

James Wood Photo



The 2000 CBNF Study Tour Group: Front row (l.-r.): Dr. Serge Durlinger, LCol David Patterson, Joanne Rodriguez; Back row: James Wood, Sean Pollick, Joni Yarascavitch, Lisa Goodyear, Andrew Burtch, Michael Chisholm, Sophie Lalande, Cailin Rolls, Marie-Noël Duhaime, Michael Holden, Damian Burianyk.

The 2000 Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation Study Tour

The Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation's sixth annual tour of selected Canadian First and Second World War European battlefields and commemorative sights was a great success this year. The group was led by LCol David Patterson and Dr. Serge Durlinger and consisted of six men and six women representing all regions of Canada. The group left Toronto for London, England on 25 May and visited the famed air and land warfare museum at Duxford, the RAF museum at Hendon and the Imperial War Museum. The students concentrated on learning about Canada's enormous commitment to the air war in Europe.

Crossing under the Channel by train on 29 May, the group toured Canada's First World War battlefields at Ypres, Passchendaele, the Somme, Vimy, and Amiens. For the first time, a CBNF tour visited the grave of Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae, author of "In Flanders Field," in Wimereux, France. On 1 June the group travelled to Dieppe. Two days later, the tour participants arrived at the Abbaye d'Ardenne in Normandy,

site of the infamous murders of Canadian prisoners of war by the 12th SS Panzer Division. As with every study tour, the group was quartered at the Abbaye for about a week and participated in the many ceremonies held on June 6 and 7. The students met many Canadian veterans and the encounters were frequently memorable for both young and old.

The group spent two days at Falaise to end the tour. By the end of the trip, the Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation 2000 Study Tour participants had gelled into an especially close-knit group of young Canadians obviously sharing an educational and formative journey of discovery. The bonds of comradeship which they developed were forged in the giant shadow cast by those of their countrymen who preceded them overseas over half a century previously. And not for a moment of our stay were these men's service and sacrifices forgotten.

What follows are excerpts from the daily journals kept by the students on the tour.

Thursday, May 25/Friday, May 26

Faithful reader, it is now one day before I go on the tour, and the excitement is killing me KILLING ME!!! I've got 19 days of study ahead, and I feel this little black book will be well-worn by the end. Hopefully, I shall pull from this a better understanding of where these veterans fought and what conditions they faced. I have been told that the primary source for any military historian is the battlefield, and this is my opportunity to consult and withdraw from that source what I need. In this way I also hope to better appreciate the ceremonies of Remembrance Day- to personalize it, in this way I can ensure its survival in my family. I have long felt that once the veterans have passed, Remembrance Day shall hold less meaning to those left behind, but through an understanding of sacrifice, the meaning of Remembrance Day can be preserved and perhaps advanced to greater importance in Canada.

Andrew Paul Burtch, Carleton University

Je suis arrivée à l'aéroport de Toronto en sachant que j'allais vivre une expérience extraordinaire, que cette tournée d'études était une opportunité incroyable, mais je ne me doutais pas à quel point ce serait une expérience marquante dans ma vie....comment ce voyage changerait ma vision de la guerre et je ne me doutais également pas des liens créés avec les autres étudiants. J'y ai rencontré des personnes intéressantes, forger des amitiés solides, impressionnantes même étant donné la durée du voyage.

Sophie Lalande, Université de Montréal

Saturday, May 27

The afternoon was spent at the Imperial War Museum, which houses a truly outstanding collection of artifacts relating to British wars in the 20th Century. I spent the entire afternoon walking through the First and Second World Wars in the first level of the museum. With so much to see, I found it rather surprising that the item I remember most was serving as a backdrop for one of the displays. In one of the many glass cases, the flag flown by the Canadian army at Vimy Ridge hangs behind pictures and artifacts from the First World War. I am told that there have been attempts to have the flag repatriated to Canada, but the Imperial War Museum has refused. I am sure there must be

two sides to this story, but at the same time it made me angry to see that particular flag serving as a background wall-hanging in a British museum when a replica would do just as well.

James Wood, Wilfrid Laurier University

Monday, May 29

We arrived in Ypres with just enough time to check into the hotel and get to the Menin Gate ceremony. The local fire department does a fantastic job of the Last Post. The city blocks off the street for a few minutes and there is always a crowd there. I'm glad to see that some people still take the time to respect and remember the dead. Canada needs more of that.

