

Canadians all and forever

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The years 1994 and 1995 have been special in our Canadian history. The invasion of Europe and victory in Europe on May 8, 1945 will soon be 50 years past.

The question can be asked, "What does Canada Remembers mean?"



**CHARLIE
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Guest
column

Many Canadians will visit Holland this year to pay respects to the Canadian soldiers who gave their lives that all people could be free. Some are surely thinking, "What a horrible price to pay." None could say it better or more so than the soldiers who fought and died from the beaches in Italy and Normandy to the Zuider Zee.

Last year I had many sons, daughters, wives, sisters, brothers, uncles and others contact me to ask questions like, "What was my father like?" Some of these people weren't even born when their fathers gave their lives for what they believed was a just and honest cause.

Let's answer the question what were these young Canadians like. I am and was quite familiar with the soldiers (or riflemen, as they were called) of The Queen's Own Rifles of Toronto. These riflemen loved their Canadian way of life; the family unit was very important; religion and freedom came high. Pride and love of their country, your Canada, was unbelievable.

Pride and love for the regiment became embedded. Risking life time and time again for comrades became an hourly and daily routine.

I cannot forget what these soldiers achieved. The cost — the numbers — certainly that's frightful to think about. All of us knew it had to be done. The real price is known only to those who are spared.

We remember always the bravery, love and devotion of those who stayed behind. They are comrades forever, forever young and locked in memory — still devoted, still loving, still proud.

They are Canadians forever.

The battle for Boulogne in France of September, 1944 illustrates what a Canadian soldier was. In this particular battle, "A" Company of The Queen's Own Rifles had exchanged its Seven Platoon for a platoon of Lorne Scots from my old area, Peel County, Dixie, Port Credit and so on, which is now Mississauga.

They performed with the usual Canadian courage and devotion, suffering many wounded and losing one soldier named Stewart. These Canadians had ancestors from many countries — Russia, France, Holland, Portugal, the Far East. One lad who was from Chatham was a descendant of slaves who escaped to Canada via the Underground Railroad from the Southern States.

Also, there was Charles Maweghahik from the Shequiandah Reserve and Herm Stack from the Gibson Reserve.

Canada remembers that Canadians of many backgrounds and religions fought on the land, sea and air. It is important to remember that 1,086,965 Canadians volunteered to die for their beliefs.

I believe you are either a Canadian or you're not. I saw Steve DeBlois and Jimmy Young lying side by side, lost forever to use on the hill leading to Boulogne. These two young men had fought together from the first wave on D-Day at Bernieres-Sur-Mer in Normandy to give their all on September 17, 1944. Steve's ancestors had come from France many generations before, Jimmy's from Britain.

That is what makes your Canada my Canada and what makes Canada such a proud and loyal nation.

This is what we must remember, not just on special days, but always for the years to come.

May they always stay forever young.

Charlie Martin was a Company Sergeant-Major with The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada during the Second World War and was among the first Canadians to storm Juno beach on D-Day. He is the author of Battle Diary: From D-Day and Normandy to the Zuider Zee and VE. He lives in Cooksville with his wife, Vi.