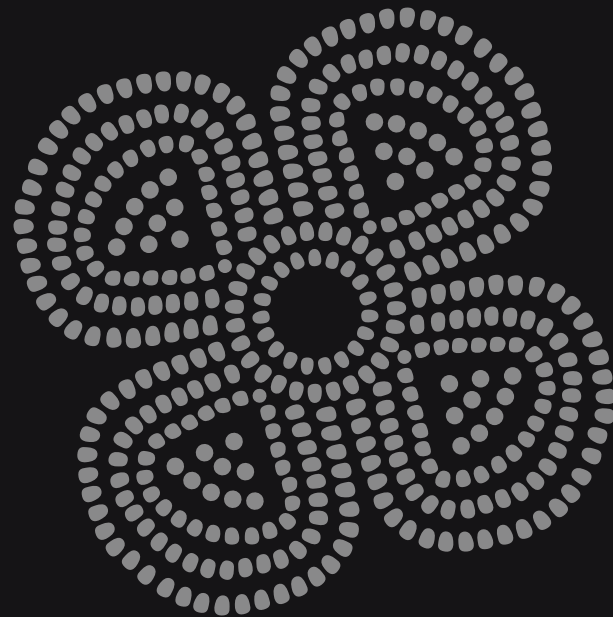
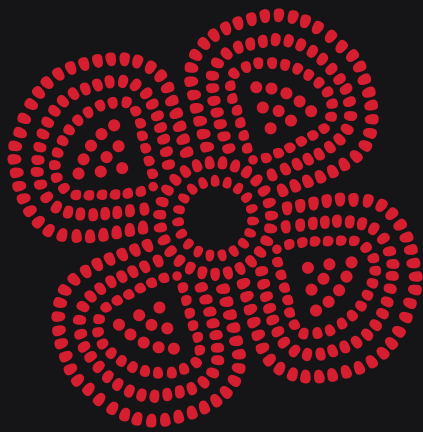