Damian Buriannyk, University of New Brunswick

Our next stop was Tyne Cot Cemetery. Words failed me here. I cannot put into words the emotion this place evoked in me. 12, 000 graves. 24,000 names on the wall behind. When I was 11 or 12 years old I had to learn the words to Flanders Fields for school. I remember walking around my house repeating the words over and over again until I knew it off by heart. It struck me at that very moment what that poet meant. The words all came back to me and I began to whisper them to myself. It took ever ounce of strength I had not to start crying hysterically. Never in my life have I felt such futility and sense of loss.

Lisa Goodyear, Royal Military College of Canada

We went to St-Julien where the Canadian war memorial is. It is wonderful, clean, and well kept. We then went to Passendale and were shown one of the most disturbing battle sites of the First World War. It was quite a field to see even eighty years later. We were told that the distance between a stream and a house 400 yards away took eight days to take. The town itself, less than two kilometers from the start line took two weeks to take at the cost of 5,000 Canadian lives, or 16,000 killed, wounded or missing....I have a personal interest in the weapons of war, from a professional and recreational perspective. Looking at the field, hearing the number of men who died and realizing that the objective served no tactical purpose has made me reconsider some of my emphasis. In the study of weaponry there is a

rather sterile realization of just what that weaponry does. Standing in the area that these men died and looking at what they were up against I realized that until then I had not fully appreciated just what the equipment was capable of doing, the amount of death was enormous. Moreover, I realize that the men who made the charge were intimately familiar with what the weapons were capable of and went over the top regardless. Their bravery and dedication must have been enormous.

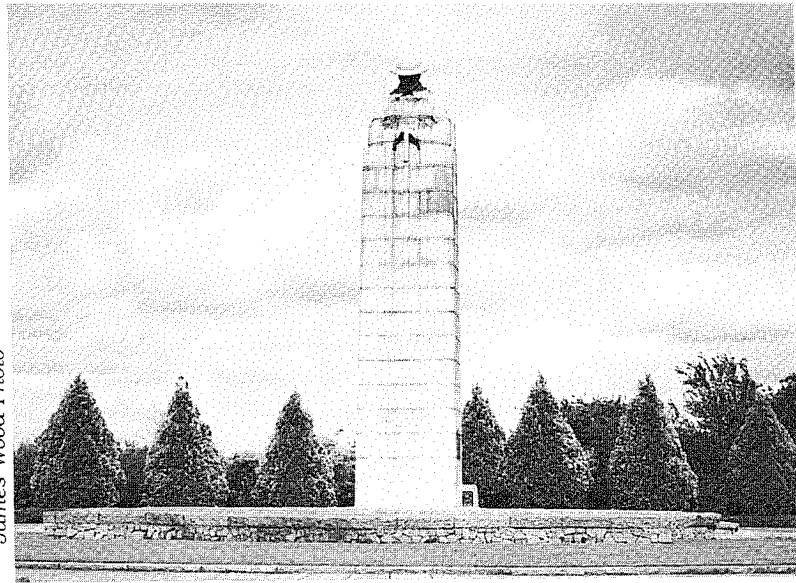
Sean Pollick, Royal Military College of Canada

Nous avons eu la chance d'admirer la statue de Saint-Julien. Elle est beaucoup plus imposante que je me l'étais imaginé... Je crois que, aujourd'hui, cette statue représente le sacrifice de notre nation et l'essence qui est sensé de ressortir de ces lieux sacrés, qui est en fait, une commémoration beaucoup plus grande et profonde que juste la «victoire». Il est impératif de penser aux soldats - fils, maris, pères et même, des fois, des femmes - qui ont fait la guerre, mais surtout à ceux qui ne sont pas revenus, à l'ultime sacrifice qu'ils ont accepté et ce, souvent avant même de partir de leur ville, de leur pays, de leur continent. «Ici, les 22-24 avril 1915, dix-huit mille Canadiens du flanc gauche britannique résistèrent victorieusement aux premières attaques de gaz des Allemands. Deux mille d'entre-deux, glorieusement tombés, reposent près de cette colonne» J'ai signé le registre et écrit: «Silencieusement, je me souviens.»

