



Glens' Trip from Juno Beach to Nijmegen

September 20 – October 1st, 2018

By Lynn Kyte

Prologue

In early 2018 I read in *The Glengarrian* about a planned trip for the Glens 150th Anniversary to tour Caen, Gent and Nijmegen. After reading it I thought it sounded really interesting but didn't give it much more thought. However, it stuck in my mind and every once in a while the idea would come back to me. Once the idea started to take hold I then tried to think of someone to come with me. This was a specific type of trip – you needed to be interested in military history and in particular, the history of the SD&G Highlanders and I couldn't think of anyone who fit that description so I resigned myself to not going. However, I attended the Saturday afternoon event of the Reunion weekend where I met Stephani Valade who was so keen on the trip and so effusive on how good the trips were that my resolve to go strengthened. I spoke with Roy and he assured me that even if I didn't have a partner I would be matched with someone in the same situation. So it was that I made up my mind to go even without knowing who was going to be my roommate. It turned out to be one of the best decisions of my life!

Day 1

I arrive at the Cornwall Armoury as the meeting up point where I meet my roommate, Padre Andrea Harrison, for the first time. Spoiler alert: we become good friends quickly!

Off on the bus we go to Montreal's Pierre Elliot Trudeau Airport for a night flight to Paris. By this point I am actually relaxed and happy and ready for this adventure! During the wait to board our flight I met up with one of the other travellers, Heather, and we got to know each other. She, too, was travelling on her own but her motive was quite different because her father fought with the Glens during WWII and she wanted to go see the battle sites since he never talked about his time in the war. Her father received the Military Medal of Bravery and he got it directly from King George in Buckingham palace! He received the ribbon for the medal from General Montgomery in the field for his actions at Hell's Corners. Her grandfather was killed during WWI and she wanted to visit his grave site.

Day 2

Arrive in Paris after a good flight. We board our bus which will be ours for the next 10 days. I was so looking forward to a fabulous French lunch since we were to stop at a little cafe on the way to Caen. However, the traffic was so bad getting out of Paris that we were well past lunch when we stopped at a gas station to find something to eat. So much for fine French dining!!

We arrive at our hotel and begin to unpack. The rooms are tiny and by that I mean really small! Two single beds with no more than an inch between them and barely enough room at the ends of the bed to get to the washroom. Ahh, no better way to get to know your roommate! After unpacking, Andrea and I set out to explore the city of Caen which included a large castle just beside the hotel. We walked all around and through it. We also saw an ancient, large turret in the middle of the street. Turns out that that part of the city had once been the edge of a canal and the turret was there to defend against invaders. However, even though in the early 1800s the canal was filled in the turret stayed as is.

That evening we had a group dinner with Jean-Pierre Benamoux as our guest. He is a dentist but also a historian with an OBE who has great enthusiasm of the D-Day invasion. The man is a walking encyclopedia of everything to do with D-Day including troop movements. We are very fortunate that he has become a good friend of the Glens and will accompany us during the next few days to give us info on the sights we will see.

Day 3

We begin the day with a bus tour of the Normandy beaches: Utah, Omaha, Juno, Gold and Sword. The beaches were originally code named U, O, J, G and S. The Americans were to have beaches U and O and were tasked with naming them. There were two carpenters working with the American general at the time and since they were from Omaha and Utah it just worked out. General Montgomery wanted the remaining 3 beaches named for fish hence they were called: Jellyfish, Goldfish and Swordfish. However, the Canadian Wing Commander, Michael Dawney refused to fight in a battle with the code name Jellyfish so "Monty" told him he had 24 hours to come up with a name starting with "J". Since the Wing Commander's wife's name was Juno that was what he chose. Meanwhile, Monty was told to drop the "fish" from the code names hence Gold and Sword are the remaining two beaches for the British.

The Normandy beaches are 6 miles long and the Germans had put up a huge wall along it to make it impossible for troops to attack. More details about Juno when we go there on Day 4. There are also Mulberry Harbours still there which are huge concrete blocks that float in the water and were used during D Day to create harbours for the ships to allow the Allies to re-supply. We also explored some of the few remaining gun posts that once numbered in the thousands. Dr. Benamoux explained about the folding bicycles that the SD&G Highlanders carried with them on D-Day. They had been designed for soldiers to carry them on their backs so that they could reach the city of Caen (some 40 km away) on the same day. Unfortunately even though they made it over the wall they found that the bicycles were useless since the terrain was under constant bombardment making the roads/fields impassable by bicycle. They were tossed in huge piles and left there.

A quick return to the hotel to have lunch on our own. Andrea and I went next door to a little restaurant where Betty, Corkie, Judith and Dougal were already eating. Andrea and I enjoyed a "croc monsieur" which is a grilled ham and cheese sandwich.

That afternoon was our first memorial service in Caen that was put together by a youth

group called Westlake Brothers Souvenirs. The monument is on a street corner in Caen so the police were there to keep the traffic away. The young people did their best to speak English and had written a poem that brought us to tears with some of the lines reading:

*When my life is over
And I reach "the other side",
I'll meet my friends from Normandy
And shake their hands with pride*

*And the tears flowed.....*I shed tears for the first time during the tour but certainly it wouldn't be my last. There was prayer by the padre, laying of a wreath, moment of silence, the pipes played the lament and we sang both national anthems (French and Canadian). One of the young women sang Amazing Grace with such a beautiful voice! We were then taken to city hall which would put our Parliament buildings to shame. Caen is a small town but their City Hall is actually an Abby dating from the 11th century and built to honour William the Conqueror (he is buried at that site). The very high walls were adorned with enormous art works. Since we were there on a Saturday there were many weddings taking place and one of the traditions is for the women guests to shrill in a very loud voice for several minutes in celebration. We were thanked by the mayor which was, we found out later, an honour since he rarely, if ever, attends these sorts of ceremonies. I spoke in my limited French to the young woman who had sung Amazing Grace. Her name is Ramone and she is 21 years old studying communication. She will be coming to Canada next year as part of the Westlake Brothers Souvenirs tour so I hope to meet up with her again when they come to Cornwall.