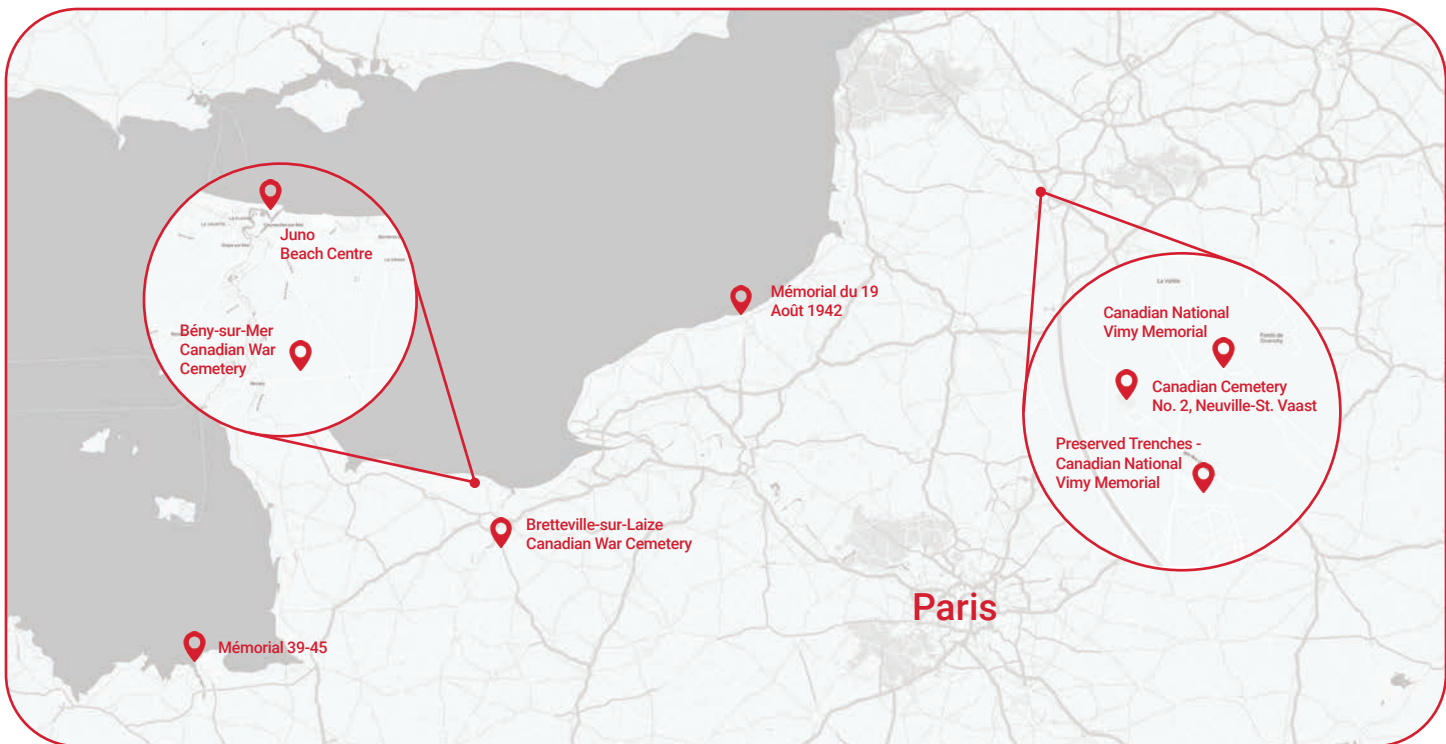


# Beyond the Pages of History:

Red River Métis Youth Honour Veterans in Normandy



Prepared by Sage Research & Consulting



**It's been 80 years since the Canadian troops fought on Juno Beach during WWII and to many Canadians, the conflict remains merely a part of history. For the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) however, commemoration means more than simply acknowledging the past.**

In continuing with their unwavering commitment to honour veterans and uphold commemoration, the milestone anniversary for Juno Beach provided an opportunity for the MMF to engage beyond the pages of history. The MMF's Red River Métis Veteran's Department (RRMVD) organized and led a delegation to travel to France to attend the 80th Anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy Ceremony in June 2024. In addition to attending the ceremony, the delegation visited important sites across Normandy, such as Canadian WWI and WWII Cemeteries, Vimy Ridge, Dieppe, and St. Malo. The delegation spent time at monuments, learned about significant WWI and WWII battles, and commemorated Red River Métis veterans, including those who returned home and those who are buried in foreign grounds.

For this important anniversary, the RRMVD brought together a delegation that fostered a dynamic learning and mentorship experience, by inviting Métis Veterans Legacy Program (MVLV) Commissioners and a delegation of Red River Métis youth on the commemorative pilgrimage abroad. The youth were encouraged to engage deeply with both the educational sites and materials, and to learn from delegation members, including veterans like MMF Ministers Shawn Nault and Vice-President Andrew Carrier, and MVLV Commissioners Jack Park,

Harry Hope, Elder Jimmy Durocher, and Alex Maurice. Other delegates shared stories from their ancestors' military experiences or their own experiences in the Canadian Armed Forces or in a Cadet Program. This multi-generational delegation offered rich learning opportunities and valuable perspectives for commemorating Red River Métis veterans.

The selection process for the youth delegates varied by Region, with nearly every Region being represented by the nine youth who were able to attend, including Beyond Borders. This journey overseas was an opportunity for the youth to learn, develop leadership skills, experience personal growth, and gain experiential knowledge to bring back home to share with their family, friends, and community—all to ensure the legacy of Red River Métis veterans is never forgotten. To bring these experiences and lessons back home, the youth were required to develop a reflection project about their journey to present back either to their Local, Region, their classmates, or members of their family and community. This assignment aligned with the words MVLV Elder Jimmy Durocher shared during the trip: "It's really important that when you go back, you talk to your siblings, you talk to your friends and try and get them involved in remembering these people that gave their lives."

# Meet the Red River Métis Youth Delegation

for the 80th Anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy



**Sage Hartmann**



**Lydia Gork**



**Tori Holstrom**



**Sydney Flemming**



**Emma McKay-Sharpe**



**Caiden Trupp**



**Danielle Kraichy**



**Owen Gillespie**



**Alexina Nault**



Red River Métis Youth delegation enjoying the day with MVLP Commissioners and MMF Veterans Working Group at the Kitchen Table Talk day.



**Prior to leaving Winnipeg, the youth gathered to spend the day with the MVLP Commissioners and the MMF Veterans Working Group to take part in the *Kitchen Table Talk* day, which had been organized by the RRMVD.**

This event was intended to prepare the youth delegation for their journey to France. A historical overview of WWI and WWII was provided, as well as several presentations, including one from Colonel David Grebstad—one of the highest-ranking Red River Métis active service members in Canada—and Sergeant Brent Thompson, from the Royal Canadian Air Force 17 Wing in Winnipeg. Not only was this day an opportunity for the group to familiarize themselves with the history of the places they would be visiting, but it was also a chance for the youth to ask questions, meet each other, and begin building relationships with members of the delegation before leaving.

