

Introduction

The Communications and Electronics (C&E) Branch Heritage Program coordinated an impressive Battlefield Study Tour in conjunction with the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery (RCA) that took 100 serving, retired and associate members of our Branch on a WWI/WWII Battlefield Study Tour from 1 to 10 April 2017. The tour included participation in the national commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, on 9 April 2017, and an educational program that delivered guided tours of Passchendaele, Menin Gate in Ypres, Verrières Ridge, Beaumont-Hamel, Arras, Dieppe, Normandy, Juno Beach, Caen and other places of historical military significance.

Our Branch Leader's intent was “to promote the Preservation, Celebration and Education of our incredible C&E history.” “It’s about our people creating esprit-de-corps and identity, as part of our professional preparation to face the operational challenges of today and do our business to communicate and conduct information operations and cyber warfare. The courage, initiative and sacrifice of our fore-bearers at Vimy Ridge, and other iconic battles, can only reiterate the commitment and motivation of our branch members to better “enable command”.”

Through sponsorship and fundraising, the C&E Branch was able to send 50 deserving members, accompanied by another 50 retired and serving members, and their spouses (VIPs) who paid their own way.

(Pictures: group Beny sur Mer, RCCS Wreath at Beny sur Mer)

Vimy 2017 Battlefield Tour - Testimonies from some of the deserving members

1. Je tiens à vous remercier pour le voyage a Vimy, ça été une expérience inoubliable, j’ai passé des moments incroyables et fait de belles connaissances. Encore aujourd’hui, j’ai de la difficulté à le décrire en mots, but the best I could do is : cela a été incroyable.

Merci beaucoup,

Sdt Alarcon-Chinchilla
QGET, Valcartier Que

2. The Vimy 100 Battlefield Study Tour was genuinely a once in a lifetime experience. I grew up with stories from grandparents about the devastation of both world wars and participated in many history classes, but nothing could have prepared me for cemeteries and memorials in commemoration of thousands upon thousands of fallen soldiers from both sides of the conflict. The tour allowed me to gain a better understanding of that overwhelming sacrifice, as well as appreciate the war efforts from all Allied and enemy countries, not only Canada. The most memorable site of the trip for me was Beaumont Hamel, where the Newfoundland Regiment lost 732 of its original 800 men after the first day of the Battle of the Somme. We were able to tour preserved trenches and craters, as well as monuments, cemeteries, and a museum.

Another highlight was the honour to participate in the Menin Gate Last Post ceremony, which has occurred every evening at 2000hrs since 1928 with the exception of the German invasion during WW2, in honour of the soldiers who died for Belgium's freedom and independence. Many locals were present for the ceremony, and shook our hands as we toured the monument. The support from the Branch to have made the trip a reality for myself and all of the deserving members is very much appreciated!

Capt Kathryn Bowen
(C&E Officer of the year)
12 WTIS, Shearwater NS
(Picture: [Loos_Bowen](#))

3. "Words cannot express how truly blessed I feel to have had the opportunity to take part in the 2017 Vimy Battlefield Study Tour. The trip was something I will always treasure. To be able to see the battlefields where our ancestors once fought was a magnificent experience. To take part in the Menin Gate ceremony and to stand at Vimy Ridge on the 100th anniversary is something I will always hold dear - Makes me proud to be a Canadian. May we never forget the sacrifices they made."

Thank you so much,

Cpl Kellie Cluney
37 Sig Regt, St. John's NL

4. C&E branch, I would like to thank you for making this battlefield tour possible and giving me the opportunity to assist at the Vimy 100th anniversary. It was a memorable life time experience.

Thank you again.

Cpl Martel
21 EW Regt, Kingston ON

5. I would like to thank so much everybody who made this once in a life time experience for me. I did not know what to expect from this trip at the beginning. During this experience I surprised myself with different feelings at the same time. Sad to see with my own eyes how many Canadians died for our FREEDOM and so proud to be Canadian at the exact same moment. Those are feelings that I will never forget and this intimacy with our soldiers will be forever in my heart. // J'aimerais remercier tout le monde qui ont eu un rôle à jouer pour rendre possible cette expérience de vie unique. Je ne savais pas à quoi m'attendre au début de ce voyage. Au cours de cette expérience, je me suis surpris à ressentir des sentiments retrouvés à l'extrémité d'un spectre, en même temps. Triste de voir de mes propres yeux combien de Canadiens sont morts pour notre LIBERTÉ et tellement fier d'être canadien, exactement au même moment. Ce

sont des sentiments que je n'oublierai jamais et cette intimité avec nos soldats sera à jamais dans mon cœur.

