

THE/LE BULLETIN



Over the course of a year, *The Bulletin* will be running a four part series on uncovering the truth about a mysterious photo from the Second World War. Relive the author's experience searching for answers in each issue.

The Mystery of the Christmas Dinner Photo Revealed

By Karen Storwick, Director of Communications, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry

What was considered to be a minor objective in the offensive to capture Rome during the Italian Campaign of the Second World War, Ortona became the scene of one of the bloodiest battles in Canadian history. On 20 December 1943, the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and the 12th Canadian Armoured Regiment entered the town of Ortona, engaging in some of the fiercest street fighting during the Second World War. What became known as "Little Stalingrad", the Canadian infantry took Ortona in 8 days of bitter warfare, quite literally street by street and house by house.

In the decades after the Second World War, a photograph emerged that became a symbol for the battle of Ortona. On December 25th, just blocks from the front line, men rotated back for a shared Christmas dinner then returned just as quickly to the fighting, many killed only moments later. A rare photo of the Christmas dinner being served to the troops became a symbol of civility amidst the horrors of war. It also served as a Regimental icon of the Seaforth Highlanders' remarkable experience in the Church of Santa Maria di Constantinopoli on Christmas Day, 1943.



Some years ago, however, doubt was cast on the authenticity of the photo. When closely examined by Seaforth veterans present at the Christmas feast in the church that day, they realized this photo wasn't their dinner.

The Seaforths ate inside the church nave. The tables were set in long rows, complete with tablecloths, real silver and china, and the two pints of coveted beer. In spite of the fact that the two other regiments from 2nd Brigade, as well as supporting units, were all in the vicinity of the church during the heavy fighting, only the Seaforth Highlanders were lucky enough to be spirited away from battle to enjoy some remarkable moments of peace and good cheer on Christmas Day. (Continued on next page)

In the classic photograph, a canopy of foliage drapes over a medieval brick fortress wall. This picture was not shot inside a church. Even more telling, the tables in the photograph are arranged in a square. There are no tablecloths, and, most of the men are eating out of their mess tins. Only the odd man has the treasured two bottles of beer that each Seaforth was given with dinner. Furthermore, some men in this photo are clearly wearing shoulder patches from units other than the Seaforths. Too many details in the photograph were inconsistent with the well documented event and had been verified by Seaforth veterans. It was a natural conclusion. This beloved image, capturing the spirit of that incredible moment in history, was not taken at the Seaforth dinner after all.

Consequently, the photograph was dismissed from the iconography of the Regiment and removed from its annals of history as representative of that historic day. Recent publications of the photo indicate that it was taken at a brigade dinner at an unknown time and unknown location behind the lines. It is now a widely considered fact that the dinner in the photo was not at the Santa Maria de Constantinopoli church "as often said", but at the Divisional Headquarters at San Vito Chientino.

Next issue: Karen discusses the photograph with one of its Seaforth subjects and begins her journey to discover the truth.

Wheels and Wings Meet at "The Hangar"

By MWO Norm Marion, 16 Wing Public Affairs Officer

They may not be as old as the First World War hangar that's standing behind them, but the dozen of vehicles from the Antique & Classic Car Club of Canada looked right at home last Friday, all lined up in front of the Air Annex of the Base Borden Military Museum (Hangar 11). For sure, the convoy of beautifully restored classic and antique cars turned many heads along the road on base, as the Mustangs, Sedan de Ville, even a 1939 Chrysler Royal made their way to the museum.



Photo credit Sgt Kev Parle

The members of the ACCCC (Brampton Region) were on their annual Fall Tour when they stopped in Borden for a pre-arranged visit of the historic Royal Flying Corps hangar, courtesy of 16 Wing. "The visit was not only interesting, but educational, and I know for a few it was the highlight of our three days," says the ACCCC tour coordinator, Bob McGugan. "Many were still talking about it at our wrap up lunch on Sunday!"

Built in 1917 as part of a programme aimed at recruiting and training Canadian aviators for service in Europe, Hangar 11 is one of only seven remaining First World War hangars left in Borden.

They were the first purpose-built military aviation hangars in the country, and they witnessed the birth and all phases of evolution of a national Air Force in Canada. For those reasons, the Borden hangar line was designated a National Historic Site in 1989.

