

Corporal Gerard “Gerry” Gaudet WW II Veteran Presented The French Legion of Honour



The **Canadian Military Engineers** are pleased to advise that the Government of France has presented the National Order of the Legion of Honour to Corporal Gerrard “Gerry” Gaudet, a WW II Royal Canadian Engineer veteran and a participant in the Battle of the Liberation of France. Some background on this honour is found at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legion_of_Honour

Born in Rogersville, NB in 1922, Gerry enlisted in the Royal Canadian Engineers and trained in Canada with 23rd Field Company, RCE. His unit embarked for England in July 1943 and they continued their training and employment in England leading up to their participation in the invasion of Europe. Shortly before D-Day Gerry was injured in a motorcycle accident and was posted to the Engineer Holding Unit when he was fit for duty. From there he was assigned to 20th Field Company and further attached to the Regina Rifles to support their assault role in the D-Day invasion.

Corporal Gaudet landed in the Village of Bernieres Sur-Mer on Juno Beach early on D-Day in the morning of June 6th 1944. Upon landing, the sappers were involved in clearing the beach obstacles and gradually became more involved in opening up the roads. They repaired roads and slowly advanced to the Carpiquet airfield where they continued to clear land mines around the airport. At this time, Gerry became aware of the landing of his former unit and he was able



to re-join the 23rd Field Company. They then moved on to Caen where they continued to clear mines, build roads and constructed their first Bailey Bridge over the Orne River - the Reynold Bridge (named after one of their officers who was killed in action). They conducted Storm Boat crossings and built other bridges in the Caen area including “Little Abner” and “Daisy May” and constructed rafts to ferry tanks and infantry across the Seine River.

The route of 23rd in France took them through Caen, Rouen, Abbeville, Omer, Bethune and Lens then on to Belgium Holland. In Holland, the 23rd played the major role in Operation BERLIN - the evacuation of the British 1st Airborne across the Neder Rijn River after the failure of Operation MARKET GARDEN.

After the war Gerry returned to New Brunswick for a couple of years then moved to Western Canada where he was employed by Dominion Glass for 34 years and became the Supervisor of Process and Equipment. In 1994 Gerry and his wife and a number of veterans of 23rd Field Company returned to The Netherlands for the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of Arnhem.

Gerry's Legion of Honour was formally presented to him at an impressive ceremony arranged by the Whalley, BC branch of the Royal Canadian Legion and presided over by Jean-Christophe Fleury, Consul of the French Embassy. The organizers report:

"...Mr. Gaudet was to receive the L'ordre national de la Legion d'honneur and wanted to be presented with it so he contacted the Whalley Legion. An executive, Jill Bilesky, contacted Jean-Christophe Fleury who is the consul of the French Embassy who agreed to attend the ceremony and present the medal. It was then discovered that another veteran, John Thompson, was also to be honoured so his family was contacted and he agreed to come. Mr. Gaudet then went to the local RCMP detachment to tell them about it and unbeknownst to him they organized a special treat for him. Mr. Thompson could not attend this aspect as he is in a wheelchair.



However, they picked Mr. Gaudet up at his home, brought him to the detachment where he did an inspection of the RCMP and they then brought him with a motorcycle escort to the Whalley Legion. There were 20 RCMP officers and auxiliary RCMP who proudly marched into the Legion escorting the two men. They then stood as an honour guard throughout the ceremony. They also all volunteered for this and thought it was their honour to be included. There were speeches (a wonderful one from Mr. Fleury) and then the presentation of the medals to the two men. The RCMP then marched out and the two men stayed for a while with their families and members of the Legion to enjoy the moment.

It was a wonderful event...."