



# NORMANDY NEWSLETTER

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Autumn 2002

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

*LIEUTENANT-GENERAL CHARLES H. BELZILE*

As we approach the next year, one can only conclude that the Canadian Battle of Normandy has had another very successful year:

- Tour 2002, under the leadership of Professor Geoff Hayes, of the University of Waterloo, was by all accounts a great Tour. This brings the number of our “graduates” to 96.
- Tour 2003 is well into its planning phase. It will consist of a return to the Italian Battlefields but will this time include Sicily. Because of the additional costs and the time constraints which must apply, the tour, exceptionally will NOT visit Normandy. This also means that our commemorative activities in Normandy in 2003 will take place without the presence of our students and will be more dependent on the attendance of some members of the Board and our guides in Caen. (Separate article on our Guide programme in Caen can be found elsewhere in this Newsletter)
- We were fortunate this year to have General Roland Reid, our Founding President, lead our commemorative activities in Caen. He was also able to speak to our students during their visit to Normandy and, inter alia, entertain them with his personal memories of the Battle of Normandy as a CANLOAN officer.
- I am happy to report that at our last Board meeting in September, Shelagh Whitaker has accepted to take the Chair of our new Communications Committee. Thank you Shelagh, we can sure use your experience in that indispensable field.

Also included in this Newsletter are comments on our finances by our Treasurer Harry Needham, comments which I would like to support and elaborate on. As he points out we are totally dependent on your support to continue operating. Besides your membership dues

which pay for such administrative costs as the production and the mailing of this Newsletter, your continued donations allow us to supplement the Trust Fund which does not yet provide sufficient revenues to completely cover the expenditures of our Annual Bursary Tours.

If any of you know of a potential large donor foundation, corporation ...or individual willing to provide us with a designated bursary (\$50,000.00), we would be only too glad to follow up on your suggestions.

Besides we are still hoping to continue the development of our Memorial Garden in Caen. Those developments include the erection of additional steles on the upper terrace, where Canadian units and formations which participated in campaigns other than Normandy would be highlighted. Needless to say I urge you all to continue demonstrating your generous efforts.

Your President has been invited by the Minister of Veterans' Affairs to be part of a 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D Day Committee. Its first meeting took place on 21 October 2002 and is intended to start planning now for the 2004 D Day ceremonies. I was delighted to accept the invitation as it speaks highly of our Foundation's reputation with regards to our commemorative and educational activities in Normandy.

The Committee's prime objective is to ensure that we, along with Veterans Affairs, the Royal Canadian Legion and other organizations, can help in facilitating the attendance of as many D Day veterans who wish to be there for what will likely be one of their last chances to visit those battlefields. There will be more information forthcoming as VAC's plans are elaborated and published.

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*\*Normandy Veteran*

The annual general meeting of the  
Canadian Battle of Normandy  
Foundation

will be held on  
Thursday, 21 November 2002  
in  
the Army Ottawa Officers' Mess,  
149 Somerset Street West, Ottawa,  
at 1400 hrs.

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## LAST POST

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

Mr. William Balon (Toronto ON)

Mrs. Carolyn Conron (London ON)

Capt Gary B. McCourt CD (Calgary AB)

Hon Hartland de M. Molson, PC, OBE (Montreal, QC)

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## TREASURER'S REPORT

Thanks to all those who have sent me their membership payments for this year – and the many members who have already paid for 2003! If you are not sure whether you are paid up or not, look at the mailing label on this newsletter and you will see the last year for which you have paid. If the label reads “????”, you have not paid your dues for at least four years.

Please note that special donations to our Scholarship Trust Fund this year, in response to the President's special appeal, have been treated as exactly that, and NOT as payments of annual memberships.

Some of our members are in the habit of paying their dues only every two or three years. Frankly, that's not enough to support the very active educational and memorial pro-

gram we have – which seems to grow every year, thanks to all the individuals and organizations that DO provide regular support, often well above the minimum \$25 we ask.

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.

## OUR GUIDES IN CAEN

For the past few years, we have maintained a guide during the busiest part of the summer at Le Mémorial de Caen, to provide assistance to visitors, give tours of our Memorial Garden and, time and transportation permitting, providing guided tours of nearby battlefields, including the landing beaches. For the past two years, thanks to the generous support of Veterans Affairs Canada, we have been able to send three guides to Caen. This year, we were able to add a fourth guide for part of the period.

