

Dutch trip a step back in time

As the Boeing 767 bounced over the turbulence crossing the cold North Sea, I felt transported back in time.

Sixty years back, to be precise. The plane had only a short time earlier flown over Ireland and Scotland during the final leg of a seven-hour overnight flight that had left Toronto, Monday afternoon.

The final destination was Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam, in The Netherlands.

As the pilot easily handled the mild turbulence and the fasten seat-belts light came on, I peered out the window.

At 33,000 feet, there is a world above the clouds, where the sun is immune to the haze and fog from down below. At 5:45 a.m., a faint line of red gave a definition to the horizon, as a tiny dot of red sun struggled to come up in the east.

I thought how this spectacle must have been witnessed time and time again, by Allied bomber pilots, as they returned in their Lancasters, exhausted from overnight bombing missions over Europe, 60 years ago this week.

But in their case, the shaking of the aircraft wasn't always caused by meteorological turbulence. More often it was the effect of anti-aircraft shelling from below.

And now I'm here, in The Netherlands, joined with 52 others in the group as we re-trace steps that our fathers, grandfathers and other relatives took across Holland, France and Belgium, during the two world wars in Europe.

The tour is called *Keeping the Memory Alive*, and it is so aptly named.

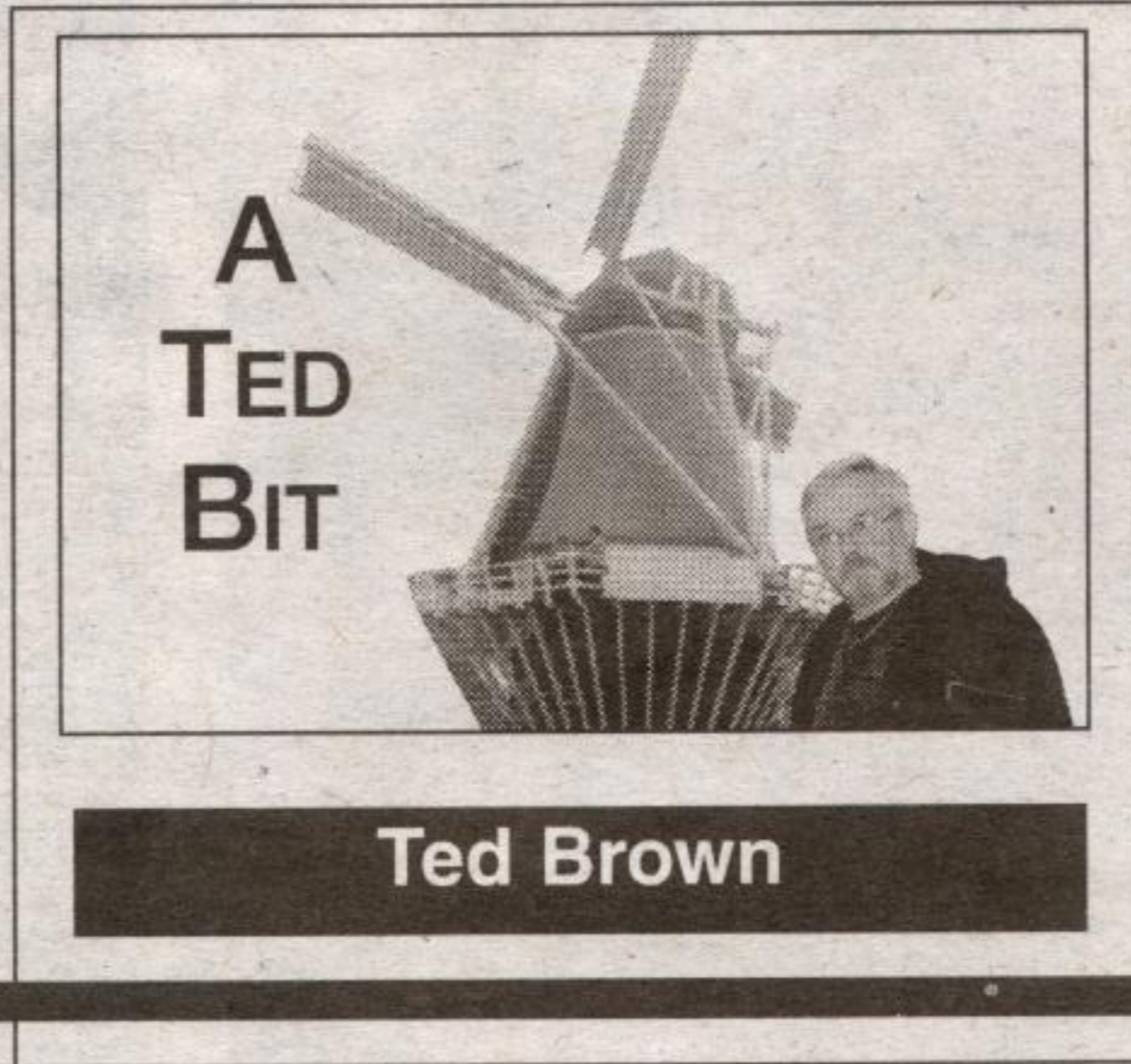
With us, we are honoured to be joined by three Second World War veterans and we are touching upon areas where towns and villages were partially obliterated by artillery and still bear subtle visual scars of what happened here.