Sessions such as the *Kitchen Table Talk* day hosted by the RRMVD are important, however, Sierra Hill, Project Coordinator for the RRMVD, also acknowledged that many people, including youth, learn best through place-based learning. Bringing the youth delegation to France was intended to acknowledge and support different learning styles by creating an opportunity for the youth to engage with history and learn about Red River Métis participation in the wars directly in the places where the conflicts occurred. Winnipeg Region delegate Lydia Gork voiced that being on the soil where the battles took place provided her with perspective for the historical events that she could not otherwise get from a history class or documentary.



It really gives you a sense of the context, and places you a lot deeper. You can empathize a lot better with the experience of those veterans. It really makes it a reality to not just read about it in a book but to actually see and feel those trenches, the grass, the craters from bomb attacks. It makes it a lot more real.”

— Lydia Gork



MVLP Commissioner Harry Hope pays his respects at the Canadian War Cemetery No. 2.



Bény-sur-Mer Cemetery where the grounds are immaculately maintained.

## Honouring Fallen Soldiers at Canadian War Cemeteries

Throughout the weeklong trip across Normandy, the delegation made stops at three Canadian war cemeteries including the Canadian Cemetery No. 2, Bény-sur-Mer, and Bretteville-sur-Laize Cemeteries. The cemeteries were lined with sprawling maple trees—a warm reminder of home. Each headstone was surrounded by pristine flower beds, which were brightly in bloom during the delegation’s visit.

The first cemetery that the group visited was the Canadian Cemetery No. 2 at the Canadian National Vimy Ridge Memorial site. Established by Canadian Corps on April 9, 1917, the cemetery is the resting place of soldiers who died in combat at the Battle of Vimy Ridge, those who succumbed to their injuries thereafter, and those who were retrieved from nearby battlegrounds. The youth explored the cemetery together, reading the names on the headstones, reflecting on their surroundings and paying their respects to the fallen soldiers.

In the following days, the delegation visited the Bretteville-sur-Laize Cemetery and the Bény-Sur-Mer Cemetery, both of which commemorate fallen soldiers from D-Day and the Battle of Falaise. The RRMVD led two ceremonies in these cemeteries and asked the youth to contribute in various ways,

including reading the *Commitment to Remember*. The first ceremony honoured Lance Corporal John Henry Genaille in the at Bretteville-sur-Laize Cemetery, and the second ceremony honoured Private Charles Joseph Chartrand at Bény-sur-Mer Cemetery. At the Bény-Sur-Mer Cemetery ceremony, MVLP Elder Jimmy Durocher opened the ceremony with a prayer in Michif and MVLP Commissioner Chair, Jack Park shared a few words about the life of Private Charles Chartrand, which demonstrated the importance of honouring veterans beyond their roles in service, but also as beloved community members. For many of the youth, the ceremonies evoked an unexpected sense of emotion. “When we were at the cemetery a few days ago, I cried,” said Infinity Women’s Secretariat delegate Alexina Nault. “That’s a pretty rare thing for me. I don’t cry a lot,” she added.



MVLP Commissioners [L to R: Jack Park, Elder Jimmy Durocher, Harry Hope, and Alex Maurice] and MMF Minister Shawn Nault salute at Private Charles Joseph Chartrand's graveside at Bény-sur-Mer Cemetery, accompanied by ceremony emcee, MMF Minister Will Goodon.



The youth delegation posing alongside MVLP Commissioners Jack Park, Harry Hope, Alex Maurice, and Elder Jimmy Durocher, as well as Minister Shawn Nault and Vice-President Andrew Carrier. The group is joined by other Red River Métis youth: Hunter Goodon and RRMVD staff, Erin Riccardo and Sierra Hill.

Alexina also reflected on the emotions she felt reading the headstones, many of which are engraved with messages from soldiers' families. "On the gravestones its either the generic 'Thy be with God' or 'Rest in Peace,' but some of them have ones that were chosen by the families," she recalled. "Whenever we go see them, I take time to find the ones that have ones that were made by the families and go and read them... You read it and you can feel the grief of the families."

Following their visit to the three cemeteries, many of the youth reflected on how well maintained they were. MVLP Elder Jimmy Durocher encouraged the youth to think about the cemeteries back home and how they might care for them better. "The gravesites in Manitoba really need some work compared to the ones that we've seen here," said youth delegate Sydney Flemming.

"The number one thing that veterans want is to be remembered for what their sacrifices were, beyond any money, benefits, or land," said Lydia Gork. "To see the kinds of words and languages and landmarking symbols to maintain that memory over time is pretty inspiring for what we have the capacity to do back home in Manitoba," she added. Southwest delegate Emma McKay-Sharpe echoed Sydney and Lydia's sentiments and acknowledged that visiting graves sites is a way to show respect. "We need to put more value into our veterans," she said. "We should not forget."



