

School News from the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario

School: St. Michael CHS, Kemptville
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Veterans Affairs Canada, Royal Canadian Legion Branch 212 Visit Authentic First World War Trenches at St. Michael CHS

Kemptville, ON – For the past couple of months, students in Mr. Fred Bortolussi and Mr. Bill Doyle’s Grade 10 *Canadian History in the 20th Century* classes have been studying Canada’s role during the First World War.

The class took on an ambitious project they will never forget: they transformed a portion of their school yard into authentic First World War trenches, complete with bunkers, sentry posts, and a tunnel.

The students then spent a night in the trenches experiencing many of the same things Canadian soldiers had to endure over the course of the war. During two hour shifts, sounds of war echoed through the night. The group had to repair leaks in the trench system, stand guard, and prepare letters for loved ones back home. Some students spent some time sleeping in a bunker. Messages in the form of lights had to be interpreted to alert those in the trenches of pending German attacks.

Fifteen year-old Byron Carroll said the night was an amazing learning opportunity. “We only had to experience it for one night; I can’t imagine what it must have been like to go through that night-after-night. I have such respect for our veterans and what they sacrificed for us all.”

Fifteen year-old Rebecca Cronk agreed with her classmate. “I always had respect for what our veterans went through during the war. Going in to this, I thought it would just be an interesting project, but now I realize the gravity of what our troops did for us.”

“That makes it all worthwhile,” said Legion member Doug Brunton during a visit to the school on October 30, 2007. “This is a good thing that these kids have done. I’m glad they are learning what it was like. To hear that they have the utmost respect for our veterans is wonderful.”

Mr. Brunton was joined by seven other members of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 212 in Kemptville as they visited the school to see the trenches first-hand. The group spoke to the class about their personal experiences before being led on a tour of the trenches.

Legion member Pierre Blackburn said, "It's one thing to read about something like this, but it's a completely different thing to experience it. I know in speaking to these kids that they all have a new appreciation for what our soldiers went through, and are going through, for the benefit of all Canadians."

Mr. Bortolussi stated, "It is fortunate that our students have this opportunity to hear our veterans speak, and to ask them questions. I am very proud of the respect they showed them, and how they have embraced this project."

Director for Remembrance Outreach, Ms. Lynne Sherren, was joined by two of her associates from Veterans Affairs Canada as she visited Mr. Bortolussi's class and the trench system on November 1, 2007. Ms. Sherren's office specializes in learning initiatives across Canada to help schools convey the importance of remembering Canada's veterans.

"I am awestruck. I've never seen anything like this," said Ms. Sherren. "It's obvious that the students understand what they're learning about our veterans and want to be a part of sharing the message."

Ms. Sherren said that Veterans Affairs Canada likes to be a catalyst for learning initiatives to allow schools to carry out projects such as the trench recreation at St. Michael CHS. "It is so important for our students to experience this and to feel the emotions that our soldiers felt in the First World War. We try to teach young people to share the same values of peace, freedom, justice and knowledge that our soldiers had with others, it is obvious that these students have grasped that concept completely."

Mr. Bortolussi was honoured that the legion and Veterans Affairs would visit. "I am so pleased that they took the time to come and see what our students have accomplished."

For more information, please contact CDSBEO Communications Officer Bob Perreault at 613-258-7757 ext. 206 or 613-859-0678 (mobile).

The Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario operates 40 elementary and 10 secondary schools across 8 counties. The CDSBEO offers excellence in Catholic education through provincial-leading programs to approximately 15,000 students.

Attached Photos:

Legion BR 212 at St. Michael CHS.jpg – Eight members of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 212 visit the authentic First World War trenches at St. Michael CHS



Legion Class Visit.jpg – Members of the RCL BR 212, Kemptville are greeted by St. Michael CHS students in Mr. Fred Bortolussi's Grade 10 *Canadian History in the 20th Century* classes



Gar Shaw with Students.jpg – Legion member Gar Shaw answers St. Michael CHS students' questions beside the authentic First World War trenches built by Mr. Fred Bortolussi's Grade 10 *Canadian History in the 20th Century* classes



Veterans Affairs Visits St. Michael CHS.jpg – Veterans affairs representatives Paula Ling and Lynne Sherren visit the trench system at St. Michael CHS on November 1, 2007



St. Mike's Trenches.jpg – St. Michael CHS students Anastasia Hrebacka, Rebecca Cronk, Byron Carroll in the trenches they helped build for their Grade 10 *Canadian History in the 20th Century* class

