

# **The BCR News Battlefield Tour Special Edition**

**21 July 2023**



Poppies in Flanders Fields - BCR Battlefield Tour 2023

## **BCR WEEKLY NEWS**

Published by The BC Regiment (DCO) Association

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Editor's Notes: By the time that you receive this special edition of THE DUKE, our tour will have been over for six weeks. I remain indebted to Lt Desmond Wong for his daily Facebook articles from which I have used as the basis for our narrative, and to those other individuals on the tour who have provided their photographs and input for this publication. It is especially important to thank everyone who worked hard to make the 2023 Battlefield Tour (BFT) develop from a plan into a reality. This included those who made donations and who assisted with fundraising and made our bookings for flights and hotels. My special thanks to HCol Farid Rohani, former HCol Ted Hawthorne, 'Recce' Bob Remple, and especially the members of the Battlefield Tour Committee including Maj Greg McCullough, WO Dwayne Snow, HLCOL Bill Diamond and Col Ret'd) Keith Maxwell who aided the BCR Association to make this BFT happen. Our overseas contingent of supporters to be acknowledged include Capt (Ret'd) Patrick Guenkel, Dr Jean Pierre Benamou, Luke Vandenbussche and his

brother Wim, and Iris Van Landschoot. On a personal note, I would like to thank HLCol Bill Diamond for his efforts in making our reservations, chairing our meetings, and keeping us on the right track, and especially Col Keith Maxwell for being our excellent Tour Guide and allowing me the opportunity to share my knowledge of the Battlefields with the group.

I wish to thank my Member of Parliament for Port Moody - Coquitlam, Bonita Zarrillo, and her staff for providing me with Canadian Flags to be used at our monument at Hill 140 in Normandy, and for the small Canadian Flag Lapel pins which were gifted to many of the people we met along the way and which were given out to the school Children who met us at the Cemetery in Belgium with Iris and the local school staff. Flags and Pins were also received by Ted Hawthorne to support our tour from Ron McKinnon, MP for Coquitlam-Port Coquitlam.

My thanks to the Commanding Officer BCR (DCO) LCol Vince Virk and RSM Arn Matibag for their support and to all the serving and former soldiers and friends of the Regiment who attended and made this a most memorable event.

As always, any errors are mine to acknowledge and correct where possible.

LCol (Ret'd) Jim Barrett  
BCR Association President  
Editor BCR Weekly News & The Duke

Subject: Re: BFT 2023 Day 1 – 21 May 2023



The BCR BFT 2023 commenced with a departure from Vancouver on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May for a long flight on Air Canada with a three hour layover in Toronto before boarding our trans-Atlantic flight to Europe, arriving at Charles De Gaulle Airport in France. At the Airport to greet our contingent was former BCR Capt (Ret'd) Patrick Guenkel and his two young sons, our driver, Henk, who had our tour bus waiting outside.



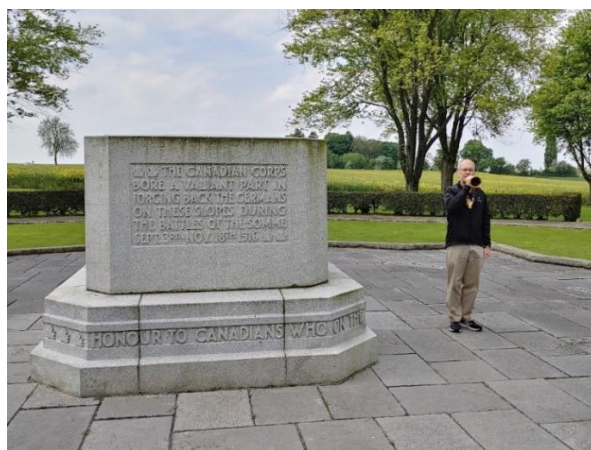
We were piped out to the bus by Piper Rich Nichol from the BCR Irish Pipes & Drums, where we settled in on board and started our journey to head north towards Arras. Our first stop was near Albert, France to learn about the Battle of the Somme from Col (Ret'd) Keith Maxwell and LCol (Ret'd) Jim Barrett.



The first stop near the Somme was at the Royal Tank Corps Monument near where tanks were first used in battle in 1916 on the Flers- Courcellette road. The monument is



surrounded by a chain link fence whose posts are the 6 pounder guns from tanks used during the war and has miniature tanks made in brass on each corner. Some showing signs of 'pot shots' from German soldiers from WW II.



Our next stop was at the Canadian Memorial for the Somme and the nearby Regina Trench Cemetery, where Bugle-Major Chris Ahern played the last post and piper Rich Nichol the lament.





We next visited Beaumont-Hamel where LCol Jim Barrett took over the narrative and explained the events leading to the fateful attack of the Newfoundland Regiment. He described the action as he walked us down the trenches towards their coming under direct fire, the location of the German trenches and the 'Danger Tree' which was the furthest point reached by any of them during their attack. Later designated the Royal Newfoundland Regiment for their valour, they suffered great loss during the first day of the Battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916.



