

2011

Rearranged Snowdrops: The Construction of Memory at the Abbaye d'Ardenne

Vanessa McMackin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh>



Part of the [Military History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McMackin, Vanessa "Rearranged Snowdrops: The Construction of Memory at the Abbaye d'Ardenne."
Canadian Military History 20, 3 (2011)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Canadian Military History by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.



The restored Abbaye as it appears today.

Rearranged Snowdrops

The Construction of Memory at the Abbaye d'Ardenne

Vanessa McMackin

“There is a curtain of sadness that pervades the garden, a physical feeling almost. It’s quiet and cool and shaded, but it is not a comfortable place. It’s as if, and excuse the imagination, we can only see one face of the garden and the Canadian soldiers’ souls inhabit another plane. We can feel them, but not see them.”¹ So wrote Jan Goertzen, a student on a tour under the aegis of the Canadian Battlefields Foundation (CBF), in an emotional entry in her diary about her visit to the garden of the Abbaye d’Ardenne, near the beaches of Normandy.

This garden houses a memorial to 20 Canadian soldiers murdered by teenaged German soldiers after being captured by the 12th SS’s Hitlerjugend [Hitler Youth] Panzer Division in the days immediately after the Allies’ invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944. The Germans shot or beat to death a total of 156 Canadian prisoners of war in the Abbaye d’Ardenne and in nearby Audrieu and Authie, in contravention of international law.² The three villages still commemorate these events, especially at the Abbaye each year on 7 June.

Between January and May 1945 recently returned residents discovered five well-concealed graves in the garden of the Abbaye.³ They had earlier located another burial next to the walls. The graves contained bodies of 19 Canadian

Abstract: The construction of memory regarding the Second World War is a field in Canadian historiography that requires further exploration and research. The memorial at the Abbaye d’Ardenne in Normandy provides a case study that speaks to larger patterns of collective commemoration of the war by Canadians and the local population. Memories of war must be examined in the context of their construction. Several factors have given the Abbaye prominence among the many monuments to Canadian soldiers in Normandy. The monument itself, the physical space it occupies, the motives of those who create and sustain it, and the time that has passed since the events all work in the development of the memory created and how it is woven into the national narrative.

soldiers reported missing on 7-8 and 16-17 June 1944. The 20th, that of Lance Corporal George Pollard, last seen with Lieutenant Freddie Williams the night of 16-17 June, has never been found. All the men died of head trauma, either by the beating in of the skull or a bullet. The Abbaye was the only place where the victims were buried rather than being left where they fell; the apparent effort to dispose of the evidence of a crime gives the place a sinister tone. Visitors stand in the garden where they were discovered, where these soldiers were brutally executed and their remains hidden away.

Canadian historian Jack Granatstein believes that the garden should be a national monument. Today, it is a sacred place of remembrance that often elicits strong emotions such as Goertzen’s. To explain this response, this paper examines the construction of memory at the Abbaye.

Even in the context of one of the world’s most vicious wars, the stories of these Canadian soldiers are chilling. For many Canadians, they symbolize sacrifice to free Europe from Nazi tyranny. These painful tales of unnecessary and unlawful death evoke sadness and outrage. Most people who visit the Abbaye garden experience both emotions – and many others as well.

War and Memory in Canada

The impact of Canada’s participation in the Second World War incorporates yet transcends its involvement in operations, its human losses in deaths and injuries, and the struggle on the home front. Memories of the war, such as the one in the garden, continue to shape Canadians’ understanding of their country’s participation in the conflict. These memories, however, are human constructions. They do not necessarily reflect events as they happened, but are a product of the present. We must look at memories of war in the context

of their construction. Several factors have given the Abbaye prominence among the many monuments to Canadian soldiers in Normandy. The monument itself, the physical space it occupies, the motives of those who created and sustain it, and the time that has passed since the events have all contributed to the emotional experiences of visitors.

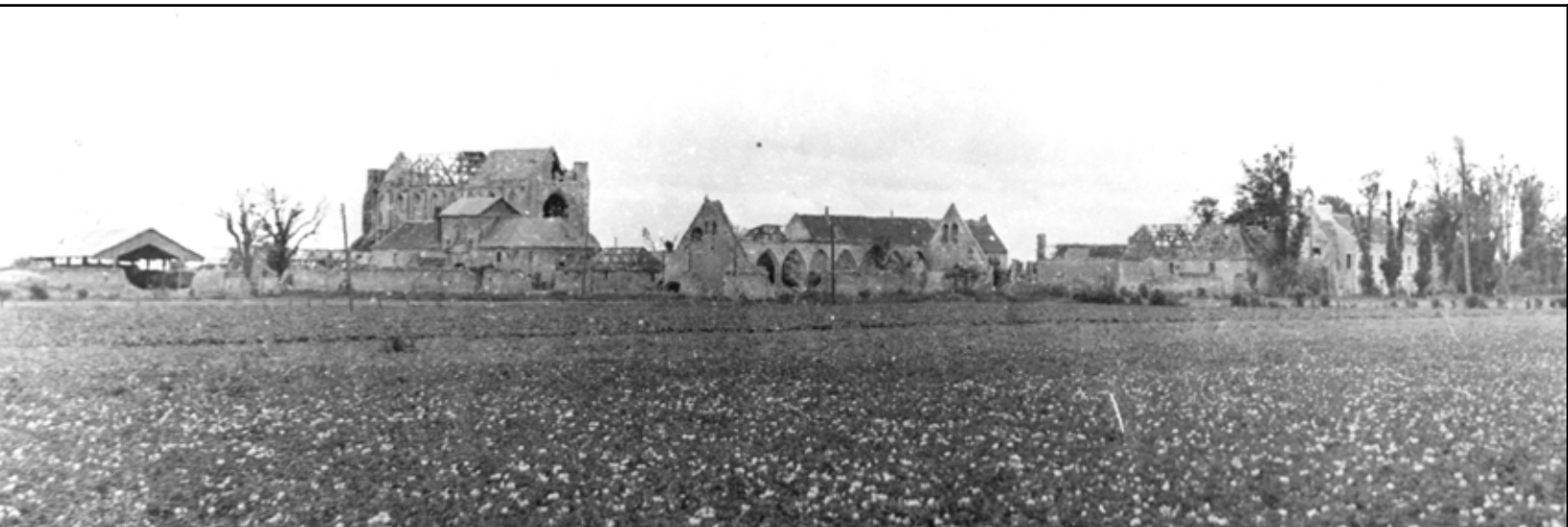
The study of war and memory is a growing field of academic research. The past two and a half decades have seen increasing attention to the relationship between war and memory. Wars typically mark

