

Premier Gordon Campbell
Juno Beach Centre Announcement
May 9, 2003

Check Against Delivery

On the front lawn of the legislature in Victoria, there's a cenotaph that stands in honour of the Canadians that we have lost to war.

Thousands of people walk by it every day, passing by the wreaths placed around its base and the commemorative plaques above them.

And they pass by the statue of a single soldier who stands on top of the cenotaph, a silent reminder that armies are made up of individuals – of citizens who are committed to a common good and to the future, single men and single women with their own fears, and ideals and dreams.

Young men like Jimmie Wright, the son of a market owner in Rossland British Columbia who enlisted with the military in at the age of 17 and died in the war one month before his 21st birthday.

On June 6, 1944, 15,000 young Canadians like Jimmie Wright stormed Juno Beach as part of the Allied D-Day landing in Normandy.

I don't know the name of the first Canadian soldier that stepped into the water, and mud and terror at Juno Beach; and I don't know the name of last.

But I do know that each and every one of them stepped forward with uncommon courage into a battle that helped change the course of history and bring about victory in Europe.

We asked them to offer up their lives in our defence, and when the war ended all they asked of us was that we remember what they fought against and, more importantly, what they fought for.

59 years after Normandy, their duty is long done...but our duty endures.

It is our responsibility to remember what happened through all the years of the war, through the courage-filled chaos of Normandy, through the cities and towns of Europe and the Pacific, where Canadians stood in defence of freedom and in pursuit of peace.

That's why today, on behalf of every British Columbian, I am proud to announce that the province of B.C. is donating \$1 million to help complete the Juno Beach Centre in France.

It is the strength of individual citizens committed to our values, committed to democracy and committed to others that sets Canada apart, and that is something we all should cherish.

My sincere thanks to the Juno Beach Centre Association for the opportunity to join them in establishing this facility to honour all the Canadians who fought not just at Juno Beach, but throughout Europe and in Asia and the Pacific in World War II.

Whether by visiting the centre in person or via a virtual museum on the Internet, people the world over will be able to explore a powerful and lasting reminder of courage and the story of how a nation of just 11 million people sent more than one million to take up arms in defence of freedom and democracy.

Among them were 90,000 British Columbian young men and women from communities large and small across this great province.

They fought throughout the war with Canadian regiments such as the Seaforth Highlanders; the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry; the Royal Westminster Regiment; the B.C. Dragoons; and the B.C. Regiment. Many joined the Canadian Scottish from Vancouver Island and the 6th Company Canadian Engineers from North Vancouver, both B.C.-based regiments that participated in the Juno Beach landing on D-Day.

Children, brothers and neighbours, they travelled half way around the world to defend all that we stood for then and still hold precious today.

We make this donation in part because we can, thanks to the freedom they fought for.

We make this donation because the people of British Columbia would want us to, out of an abiding respect that they hold for our veterans.

But, perhaps more than anything, we make this donation because we must – because we must not forget and we must never allow the world to forget what those one million Canadians did.

We must preserve the legacy of their sacrifice – a lesson that must never be unlearned.

If we don't fulfill this responsibility, we risk dishonouring the memory of those who stepped into the cold water at Juno Beach and never returned, and all those who marched onward into the towns and cities of Western Europe bringing freedom and victory.

In the midst of the worst that humanity can do, Canadians carried the best of what humanity can be.

We are proud to join Canadians across the country in supporting the Juno Beach Centre, to honour those one million Canadians who gave us all the gift of our future. Our gift to them is to remember the past. Thank you very much.