The approach trenches of the R New R



LCol Barrett at the danger tree. German Trench line behind



Colours of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment laid up at the Interpretive Centre

After having sufficient time for the tour members to view the impressive monument of the Caribou and to visit the visitor's centre and museum, we proceeded to head off to one of the



lesser visited Canadian Monuments which was that of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division on the battlefield where they advanced towards their objective at Vimy Ridge on 9 April 1917.



Amongst other memorials visited in the area, the group went to the Vimy Ridge Memorial where we got a tour of the underground tunnels used by the Canadians in preparation for the battle of Vimy Ridge.







Officer's Quarters on the left and soldier's on the right no bedding due to dampness but safe



Mine Crater at Vimy

Once the group had emerged from the tunnels and had the opportunity to walk through trenches to see observation posts and where a number of mines had been blown, we reboarded the bus to head up to the main monument which is built close to the objective for the 102<sup>nd</sup> (North BC) CEF now BCR. LCol Jim Barrett explained how the Battle unfolded and Col Keith Maxwell pointed out the name of one of the dead on the monument who has

no known grave but had won the Victoria Cross. Jim explained how the competition to design a monument unfolded and how the second place monument was selected to be erected at Vancouver Corners Near Ypres which we would be visiting later. He also took everyone down in front of the monument from the side from which it is meant to be viewed.



The green fields beyond today as seen by the 102<sup>nd</sup>





View from April 1917



Bugle-Major Chris Ahern plays Last Post



Piper Rich Nichol Plays the Lament

At the monument of Vimy Ridge, the piper and bugler played Last Post, Lament, and Réveill  while the group and other onlookers stood by and watched the moment.



Lastly, the group visited the Hill 70 memorial where Sir Arthur Currie commanded the Canadian Corps and repelled German attempts to take the hill. CSM Hanna of the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Vancouver) CEF won the Victoria Cross during this battle.



Hill 70 Memorial





Col Keith Maxwell explains the Battle for Hill 70



## Battlefield Tour Day 2 22 May 2023



After breakfast at the hotel, the group departed the hotel to visit memorials for the Battle of Amiens. The group drove on the road in which the advance of the battle proceeded. The first stop was Hangard Wood British Cemetery.



The second stop was Beaucourt British Cemetery where 15 members of the 102nd Battalion are buried. We held a small ceremony where our members placed Canadian flags by their headstones and Piper Rich Nichol and Bugler Chris Ahern played the Last Post and Lament.





After, the group went Le Quesnel Canadian Memorial that remembers the Battle of Amiens. LCol Jim Barrett told the story of the attacks across the Drocourt-Queant (DQ) Line, and the risks taken by Currie in pushing across on a narrow frontage at the Canal Du Nord.





Don Manning

The group also drove in the axis of advance at the battle of DQ line and Canal du Nord to see the ground as the soldiers would have seen it. At Dury Memorial, which memorializes the Battle of Drocourt-Quéant Line, Don Manning from the BCR Museum Society shared with us the research he had done on soldiers of the regiment in the past, giving us insight on his process and the importance of history in current conflicts. In addition, Bourlon Wood memorial, and Ontario Cemetery were visited. Don's articles are published regularly in the Quarterly editions of The DUKE. Lt Lyle of the 102<sup>nd</sup> Bn (North BC) CEF won the VC capturing the wood.

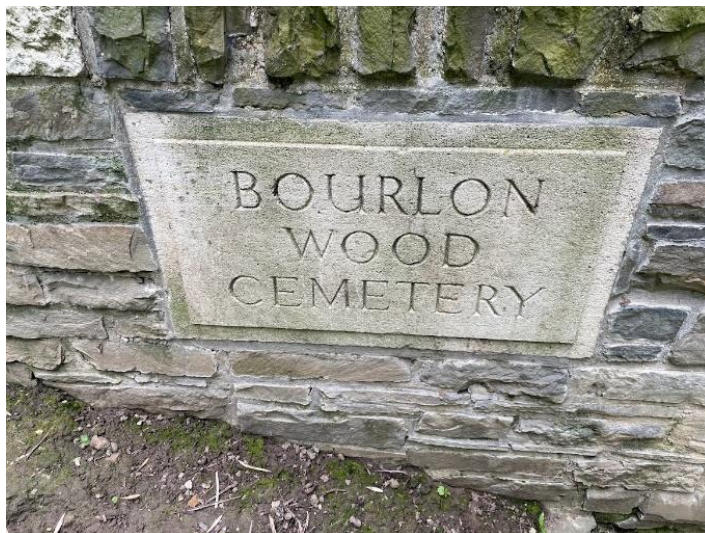


The second of the Newfoundland Regiment Caribou









Captain Coulson Mitchell, VC won for capturing bridge intact for advance on Cambrai



Battlefield Tour Day 3  
23 May 2023



The group departed Arras early in the morning for Ypres, Belgium, where we will be staying for the next couple of days. Our first stop was the Brooding Soldier Memorial in St. Julien, which commemorates the Canadian First Division's involvement in the Second Battle of Ypres. The location of the monument is fittingly known as "Vancouver Corner," where the 7th Battalion (1<sup>st</sup> BC) CEF fought in the trenches during the first gas attacks of the war. It was a cold windy morning as Colonel (Ret'd ) Keith Maxwell and Lieutenant Colonel (Ret'd) James Barrett explained the significance of this corner and battle in our Regiment's history.