Merci pour tout encore un fois,

MCpl Jean-Francois Lapierre
CFSCE, Kingston, ON
(Picture : MCpl Lapierre)

6. The tour for me was an eye opening experience. So many people know great deal about the Second World War but practically nothing about the First World War. The tour allowed me to piece it all together in a fashion I did not think possible. It also helped me to learn about family members I knew little about that had served in the Great War.

Thank you C&E Branch,

Cpl Jason O'Hearon
CFJSR, Kingston ON

7. It was an honour to be selected for the Commemorative Battlefield Study Tour. Visiting the import battlefields of our Canadian military heritage during WWI and WWII is something that will stay with me forever. To have been invited to participate in a Menin gate ceremony was surreal. To top it off, traveling with my family of signalers, from all over Canada, who share the same cap badge and uniform, made the trip truly unforgettable. The sacrifice of the soldiers who came before us and carved the way for the Canadian Armed Forces will not be forgotten. We will carry their torch with honour and pride and we will never forget.

Thank you,

MCpl Jontaylor Estey
37 Signals Regiment, St-John NB

8. The Battlefield Study Tour was an eye-opening experience. Before going on the tour, I searched for information about the locations we were about to visit in order to prepare myself for the experience. I also wanted to learn more about the battles that took place in both World Wars. When we arrived at the first location on our itinerary, I soon realized that reading about a place and actually being there are two completely different things. Visiting the cemeteries, monuments, and memorials was a whole different experience. For example, at Juno Beach, as I stood there gazing at the waves rolling in, I could not help but imagine myself being in those men's shoes. I wonder what they must have felt hours, minutes before landing; what was going through their minds as they jumped out of the landing crafts knowing that they could get hit at

any second. I read that it was medium tide when these brave men landed on D-Day. Regardless of what the tide level was, being in a vulnerable position like that is not where any soldier wants to be. It makes me tremble thinking about it. As I walked through the gravesites, I could not help but wonder who these “unknown soldiers” were. At Cabaret Rouge, there are rows and rows of these graves of unknown soldiers. In fact, there are thousands of them across the Commonwealth cemeteries. It is saddening to know that they will never be known. At the same time, it is good to know that they were never forgotten. Being on this tour was a great experience for me. I have learned a lot about our military history. I now have much more respect and pride for my job as a soldier of the Canadian Armed Forces. The least I could do for my predecessors is to be the best soldier I can be and carry on their legacy of courage, dedication and love for Canada. I am grateful for the opportunity.

Thank you to the C&E Branch, 2 CMBG HQ & Sig Sqn and my sponsors!

Cpl Jonathan Cardenas
2 CMBG HQ & Sig Sqn, Petawawa ON

(Picture: Cpl Cardenas_Cpl Cook)

9. *(This is a summary of a longer report)* During April 1-10 2017 I had the privilege of attending a C&E Branch Battlefield Study Tour. The intent of the trip was to take deserving members from the branch and send us on an educational tour of the battlefields of WWI and WWII, from a Sigs point of view. It was a one of a kind experience that I will never forget. Each stop on this eight day trip was an immersive learning experience. This was an extremely important trip for me and to be at the 100th anniversary of Vimy ridge is life changing. I could not be more grateful to those who gave me the opportunity to go on this amazing trip. Without the efforts and hard work of those who helped raise funds for this trip I would never have been able to afford to go on my own.

Thank you to all who helped make this a reality,

Cpl Gregory Cook
2 CER, Petawawa ON

(Picture: St-Julien monument)

10. I would like to say this trip was truly a lifetime opportunity, I never knew that these Cemeteries and Battlefield Sites still existed until today. I plan to bring my family to visit Vimy in the future as I truly believe it is an extraordinary experience. I would like to thank C&E Branch for giving me the opportunity to attend this eye opening tour - I feel it is my duty as a Canadian to pass this experience to my family - I will definitely take them to Europe in the near future.

Capt Said Shaath
32 Signals Regiment, Toronto ON

11. “The C&E Battlefield Study Tour was an incredible experience. For one, it’s something I’ve always wanted to do, but never expected to have the opportunity to do. More to that, the experience was enriched by the company of so many other like-minded members, and the opportunity to proudly wear my uniform while honoring our dead, our history, and representing Canada abroad. I am indeed grateful to all of our sponsors for furnishing this opportunity.