these two genres and demonstrate war's impact on a cultural level – how people cope with these events and express their grief, pride, and/or outrage.

As the commemoration of the 20 soldiers murdered at the Abbaye has evolved, the memory constructed has also come to embrace the other 136 Canadian soldiers executed in the early days of the Normandy campaign.

Research on Canadian war and memory, stimulated by Jonathan Vance's important book *Death So Noble*, has focused on the First

especially since the 1980s as those who lived through the wartime events grew older and sought to preserve memory. By contrast there had been little chance for such interaction after the First World War, when travel from North America to Europe was more difficult and expensive, and the Second World War intervened only 20 years after Treaty of Versailles had formally ended the earlier conflict in 1919. Canada's great national war monument in Europe, at Vimy in France, was unveiled only in 1936. Although thousands of Canadian veterans returned to the battlefields



LCMSDS Photo

The Abbaye d'Ardenne, 1946

defining moments in a society and nation's history. The impact of war finds expression in the memories of those it shaped. Acts of commemoration and remembrance, in forms ranging from monuments to literature, symbolize these memories. The construction of memory, as a result, is a complex process that military and social history often overlooks. Military history tends to focus on operations, strategies, and tactics – the who, what, when, where, why, and how of war. Social history focuses on how societies evolved and how major events influenced them. Studies of war and memory fill a gap in the historiography between

World War, and much remains to explore about the Second World War. The study of war monuments and memorials – the circumstances of their original construction, and the subsequent development of the associations attached to them – has particularly underscored how societies reconstruct events in memory to fill current needs, “manipulating the past in order to mold the present.”⁴

A notable feature of Second World War commemoration has been the spontaneous collaboration of people in the liberated towns and villages of the Netherlands, France, Belgium and Italy with Canadians,

for this event, soon war would again engulf the continent.

The memorial at the Abbaye d'Ardenne provides a case study that speaks to larger patterns of collective commemoration of the war by Canadians and the local populace on the Normandy coast.

Murders and Aftermath: 1944-1945

Analysis of the construction of war memory requires knowledge of the original events and people. In the D-Day landings on 6 June 1944, units of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division faced the 12th SS Hitlerjugend [Hitler Youth] Division, a superbly equipped

formation comprised of young, fit and aggressive soldiers, led by veteran NCOs and officers of the brutal campaigns on the Eastern Front. Reports of war crimes by the division began circulating immediately after the Allied liberation of Norman villages. Early accounts reported over 100 Canadians were executed while prisoners of war.

On 7 June, the day after the landings, the infantry of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders and the tanks of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers (27th Canadian Armoured Regiment) were leading the advance on the exposed

prisoners of war. The rest began their march to the headquarters of the 12th SS's 25th PGR, which was under the command of Brigadeführer Kurt Meyer. The following day, when the captors returned payroll books, some Canadians noted that no one claimed the books of those who had "volunteered."

The Germans murdered 11 Canadians at the Abbaye on 7 June. The next day, 8 June, they took seven more prisoners to the Abbaye. Jan Jesionek, a soldier of the 25th PGR, later testified that the Germans held these men in the courtyard.

only ones. Canadian investigators found evidence of murders in Authie, after the intense action on 7 June. Sergeant S. Dudka of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders, who was captured in that battle, recounted walking through the streets of the village and seeing the dead bodies of seven men from his platoon lined against a wall, no more than two feet apart, with no helmets or arms nearby.⁹ Another North Nova witnessed a "defenceless" Canadian soldier machine gunned to death and then later the shooting of a wounded soldier at the end of



Kevin Eyre Photograph

The Abbaye d'Ardenne, 2010

eastern flank of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, when they suffered heavy losses at Authie and Buron in a counterattack by the 25th Panzer Grenadier Regiment (PGR) of the 12th SS. The Germans took many prisoners and held 150 at the Abbaye, about two kilometres south-east of Authie, behind German lines.⁵ They asked for ten "volunteers" and, when no one responded, chose ten soldiers randomly and took them into the stables. Lieutenant Tom Alfred Lee Windsor gave only his name, rank, and serial number – all that international law required.⁶ Germans slapped him across the face and separated him from the other