Youth delegate Danielle Kriachy reads a poem at a ceremony honoring Red River Métis Private Charles Joseph Chartrand.



Youth delegates Lydia Gork (Former Air Cadet) and Alexina Nault (Canadian Armed Forces) pose for a photo following ceremony with Veterans, including MVLP Commissioners, Minister Shawn Nault and Vice-President Andrew Carrier.



MVLP Elder Jimmy Durocher addressing the group about Vimy Ridge prior to entering the memorial site.



Red River Métis youth delegates Danielle Kraichy, Tori Holstrom, Sydney Flemming, Emma McKay-Sharpe and Sage Hartmann viewing the ceremony alongside Minister Andrew Carrier.



The Canadian National Vimy Memorial towers into the sky in commemoration of Canadian soldiers who lost their life during WWI in France.

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*Veteran delegation members standing in front of the Vimy Ridge Memorial.  
[L to R: MVLP Commission Chair Jack Park, MMF VP Andrew Carrier, MVLP Commissioners  
Elder Jimmy Durocher, Alex Maurice and Harry Hope, and MMF Minister Shawn Nault]*

## On the Ground at Vimy Ridge

**In addition to cemeteries, the delegation also visited important commemorative sites. The Canadian National Vimy Memorial, which commemorates the Battle of Vimy Ridge during WWI, was the first memorial site visited.**

The delegation walked up in awe of the commemorative monument, which impressively reaches 360 ft into the skies from the vast and open terrain below. The monument is located on the Vimy Ridge battlegrounds which are enclosed in the 250-acre park maintained by Veterans Affairs Canada. The Battle of Vimy Ridge gave Canada international recognition and is a source of pride for Canadians, as it was the Canadian forces that captured the ridge after failed attempts by the British and French.

Many Red River Métis veterans fought in the Battle of Vimy Ridge and some delegation members were able to locate the names of their ancestors on the monument. After exploring the site, the delegation was taken on a tour of the trench system. The tour was intended to provide the youth with an overview of WWI warfare which was largely considered a trench

war, characterized by artillery, machine guns, and chemical weapons, such as mustard gas.

For Beyond Borders youth delegate Sage Hartmann, this was her second time at Vimy. She had previously visited the grounds with her family when she was 14. She expressed that when she was younger, she wasn't able to comprehend the severity of the events or appreciate the history of where she was visiting. "Me and my sister always talked about how we wished that we could return to those sites because at the time, we were really too young to understand or comprehend what we were looking at and experiencing," she said. "I've had an interesting comparative that now I feel like I can appreciate the information that is being presented in front of me more than I did when I was grade 9."



*Walking through the preserved WWI trenches at Vimy Ridge.*



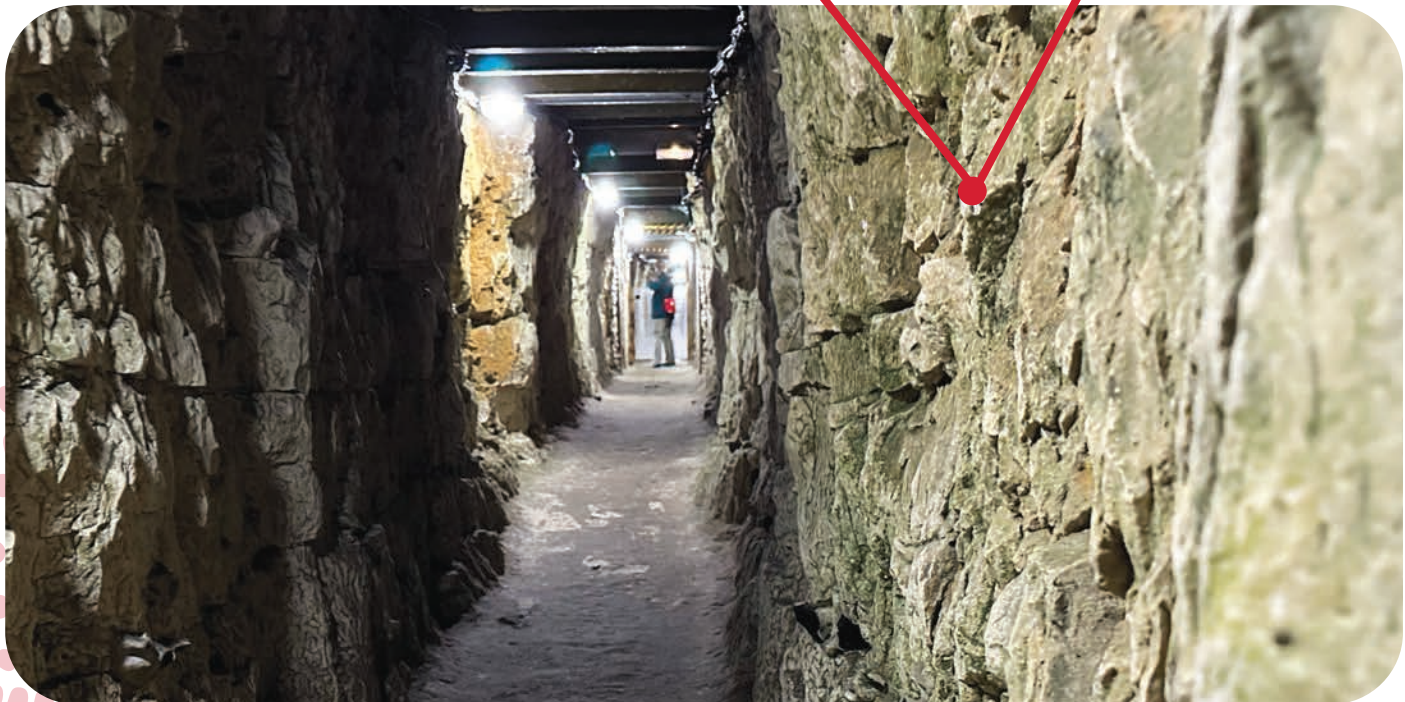
*Preserved trenches from WWI Vimy Ridge Battle*





