



Videography and student engagement: The potentials of battlefield tourism

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this article is to present the findings from a collaborative study conducted by a research team consisting of Canadian university students and a course instructor visiting battlefields and memorials located in Western Europe. The goal of the course was to provide students with an experiential opportunity to learn about the First and Second World Wars, participate in video interviews, and administer surveys on-site. Emphasizing the field component of the course, this paper discusses how visual ethnography can be used to provide a greater understanding of visitor motivations and enhanced tourism learning experiences. Also discussed are the strengths and weaknesses of conducting field research for a university undergraduate level course and the potential contributions that such approaches bring to learning.

KEYWORDS: battlefield tourism, WWI, memory, tourism, visual studies, Vimy memorial, historical consciousness

Introduction

Drawing on the events pertaining to the First World Centenary (2014-2018), this article presents the findings of a collaborative study carried out by 9 authors (the instructor and 8 undergraduate students attending a course offered by the School of Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Tourism at Lakehead University) visiting battlefields, memorials and museums located in Western Europe and associated with the First and Second World Wars. In-order to add greater authenticity to the article, each co-author is addressed by his/her real name throughout the text (see table 1). This approach, we believe, adds further veracity to the study, while helping to contextualized and personalize the findings and reflections emerging from this study.

Offered in the spring of 2014, the goal of the course was to provide students with an experiential opportunity to learn about the First and Second World Wars, acquire insights into the management of battlefields, memorials and museums, understand the process of memory-making, participate in video interviews, and administer surveys on-site. Emphasizing the field component of the course, this paper discusses how visual ethnography through video interviews and in-situ research conducted at the Canadian National Vimy Memorial can be used to engage historical consciousness and memory-making and enhance learning experiences in a tourism context. The goal is to showcase the benefits of engaging students and instructors through video interviews and in this particular instance, in-situ interviews conducted with other battlefield

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tourists. Also discussed is how these approaches enhanced and transformed our understanding of our historical narratives and the management of these sites.

An overview of the literature pertaining to the role of remembrance, pilgrimages and visitation patterns along the Western Front throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries is provided first. Following is a discussion pertaining to video interviews and semi-structured interviews. The findings profile the research team and the tourist participants. The conclusion re-examines the key findings and discusses some of the challenges and opportunities associated with conducting field research for a university undergraduate level course.

Literature Review

Remembrance

As Winter (2012) explains, remembrance is a social process, thus:

activities relating to the war are performed as symbolic rituals at specific times and places to recall people, events, ideas and values ... Because the memories are developed to satisfy particular social needs, each new generation re-negotiates and re-selects (or forgets anew) aspects of the memories to suit its own needs. (p. 249)

The historicizing of events and memories associated to warfare and traumatic events can be reinforced or discarded by governments (Lederach, 1997), perpetuated by media and family members (Bird, 2013), transmitted inter-generationally (Clark, 2014; Levy & Sznajder, 2002; Volkan, 2001; Weldon, 2009), and contested by groups that have been omitted from certain battlefield narratives (Vance, 2016).

For Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders and South Africans, the collective memory of the First World War is often associated with the “nation-creation mythos” where members of “the Commonwealth entered the Great War as colonies, and although they were still members of the Commonwealth at the conclusion of the First World, these countries, through their contributions to the Great War had distinguished themselves as individual nations” (Brown & Cook, 2011, p. 38). As a result, following the conclusion of the First World War, thousands of memorials were erected throughout Australia, New Zealand and North America to honour the dead (Lloyd, 1998). For its war efforts, Canada was given three parcels of land in Belgium and five in France. After some debate, the Canadian National Vimy Memorial (the Vimy Memorial from here on) was erected on the parcel at Vimy Ridge and designated as Canada’s national First World War monument (Hucker, 2007). Completed in 1936, the Vimy Memorial is comprised of a monument and a 91.18-hectare memorial park (Hucker & Smith, 2012).