Marie-Noël Duhaime,
Royal Military College of Canada

The St. Julien monument reflected the level of death and horror experienced by soldiers of both sides in Ypres. A solemn pillar of plain stone with the silhouette of a soldier carved into its peak, the monument conveyed a sense of grim determination which forces a reaction by those viewing it. The most common feeling within the group, as far as I could measure, was sorrow. The unmoving stone guard of honour here at St. Julien caused the poem 'In Flanders's Field' to roll through my head. Apparently, the monument here was quite controversial after the war because the Canadians did not feel it portrayed victory, rather, it felt too grave and seemed obsessed with the loss, not a sentiment

James Wood Photo



The First World War Canadian Memorial at St. Julien.

shared by a victor nation. Years later, however, it seems entirely apropos.

Andrew Paul Burtch

Ypres is a walled city and Mike and I walked some of the wall before wandering into a pub. It was a lovely place just off the town square. Leaving the pub we ran into a biker named Yves, who asked if we were American. We told him that we are Canadian and he responded 'Ah, the liberators.' Of anything that a local said to us during the course of the trip that particular phrase struck me as the most touching. A biker, 80 years after the fact, recognized the Canadian contribution to the liberation of his country. That was surely the most flattering thing said to me on the trip.

Sean Pollick

Tuesday, May 30

It is now 3:15 pm and we are on our way to Beaumont Hamel. I have a knot in my stomach. We arrive at Beaumont Hamel and the rain is pouring. The memorial is impressive. The ground is still scarred and when I reach the top of the Caribou I see the Danger Tree for the first time. From this vantage point I have a view of no-man's-land and I can see the German lines. I gave my presentation mostly from memory since the rain made it impossible to read from my prepared presentation. I think it was ok. My emotions were running so high, I felt like I was stepping on hallowed ground. It was very sombre walking through the tall, wet grass with the rain falling. I walked past the danger tree and stopped and realized this was the most dangerous place in No Man's Land. As I walked into the

Newfoundland cemetery I felt such a sense of sadness. I recognized all the family names. I know what part of the Island these names are from. I wonder who among my friends have family here.... Walking around this battlefield has been emotionally exhausting for me. It will be a long time before I can deal with the range of emotions I felt here today.

Lisa Goodyear

This is what I had been waiting for, Vimy Ridge. The boys (QOR) had told me how impressive it is but that compared little to the feeling of actually being there. I stood in awe looking towards the monument from where the Canadians would have advanced. It was pouring rain as I walked onto the monument, but no amount of rain could have dampened the feelings I had as I first looked over the ridge down onto the towns in the valley below.

Michael W. Chisholm, University of Toronto

Wednesday, May 31

While in the cemetery I started doing what I was to do for the rest of the trip, laying small Canadian flags on the headstones of Canadian Military Engineers. It is a small token to be sure, and certainly biased toward my military trade, but I felt it was appropriate that there be some sign that the sappers were remembered. Some of the inscriptions were heart-wrenching and personal. One inscription to a British soldier read 'To our Dear Daddy', and another was to 'A Loving Husband'. It is these inscriptions that remind you that these were more than just soldiers, they were men with families who they left and never saw again.

Sean Pollick

We made an unexpected stop at the Wimereux Cemetery in Boulogne. At first, as we walked towards the cemetery, it was unclear to me as to why they were there. It seemed we were just walking through a civilian cemetery. It wasn't until we reached the other end that it was finally clear. On the stone wall was a plaque dedicated to John McCrae, the Canadian author of "In Flanders Fields." On the other side of the wall was a military cemetery, including the body of McCrae. We walked through and paused at his gravesite. It was here that I had the honour of placing a Canadian flag on his grave and reading

his famous poem. All of my life, I have been reciting this poem on Remembrance Day at parades and ceremonies. To finally be at McCrae's gravesite and to read the poem he wrote in World War One meant so much to me.

Joni Yarascavitch, University of Waterloo

Thursday, June 1

Nous nous sommes dirigés vers la plage de Pourville. C'est sur cette partie du débarquement, effectué par le South Saskatchewan Regiment et les Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada, que je faisais ma présentation. Je trouve que le fait de présenter sur une bataille ou un débarquement est une excellente idée. La lecture et le temps que j'ai mis à préparer cette présentation m'ont donné un sentiment d'appartenance à cette plage, aux soldats qui y sont mort où qui y ont survécu.... Lorsque nous sommes allés dans le cimetière, j'ai passé quelques minutes devant la tombe du Lieutenant-colonel Gostling, commandant des QOCH. Cet homme a tout juste eu le temps de déposer son pied sur la plage lorsqu'il a été atteint par une balle. J'étais émue d'être devant sa tombe, là où son corps repose. J'ai fait une prière pour lui.