Eventually they called one at a time through a passage into the garden; each man passed through the door and climbed the steps, where they shot him in the head. After the first man went through, the rest assumed they would meet the same fate and shook hands with one another.⁷ After the war ended, the Vicos, a local family, found shallow graves containing the remains of Canadian soldiers. Mrs. Vico had planted snowdrop bulbs the previous year, and they were growing in a different pattern. She brought a shovel and found five bodies.⁸

The prisoners killed at the Abbaye d'Ardenne were not the

the column of prisoners because he could not keep up.¹⁰ Testimony of the murders in Authie was supported by local witnesses. A French mason, Albert Guilbert, watched from his window as a Canadian surrendered to a German soldier and was shot. He also saw a wounded Canadian bayoneted to death by Germans.¹¹ One Frenchman told how the young SS troops refused to allow local villagers to remove the bodies from the streets and bury them. They lay in the traffic of military vehicles for six days and by the time the locals were allowed to bury the bodies they were so mutilated that they had been "crushed to jelly."¹² There were

approximately 37 murders in Authie.

On 8 June, troops from the 12th SS set up a command post under a sycamore tree on the grounds of the Chateau d'Audrieu, 18 kilometres to the west of the Abbaye d'Ardenne. At 1400 hours prisoners brought in from the fighting in Putot-en-Bessin, 4.5 kilometres west of the chateau, against the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade on the western flank the Canadian front. One of the residents, Monique Level, saw SS guards take three prisoners into the woods. She followed them until they were lost to sight. On her return to the chateau she heard shots and then saw the guards emerge without the prisoners. Later in the day another resident, Beatrice Delafon, saw another four prisoners being marched away. And again that day they saw 13 dead prisoners lined in a row against a fence. Level was living at the chateau when the 26th PGR of the 12th SS took it as their headquarters. After British and Canadian forces liberated Audrieu, she told a British officer what she had seen and led him to the bodies. Approximately 24 executed Canadians were found at Chateau d'Audrieu on the evening of 8 June by British troops, nearly all members of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles. Nineteen were confirmed by a Canadian pathologist Lieutenant-Colonel R.A.H. MacKeen to have been shot by pistols at close range.¹³ Thus the bodies of the Canadians found at the Chateau showed signs of execution in the same manner as those found at the Abbaye.

A Canadian War Crimes Trial

In September 1944 Kurt Meyer, Regimental commander of the 25th PGR during the early days of



Brigadeführer Kurt Meyer, commander of 25th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, 12th SS Division.

the invasion, and later, following the death of Generalmajor Fritz Witt on 14 June, commander of 12th SS Division, was captured by Belgian partisans who turned him over to the US Army.¹⁴ In December 1945 a Canadian military court at Aurich, Germany, in the Canadian Army's occupation zone, tried him for the deaths at the Abbaye. He was the first war criminal to stand before a Canadian military court. The killings by the 12th SS were murder under international laws and conventions of war. Yet there is at least a moral distinction between "heat-of-the-battle murders" and murders behind the lines.¹⁵ The killing on the

battlefield of enemy soldiers who have surrendered during or immediately following combat is a harsh reality of war – as in the executions in Authie. Lethal violence by young soldiers on an adrenaline rush in the heat of battle is in a category different than the shooting of prisoners at a headquarters behind the lines in the presence of officers who are supposed to exercise control. The methodical murders at the Abbaye, provided the most damning evidence against Kurt Meyer. His 12th SS was the only division, Allied or German, accused of war crimes in Normandy.¹⁶

Evidence at the trial established his presence at the Abbaye during the executions. The prosecution could not prove that he had given a direct command, but the court condemned him to death. In the second of two reviews mandated by regulations, Major-General Chris Vokes, commander of the Canadian occupation force, commuted the sentence to life imprisonment and Meyer was ultimately released in 1954. The eleventh-hour commutation of the death sentence was controversial at

the time and has continued to be so, but a recent study has noted that the Canadian regulations for war crimes trials were among the first of any nation to hold a senior officer so fully accountable for the actions of troops under his command, and Vokes was clearly reluctant to impose the death sentence in the absence of clear evidence that Meyer had personally ordered the executions.¹⁷

Meyer's trial publicized the atrocities¹⁸ and was important to Canadians. He represented everything that Canadians had lost in the war.¹⁹ The trial's outcome dismayed many Canadians – a factor now part of the memory



Kurt Meyer (centre, no hat, back to camera) stands in the courtroom before the Canadian judges (l-r): Brigadier J.A. Roberts, Brigadier H.A. Sparling, Lieutenant-Colonel W.B. Bredin (judge advocate), Major-General Harry Foster (president), Brigadier Ian Johnston and Brigadier Henry Bell-Irving.

constructed at the Abbaye and in the reactions of students and visitors. In his memoirs,²⁰ Meyer swore his innocence and presented himself as a scapegoat. He returned to the Abbaye in 1957. While he was walking around the grounds, Jacques Vico's brother, Jean-Marie, went to speak with him. Jean-Marie asked him how he did not know about the Canadian prisoners. Meyer told him that he learned about the executions from a guard. When Jean-Marie asked why he did not report this at his trial, Meyer responded, "I could not, for reasons of honour, admit to an enemy court that my men had done such things."²¹

The role of Meyer forms an integral part of the memory constructed at the Abbaye. He was on the grounds when the murders occurred. He is the villain, the personification of the Nazi SS soldier, a highly decorated officer who had proven himself many times in battle on the Eastern and Western fronts. He was a dedicated Nazi and remained so after the war.