We returned to the hotel to have dinner on our own which I did with Heather, Thelma and Andrea at a place called Holy Moly. And, holy moly, we had to return our hamburgers because they were raw and even after they came back a second time they were still pretty pink in the middle so we just ate around the edges. Turns out this is how hamburgers are prepared in France but I wasn't taking any chances. Note to self: restaurants don't open in France until at least 7 p.m.!

Andrea and I headed off to a church we had seen earlier on our walk and took in a Saturday night Catholic Mass all in French. I wished I could've understood more of the sermon because the priest was an excellent speaker. The pipe organ music was so wonderful that Andrea and I stayed at the end of the mass just to listen.

As soon as we returned to the hotel we boarded the bus and headed just outside Caen to the Beny Sur Mer War Cemetery. There are 2,049 Canadians buried there of which 101 are Glens. The Westlake Brothers Souvenirs had put a small white candle on each of the Glens' graves and in the early evening it was quite a sight to look out over all the graves and see random white candles knowing this was a grave of a Glen. We did the usual service of prayer, silence, wreath, lament but this time the young people read the names of all 101 Glens buried there. They then asked us to go to each grave that had a white candle and light the two red candles that were on either side so that it represented the

Canadian Flag. *And the tears flowed* as I made my way through immaculate grave markers, in the dark, to light candles. Not a dry eye in the house as we stared out over the graves with the candles all lit. Once that was done we retreated to the small entrance area where our hosts pulled out tiny ceramic cups which they filled with a local drink- Calvados. Powerful stuff and even more so for me since I had two – and after a busy day and being so emotional this really put me in a reflective mood. This experience was so moving.

Day 4

There was a very large fruit/veggie/flower market set up outside our hotel so Andrea and I took a walk around to see all the different items for sale. So many colours and so many flowers. The flowers were quite cheap so Andrea bought a dozen roses for 3.50 Euro for our room.

After breakfast we boarded the bus with Dr. Benamoux as our guide as we returned to Juno beach area. Caen was used by the Germans to bring in supplies to build the Atlantic wall. Caen is the capital of Normandy and was 80% destroyed by bombs during D Day. Just two weeks ago (so around the beginning of September) two x 1,000 pound bombs were discovered near Caen which meant that over 5,000 people were evacuated while the bombs were de-mined. In fact, the city of Caen employs two full time de-miners even 74 years later.

Our first stop is Abbaye d'Ardenne which is now the Library of National Archives but during the war it became a German HQ. In June 1944, there were 20 Canadian POWs (some were SD&G Highlanders) who were being held at the Abbaye then taken out to the garden and executed with a bullet to the head. It was a sobering thought to see the few steps leading from the Abbaye to the small garden area and to think that this was where these young men walked those very steps for the last time as they were taken to their execution. *And the tears flowed*. ... It was only about a year after the war ended that the family living at the Abbaye realized there were bodies buried under their tree. A German officer was later arrested for war crimes, convicted and sentenced to death but this was commuted to a 5 year sentence. He died in 1961 of a heart attack.

Next was a ceremony at Hell's Corners with the Mayor, Gerald Aniel in attendance. The SD&G Highlanders reached this intersection on D-Day, some 8 km from the beach, and used the Chateau Buisson, near Hell Corner's as their HQ. The home is owned by the de Paix de Coeur family. During the liberation a young woman went into labour so the medical corps helped deliver a baby girl named Marie-Jose Mispelaire. Her sister, Annik married into the de Paix de Coeur family of the Chateau les Buissons. (We would meet this family later on the tour). We were treated to another reception at a small centre that included the flag bearer and the young man dressed as a soldier. After talking to him about his authentic uniform his comment was that it was very hot to be wearing it on such a warm day!

The afternoon was spent at Juno Beach and while we were there it was quite windy with

a bit of a rainy mist falling. The Atlantic wall has since been reduced to a much smaller wall along the beach. The SD&G Highlanders landed, bicycles on their backs, with the second wave on D-Day around 11 a.m. and they are in the famous picture of D-Day. However, the bikes turned out to be useless and were discarded quickly. Juno beach was crossed in 20 minutes and they were 8 miles inland at Hell's Corners by 4 p.m. the same day. The Germans attacked the next day with 7 divisions of Panzer tanks. It rained almost every day in June 1944 so the fields were underwater and/or muddy. The streets are very narrow which slowed down the tanks.

The Germans had deliberately decimated the area around the beach leaving only a few strategic buildings to be used as target markers. One of these is now known as Canada House. The owners are very good to the Glens and have had them for lunch in the past. However, they weren't available when we were doing our tour.