We stood at the very spot right behind the monument where past dukes would have dug in and fought, overlooking the location where Lieutenant Colonel Hart-McHarg was fatally wounded while on a leader's recce. It was also in this battle that Lieutenant Edward Bellew won the first Victoria Cross of the regiment for holding the machine gun line while the rest of the battalion withdrew. LCol Jim Barrett explained that if we 'read the ground' that where we were standing, as indicated in the photograph was where you would have sited your pair of Colt Machine Guns for maximum field of fire and that we were likely standing exactly where Lt Bellew won his VC.





Plaque to Lt Bellew, VC erected on a building across from the monument

To our right would have been the line of Locality C where the rest of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion would have dug in to repel the German advance prior to being forced to withdraw back to the next defensive line on Gravenstafel Ridge to the west of the monument.



At the monument, we held a small ceremony where Lieutenant Colonel Vincent Virk and Chief Warrant Officer Arnold Matibag laid a wreath in remembrance of the sacrifices made in that battle. Piper Rich Nichol and Bugle Major Chris Ahern played the Last Post, Lament, and Réveillé after.





The ridge where the 7<sup>th</sup> Bn CEF and remainder of the brigade dug in.

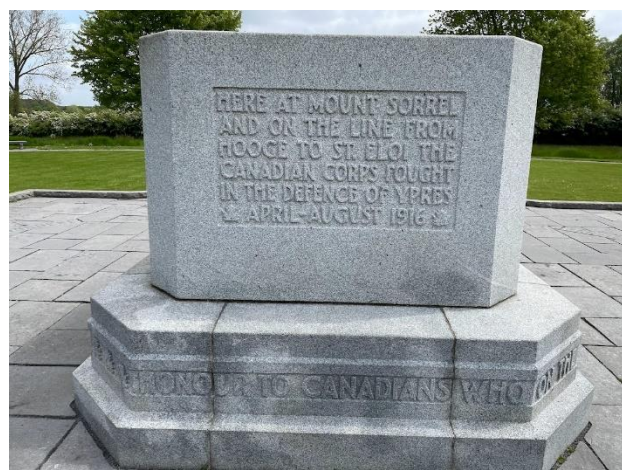
The second location of the day was Tyne Cot Cemetery, the largest commonwealth cemetery in the world. Over 11,000 soldiers are buried there. We tried to read as many names of the soldiers on the headstones and memorial walls as possible, feeling the gravity of the losses throughout this war. Our piper and bugler played several pieces fitting of the occasion. The dead included names of soldiers from battalions perpetuated by the BCR.







After Tyne Cot, we went to the Passchendaele Canadian Memorial, one of 6 other memorials designed by Percy Erskine Nobbs just like it that we had visited in France. There, Col (Ret'd) Maxwell explained how that battle played out and the contributions of 102nd Battalion Canadian Infantry in this battle.



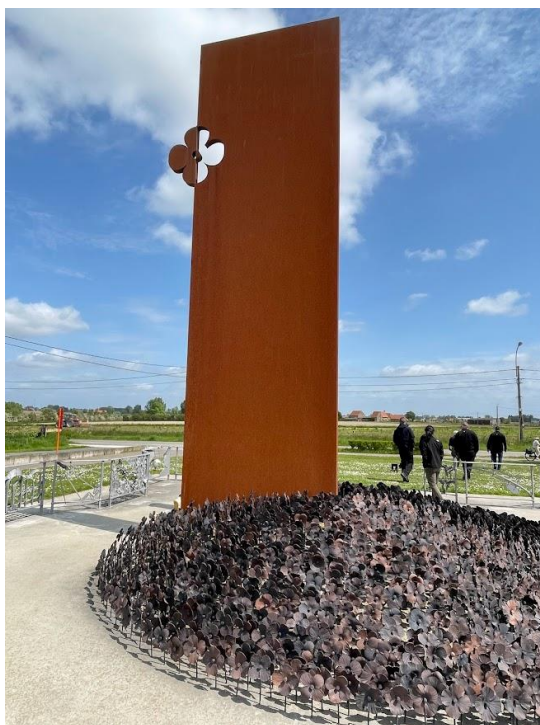


The last of the six memorials designed by Nobbs that we visited was on Hill 62 at Mount Sorrell where the 7th Battalion had fought to regain the hill from the Germans that was lost as part of a hasty counter-attack. Jim Barrett pointed out the line of advance of the battalion and Keith explained that General Byng had just received command of the Canadian Corps four days prior. LCol Jim Barrett explained how his Grandfather, LCpl William Barrett was a survivor of the 7<sup>th</sup>'s attack, and his Great Uncle Pte Jack Adam was badly wounded in the arm. A second more planned attack was successful, and the Germans were pushed back from Hill 62.



LCpl Virk places a Canadian Flag at the Grave of LCol Hart-McHarg CO 7<sup>th</sup> Bn CEF Killed at St Julien 1915

With some extra time available before we could check-in to the hotel, we decided to visit LCol Hart-McHarg's grave at Poperinghe Old Military Cemetery. There, LCol Virk explained the significance of LCol Hart-McHarg's actions and contributions to military service.