*WWI craters still visible on the Vimy Ridge grounds.*

*Closeup of the tunnel walls at Vimy Ridge that have engravings left by soldiers during wartime.*



*Preserved WWI tunnels underground at Vimy Ridge.*



*The delegation views a documentary at museum Mémorial du 19 août 1942 in Dieppe.*



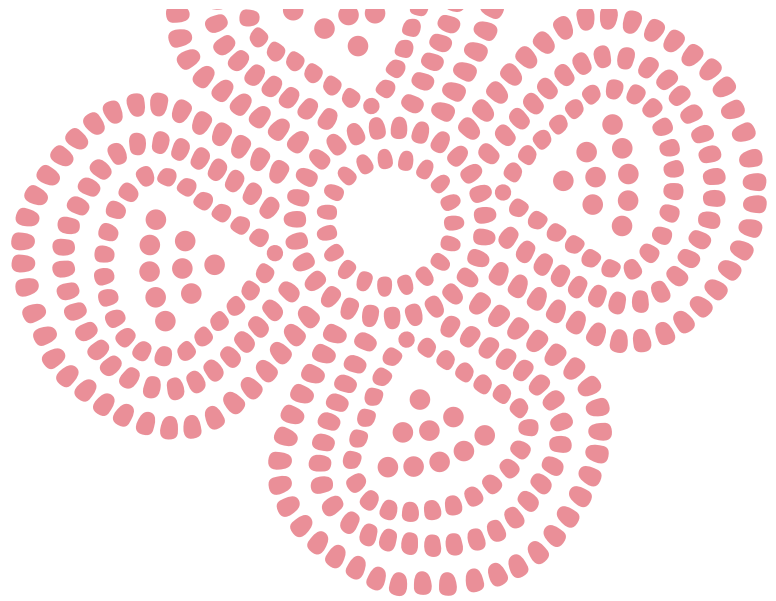
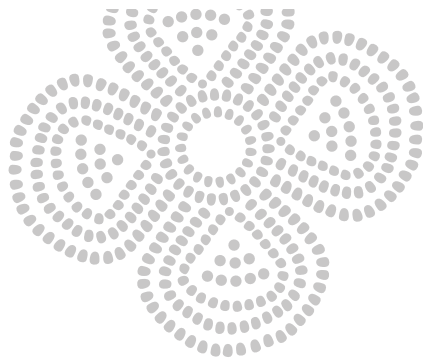
*The Métis flag hangs proudly alongside other flags at the museum Mémorial du 19 août 1942 to commemorate contributions made by soldiers who fought at Dieppe.*

## Experiencing Dieppe's Commemoration

Following their visit to Vimy, the delegation stopped at Mémorial du 19 août 1942, a museum that commemorates the Canadian efforts during the WWII Dieppe Raid. The museum, which opened its doors in 2002, is entirely run by volunteers and was created by the community of Dieppe to honour Canadians who suffered significant losses during the raid. The delegation was welcomed by museum President Martine Pietrois who provided a tour and a viewing of a short documentary describing the invasion from a French perspective. The museum includes historical documents, uniforms, photos, and videos that bring the Dieppe Raid of August 19, 1942, into perspective.

