



Commemorating the Canadians

MY FIRST six months as High Sheriff of East Sussex has been a whirlwind of events, but the highlight was my visit to Dieppe to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Dieppe Raid.

On 19 August 1942, 5,000 Canadian and over 1,000 British troops from Newhaven, stormed a ten-mile section of heavily defended coast at Dieppe, expecting to surprise the enemy during the night. Unfortunately they encountered an enemy naval convoy and arrived in daylight to a forewarned enemy. More than 3,350 Canadians were killed, wounded or taken prisoner, out of a population of over 11 million, Canada's bloodiest day of the war. It was the single worst day for Allied aircraft losses. Although a disaster, lessons learnt helped to ensure the success of D Day.

I travelled to Dieppe with my husband Michael, my chaplain and the Mayor of Newhaven and Brighton and the Chairmen of East Sussex County Council and Lewes District Council.

We were immediately driven to the Dieppe airfield and were introduced to the MP, Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Dieppe and local and Canadian dignitaries. The remembrance service, like all those that followed was memorable.



Above: HS and consort at Canadian Cemetery with a French family of three generations; Canadian Soldiers at Puy's Beach



Rousing speeches and prayers in French and English were followed by everyone singing the French, Canadian, British and American National Anthems. Refreshments followed where we had the opportunity to chat to our new friends.

A similar ceremony followed at Saint-Aubin Cemetery, where I laid my first wreath among many in memory of the Canadian raid's airmen.

Then off to Dieppe's West Pier for the Sailors' Memorial. After laying our wreaths I and others inspected the troops.

At 9.00 pm we visited the Canadian cemetery, taking part in a particularly moving service and vigil. We listened to a very touching story of a young Canadian

soldier who celebrated his 18th birthday at Newhaven, just before embarking for Dieppe where he was killed as he ran up the beach. His last letter was read out by the young people of Dieppe. After the service we all walked in procession between the rows of some 1,000 candlelit headstones before finally attending the vigil.

The next morning we and our Sussex colleagues were invited by the Mayor of Dieppe to join him and his colleagues for a 7.00 am breakfast. The relationship we in Sussex have with Dieppe is very strong and we agreed we would always continue to work together, not only to commemorate the Dieppe Raid but also develop new commercial joint ventures.

The day continued with wreath-laying and National Anthems at Puy's beach and at our final ceremony was held at Canada Square, Dieppe where we watched and took the salute as French and Canadian soldiers marched past. We then all paraded along the seafront to four individual memorials where they paid tribute to the fallen. The seafront was packed with people and it was as if the whole of Dieppe had come out to thank the Canadians.

I cannot describe how those two days affected me. It was such an emotional and moving experience and I was so grateful that I had had the opportunity to be there.



Above: At the Canadian Memorial and Cemetery

◆ Maureen Chownen

High Sheriff of East Sussex 2017-18