We also visited the Langemark War Cemetery where over 44,000 German soldiers from the First World War are buried. There was a great distinction in the way the cemetery was laid out compared to commonwealth cemeteries. Most graves had multiple names on the headstone as they were mostly mass graves where the remains of multiple soldiers would be placed under one headstone. This gave our soldiers a different perspective of that is often unrecognized.



Following this visit, everyone checked-in to the hotel in Ypres and prepared for the ceremony at Menin Gate later that evening. We were met with a large crowd as we were formed up in front of Menin Gate which was still under reconstruction.





LCol (Ret'd) Chris Mullins and Cpl Trinh lay the wreath for the BCR (DCO)







Secondary School Students from Victoria, BC, Canada join us for our group photograph

The ceremony started with Last Post by the local Last Post Association, followed by a lament by Piper Rich Nichols. LCol Virk gave a short speech about remembering our soldiers and Corporal Sabrina Trinh was chosen to lay a wreath alongside LCol (Ret'd) Chris Mullins during the ceremony. After the ceremony, we took some photos with the locals as well as a school from Victoria, BC who also happened to be on a Battlefield Tour.



LEGO Display of Menin Gate at the Commonwealth Graves Office in Ypres



Cloth Hall Ypres at night



The night ended with a dinner in uniform at a local restaurant which was paid for graciously by the members of the British Columbia Regiment (DCO) Association on the tour with us.

#### Battlefield Tour Day 4 24 May 2023



Piper Rich Nichol pipes in the BCR Contingent

Elementary school children from Iris Van Landschoot-De Pover's 3rd and 4th grade class from Vrije Basisschool De Schakel (Elementary school) in Saint Lauren's greeted us warmly at the Adegem Canadian War Cemetery.





School Children read a welcome and thank you Canadians for their liberation and freedom

The children read touching messages about our regiment's involvement in liberating Flanders in October 1944. Each student gave us cards with a preserved maple leaf laminated on it.







Afterwards, the students showed us the locations of the 6 dukes from the Second World War buried in the cemetery with a small summary of who each of them was and what they did. Near the end of the ceremony, Colonel (Ret'd) Keith Maxwell and LCol (Ret'd) James Barrett presented Iris a print of a BCR soldier in ceremonial patrols.













Special thanks to Isabelle van Hoecke and Elle van Landschoot for helping to organize this event as well.

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Editor: I have attached an article sent to me by Iris following our visit.

## **BCR BATTLEFIELD TOUR VISIT ADEGEM CANADIAN WAR CEMETERY**



From Iris Van Landschoot-De Pover

**LIBERATION OF FLANDERS (BELGIUM) SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 1944**

**(VILLAGE : SINT-LAUREINS – AREA : LEOPOLD CANAL – BATTLEFIELD –  
SWITCHBACK OPERATION - ADEGEM  
CANADIAN WAR CEMETERY)**

When my mother was 9 the village, she lived in was liberated by the Canadian soldiers. One of them, Bill Murphy from Glace Bay Nova Scotia, gave her a photo of him and his sister because her name was also Elisabeth like hers. On the back of this photo was an address and many years later she wrote a card (in Flemish) and mailed the photo back to Canada. More than 2 years went by and then a card from his wife arrived. She explained she found my mother's card, after Bill's parents died, in their house. Later I learned some English at school and became the translator and cards became small letters. Bill wrote us that 3 of his brothers were also in the war and 2 of them did not return home. When I got married my husband and I made a lot of trips to battlefields and museums, and we learned a lot about the liberation of Europe and the Canadian and Polish soldiers. And later when I became a mother, I began to realize what his mother must have felt.

In 1995, when my daughter was 9, I asked her teacher if she would be interested in visiting the Canadian War Cemetery in Adegem with her class and she said "yes". I made the arrangements with a pilgrimage from Canada that was also visiting that day to meet up with my school kids. A few days in advance I went to the class, and we made a "Thank you for the peace card" for all the visitors. With a dried maple leaf (from the trees at the cemetery) and a poppy and a special message from the children on it. While making these cards I told them about the liberation of their village and the meaning of those Poppies . Of whom was

buried at this cemetery, what you can find on a headstone, how to find a grave and a lot more.

I have no words to describe how wonderful the meeting at the cemetery was (and afterwards they just loved to receive mail from Canada). Like one of the visitors said : "If this trip was a cake. Those children were the cream and the cherry on it".

When my son was 9, I asked his teacher the same. Now both schools go to the cemetery once a year and we made way over a 2000 of those cards who must be spread all over Canada and other parts of the world. It's always overwhelming to see the enthusiasm of the children and the emotions of the visitors. And I hope one of these children remembers this visit when his or her child is 9.....

Bill died in 2006 but I used to phone him and tell him about the children. I know he appreciated all what we are doing, and I treasure the memory of the long conversations we had on the phone. And we were lucky to meet tour operators who took pictures for us of both graves of Bill's brothers in Italy and France so we could send them to the Murphy family back home. For my husband and I it was the start of so many contacts in and letters from Canada asking for a photo of a grave, place or monument, find a Flemish family.....etc. We are very active Canadian Veteran Ass. , Maple Leaf Legacy Project, Royal Canadian Legion zone Europe members and I am a volunteer guide at the Canada-Poland War II museum at Adegem and in 1995 started this "Thank you for the peace" project for grade 3 children of my village, Sint-Laureins at the Leopold Canal.