The Vimy Memorial

The capture of Vimy Ridge in France on April 10-12, 1917 by the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) solidified the CEF’s reputation among the allies (Brown & Gimblett, 2006). While the CEF would go on to fight in other significant battles in the First World War (Passchendaele July 1917, Amiens August 1918, Cambrai October 1918), Vimy quickly acquired an iconic status in the minds of Canadians and would, until the Second World War, remain Canada’s most celebrated military victory (Brown & Cook, 2011; Hayes, Iarocci, & Betchhold, 2007).

At 27 metres high and containing 15,000 metric tonnes of concrete and masonry, the monument features twin white pylons and 20 carved figures representing, peace, justice, truth, knowledge, sacrifice, bravery, and death (Brown & Gimblett, 2006). Flanking the staircase

leading up to the pylons are carved male and female mourners surrounded by the names, carved in stone, of 11,285 Canadian soldiers killed in France (Hucker, 2009). At the front of the monument is the sorrowful figure known as “the bereft” and below her is a sarcophagus (Lemelin & Johansen, 2014). Located downhill from the monument is the memorial park featuring an interpretive centre, remnants of the battlefield (i.e., craters, dugouts, trenches, tunnels), and two cemeteries (Givenchy Road; the Canadian Cemetery No. 2) (Parks Canada, 2005). With visitations totalling 700,000 annually, the Vimy Memorial is a popular destination along the Western Front (Lemelin & Johansen, 2014).

Pilgrimage

Tours to the Western Front battlefields in France and Belgium began soon after the Armistice was signed in 1918 and visitors, especially from the allied nations, came from around the world (Brown & Cook, 2011). By 1928-29, Germans were also visiting these battlefields in significant numbers (Eksteins, 2000). For Canadians and Australians, distance proved to be a formidable barrier, but even so, they came; nearly 6,000 Canadian veterans and their families (including French and Japanese Canadians) travelled to France to witness the unveiling of the Vimy Memorial in 1936 (Brown & Cook, 2011).

Pilgrimages made by veterans and their families were given prominence and by 1921 the French parliament passed a law “providing free transportation to war cemeteries for relatives of the dead, thus ensuring the continual flow of ‘pilgrims’ to the former war zone” (Sherman, 1999, p. 39). Visitation to the Western Front remained popular until it was interrupted by the Second World War (Vanneste & Foote, 2013). Although the Western Front continued to attract not only pilgrims but also history enthusiasts and organized youth groups throughout the 20th century, a decline was noted in the 1950s and early 60s (Eksteins, 2000). Concerns regarding these declining visitations in France prompted the French government to construct various memorials dedicated to the First World War like the Mémorial de Verdun in 1963 and the Historial de Péronne in 1992 (Eksteins, 2000).

In the 1980s, a resurgence of visitors from Canada and Australia was noted in Gallipoli and along the Western Front (Clarke & Eastgate, 2011; Fathi, 2014; Hyde & Harman, 2011; Lemelin & Johansen, 2014). Factors influencing these changing visitation patterns include a heightened focus on national narratives and commemorative activities like the First World War Centenary, an increase of coverage of the Great War and memorial sites in traditional media like books, documentaries and movies (e.g. Gallipoli, Passchendaele), greater exposure of these events in newer media like social media and podcasts (Clarke & Eastgate, 2011; Winter, 2006; Winter, 2012). Tours (Hyde & Harman, 2011; Seaton, 2000), and organized outings to battlefields by schools, cultural organisations, military or para-military institutions (Fathi, 2014; Lemelin & Johansen, 2014) have also helped to increase the visibility of these events in the national consciousness.

