

**Visit to Normandy by members of the Travel Club of the
Cameronian Association.**



July 2022

Report



1. Personnel.

Front Row: (L-> R):

Willie Miller, Tom Brydson, Archie Robertson, Richard McKnight, Joe. McDonald, Jimmy, Molloy, Linda McDonald.

Back Row (L->R):

Charlie Todd , Aaron Clark, Douglas McCreath, Chris Donald, Adrian Smith.

2. Purposes of visit

- To 'show' the Cameronian cap badge.
- To gain a deeper understanding of Operation Overlord (6 June 1944-30 August 1944).
- To highlight the role of the 15th Scottish Division, and in particular the 9th Battalion Cameronians (Scottish Rifles).

To draft a report of the visitation for the Association.

- To share the report with other interested parties

3. Itinerary

Day 1: Sunday 17 July

Pick up Glasgow and Low Parks Museum, Hamilton.
Lunch stop Red Lion, Wetherby.
Overnight in Grand Burstin Hotel, Folkestone.

Day 2: Monday 18 Jul

Through Eurotunnel to France.
Lunch stop at Conchil-Le-Temple.
Visit to British Normandy Memorial, Ver-sur Mer.

Day 3: Tuesday 19 July

Free Day (Driver's rest day).

Day 4: Wednesday 20 July

Bayeux War Cemetery
Saint Manvieu Cemetery
15th Scottish Division Memorial, Tourville-sur-Odon
Hill 112, Fontaine-Etoupfour, Ranville.
Pegasus Bridge Museum
Canadian Military Cemetery, Beny-sur- Mer

Day 5: Thursday 21 July

Caumont-sur-Aure
St Charles de Percy War Cemetery
La Percee du Bocage Museum, Soulevre en Bocage
7th Armoured Division Memorial, Villers-Bocage
Tilly Sur Seules War Cemetery, Colleville-sur- Mer
Brouay War Cemetery
American Cemetery,

Regimental Dinner, Golf Omaha Beach.

Day 6: Friday 22 July

Banneville- la Campagne Cemetery
Lunch at Rouen
Travel to Channel Tunnel
Overnight in Grand Burstin Hotel, Folkestone.

Day 7 Saturday 23 July

Travel home

4. Background/ Context of Visit

Following the setbacks of 1940 the Cameronians' three Territorial infantry battalions had spent their war in Britain training for the time when the Allies would be able to take the war back to the European mainland.

First to go into action was the 9th Cameronians which was destined to be in continuous active service from June 1944 until the end of the war 11 months later; as a result its casualties were the highest in the regiment - during WW2 The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) lost a total of 1222 soldiers killed in action.

The 9th Battalion landed at Arromanches on 17 June and was immediately in action.

Two weeks after the initial D-Day landings the Allied attack had stalled, with the Germans still defending the town of Caen, preventing any movement towards the open ground around Falaise.

Montgomery's response was to use three newly arrived divisions including, the 15th Scottish to make an attack towards the high ground east of the River Orne - in order to envelop the city and seep up its defenders.

The operation, code-named Epsom, began on 26th June with moving forward with the 15th Scottish Division in the vanguard, moving forward with 700 infantrymen backed by artillery and armoured support provided by 11th Armoured Division and 31 Tank Brigade.

Poor weather conditions with heavy rain meant there would be only limited air cover and when the Cameronians went into the attack a hail storm began with drizzle persisting throughout the day as the 15th Division pushed towards the small town of Cheux.

Before the 9th Battalion began its attack one of the company commanders noticed that a planning error would lead to his outer flank coming under 'friendly fire' from allied artillery. Sadly, it proved impossible to make any changes to the plan and many of his riflemen were killed or wounded in the opening barrage.

During the operation the battalion reached its objective, the village of Haut du Bosque - but in the process suffered 120 casualties killed or wounded.

The fighting continued for a week before the division was withdrawn without achieving the hoped-for breakthrough.

Although Epsom was not a tactical success' it took the sting out of the German counter-attack and prevented the German armour from driving a wedge between the Allied forces the fought their way south into Normandy.

5. CWGC and AMBC Cemeteries

Something approaching 1,700,000 Commonwealth sailors, soldiers and airmen were killed in the two World Wars.

Today the majority of these men lie buried in cemeteries maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which are to be found worldwide in some 140 different countries.

In France alone there are 2,940 burial grounds containing over 465,000 Commonwealth graves and, in Belgium, a further 628 burial grounds with some 149,000 graves. The vast majority of these date from the Great War, 1914-18.

As a consequence of the second World War, 1939-45, the Commission tends over 50,000 graves in the Far East, 46,000 in Italy, 45,000 in North Africa, 32,000 in Germany, 19,000 in the Netherlands and 15,000 in Greece. In addition, the Commission's memorials commemorate the 232,990 missing servicemen of the Second World War as well as 66,373 civilians whose deaths were due to enemy action.

In the Calvados region of Normandy there are eighteen Commonwealth War Cemeteries containing the graves of 22,410 men who lost their lives on D-Day, 6 June 1944, and during the weeks that followed. Some servicemen also lie in civilian cemeteries or are to be found in individual plots in numerous churchyards across the region.