If you know of such a pilgrimage coming to Adegem Belgium, please let me know. Or do you or someone you know need help in their research, contact me. As each year at the end of the school year I will invite grade 3 to our house for an ice-cream with maple syrup. Most Belgians don't know what maple syrup is but the kids just love this new experience!







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Please do pass all this on to the members of your group and remind them to send a short e-mail to the schoolchildren of the VBS De Schakel who they met at the Adegem Canadian War Cemetery. This will be highly appreciated by the kids. They can do this to my address [idem.van.landschoot@belgacom.net](mailto:idem.van.landschoot@belgacom.net) or the address of the school [info@vbsdeschakel.be](mailto:info@vbsdeschakel.be) (or both). The director and I will pass them on to grade 3 and 4.

Many greetings from Belgium and hope to hear from you soon,

Iris

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The next stop for our tour was at Saint Phillipsland where a troop of BCR tanks and a platoon from the Lake Superior Regiment famously sunk three German frigates and damaged a fourth that were docked along the Scheldt Estuary. This attack, as part of the larger Battle of the Scheldt sought to provide safe passage for logistical support into the port of Antwerp.







Where German Frigates were sunk by BCR Tanks at Zipje harbour 4 Nov 1944



Leopold Canal and BFT on modern bridge replacement for WWII Bailey Bridge

Another stop was made at Leopold Canal where 4th Armoured Division attempted to cross in early September 1944, but failed due to heavy German resistance on the opposite side of the canal. One BCR tank destroyed following crossing Canadian Engineer laid bridge in support of infantry. We had visited the dead crew members graves at Adegem Canadian War Cemetery.

The next stop was the town of Leke, a town in which the BCRs had a hand in liberating during the Second World War. The serving members and association members changed into uniform and attended a ceremony in front of a memorial donated by LCol Arthur Lungley. The Mayor of Leke's representative gave a speech while the rest of the regiment stood in uniform and formation.









HLCol Bill Diamond BCR & Leke Memorial

After the speeches and wreath laying by Trooper Matthew Green and Association Member Lt (Ret'd) Chris Ng, Piper Rich Nichol and Bugle Major Chris Ahern played the Last Post and Reveille. Immediately following this ceremony, the BCR contingent marched down the street



towards the Sint-Niklaaskerk Church for another ceremony where Corporal Sabrina Trinh and Association Member MCpl (Ret'd) Greg Trigg.



Once the ceremonies were complete, the Dukes had some time to speak with the locals and enjoy the warm company of the Leke people.









A wonderful BBQ was held with food prepared by the local fire brigade followed by some presentations from the locals to Col (Ret'd) Keith Maxwell, HLCol Bill Diamond, LCol Vincent Virk, CWO Arnold Matibag, Lt Desmond Wong, Piper Rich Nichol, Bugle Major Chris Ahern, Corporal Sabrina Trinh, and Trooper Matthew Green. Col (Ret'd) Maxwell and LCol (Ret'd) Barrett also presented Luke and his brother prints of a BCR soldier in patrols and a drawing of the Beatty Street Drill Hall in recognition of their efforts in organizing all these events at Leke and Menin Gate for us.



One more surprise was a cake to celebrate CO LCol Virk's 45th Birthday and his wedding anniversary that occurred during the trip, but he was unable to attend as he felt ill that day. The day ended rather late this day as the dukes continued to socialize with the locals, but it was a well-received day from all Dukes and the locals from Belgium.







Wim, Luke, Tpr Green & Cpl Trinh

## Battlefield Tour Day 5

25 May 2023

Today started with some later timings after a long day in Leke yesterday. The first stop after breakfast was Essex Farm Cemetery, where Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae operated as a surgeon during WWI and wrote the famous poem "In Flanders Field."



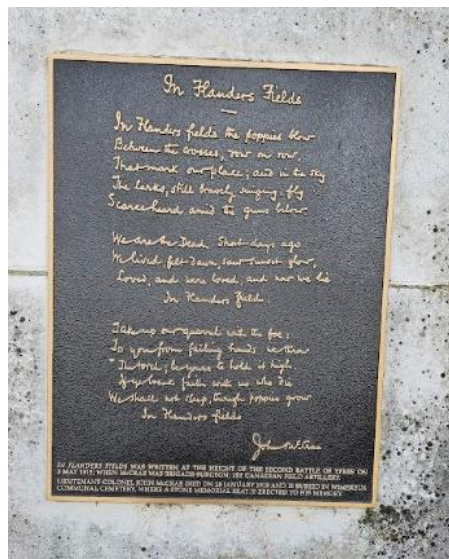




LCol (Ret'd) James Barrett pointed out and described the way LCol McCrae and others at this first aid post would have treated patients who had suffered wounds in the front lines.



He painted a picture of how patients would be triaged for their injuries, all in an effort to maintain as many soldiers in the battle as possible.







RSM BCR CWO Arnold Matibag recited LCol McCrae's poem in one of the operating rooms that he would have been operating in during the war. It is also at this cemetery that the youngest soldier recorded was buried at the age of only 15.



