



The Canadian Battlefields Foundation

**Special Newsletter: In the Students'
Footsteps...D-Day, 2004**

Merci! Canadian Battlefields Foundation Patrons!

“The trip has left me with memories I will cherish forever and has made me even more proud to be Canadian.”



D-Day with HE Adrienne Clarkson: I to r: Myrienne Dubé, Shelagh Whitaker, Audrey Tardiff, Mare-Noel Boisjoli, Jeremie Leblanc, HE John Ralston Saul, Terry Copp, LGen Charles Belzile, Alex Carette, Christine Leppard, Chris Finnie, Christine Mathers, John Maker, Laurel Halladay, Robert Dienesch, Brent Wilson.

Christopher Finnie speaks for all sixteen CBF Bursary students in summing up his study tour to Normandy in June 2004. Chris, a recent University of Waterloo MA history graduate, is attending Teacher's College this year:

“The whole experience will be something that I hope to teach to other young Canadians in the future as I follow my pursuit of a career in teaching at the high school level. My pictures, film and journal of the tour will be used to help present my experience and hopefully engage students in a way that is different from their traditional way of learning.”

In the past decade the Canadian Battlefields Foundation (formerly the Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation) has organized and sponsored annual study tours for selected Canadian university students to France, Belgium, the Netherlands, England and Italy. Over 120 alumni are now disseminating a newfound sense of pride of country to students and colleagues across the nation.

Researching a soldier's life

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The fortunate candidates are each given two tasks before they even leave Canada: the first is to research a single WWI or WWII battle for presentation at the actual battlesite. The second task, described here by Christine Mathers, (third-year Honours History (Co-op), University of Waterloo), proved to be a very emotional and bonding experience.



“One of our major projects was to research a soldier buried in one of the cemeteries located in northern France. We found whatever information we could about them, either in books, archives or using the Internet: what jobs they had before enlisting, what education they received, favourite hobbies, stories from their fellow soldiers, etc. A few of the students were even able to contact the families of their soldiers. Then, at the cemetery, we found the headstone of the soldier we researched, and presented the information to the rest of the group. Hearing about the personal lives of these men really put a human face on the war.

“These weren't just names written on headstones, or a statistic on a casualty list - they were young people like us with families, interests, and ambitions who lost their lives while serving their country.”

Marie-Noël Boisjoli, 24, in her fourth year at Université d'Ottawa, wrote movingly:



“The most important moment for me during the study tour was to find the grave of ‘my’ soldier. I worked on his life for four months. When we went to the cemetery where he was buried, Béný-sur-Mer, I cried at his tombstone. For me, now, he is a special person, almost a friend. I went to say goodbye to him. I couldn't stay at his grave, but I was unable to leave him; it was too difficult. Just thinking about this moment makes me sad-happy. Sad because I miss him, and happy because seeing his grave was the coronation of my work. For this beautiful moment, I want to thank the Canadian Battlefields Foundation for choosing me.”

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Alexandre Carette, 29, entering his third year Master's program in political science at the University of Montreal, elected to study French-Canadian Jean Brillant, a lieutenant in the 22nd Battalion who was awarded the Victoria Cross in 1918. Alex had passed through the Brillant Building many times in Montreal without realizing the heroic nature of its namesake.

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Laurel Halladay, MA History, completing her Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Calgary with a teaching career in view, focussed on a young Fort Garry Horse soldier, Kenneth Hutchinson.



“An archival search in Calgary led me to a cache of Ken’s letters home, dated from the middle of August 1942 when he arrived at Camp Borden to begin training to the last day of June 1944, only days before Ken was killed in action.

“Through an analysis of these letters, it is possible to form an impression of this man, including his thoughts on the war and the fears it generated, the things he felt sentimental about, his identity as a western Canadian, how important contact with his home was and how he perceived death.”

Jeremie Louis Leblanc, 27, has a Masters degree in Atlantic Canadian history from the



University of New Brunswick. He selected a fellow Acadian as his soldier.

“I presented a young man from outside my home town, who had chosen to be a field ambulance medic. He wanted at all cost to go oversees, and help the cause. In my attempt to find more information about him, I interviewed his sisters. I learned that many men wanted to contribute to the cause, but could not see themselves killing others. This was the case of my soldier. I could not think of braver individuals than these field ambulance people, who would land like others on the beach, would be shot at, but carry on with their jobs helping the wounded. They were fired upon like anyone else.”

Jean-Francois Born, 20, University of Ottawa, researched the tragic story of three brother of the Queen’s Own Rifles who died within a few days of each other — two in one day — in Normandy.