Sophie Lalande



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We went for a walk around Dieppe. Andrew showed a few of us a small monument behind a church, which was in memory of two Canadian soldiers who were shot on this spot. It was so modest but unbelievably moving. As I looked around I could imagine the fear of the men pinned here, wondering where the next shot was coming from.

Lisa Goodyear

Our days spent at Dieppe, I now know, were the pivotal event of my Normandy Tour. Before this point, I really had not the slightest idea of what war and remembrance were about. I know that at times soldiers are asked to stand their ground in impossible situations and to go forward when every instinct is to turn and run, or at least keep their head down. And I knew about the bonds that tie soldiers to one another and make them unwilling to turn away from a fight for fear of what their buddies will think of them. But seeing the beaches at Dieppe made me realize that while the things I thought I knew were not incorrect, they amounted to only a shadow of an understanding...After visiting Dieppe I have come to understand why these brave men went forward and why, in the end, they suffered such terrible losses. As for the questions left unanswered, seeing the beaches left me with a need to know more. There has scarcely been a moment of my spare time since the Normandy Tour that I have not spent reading about some aspect of the war.

James Wood

Friday, June 2

After seeing the beaches, we went and saw the result of this action, the cemetery at Dieppe. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission have done an excellent job of preserving memory of the fallen...This place hit me pretty hard. Standing in the middle of a thousand dead Canadians who were all killed on one day, most about my age, was too much. In a perfect world, this place would not exist. Every Canadian should visit this place. I will bring my children here someday.

Damian Burianyk

Next stop, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery at Dieppe. I did not enjoy standing amongst a thousand dead Canadians but I guess that is why it is there. To



Mike Bechtold Photo

Left: Memorial in Dieppe: "Here fell two Canadian soldiers on 19 August 1942"



James Wood Photo

Below: The Canadian Military Cemetery at Dieppe

remind me about the terrible things that have happened in the past. I cried when I saw so many names, all in their early twenties...that could have been me or any of my friends or any of us on the tour!

Michael J. Holden, Mount Allison University

Sunday, June 4

As I stood there, nervous though I was, I was also struggling to contain my feelings....The only thought that thrummed through my mind, compelling my silence, was *I'm on Juno beach!!!!* Finally, I had arrived, it seemed like the climax of this adventure, drawn to the beach where our men, brave, young and foolish, fought and fell-taking the war to Hitler and winning. This moment was of utmost importance to me, and the immediate conclusion I reached was that I had to become a better Canadian. From that moment on, I became more patriotic than I had ever been in my life, I am a Canadian, I am proud, I am sad for our losses here but enthralled by our accomplishments.

Andrew Paul Burtch

We attend a ceremony at the Bold Tank where a plaque was dedicated to the Fort Garry Horse and the Sherbrooke Fusiliers. Here we had the privilege to meet several Canadian veterans....It was the first time in many years I have sung our national anthem. For the first time it actually meant something to me. Seeing the Veterans salute at the playing of the last post was stirring. They snapped to attention and were so straight and proud.

Lisa Goodyear

Le fait que le voyage nous permette de participer aux cérémonies de souvenir du débarquement de Normandie a été l'une des plus belles expériences. Rencontrer ces hommes qui ont vécu le débarquement est tellement intéressant, j'avais le goût de tout savoir, qu'il me raconte dans les moindres détails. D'un autre côté, je me sentais mal de rappeler à ces hommes la douleur qu'ils ont vécue. Combien d'amis ont-ils perdu? Et de quelle manière? Leurs yeux ont vu ce qu'il y a de plus laid. Et chacun de ces hommes avait une histoire, une famille, des proches qui l'attendaient patiemment et qui priaient pour lui chaque soir. Combien ont souffert dans l'attente ou lorsque les nouvelles sont finalement arrivées? Est-ce qu'il y a vraiment une seule personne qui n'a pas été touché par ce conflit?

Sophie Lalande

It gets harder with every cemetery we visit. It took only a few moments to bring me to tears. Everyone gets very quiet and speaks very little. This place is so serene, the maple trees and the rain gently falling, it is easy to lose myself in my own thoughts. Like so many other moments on this trip words fail me, I am emotionally overwhelmed by the loss of life that surrounds me. I have to leave this place and sit alone for a few minutes to pull myself together.

Lisa Goodyear

We moved onto Sword beach and stopped at a monument while Serge and David gave a briefing. There was a man walking and he stopped while we were talking and seemed to be listening to our briefing. It turns out that he was a German veteran who, during the war, was responsible for defending that beach from the Allies on D-Day! I couldn't believe that we had the opportunity to hear his version of the events.

