

A virtual Memorial Day service

With the pandemic, most traditional events organized by San Francisco Branch of The Royal Canadian Legion in California were suspended. However, when the Digital Moose Lounge, a local organization of expatriate Canadians, approached the branch to participate in its virtual Canada Day celebration, First Vice Michael Barbour, a professor of educational technology and a native Newfoundlander, saw an opportunity to engage members of the branch and local cadets.

In addition to being Canada Day, July 1 is also remembered in Newfoundland and Labrador as Memorial Day or Commemoration Day, created to honour the tragic events of July 1, 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme.

That was when the Newfoundland Regiment courageously went over the top in the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel in France and was nearly wiped out. Not a family in the independent dominion of Newfoundland was unscathed by the loss.

The events of Beaumont-Hamel were so devastating that Commemoration Day in Newfoundland was established just one year later. After Confederation with Canada in 1949, the province continued the tradition of Commemoration Day on the morning of July 1 and reserved the remainder of the day to celebrate Canada Day.

To honour that tradition and to engage with members again,



Screenshots reveal the range of the virtual service organized by the Legion's San Francisco Branch. The video "The Battle of Beaumont-Hamel" (INSET), narrated by Gordon Pinsent, was also part of the service.



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the branch created a virtual sunrise service at 6 a.m. on Commemoration Day (more commonly known as Memorial Day, but not to be confused with the American holiday in May).

The service was composed of a collection of recordings made over the preceding month by members and friends of the branch, as well

as members of the local U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps, Arkansas Division, and all of the branches of the Western U.S. Zone.

A time-lapse video of sunrise over San Francisco Bay was included. The flags of Canada, the United States and the Legion were raised. Guest speakers included Rana Sarkar, Canadian Consul General in San Francisco, and Seamus O'Regan, minister of Natural Resources and former minister of Veterans Affairs. There were performances by musicians from Newfoundland and Labrador, and *Legion Magazine's* "Military Moments: Battle of Beaumont-Hamel," narrated by Newfoundlander Gordon Pinsent, was included in the service.

The service was repeated at 10 a.m. for those unable to view at sunrise. It can be viewed at <https://royalcanadianlegionus25.com/2020/07/01/commemoration-day-virtual-service/>. 