Memorials

The memorial in the garden of the Abbaye was erected in 1984. The

Vico family, who had discovered the graves, and their neighbours made the arrangements to unveil it on 7 June, the 40th anniversary of the first murders. Residents and dignitaries put together a small ceremony, and Canadian officials attended, with the minister of veterans' affairs as guest of honour.²²

In Authie, a small plaque mounted on the wall of a building names one of the main thoroughfares "Place des 37 Canadiens" in memory of the prisoners killed in the town after the intense battle on 7 June 1944.²³

In the town of Audrieu, approximately 18 kilometres west of the Abbaye, the Royal Winnipeg Rifles (RWRs) erected a plaque on 8 June 1989²⁴ to commemorate the Canadian prisoners whom the Germans shot on 8, 9, and 11 June at the Château d'Audrieu, headquarters of the 12th SS's 26th PGR.

To the memory of those members of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles and supporting arms who were murdered, while prisoners at le Château d'Audrieu, near le Mesnil-Patry, and at le Haut de Bosq, on 8, 9 and 11 June 1944. A la mémoire de

ceux du Royal Winnipeg Rifles et des armes associées qui, alors prisonniers de guerre, furent assassinés au Château d'Audrieu et près de le Mesnil-Patry et du Haut de le Bosq, le 8, 9 et 11 juin 1944.

This text is followed by a names and serial numbers of the 65 men from the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, the 3rd Anti-Tank Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA), the 6th Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers (RCE), and the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa. The town donated the space, and the regiment's Friends of the Rifles and Associations paid for the plaque, which was made in Winnipeg and went on display at the Minto Armory and the Manitoba Club before going to France.²⁵ The regiment has since taken cadets to the site. Audrieu has not had the impact for Canadians that the Abbaye possesses. While the plaque is in the town, the actual killing site at the chateau is one kilometre away on the grounds of what is now a fine dining restaurant and hotel. Understandably, the proprietors have not been keen to mark the incident. Staff responds to the curious by directing them

to the plaque in town. In contrast, the Abbaye itself was the site of the murders, burials, exhumations and memorials. Audrieu has had no strong proponents, whereas the Abbaye has its champions – most notably, Jacques Vico and a Canadian, Ian Campbell.²⁶

Jacques Vico and Ian Campbell

Jacques Vico grew up on the grounds of the Abbaye and maintains and perpetuates the soldiers' memory. His family owned and resided on the estate until the Germans took it over in 1944. Since the Vicos' discovery of the bodies, they have worked to commemorate the incident. Jacques and his family, particularly his brother, Jean-Marie, started providing information and tours to visitors as early as 1947-48. The family moved to the house across the road in 1954, began offering regular

tours in 1960, and erected a small wooden memorial altar.²⁷ This type of continuing endeavour is crucial to constructing war memory.

For the Abbaye, construction of memory was both literal and figurative. In 1979, officers from 4th Canadian Service Battalion (CSB), part of Canadian Forces Europe, based in Lahr, West Germany, studied the Normandy battlefield. While they were in Caen, Professor Robert Bennett, at the Université de Caen, offered them a tour of the area and took them to the Abbaye d'Ardenne.²⁸ There they met Francine Vico and her son Jacques, who told them what had happened in June 1945.

When Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Campbell took command of the 4th CSB later in 1979, he learned about the Normandy tour, and visited the Abbaye, where the absence of a substantial memorial stunned him²⁹

– only the Vicos' small wooden altar evoked the massacre. Campbell's visit was the genesis of the memorial completed in 1984.³⁰

He located a company in Vancouver to produce a memorial plaque and paid for it himself. He prepared a small booklet about the men and their lives and sent copies to the North Nova Scotia Highlanders, the Sherbrooke Fusiliers, and the Glengarry Highlanders, all of which lost men at the Abbaye. He soon started to receive cheques from these units and other would-be sponsors.³¹

The plaque was simple: "On the night of 7-8 June, 1944, eighteen Canadian Soldiers were murdered in this garden while being held there as prisoners of war. Two more prisoners died here, or near here, on 17 June, 1944. They are gone but not forgotten."³² There followed a list of the twenty names. The plaque went on a stone altar, created out of

Jacques Vico (centre, back to camera) talks to a group of Canadian teachers about the events at the Abbaye d'Ardenne.



Mike Bechthold Photograph



A group of Canadian teachers gather for a photograph with M. Vico in the garden at the Abbaye.

discarded or damaged stone – pieces of the 12th-century monastery.³³ A local mason, Leon Garnier, and a local stone cutter, Jean Mesnil, built the altar. The arch-like structure echoes the Great War monuments in Canada.

