

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier
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Ingersoll student to retrace steps of Canadian soldiers in France *Laurier Brantford student selected to be on the first Cleghorn Battlefield Fellowships Tour*

For Immediate Release

**August 19, 2004
54-04**

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BRANTFORD – Laurier Brantford student Evan Habkirk will retrace the steps of Canadian soldiers in France with seven other Laurier students on the first Cleghorn Battlefield Study Fellowships Tour.

Over the summer, Habkirk has researched the life and experiences of Private William Houston, who died in combat at age 21 – the same age that Habkirk is now. The Ingersoll native will share Houston’s story with the other tour members as part of a requirement to research a particular soldier in preparation for the tour.

In order to research Houston, Habkirk enlisted the help of Ingersoll veteran Art Presswell, a friend who served with Houston in the Highland Light Infantry of Canada. Houston, whose family is from Ingersoll, and Presswell landed on D-Day together at Normandy. Houston died a few days after the Normandy invasion, most likely when the Highland Light Infantry captured the town of Buron.

This is Habkirk’s first foray into studying both the First and Second World Wars, having previously only studied colonial wars such as the Boer War and the War of 1812.

“This seemed like a good opportunity to learn about the Second World War,” says Habkirk, who has never been outside of Ontario and expects there will be a culture shock while in France. “I expect to be overwhelmed by the thought of ‘how did they do it?’.”

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Habkirk is entering his third year in undergraduate in honours history and general contemporary studies. The Cleghorn Fellows also include two master's students in history, Teresa Iacobelli and Michelle Fowler; two undergraduate honours history students, Elissa Marion and Mary Duncan; and three undergraduate business students, Paul Wheaton, Daniel Sosna and Drew Franklin.

The eight students will travel to Paris, France, on August 25. They will visit two of the major First World War memorials – Beaumont-Hamel and Vimy Ridge. They will then travel to Dieppe to study the beaches where Canadian soldiers landed in the infamous raid of August 19, 1942, and will stay overnight in a hotel that overlooks the beach.

They will also spend seven nights in Normandy, based just outside Bayeux. From there, the students will visit the most important Canadian battlefields, as well as D-Day sites such as Omaha Beach and the airborne landing areas. The tour returns to Paris on September 4 and ends in Toronto on September 6.

Throughout the two weeks, fellows will participate in daily on-site discussions and participate in tactical exercises without troops (TEWTs), which put the students into the shoes of those who fought for Canada.

The Cleghorn Battlefield Study Fellowships are funded by a generous donation from John Cleghorn, former chairman and chief executive officer of the Royal Bank of Canada and past chancellor of Wilfrid Laurier University, along with his wife, Pattie, and their children. The family donated \$1 million to Laurier last year to fund five initiatives, including the fellowships.

The Cleghorn Battlefield Study Fellowships program supports efforts to expose students to Canada's role in world conflicts by touring famous battlefields. The fellowships are designed to foster greater understanding of military history and, in particular, battles in which Canada played a significant role.

The Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies (LCMSDS) fosters research, teaching, and public discussion of military and strategic issues of national and international significance. Founded in 1991, LCMSDS supports classroom teaching and educational programs at Laurier in the departments of history, political science and mathematics. For more information, please visit www.canadianmilitaryhistory.com.