

# WAR AND REMEMBRANCE

The sacrifice and celebration of last century's definitive conflicts continue to reverberate in Canada's close relations with Europe today.

Aboard the ships headed for the Normandy coast that night, rough waters and anticipation of a beach landing under heavy artillery fire churned stomachs and minds.

No soldier among the 15,000 troops in the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division could miss the enormity of the hour. They belonged to the largest amphibious invasion in military history, with more than 5,000 vessels approaching the dawn of D-Day to reclaim Europe from Nazi Germany.

"You felt you could almost jump from one ship to another, they were so close," recounts Bruce Evans, 81, a farm boy from Woodbridge, Ontario, and an artillery

specialist with the 1st Hussars Armoured Regiment at the start of the campaign on June 6, 1944, known as "Operation Overlord."

Evans, who to this day carries shrapnel in his shoulder from a German mortar blast that morning on Juno Beach, recovered in time to join subsequent European battles where Canada played an instrumental role, especially in the Netherlands.

It's been a longer healing process for Phil Neis, 82. Among the first wave to hit the beach, he for many years could not speak even to his children about the carnage that took the lives of 359 Canadians that day, including a number of Winnipeg Rifles for whom his unit had provided artillery support, who were captured and summarily executed.

"It's something that you didn't want to remember, although you couldn't get it out of your mind," says Neis, a 12th Field Regiment veteran from Fort Saskatchewan outside of Edmonton. At the urging of his family, he returned to Normandy in 2000, "something I should have done years before."

Sacrifice and celebration, personal loss and national victory are the opposing yet fused themes attending the conclusion of last century's definitive conflict, one that continues to reverberate in Canada's close relations with Europe today.

The 60th anniversary of the D-Day landings and the Battle of Normandy, marked by major commemorations in France, Canada and around the world, will be followed by ceremonies noting such Second World War milestones as the Italian campaign and the liberation of the Netherlands.

Many among the one million enlisted Canadians played critical roles in all of these events. A deeply ingrained sense of gratitude thus still colours how Canada is seen in France, Belgium, Britain and particularly the

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D-Day landing: No soldier could miss the enormity of the hour.



Corporal Bruce Evans in December 1944, at age 21.

