

Evergreen Avenue Celebration June 6, 2015

Student Impressions

Carlin Henneberry

Good morning!

Last year I had the opportunity to travel to France with a small group from my high school. We travelled to participate in the ceremonies surrounding the 70th anniversary of D-Day. We learned and experienced so much from many people and places. We went to almost all of the landing beaches and toured cemeteries as well as attending ceremonies.

At one point we stood on Juno Beach at sunset and up until this point we hadn't realized how much this trip would mean to us. We realized that we were standing where thousands of men had fought for our freedom.

At the landing beaches that we travelled to, the most asked question among ourselves was: "Can you imagine that this was a war zone?" and of course none of us could imagine this. We couldn't wrap our minds around the thought. I had wondered if the veterans who joined us felt the same way. or were they able to connect the past and present in a way we weren't able to.

I found it difficult to imagine what this area looked like, because now they're wonderful, well-kept places to visit and remember. During the time we spent on Juno beach it was so hard to believe that this site had once been the place of a great battle. Because of the beauty, it was hard to keep focused on why we were there and the lessons it was supposed to teach us.

On our adventures we had veterans full of life and enthusiasm come forward to tell us their stories. Sometimes they got emotional about what had happened, and they teared up. But they were happy to share their experiences with us. Throughout the trip I wondered how we will remember these wonderful people and what they did for us. Although I couldn't understand what they had went through, Just being on those famous beaches helped me understand.

In Mr. Seward's history class I was given a soldier to research named George Gill. We had gone to visit the Beny-Sur-Mer Canadian Military cemetery where George was buried as well as most of the soldiers we had researched. When we arrived at the cemetery we saw how beautiful it was. When we began walking around we decided to find our soldiers graves. We started running through the grounds searching for them. When I found my soldier I sat in front of his grave and I started to cry. When you sit in a classroom for months learning everything about someone's life, you get attached. He was like an old friend to me. While doing our projects we said to our friends: "How cool would it be to go see their resting place?" and you never think you will. So to go sit in front of George's grave was like the whole journey had come full circle. It felt like the cumulative experience of my project. And now I had real life experience to go along on my journey with George. I think in a spiritual sense, my project will never really end because I am so attached to it now.

George had lost his life at the Abbey d'Ardenne, as well as other Canadian soldiers who had landed on D-Day. The walls of the Abbey now hold the souls of those fallen soldiers.

Like the walls of the Abbey d'Ardenne, the sands of the D-Day landing beaches holds the spirits of many other fallen soldiers. I think that the veterans who lived also carry the spirits of the fallen.

My trip to France has taught me that we need youth to come and learn about what our soldiers have done for us because once the veterans leave us, the memory of those that fell before them will be carried away as well.

We have been handed a torch to carry on for the next generation. We have met the people who have fought for us. We have heard their stories and been where their comrades have fallen. We need more youth to come forward and carry this torch with us so their sacrifices aren't forgotten.

Thank you.

Juno Beach Speech Jared Hayes

A few days back, I was given the honour to address a group of veterans about my experiences on Juno Beach. The task was to say at the very least daunting. What could I possibly talk about? As I looked over the seemingly endless statistical information about June 6th, 1944, I was always drawn to a single piece of data - the average age of a Canadian soldier. Many of you were not much older than I am now when you left your home, your families and your nation to take up arms against an enemy which was thought to be unstoppable at the time. Although important, statistics will never indicate the true bravery and dedication of those tasked with defending Canada's freedom.

In July of 2014, I was honoured to be one of five students to attend the War and the Canadian Experience Battlefield Project, hosted by the University of New Brunswick. When asked about my trip, I can only say that it was very surreal. Until one stands in a field of graves so massive that no photograph could capture the magnitude of those lost, do you truly begin to understand the incredible amount of sacrifice of Canadian soldiers.

During one of several stops we discussed Juno Beach and its importance. One such discussion that I will always remember was the interaction between a Canadian soldier and an elderly French woman on D-Day, which I would like to share. When the Canadian assault on Juno Beach began, the people of Bernières huddled together in the basement of the town hall, too scared to venture out in fear of being killed in the firefight or be executed by the Germans for collaborating with the enemy. Eventually, when the sounds of fighting had stopped, an old woman volunteered to investigate. The old woman managed to make her way outside and found a Canadian soldier standing behind a wall for cover and asked him “if this was it, the day when her liberators were here to stay?” The Canadian soldier beckoned the elderly woman to come closer, she slowly moved closer and again she asked the same question of him. As she inched even closer he told her to follow him to the beach. What she saw made her fall to her knees in tears – tears of joys. Thousands of soldiers and ships were clustered about the beach and in the ocean beyond. The soldier, who was now smiling, helped the woman up to her feet and said in perfect French “Yes ma’am, we are here to stay”. This is just one of the countless stories told of Canada and her allies by the local population. Small and insignificant to many but a hope of tranquility to this elderly lady to say the least.

People often ask if history should even be taught in schools today and how relevant is it to today's youth. My answer is that history is still quite relevant, for it is only by studying our past that we can hope to create a future worthy of your sacrifices. It is imperative that your stories are not lost in the cracks of time but will continue for many generations to come. In the words of the elderly lady on Juno Beach, I offer you a simple thank you.

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