



THE DUKE



SPECIAL EDITION

2012 EUROPEAN BATTLEFIELD STUDIES TOUR (6 - 13 August 2012)

We are most pleased to report that the 2012 Tour was a complete success! The Tour group consisted of 35 serving members of the Regiment; the "Old Guard", consisting of our very good friends, Tochi Sandhu, Bob Rai and his wife, Harpreet; President Ted Hawthorne, Vice-President Bill Diamond and Bob Remple representing the Regimental Association; and Keith Maxwell and Bob Hall, our Tour guides.

We wish to thank Keith Maxwell and Bob Hall for their excellent work on the Tour and for their valuable work on the production of the summary which follows.

Finally, many thanks to the CO, LCol Harj Sajjan, for including us on the Tour and to the serving members for their support and assistance to the "Old Guard". It was greatly appreciated. A great time was had by all!

Please look for further photos on Facebook at www.facebook.com/BCR.Association. Many thanks to Bill Diamond and Tochi Sandhu for the photos!

DAY 1 (6 August 2012)

Our tour officially began after our 9:30 am arrival at Paris CDG Airport. We were met by our advance party and picked up in our coach by our driver Peter. Our trip to the Normandy D-Day beaches was delayed by bumper to bumper freeway traffic for about two hours. After we were able to clear the sole impediment to our progress, our tour proceeded with all speed to catch up on a little time!

Colonel (retired) Keith Maxwell provided a great narrative as the tour covered the following D-Day sights:

- 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion drop area;
- 6 British Airborne Division drop zone;
- Pegasus Bridge;
- Berniers-sur-Mer;
- Canada House - great visit with Westlake Brothers Souvenir;
- Courseulles-sur-Mer;
- Juno Beach Centre (Canadian landing sights) tour stop - walked the beach and visited the centre;
- 12 SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment and 9 Canadian Infantry Brigade encounter battle engagement; and
- Abbaye d'Ardenne (SS observation area and sight of the murders of a number of Canadian POW soldiers).

We then proceeded to our Hotel (Ibis-Caen Herouville Savary) for our quick check in, dinner and a review of one busy day.

DAY 2 (7 August 2012)

Our day included the following notable stops in our very busy itinerary:

- Point 67 Verriere Ridge (south of Caen) - our BCR hat badge plaque was dedicated at a ceremony where our serving members paraded as a guard wearing DEUs with medals. It was an impressive ceremony. Members of the Regimental Association wore berets, blazers and medals. Special guests were Dr. Jean Pierre Benamou and Gauthier Hebbelynck. Our piper, Pipe Sgt Mike Giles, provided that extra touch to make this ceremony memorable for us all.
- Bretteville-sur-Laize Canadian War Cemetery - The Regiment held a moving ceremony at the largest Canadian cemetery for the Second World War. There are three thousand Canadians buried in the cemetery. The cemetery is the final resting place for 45 Dukes in identified graves and one grave marked as an Unknown soldier of the British Columbia Regiment. There are 16 BCR soldiers who were killed in Normandy and whose names appear on the Bayeux Memorial - they have no known grave. Most of those also lie in this cemetery in graves marked as Unknown. That makes a total of 61 BCR graves in the Bretteville-sur-Laize Cemetery in Cintheaux, Normandy, France. 54 of those were killed on the slopes of Hill 140 during the fighting on 9 August 1944. For the ceremony in the cemetery, the soldiers were formed up in two ranks and remarks were presented by Mayor Michel le Baron, the mayor of the local town of Cintheaux. A wreath was laid by LCol Harj Sajjan, Mr. Ted Hawthorne and Colonel (retired) Keith Maxwell. The troops then had an interpretation of the Worthington brothers' graves by Capt Jen Hillman. The graves are side by side. Colonel (retired) Maxwell gave an interpretation of the Simpson brothers near the grave of Trooper Percy Simpson. He had a cousin killed a month earlier near Caen, and his younger brother was serving in the same Squadron. Tom Simpson, the younger brother, was mentioned in dispatches for his bravery during the fighting that day.
- The tour then drove to the Hill 140 Memorial where Worthington Force fought on 9 August 1944. The troops made up two inward facing ranks along the walkway to the memorial and remarks were made by the CO, Dr. Benamou and the President of the local Veterans Association, Pierre Bouillard. A wreath was laid by the CO, Colonel (retired) Keith Maxwell and Ted Hawthorne. The President of the local Polish Veterans Association - Mr Edward Podyma, who is a veteran of the fighting - made remarks about the Polish operations in the area and it was formally announced that the Polish Veterans would place a plaque on the memorial at the 70th anniversary of the battle in 2014. After a moment of silence the piper played the lament. It was a very moving ceremony. The tour was then invited to a reception at the town hall at the village of Maizeres, located three kilometres from the battlefield. The BCR Association paid the annual maintenance costs of 300 Euros for the Memorial to the Rouvre French Veterans Association. Following the reception the tour returned to the Memorial for photos then changed into clothing more appropriate for exploring the battlefield (t-shirts and jeans mainly).
- The tour then walked to the field where Worthington Force defended against the German Panzer forces and lost 47 tanks. The force also lost approximately 50% casualties. The standard "iron harvest" was collected, including approximately ten kilograms of shrapnel and pieces of tank armour. The most interesting find was a collection of half a dozen unfired 37mm armoured piercing rounds. The rounds were from the sole Stuart tank that made it onto the hill. The tanks was commanded by then-Lieutenant Art Biddlecombe who was commanding the reconnaissance troop. A detailed interpretation and explanation of the battle was given by Dr. Jean-Pierre Benamou and Colonel (retired) Keith Maxwell.
- The tour then returned to the cemetery at Cintheaux and visited the graves of all of the Dukes buried in the cemetery, including the one grave marked as an unknown soldier of The British Columbia Regiment. The BCR graves had been marked by the local dignitaries with small Canadian flags, which greatly helped finding the Dukes amongst the three thousand Canadian graves.

- The tour then visited Dr. Benamou's D-Day Academy at Rots near Caen. It is a wonderful hands-on, living open air museum with the best collection of equipment and materiel from the battle. The troops got to drive a jeep, an American half-track, a White scout car and a DUKW (amphibious truck). It was this vehicle that had been used to ferry King George VI to visit the troops during the battle and the crew retained the royal standard that was used while the King was in the vehicle. It's now known as the "Royal Duck". We then had the opportunity to formally thank Dr. Benamou for his help of this and previous tours. A contribution of 400 Euros was made to support the Academy.

A film crew from London – Mr. Rajesh Thind and Nadia Woodhouse – met the tour at the Hill 140 Memorial and filmed interviews and other material at both the Memorial and the Cemetery. The filming was arranged by the Vancouver South Asian Film Festival to document the tour.

DAY 3 (8 August 2012)

The tour left the hotel early at 0800 hours and drove 200 kilometres north to the First World War battlefield of the Somme.