Methodology

The course consisted of in-class discussions and assignments aimed at familiarizing the students with issues pertaining to the First and Second World Wars. The research trip consisted of visits to various sites in Western Europe associated with the Canadian Expeditionary Force’s involvement in the First World War and the Canadian Army’s involvement in the Second World War. In accordance with the course pedagogy, 10 of the 11 students (one student opted to conduct his own project and declined to participate in the writing of this article) conducted

video interviews. The on-site surveys were administered by research teams consisting of Calla and Matt, Wesley and Kathryn, Sam and Zachary, and Shannon, who opted to work on her own. John and Sarah conducted their own research projects on other topics pertaining to battlefield tourism, while Corey was assigned the responsibility of creating stock video footage of the field trip as well as helping to conduct the video interviews.

One of the goals of this course was to share our experiences with others, this has been accomplished by presenting some of the findings from our studies at national and international conferences, sharing our experiences on a blog (<http://goo.gl/Wzw0K6>) and, on a website (<http://battletourism.ca/index.html>). We have also produced two videos depicting Canada's role in the First and Second World Wars and recounting our experiences acquired in this course. Both videos can be found on the web (<http://battletourism.ca/index.html>).

Video Interviews

Scholarship in battlefield tourism over the last three decades reveals that many of these studies continue to use traditional research instruments: questionnaires (Winters, 2012), interviews and participant observation (Clarke & Eastgate, 2011; Dunkley, Morgan, & Westwood, 2011; Seaton, 2010), or journal analysis (Fathi, 2014). While important contributions to the study of battlefield tourism have been made through these traditional research methods, visual studies, which often feature images and videos of participants partaking in an activity (Pink, 2001; Rose, 2001), can help visualize shared commonalities, encourage reflexive encounters, provide moments of contemplation, and accept that mutual vulnerabilities may occur during these discussions between the researcher and participants (Rakik & Chambers, 2009; Scarles, 2010). Although these video interviews as we described next were combined with in-situ interviews, the key aspect of this study is that it was conducted on site with other visitors who were on the same site (in this case the Vimy Memorial Site), the site itself being a significant memorial site.

Conducting Video Interviews in the Field

The video interviews consisted of four semi-structured interviews conducted with all members of the research team. The first interview was conducted prior to the trip, the second following the Normandy visit, the third occurred during our visit to the Western Front, and the final one followed the May 5 ceremonies in the Canadian cemetery in Groesbeek, Holland. For members of the research team, the video interviews facilitated experiential reflection and expansion of ideas and perceptions (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008). The names of the research team are provided below (see table 1).

As we head into mere weeks before leaving for France and Holland, our class has now completed our first interviews, prepared for the research we will be engaging in, and are now preparing ourselves for departure. Many of us have family connections, keepsakes, and personal investment in taking this trip together. Over our growing discussions of what we will be doing and the places we will be visiting, we are now not only preparing for our physical journey, but preparing ourselves for the emotional and spiritual experiences we will be facing as a group and individually. (Shannon)

Averaging 5.26 minutes per interview, the combined time of the four rounds of interviews was 3 hours and 51 minutes. The shortest interview was 18 seconds and occurred during the first round, while the longest interview was 14.46 minutes and occurred in the fourth round. From the first round of interviews, which averaged 44 seconds per interview, the video interviews increased significantly in length in each round (II=4.52 avg.; III=7.22 avg.; IV=8.86 avg.). When asked to explain these differences, Sarah suggested that "at first, I found the interviews difficult. I found myself focusing on facts and itinerary rather than my experiences and

thoughts. However, as the interviews went on, I found it easier to connect to the places we went to and be able to put into words the complex emotions I was experiencing.” In a similar light, John explained “that visiting the sites enhanced our understanding of these places and deepened our connections to these events, this type of experience was conducive, at least for me, to discussion.” Corey, a member of the interviewing team stated that we “just got better at it”. When asked to elaborate Corey noted that:

As the interviews progressed, we began to notice a growing ease and comfort with each other and even with a subject matter that could be at times, quite heavy. By the third interview I noticed that the interviewer [Harvey] became more sensitive to certain issues, instead of rushing through the interview, or asking the next question, we took our time, allowed for silent breaks, or even turning off the camera and taking a break. This more sensitive approach appeared to alleviate a number of concerns. (Corey)

