

Family set to follow in late veteran's footsteps overseas

MATTHEW DAIGLE
TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

In the final years of the Second World War, hundreds of thousands of Canadian soldiers marched through the Netherlands, liberating the country from Nazi rule. Seventy-seven years later, a Saint Johner, accompanied by her two children, will follow the footsteps of her late father who served during the liberation.

Linda Webb, with her children Julian Webb and Helen Webb, are headed to the Netherlands in September for the In Our Fathers' Footsteps trip, where they will tour the country and the places where Canadian soldiers fought in the war.

"I had my children in the '90s and my father died in '85, so they really didn't know him at all," said Linda Webb. "But they are interested, and especially my son is more up in the history of the war, so that's why really I was interested in going ... it'll just be a place for them to see and understand a bit more about what it was like."

Originally, Webb was supposed to take this trip in 2020, but it was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 70-year-old said she was first going with her brother, but he wasn't able to go, so she decided to invite her two children on the trip.

The family will be in the Netherlands from Sept. 7 to 19, where Webb said the days will be filled with long hikes, as well as visits to various memorials and historical sites during the time of the liberation of the Netherlands during the Second World War.

"It just means a lot to experience more of (my father's) time over there and what they experienced ... it just really interested me to go where he was,



Julian Webb with his mother Linda Webb and sister Helen Webb. The family is travelling to the Netherlands in September to trace the military footsteps of their late father and grandfather, Paul Maurice Blanchet, inset. PHOTOS: SUBMITTED

Family set to follow in late veteran's footsteps overseas

FAMILY → B1

and I'm sure I'll really get a lot out of it," Webb said. "There's two days of walking 20 kilometres in the footsteps of the Second Canadian [Infantry] Division."

After the Allies' invasion of Normandy in 1944, British, Canadian and Polish forces eventually made their way into the Netherlands. The First Canadian Army included the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Divisions, as well as

the 4th Canadian Armoured Division.

Anywhere from 105,000 to 175,000 Canadian soldiers were part of the liberation, with more than 7,600 men dying in the eight-month campaign.

Webb said her father, Paul Maurice Blanchet, was a Major in the 8th Canadian Hussars out of Sussex and was part of the liberation effort. She said her father spent much of the war fighting in Italy.

"He did read his diary to us every so

often," she said.

Following multiple delays, her son Julian Webb said it's a relief that his family is finally taking the trip. Since he never knew his grandfather, he said this is one way he can get closer to his memory, standing where his late grandfather possibly stood decades earlier.

As a lover of history, and in particular military history, Webb said this is a chance to see firsthand where the soldiers would have been stationed and to

learn more about the liberation.

"It really itches my history bug," he said. "I haven't been on a vacation with my mom in a long time."

This won't be Linda Webb's first history trip to Europe. In 2003, on the 50th anniversary of the Allied landing of Sicily, she and her husband travelled through Italy where her father spent much of the war.

"I'm sure I'll really get a lot out of it," she said of this latest trip.