- We arrived at the Australian Memorial which marks the line where the Canadian Corps relieved the Australian Corps on 1 September 1916. It was also the jumping off point for the battle of Flers-Courcelette, which was a part of the Somme offensive. It was the first time in history where tanks were used in battle and we visited the Tank Corps memorial and Mr Bob Hall gave an interpretive presentation on First World War tanks. During the battle of Flers-Courcelette the Canadian Corps along with 11 other Commonwealth Divisions, moved the front line forward four kilometres, which was considered a major success. The 29th (Vancouver) Battalion, which the Regiment perpetuates, played a major role in taking and holding the village of Courcelette. The tour received an overview of the whole battle of the Somme from the highest point on the battlefield at the Australian Memorial. We then drove past the Canadian Memorial at Courcelette - one of eight on the battlefields - and drove to Adanac Canadian Cemetery, which contains the remains of two thousand soldiers, approximately half of them Canadian. The tour visited many graves of soldiers from battalions perpetuated by the BCR. The Grave of Piper James Richardson, VC, of the 16th Battalion (Canadian Scottish Regiment) is in the cemetery and the tour gathered at his grave while Pipe Sgt. Mike Giles, who had formerly been a member of the Can Scots Pipe Band, played their Regimental March past, "Blue Bonnets". Piper Richardson had played the same tune while marching up and down the parapet to pipe his Regiment into battle when they attacked Regina Trench.
- The tour then returned to the Autoroute and drove to Arras and then moved to the start line for the Canadian Corps attack of 26 August 1918 - the second phase of the battles of the final 100 days of the First World War. The Canadians played a major role in defeating the German Army in those 100 days, starting on 8 August during the battle of Amiens where they and the Australian Corps inflicted the "Black Day of the German Army" according to Field Marshal Ludendorf's memoirs. East of Arras, the Corps attacked for five consecutive days, breaking four major German lines of defence and approaching the Hindenburg Line. After a two day pause to reinforce and resupply, the Corps attacked and broke the Hindenburg Line on 3 September 1918. Private Rayfield of the 7th Battalion won the VC in the operation. The tour visited the Canadian Memorial located on the battlefield.
- The tour then drove to the Canal du Nord, which the Canadian Corps crossed on 27 September 1918, taking Bourslon Wood. Lieutenant Lyall of the 102nd (North BC) Battalion won a VC in the process. The tour visited Ontario Cemetery where a large number of senior and highly decorated soldiers are buried.
- Next stop was Vimy Ridge, where we visited the preserved trench lines and the Grange tunnel, located in the 3rd Division sector for the attack on 9 April 1917. WO Harris and Sgt Snow gave excellent interpretive presentations on the battle. Photos were taken of the Regiment and then the whole tour on the beautiful national memorial to the more than 60,000 soldiers who died in WW1 and also the 11,285 soldiers who were killed in France with no known grave (their names are engraved on the memorial).

The CO's Report to date follows:

All ranks are very excited to be on the battlefield tour - regardless of the jetlag - to retrace the steps of our Regiment. I am thankful to the donors and the Regimental Family for their support in turning an idea into reality. Hill 140 has been the highlight to date. It pulled on the heart strings of all. We were also humbled by the large turnout of the town folks and the Mayor which also included French Veterans at the Memorial site on Hill 140. Walking on the ground has given us a brand new appreciation and perspective. Visiting the gravesite of 40 Dukes put a few people to tears. Most of the Dukes on the battlefield tour have been on deployments, some to Croatia and Bosnia and many to Afghanistan. I know many are reflecting on their own experience and I hope this battlefield tour helps them come to terms with their own memories. Vimy Ridge has also left a mark for many because the sheer size of the monument reflects the magnitude of the sacrifice. Tomorrow we head to Vancouver Corner.

Up the Dukes!
Harjit Sajjan
CO

DAY 4 (9 August 2012)

Our very busy day included the following highlights:

- On our way from Arras to Armentieres, we noted a German Cemetery with 45,000 graves; Cabaret Rouge" Cemetery with 8,000 graves (the location of where the Canadian "Unknown Soldier" of Canada was originally buried); a view through the fog of the Vimy Ridge Memorial in the distance as we proceeded to Armentieres; Notre Dame de Lorette - very large French Cemetery with more than 20,000 graves; and huge coal tailing piles near the city of Lens.
- At Hill 70 we viewed the two plaques (for CSM Hanna, VC of the 29 Bn CEF and Pte O'Rourke, VC of the 7 Bn CEF) which were dedicated by the Regimental Association in 2008.
- We drove through the famous town of Armentieres in French Flanders, close to Lille on the French/Belgian border and crossed into the famous WWI Ypres Sector in Belgium;
- We stopped at Petite Douve (outside of Messin) - first successful trench raid carried out by 50 members of the 7th (1st BC) Battalion, CEF in 1915. A tremendous interpretive presentation was given by WO Leblanc and Sgt Dwayne Snow regarding the successful well planned raid which was totally undetected by the Germans and accomplished all objectives (intelligence, equipment, effecting enemy moral and inflicting 50 enemy casualties). Members of the Regiment thoroughly enjoyed searching the area for artifacts and were quite successful in doing so. It would seem that this area might become an area of interest in the future.
- Vancouver Corner - Recognition presentations were made to Luke Vandebussche and Gauthier Hebbelynck. Messrs. Tochi Sandhu and Ted Hawthorne laid the wreath on behalf of the Regiment. The CO, LCol Harj Sajjan, addressed all those present and paid tribute to Past President of the Regimental Association, Ray Glover. The CO requested Regimental Association President Ted Hawthorne to detail Raymond's work with the Regimental Family. Mr. Hawthorne outlined Raymond's tremendous support of the Regiment, the Regimental Association and the Regimental Family and provided a full biography of our friend and colleague. Background information on the 2nd Battle of Ypres was provided by Colonel (retired) Keith Maxwell, WO Leblanc, Capt Perry, Sgt Snow and SSM Mullick. Capt Patrick Gunkel presented a brief history of Lt Bellew, VC whose commemorative plaque was dedicated in 2008 by the Regimental Association across the highway from Vancouver Corner. SSM Mullick delivered an excellent rendition of LCol John MacCrae's "In Flanders Fields" and concluded with his impressions of the meaning of this visit and the service of our soldiers in WW I. Mr. Gauthier Hebbelynck spoke to the

group about his involvement with the Regiment over many years. The wonderful ceremony was concluded with the singing of "O Canada" by Cpl Alexander and the entire Regimental Family.

- Passchendaele Fields - members received an excellent overview of the battlefield by Colonel (retired) Keith Maxwell as we drove to our next stop.
- Vindictive Corner - we stopped at the highest point of Passchendaele Ridge where the 7 Bn CEF saw action and received a further briefing from Colonel (retired) Maxwell. We continued on our Tour passing the Passchendaele Memorial and proceeding to our next stop.
- Tyne Cot Cemetery - we stopped at this cemetery where 11,000 soldiers are buried and 33,000 names are engraved on the memorial. This was yet again another very somber visit.
- Ypres and St. Julien Mess Dinner - we proceeded to our hotel (Novotel Ypres) and immediately prepared for the ensuing mess dinner – DEUs or Patrols and medals for members of the Regiment and blazers and medals for the "Old Guard". Duke was dressed in patrols as well. We said our good-byes and conveyed our many thanks to Gauthier who was leaving with his family for the Cote d' Azur. We proceeded to St. Julien and then to Vancouver Corner where photos were taken. Our next stop was Zonnebeek which is situated in the centre of the 7th Battalion CEF theatre of operations in the Ypres Salient. We received an excellent guided tour of the Passchendaele Museum and then proceeded to the Mess Dinner conveniently located in an adjacent building. We enjoyed a wonderful dinner complete with beverage service. MCpl Schultz opened the dinner with a warm and heart-felt grace to bless our meal and gathering. Very memorable toasts were given by two of our members (MCpl Callejo to the Regiment and MCpl Clews to the Fallen). The CO acknowledged two very good friends and supporters of the Regiment, Messrs. Tochi Sandhu and Bob Rai. In addition, a presentation was made to our friend and colleague Luke Vandebussche in recognition of his many years of support of the Regiment and Regimental Association. The CO conveyed some very kind words to Luke, followed by words of appreciation by Colonel (retired) Keith Maxwell and Mr. Ted Hawthorne. It was a night to remember for the entire group!