After the interviews were conducted, the video files underwent a standard video rendering procedure in order to allow the video interviews to be viewable on a variety of computers. This involved two stages: the transferral of video files from the camera to a computer hard drive and back up drive followed by conversion to MPEG files. Rather than utilizing written transcriptions of the video interviews, a widely accepted method of data preparation (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999; McLellan et al., 2003), a temporal indexing method (indexing short phrases and sentences) was employed which allowed for a quick retrieval of pertinent qualitative data during coding (Saldana, 2009). The video interviews were then analyzed descriptively, using inductive open coding to allow for emergent themes (Saldana, 2009). Crichton and Childs (2005) argue that such methodology allows the research team “to hear and see the gestures, intonation, passion, pauses, and inflections throughout the analysis process” (p. 42). This type of data also allowed us to understand transformations and moments that were particularly engaging.

Semi-Structured, In-Situ Interviews

On May 1, 2014, 3 pairs of researchers consisting of Calla and Matt, Wesley and Kathryn, Sam and Zachary and one solo student (Shannon) administered the surveys. As stated earlier, three students (John, Sarah, and Corey) did not participate in the in-situ interviews. With only half-a-day to conduct interviews we completed 36 semi-structured interviews with tourists visiting the Vimy Memorial (see Table 1 and Table 2 below). Managed as a national historic site by the federal government of Canada, the 100 hectares Canadian National Vimy Memorial is composed of a monument rising 27 metres in height, and a memorial park preserving the remnants (e.g., craters, dugouts, trenches, shell holes and tunnels) of the battlefield. Also found at the site are two cemeteries, an interpretive centre, and various other structures associated to the management of the site (Lemelin & Johansen, 2014).

Approved by a university research and ethics board, Parks Canada and Veterans Affairs Canada, the research instrument consisted of questions pertaining to the visitor’s knowledge of the First World War, the Vimy Memorial and other sites they had visited, their perceptions of the interpretation and management strategies (most effective/most innovative) at the Vimy Memorial, and their awareness of the commemorations of the First World War Centenary (2014–2018). Participants were also asked to provide basic socio-demographic information (nationality, age, education, etc.).

Speaking of research projects, after a hasty lunch on the bus, it was time to do the other half of what we came to do at Vimy- research. We split into groups or teams with our ‘research instruments’. A five question survey, essentially, about people’s experiences at Vimy and other memorial sites, their demographic, and any other comments. It was a rough day for it for a few reasons. It was a french holiday, so many of the visitors that day didn’t speak english. Also, the weather had turned dark,

and a bit chilly, and there was a damp, quickening wind that had ‘something wicked this way comes’ written all over it. Sure enough, about an hour in the skies opened and dark clouds poured rain all over the ridge while those of us assigned to the site and parking lot dove for the bus, and those of us by the trenches ran for the visitor centre. Dr. Lemelin rounded us up and took an interview count—our minimum sample was 20, and we were still short. We waited out the rain, and then split up again to hopefully get a few more before it was time to leave for dinner. Our guide, Phil, a Czech born Australian-raised Frenchman, helped out by translating some french groups for us. After another hour, we had almost 30 interviews. Damp, tired, and probably more than somewhat emotionally exhausted after the last three days of cemeteries and remembrance monuments, we arrived back at our hotel to crash for about two hours before supper. We all needed it. (Shannon)

These semi-structured interviews were transcribed soon after the interviews had taken place and analysis began in the field. Participant anonymity has been preserved by referring only to respondent nationality and approximate age (e.g., P14, Canadian man in his fifties). Using the transcripts and the interview guide, participant responses describing their knowledge of the Great War, their family affiliations (if any) with the Great War, the reasons for undertaking the trip, on-site experiences, their awareness of the First World War Centenary, and other themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews, were examined. This preliminary analysis was circulated to and studied by all members of the research team. Excerpts from the interviews were organized into tables based on these themes. Tables were revised and excerpts added or eliminated in various categories as transcripts were read and re-read. In every phase of the analysis, the contents of the different themes were juxtaposed alongside each other to refine the analysis (Saldana, 2009).

