

Young Aurora historian prepares to retrace Canada's steps in the World Wars



By Brock Weir

24-year-old Robert Revington gets a certain charge whenever he takes one particular wooden club in his hands.

Too small to be a baseball bat and but just too big to fit in a pocket, it is fairly non-descript except for a few black studs dotting the head that catch the light just so.

Cracked due to age, you might not notice it, but it is an object rich in family lore: it is a club used by his great-grandfather, Ben Johnston, during trench raids while fighting at the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

A soldier who was lucky enough to survive the decisive Canadian victory before being wounded the following August and coming back home, his story just might have planted a few seeds in the mind of his great-grandson, who is now studying for his Masters in History at McMaster University.

Now these seeds have germinated with Robert preparing to leave Canada for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity as just one of 12 Canadian students selected for this year's study tour hosted by the Canadian Battlefields Foundation from May 27 through June 12.

The Canadian Battlefields Foundation was founded in 1992 to raise awareness of Canada's role in the Second World War and each year students from a variety of universities are selected to visit these historical sites and highlight soldiers who have served King and Country.

"It was very exciting when I got the phone call," says Robert, a graduate of Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School. "I am certainly lucky McMaster has a great history program because it is a very competitive process. You have to have good references for a trip like this. Part of the interest is my great-grandfather and grandfather both served - my great-grandfather in places like Vimy and my grandfather [Stuart Revington, who turned 90 last year] and visiting places where he was. It was an opportunity to see family history and learn a lot."

Robert highlighted this family history during the application process, as well as some of his own life experiences. Over a year ago, he had the chance to study abroad for one semester, spending his time in Jerusalem and living just across the street from the British cemetery for those killed during the First World War.

"It left quite an impression on me and it made me more interested in the Canadian context," says Robert, who, as part of this program's learning component, will focus on the life of Canadian Victoria Cross recipient Frederick William Hall, one of three VC recipients hailing from Winnipeg's storied Valour Road. "We will be going to Vimy, Dieppe, Ypres, the Somme, and Passchendaele,

but one of the most exciting parts of it is we get to participate in ceremonies on Normandy Beach on June 6, which is a great opportunity.

?It is hard to say what might go through my mind without actually doing it, but it is one thing to read about particular battles in books; to see the sites themselves makes it feel real in a way that you can't get from a classroom.?

For more about the Canadian Battlefields Foundation, visit www.cbf-fccb.ca.