

Memorial March Completed from Amherst to Debert

By Linda Harrington

When you 'goggle' walk from Amherst to Debert, the time listed is 18 hr 55 min over a total of 92.8 km but this is the modern version, taking new highways. The original route completed by 150 members of the North Nova Highlanders back in May, 1941 followed what are now considered back roads, from Amherst over Lynn Mountain and along the Bay of Fundy for a total of 125 km, ending at the staging grounds in Camp Debert.

Kevin Byrne, 65, a retired air force officer has a personal connection to the North Nova Highlanders. In 1940, his father, John joined the Cape Breton Highlanders at 15 years of age. He went overseas in 1941 and joined the North Nova Scotia Highlanders B Company in 1944, landing with them on D-Day. John was wounded twice, once on June 9th and again on Sept. 19th.

Kevin went to a couple of the North Nova Highlander's reunions with his father and often heard about the march from Amherst to Debert. "The militia units never got the credit they deserved like the regular forces," says Kevin, "On D-Day at Juno Beach there were no regular forces, they were all militia. With the 80th Anniversary of the march coming up, I felt it was time to commemorate their accomplishment. They deserve more credit."

Kevin started planning the trek back in 2018. He issued an in-

vite to the Cadets program for anyone wanting to join him. He had two applicants, Katie Clyburne, now 18 and William Pomeroy, now 19. They both are Silver and Bronze Duke of Edinburg recipients, currently working on their Gold Medal. The three began training together taking 20km and 30km hikes and they also did separate training, as well.

The walk was originally planned for the 80th Anniversary in May of this year but due to Covid, the date was changed to June 24th.

When the big day arrived, the trio got off to a bit of a late start after enjoying a tour of the North Nova Highlanders Museum at the Col. James Layton Ralston Armoury in Amherst, where they "politely declined" the offer to wear full battledress for the hike. By the end of the first day, they had logged 38km. "The terrain around Springhill was the most difficult of the four days," says Kevin, "We had been warned about other areas like Lynn Mountain and Economy Mountain but Springhill was definitely the most challenging."

The second day, they covered 28 km, the third 31 km and the last day a hike of 23 km took them to their final destination at the Debert Military Museum, originally known as "Camp Debert". For the last kilometer, George Hudson and Wilfred Crowe escorted Kevin, Katie and William in a military jeep, along with a piper from the NS Highlanders. Eight members of the Nova Scotia Highlanders Association lined the final route, displaying their banner and offering congratulations on their accomplishment.

Kevin was emotional as he recalled the events of the last four days, especially the kindness of people like a man named "Andrew" who offered up his property for them to camp and Anita McLellan for opening the World War II Observation Tower in Economy at early hours for an exclusive tour and for them to have access to a washroom.

Katie was pleased with how much additional information they learned on the walk from visiting the museums and hearing stories from people who walked along with them. "The photos of the original walk from 1941 located at the Bass River Heritage Museum were very informative," she says. The final day was made easier with people clapping and waving as they went by.

With the 125 km hike now completed, Kevin had a renewed appreciation for the original march by the North Nova Highlanders. "What they did was a real accomplishment, and this is why I wanted to do something to recognize this march," said Kevin to those who had gathered at the Museum. "They were coming here, and within a couple of months, they were boarding a ship headed for England, and they had no idea when they were coming home, and unfortunately, a lot of them didn't. And that's what you've got to remember."

See story: "Article in Local Newspaper on May 12th, 1941" on page 6.



Kevin Byrne, Katie Clyburne and William Pomeroy walking along the highway in Glenholme on their final day of the four day hike from Amherst.



Those packs must have seemed much heavier after four days of hiking in sweltering temperatures.



Members of the Nova Scotia Highlanders Association who were waiting to congratulate Kevin, Katie and William. Left to Right: COL Colin Todd, Jim Stewart, William MacKenzie, Blair Green, Tony Dickie, Bob Grant, Daniel Stewart and Gary Stewart.




A well-deserved congratulatory hug after arriving in Debert after four days of hiking from Amherst.



Wilfred Crowe and George Hudson were driving a military jeep when they met up with the hikers in Glenholme and later escorted them for the final kilometer to the Debert Military Museum.



Daniel Stewart and Gary Stewart, members of the Nova Scotia Highlanders Association pose with Kevin Byrne, Katie Clyburne and William Pomeroy upon their arrival in Debert.



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Kevin, Katie and William extended appreciation to Ivy Byrne, who was their support driver on the four day hike. Ivy spent many hours alone in her car making sure the team had what they needed.



Arriving at the Debert Military Museum.

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