Findings

The analysis of the findings profiles our research team and the visiting participants. All members of the research team (with the exclusion of the course instructor)¹ were in their early twenties and pursuing undergraduate degrees at a Canadian university. Although only Calla had previously visited many of these sites, four had familial links to the First World War, eight had familial links to the Second World War, four had connections to both World Wars, and two had no connections to either World Wars (see Table 1).

Research Team Pseudonyms	Connections to World Wars	Previous Visits To World War Sites
Carlson	WWII	No
Sherry	WWII	No
James	WWI, WWII	No
Joshua	WWII	No
Hank	WWII	No
Mike	WWI, WWII	No
Jenny	None	Yes
Lorna	WWI, WWII	No
Warren	WWI, WWII	No
Valerie	None	No

Table 1 – Student Researcher Profiles

The tourist participant sample consisted of students, engineers, military personnel, and retirees. Of these, 23 were men and 13 were women. More than 50 percent were from the Commonwealth (see Table 1). Due to time limits, we opted to forego asking participants about their age and income, and only estimated approximate age.

Nationality	Total
Australian	7
Belgian	5
Canadian	6
English	13
French	4
Polish	1
Total	36

Table 2 – Tourist Participant Nationality

The majority of the participants (of those who reported it) had a post-secondary education (see Table 3). Less than 40 percent of the 36 respondents (n=14) reported any familial links to veterans of the Great War.

Age Group	Total	Education	Total
20–30	5	High School	2
40–50	12	University degree/ College diploma	12
60–70	18	Post-Graduate	4
Total	35	Total	18

Table 3 – Age Group and Education

The Vimy Memorial was but one of many battlefields and museums located along the Western Front that were visited by the participants. However, because the Vimy Memorial was the first site visited by some participants (n=3), the numbers of reported battlefields and memorials visited in Table 4 cannot reflect the total number visited by the participants during their travel. Apart from a few French and Belgian participants who came specifically to visit the monument or to partake in a leisure opportunity provided by the various trails found on site, repeat visitations to the Vimy Memorial were rare (n=4). Participants' descriptions of sites visited were often vague depicting more general areas (e.g., the Western Front, Flanders Fields, and the Eastern Front) than specific sites like the Tyne Cot Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery and Memorial in Belgium.

Location: First World War	Number of Visits	Location: Second World War	Number of Visits
Ypres	11	WWII (unspecified)	8
Passchendaele	8	Juno	5
Beaumont-Hamel	5	Omaha	4
Thiepval	4		
Wellington Quarries	3		
Verdun	2		
Flanders & the Western Front	2		
Eastern Front	1		
Total	35		17

Table 4 – Battlefields Visited by Participants

Every Canadian tourist participant (n=6) mentioned that they had either been, or were going to battlefields associated with the Second World War. Although not representative of all battlefield tourists visiting the Vimy Memorial, this finding does suggest that battlefield tours for many Canadians include visits to both First and Second World Wars sites. These early observations as well as travel logistics made prioritizing battlefield site visitation necessary. It

is possible that similar logistical constraints occurred for some of these Canadian visitors and perhaps, limited their travels to other, less well-known battlefields in Western Europe.

Although Australian (n=5), Belgian (n=4) and British (n=8) participants discussed various events planned to commemorate the First World War, no Canadian tourist participant was aware of any plans that Canada might have to commemorate the First World War. These findings should not come as any surprise considering that while millions of dollars are being allocated to exhibitions and galleries, digitizing archives, creating websites, hosting conferences, and youth education throughout Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand (Hopkins & Norton-Taylor, 2013; Lemelin et al., 2013), no new monies are being allocated to First World War Centenary events in Canada. Indeed, government departments, agencies and crown corporations “have been ordered to finance the commemoration costs out of existing budgets” (Granatstein, 2014). Although this government reticence is disappointing, it does provide an opportunity for Canadians to learn, discuss and re-examine issues pertaining to the First World War centenary in less nationalistic terms (Smith, 2014; Vance, 2016).