Following this stop, the group went back to Tyne Cot Cemetery, but this time, Colonel (Ret'd) Keith Maxwell took the group on a hike of the Battle of Passchendaele in PPCLI fashion. Col (Ret'd) Maxwell pointed out the locations and ground features of the Canadian elements



throughout this 8 km march, detailing the amount of time it took to cover the ground that they did, the lives lost, and tactics that allowed the Allied Forces to continue their advance to defeat the Germans.



This march gave all of us perspective of how the battle was fought, as well as the time and effort required to achieve the objectives.



The church which was the Seaforth objective









Keith Leading the way back to Tyne Cot and the Bus

The day ended early after this march, giving everyone some time to enjoy the city for the rest of the day. We joined Bugle-Major Chris Ahern, who played that evening at the Menin Gate.

## **BCRs at the Menin Gate ceremony**



By Chris Ahern

The Menin Gate, officially the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing, is a war memorial in Ypres, Belgium, dedicated to the British and Commonwealth soldiers who were killed in the Ypres Salient of World War I and whose graves are unknown. The memorial is located at the



eastern exit of the town and marks the starting point for one of the main roads that led Allied soldiers to the front line.



Every evening at 2000 hrs, the Last Post Association closes the road which passes under the memorial and buglers from the Ypres fire brigade sound the "Last Post". Except for the occupation by the Germans in World War II when the daily ceremony was conducted in Surrey, England, this ceremony has carried on uninterrupted since 2 July 1928.







During the battlefield tour, the BCRs had the honour of parading and laying a wreath at this ceremony. BCR Piper Rich Nichol played the lament and BCR Bugle Major Chris Ahern sounded Reveille. Bugling at this ceremony is closely guarded by the Last Post Association and it was quite exceptional and a great privilege to bugle at this event. This is only the second time in the history of this event that this has occurred. Special thanks to Col Keith Maxwell and HLCol Bill Diamond for their contribution in making this happen.

Battlefield Tour Day 6  
26 May 2023

Today was our driver Henk's day off, but we started the morning with a visual brief from Colonel (Ret'd) Keith Maxwell of the battlegrounds that we visited in days prior. This gave our members context of how the battles that past dukes participated in integrated into the larger conflicts. All members of the group made individual plans afterwards to explore the city of Ypres, visiting the museums and shops throughout the town.



Col Maxwell's Battlefield slide presentation



Dukes head towards the Cloth Hall to explore





The Church of St George where plaques from the units who served in the Ypres Salient are mounted on the walls





LCol Virk addresses the dinner

The group ended the day with a traditional Flemish Dinner and had a relaxing final evening before heading south to Caen.

Battlefield Tour Day 7  
27 May 2023







Today, the group left Ypres, wrapped up the tour for World War I and moved onto World War II. The first stop was where Lt-Col John McCrae rests in Wimereux Cemetery in France. We visited his grave and found another 7th Battalion member buried there, Lieutenant G.B. McDonald who died on April 12, 1917. There, Col (Ret'd) Keith Maxwell began giving the group context behind the monuments and sites we would visit later on in the day.



Afterwards, we went to Dieppe Canadian War Cemetery to visit the graves of the soldiers who fought in the Dieppe Raids. Majority of these graves were soldiers from the Essex Scottish Regiment, the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, and the Royal Regiment of Canada.





The tour had the opportunity to walk the beaches of Dieppe where the raids occurred. Walking down from the walkway down to the water gave us perspective of the difficulty of this raid and why it was so unsuccessful due to the gravel rocks, the undulating ridges, and the long stretch of beach as well as the cliffs enfiling the beach where the Germans had their gun positions located.



At each location where the battalions and units landed on that beach stood a memorial commemorating the losses endured on that day.



Bridge at Dieppe where Lt-Col Cecil Merritt of the South Saskatchewan Regiment won the Victoria Cross 19 Aug 1942

The next and final stop of the day was Pegasus Bridge. The bridge connected the city of Caen to Normandy and was a key objective for the Allied forces to capture intact during the Second World War.





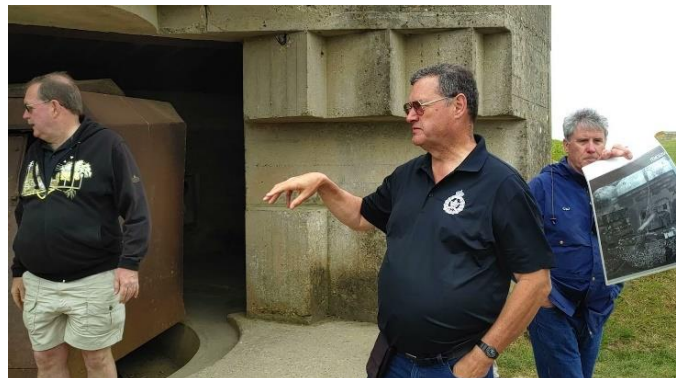
LCol Jim Barrett took over the historical narrative and told how Major John Howard commanding the landing of six British Gliders near the bridge on June 6, 1994, captured the bridges intact and held them until BGen Lord Lovat of Fraser and his Commandos relieved them.