There is a Juno Beach Centre built there by Canadians – not taxpayers – but the citizens. The cost was \$15 million of which WalMart contributed \$2 million by allowing veterans in their stores to ask customers for donations. It is an amazing building in the shape of a propeller. Each of the blades of the propellers has “veins” like a maple leaf so that the water runs off easily. Students from Canada can apply to work there for a one year term. As you enter the first part of the museum you are in a simulated landing craft and then a movie plays surrounding you so you think you are landing on the beach. Very well done. It would have taken more than a day to go through all the information in the museum and we didn't have the time. There is a must-see movie at the end with a most powerful ending: it shows a modern day family happily walking the beach with silhouettes of soldiers walking behind them and the title of the movie is: *They walk with you. And the tears flowed.....*

Once we were outside again I helped Heather find the plaque with her Father's name on it – the family can pay to have a soldier's name on a plaque if they landed on D-Day.

That evening Heather, Thelma, Andrea and I found a little cafe to have dinner. A place where speed was not a factor with only one waitress trying her best to serve everyone. The meal itself was splendid but we overdid it by also getting dessert – too much food!

Day 5

We started the day with a memorial service in Urville which is 30 miles from Juno Beach. This is largest Glen monument in Normandy. It took 70 days to get to Urville from Juno because it was being defended by the Hitler Youth who were brutal and stubborn. The Glens needed to build a bridgehead to get to Falais. There were 2,000 aircraft bombing in front of them creating craters making it difficult for tanks and others to get across. About 300 soldiers were killed by friendly fire by the US. In the end about 130,000 German soldiers escaped which meant that the war lasted another 7 months. Falais is where William the Conqueror was born and General Montgomery wanted Falais for the British. Canadians finally take Falais on Aug 16, 1944. The Glens had 3 objectives: breach the Atlantic Wall, liberate the City of Caen (5 weeks later) and build a

bridgehead from Caen to Falais.

We prepared for the usual ceremony: prayer, wreath, moment of silence, lament. There were about three classrooms of children aged about 8 or 9 years old in attendance. Each of them had prepared a card for us and after the service we exchanged the card for a small gift that we had brought with us: Canadian flags, pencils, bracelets. I was so choked up and crying when they were giving me their cards as they kept saying "Merci". *And the tears flowed.....* In fact, the teachers wanted to make a connection with teachers here in Canada so they could be "pen pals" or whatever is the more modern term. We were then piped from there a short distance to their City Hall where we had a lovely reception with some of the town's people. It's hard to describe how hospitable everyone is towards us as we mingled among the town folk.

From there we headed to Cintheux War Cemetery where the youngest Canadian, Gerard Dore is buried. He was 15 yrs 9 months when he enlisted and just over 16 years old when he was killed. The mayor of 53 years, Michel Le Baron, was there. He told us the 300 citizens of Cintheux look after the 2,960 graves themselves and they take great pride in it. Looking out from the cemetery is a beautiful view of the countryside. If two grave stones are touching it means that there is more than one body buried there and they couldn't determine who was who. This was especially poignant later on at another grave site when a flight crew of 5 are buried together under 2 markers. The ceremony included the reading of the names of the 36 Glens buried here. Each Glen's grave marker had a Canadian flag planted next to it. Some of the epitaphs on the graves bring tears to your eyes: things such as: *In this far away land, would some kind soul please leave a flower at our son's grave.* If that doesn't tug at your heart strings I don't know what would. *And the tears flowed....*

The best part of the day was about to begin. We headed to the D Day Academy, a working museum that is owned and operated by Dr. Benamoux. He treated us to an outdoor barbecue of steaks and salads and wine. He collects all the items he can find from the area. Once lunch was done we loaded up into several working WWII vehicles: a jeep, a scout car and a troop carrier and off we went over 6 km back to Hell's Corners. We travelled the narrow cobbled streets and through the countryside just as the Glens would have done in 1944. For most people on the tour this would be the highlight of the trip. Once at Hell's Corners, the de Paix de Coeur family greeted us with drinks and treats while we toured the property. Annik, sister of the baby born during the D-Day invasion, was there along with her son Gilles, daughter Cecile, son-in-law Phillippe and grandchild. The house, with bullet holes still visible, has an SD&G plaque on the side of the house where we did a small ceremony. After the visit we piled back into the vehicles and returned to the Academy which gave us another opportunity to check out the museum.

The de Paix de Coeur family were our guests that evening at our group dinner at the hotel. I was fortunate to have Dr. Jean Pierre Benamoux as the guest at our table. Roy and I regaled him with some funny stories from our early days in the unit in Petawawa. That seemed to break the ice so that in the end we all had a good time. There was

another group of Canadians from Alberta touring battlefields who were having dinner at the hotel and it made me realize that they wouldn't get near the same experience as us. We had the privilege of having Dr. Benamoux, a D-Day expert with us during the tour to give us all kinds of background information and who gifted us with the experience of travelling to Hell's Corners in WWII vehicles. The uniqueness of this trip and just how special it is has now begun to sink in.

Day 6

We pack up and head out towards Gent, Belgium. Andrea and I spend a good part of the morning going over our notes and filling in the blanks. So much is going on and even though we are both good note takers we sometimes miss things and can't remember.

On our journey to Gent we stop at the memorial at Dieppe. This was a raid that went terribly wrong. The area is in a low bowl and the Germans were at the top just waiting for the Canadians to land. The Canadians asked for this opportunity because they had spent two years training in England and were just itching for a battle plus they were starting to cause a bit of trouble in town since they were bored. It was poorly planned and many lessons were learned that helped with D Day.

1. they needed support – artillery, air and naval
2. beach selection was important – this wasn't a good place to land
3. the surface of the beach is pebbles and so the tanks couldn't get any traction to move plus they couldn't raise their turrets high enough to take out the Germans at the top of the hills. Germans easily picked them off.
4. There was 9 hours of engagement and they had difficulty trying to remove the dead and wounded.
5. There was no back up plan to retreat so it was mostly done by fishing boats
6. two Canadians were awarded the Victoria Cross (highest honour) and one was a padre from the Hamilton Light Infantry.