The Management of the Vimy Memorial

When asked to comment on the interpretation strategies provided at the Vimy Memorial, tourist participants, much like all the members of the research team for that matter, were overwhelmingly positive in their praise of the management approach at this national historic site (see Table 5 below).

Comments	Number
Interpretation is fair and balanced	15
The monument is powerful, impressive, memorable	10
The guides are well-informed	10
The displays and visual aids (e.g., movie) are effective	10
Seeing the battlefield and having an opportunity to walk through the trenches and visit the tunnels is crucial	8
The interpretation in various languages (English, French, German) is commendable	3

Table 5 – Comments Pertaining to the Management and Interpretation of the Vimy Memorial

As some participants noted, the on-site experience was crucial as well as memorable.

Being at the actual place and seeing the surroundings speaks more of an understanding than just reading about it. (P5, Belgian man)

The landscapes speaks for itself. (P22, British woman)

Being here where it happened, feeling the connections, seeing the spaces where the soldiers were. (P36, English man)

Members of the research team also highlighted the importance of the experiential aspects of this educational experience. For the weather and the terrain accentuated the learning opportunities and provided a spatial depiction of what the men would have experienced. For Corey, Shannon, John, Zak and Matt it was the beaches of Dieppe that resonated quite strongly with them, “you see the picture and the videos, but until you actually walk on the beaches and see the cliffs, you don’t truly understand what the men were facing” (John). For Shannon seeing the movie *They Walk With You* at the Juno Beach Centre and walking along the beaches where the Canadians landed was an “unexpectedly emotional experience.” In addition to providing a greater historical understanding, this type of opportunity suggested Kathryn, “provides an opportunity for all of those history lessons to finally sink in.”

Although most visitors were satisfied with their experience at the Vimy Memorial, the Memorial was for many visitors, simply one of many sites to be visited on this trip. As a result, the Vimy Memorial was often compared to other sites recently visited. For example, some participants suggested that visitor experiences would be enhanced if the site provided living history, re-enactments and more experiential opportunities. One participant stated that although they were quite impressed with the monument at the Vimy Memorial, they believed that additional interpretation similar to that used in the trenches and tunnels in the memorial park should be provided at the monument. Although some of us agreed with this observation, it is worth noting that since the monument also serves as a site of remembrance, careful consideration of how to balance interpretation and commemoration at this particular site would be required.

Reflections

A collaborative approach to visual ethnography became instructive as members of the research team engaged in both the video interviews and conducting semi-structured interviews with visitors to the Vimy Memorial. Mitigating unexpected challenges such as conducting video interviews in open space where there were noises and distractions from curious onlookers (Rakik & Chambers, 2009) was educational for all members of the research team, and we reduced these aspects of it, as we proceeded through our trip. Minimizing distractions and making the interviewees more comfortable was a key component for improving how the video interviews were conducted. As Sarah states:

The video interviews ended up being an important part of the trip to me. I feel that without that opportunity for self reflection, I would not have been provoked to truly analyze and critique what I saw. I would not have understood the importance of what I was experiencing. I've realized that learning cannot occur without reflection. The video interviews offered me a chance for reflection. Having to put into words what I experienced and saw made a huge difference in my overall experience. I was able to consider how each museum, monument, or cemetery made me feel and this forced me to put those thoughts into words. Merely thinking about an experience can sometimes not be enough; I think it's important to express in words one's thoughts and feelings for such an important journey. I had the opportunity to create a video of our trip which included the video interviews. I was deeply moved by the insights and reflections of my peers. The interviews provided us with the opportunity to express our gratitude for those who came before us and to connect us to our emotions. With permission, I was able to include some of the footage in the video I created. I was able to create a lasting memory that I shared with my peers. (Sarah)