A further 1,808 men who have no known graves are commemorated by name on the panels of the Bayeux War Memorial which is situated opposite the Bayeux War Cemetery, the largest of the Second World War cemeteries to be found in France.

Founded by Royal Charter in 1917, the Imperial War Graves Commission, as it was originally known, set out to remember the sacrifice of each of the fallen, either by a permanent grave or, where the serviceman is missing and has no known resting place, by an inscription on a memorial. Visitors to the Commission's

cemeteries are ever impressed by the standards of maintenance and by the care shown by their gardening staff. The land on which the cemeteries stand has been given as a free gift by the French people 'for the perpetual resting place of the sailors, soldiers and airmen honoured here'.

As of 2018, there were 26 cemeteries and 29 memorials, monuments under the care of the American Battle Monuments Commission. There are more than 140,000 U.S. servicemen and servicewomen interred at the cemeteries, and more than 94,000 missing in action, or lost or buried at sea are memorialized on cemetery Walls of the Missing and on three memorials in the United States.

5. Visits to Memorials, Museums and War Graves

The Travel Club visited a number of war cemeteries where Cameronians are interred, as well as the graveyards of other allied servicemen.

At a number of the war grave sites, a short ceremony was conducted involving lowering the standard (during which the Last Post was played on a phone, raising the standard (accompanied by Reveille), a short address and a prayer, ending with Binyon's lines and a wreath laying.

Battlefield sites, beaches, memorials and museums were also visited.

These were:

(i) The British Normandy Memorial

The British Normandy Memorial records the names of the 22,442 servicemen and women under British command who fell on D-Day and during the Battle of Normandy in the summer of 1944. This includes people from more than 30 different countries. Inscribed in stone, their names have never, until now, been brought together. The site also includes a French Memorial, dedicated to the memory of French civilians who died during this time.



(ii) Bayeux War Cemetery



There was little actual fighting in Bayeux although it was the first French town of importance to be liberated.

Bayeux War Cemetery is the largest Commonwealth cemetery of the Second World War in France and contains burials brought in from the surrounding districts and from hospitals that were located nearby.

Bayeux contains 4,144 Commonwealth burials of the Second World War, 338 of them unidentified. There are also over 500 war graves of other nationalities, the majority German. The Bayeux Memorial stands opposite the cemetery and bears the names of more than 1,800 men of the Commonwealth land forces who died in the early stages of the campaign and have no known grave. They died during the landings in Normandy, during the intense fighting in Normandy itself, and during the advance to the River Seine in August.

(iii) St Manvieu War Cemetery, Cheux.



Cheux is a village 10 kilometres west of Caen.

Those buried in St. Manvieu War Cemetery died for the most part in the fluctuating battles from mid June to the end of July 1944, in the region between Tilly-sur-Seulles and Caen. The cemetery contains 1,627 Commonwealth burials of the Second World War, 49 of them unidentified. 54 Cameronians are interred here. There are also 555 German burials.

(iv) 15th Scottish Division Memorial (Tourville sur Odon)

The monument commemorates the units and actions of the 15th (Scottish) Division, which engaged the troops and tanks of the 2nd SS Panzer Division over control of the bridges over the Odon River during Operation Epsom. On the afternoon of 27 June, the stone bridge, a short distance ahead was captured, allowing 11th Armoured Division's tanks to cross the river.

The monument, a grey granite obelisk topped by a crying lion, carries plaques all sides of Divisional Regiments.

The plaques are surmounted by the simple words: 'Scotland the Brave'



(v) Hill 112



On 10 July, men from the 43rd Wessex, 53rd Welsh, 15th Scottish and 11th Armoured Divisions finally took control of one of the most strategically important battlegrounds in northern France. It took ten weeks of fierce fighting and cost the lives of 10,000 men, but taking and holding Hill 112 allowed the Allies to retake Caen and continue the liberation of Europe.

(vi) Pegasus Bridge Museum,



The glider airborne landings close to the bridges over the Caen Canal and River Orne was one of the most spectacular and successful operations on D-Day. The canal bridge, subsequently called Pegasus Bridge is situated in the outskirts of Benouville.

The main task allocated to the British 6th Division was to secure the left flank of the Allied landing area on the far side of the River Orne. If the bridges could be taken and held as well as the ridge of high ground beyond, then the invading armies would stand a better chance of breaking out eastwards towards Paris.

Today a bridge still stands across the Canal. It is called Pegasus Bridge after the famous winged horse of Greek mythology which was the emblem of the Airborne Forces

Adjacent is the Pegasus Bridge Museum which tells the story of the exploits of that night and the following day.

(vii) Canadian Military Cemetery, Beny-sur- Mer



This impressive cemetery contains the graves of 2,048 servicemen, of whom all but five are Canadian. They were killed during the early stages in the fighting for Caen.