5,000 Canadians and 1,000 Brits were in this battle on 19 Aug 1943. 807 Canadians killed and 1,946 taken as POWs and 2,210 returned.

The gardens and monument at Dieppe are beautiful and just standing there looking at it, thinking of all the young men killed...*And the tears flowed....*

The scenery as we drive from Dieppe to Boulogne is spectacular – immaculate farm fields, wind mills, hills, cows – almost always all white cows, immaculate hedges and gardens. The one theme everyone remarked on was how much effort every single resident puts into their hedges/gardens. In the end we didn't stop at Boulogne due to time restrictions. The Citadel at Boulogne is the city hall and is a series of small fortified buildings that the Glens were tasked with clearing. A citizen approached them and told them he knew of a secret tunnel so 10 Glens went in the tunnel and came out with 200 German prisoners without firing a single bullet! It was also where Kangaroos were employed: these were tanks that were no longer being used so the Canadians took the

turret off and used the remnants as a troop carrier which protected the troops well. This was then adopted by other nations.

We made a stop at the Calais cemetery where you can see the white cliffs of Dover across the channel. Here there are 36 Glens along with 17 Polish and 9 Czech soldiers buried. It's a lovely walk up a path to the cemetery where I was chosen to lay the wreath during the brief ceremony. *And the tears flowed.* ..as I felt the weight of placing a wreath on behalf of all the Canadians who might never make it over to pay their respects.

We passed by Hill 80 but didn't stop. The Allies were within 200 M of their objective on the hill when their guns stopped working. A German officer came out and shot one man in the knee which rallied the Glens to charge the hill and take 185 Germans as POWs. They also blew up a hut that was nearby which turned out to be an ammo storage hut. There is so much unexploded ammo on Hill 80 that they covered it with 30 m of earth and put a children's playground on it called "Parc du Soleil".

It took all day to get to Gent with stops at Dieppe and Calais and a quick stop for lunch. Neil had us laughing with his silly sign "SUM IT UP Quick!" which he used when Andrea and Meagan were talking about their time in the military. During this drive and other times, Roy would read from John Angus MacDonald's or Jack Steven's personal accounts of their recollections from D-Day all the way to Nijmegen and some of the stories were quite gripping. The reading of these stories brought things into focus from the eyes of a soldier.

That evening we walked over to an Irish Pub for a group dinner with the Jones brothers who have the For Freedom Museum, Frankie the pipe major and Dirk the Drum Major. Way too much food once again. I had the Guinness Stoveij (really can't remember the spelling) but it was pork cheeks in a Guinness sauce that was very good. The other patrons were surprised to hear the piper playing during their meal but this just added to the fun atmosphere of being there. The walk home was magical too: calm, clear night with a full moon, walking across a couple of bridges over canals with our small group of friends. The next day I was talking with our tour guide, Carol, and she told me that when she went to pay the bill for the meal she wanted to leave a tip but the restaurant said no they don't accept that. Carol explained that we are Canadians and it is our custom to show our appreciation and left a tip of 100 Euro (10% of the bill). As she said that was not as much as she would normally leave but still the staff was shocked and thrilled at the generosity – makes you proud to be Canadian!

Day 7

We had a bit of a drive to Vimy so Hugh, president of the Cornwall Legion gave us some info on the Poppy Campaign. And to be clear: you do NOT buy a poppy – you make a donation. During WWI, 628,000 Canadians fought, 60,000 casualties, 2,818 POW and 800 were merchant seaman. During WWII, 1,300,000 Canadians fought which included 49,993 women, 44,927 died, 53,000 wounded, 8,271 POW and 1,146 were merchant

seaman. In the Korean War, 26,721 served, 516 died, 33 POW and 1,568 wounded. During the Gulf War 3,837 men served, 237 were women but there were no POW or casualties. The poppy was first made by disabled vets in 1922 to give them some income and by 1925 the Legion was selling them. The Poppy campaign always begins the last Friday in October and they are to be worn until November 11th. That means that some years there is a shorter time frame for the campaign if the last Friday of October is Oct 30th or 31st. All the funds are kept in the local Legion.

The SD&G Highlanders did not fight as a unit in the First World War because it had been disbanded. However, the unit has battle honours for Vimy Ridge and Hill 70 because our men still fought in those battles with other units.

On April 9, 1917 all of 4 Division of the Canadian Corps fought together for the first time. There were 10,602 casualties and 4,000 died – mostly on the first day of the battle. The Vimy Memorial has carved the names of 11,285 soldiers killed in France whose remains are unknown. The monument was designed by a Canadian, Walter Seymour Allward. It is made of Seget limestone from Croatia, on a concrete foundation (11,000 tons of concrete), and took 11 years to build. The figures were carved on site. We took a tour of the tunnels and one of the first things you notice is how cold and damp it is down there. Now they have more lighting since they give tours but for a brief moment they turn off those lights and leave only those lights on that would have been in place during the war and you get the feeling of how dark it was in there. To add to that the soldiers had to be very quiet because the Germans were only meters away in some cases and the sound would travel underground through the rock. In fact, it was practice to have soldiers tap or make noise in one area to trick the Germans into thinking that is where the tunnel was heading so that they could actually dig the tunnel in a different direction. The Highlander units fought with their kilts on and had to stand, quietly, in the tunnel up to two days before the battle began. That's standing in the dark and being quiet. Add to that the fact that it was raining in the days leading up to the battle so the tunnels were mucky and if the soldiers had to "do their business" there was no choice but to do it where they were standing which made the muck even worse and the smell added to the misery. We toured outside the tunnels in the bunkers and you could get a sense of how close the Canadians and German soldiers really were – mere meters apart in some places. Surrounding the tunnels and the road leading to the monument are fields protected by short electric fences to keep people out. Sheep are allowed to graze there because they keep the grass short and are not heavy enough to accidentally set off any unexploded bombs. However, every once in a while a sheep will detonate a bomb that has come up to the surface the last being several years ago. The entire landscape is just huge potholes.