A Canadian Artefact Repatriated

By Marilyn Gurney, OMMC President

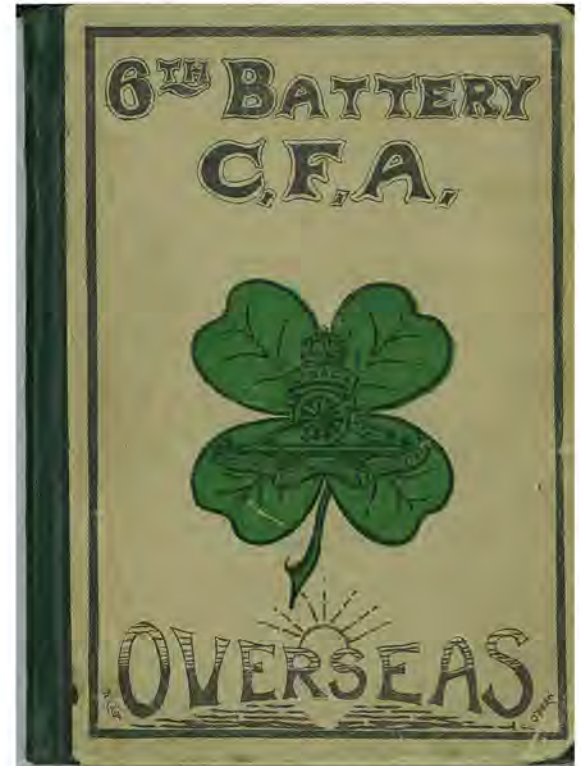
Recently, a small package arrived in the mail. I was expecting it. It had come from England, sent by a young British soldier readying for deployment. It was far more than what I had expected.

It is a delightful little, First World War, souvenir booklet of the 6th Battery, 2nd Brigade, C.F.A. Overseas. Initially, I was quite surprised by the quality of the publication and the information contained therein. The front piece inscription was insightful "To Lady Arthur with the compliments of the Battery" and signed by E.L. McColl, Major. I immediately questioned the identity of Lady Arthur and the closest (but not confirmed) was the Duchess of Connaught, wife of the Governor General. Major McColl was the Commanding Officer of the Battery, throughout the war. Compiled and arranged by L.M. Firth, B.A. Lieut, it was published by Charles Georgi, Bonn, 1919.

As I am not overly familiar with unit histories and war diaries, I found this booklet to be well done and chocked full of interesting information. Its history commences with the declaration of war in 1914, and the formation of the Battery at Valcartier, and ends with a big Christmas dinner in 1918 at Eil – a sharp contrast to Xmas dinner 1915 that was held "at guns and at wagon lines".

Illustrated with the photographs, humorous remembrances, jokes, poetry and other tidbits, this history ends with a nominal roll of all ranks of the Battery as it arrived in Germany, the decorations awarded, those wounded and those killed.

This booklet is in excellent condition and will be donated to the museum that perpetuates the history of this Battery. If you represent this museum, please contact me at ommcinc@gmail.com



Quick Facts!

In Commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry
Contributed by Karen Storwick

In Sept 1914 the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry left for France, becoming the first and only Canadian unit to serve in the theatre of operations in 1914. All of the combined training and experience could not have prepared the newly formed Regiment for the horrors of trench warfare they would face. In the first three months on the line, the Patricia's were to suffer 238 battle casualties and lost its original Commanding Officer. The worst was yet to come.



Totem Pole Comes to Barrie

By MWO Normand Marion, 16 Wing Borden Public Affairs Officer

"On this 15th anniversary of the twinning of our two cities I am pleased to present this totem pole as a gift to the citizens of Barrie," said Mayor Rolf Franzen, mayor of the City of Zweibrücken, Germany. "I hope it will remind you of those who gave their lives while serving at RCAF 3 Fighter Wing in Zweibrücken." Mayor Franzen was addressing a crowd that had gathered inside the Barrie Armoury on September 8th, 2012, to witness the presentation and re-dedication of a totem pole that once stood at the entrance of a Canadian air base in Germany.

In his address, Mayor Franzen explained the link between the totem pole and Zweibrücken: "There were two separate ceremonies [at the time of the closing of the RCAF base] involving totem poles, and the larger of the two is still standing in our Rose Garden, where it was dedicated some 43 years ago. The second ceremony was that of the smaller totem pole being erected at the entrance of the R.C.A.F station."



Posing in front of the totem pole, left to right: Mayor Jeff Lehman; Mayor Rolf Franzen; LCol Peter Earle; and Mr Stuart Beaton (Lcol ret'd) (DND photo by Sgt Kev Parle)

It was this smaller totem pole - a tribute to the RCAF airmen from Zweibrücken who made the ultimate sacrifice, which was being presented to the City of Barrie after being restored to its original splendour.

During the presentation ceremony, Mr Stuart Beaton (LCol retired), Director of the Base Borden Military Museum, recalled for the audience the totem pole's amazing journey, which had begun decades earlier on the west coast of Canada. "The log was fell and donated to the RCAF by the Macmillan Bloedel Company," he said. "There were actually a number of trees donated and various totem poles were created by a Haida First Nations Carver, Mr. Douglas Cranmer of Deep Cove, B.C."

