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## 'In our father's footsteps': N.B. sisters' legacy trip to the Netherlands

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Mark Cahill's Second World War service brought him through many nations, but it was the Netherlands that he yearned to return to once the fighting was through.

Cahill helped to liberate that country alongside many other Canadians in 1945, and in 1986, he had the chance to see it again. But that time, he was flanked by family rather than soldiers.

"The last time he was there, the villages were devastated, and to see them rebuilt and vibrant again, he found that very emotional," said his daughter Cindy Mitchell, who lives in Saint Andrews.

Her father hardly spoke about his war experience, and suffered nightmares his whole life as a result of those battle-battered times.

Cahill did, however, speak about his arrival in Holland, and how devastating it was to see the starving people, for whom he and his comrades sacrificed food rations to nourish.

"They were just so grateful and so thankful, because they had been living under the German oppression for so long," Mitchell said.

Even today, she continued, if someone from the Netherlands finds out you have a father or relative who was there, they are so thankful. Come May, she and her sister Shelley Richford will have a chance to meet those people, along with a cohort of other Canadian descendants of veterans who helped liberate the country.

The trip, which will run from April 29 to May 11, is called "In Our Fathers' Footsteps: A WWII Dutch Liberation Pilgrimage," and will commemorate the 75th anniversary of the liberation.

It was organized by Karen Hunter of Guelph, Ontario. She, too, is the daughter of a warrior who waded his way into the Nazi-occupied Netherlands to fight for its peoples' freedom.

From Toronto to Europe, they will carry a "Canadian Remembrance Torch," according to a press release.

Once landed, the plan is to walk a span



Gilbert Hunter served in the liberation of the Netherlands in 1945. His daughter, Karen, spawned the 'In Our Fathers' Footsteps' trip, which will bring Canadian descendants of Second World War veterans to the Netherlands for a 60-kilometre march in commemoration of the liberation's 75th anniversary. PHOTO: SUBMITTED

of 60 kilometres, following in the footsteps of the First, Second, and Third Canadian Divisions, Hunter said. The group, which she hopes will gather up to 75 people, will hold commemorations at Canadian war cemeteries and monuments, carry out veterans' wishes, and partake in liberation festivals with the Dutch. Then, at the trip's culmination, the group will march to the sounds of a military band and wave flags as a unified Canadian contingent into Het Loo Palace in Apeldoorn, where they'll meet Princess Margriet.

"I expect that will be a highlight," Hunter said.

The idea for the trip was spawned when she received a war memoir from her father, Gilbert Hunter, on his 80th birthday.

In 2009, Hunter began walking what she called a "spiritual path," and journeyed to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro and to monasteries in the Himalayas, among other places.

It was on that path that she began to think about her father's memoir, and the notion began to bloom inside her that it



Cindy Mitchell and Shelley Richford will partake in the 'In Our Fathers' Footsteps' trip, which will bring Canadian descendants of Second World War veterans to the Netherlands for a 60-kilometre march in commemoration of the liberation's 75th anniversary. PHOTO: SUBMITTED

would be interesting to retrace his footsteps in the Netherlands.

"It was life changing, and sort of set me on that path of self-discovery, or exploring my background, and trying to understand it."

In February of this year, she travelled to Belgium, and began conducting research into how a trip might manifest, and attended the Liberation Route Europe Conference.

While there, she crossed paths with many people who wanted to know more about their fathers' experiences.

So, Hunter gave it some more thought, and decided to invite other Canadians to retrace their fathers' war-time paths alongside her.

"In My Father's Footsteps" became 'In Our Fathers' Footsteps. And it's really just taken off from there," she said, adding that it has captured the hearts and souls of people across Canada whose ancestors served.

Hunter said family friends in Holland are helping to manage the logistics, including Peter and Ans Van Der Meij,

who embraced her dream. She said that one merely needs to mention the word "Canadian" in the Netherlands, and the response is "amazing."

She recalled her father's experiences, and how the people treated the soldiers in 1945.

"I remember my father saying: 'You know, we were just doing our job. And yet, these people were giving us flowers, and they were crying, and singing, and laughing, and shouting with joy.'"

She said it will be an honour to pay respects to her father, and all the troops who served, many of whom were from New Brunswick.

"It really is a legacy for them, that they have left in the Netherlands," Hunter said.

She said there are some spots available for the trip, but the Dec. 31 deadline to register is rapidly approaching.

For more information visit [Inour-fathersfootsteps.com](http://Inour-fathersfootsteps.com).

"It's a one time event, a once in a lifetime event, I believe. And that's what I hope to achieve."