

# Sherry Hirsche walked in veteran father's footsteps

**FRANK MCTIGHE**  
GAZETTE EDITOR

Sherry Hirsche made an emotional journey this fall as she walked in the footsteps of her World War Two veteran father.

Hirsche joined the "In Our Fathers' Footsteps" tour in September that followed the path Canadian soldiers took as they liberated Holland from the Nazis.

"I just wanted the feeling of being in Holland where my dad had been," said Hirsche, whose father Rulon Hirsche was a D-Day veteran who spent three years overseas as a medic with the 3rd Division, 22 Field Ambulance.

"In Our Fathers' Footsteps" was organized in 2019 by Karen Hunter but was delayed by travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The trip took about 90 Canadians to the battlefields and towns and cities the soldiers passed through during the liberation of Holland, which started in October 1944 and went until May 1945.

Rulon Hirsche was in the second wave of Canadians who landed on Juno Beach on June 6, 1944. The landing craft he was on struck a mine and sunk instantly.

The soldiers who survived the mine blast waded ashore in chest-deep water, holding their rifles and gear above their heads.

"Basically, they were sitting ducks," Sherry Hirsche said. "And he had a big red cross on his helmet, being a medic, so a good target. He said, 'I don't know how I ever made it off that beach!'"

The Canadians landing at Juno Beach were told to keep moving forward, regardless of what was happening around them.

"Some of the guys, he only had time enough to stick them with some morphine, just to get them out of pain, and keep moving. He wasn't allowed to do anything else. He said he didn't know whether they lived or died."

Rulon Hirsche returned to Canada from the war in 1946 to farm in the Fort Macleod area. He became involved in the Legion and eventually became provincial president, but rarely talked about the war, only sharing a few stories with his family.

Sherry Hirsche said her dad likely had post traumatic



Photo by Frank McTighe

**Sherry Hirsche took part in the 'In Our Fathers' Footsteps' tour that followed the route taken by Canadian soldiers to liberate Holland from the Nazis in 1945.**

stress disorder, although it was never formally diagnosed. He would have nightmares in which he could hear men on the battlefield calling for help.

"My mom always said he was not the same man she married. And why would he be, after seeing that kind of stuff?"

Rulon Hirsche was sponsored by the local Dutch community to attend the 50th anniversary celebration around the liberation of Holland.

"He remembered that as a young soldier his group would give their rations to the Dutch kids or whoever was hungry because all they were eating were tulip bulbs."

Sherry Hirsche first heard of the "In Our Fathers' Footsteps" tour in 2019 but didn't plan to attend. The trip was planned and cancelled one more time due to the pandemic, and finally moved forward in 2022.

Sherry Hirsche was one of 90 people who signed up for the tour, which was split into a nine-day tour and a 13-day tour. She was one of seven people from Alberta.

The Canadian contingent met up in Amsterdam where they were loaded on buses to begin a journey that took them across Holland and into Germany, with hotels and meals

2nd and 3rd Canadian divisions.

They visited the Canadian War Monument, which commemorates the Ussle River crossing known as Operation Cannon Shot.

They were also treated to high tea with Princess Margriet and the Canadian ambassador to Holland.

One of the features of the tour was a torch designed by three McMaster University students who accompanied the Canadian delegation. The torch was left in Holland to be used at future ceremonies.

Guides provided the visitors with a wealth of information along the way, and the Dutch people provided a warm welcome everywhere the Canadians went.

"The Dutch people were ready. They had Canadian flags flying on their houses."

The Canadians on the nine-day tour with Hirsche formed a strong bond and have remained in contact since they came home.

The gratitude of the Dutch people toward the Canadian soldiers like her father left a lasting impression on Sherry Hirsche.

"The Canadians were their saving grace. As far as they are concerned the Canadians were the ones who liberated them. They don't mention anyone else. The 90 of us, we were treated as if we had done something great, and we all said, 'It wasn't us.'"

They just happened to be walking in the footsteps of their fathers, who were the real heroes.



Photo courtesy Sherry Hirsche

**Rulon Hirsche was a D-Day veteran who served with the 3rd Division, 22 Field Ambulance.**



**Honour Them by Remembering**

**MD of Willow Creek**



Photo courtesy Sherry Hirsche

**Sherry Hirsche with a 90-year-old Dutch woman who was 13 years old when a Lancaster bomber crashed near her home. As a young girl, she would put flowers on the Canadian airmen's graves.**

arranged in advance.

The Canadian contingent participated in special remembrance tributes at the Groesbeek and Holten Canadian war cemeteries, which Hirsche said was the most emotional part of the tour. Of the 1,394 graves at Holten, 1,355 are filled by Canadian soldiers.

"The Dutch love Canadians, and they take good care of the cemeteries."

They also had the opportunity to walk 20 kilometres in the footsteps of the 1st,



Photo courtesy Sherry Hirsche

**Dutch people take exceptional care of the war cemeteries where Canadian soldiers are buried.**

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