Memorials erected here marked the locations where the gliders landed. On our way to Caen Col Keith Maxwell told the story of the Canadian Parachute Battalion and their participation during the D-Day Landings and we visited their landing areas and final positions. The day ended with everyone checking into the first of two hotels in Caen, where we would be spending the next 4 days.

Battlefield Tour Day 8  
28 May 2023

The morning started with Dr. Jean-Pierre Benamou guiding us through the Normandy Invasions on D-Day. The first stop was the Longues-sur-Mer Battery, a German artillery battery located between Gold and Omaha beach on D-Day. Here, Dr. Benamou explained the significance of this location even though it was captured on June 7, 1944. LCol Jim Barrett explained how artillery fire was coordinated to the gun positions from a central command post and the difficulties of coordinating fire after the phone lines had been cut by effective fire from the battleships and support vessels. Not very pleasant if you were being sent out as a runner under fire when the phone lines were cut. Dr Benamou also advised that almost 40% of the troops manning the Atlantic Wall were not German at all, but rather captured troops who were given little choice from the Russian Army and Indian troops captured in North Africa.



L-R: HLCol Diamond, LCol Barrett, LCol Mullins





The Command Post – Cpl Delaat





The next stop was The British Normandy Memorial, a memorial that commemorates all those lost during the Battle of Normandy. The memorial was unique as it took each visitor on a guided walk from the parking lot to the memorial using white slabs engraved with text that unfolded the events of the battle as you move closer to the memorial. Within the memorial are white columns that have all the names of those troops from the United Kingdom by their branch of service and the date they died.



After, we went to the pier on Courseulles-sur-Mer, one of the few villages that were part of Juno Beach. Here, we also visited the Juno Beach Centre to see some of the monuments and pay homage to the fallen on that beach with a moment of silence and the laying of a poppy on the beach.







BCR Plaque is one of many on a recovered amphibious Sherman Tank



Dukes at Juno Beach





Dr Benamou with Bugle-Major and Piper



Before we left for our next stop, we made a short halt at the Churchill Tank monument at Graye-sur-Mer. It was part of 26 Assault Squadron, 79<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division during the Normandy Landings but was hit and pushed into the water. Members of the crew were wounded or killed, but the tank stayed there to support a girder bridge for other tanks. The tank was buried there for another thirty-two years before being unearthed and placed as a memorial where it is today.







The next stop was Canada House right on Juno beach in the village of Bernières-sur-Mer. This house was the first house liberated as part of Operation Overlord and has since been a part of Canadian military history. There is a BCR Plaque on display in the house.



Dukes at Canada House







We were greeted by the occupants of the home who were very happy to have seen us show up. There, Bugle Major Chris Ahern and Piper Rich Nichol played the Last Post, Lament, and Reveille on a Canadian Monument right beside the house.



The last stop was the Bény-sur-Mer Canadian War Cemetery where 2048 soldiers who were killed during the Battle of Normandy are buried.



Battlefield Tour Day 9  
29 May 2023

This morning we stopped at Verrières Ridge where Dr. Jean-Pierre Benamou and Col (Ret'd) Keith Maxwell explained Battle of Verrières Ridge and the subsequent Operation Totalize, where BCRs would see their first action in WWII.



We then visited the Polish Cemetery where the fallen from the Polish Division were buried following Operation Totalize and Operation Tractable. We also visited the chateau and wall where in August 1944, Lt Radley-Walters's Troop from the Sherbrooke Hussars made holes in the wall for fire and engaged the 12 SS Panzer counter-attack and are credited with killing SS Panzer Ace Captain Michael Wittman.







Polish Cemetery Maim Monument

After spending some time here understanding the battles, we moved to Hill 140 where we walked the grounds of 140 where the Worthington Force would fight against Germans and suffer many casualties.







A ceremony was held near the hill with French and Polish dignitaries in attendance. LCol Vincent Virk, Commanding Officer BCR, placed a poppy in a small ceremony near Hill 140 to commemorate the losses in that battle. LCol (Ret'd) Jim Barrett as President of the BCR Association thanked the local community for their remembrance of the sacrifices of the Soldiers from the 28<sup>th</sup> Armoured (BC) and Algonquin Regiments.









After the ceremony, we were invited to a reception hosted at a local resident's home. The host prepared many Normandy dishes for us and the other guests. Local artists and public officials were also in attendance. Some presentations were made to us while LCol Virk, LCol (Ret'd) James Barrett, President BCR (DCO) Association, made presentations to the host and local dignitaries.



A French Veteran presented us with several paintings





Once the reception ended, we returned to Hill 140 to walk the grounds and search for some of artifacts from that battle. We found some shreds of tank tracks, shrapnel, and craters left by Typhoon strikes.







The last ceremony of the day was held at the Bretteville-Sur-Laize Canadian Military Cemetery in Cintheaux. This is the cemetery where the Worthington Brothers along with many members of the 28th Armoured Regiment from the Battle at Hill 140 are buried. The Mayor from Cintheaux and Béný-Sur-Mer were both in attendance along with a French Ambassador were in attendance of the ceremony. Dr. Benamou hosted this ceremony in honour of our fallen. The ceremony was cut short though as a medical emergency occurred. However, serving BCR members MCpl Justin Lee and Cpl Randy Aberdrabbo, who are also paramedics in their civilian careers, administered first aid immediately until the local ambulance arrived. Once the ambulance arrived, the group departed back to the hotel for dinner and evening plans.