When the officers of the 4th CSB visited in 1979, Vico carried with him a file folder of information he had collected;³⁴ Vico and Campbell then carried out further research. In 1994, Campbell published a small book, *Murder at the Abbaye*, with details about each soldier and where he fought, photographs of 16 of them, and the story of the memorial and its creation.³⁵ Enlargements of the photos now hang on a banner along the garden wall, along with other pictures Campbell has collected.³⁶

Vico's dedication to the garden derives from intense gratitude. He, and his father, brother, and sister were all members of the French Resistance, although no one in the family knew that the others belonged. Germans had captured his father

before D-Day. Jacques had been storing ammunition in the stables at the Abbaye. One night, after hearing about plans for an impending German raid, Jacques and colleagues carried the stores by foot five kilometres to another barn – the Germans arrived in the morning.³⁷ Germans murdered some of his Resistance friends in the Caen prison on 6 June 1944. Jacques tells visitors too about the Resistance and is a major figure in French commemorative activities.³⁸

Jacques Vico speaks at each 7 June ceremony, and his gratitude for the Canadians' sacrifice is intense: "Indeed, their wasted lives, their ruined lives, was the price they so generously paid in order to regain liberty and dignity for all men."³⁹ To forget these men would be to condemn the future: "The work of remembrance is a duty, in order to defend the values of democracy, justice, peace and promote the rights of men."⁴⁰

Between September 2005 and March 2006, he gave tours to four groups of French adults (60 people each time), six or seven groups of French high school students (50 students in each), four Canadian school groups, and three groups of individuals.⁴¹ He is an active member of les Amis du Mémorial, which promotes Le Mémorial de Caen: Un Musée pour la Paix. He often leads groups of children through the museum and always proposes a visit to the Abbaye to older groups. The French government supports his work and produces an annual report about his activities.⁴²

The Canadian Battlefields Foundation

Vico leads study groups from the Canadian Battlefields Foundation (CBF) through the Abbaye.⁴³ The CBF⁴⁴ offers travel bursaries to Canadian university students, and its predecessor, the



Mike Bechthold Photographs



Left: The memorial to the Canadian soldiers executed at the Abbaye d'Ardenne. The small wooden alter on the left was the original memorial constructed by Jacques Vico and his family. The stone monument was placed through the initiative of Ian Campbell.

Right: A close-up view of the descriptive plaque.

Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation, conducted the first study tour in 1995.

The major anniversaries (40th, 50th, 55th and 60th) of the war, and particularly the Normandy campaign, have renewed Canadian interest in those events and stimulated fresh commemorative efforts. In the decades immediately after the war, many veterans did not talk about their experiences, and some young people considered war a taboo subject. Students on the battlefield tours are two generations distant from the war – often grandchildren of veterans. As veterans grow older, more people are acknowledging their contribution, as we can see in Veteran Affairs Canada's maintenance of the garden. Many young people hold veterans in high regard and show great emotion towards them.

7 June

Each year, students of the CBF tour participate in the ceremony of 7 June. They lay a maple leaf on the memorial for each man, as someone reads their names aloud. Restoration turned one of the Abbaye's buildings

into a student residence, which housed the visitors⁴⁵ and served as a central base for exploring Normandy's battlefields. Although the study tours no longer stay there, the Foundation still participates in the ceremony, and its involvement has⁴⁶ helped make it an annual event. The vice-president of the CBF for France, Céline Garbay, arranges the ceremony.⁴⁷

The ceremony is the only annual event honouring murdered Canadian prisoners of war. Guests include survivors of the German occupation and local dignitaries, and more recently representatives from Veteran Affairs Canada and the Canadian embassy in Paris.⁴⁸ "Liberation" ceremonies take place every year in towns and villages in Normandy that Canadians freed. Mayors from many of them sit on the Comité Souvenir de Juno, which organizes these events.⁴⁹ In Caen, CBF students attend a ceremony at l'Ancienne Boucherie, where the Canadians entered the city. They also attend commemorations on Juno Beach and at the Canadian garden of the memorial at Caen.⁵⁰ These events seem not to move the students as much as the one at the Abbaye.

Student Journals

CBF bursary students must keep a journal of their experience, which usually describes their first visit to the Abbaye in very moving terms.⁵¹ As a master's student at Wilfrid Laurier University, Mike Bechthold joined the first tour in 1995. Before their first visit to the garden, Canadian military historian Terry Copp gave them the details of the story. One of the martyrs, Lieutenant Tom Alfred Lee Windsor, was, it turned out, a distant relative of one of the tour members – Lee Windsor – to whom he bears a striking resemblance.⁵²

Many students describe the garden as peaceful and quiet: "No one had to tell us to stand mute. The garden speaks volumes of silence."⁵³ In 1997, before learning about the events, Robb Furlong, from the University of Waterloo, found the place interesting; after he found out about the details, he thought it "a much more somber place to stay."⁵⁴

Guests at the Abbaye often take a proprietary interest in the garden. Military historian Marc Milner of the University of New Brunswick has guided dozens of students through

Normandy. On one occasion, while the University of Tennessee was renting the grounds, the CBF tour group shared the grounds with the university's summer immersion program. One night a few Canadian students found an American couple making out in the garden. A major incident erupted, "as the Canadian students were incensed at what they saw as a desecration of sacred ground."⁵⁵

Their experiences at the Abbaye often drain students emotionally. One 1996 visitor described the event as "the most brutal part of the day... It was heartbreaking. The most indescribable moment of my life – after the ceremony I was really upset."⁵⁶ Brandey Barton was half-way through reading Campbell's book when she first visited the Abbaye. For her, "they were not just names on the plaque in the garden but actual people. I ... could not control my tears while M. Vico explained what happened." Her tour group in 2004 took the rest of the day off because of emotional exhaustion.⁵⁷

The ceremony in 2001 featured overcast skies. Rod Holloway noted, "During the remembrance activities, the sun broke through...The diffused light, the silence and the flowers, created an effect that was almost supernatural. It was as if heaven was validating our efforts to honour these fallen soldiers."⁵⁸ Another 2001 student wrote: "We started at the Abbaye and my spirit never recovered from that."⁵⁹ Other journals from that trip reveal similar sentiments. Many students use traditional language – the "High Diction"⁶⁰ that Paul Fussell argues disappeared after the Great War. Yet our memory of the First World War uncovered Jay Winter and Jonathan Vance appear to apply as well for the Second.