The visit to the museum allowed the delegation to see the dedication of the community of Dieppe to honour Canada's losses and sacrifices. Northwest Region youth delegate Sydney Flemming described her appreciation for the opportunity to connect with the elders and veterans in the delegation about what she heard and saw at the museum. "It's really great to get those perspectives," she said. "You can come to the museum here and you can read or see the pictures,

or see the objects," she added. "But now being able to go back on the bus and being able to talk to the elders about that, or say hey what does that mean, or when you were in the war, how did that affect you?" Having the youth travel with the older generations, including veterans and elders, provided a valuable opportunity for the youth to process and build upon their experiences.



## Gaining Perspective at Fort de la Cité d'Alet

At their next stop in St. Malo, the delegation made their way to Fort de la Cité d'Alet, a site German forces occupied and used as a base during WWII. Structures on the grounds date back to the Roman period, with some remains still standing on the site, however German forces heavily fortified it from 1941 onwards as part of Hitler's Atlantic Wall to protect their position. During German occupation, the fort was mobilized for defense and shelter until it was eventually liberated by American troops in 1944. To commemorate this past, part of the fort still stands at the site as a museum.

The tour of Fort de la Cité d'Alet was eye opening for many of the youth delegation members as they could see the impact of the shelling to the pillboxes and understand the vantage point the Germans had from the top of Fort de la Cité d'Alet. Pillboxes were structures that protected gunners from enemy attacks, with openings they could shoot from without being exposed. "A lot of the terminology we've been throwing around like pillboxes, mortar, artillery, they're just words until you actually see and understand", said Alexina Nault.

Emma McKay-Sharpe and Owen Gillespie shared similar perspectives. "When I learned about it in high school, it didn't affect me as much," said Emma. "But now that I'm actually here exploring the sites, I actually feel its effect." Similarly, Owen comments, "It's been upsetting to hear what actually happened. It's not what I imagined it would be... It's very different."



A lot of the terminology we've been throwing around like pillboxes, mortar, artillery, they're just words until you actually see and understand."

– Alexina Nault



**MEMORIAL 39-45**

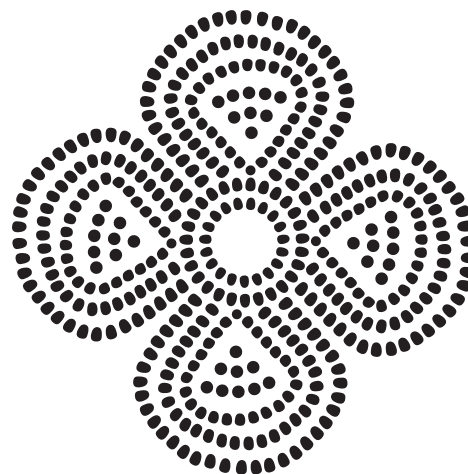
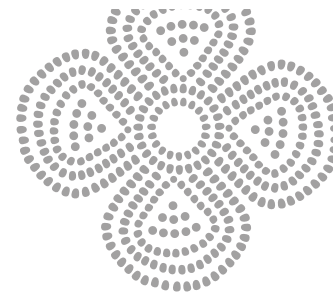
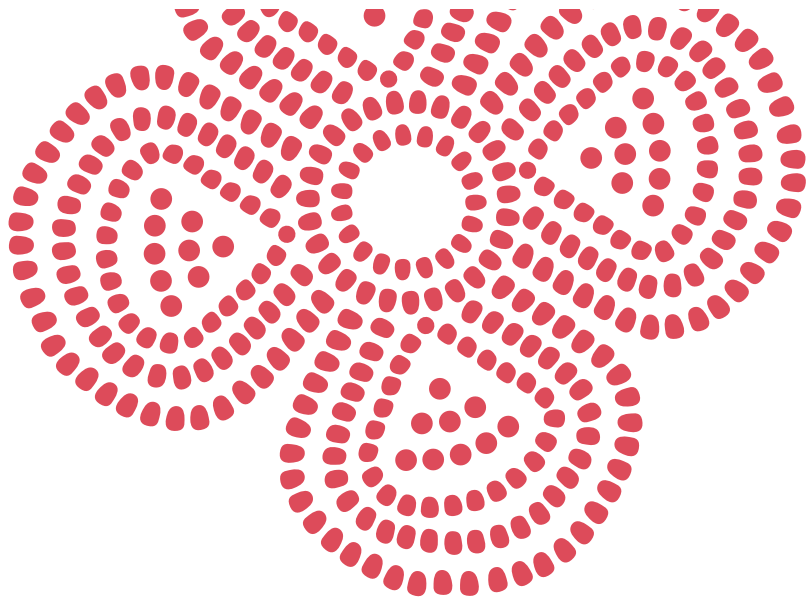
*Memorial 39-45 at Fort de la Cité, near St. Malo.*