For me one of the most incredible aspects of this trip was being able to see and walk the ground on which our soldiers fought. Pictures are one thing, but experiences like standing on the beaches of Normandy and Dieppe, and walking through the moonscape of Beaumont Hamel and Vimy Ridge convey so much more; it imparts an understanding of what happened there that is difficult to otherwise grasp. Dieppe and Beaumont Hamel were indeed key for myself in understanding what our soldiers experienced. At Dieppe, many of us were stunned by the vast kill zone our troops had to cross to reach any objective, a lot of the commentary moved from it being a shame we didn’t accomplish more, to how amazing it was we accomplished what we did. At Beaumont Hamel, I was particularly shocked to see how close together the German and Canadian lines actually were; I’d always thought of them as being considerably more separated, but realizing there was often less than 100m between lines was quite an eye opener.

(Picture: Beaumont Hamel)

By far the most educating and sobering aspects of the trip were visiting the Commonwealth Cemeteries that dot the landscape, Notre Dame du Lorette, and seeing monuments at the Menin Gate, Theipval, and Vimy Ridge. So much death, so many names. I mean, we all hear the numbers and the stories, the poems, and the history lessons but there’s so much more reality in being there and seeing it for yourself. I never realized how many tens of thousands are missing and have no known grave, and I could never truly visualize how many were buried in the cemeteries until I saw the walls of names and rows of crosses and markers. Even in writing this I have a hard time thinking it over, it really is an experience that affects you at a deeper level. I have a great, deep respect for the men and women listed on those walls and found in those cemeteries, and it was a privilege to be able to honor them.

My next step in this experience is to carry the message home. As a start, I will be providing a briefing to my colleagues here in Comox on my experiences during the tour. Beyond that I’m hoping to visit a school this fall, and in subsequent years, to participate in Remembrance Day observances and hopefully share some of my experiences with them, and impart to them why it’s so important to remember.”

My Most Sincere Thanks,

Cpl Jason Bridger
19 WTIS, Comox BC

(Pictures: Notre_Dame_de_Lorette, Notre_Dame_de_Lorette-4)

12. I would just like to thank our sponsors for this opportunity. Few of us could never afford to make such a trip. As a military member, being able to see the battlefields, the monuments, and the history of the Great War put my role as soldier into a unique perspective. Although the technology and means of mobility have significantly changed, the soldier's role is still one of duty, honour, and if necessary sacrifice. The trip was highly educational and it is my hope to take this experience and share it amongst my peers and fellow signalers.

Thank you C&E Branch,

MCpl Christopher Lenihan
39 Signal Regiment Detachment, Vancouver BC

(Picture: Bugler_piper Beny sur mer)

13. As I look back on this once in a lifetime trip I reflect on a few moments that enhanced my perspective on how detrimental both wars were. One for me that was surreal was the amount of grave sites we constantly passed along the countryside while travelling from each location. Some small, some massive, but it enlightened my understanding when I saw the number of people who gave their lives compared to actually hearing a number. Also, the thousands of names etched in some of the memorials such as the Menin Gate, the Thiepval and Somme, and the Notre-dame-de Lorette circle let me understand how important it is to remember who these men and women were and what they fought and died for. Another aspect was the age on the majority of the tombstones. The average age I recognized was ranging from 20-25 and I try to imagine how these men (if not teens) felt going into a battle at such a short time in their lives knowing the inevitability of never coming back home. A final thought I had while on the tour was the relevance of how many Canadians were participating for the 100th anniversary of Vimy, especially the youth groups. It is always important to constantly remind each generation that each day that they live is to remember what sacrifice is and to be able to send these kids and teens to experience it first hand and understand the importance of freedom.

Before we left on the trip I sent my appreciation to Mr. Pattenden:

*“Dear Mr. Pattenden,
I would like to express my profound gratitude to everyone from The William James Henderson Foundation who participated in helping to donate for this once in a lifetime opportunity. Being selected for this tour is an honor, especially for Vimy's 100th Anniversary.
I intend to learn as much as I can during each portion of the tour and reflect on the sacrifices and victories that are associated with their period in history respectively.
When I return, I have no doubt that I will have stories to tell on the people I met, including many veterans especially, along with the food, the scenery and the culture of France.
If you would like, I can send you pictures and videos about our group (21EW) experiences while on the Tour.
I am eagerly awaiting to add France to my list of travels.
Thank-you”*

As I look back on the tour, my appreciation will always be found in reminiscing from all my photos and videos.

