

Memories of Nijmegen 2005 go far beyond the blisters

By Kristina Davis

Sometimes the most poignant moments come from unexpected places.

One night, during Nijmegen 2005, Colonel (Ret) Murray Johnston, the former colonel commandant of the Electrical Mechanical Engineering Branch, met a local Dutchman.

His name, though, did not sound Dutch. In fact, it sounded Canadian and it was. Named for the Canadian soldier, who died in his families' front yard during the Second World War, Paul Gabriel Caron's relatives still looked after the gravesite of his namesake.

Moments like that marked Nijmegen 2005—a journey that went far beyond the blisters to the very hearts of the marchers. In all, 220 CF members participated in the 89th Nijmegen Marches, a strenuous 160-kilometre military march, which ran from July 19 to July 22.

Col Johnston, originally from Winnipeg, now calls Ottawa home. At 72, he was not even the oldest Canadian marcher. While that distinction went to 76-year-old Chief Warrant Officer (Ret) Jack de Bruijne the Royal Canadian Legion representative, Col Johnston says he hoped he could still offer CF members inspiration.

"The first challenge," he says with a laugh, "is getting from one rest stop to the other." The second, though, came way

before he ever set foot in the Netherlands: the training.

Also marching for the fifth time was CWO de Bruijne. And why? He says it was a unique opportunity to work with younger military personnel. Plus, he adds, "There was no hockey."

As for the welcome they received, he says it was enthusiastic. "They were elated to see Canadians marching through cities and towns." And the crowds lining the route were impressive. At one point, he says the Canadian teams literally had to push themselves through the throngs of people. "With that energy, you don't have to walk," he says. "It propels you through."

Lieutenant-Commander Michel Audy is a Reservist at HMCS *Montcalm* in Québec City. A member of a joint Navy Reserve and Chief of the Maritime Staff Team, they never had the opportunity to march together. And, in fact, only met each other for the first time on the plane. The team soon gelled and on the second day, had shaved half an hour off their time.

En route to the Netherlands, the Canadian contingent visited the Canadian National Vimy Memorial Park in France, a visit sponsored by the Royal Canadian Legion. LCdr Audy says Vimy is eerily quiet and calm, a marked contrast to the death and devastation once wreaked there.

Of the crowds in the streets, he also says Canadians receive a special welcome

and sometimes some much needed sustenance. One onlooker even pressed a glass of beer into his hand.

Master Corporal Angeline Mooney is the chief clerk or "scribe" on HMCS *Victoria*. Despite 19 years in the Air Force, she had never had the opportunity to do Nijmegen. So 2005 she decided, in the Year of the Veteran and the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, would be her year.

During the contingent's visit to the Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek, she had a special task. Armed with a VE Day nickel, she planned to lay it on a Canadian grave. Initially, she chose any fallen soldier, but then learned that a colleague's great uncle was buried there. It would be his grave that she searched for—among the many—to bring a piece of thanks and Canada to the young man who lost his life at 19.



PHOTOS: MCPL/CPLC ROBERT BOTTRILL



CF personnel from the Navy Reserve and Chief of the Maritime Staff's Nijmegen 2005 team cross the Waalbrug Bridge on the first day of the four-day marching event being held in Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Des membres de la Réserve navale de FC et du bureau du chef d'état-major des Forces maritimes traversent le pont de Waalburg au cours de la première des quatre journées qu'a duré la Marche de Nijmegen 2005, aux Pays-Bas.

CWO (Ret) Jack de Bruijne, the Royal Canadian Legion representative (left), introduces himself to the Colour Party consisting of fellow Legion members at a memorial service at the Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek, the Netherlands.

Au cours du service commémoratif tenu au Cimetière de guerre canadien de Groesbeek, aux Pays-Bas, l'Adjuc (ret) Jack de Bruijne, représentant de la Légion royale canadienne (à gauche), se présente à la garde du drapeau des membres de la Légion.

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