

## ***Knokke Heist 2012 - 39th Annual Canadian Liberation March***

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Over sixty-seven years ago the community of Knokke-Heist, on the shore of the North Sea next to the Dutch border, was occupied by Germany since the onset of World War II. In 1944, Operation SWITCHBACK ordered the recapture of the Belgian East Coast, Zeeland, the Isle of Walcheren and Zuid-Beveland by Allied Forces to allow access to the port of Antwerp, which was the first major port captured intact by the Allied. The use of the port of Antwerp was critical in reducing the long logistics tail that stretched back to the beaches of Normandy and preparing for the invasion of Germany. In the fall of 1944 the picturesque European countryside was transformed into a thick quagmire of mud accompanied by torrential rains, making mobility and survivability extremely challenging. In early November after five years of German occupation, the entire region was liberated by Canadian and Polish soldiers, more than 6 000 Canadian soldiers became casualties. The locals have not forgotten the sacrifice of their brave liberators!



Canadian Contingent marching through Dutch country side with rainbow

The Canadian Liberation march is an annual celebration of one of the more significant events in Canadian history: The Liberation of the Scheldt Estuary by the First Canadian Army in the fall of 1944. Rated in the top twelve most significant events by the Canadian Legion Magazine (Oct 2012 edition) and relatively unheard of by fellow Canadians. This popular autumn event draws thousands of outdoor enthusiasts and local figureheads to the region in order to relive the thrill of freedom's return. The main activities over the course of the three day event are several solemn commemoration ceremonies in a number of small towns as well as the Canadian Cemetery, a visit to two stunning battlefield museums and a culminating 33 km day-long march through the towns of the Netherlands and northern Belgium.



Canadian Contingent at Memorial Service

This year's 39th Knokke Heist Liberation march took place from 2-4 November 2012, with a 30 military member contingent lead by LCol Stewart Beal representing the Canadian Forces in Europe. The event was also host to teachers and students of AFNORTH secondary as well as several family members of the Tri-border community. VIP in attendance included: Denis Robert - Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium and Ambassador-designate to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, as well as Brigadier General Jorgensen of JFC HQ Brunssum.



Canadian Engineers (LCol Beal, MWO Ramsay, Sgt Morrissey and Sgt Holmes) laying a wreath at Hickman Bridge in Retranchement, Netherlands

Overall, this year's activities were a great success thanks to the contributions of several event coordinators and supporting staff. A fond farewell and heartfelt thanks goes out to lead organizer of the annual Canadian Liberation March for the past 38 years, Knokke City Counselor Mr. Danny Lannoy, who is taking his retirement this year but pledges that he will continue walking the annual 33km march alongside his Canadian friends for many years to come.



Canadian Contingent marching through Dutch country side