The Vimy Memorial is impressive to look at when you get there. What stands out is how the monument is situated in a field with nothing else around it so that you are drawn to it. There is nothing else to take your attention away from the memorial. The other visitors to the site were awestruck to see and hear our piper standing near the base and playing. And as I stood and listened to the piper *the tears flowed*.....

Then it was off to lunch in nearby Lens where a few of us went to a local bakery and

indulged in fabulous French pastries. The prices were ridiculously low compared to what we would have paid here for similar delights so we indulged! One thing to know about Europe is that public washrooms are few and far between but one was needed that afternoon. Since the train station was just a few blocks away we thought it would be easy to walk there however it was closed due to renovations. That left us with the urgent task of searching one out quickly. We roamed a few blocks checking everywhere when intrepid Thelma spotted a parking garage and convinced the guy at the desk to let us use theirs. Not especially clean but that wasn't the priority by then!

At this point Heather left with our guide, Carol, to go to her grandfather's grave which was about 40 km away from Lens. The rest of us continued on the tour to Hill 70. The hill is so-named because it is 70 m above sea level. This was the battle just after Vimy and is mostly forgotten. The monument was just unveiled in 2017 – 100 years after the battle and was totally paid for by private donations including a large personal one from the-then Governor General David Johnston. This area was an important coal site for the Germans and in the end 1,877 Canadian soldiers died taking the hill. So for that reason there are 1,877 maple leaves randomly embedded in the sidewalk leading up to the monument. *And the tears flowed.....*

It was then a short ride to the Essex Farm Memorial and War Cemetery where Colonel John McRae wrote "In Flanders's Fields". The bunker is still there where there was a battalion HQ and his make shift operating room/first aid station. All the wounded from Vimy and Hill 70 were brought there so you can understand why he was so overwhelmed. Again, walking into the bunker you could feel the coolness and dampness and appreciate how dark it was in there even during the day light. *And the tears flowed.....* as I looked at all the Canadian Flags and poppies laid so carefully in the bunker realizing how many others have paid tribute. We also did a small ceremony at the Essex Farm Cemetery which included the piper playing "The Lament" *and the tears flowed....*

The last stop of the day was at Ypres the location of the famous Menin Gate. There are about 54,000 names engraved to honour those who died in WWI but do not have graves. Every night at 8:00 there is the playing of the Last Post a tradition that started on Nov 11, 1929 and has continued every night since. The only exception was during the four years of German Occupation so it was then done at Brookwood Military Cemetery England. The very night that the Polish forces liberated Ypres the Last Post was played again even though there was still some fighting. We couldn't stay that late to listen to the Last Post due to driver hour restrictions which was too bad as many of us would have liked to be there. As I stood there looking at the names and the wreaths/memorials that were left by previous visitors....*the tears flowed....*

The town has a beautiful building, Cloth Hall that was built in 1200 and was the heart of the city. It was completely destroyed during WWI even though 250,000 soldiers died defending it between 1914 to 1918. This was the place chlorine gas was used for the first time and there was nothing left of the town. After the war the generals decided against rebuilding the hall but the citizens rallied and rebuilt it exactly as it was before. Considering there wouldn't have been detailed photographs of the building during that

era they did an impressive job rebuilding it to look like it could have been from 1200. After it was built cats were thrown off the roof each year to get rid of evil. This obviously doesn't happen now – instead every three years they have a cat parade. There is a Flanders Field Museum in Ypres that a few of us considered going through but we decided that since it was such a sunny day our time would be better spent outside. We found an outdoor cafe that served a variety of items so we each got our wish: sherbet, cappuccino and a gin and tonic. Can you think of any place here that would have such a varied menu at a lovely outdoor café?

The battle of Passchendaele was between 21 July and 6 Nov 1917 where there were 500,000 casualties on both sides.

Day 8 (and is it really only Day 8?)

The day began at the Adgem Canadian War Cemetery where 40 Glens are buried. We did the usual service with Megan reading out the names of the Glens. An interesting story.... When it was the 60th Anniversary tour Ivan White (who is blind) and his wife Edith were part of a group of Glens who attended a special commemorative ceremony at the cemetery. All the veterans were to be given special seating near the front of the service but for some unknown reason there was a mix up and the Glens ended up near the back. Canadians hold a very special place in the hearts of the Belgian people and when the prince of Belgium realized that the Canadian Glens were at the back he was mortified. After the service he paused, spoke to someone and then had the Glens brought up to the front to line the walk way. He then proceeded to take off his gloves and (very against protocol) shook each man's hand and spoke to them personally. This was considered a special honour and was by the way of an apology for the way they had been treated. *And the tears flowed....*

It was a short drive from there to Knokke-Heist (it was two separate towns back during the war but has since been amalgamated). There they have a small park with a plaque on a rock where we did a memorial service which included the laying of a wreath. The alderman was there and he thanked us for being part of the group who liberated their town which also included the Cameron Highlanders and the North Nova Scotia Highlanders. In tribute, each year they hold a 33km Knokke Heist Liberation March, commemorating the liberation of the Scheldt Estuary. A small contingent of Canadian soldiers (usually from those posted in Europe) participates each year. *And the tears flowed....*