Interviews with tour members from various years consistently find students speaking of their experience as "moving." Excerpts

from summaries in *Canadian Military History* yield the same description. For all these students the visit was an individual affair, yet all reported having been moved. And they all felt strongly that Canadians must not forget these atrocities. These sentiments become part of the construction of the memory. The ceremony and the students work together to make the Abbaye a site of commemoration for all 156 executed Canadian soldiers.

Bringing the Men to Life

On 7 June each year, Jacques Vico presents details about the martyrs – ordinary men in extraordinary circumstances. They were the same age as, if not younger than, many of the students, who usually notice this reality. Here they learn more about the men, who become for them individuals, with a life before the war and friendships that they made during it – a personal dimension missing from Normandy's other memorials to the 156.

Many of these 20 men were comrades and shared a common background. Eleven were North Nova Scotia Highlanders, Maritimers with few prospects during the Depression. The other nine were Stormont Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders from eastern Ontario or members of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment from Quebec. Ian Campbell's research has yielded many such details. His book provides a glimpse into the lives of these men, through interviews with surviving family members and comrades and from service files. These details personalize the victims of the Abbaye.

Joseph ("Fah") Francis MacIntyre was one of four sons of a First World War widow in Nova Scotia. Fah was a neat young man who did his work quietly and cheerfully and was good at sports. He quit school to work in the Sydney mines, where he stayed

for three years, and in 1939 he left for Ontario to mine for gold. It was his mother's pleading for his safety that brought him back to Nova Scotia, where he enlisted in Sydney at the age of 24. He was a scrapper, which cost him a couple of days' pay, and one time he was confined to barracks for 14 days for going "absent without leave." In other incidents, he spent ten days in the brig and lost ten days' pay for "disobedience." Yet he was made an acting lance corporal in August 1942 and confirmed as a corporal the following March.⁶¹

Roger Lockhead enlisted in the Sherbrooke Fusiliers at the age of 21 in August 1940. He grew up on a farm in northern Quebec. While training in Sherbrooke, Roger and a friend met two young women – one turned out to be his uncle's niece – a perfect match for him, his uncle had long predicted! Five months later, Roger married Rose. He served a year in Newfoundland (then a separate country) and later trained in tank duties with the conversion of the Fusiliers to an armoured regiment.⁶² Rose gave birth to their son, Richard, on 22 January 1942. By November, Roger was in England. He wrote four or five letters a week to Rose and dreamt of owning a plot of land to farm when he returned home.⁶³

Thomas Alfred Lee Windsor grew up in Montreal, finished high school, and attended McGill University. He loved sports, reading, and bridge. Before enlisting in 1942, he was a militia sergeant in an armoured unit. In October 1942, he began training at the Officer Training Centre in Brockville. He graduated as a 2nd lieutenant; by April 1943 he was a lieutenant. In May 1943, he left his wife of six years, Roma, for England. In June, he became troop commander of 27 CAR. Two of his crew members, Roger Lockhead and Harold George Philip, shared his fate at the Abbaye.⁶⁴

Ian Campbell's book shows these "regular guys" volunteering for the

sake of the greater good. The personal details for the Abbaye men offer students a connection not available at other sites. The visitors walk through the same passage the men did in 1944 and stand in the garden where they died and were buried. The memory constructed at the Abbaye evokes strong emotions.

Changes since 2000

The garden has gone through extensive changes over the decades. After discovery of the bodies in 1945, clearing of brush sacrificed some of the garden's intimate feeling. The elm trees that once lined the

outer wall gave way to (Canadian) maples. Francine Vico's small garden of snowdrops still remains in the centre. She sold the property to the Conseil régional de Basse-Normandie with the stipulation that the garden remain accessible to the public.⁶⁵ The Conseil has since rented out the estate to the Institut mémoires de l'Édition contemporaine (IMEC), a specialized archives.⁶⁶

Early in 2007, the Conseil installed walls leading up to the garden and fences that blocked public access; a new fence at the far end of the garden did the same. By April 2007, the walls and the fence had come down – on whose order

remains a mystery.⁶⁷ In 2006 new trees in front of the steps on which the soldiers had walked blocked visitors' view of them. Jacques Vico tore them out, leaving only one and promising that, if it still bothered him, he would remove it as well.