Like almost all our guides so far, our fourth guide, Maryanne Lewell of New Brunswick, was a participant in a previous study tour (in her case, 2001). Maryanne's service as a guide this summer fulfilled one of the final requirements for her Bachelor of Education degree and she is very excited to be starting her teaching career this fall as a French Immersion teacher at Saint John High School – where she will have the opportunity to teach her students about Canada's wartime service and sacrifices.

Maryanne recently sent us a small album of photographs



*Main entrance to Le Mémorial*

*(continued p. 4)*



*The medieval quarry which forms the garden area at the rear of the museum, as seen from the Canadian Memorial Garden. Part of the new addition is visible at the top left. The displays on the right are a recent addition.*



*Guide Maryanne Lewell at the Foundation's desk inside the main entrance. Not visible is a tray of poppies provided by Dominion Command of the Royal Canadian Legion. It attracted a great deal of attention from visitors and raised \$360 for the Legion's Poppy Trust Fund.*



*Our senior guide this year, Marie-Eve Vaillancourt, M. Jacques Vico, and the Sous-Préfet of Bayeux at a ceremony honouring the Marquis de Saint-Clair*

Marie-Eve's excellent report on this summer's program formed the basis of our report to our sponsor Veterans Affairs Canada and made many recommendations for continuing and improving the guides program in future years. Her report – and the changes that will be made to the program – will be featured in the Spring 2003 newsletter.

M. Vico, then a teenager, was the man who discovered the bodies of the Canadian prisoners who had been murdered by the SS in the garden of the Abbaye d'Ardenne, near which he lives. He has been a very loyal friend of the Foundation over the years and each year does a great deal to make our guides welcome in Normandy and to provide any information they might need for their program.



*Guides Maryanne and Kelli Fraser, with Ted and Enid Turner from England. Ted was a Royal Marine manning a landing craft carrying Canadians into Bernières-sur-Mer. The door leading to the Canadian Memorial Garden is directly behind Ted.*

Thanks, Marysanne, for some great photos and your thoughtfulness in sending them in. Good luck in your teaching!!

## ONE GUIDE'S EXPERIENCES

*Céline Garbay, Guide, Le Mémorial de Caen*

*In addition to the photograph album submitted by Maryanne Lewell, photos from which are printed elsewhere in this newsletter, we received two very different reports from the senior guide, Marie-Eve Vaillancourt and from guide Céline Garbay.*

*Marie-Eve's report, compiled with the input of the three other guides, was quite comprehensive. It made MANY recommendations for improving the program. This report, and the changes being made to the guides program, will be featured in the Spring*

*2003 newsletter.*

*Céline's report is much more "personal". While space does not permit us to reproduce it in full, we thought the following excerpts would be of particular interest to our members. Her words are straight from the heart.*

*(continued p. 6)*

“My interest in Canadian military history is quite new, born out of four years spent as a reservist with the Royal Regina Rifles. I was a participant of the Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation’s 7<sup>th</sup> annual battlefield study tour in 2001 and was the recipient of the Royal Canadian Legion’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary bursary. The emotional nature of the tour, as well as the knowledge and insight I gained from the experience have prompted me to come back to Europe for an indefinite period of time to learn more about the battlefields and the role played by Canadian soldiers in European theatres of war. When I was offered the chance to be a guide at the Memorial, I saw it as a unique way to learn more about the Battle of Normandy. I was a little apprehensive about my lack of guiding experience but was reassured by members of the Foundation that it would not be a problem.

Having had no previous experience as a tour guide, I was very thankful for the presence of Marie-Eve Vaillancourt and Kelli Fraser, who had worked at the Canadian War Museum and Beaumont-Hamel, respectively. Both had many helpful suggestions on how to structure a tour, and we compared notes and ideas to ensure that we were all on the same page with regards to the information we wanted to convey to visitors. We also toured the museum together to get a sense of what mindset visitors to the Memorial would be in once they arrived at our kiosk. It was helpful, for instance, for us to know that the film “Hope” - a gut-wrenching look at human rights and freedoms during and since the Cold War - empties into the hallway right beside our spot in the main hall. Knowing that many visitors would be emotionally drained once they got to us was good to know, if only to avoid being abrasively cheerful!