As we were bused down the street toward the For Freedom Museum we noticed that the windmill had a Canadian Flag attached to the top of it. And as we got really close to the museum we saw the For Freedom Pipe and Drum band come marching towards us. They looked and sounded magnificent – a real treat to hear them. Once they arrived they

played several more tunes that had everyone smiling and laughing and enjoying the lovely day. Various people were gifted with regimental ties for their outstanding work with the Glens. The museum was amazing – so much work went into the displays. Freddy Jones, who is a banker by trade, taught himself how to repair mannequin faces and his mother repaired many, if not all, of the uniforms that were on display. Freddy has a friend who does the face painting and some of the displays were eerie because they perfectly duplicated some of the soldiers whose picture was placed in the display. The displays included scenes such as a river crossing and with the new sound system you could hear the bombs falling as the soldiers were trying to climb the bank of the river or a scene in a local pub and you could feel like you were right there.

One particular item of interest is a one man German submarine that had been discovered in the river Waal going towards a bridge to blow it up. The Glens spotted it and disabled it thus becoming the only infantry unit credited with sinking a submarine! There were numerous other items on display that had been discovered in the area.

I learned that one of the pipers had only started piping six years ago when he retired. He was in the demolition business previously and when he retired he needed something to do. From a young age he had always been fascinated with the sound of the bag pipes and so he took lessons and since he had lots of free time he could spend hours practising. Hmm...wonder if I could do that too?! Their band is so popular that during the summer months they play up to 2 or 3 times a week at various events.

After the luncheon and a quick tour of the museum, the pipe band gathered once again to play several tunes which included our piper, Dave, who was honoured to be part of the group. There is something about listening and watching a pipe band on a sunny day that just puts brings a smile to your face. It was difficult to say goodbye to the group since we were having such a great time and they were so hospitable but we were off to Bruges.

Bruges is a picturesque city with many canals, old buildings with spectacular architecture and lots of chocolate and lace shops! The first thing Andrea, Heather, Thelma and I did was to take a canal ride of just over half an hour. A great way to see so many of the buildings is to take the canal tour while relaxing on the boat. The rest of the time was spent checking out all the tourist shops before heading back to Gent. Chocolate and lace are two of the best things to buy in Bruges...and I took full advantage!

Once back at the hotel Andrea and I decided to take a short walk to downtown Gent during the evening. We took a leisurely walk to the centre of Gent where it was just jaw-dropping beautiful with so many large, ornate churches. Each one would take hours to admire but then there would be another one nearby or another similar building. The area is mostly cobblestone and in the moonlight there were people dining el fresco or having a drink or, like us, just walking around. We discovered a small cafe that was next to the canal so we took a seat at a small bistro table by the water. And when I say by the water, I mean we were mere inches from the canal without a railing or anything stopping us from accidentally falling in! We enjoyed a Gueze en Fruitbieren (flavour framboise) which I would compare to a craft beer. A picture of the full moon shining over one of

the canals was the last thing we do to signal the end of the day.

I am not sure I have had a more enjoyable day ever and I certainly didn't want the day to end.

Day 9

We are on our way to Nijmegen and on the way we stopped in Breskens – a small community that was leveled during the liberation. There is a poignant monument to the civilians killed during the liberation that consists of a brick wall with a broken window. Just below are shards of glass from the broken window – one for each civilian killed – the large shards representing adults, small shards represent children and if the shards are touching each other it means they were related. *And the tears flowed.* .. While we were standing there an older gentleman came out to meet us because he is responsible for looking after the monument. Once he realized why we were there he came back and gave us a book that was written on the 70th anniversary of the liberation that chronicled the people who were killed. The anniversary of the liberation is September 11th so there were still many flowers/tributes at the memorial when we were there.

We headed then to Hoofdplaat and along the way we stopped at a small cafe where the woman serving us talking about her mother growing up during the war. Her mother said that four times she had to leave her home – when the war started, when the war ended, when the floods came and then when her home burned down. The waitress was so pleasant and talkative and was very thankful to Canadians.

Just outside Hoofdplaat there is a Dutch memorial for 9 Division for their involvement in the liberation. The individual units were invited to put their plaque on the back of the monument but the SD&G refused – if they couldn't have their crest on the front of the monument they certainly weren't going to put it on the back. At this point we went down to the Scheldt estuary. The Canadians were on the south side and were being heavily shelled by the Germans. However, the Canadians cleared the Germans so the British had a much easier time clearing the north side of the Scheldt because the Canadians had already taken out the Germans.

Grossbeck Cemetery has 2,617 soldiers of which 40 are Glens. There is a group called "Faces to Graves" and they had prepared a laminated picture of each of the Glens along with some personal information to place at each of their graves. Their intent is to get a family bio of each soldier and put it on the internet for everyone to read so that these men become real instead of just a name. *And the tears flowed.* .. as I realized their commitment to the Canadian soldiers. We said a prayer, read the names of the Glens, laid a wreath, moment of silence, and playing of The Lament...*and the tears flowed...*

We arrived at our hotel in Nijmegen and after a group dinner of fish and chips at the hotel, Andrea, Carol and I went next door to the train station. There was a piano that young people were sitting around and playing classical music while another woman was singing in a beautiful voice. After a few of them had taken a turn at the piano Carol took

a seat and played a lovely tune!

