they become mere memories.

Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies/ Veteran's Affairs/Historica Teachers' Battlefield Tour July 8-18, 2008

This year 18 teachers from across Canada participated in the Teachers' Battlefield Tour sponsored by the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies, Veteran's Affairs Canada, the CBF and Historica. Teachers met at Pearson airport to begin an intense 10 day tour of the battlefields and cemeteries of the Great War and the Second World War. Under the expert guidance of Lee Windsor, Deputy Director for the Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society, and Blake Seward, founder of the *Lest We*

Everyone on the battlefield tour had the opportunity to share their current practices in the classroom and how they teach the wars to their students. Now that they have walked the grounds of the battlefields and visited the cemeteries, teachers are going back to the drawing board to enhance their work. They have gained a new and important perspective of what war is really all about.

Teachers also participated in the unveiling of the Rocquancourt Memorial. The South Saskatchewan Regiment liberated the town from the Germans on the nights of 7-8 August 1944. With the First Hussars and the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, the SSR's pushed south to take Verrieres Ridge on 9 August 1944 as part of Operation "Totalize".

At each battle site teachers were responsible for completing biographical research on a soldier that participated in each of the battlefields we visited. Standing beside the gravesite in a War Graves cemetery or name commemorated on a memorial, each teacher completed the final piece of their research by telling the story of their soldier and how he died within the context of the battle.

Admittedly for all involved, this tour is one of the most emotional experiences they have been involved in. Many have commented that it has changed their lives and will change how they teach their students about the wars. In

building momentum for how teachers teach their students about the wars, participants in the Teachers' Battlefield Tour will inspire the next generation to be the custodians of Canada's participation in the two World Wars. The essence of the task that John McCrae charged Canadians with lives on through the efforts of this tour.



Teachers participate in the unveiling of the South Saskatchewan Memorial in Rocquancourt.

Forget project, teachers were continuously engaged and challenged in a variety of activities and lessons. At Vimy and throughout Normandy teachers participated in TEWTS ~Tactical Exercises Without Troops- to understand soldiers' experiences, perspectives and the wartime decision-making process.

Teachers experienced the awe of Vimy and Beaumont Hamel and followed in the footsteps of soldiers that fought on the Somme battlefield. Teachers participated in tactical exercises at Dieppe and the Normandy beaches gaining critical insights that will ensure teachers can provide enriched curricula for their students in the classroom.

During the tour teachers had to research and present several topics of discussion pertinent to aspects of war while using their experiences of walking the ground to build lessons for their classrooms. The results of their experiences on European battlefields and cemeteries have been uploaded onto the Historica website in a series of classroom lessons for teachers to use with students. (www.historica.ca)



John Stewart of NWT presents his biography research at the Abbaye d'Ardenne

The Historica/CBF Teachers' Tour (Fr.)

For the first time, the Canadian Battlefield Foundation and Historica Foundation organized a study tour in which the primary language was French. Sixteen high school teachers from seven provinces met on the morning of July 30 at the Charles-de-Gaulle airport for an 11 day adventure in the course of which they discovered or rediscovered our rich military heritage.

The tour was led by David Patterson, Maryanne Lewell and Alexandre Carette, three CBF alumni, and by Stéphane Rousell, professor of political science at the Université du Québec à Montréal. Jean-Philippe Proulx from Historica also took part in the tour.

We followed a classic itinerary which took us from the Ypres Salient to Normandy by way of the Somme, Vimy and Dieppe. Each of these stops was an occasion to deepen our understanding of the role played by Canada in both World Wars.

I was always of the opinion that the strength of these battlefield tours resided in the exchanges of ideas and debates that occurred between participants; this tour was without a doubt a convincing proof of this theory. We were thus able to discuss such key themes as the laws of war, the causes of war, peace efforts as well as the human, physical, financial, moral and social consequences of armed conflict.

Teachers on this tour had different backgrounds and came from various provinces but had one thing in common:

they all taught in French. Some were just beginning their careers while others were close to a well deserved retirement. This diversity was key to our discussions on the various interpretations of history and ways to teach history. Teachers exchange best practices and innovative ideas such as using songs or stamps to make history more interesting to students.

On top of the friendships that were cemented and great discussions we had this tour was an incredible opportunity to rediscover such a crucial, at times triumphant and others tragic, of our history

Alexandre Carette
CBF alumni 2004

Note: Board member and former CBF Alumnus Alexandre Carette has just been posted to the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) for a one year assignment as Political Officer responsible for the Afghan National Police reform file as Political Advisor to General Vance, the next Task Force Kandahar CO. Alex writes: "As Political Officer I will have the opportunity to work closely with the Canadian Forces (on whom I will very much rely on for my security!) and the Canadian civilian police contingent in the field. Having already spent two months at the PRT this Summer (working on the detainee file) and a full year on the Afghanistan Task Force at Foreign Affairs, I very much know what I am getting myself into and look forward to this experience."

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Commemorate the life of a fallen relative or friend buried in a European cemetery by sponsoring one of Canada's leading university students to walk his battlefield and learn firsthand of his sacrifices and contributions, on land, sea or air. Then, while at his actual gravesite, the student will share the history of this brave Canadian volunteer with his colleagues.

Thus documented, his story will live on in two ways. The sponsor will receive a bound copy of the presentation. The student will carry the memory throughout his/her academic career, sharing it with future students and peers.

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*All donations are tax deductible

Following a presentation at the Royal Canadian Military Institute by CBF Past President MGen Clive Addy, OMM, OSJ, CD, the Fort York Branch 165 of the Canadian Legion has made a generous donation to the Canadian Battlefields Foundation, in recognition of the importance of our work. They will also distribute our pamphlet again shortly after the New Year.

CBF Newsletter ~ Editor: Shelagh Whitaker – Layout: Lori Veljkovic

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