

Battlefield Tour 2011

Yukon High School students will have the opportunity to travel to France and Belgium next spring break to participate in another Battlefield Tour. Their two week itinerary is divided between WW I and WW II sites with a break in Paris separating them. The purpose of the tour is to give students a better understanding of both major conflicts with illustrations of battlefield movements, strategies and hopefully, a lingering question as to how these conflicts could have been settled without a major war. Walks through graveyards containing the remains of 40,000 soldiers, leaves one reflecting in thought as to how to prevent something like this from reoccurring.

Near Ypres, students will carry out a small exercise at an ambulance station on Essex Farm, setting for the writing of "In Flanders' Fields," the famous poem by John McRae. It is at this site students will discover the grave of a 15 year old British soldier.

Vimy Ridge is one of the most impressive stops where students can't help but burst with pride after learning of the Canadian Corp's achievement, taking the ground where other Allied armies had failed. They will tour the tunnels the troops hid themselves in prior to attacking the famous ridge and capturing it in 6 hours.

WW II sites include the Normandy Beaches, scene of the largest invasion in military history. Students will walk along Juno Beach where Canadian troops landed, as well as tour the new Juno Beach museum to commemorate our country's efforts and sacrifice on June 6, 1944. Stops at Omaha Beach, where the U. S. troops had extreme difficulty and at Le Chaos and Arromanches (the mulberry harbors are still visible) will round out visits to Normandy.

Students will participate in an exercise on the beaches of Dieppe, scene of the disastrous raid by Canadian troops in August of 1942. At this site the Canadian Army suffered its most serious losses in any single day of the Second World War. 907 men lost their lives here in less than 6 hours. This was also the scene of the largest single day aerial battle of WW II. Students will take the role of a Canadian Engineer raiding the beach in the early hours of that fateful day and walk through what he would have witnessed. It won't be pleasant; a tour of the Canadian graveyard above the town will bear witness to that.

A visit to view the Maldegen Museum, built and dedicated to the Canadian Army by an appreciative Belgian citizen for the liberation of his country will occur near the end of the tour. This will include a walk through the Adegem Canadian Cemetery, where Belgian school children present our students with small cards containing a maple leaf and poppy with a message of "Thank you for Peace."

It is hoped this experience will make our students think about how we as human beings view one another and how we should attempt to settle our differences in a much different manner than we have witnessed in the past. We had a great student represent St. Elias School last year and we'd love to have more of your students join us. If parents are interested in having their child participate in this tour, they are asked to contact Mike Luxton or the principal at the school for more information.