

# Canadian Battlefields Tour takes students beyond history textbooks



Photo courtesy of Laura Fyfe

At King's we take pride in the experiential learning opportunities made available to students and faculty. For Laura Fyfe '12, King's graduate in History and Bio-Archaeological Anthropology, one of her most stimulating historical lessons took place outside of the classroom and beyond her history textbooks. Last May, she was one of 12 Canadian students selected to participate in the Canadian Battlefields Tour (along with King's students Tara McDonnell-Gordon and Shelsie Tunks). We asked Fyfe to share her experience as she toured across the Canadian battlefields in Europe and learned about the role Canadians played in the World Wars.

*Take whatever history book you have and close it. I'm willing to bet that's a sentiment completely alien to most history students. I always figured that the more you read, the more you'd know; the more you study the more you'd understand. Of all the lessons I thought I could possibly learn on my tour with the Canadian Battlefields Foundation, what ended up being the most important to me was that no matter how much text you devour, the moment you step into rural France and see that very first war cemetery, all of that information in your head is replaced by a completely new understanding of remembrance.*

*When we study the wars in our classrooms, we almost treat the past as a different country, separated from us by the span of time. What I grew to realize, during our two-week tour was that in France, the wars are experienced daily. Acts of remembrance are ongoing, and whereas we often think of the wars as something to solemnly remember in November, France and her people bear witness every single day.*

*Where we spent our time, you couldn't drive for ten minutes without seeing a cross in the distance, denoting a commonwealth war cemetery. Every single day of the tour the numbers in our books became real. We are almost desensitized to the phrase "millions of war dead," but in France, those numbers take on a whole new significance. Walking through the rows of stones, reading of men on average not much older than we are, (and in many cases, much younger) the shock does not lessen. Each successive stone in each successive cemetery brings the reality closer and closer to home.*

*The places I was fortunate to see and to spend time in filled me with a sense of awe and gratitude that I doubt will ever fade. Each and every one of us on that trip took away something different and special. For some it was the thrill of being on the fields where these historic battles were fought. For others it was watching the text come to life and surround them. For me, it was not visual confirmation of what I had learned, but the realization that there were things I would never understand about the war. The experiences on the tour showed me a whole new way of remembrance, and not a day will go by when I will not be grateful for one of the most personally and intellectually enlightening experiences of my life.*

Now in its 19<sup>th</sup> year, King's history professor [Graham Broad](#) and Western professor Andrew Iarocci are leading a group of students to this year's Canadian Battlefields Foundation Study Tour from May 26 – June 9, 2013. The group will be making stops at Ypres, the Somme, Vimy Ridge, Dieppe, the Normandy battlefields, and participate in ceremonies marking the anniversary of D-Day.

To learn more about the Canadian Battlefields Foundation Study Tour, please visit <http://www.cbf-fccb.ca/>