To commemorate the 60th Anniversary of D-Day, the Foundation awarded bursaries to 16 students, increased from the usual 12, and focussed on battles of both World Wars in France. A trio of seasoned leaders and teachers led the tour: LCol David Patterson and noted historians Professors Terry Copp, Wilfrid Laurier University and Marc Milner, University of New Brunswick. Four of the Foundation's Directors, MGen Clive Addy, Col Ernest Coté, Dr. Alec Douglas and Shelagh Whitaker joined the tour as full participants. Col Coté, who served as the chief logistics officer (AA&QMG) of 3rd Canadian Division, landed on D-Day and the students greatly appreciated his first hand accounts of the Normandy battles

Vimy Ridge

Christine Mathers, planning a career in teaching history, found Vimy Ridge impressive:

“All of my life I have read about the almost mythological significance of Vimy as the place where Canada became a nation, and to see it in person was truly thrilling for me. We toured the grounds and tunnels of the Battlefield Park, the location of the Canadian front line in 1917.

“The grooves of the trenches and craters from shells are still prominent. Though it has been more than 80 years since the First World War, these scars of conflict still remain.”

Dieppe

After a study of the WW1 site of Beaumont-Hamel, the group moved on to Dieppe. To Chris Finnie, this was a memorable experience:

“When I first saw the cliffs of Puys I was stunned. I could not believe that any sort of attack was mounted on such a place. I had read that the Canadians went up against difficult odds but when I went down to the



Chris Finnie standing on a bunker at Dieppe.

beach, the area was so small that anyone could defend it with just a few machine gun posts. I was amazed to finally see this place that casts a dark shadow over the Canadian military.”

D-Day Commemorations

The D-Day 60th Anniversary ceremonies at Juno Beach made a profound impression on all the students, perhaps most of all on Bryan Tennant. Bryan is a 22-year-old South African currently attending UBC and serving as a military engineer with 6th Field Engineer Squadron in Vancouver. He plans ultimately to get his Ph.D. in biochemistry and teach at the Canadian Forces School of Military Engineering.



“I was very proud to be part of the D-Day ceremonies. I think it was even more important for me as I am serving with the military. It was just amazing to see all the veterans at the ceremony. I was grateful to get the opportunity to speak with some of them; they are a wonderful bunch of men. Their ability to relive their experiences was touching and the fact they could do so with a bit of lightheartedness was incredible. One veteran asked his friends to let him know if they found a leg on the beach because it would probably be his.”

LGen Charles Belzile, president of the CBF, hosted three separate Foundation commemorations to honour the exceptional role of our military during the 11 weeks of the Normandy battle.

“Canadians did not just fight on the beaches,” LGen Charles Belzile said. “Our original strength of some 20,400 troops on D-Day, grew into an army of 100,000. They cannot be forgotten. When the Germans were finally driven out of Normandy on August 23rd the tally of Canadian casualties was 18,444, of which 5,021 were fatal.”

Her Excellency the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, Governor -General of Canada and His Excellency John Ralston Saul with a full Canadian Honour Guard, participated in the ceremonies.



Battlefield Tours

The students’ main activity for two weeks was walking the battlefields. Each morning, lunches packed, they assembled at 8 am for a briefing by Professors Copp or Milner on the day’s objective, then headed out in the CBF vans to study the site. Literally, they walked every battleground in Normandy where Canadians fought.

Christine Leppard, in 3rd year history at the University of Calgary, described one unusual study event that intrigued them all:



CBF Guides Mackenzie Brooks, Céline Garbay and Brandey Barton at the Canadian Memorial Garden

“On 7 June 1944 the 3rd Canadian Division was hit by fierce German counterattacks, intended to drive the division back into the sea. The Winnipeg Rifles were pushed out of their position in Putot-en-Bessin.

“Sixty years after these battles, the Canadian Battlefields Foundation Study Tour conducted a Tactical Exercise Without Troops (TEWT). We theorized how the defense of Putot-en-Bessin could have been better organized to repel the German counterattack. The TEWT provided an invaluable learning experience, as students interacted with each other, and with historians and veterans, to brainstorm new defence tactics. By engaging in this tactical exercise, students were able to conceptualize the weak points of the Winnipeg’s defence, and formulate a new plan. The real punch was that while we had the benefit of historical hindsight, the RWRs were making life and death decisions under fire. The TEWT reinforced my appreciation for the scale of the Canadian achievement in Normandy.”



The Governor General reviewing the Guard of Honour at the CBF Canadian Memorial Garden

The Foundation also hosts annual commemorations at Caen and at the Canadian Memorial Garden, established by the CBF in 1995 at Caen's Le Mémorial Museum of Peace.