Currently Veterans Affairs Canada is cooperating with the CBF to improve the garden. As it is now, the path to the garden is dirt, with roots poking through the ground, making navigation to the memorial somewhat difficult for veterans. Veterans Affairs has proposed a brick pathway instead and plans a bench near the memorial for sitting and reflection.⁶⁸

In 1996, a ten-year restoration began on the Abbaye estate for a cost of almost 3.7 million euros, with funds from the Conseil (50 per cent) and other government grants. In 2004, the IMEC produced a brochure about the Abbaye and the war. What will happen after Jacques Vico has gone is unclear. He has been the driving force of behind commemoration, and preservation, of the Abbaye. The restorations, however, do ensure maintenance of the garden for future generations.

Since the unveiling of the memorial in 1984, the CBF⁶⁹ has helped perpetuate the memory. Whitney P. Lackenbauer, now a professor at St. Jerome's University in Waterloo, was a student on the



The intimate feeling of the garden that previously existed (top photo) was lost when the brush was cleared out to open up the garden (bottom photo). The soldiers' portraits can be seen on the wall on the right side of the bottom photo.



The portraits of the Canadian soldiers executed in the garden now overlook the spot where they were killed. The photos help to humanize the names and remind visitors to the garden of the terrible tragedy which occurred in the summer of 1944.

1997 tour. His experience inspired his future work; he has prepared a documentary history of Kurt Meyer's trial in association with a colleague, Chris Madsen.⁷⁰

All the Necessary Elements

The elements to construct a war memory are all in place at the Abbaye d'Ardenne. The men who fought were part of a volunteer army, and for this, French citizens such as Jacques Vico are grateful: these men chose to fight to liberate a foreign country. They fought against well-trained, well-prepared, and tenacious enemy soldiers. This conflict led them to the Abbaye, where the enemy shot or beat them to death in violation of international law. The days of fighting after D-Day form part of Canada's national identity. The murdered prisoners form a notable element of the events of those days. The story as a whole - the fighting, the atrocities, and the trial of Kurt Meyer - has played a crucial role in the construction of the memory, both

tragic and heroic. And the efforts of many people - most notably, Jacques Vico and Ian Campbell - and organizations in Canada and France have made the process possible.

As Ashplant, Graham, and Roper demonstrate in *Commemorating War: The Politics of Memory*, there are many aspects to war memory. Memories of war do not simply exist; they emerge and flourish within political and social contexts. Jacques Vico has worked so hard and long because of his gratitude and his abhorrence for the SS. We may consider Kurt Meyer's commuted sentence and subsequent release in the light of the post-1945 Cold War and the relative novelty of a trial for command responsibility. For Canadians, these soldiers may seem victims of killings by hardened and vicious thugs. In examining war memory, scholars such as Winter, Vance, Farmer, and Linenthal agree that context for memory illuminates its construction.

The uniqueness of the memorial and the ceremony at the Abbaye has created a place to remember all

156 Canadian soldiers murdered in Normandy. The memory and the memorial represent the "Good War" fought by volunteers and their sacrifice. During the 2005 study tour, Marc Milner told his students that "if it had been an American story, Spielberg would have already made the movie."⁷¹

Notes

1. Jen Goertzen, Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation 2001, Study Tour Journal, 5 June 2001. The author has participated in Canadian Battlefields Foundation (CBF) study tours and has conducted field research in the garden of the Abbaye.
2. Howard Margolian, *Conduct Unbecoming: The Story of the Murder of Canadian Prisoners of War in Normandy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998). This has become the standard figure for the number of Canadian prisoners of war murdered by the Germans in Normandy.
3. Ian J. Campbell, *Murder at the Abbaye: The Story of Twenty Canadian Soldiers Murdered at the Abbaye d'Ardenne* (Ottawa: Golden Dog Press, 1996), pp.122-125, 144.
4. Kirk Savage, "History, Memory, and Monuments: An Overview of the Scholarly Literature on Commemoration,"