Each side of the approach to the graves is a watch-tower. In the one on the left-hand side is a plaque to the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa

(viii). Caumont L'Evente Communal Cemetery

Caumont L'Evente is a small town and commune 34 kilometres west-south-west of Caen, and 23 kilometres south-south-west of Bayeux. It contains one single Cameronian Grave - that of Rifleman Tom Dear

The service for Rifleman Dear was particularly poignant given his solitary interment in a relatively isolated place



(ix) St Charles de Percy War Cemetery

The majority of the soldiers interred in the cemetery were killed in late July and early August 1944 as the British forces pushed south from Caumont-l'Éventé towards Vire to split the German 7th Army and 5th Panzer Army. Notable burial: Brigadier Sir Walter Bartlelot, 6th Guards Tank Brigade Killed in action on 16 August 1944 at Caumont-l'Éventé

(x) La Percee du Bocage Museum, Soulevre en Bocage

(xi) 7th Armoured Division Memorial, Villers-Bocage



(xii) Tilly sur Seuilles War Cemetery



(xiii) **Brouay War cemetery**

The village of Brouay lies half way between Caen and Bayeux.

Its War Cemetery lies on raised ground at the rear of the church, passing through the churchyard to reach it.

The cemetery contains 377 burials, seven of them unidentified. They include 12 Cameronians of the 9th Battalion. For the most part, the burials in Brouay War Cemetery relate to the heavy fighting of June and July 1944, when Commonwealth forces attempted to encircle Caen to the south.



(xiv) Omaha Beach - American Military Cemetery Cemetery and Memorial



6. Free Day (Driver's rest day: Tuesday 19 July)

Originally scheduled for Wednesday but brought forward because of predicted peak high temperatures on Tuesday. Opportunity to explore venues of choice, Including Port-en-Bessin.

Port-en-Bessin is a lively fishing port. Its harbour is flanked both east and west by high cliffs. At the bottom of the cliffs there is a German bunker with a memorial plaque to 47 Commando.

Today the harbour is enclosed by two semi-circular jetties. The one to the east has a Liberation Monument. Here visited by Jimmy and Charlie.



Prior to D-Day, the Germans turned the cliffs into formidable defensive positions. On June 6th the town lay on the western limit of Gold Beach but was outside the designated landing area of the British 50th Division, It was not until the following day that men of the 47(RM) Commando moved against the German emplacements. Their effort to take the enemy positions was supported by naval bombardment from HMS Emerald and strikes by rocket-firing RAF Typhoons. In the evening, after a day of heavy fighting the German commander surrendered.

By June 12 Port-en - Bessin was operational and able to take supplies for the British 50th Infantry Division and the American 1st Division.

It was to become an important British petrol storage depot.

7. Social Activities

Regimental Dinner in Golf Omaha Beach.



Harbourside entertainment courtesy of Charlie



Willie indulging his secret secret passion at Port-en- Bessin !



Linda and Joe enjoying a well-earned relax over dinner in Port- en - Bessin



8. Acknowledgements:

Grateful thanks are offered to a number of people for their particular efforts in making the trip a resounding success, including:

Linda and Joe McDonald for their meticulous planning and organisation.

Adrian Smith for his background research.

Richard McKnight, our standard bearer.

Alex Maxwell for making the Cameronian memorial crosses.

Joe McDonald for drafting the words spoken at the graveyard ceremonies. and our accommodating and cheerful driver, Davie.

The role of the Association in providing funds to purchase wreaths is also acknowledged.

9. Words spoken at Cemeteries

WE MEET THIS DAY TO REMEMBER OUR REGIMENTAL COMRADES WHO PAID THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE TO PROTECT OUR FREEDOM.

THE CAMERONIAN SCOTTISH RIFLES HAVE SERVED IN MANY CONFLICTS OF THE WORLD - AND OUR BATTLE HONOURS ARE MANY.

WE GIVE THANKS TO-DAY FOR ALL RANKS OF OUR REGIMENT WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES TO DEFEND OUR SOVEREIGN AND COUNTRY AND TO DEFEND OUR LIBERTY.

WE ALSO REMEMBER THOSE OF OUR REGIMENT WHO HAVE SINCE JOINED THEM.

HEAVENLY FATHER WE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER IN THY NAME. FORGIVE ALL OUR SINS AND PARDON OUR OFFENCES, SO THAT WITH CLEAN HEARTS WE MAY BRING PETITION TO THY THRONE OF GRACE.

WE PRAY FOR THE ABSENT MEMBERS OF OUR REGIMENT AND ORGANISATION, ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE WHO MAY BE SICK IN BODY OR DISTRESSED IN MIND. HEAL AND RESTORE THEM.
IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

WE ALSO REMEMBER THE PERSONNEL WHO ARE SERVING WITH OUR COUNTRY IN THE ARMED FORCES. WE ASK THAT THOU WILL BE WITH THEM AND EVER STRENGTHEN THEM SO THAT THEY MAY FAITHFULLY FOLLOW THE PATH OF DUTY.

MAY HARMONY, DUTY AND UNITY BE WITH US. THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.
AMEN.

*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.*

ALL: *WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.*

10. References

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Douglas McCreath
20 August 2022

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