Indeed, through the skilful hands and creative mind of Mr. Cranmer, the spectacular Zweibrücken totem pole soon revealed itself. It was shipped to Germany in the spring of 1969 and erected at the entrance of the base, where it stood until 1991, when the US Air Force decided to close the base. Rather than abandoning the totem pole to an uncertain fate, the USAF returned it to Baden-Soellingen, the nearest Canadian base still operating in Germany. With the subsequent closure of the last Canadian base in Germany, the totem pole made its way back to Canada, initially standing outdoors in the Air Park at the RCAF Memorial Museum in Trenton, but eventually finding a home at the Borden Museum. In 2011, it was shipped to Christian Island in Georgian Bay to the workshop of Mr. Randall King, where it was restored to its former glory.



The famous totem pole, restored to its original splendour. (DND photo by Sgt Kev Parle)

With A Little Help From My Friends

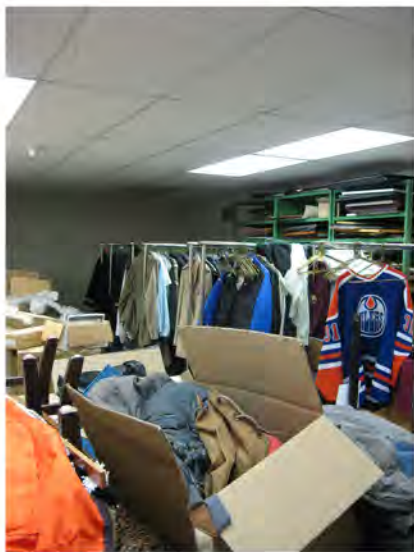
By Jennifer Large, Cold Lake Air Force Museum

The Cold Lake Air Force Museum (CLAFM) has been undergoing many transformations since its seasonal closure at the beginning of September 2012. None of these projects would have been possible without the help of the Museum Chair Maj Porteous, Museum Deputy Chair Maj Rennie, 4CES from 4 Wing Cold Lake, the Cold Lake Museums Society, MCpl Gaunt, and Volunteer Darcy Wanvig.

The CLAFM has undergone several changes of hands and stages of development since its accreditation in 2008. Like many small museums, we have our share of struggles and labours. The CLAFM will need to go through several stages of renovations and restorations in order to become appropriately functional, both with collections management and displays.

We began our projects by cleaning up all of the collections rooms in order to begin the sorting process. There are four rooms, and a resource room, spread throughout the museum. Since one of the issues that the CLAFM repeatedly has is mice, it was pertinent to get all of the artefacts off of the floors as soon as possible. The next project, which is still under completion, is moving the curator's office next to the library and archives. This will open up the front office for summer staff use and for a single lunch room in an effort to control mice. With the help of 4CES, we managed a quick but effective cleanup of the outside of the museum.

The CLAFM is in its infancy stages for development. With a little more help from friends and support, the museum will quickly grow into a notable historic site.



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Left:

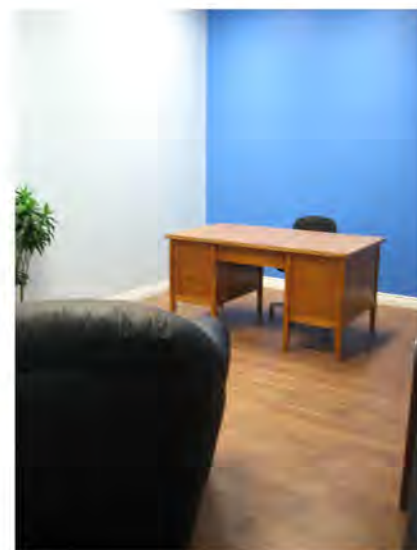
- 1 - Collection Room #2 Before
- 2 - Collection Room #2 After

Right:

- 1 - Curator's Office Before
- 2 - Curator's Office After



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New Brunswick Military History Museum Update

Capt. Kevin Anderson, NBMHM Director

Work is progressing on the renovations to the NB Military History Museum (NBMHM). Physical construction began on 17 Sep 12 and although it's been just a few short weeks, the change is remarkable. Our main focus to this point has been the Timeline Gallery where we will be highlighting 400 years of NB's military history. We will be hosting a fundraising event at the museum on the 3rd of November for provincial and municipal government officials, First Nations Chiefs, City Mayors and leaders of NB-based industries where we will demonstrate why we deserve recognition and support as a "provincial" museum.

In the Gallery, the old windows and the fireplace were filled in, covered with drywall and painted giving a nice, smooth finish to the walls. We covered over all the old ceiling light fixtures, painted the ceiling flat black and have installed LED track lighting. Our Signature Exhibit bases are installed and the murals and 3D elements will be set up in the next few weeks. New display cases have arrived and we will start filling them as soon as the electrical work is done.