*Close up of the pillbox at Memorial 39-45 showing damage from enemy artillery.*

*Pillbox at Fort de la Cité d'Alet with damage from enemy artillery.*





## Representing Red River Métis at the Canadian National Ceremony

The delegation's tour concluded with an engaging ceremony at the Juno Beach Centre for the celebration of the 80th anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy. The D-Day invasion was an attack planned by the Allies to seize three towns along the shores of Normandy. Canadian, British, French and American forces worked collaboratively on June 6, 1944, to advance over 11 kilometers onto the shores, landing by ship, aircraft, or parachute. More than 14,000 Canadian soldiers took part in the D-Day invasion, many of whom were Red River Métis men. This successful, yet costly operation, was a turning point in WWII, and would lead to the eventual liberation of Europe from German occupation.

The 80th anniversary of D-Day Canadian National Ceremony included representation from the Allied Forces who participated in the invasion through speeches made by Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada; William, Prince of Wales; and, Gabriel Attal, Prime Minister of France. The speeches were accompanied by entertainment, including an air show and live music. The delegation was proud to hear

Red River Métis artist, Morgan Grace, play familiar fiddle tunes as part of the commemorative entertainment.

Having visited the Juno Beach Centre prior to the ceremony, the delegation had a greater sense of the significance and impact of D-Day. For many of the youth, seeing the beach in person put the battle into perspective.

"Until you step on that beach, and you imagine what it was like—it's just another movie," said Alexina Nault in reflection of watching the *Storming Juno* (2010) documentary prior to leaving for France. "I stood there for a good 10-15 minutes looking at the water, imagining them coming out, and imagining the bodies there, and imagining the death and the turmoil," she said.



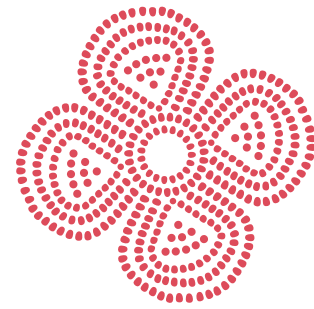
Path leading directly to Juno Beach.



Emma McKay-Sharpe and MVLP Commissioner Harry Hope interact with an exhibit at the Juno Beach Centre.



Delegation enjoying exhibits at the Juno Beach Centre.



Many of the youth expressed that they felt proud to represent the Red River Métis among the crowd of those attending the ceremony on the shores of Juno. They described that wearing their sashes and walking together alongside the delegation instilled a sense of pride in who they are and who they represent as Red River Métis people. Standing together in this pride, to honour the contributions and sacrifices made by Red River Métis veterans, and all other veterans for freedoms back home, was a moment many of them will never forget.

Beyond Borders youth delegate Danielle Kraichy expressed that she does not take her experience at the D-Day anniversary event for granted, recognizing that many generations of Red River Métis people did not have the freedom to express who they were with pride. "I feel like I get to walk into our Métis nationhood, by comparison, with relative welcoming and awareness," she said. "We get to be here wearing our sashes today and have pride. And I haven't been scared once to be who we are."

Sage Hartmann was grateful for the acknowledgement of Indigenous veterans and their sacrifices during the ceremony. "There are people doing work and making change on an international stage. For me, it was all about representation," she said.

The Pas Region delegate Tori Holstrom agreed with Sage and Danielle. "I think it's important that we can see that there were Métis people who fought in the wars," she said. "It's crazy to think that there were soldiers fighting there and that my grandpas were in these places before," she added.

Overall, the youth expressed gratitude for veterans' sacrifices and that they were honoured to represent the Red River Métis at the ceremony. Lydia Gork reflected on their willingness and bravery to fight for their rights and freedoms. "Our community members have been so dedicated to protecting our home," she said. "Our veterans were defending our land and our freedoms and that's something that Métis folks have been doing since before Canada was a nation," she added.



*The Red River Métis Youth delegation on their way to the D-Day Ceremony.*



**I think it's important that we can see that there were Métis people who fought in the wars," she said. "It's crazy to think that there were soldiers fighting there and that my grandpas were in these places before."**

**– Tori Holstrom**



Our veterans were defending our land  
and our freedoms and that's something that  
Métis folks have been doing since before  
Canada was a nation."