He spoke in German and Serge translated into English. It was a fascinating story. He described the attack and explained what he did. There was a field across from the beach full of wheat and he and his comrades had to hide in the waist-high wheat to avoid being attacked. Talking to this German veteran was almost a surreal experience. I didn't know how to read the situation. I felt as though I should have been angry at the individual because he may have been responsible for the killing of Canadians, but after hearing him speak, he seemed to be the same as every other veteran. He was fighting for what he believed was right (or he may have been conscripted against his wishes). Nevertheless, he fought and survived and was willing to tell us of his experiences. It was clear to me that it was a war and that certain experiences are bound to occur which cannot be held against the other side for a lifetime. In the words of this German veteran, Willy Harnack, "We are all friends now."

Joni Yarascavitch

At Sword Beach we saw a vet walking along the road. He was a German vet from the 716th Infantry Division. This was completely unexpected and kind of a bonus. There was a bit of trouble with the translation, but we got his story. He talked about seeing the invasion fleet, the bombardment, the invasion, his friend being shot, and surrendering. He was the enemy then, today he is just an old man.

Damian Buriannyk

Tuesday, June 6

Peu après, nous avons rencontré un vétéran, je crois que son nom était Patty Hutton des Queen's Own Rifles. Il a partagé ses souvenirs, mais comme il avait de la difficulté, sa femme l'a aidé. Col Gould aussi était l'a et lui aussi a partagé ses souvenirs. Pendant que ses deux hommes parlaient, je m'imaginai à leur place. J'ai déjà travaillé dans un tank, mais je n'ai jamais été dans un débarquement, sous le feu de l'ennemi ou encore dans une situation de guerre. J'ai de la misère à m'imaginer ce qu'ils ont pu vivre, les sentiments qu'ils ont pu avoir, la douleur qu'ils devaient ressentir, la peur toujours présente... Trop de chose dans la tête, j'essai d'arrêter de penser pour mieux écouter leur histoire.

Marie-Noël Duhaime

Wednesday, June 7

Then the big ceremony back at the Abbaye garden. The garden is fairly small and it is packed with people. The vets are here, as are many more people, including the students from the University of Tennessee and some guides from Beaumont Hamel and Vimy. This is the most moving and personal ceremony I have ever had the privilege to attend. There are tons of flowers placed on the

James Wood Photos



marker and almost everyone lays a wreath. We are able to take part in the ceremony and lay a maple leaf on the memorial as the names of those killed are read out. This is something I will remember and cherish always. "They are gone but not forgotten." Most people filter out after the ceremony and we are left with the vets. They tell some stories that even today (as I write this) bring a tear to my eye.

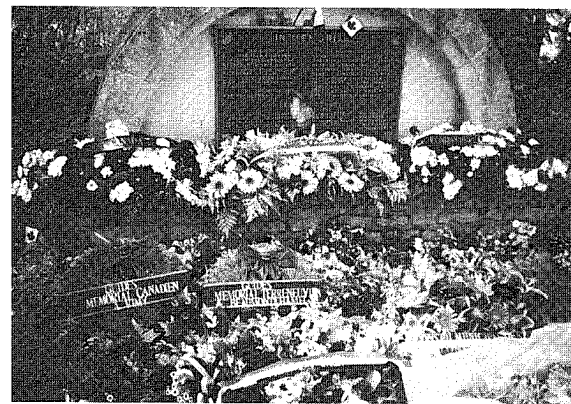
Damian Burianyak

À 15h30, nous sommes retournés au jardin de la fondation et à 16h30 c'était au jardin de l'abbaye d'Ardenne que nous étions. Il débordait tellement il y avait de gens. Chaque membre du groupe a eu l'honneur de déposer une feuille d'érable en souvenir de tous les Canadiens qui ont été assassinés dans ce jardin. Cette cérémonie était de loin la plus touchante. Une fois la cérémonie terminée, quelques vétérans sont restés dans le jardin avec plusieurs membres du groupe. Ils nous ont conté des histoires vraiment affreuses de ce qu'ils ont vécu pendant la guerre, en y pensant, j'ai encore des larmes aux yeux.