My tour was fairly straightforward and would generally last about 20-30 minutes, depending on how chatty my guests were. Before we would head out to the garden I would size them up by asking what their reason was for coming to Normandy, how long they intended to stay, and what they’d already seen. Their answers would help me engage them at different points during the tour.

Next we would head down the path that spans the wall of the Memorial, leading to the terrace of the Canadian garden. It’s a long walk, but the perfect amount of time to explain the creation and goals of the CBNF, as well as the importance of the annual battlefield study tour and the guide programme at the Memorial.

By this point we would be standing at the terrace, ready to enter the garden - which really looks nothing like a garden, at least not in the traditional sense. I found it

very important to prepare visitors by putting emphasis on the fact that it is an interpretive space and should be looked at as a piece of art - something to think about, with elements that they could feel free to like or dislike, and ideas with which they could agree or disagree. For me it was extremely important to offer interpretations, and not dictate them.

By far the best part of the entire experience was having the opportunity to talk to so many different people from so many walks of life, about the same topic. The range of perspectives was incredible, and I learned something from each conversation. Granted, some visitors felt a very deep personal connection to the Second World War and some didn’t. But each time, I saw an opportunity to help establish and/or strengthen a connection - perhaps nurture a spark of interest and show how history can come to life. How I did that depended, obviously, on the visitor.

I did not give many tours to veterans, mostly for mobility reasons (it’s a long walk on bad knees or hips) but many relatives were very eager to see the Memorial’s only real Canadian content. I made the most of helping them find the names of units on the glass steles, and also of indicating which communes had been liberated by that unit (if applicable) on the stone wall behind the reflective pool. I also frequently provided information on how to obtain copies of service records from the National Archives of Canada; an invaluable research tool that far too few people know about.

I remember the time when I too, knew nothing about WWII aside from a few general facts, but I was aghast to see how systemic that ignorance is in Canadian society. I was especially surprised to see how many people my parents’ age had little or no basic knowledge about the chronology of events or magnitude of Allied efforts - because it seemed to me that people of that generation would have had parents who had participated in, or at least lived through, the war.

Attracted by the Canadian flags, the books, the poppy display or the Typhoon that hung above our heads, many older Europeans would come by just to chat; to see what we were up to and to offer their own thoughts. Some comments were just brief; others were colourful. And others were indescribable, like those from a French woman who cried recalling her father’s years in the Resistance and the anguish it caused her mother, and those from a French man who told about hiding in a quarry outside of Caen in the summer of 1944. Nothing makes war more real than seeing it in the eyes of the person standing in front of you.

As the Memorial receives hundreds of school-age children each day, there were many occasions when large groups of students, mostly from France, would gather around our desk, curious about the poppies. Those aged 6-11 seemed the most interested and talking to them always gave me a really good feeling about the job that we were doing. They were often genuinely interested in hearing about what Canadian soldiers did in Normandy and surprisingly, some were quite moved by the significance of the poppies. I was astounded by their generosity, placing one and two-euro coins in the collection box in return for one; sometimes even more.

Without a doubt, I saw my role as a CBNF guide as more than just explaining the garden to visitors at the Memorial and providing information on the battlefields, monuments and cemeteries. I saw myself as an ambassador for Canada and for the Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation. Simply put, I talked to people - in the grocery store, at the Memorial, on the beach, in the train station, everywhere. Participants of the CBNF tours have the advantage of meeting wonderful people like M. Vico at the Abbaye d'Ardenne, among others. But on my own I discovered many other warm and inviting people who were

more than happy to get to know the members of our guide team and to talk to us about their experiences. Whether it was supper in Bretteville-L'Orgueilleuse, coffee in Authie or a fundraising dinner for the Juno Centre, I accepted - and made the most of each opportunity to talk about the Foundation. In doing so, I'd like to think that I established or maintained a warm feeling between all these people and the CBNF.

Through them I also gained once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to learn more about the soldiers of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division. There are more than just monuments and battlefields to be seen in this part of France; the buildings, roads and stone walls themselves have stories to tell. Quite a few of my weekends were spent looking at names inscribed in stone, partially eroded but still legible, and researching the stories of the soldiers who may have left them there.

Being a guide at the Memorial this past summer was a wonderful kick-off to my personal battlefield study tour of Europe. Just like the CBNF battlefield study tour, it provided me with unique insight into the events of 1944 and beyond. I cannot thank the Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation enough."

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