Laurel Halladay remarked:

"I was so impressed with this facility and its Gardens. It was amazing, especially the view one gets looking back at the winding path and swaying grass.

"Well done, Battlefields Foundation! Given that Normandy is covered in flowers and more traditionally designed gardens, I think this one really stands out as being more rugged, robust and hardy, which is only fitting for a Canadian garden.

"The Governor General appeared at the Gardens ceremony, as well as a large group

of vets. The ceremony itself was quite touching and the Governor General gave a speech without notes. The Last Post was played up on the hillside.

"Our next stop was downtown Caen at the Place de l'Ancienne Boucherie for wreath laying at a monument that marks the spot where the local citizens emerged from the abbey's cellars to meet their Canadian liberators in the summer of 1944. LGen Belzile led this ceremony as well, which was very well attended. A gaggle of French school children arrived and were told to sit down in the street, which they did without pause! They were very enthusiastic and had flags that were French on one side and Canadian on the other. They went all googly-eyed when they saw the Mounties in their red serge uniforms. The ceremony ended with "Vive la France, Vive le Canada!"

The Abbaye d'Ardenne

A total of 156 Canadian Prisoners of War were brutally murdered by the 12th SS Hitler Youth in the early days of the campaign. Since 1995, the Canadian Battlefields Foundation has held a very moving commemorative service for them on June 7 in a small garden inside the Abbaye d'Ardenne compound.

Christine Mathers describes the Abbaye d'Ardenne experience as “one of the most poignant moments of our trip.”

“We were very fortunate to have been given a private tour of the Abbaye grounds by Monsieur Vico, who lived there with his family during the war. Its beauty gives no indication of the crimes committed by the Hitler Youth. He eloquently related the story of the murder of the 20 young Canadians there, a story that I will never forget. We visited the garden where Monsieur Vico and his family found the soldiers' bodies buried in a shallow grave; it was so solemn. To stand there, and look at

the door that those men walked through just before they were shot in cold blood sent chills up my spine. After Monsieur Vico finished telling his story, most of us had tears in our eyes.

“Our group returned to the Abbaye for the Canadian Battlefields Foundation ceremony which commemorated the loss of all 156 Canadian prisoners of war murdered by the 12th SS in Normandy. Generals Belzile and Addy read out the name of each soldier, along with his age. To hear how many of these men were my age or younger truly broke my heart. To lose your life at such a young age in war is tragic enough, but the fact that they were killed by the fanatical Hitler Youth who completely disregarded the conventions of war is that much more appalling. The story of what happened is one that every Canadian should hear. Their memory should never be forgotten, and the Canadian Battlefields Foundation makes a great contribution towards this remembrance.”

Students with M. Vico on the grounds of the Abbaye d'Ardenne. (l. to r.) Alex Carette, Lloyd Taggart, LCol David Patterson, Christine Mathers, Christine Leppard, Chris Finnie, Myrienne Dubé, Jim Wood, Marie-Noël Boisjoli.



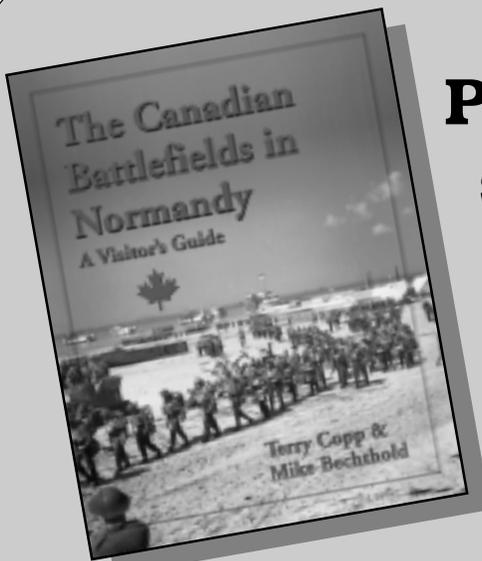
Lessons Learned

Alexandre Carette: “the biggest lessons I learned from this trip were on the beaches, battlefields and cemeteries of Normandy and the Somme. It is only by standing on these hallowed grounds that you can truly understand the extent of the sacrifice of the Canadians soldiers as they fought their way through German lines: the courage, determination and sheer will required of these young men to push forward in spite of all obstacles. You cannot really appreciate all of this only from books and