2006. <<http://www.nps.gov/history/history/ressedu/savage.htm>> (accessed 10 October 2006).
5. Campbell, *Murder*, pp.106-7.
6. International Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (signed at Geneva, 23 June 1929).
7. Campbell, *Murder*, p.110.
8. *Ibid.*, pp.124-5.
9. Ralph Allen, "Grim Stories of Murder of Unarmed Canadians Told to Aurich Court," *The Globe and Mail*, 13 December 1945, p.1
10. Ralph Allen, "Canadian Troops Shot With Their Hands Up, Military Court Told," *The Globe and Mail*, 12 December 1945, p.1
11. Ross Munro, "He Saw Prisoners Shot: Canadian Wounded by SS," *The Maple Leaf – UK Edition*, 13 December 1945, p.1.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Patrick Brode, *Casual Slaughter and Accidental Judgments: Canadian War Crimes Prosecutions, 1944-1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp.8-9. The account of the murders at the Chateau d'Audrieu was found in Brode's work.
14. Margolian, *Conduct Unbecoming*, p.144.
15. Stephen Hart, "Indoctrinated Nazi Teenaged Warriors: The Fanaticism of the 12th SS Panzer Division *Hitlerjugend* in Normandy, 1944," in Matthew Hughes and Gaynor Johnson, eds., *Fanaticism and Conflict in the Modern Age* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), p.88.
16. Terry Copp, *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p.71. Copp refers to this in *Fields of Fire* as well as in his and Mike Bechthold's *The Canadian Battlefields in Normandy: A Visitor's Guide* (Waterloo: LCMSDS, 2004).
17. In the introduction to *Conduct Unbecoming*, Margolian expresses frustration, a sense that justice had not been served. (p.x); see also Chris Madsen, *Another Kind of Justice: Canadian Military Law from Confederation to Somalia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), pp.90-92; P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Chris M.V. Madsen, *Kurt Meyer on Trial: A Documentary Record* (Kingston, ON: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2007), pp.13-18.
18. Brode, *Casual Slaughter*, p.21.
19. Karen Priestman, "The Kurt Meyer case: the press and the Canadian public's response to Canada's first war crimes trial," (unpublished major research paper, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2003), pp.16, 33.
20. Kurt Meyer, *Grenadiers : the story of Waffen SS General Kurt "Panzer" Meyer* (Winnipeg: J.J. Fedorowicz, 1994 1957)).
21. Campbell, *Murder*, p.172.
22. *Ibid.*, p.177.
23. Marc Milner, e-mail to author, March 2006.
24. Gerry Woodman, e-mails to author, 30 April 30-8 May 2007.
25. Gerry Woodman, e-mail to author, 2 May 2007.
26. See author's "Rearranged Snowdrops: The Construction of Memory of Executed Canadian Prisoners of War in Normandy, June 1944" (unpublished major research paper, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2009), appendix A.
27. Jacques Vico, interview by author, 11 April 2007.
28. Ian J. Campbell, telephone interview by author, 25 April 2007.
29. Campbell, *Murder*, p.174.
30. Ian J. Campbell, telephone interview by author, 25 April 2007.
31. Campbell, *Murder*, p.176.
32. Campbell, *Murder*, p.174.
33. According to Jacques Vico.
34. Campbell, *Murder*, p.174.
35. *Ibid.*, p.176.
36. Ian J. Campbell, e-mail to author, August 2007.
37. Jacques Vico, interview by author, 11 April 2007.
38. Céline Garbay, vice-president, Canadian Battlefields Foundation, France, interview, March 2006.
39. Jacques Vico, speech in homage to Canadian soldiers, Abbaye d'Ardenne, 7 June 2000, trans. Kathryn Gulizi.
40. Jacques Vico, speech in homage to Canadian soldiers, Abbaye d'Ardenne, 7 June 2003.
41. Garbay interview.
42. *Ibid.*
43. The CBF was originally the Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation (CBNF).
44. Canadian Battlefields Foundation, "Who Are We?," <www.canadianbattlefieldsfoundation.ca/foundation/who_are_we.htm>
45. *Ibid.*
46. Garbay interview.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Canadian Battlefields Foundation, "Who Are We?"
49. Garbay interview.
50. This information comes from the author's personal experience as a CBF student as well as journals of the 2001 tour and accounts that appeared in *Canadian Military History*.
51. The review of over 40 student journals from various CBF tours, as well as over a dozen interviews with students and testimonials in *Canadian Military History*, reveals that the majority of students felt that the ceremony at the Abbaye was the most moving event of the tour. Accounts of students' experiences there inevitably include mention of deep sadness, intensity, and anger. Students who had previously known what happened, and those who just learned of it are all very emotional.
52. Mike Bechthold, e-mail to author, April 2006.
53. Andrew Godefroy, "The Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation, 1997," *Canadian Military History* 6, no. 2 (Autumn 1997), p.126.
54. Robb Furlong, interview by author, March 2006. Furlong was on the 1997 tour.
55. Marc Milner, e-mail to author, March 2006.
56. Marie-Ann Ramson, "The 1996 Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation Study Tour," *Canadian Military History* 5, no. 2 (Autumn 1996), p.115. These summaries include excerpts from students' journals.
57. Brandey Barton, interview by author, March 2006.
58. Rod Holloway, Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation 2001 Study Tour Journal, 7 June 2001.
59. Jen Goertzen, Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation 2001 Study Tour Journal, 5 June 2001.
60. "High Diction" refers to the language of romanticism and progress of the 19th century. In *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), Paul Fussell argues that this language was no longer sufficient to describe and remember the experience of war. Jay Winter, in *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), and Jonathan Vance, in *Death So Noble*, demonstrates that Europeans and Canadians returned to these forms to cope with their grief and the experience of total war.
61. Campbell, *Murder*, pp.4-5.
62. "Sherbrookes" was the common term for the regiment's men.
63. Campbell, *Murder*, pp.16-17.
64. *Ibid.*, pp.31-2.
65. Jacques Vico, interview by author, 11 April 2007.
66. See author's "Snowdrops," appendix D for additional photographs of the Abbaye and the garden and the changes over the years.
67. These observations are from the author's field research in April 2007.
68. Major-General Clive Addy, president, Canadian Battlefields Foundation, interview by author, 22 February 2007.
69. Institut mémoires de l'Édition contemporaine, <www.imec-archives.com/ardenne> and <senat.fr/rap/r01-378/r01-37828.html>
70. Lackenbauer and Madsen, eds., *Kurt Meyer on Trial*.
71. Marc Milner, commentary during CBF Study Tour, 5 June 2005.

Vanessa McMackin completed her Master of Arts in History at Wilfrid Laurier University in 2007. This article is a result of her studies there and stems from her 2005 study tour with Canadian Battlefields Foundation. After witnessing the raw emotions of fellow students on her tour, she decided to study the relationship of war and memory and its impact on national narrative and how it has shaped the historiography of the Second World War. Currently she works with graduate students as a staff member of WLU's Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.