DAY 5 (10 August 2012)

This was a no travel day. Most members enjoyed the day by visiting the local sights such as the Cloth Hall, Museum, Cathedral and other historical sights. Colonel (retired) Keith Maxwell led a walking tour to the Mt. Sorrel Memorial. It was a long walk and was enjoyed by all on such a pleasant day.

Our "embedded" journalist guests (Rajesh Thind and his assistant, Nadia Woodhouse) conducted a number of interviews of members and the "Old Guard" alike. Rajesh and Nadia have been travelling with us and recording all of our many stops, briefings and ceremonies. These folks have been a great addition to the Tour and were well accepted by all.

Menin Gate Ceremony - This evening's ceremony was one of the highlights of the Tour. The Old Guard had assembled at Menin Gate and had a great view of the Regiment lead by the CO, LCol Harj Sajjan, marching into position as the Guard of Honour for the ceremony. The members were dressed in DEUs with medals and the Old Guard with berets, blazers and medals. The Act of Remembrance was recited, wreaths were laid by the Ambassador of Australia and then by Pte. Kathleen Parker, Colonel (retired) Keith Maxwell and Mr. Ted Hawthorne, on behalf of the Regiment. The Last Post and Reveille were played by the Firemen in accordance with a long standing custom. Pipe Sgt. Mike Giles played the Lament and added so much in support of the presence of the Regiment. For all of us it was a night to remember!! After further photographs and discussions with enthusiastic members of the crowd, the Tour disbursed into smaller groups and dined in the European manner. Another tremendous evening to remember!

DAY 6 (11 August 2012)

The tour got underway on time and visited the John McRae memorial next to Essex Farm Cemetery. It is the location where, on 4 May 1915, then-Major John McRae composed the most famous poem of the war – “In Flanders Fields”. The poem was written after McRae had buried a friend in the cemetery and observed the rows of crosses and the poppies. Sgt-Maj Mullick gave another evocative and moving rendition of the poem on the bankside as a lark flew overhead.

The next stop was at the village of Leke where the Regiment was greeted by many old friends, including Luke and Doreen Vandebussche. With a crowd of forty local citizens, a flag party, the local fire brigade and the Regiment, a solemn and meaningful ceremony was held in Canada Park in front of the Regiment's Memorial noting the liberation of the village by the 28TH Armoured Regiment (BCR) on 8 September 1944. A wreath was laid by Pte. Regalla and Mr. Ted Hawthorne on behalf of the Regiment, comments were made and old friendships renewed. Two local citizens who were veterans of the Belgian resistance were present, which added to the solemnity of the event.

The Ceremonial group, led by the piper, then moved to the village War Memorial and carried out another memorial ceremony to Leke's lost and missing, including people with the same names of many of the ceremony's participants and onlookers. The piper led the entire group to the local meeting hall where refreshments and an exchange of greetings were shared. The CO made presentations on behalf of the Regiment to the local dignitaries.

The Tour re-boarded the bus around noon and headed to the Canada Museum in Adagem where we enjoyed an excellent lunch and visited the premier museum dedicated to the Canadians who fought during the battle of the Scheldt, with the aim of clearing the Scheldt estuary and access to the port of Antwerp. The battle was fought in October and November 1944.

The next stop was on the Leopold Canal just north of Adagem where we visited the remaining German concrete bunker which was used to inflict so many casualties on the battalions of 7th Infantry Brigade during the canal's crossing on 7 and 8 October 1944. The machine gun fire from the fixed lines up and down the straight canal from the invulnerable bunker was devastating.

The tour then visited the Adagem Cemetery nearby and laid a wreath (Mr. Tochi Sandhu and MCpl Clews), recited the Act of Remembrance and heard the Lament played by Pipe Sgt. Mike Giles. We gathered at the grave of Sgt Clendinning, MM and his citation was read aloud. Sgt Clendinning and one of his crew were killed nearby when their tank was hit by a Panzerfaust infantry anti-tank rocket.