Marie-Noël Duhaime

Saturday, June 10

Our last morning at the Abbaye and I felt saddened by the fact that I will probably never be back for a second visit. Adding to this, I was feeling a bit anxious about my presentation on the fight for Verrières Ridge. Each of us had



Two views of the memorial garden at the Abbaye d'Ardenne.

been tasked with presenting a brief outline of some event, such as the Dieppe raid, Juno Beach, or naval support at D-Day. To this point, I had been impressed with the briefings given by

the other members of our group. Our TEWT of the Bretteville defence had left me with a disdain for those who would criticize military commanders after the fact. These men bore what must have been a crushing responsibility; what right do any of us have to pass judgement on their actions without having walked a mile in their shoes? I was thinking about this before my presentation and I came to the conclusion that there is a place for historians to examine and scrutinize the decisions made by these commanders, but not to attack them personally for their failings and mistakes. It is a fine line, but I think the lesson I have taken away from this episode is a valuable one.

James Wood

Sunday, June 11

We got up pretty early this morning and recreated the march of the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders up Hill 195. The march was meant to sneak up behind the German forward lines and establish a defensive position behind their lines. Our march was a good idea, although some of the mystique was lost since people talked the whole way up. It would have been nice, from my point of view, to have done the march attempting to make no noise so that we could gain an even greater appreciation of what the Argylls had to do. In any case it must have been a big surprise for the Germans during the war.

Sean Pollick

We began the day at 3 am by retracing the Argyll's Bn sneak up Point 195. I think the fourteen of us made more noise than the Argyll's did. An amazing accomplishment for the Argyll's when you think of it. Saw the sun rise over Caen from this position. You can still see the gaps in the trees where Sherman's had pushed through.

Michael W. Chisholm

We came back to a house at the bottom of the hill to have breakfast with a gentleman farmer who was a sixteen year old boy in 1944. He showed us around his farm, where some of the Canadian slit trenches can still be made out, and showed us some gaps in the trees where Sherman tanks had crashed through. We then went up to the old farm house where the dead of the Argyll regiment had been buried awaiting the graves commission. Back in his house he had a recently unearthed Lee-Enfield rifle that a plow had turned up a few weeks earlier and told us stories about the German occupation. Apparently the Wehrmacht were okay sorts but the SS were real 'bastards'. We said our good-byes to our gracious host and left to tour the battle of the Falaise Gap.

Sean Pollick

Postscript

To say it was an experience of a life time some how does not seem enough. This trip has meant more to me than anyone can really understand. I feel focused and that I have retrieved my sense of direction. To say goodbye to the people I shared this experience with was sad. I hope to stay in contact with everyone. I know I have really connected with some people on this tour and saw a glimpse of everyone's life. This tour has given me a lot to think about and reminded why I love to study military history. I have finally become a patriot of my own country. I know now it is up to my generation to go forth and never let our country forget the sacrifices that were made.

Lisa Goodyear

As a young military historian the Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation Study Tour was arguably the greatest experience of my life. For that I would like to thank General Belzile and the other members of the Foundation. Under

the able leadership of Serge Durlfingier and David Patterson I learned more about the Canadian involvement in the European theatre than I ever thought was possible. I got to see the great battlefields that previously I had only read about and imagined. I spoke to veterans, Allied and German about heard about what they remember from the war. I spoke with civilians and heard yet another side to the same story. I stared at the same sky that the Allied soldiers had looked up to wondering what I would have been thinking, feeling and scared of had I been on a landing craft during the D-Day invasion.

Michael J. Holden

The lessons that each of us have taken away from the trip are valuable ones...now that we are home the responsibility lies with us to make use of what we have learned and to share it with others.

James Wood

Je réalise également qu'il est important de connaître l'histoire militaire canadienne, ce qui s'est réellement passé, et de transmettre cette histoire aux futures générations. Je sais que c'est ce que je ferai de mon côté.

Sophie Lalande

This tour has been one of the most memorable experiences of my life and I am thrilled that I was fortunate enough to be given this opportunity. I cannot even begin to sum up all the things that I learned on the tour. If I had to choose one lesson, it would be the following: people can study war in a classroom or by reading books but they will never gain a true appreciation for the effects of war until they walk where the soldiers stood. Prior to the tour, I had studied Dieppe, D-Day, and Vimy but when I stood on the battlegrounds and talked to the veterans, history, to me, became much less academic and so much more human. I could finally put human faces to the names and fields to the battles. Visiting the cemeteries was no different. Pictures do nothing to convey the immensity of the loss of life and suffering that war causes. I only hope that the lessons I learned on this study tour will remain with me for the rest of my life so that I will always remember why I have the luxury of being free.

Joni Yarascavitch