In Zutphen, there is a bridge over one of the many rivers flowing through the town.

It's called the Canada Bridge, named in honour of the heroic deeds performed by Canadian soldiers when they took it from the Nazis. In a town that still has portions of its original walls standing from 800 years ago, one cannot help be moved by a sense of history.

At Holten Canadian War Cemetery, there are 1,355 Canadian soldiers buried in a forest near Arnhem. And Wednesday, at Holten, our three veterans laid wreaths remembering those 1,355 soldiers, at a ceremony that also included Governor General Adrienne Clarkson.

'Our' three vets, as I like to call them, Shell Lawr, Orval Paul and Barbara (Cousens) Duncan (who grew up in



Georgetown but now resides in Victoria B.C.) were in my opinion, the true guests of honour at that event, not Adrienne Clarkson.

After Clarkson addressed the assembly, a helicopter from the Canadian Armed Forces flew overhead, dropping thousands of poppies on the crowd, as an Act of Remembrance for the soldiers in Holten.

My chest burst with patriotism. Little Dutch kids scrambled to pick up poppies; local police and Dutch undercover cops picked up a souvenirs— hell, even the seemingly unemotional Dutch media, the 'pers' as they are called, were down on their knees to get one to take home.

For me, this trip started out as a simple vacation, to enjoy seeing the diverse culture and visual elements of Europe, while taking in some history as well. But early in the itinerary, I've discovered that it's much more.

I'm visiting places that I've written about over the years, and will see the actual ground that local heroes like Red Asseltine defended in Otterloo to save his regiment, or the sand on Juno Beach where local Georgetown vets Bob McMenemy and Trevor Williams clawed their way across, with no concern for their own lives on D-Day, 60 years ago.