Six members of the 28th Armoured Regiment (BCR) lie in marked graves at Adagem. We then drove to the area east of Antwerp and drove through the areas where 2nd Infantry and 4th Armoured Divisions attacked north from Antwerp toward Bergen op Zoom to clear the estuary and cut off the Beveland Peninsula and capture the remaining German installations blocking access to Antwerp. The 28th Armoured Regiment (BCR) led the sweep east and then north of Bergen op Zoom to finally clear German resistance from that corner of the Netherlands.

We then drove to the point where Lt Goepel's troop and a platoon from the Lake Superior Regiment engaged four German minesweepers/coastal patrol vessels on 4 November 1944 – they sank three and badly damaged one. The following day they crossed the channel on a fishing boat and recovered the bells and log books of the destroyed and abandoned vessels. One of those bells now rests in the BCR Officers' Mess to be rung on special occasions.

A quiet night was spent in the hotel near downtown Bergen op Zoom (Tulip Inn).

DAY 7 (12 August 2012)

The tour first visited the Bergen op Zoom Cemetery where nine Dukes who died in the Battle of the Scheldt and subsequent operations are buried. We held a quiet, sad ceremony in their remembrance. We then drove across the Netherlands to the Groesbeke Cemetery where the Canadians who died in the Battle of the Rhineland are buried – thirteen Dukes rest in graves in that Cemetery and one soldier who has no known grave is commemorated on the Memorial located on the cemetery grounds. Another moving ceremony was held in front of the Cross of remembrance where SSM Mullick recited the Act of Remembrance, the CO spoke in remembrance of our Fallen, the Piper played the Lament and Cpl. Chandra recited a memorable poem. The Regiment also noted with sadness, but also with warm memories, the recent passing of retired Lieutenant-Colonel Ernie Wesson. The Regiment then toured the battlefield – a battle which was the largest ever commanded by a Canadian – General Harry Crerar. The drive followed as closely as possible the centre line of 4th Armoured Brigade and we got a very good view of the front of the Hochwald Forest, the forward edge of which contained the front lines of the Siegfried Line – the final line of defence near the German border. The infamous gap in the Hochwald – the graveyard for so many tanks from the two Guards Regiments of the Brigade - was clearly visible.

The Regiment then drove the centre line of the advance of 28th Armoured Regiment (BCR) to Veen, Germany and we stopped to interpret the Regiment's engagement in that location. We then drove to Nijmegen where we spent the night in that beautiful Dutch town (Hotel Mercure).

DAY 8 (13 August 2012)

The tour got an early start the next morning – the last day of the tour. We drove non-stop to Waterloo in the outskirts of Brussels, Belgium and visited that famous battlefield. The battle of Waterloo shaped the course of politics for the next century and a half. It was Napoleon's final defeat and the victors – led by the British and the Prussians, formed the balance of power in Europe which led to an era of relative stability. After an interpretation of the battle, a visit to the wonderful museum and a climb to the top of the "Butte de Lion", the bus headed for the hotel at Charles De Gaulle airport north of Paris for the return flights the next day (Novotel Paris CDG).

Colonel (Retired) Keith Maxwell
Captain (Retired) Robert Hall
Ted Hawthorne, Association President



Canada House



The Old Guard with Edward Podyma (Centre),
President of Polish Veterans Association



The Old Guard on the Hill



Wreath



Hill 140 Memorial



Pipe Sgt. Mike Giles – The Lament



Vancouver Corner



L to R: WO Harris, LCol Sajjan, Gauthier Hebbelynck and MWO Mullick



Junior Ranks – St. Julien Mess Dinner



WOs' and Sgts' Table – St. Julien Dinner



Menin Gate – BCR Honour Guard



L to R: Col(R) Maxwell, Pte Kathleen Parker, Ted Hawthorne



MCpl Clews and Sgt. Snow – a great find from Petite Douve



Leke Memorial



Doreen, "Duke" and Luke Vandebussche



LCol Sajjan and MWO Mullick (Indian Soldiers Memorial)