— Lydia Gork

*A C-130 Hercules aircraft flies over  
Juno Beach in preparation for the  
D-Day Anniversary Ceremony.*



The Red River Métis youth delegation stand with MMF Minister responsible for Veterans Shawn Nault outside the Juno Beach Centre.

[L to R: Sage Hartmann, Emma McKay-Sharpe, Alexina Nault, Minister Nault, Tori Holstrom, Danielle Kraichy, Sydney Flemming, Owen Gillespie and Caiden Trupp]

## Inspiring Leadership

In addition to learning about the contributions and sacrifices of Red River Métis individuals in the wars, the trip also provided an opportunity for the youth to think deeply about the purpose of commemoration and the role of leadership in ensuring commemoration never ends. It was a unique experience to witness leaders engage in commemoration on an international level, including their own leaders from the Red River Métis National Government and the MVLP Commission.

There were many opportunities for the youth to ask questions and engage in conversations with government leaders, staff, and their peers. "This trip was so much more than a physical gift," reflected Danielle. "It's talking with people around my age, it's talking with people not around my age, it's hearing different opinions, and hearing from people from all different walks of life that are all rooted in one. That's what makes it so valuable."

Upon returning home, the youth expressed they were grateful to have had the opportunity to travel as part of the MMF delegation in commemoration and celebration of the 80th anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy. They expressed that they were excited to share their reflection projects with their communities—recognizing that sharing the stories, experiences, and perspectives from this trip will play an important role in ensuring the sacrifices of veterans are never forgotten and commemoration does not end.

Sierra Hill expressed that the RRMVD hopes to continue to support commemorative efforts, including

international pilgrimages. "We are trying to find ways that we can continue to honour our veterans," she said. "All veterans, but specifically our Métis veterans who didn't always get the recognition that they deserved and continue to deserve."

As a teacher back home in British Columbia, Danielle is looking forward to using her reflection project to educate her colleagues on Red River Métis people's participation in the war. "It's crazy knowing that so many Métis walked in some of these places, and that there is a big culture of Métis veterans and Métis contributions that, when I was in school, wasn't really discussed much," she said. "It's up to the youth and the next generation to make sure the veterans' stories are not forgotten," she added.

Sydney Flemming voiced similar opinions. "I think for the Métis people as a whole, it's important to give them the recognition that your people were there too," she said. "They did their part in the war, and they helped us get where we are today."

## Value of Commemoration Beyond the Pages of History

Throughout the trip, MVLP Commissioner Durocher made heartfelt requests to the youth and all members of the delegation—we *must remember*. He emphasized that we must not forget the time when young Red River Métis people left the comfort of their homes and families to fight for the privileges that we have in Canada today. “All those veterans that are buried here that gave their lives for something that we sometimes take for granted—and that’s our freedom... all they ask for is that we never, ever forget what they have done. They don’t ask for anything else and that is really important.”

According to Commissioner Durocher, even small acts of remembrance, such as saying the names of fallen soldiers aloud, are important. His words were not lost on the youth. Many commented on the weight of his plea and how they personally felt emboldened to take on the responsibility of commemoration. For the youth delegation, seeing the very places veterans served, and the places where fallen soldiers are laid to rest on foreign ground provided them an opportunity to deepen their understandings and gain a better appreciation for veterans’ experiences. This experience expanded their understanding of the role, purpose, and value of commemoration.

Their experience was enriched because they were able to travel with the delegation and learn from veterans, elders, leaders, and community members. Together, the delegation spoke the names of Red River Métis veterans out loud and remembered their contributions, as well as those of all veterans, with pride. The pilgrimage overseas was an opportunity for the delegation to extend commemoration beyond the pages of history—into the lives of youth.

The youth acknowledged that larger acts of commemoration, including commemorative pilgrimages overseas, are not everyday forms of

commemoration. For this reason, the youth were appreciative of the MMF for organizing the trip to attend the 80th anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy Canadian National Ceremony. They recognized that taking the initiative to mentor youth on the value of commemoration was part of the MMF’s commitment to never forget their Red River Métis veterans. The cost and resources involved in commemoration cannot outweigh the cost incurred by soldiers and their families, who paid the ultimate price.



All those veterans that are buried here that gave their lives for something that we sometimes take for granted—and that’s our freedom...all they ask for is that we never, ever forget what they have done. They don’t ask for anything else and that is really important.”

– MVLP Elder Jimmy Durocher