Special thanks again to the Old Guard and it's Friends for sponsoring yet another dinner for serving members.

Battlefield Tour Day 10  
30 May 2023

Today started with a tour of the D-Day Academy by Dr. Jean-Pierre Benamou. It featured many vehicles, weapons, aircrafts, and equipment from that World War II, and more specifically, that battle.







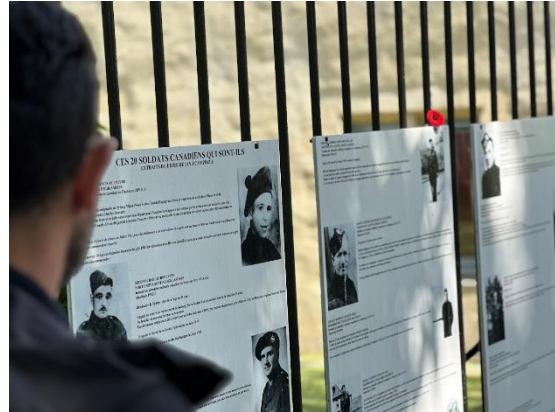
To help us understand the context event further, he gave us a map brief of the campaign as a whole, pointing out the advance of the Allied forces, positions of the Germans, and the locations of battles throughout.







L-R LCol Mullins, LCol Barrett, Col Maxwell & Trooper Green being filmed for a documentary



Shortly after, we went to the first memorial of the day was in Putot-en-Bessin for the Royal Winnipeg Rifles and Canadian Scottish Regiment. Some of the names on the memorial indicated that they were murdered as prisoners of war by the German forces. Other names had indicators that they were killed accidentally when allied strafing fire had hit the German transport vehicles they were travelling in as Prisoners of War (POWs). Our next memorial stop was near Chateau d'Audrieu, a mansion that was used as a battalion headquarters by the German SS, where twenty-four Canadian soldiers and two British soldiers were executed as POWs. Those murdered were from the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 3rd Anti-Tank Regiment RCA, 6th Field Company RCE, and the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa. We held a small ceremony with Piper Rich Nichol playing the Lament. The next memorial was in Buron where the Highland Light Infantry of Canada along with tanks from the 27th Armoured Regiment (The Sherbrooke Fusiliers) assaulted the town and helped liberate it on July 8, 1944. We proceeded to another memorial at Ardenne Abbey where 20 Canadian POWs from the North



Nova Scotia Highlanders and 27th Armoured Regiment were executed by the German 12th SS Panzer Division. Once again Piper Rich Nichol was asked to play the Lament to remember those who suffered this tragic fate.







We returned back to the D-Day Academy for lunch and continue exploring the many artifacts that Dr. Benamou had in his collection. Dr. Benamou was also gracious enough to serve us Calvados from 1945, a signature brandy from the region, along with wine, cheese, and apple pies made with Normandy apples. We also enjoyed a ride in vehicles from that time period that Dr. Benamou and his team restored to working order.





We were driven to Rots Liberation Memorial for a small ceremony hosted by the local mayor. After the ceremony, we returned to the D-Day Academy before heading back to our hotel for dinner.



For the evening, we held one last group dinner with the 'Old Guard and Friends' for this Battlefield Tour. Huge thanks and appreciation to the members of the Old Guard and a number of the CO's Committee for sponsoring this dinner. LCol Vince Virk presented Col Keith Maxwell, Dr Jean-Pierre Benamou and LCol Jim Barrett with his Commanding Officer's Commendation and coin.

Battlefield Day 11  
31 May 2023

On the last day of the Battlefield Tour, we visited memorials and battlefield sites of Operation Tractable which would be part of closing the Falaise Gap.





The first stop was the memorial in Trun which the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division helped to liberate. The next stop was the memorial near Saint-Lambert-sur-Dive, the town in which Major David Vivian Currie won his Victoria Cross. Finally, we went to the Memorial de Montormel, a hill with great observation of the ground around it. This was the position that the 1st Polish Armoured Division defended from the German attempts to take the hill. The BCR's final position was to the East of the Poles. This would mark the final stop for our Battlefield Tour.



Views from the Polish Monument



BCR's final position in the middle of the photo facing right



Memorial to Polish Commander





From there, we made our way to our hotel near Charles De Gaulle Airport, and everyone began to go their separate ways. Some stayed at the hotel for the remainder of the day while others like Lt Desmond Wong, went to Paris and visited the Arc de Triomphe, the Eiffel Tower, and some other famous landmarks.



Most of the Battlefield Tour group returned from France, but some staying for a little longer for a burial tasking. In the following days, more members of the British Columbia Regiment (DCO) will come to Arras here in France for the interment of two Dukes from the First World War killed at the Battle of Hill 70.

The 2023 BCR Battlefield Tour was a great success and brought both the 'old guard' and serving soldiers together for an in-depth understanding of our Regiment's involvement in both World Wars as well as an understanding of the major actions of which they were a part.