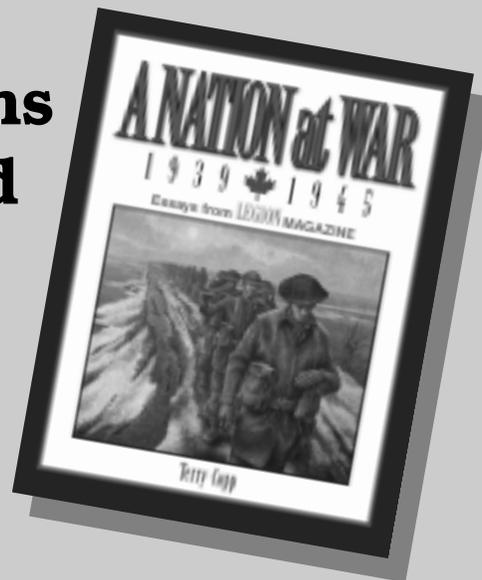
maps. We were also fortunate to be accompanied by some of the finest military historians in the country and I learned great lessons in leadership by listening to and watching the retired generals (Charles Belzile and Clive Addy) who accompanied us. Overall, this was a once in a life time experience.”

Audrey Tardif, 23, history major at l’Université d’Ottawa:

“The study tour in Normandy afforded me the opportunity to see the terrain and visualize war, particularly through the



Publications sponsored by the CBF



The students’ comprehension was greatly enhanced by using as a reference the recently-published **The Canadian Battlefields in Normandy: A Visitor’s Guide** by Terry Copp and Mike Bechthold. The 152-page book with full colour maps and illustrations was published by the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies in association with the Canadian Battlefields Foundation.

This book costs \$30.00.*

The Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies has also just published, **A Nation At War: Essays from Legion Magazine**, a 240-page illustrated collection of historian Terry Copp’s *Legion Magazine* articles. The book is endorsed by the Royal Canadian Legion and all proceeds including author’s royalties will be donated to the Legion and to the Canadian Battlefields Foundation.

This book costs \$34.00.*

Note: Three additional guidebooks will shortly be published highlighting Canadian battlefields in Northern France; Belgium, Holland and Germany; and Sicily and Italy.

*** Price includes taxes and shipping. Books can be purchased at:**

www.canadianmilitaryhistory.ca or by calling:

1-800-726-9715 or 1-519-884-0710 ext.2080

(note: VISA & Mastercard accepted, charges will show up on bill as “Wilfrid Laurier University.”)

testimony of veterans and members of the resistance. This trip also served to remind me that the democratic society, in which we are privileged to live today, owes much to the courage and sacrifice of yesterday's young soldiers."

John Maker, MA student, Wilfrid Laurier University:

"One of my biggest impressions of the tour has to do with the ground itself. It is one thing to look at a map and understand that an attack started from a certain point and ended at another point. However, it is something

entirely different to stand at the start line and look across the ground towards the objective.

"Being on the fields of Normandy, I got a clearer sense of just what it was that our soldiers had to go through. This sense encompassed not only the terrain, but also the feeling of the air, the intensity of the sun, the smell of the wheat fields, and the sounds of the Norman countryside.

"The battlefields of Normandy are much more compact than I had originally thought. I was amazed at the relatively short distances that were covered in attacks that cost

Myrienne Dubé examines the Toronto Scottish Memorial at the Canadian Battlefields Foundation Belvedere at Point 67. The viewing area overlooks Verrières Ridge as well as the nearby towns of May-sur-Orne, St. André-sur-Orne and St. Martin-de-Fontenay.





The group at the Juno Beach Centre: Standing: Chris Finnie, Alec Douglas, his brother-in-law Richard, Alex Carette, Jean-Francois Born, Laurel Halladay, Christine Leppard., Lloyd Taggart, Christine Mathers, Jeremie Leblanc, Audrey Tardif, Robert Dienesch, LCol David Patterson, Brent Wilson, Jim Wood, Marc Milner. Kneeling: Bryan Tenant, Marie-Noël Boisjoli, John Maker, Myrienne Dubé.

thousands of Canadian, British and German lives. At the same time I was impressed by the great difficulties posed by the terrain. The flat Norman fields, dotted with low rising hills like Verrières Ridge, offered little protection to the advancing Canadian Army which was forced to deal with an enemy who had carefully chosen such features so as to create the most formidable defensive positions they could.”

Laurel Halladay spoke for all the student-historians: “For the first time I got an undeniable sense of what a long life the memory of being liberated has. What a profound impact the wars had on the French national psyche.

“It remains important to me that the French not forget in the same way that it’s important to me that the youth of Canada not forget what our soldiers did.

“I needed proof that they still feel that gratitude strongly in order to feel the enterprise of Canadian military history is a worthwhile pursuit. I mean, if those people our soldiers liberated cease to care, what hope is there that Canadians will continue to care?

“That’s why the tour was so great. I got the proof I needed and my commitment to this academic endeavor was solidified.”

Thank You, Foundation Supporters !!!