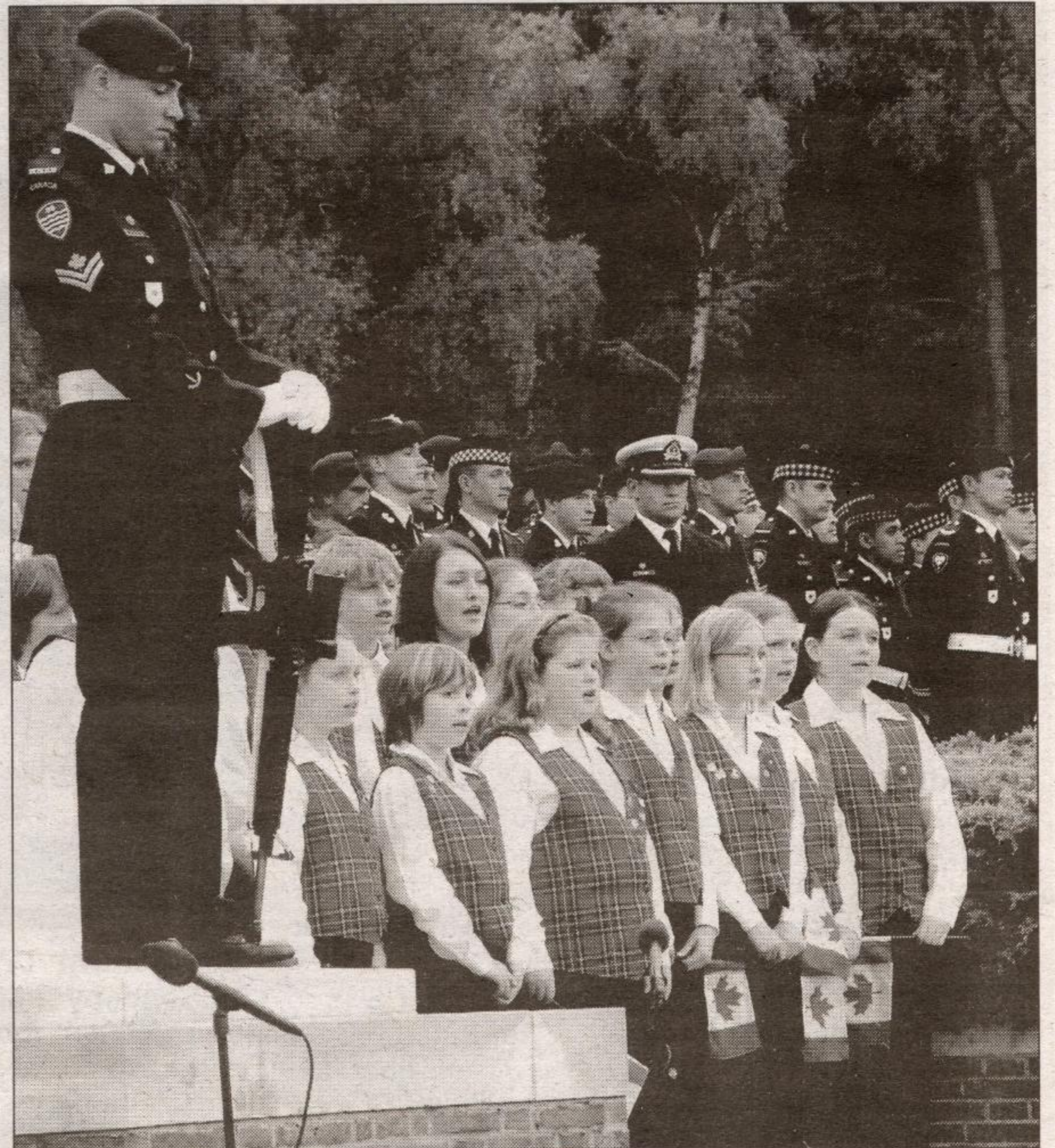
I'm visiting areas in France where my grandfather, a private in the Canadian Machine Gun Battalion, might have walked, during the First World War, 87 years ago.

This journey is a sobering experience, but filled with the unprecedented hospitality of the Dutch people, who have built a unique relationship with those Canadians who liberated their country 60 years ago this week.

There is a saying, "We can't know where we are going until we know where we have gone." I believe it's so true.

Keep the memory alive, for the good of us all.

Keeping the memory alive



The 56-member Georgetown Children's Chorus took part in the 60th anniversary of The Liberation of The Netherlands service at Holten Canadian War Cemetery during the Netherlands Remembrance Day ceremony Wednesday. The ceremony was attended by more than 8,000 veterans and their family members, as well as Governor General Adrienne Clarkson. Photo by Ted Brown



During the reception hosted by Jan and Hilly Nijstad and Mayor W. P. Omta of Ermelo, Martin Boomsma (left) presented a flag from the Town of Halton Hills to Omta Wednesday, as part of the friendship exchange. Photo by Ted Brown

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