The first thing you notice at the train station is the thousands of bicycles in the 4 level bike parking garage. People take the train into Nijmegen then take their bike to get to work and around town. Bikes are everywhere but they obey all the traffic signals so don't make it difficult for drivers. We saw babies on the front and back of bikes, people out on dates with someone sitting on the back wheel or one guy who had his golf clubs on the front as he biked along. Of course you saw cyclists biking and texting!

From our hotel room we could see the Nijmegen Bridge over the River Waal which was a bridge guarded by the Glens. This is the same bridge that the German sub was trying to destroy before the Glens stopped it. The bridge has since been rebuilt and every night at sunset there is the "March of the Soldier" which means one light at one end of the bridge comes on and then the one next to it and so on. This makes it look like a soldier crossing the bridge and there are exactly 48 light standards: one for each soldier killed defending the bridge. *And the tears flowed.....*

Day 10

On our way to Zutphen and Leeston we actually cross the border into Germany and pass old border huts that are no longer used. We are going to be met by Harm and his wife Neena. Harm's mom did some resistance work during the war and Neena's family helped hide Jews. During the war 250,000 Dutch people were killed with an estimated 10,000 to 25,000 starved to death during the winter of 1944 – just before liberation. In fact there was Operation Manna which was agreed to with the Germans to allow some food drops in the west of Holland. Of the 107,000 Jews only 3,000 returned. A total of 50,000 Allies were killed in Holland. Zutphen had only 10 houses left after the liberation where 68 allies were killed.

In November 1944 there were 11 Glens killed during the liberation of Zutphen including Aimee Periard. A crude white cross was placed on the exact spot where he was killed and, for an unknown reason, it was never removed so it stood in place for many years. Eventually the town erected a more permanent cross in the spot and made a city park around it. Zutphen is very flat and open so there was no cover for the soldiers which meant there were high casualties. It's a city dating from the 10th century with a lovely church and tower. We just missed the annual chocolate festival. Harm showed us his parent's house and we also saw the house where Hank Dykman lived – his father was the local school teacher during the liberation.

There is a monument in Leeston with all the names of the Glens who were killed and this is where we held a small memorial service. From there we walked and then were piped to the white cross where we once again did a small service. Young children played in the park or watched our ceremony and the piper played. *And the tears flowed.* We then walked to the bridge named after Marshall Lawes, a Glen killed during the liberation. The official opening of the bridge was in 2010 however it was marked with tragedy.

Lawes' son came over to do the ribbon cutting but the night before the ceremony he died in his hotel room. His other son died in a house fire not long after. The bridge itself was used by the Glens during the war when it was a railway bridge. When it was rebuilt parts of the old bridge were incorporated into it.

As we continued our walk to our next stop we noticed street signs such as "Canadasigal" and "Highlanderstaat" as well as the names of the other Glens killed during the liberation. Under the street name is info on the soldier the street is named after. We stopped at a home on "Hawkinsraat" where there was a reception that included refreshments of mini stroopwafels, coffee, beer. The back story to this reception started back in 2005 when Harold Kipp and his family bought a home in a new subdivision and when they finally got the keys to the house the street had been given its name "Hawkinstraat" and Harold wanted to know where the street name came from so he began to do some research. From there he discovered the story of the SD&G Highlanders killed during the liberation and realized that all the streets and the bridge in his new development were named for these soldiers. His son, Arthur, now 13, has taken on the responsibility of caring for Sgt. Hawkin's grave at Holsten War Cemetery. Mr. Kipp has done so much research and work with the SD&G Highlanders that he was made a honorary Glen. One of the other neighbours, Mark Hoentjen, himself a Dutch veteran who served in Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq also became interested in the story of Sgt. Hawkins. He spearheaded a personal initiative to have a plaque installed in the middle of the row of townhouses that has a picture of Sgt. Hawkins, a SD&G cap badge (with King's crown), a poppy as well as some personal info. The day we were there it was the official unveiling of the plaque with both the Padre, and Hugh – as president of the Cornwall Legion – doing the honours. And come to find out that now the residents of the other streets want to do the same and install a plaque honouring their soldier *and the tears flowed...* Mark's wife Renate, son Lars and neighbours were out and about mingling with our group, young children were running between us, the sun was shining *and the tears flowed.....* This all started because Harold bought a house 12 years ago.. who knew it would lead to this? And as I stood watching everyone I came to realize why this small gesture meant so much and caused me to shed tears: this memorial was not from the Canadian or Dutch government, not from the Army, not from the SD&G but it came from the grassroots, from the community, from young people who were not there when it happened. To me that made this memorial that much more special and gave me hope that the future generations would, indeed, never forget.

There is another story about Sgt. Hawkins that was told to me. His son, Peter, came over to Holten War Cemetery to visit his father's grave many years ago and while he was standing there a few veterans came over to him and said he must be Sgt. Hawkins son because he looked just like him. They explained to him where his father was killed and that there was a memorial with his name on it in Leeston which Peter didn't realize. Peter went to the memorial and while he was looking at it a woman came by on bicycle and asked him why he was interested in that memorial. When Peter explained that his father's name was on it she took him to meet Hank Dykman who knew so much about D-Day having been 12 years old when the town was liberated. When Hank realized who Peter was he called some vets he knew to come over. These vets presented Peter with his

father's wallet with his ID still inside and with the bullet hole in it. *And the tears flowed.....*

From that special event we went to Lochem to Canadian Legion 005 at the Mondani Restaurant that proudly claims to serve Canadian food. The restaurant is owned by Yvonne and Berry who are the happiest and most hospitable couple you could ever meet. Yvonne's father moved to Dawson Creek where Yvonne lived for several years before returning to Holland where she met her husband Berry. He was a chef and she wanted to open a museum to honour Canada so they merged the two ideas. I don't think there is any place as Canadian as their "museum" - every clichéd Canadiana item you can think of is there except, sad to say, they don't have a Sens jersey in their hockey jersey collection – a situation I will rectify shortly. (Note the Sens jersey has been received!). Even the toilet seats are painted with Canadian scenes! They served a fantastic lunch that included a Dutch classic – the kroket – which is like a fried hot dog except with stewed meat inside. Besides our group there was also Harold Kipp and his son Arthur and it was amazing to listen them switch back and forth between English and Dutch so effortlessly. We enjoyed our visit there and had a group photo taken before we left to go to Holten cemetery.