Regards

Cpl Andrew Behnke
21 EW Regiment, Kingston ON
(Picture: Henderson)

14. The Battlefield Study Tour was very informative. By attending the tour it helped put the sacrifices made by the Men and Women of the wars into perspective, something no movie or book can do. While in France and Belgium you can really feel and see the appreciation of the sacrifices made by our soldiers, everything from the upkeep of the graves of the fallen to how we were greeted as Canadians.

Thank you for this opportunity,

MCpl Saagen Taverner
CFRG HQ, Borden ON
(Picture: Inconnu)

15. I did some research on the battles fought by Canadians prior to our trip and felt I had a good grasp on their significance. I had no idea the trip would be so informative and in depth. I've been asked a few times by friends what my number one take home from the trip was. I confidently can say the pride of being a Canadian has even more meaning to me now. My life has been changed in a very positive way from the trip. Every day we were there was more humbling than the last. I am very appreciative for the opportunity to be a part of the adventure we all got to experience and the memories we all can now share.

Thanks.

16. The Battlefield Tour was not only an educational experience, it was also an honour. The feelings experienced while we walked on the same ground as our fellow Canadians, who fought to preserve our freedom are feelings I shall never forget. I would like to thank all those who worked tirelessly to make this experience possible, it truly was the opportunity of a lifetime.

Thank you,

MCpl Nate Mason.
36 Signal Regiment, Charlottetown PEI
(Picture: Lest we Forget)

17. It would be an understatement to say that this trip was a life changer for me. To walk the actual ground that so many gave the ultimate sacrifice was a feeling that I don't believe I will ever be able to adequately put into words. Visiting the graves, day after day, and seeing the cemeteries out of the window of the bus of the ones we didn't have time to visit was at times overwhelming. For myself these were the things that struck me the most that were the most moving. As well as the personal connection I was able to make on behalf of people back here in Canada who may never get the opportunity to visit or experience the final resting spot of a relative meant so much to me. I will also never forget the youth, the loss of whole generations or the scope of the horrors that we saw evidence of. Remembrance Day will never be the same for me.

Thank you C&E Branch,

Cpl Piere Marcoux
2 CMBG HQ & SIG SQN, Petawawa ON

18. The battlefield study tour was both an amazing opportunity for me, as well as an amazing learning experience. The sites we went to, from Normandy to Ypres to Vimy, were both colorful and dreary alike. Each site had a story, and a long list of names behind it. A couple of the most memorable places we went to were the Menin Gate ceremony, Neuville St Vaast German war cemetery, and of course, the Vimy Ridge ceremony. It was also nice meeting up with the Signals 1 bus, and some of the VIPs on it. Speaking with MGen Loos and laying a wreath at Beny-Sur-Mer cemetery with him on behalf of the C&E branch was very special. I am honored to have represented CFB Cold Lake in both France and Belgium on this tour, and to have learned some of the things I did over there about both wars and the affect Canada had in them. Also, I am extremely grateful for your contributions to this tour. Without the help, this trip would not have been possible. Thank you.”

Cpl Lucas Leighton
4 WTIS, Cold Lake AB

(Picture: Cpl Leighton_MGen Loos)

19. “This trip was an amazing experience for me. Being able to stand on the battlefields and imagine the daily grind for the many soldiers that fought was very poignant for me. I had knowledge of the many battles before going and thought that I was quite knowledgeable. During the trip I found that there were so many angles to view each battle from. Dr. Cindy Brown was integral to this further understanding, she engaged us in the mindset of the commanders, the soldiers, and the civilians.

The most emotional part for me was seeing the sheer volume of commonwealth grave sites and the ages of the men who fought. Seeing the soldiers' names and the fact that they were the age of my oldest son really hit home for me. This was a life-changing trip for me and I cannot put into words the meaning it had for me. I am so grateful to have had this opportunity. I want to express my extreme gratitude to all who were involved in the planning, fundraising, and preparation for this trip, it will forever be close to my heart.”

Cpl Cat Mason
ATESS, Trenton ON

Sponsorships

We would like to thank all the sponsors who offered their generous support for this trip, most importantly the over 500 retired and serving members of our Association and Branch who donated to this most successful C&E Battlefield Study Tour. The heritage continues through our endeavours together.

(Picture: Last post Beny sur mer)