Although popular with most of the research team, Calla also noted that she had mixed feelings towards the video interviews:

I understand that through video interviews you can capture the emotion behind what is being said and allows for the interviewer to take the questions further if they wish. For myself though because of what we were seeing and experiencing I would have preferred to answer the questions on paper. My journals went much deeper into what was happening through the trip than what was captured in my interviews. (Calla)

What this insight suggest is that although video interviews are a valuable research tool, we should not discount more traditional approaches (e.g., field diaries) to field research. We should in fact, encourage a multitude of approaches encouraging reflexivity and discuss this with the research team prior to the implementation of the project.

The semi-structured surveys provided an opportunity for various members to develop and in some cases, refine interviewing skills. Members of the research team were quick to learn that interviewing people in the field was not just about administering surveys, it required

interacting with people and developing sufficient trust that the participants were willing to provide insights and information. This process, as Calla suggest, could be quite intimidating:

I understood why the research was important but there was still the feeling that the individuals would be on a personal and potentially emotional experience causing them to not want to be bothered. The individuals I was able to speak with were kind, for the most part, but you could tell they did not want to talk long. They wanted to continue on their personal journey. (Calla)

The interviews also became an opportunity to acquire a greater understanding of visitor motivations associated with First and Second World Wars. When asked about their knowledge of the Great War, almost half of the participants (n=15) defined themselves as somewhat knowledgeable with the rest of the respondents situating themselves at the two poles of knowledge: very limited or non-existent (n=8) to very well-informed (n=8). In comparison, at the beginning of the course less than one-quarter of our research team had any knowledge of the World Wars (n=3). Although our knowledge of the First and Second World Wars increased throughout the trip, by the end of the trip and conclusion of the course, none of us defined ourselves as ‘experts’.

An emergent theme from this project revealed a possible characteristic of the visitors to war related monuments and battlefields. Our class as a whole did not distinguish between the various nationalities of the fallen soldiers, nor were we particularly drawn by a familial connection; rather, every researcher was profoundly moved by the loss of an entire generation, no matter the country of origin, now known as the “sacrificed generation.” Although you can appreciate the work that goes into managing these cemeteries, after visiting so many of them, whether they be French, German or from the Commonwealth “it is still in the end a cemetery, and watching the ages on the stones was an excruciating exercise- so many men (boys, really) our age and younger. 16, 19, 24. It turned my stomach after a while.” (Shannon) This was in contrast to the interviewees who were interested in the particular site because of an attachment to an event usually through a familial relationship or a national discourse. Understanding both segments of the population could guide future interpretive displays and marketing.

Conclusions

Seaton (2000) warned that visitors undertaking these types of experiences can, after a while, become bored with visiting another cemetery or another battlefield, and therefore keeping visitors engaged in battlefield tourism can be challenging. The goal of this study was to avoid this weariness and boredom by engaging all members of the research team into a collaborative research process. The responsibilities associated with administering the surveys provided various opportunities for the research team to learn about, and develop their research skills in the field. The video interviews provided an opportunity to create, reflect, and share memories. For some members of the research team, these memories have become a part of family lore, for others these experiences will be cherished memories that may in the future be shared with others. As stated earlier, inspired by these travels but concerned with the apparent reluctance of Canadian federal and provincial governments to promote the First World War Centenary, a blog (blog site removed for review purposes) and a video (video link removed for review purposes) have been created. It is our hope that both will contribute to the social memory of the First and Second World Wars, and that instructors and students will be encouraged to integrate video ethnography and on-site research, to, in the words of Winston Churchill, “excite the wonder and reverence of future generations” (Winston Churchill cited in Summers 2007, p. 7), visiting these sites.

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Endnotes

¹ Since the course instructor had previously visited all of these areas and published on the visitation of some of these sites, we decided in-order to remain consistent, to remove him from the analysis.