As we crossed over a bridge built by the Allies using German steel on our way to Holten cemetery, Harold explained to me that in the early 1960's a woman who emigrated from Iceland to Holland continued her Icelandic tradition of putting a candle on the grave of a deceased loved one on Christmas Eve by doing that to all 1394 graves in Holten. When the town heard about it they had the children of the local schools take over the tradition and now each year school children light candles on the graves on Christmas Eve. *And the tears flowed.....*

Harold also explained to me that Canadians don't get it. We don't have any idea what it is like to be occupied, to be oppressed and to have another country come from across the ocean and liberate you. He said that the Dutch will never forget what the Canadians did for them. *And the tears flowed.* as I listened to him speak so earnestly.

Holten Cemetery has 1,394 graves of which 1,355 are Canadians and approximately 200 are from accidents that happened during re-construction in the years immediately after the war. There is only one woman buried here alongside her husband. They were both 20 years old working on the re-construction when they went to England to be married. However after they returned to Holland they were killed in a motorcycle accident. I had noticed here and other grave sites that some graves had small stones on their headstones. Jewish tradition is to put stones referred to as "tears of stone" instead of flowers. *And the tears flowed.....*

On the way back to the hotel we crossed the River Waal. The Glens were tasked with keeping this bridge safe so that the Allies could advance into Germany. The Germans used bombs with a photocell and sent them downstream at night in the hopes that they would arrive at this bridge at sunrise and then explode thus destroying the bridge. Luckily they didn't work well.

Dinner was on our own so Andrea and I walked into the heart of Nijmegen to enjoy the sights and get something to eat. We found a quaint restaurant that allowed us to enjoy good food and even better conversation. It was a lovely walk back to the hotel under clear skies.

Day 11

Our last day on our tour and it's a free day. Andrea and I had initially thought we would take the train into Amsterdam to meet up with Andrea's friend and go to the Anne Frank museum. Two things changed our mind: tickets were sold out to the museum and, with so many on the tour being taken ill, we didn't want fall sick on the train. In the end Andrea decided to take it easy and I went with some of the group to the Dutch Open Air Museum. This is a large outdoor area very similar to Upper Canada Village except much, much larger. And unlike Upper Canada Village it has areas dedicated to different eras of the Dutch history. Heather, Thelma and I started to walk around but with such a large area to cover we opted to take the train to see all the different areas. We got off in the area that was dedicated to the era just after the war when the Dutch were encouraged to immigrate to Canada. It was a very interesting exhibit and I wish we had more time to explore the other areas.

We returned to the hotel and a group of us then set out for downtown to do some shopping. However, it really wasn't a tourist area so the shops were not of interest but it was still fun to walk around especially since no cars/bikes were allowed in the area.

This incredible journey was brought to fullness by having communion just before our final group dinner. In the midst of a noisy hotel lounge, our padre, Andrea was able to calmly bring us all into focus to be able to open our hearts to receive communion. After all the emotion we had been through all week visiting graves and memorials it was the healing we needed to bring us full circle.

Our final group dinner included Harold Kipp and his son Arthur, Harm and Neena, Douglas Murray (a Canadian who started Legion 005) and his war bride wife Lis. After dinner Heather came to our table to talk to Harm and they got to talking about her father and his time during the war. That led to Wigger KF van der Horst showing her his collection of photos and stories of the Glens covering several years. He was a photographer originally and he spends a lot of his time restoring old photos from the war and had a wealth of information. Our little group enjoyed our time going through his photo albums and reminiscing.

The trip home to Canada was not without a hitch as Andrea was the last of the group to be suddenly hit with some sort of intestinal bug while at the airport in Amsterdam. Of the 21 people in the group I think there were only seven of us who didn't succumb. It worked out in the end as we were all able to board the flight to Montreal for a good flight back. We were all pretty tired by the time the bus pulled into the Cornwall Armoury in

the evening to be welcomed back by our loved ones.

What originally started out as a fanciful dream of “wouldn’t it be nice to go on this trip” turned into a journey of a lifetime with vivid memories to last forever. The friendships that were formed, the honour of attending grave sites and learning some of their stories, the privilege of getting to know some of the people from cities that were liberated are the most lasting images. *And the tears flowed.....*

To my fellow travel mates on this journey: Andrea, Thelma, Heather, Carol, Roy, Jeff, Megan, Stephani, David, Dave, Neil, Hughie, Linda, Roland, Betty, Clarkie (Gordon), Judith, Dougal, John, Ian – I am happy to have shared this journey with you. As I recall moments of fun and friendship, *the tears flow....*

They shall grow not old,
As we that are left grow old.
Age shall not weary them,
Nor the years condemn
At the going down of the sun,
And in the morning
We will remember them.
We will remember them.