The partitions and the ceiling fixtures in the entry way have been removed. Two of the upstairs rooms have been crack-filled and painted and are almost ready to be turned into offices. We are just waiting on new windows to replace the old, wood framed windows that were originally installed.

The barn boards that used to adorn the walls of the former library and archive section have been removed. We will strap, drywall and paint over the walls in this room to give our temporary exhibit gallery a more modern look and feel. In addition to hosting temporary exhibits, we plan to use this room to host Combat Training Centre graduation events and other functions.

Before we reopen sometime in 2013, all of our rooms will be re-painted, new display cases and exhibits will be installed and, thanks to our partnership with the Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society at the University of New Brunswick, we will provide our visitors with a comprehensive story of New Brunswick at war and peace. Thanks to the tremendous support of Michel Litalien and Captain Yves Lesieur at the Directorate of History and Heritage, our vision will soon become reality.



The first Signature Exhibit case will show the Siege of Fort LaTour on the right and Afghanistan Task Force 1-07 (2 RCR) on the left.



The back side of the former fireplace will be part of the Saint John ship building Signature Exhibit. Note that the lights had not yet been changed.

My Visit to LCol (Ret'd) Ernst Schmidt

By Dick Mallott

It is always a blessing to visit old friends, particularly if they are as interesting as LCol (Retd) Dr. Ernst Heinrich Schmidt of Baden-Baden, Germany. I and my partner, Sharleen Marengère who speaks fluent German, visited LCol Schmidt and his charming wife, Birgit, in Baden-Baden, Germany for a week in late August 2012. We toured the beautiful Black Forest area with its quaint villages, vineyards, corn fields and wonderful small village restaurants offering local German food and wine. The Schmidt's three story home is in a typical German village setting. Birgit's mother resides on the bottom floor and Ernst, Birgit, and their big dog Maximillian "Max", live on the remaining two floors. Birgit, who has for many years conducted Italian tours to historic sites in Italy, has decorated their home with beautiful artistic works from her many tours.



LCol (Retd) Dr. Ernst Schmidt sitting at his office desk and holding his latest German military music CD

Ernst has many areas of his home dedicated to his large reference library for his military and musical research and writings, his personal military souvenirs and his photographs. In one area is a 13 volume set of his 13 visits to the OMMC Inc. Photographs, touring data, course information and other related items are thoroughly described. We spent many pleasant hours reminiscing while looking at each volume, and in particular at the course photographs, all properly identified. I wish that I had done so for the 25 years that I was associated with the OMMC Inc. Ernst has contacted Dr. John MacFarlane of DHist offering to donate his 13 Volume set to DHist at a later date.

Although Ernst retired from the military museum world some years ago he is still just as active researching German military music, recording new musical finds, and arranging military musical concerts at the local military museum. Ernst has prepared for me a 16 page account of his 13 lectures that he has presented at OMMC Inc. courses in the 1980's (he will provide the exact dates), the various museums at which he has identified German military artifacts, a list of our members with whom he worked closely like Alan Fell, Derrick Tilley, Major (Retd) Vince Brown and the late Major Peter Pym-Hember, and a suggested program, if desired, to identify German military artifacts in OMMC Inc. museums. LCol Dr Schmidt arranged to collect and ship to Canada a large shipment of East & West obsolete German tanks, artillery, weapons, uniforms and memorabilia that were allocated to many of the military museums of the OMMC Inc and the Canadian War Museum.

Our 7 day visit came to an end as we boarded the local train to Munich and thence on to Vienna the city of music, beautiful buildings, food and wine. The OMMC Inc. has had many dear friends from Europe that came to our courses and shared their knowledge with us. Perhaps it is time to reestablish those very worth-while links from the past. A great start is to do so with our dear friend and colleague LCol (Retd) Dr. Ernst Heinrich Schmidt.



The conductor's baton presented to Ernst at his last lecture with the OMMC Inc.

Milkweed Woven Into RCAF History

By Bethany Aitchison, Canadian Forces Museum of Aerospace Defence

Fall is upon us, and with it comes nature's glorious transformation. Leaves turn into bold colours, birds flock and the milkweed pods open up and release their seeds, floating on their airy white parachutes in the wind. But did you know that this milkweed 'floss' was actually used in the manufacture of real parachutes?

During the Second World War children were encouraged to pick as many milkweed pods as they could to help with the war effort. The silky floss found inside the milkweed pods was used in the webbing of parachutes used by the Royal Canadian Air Force. Irvin Industries, from Fort Erie, manufactured parachutes using the substance. Children were the prime target for milkweed picking due to labour shortages during the war and were encouraged to pick them en route to school, or to go out as classes to pick as a group. Onion bags were most commonly used for stuffing and carrying the pods.

Additionally, near the end of the war, after the Japanese had captured the Dutch West Indies and the supply of buoyant 'fluff' from the kapok tree had been cut off, the milkweed floss, which is also quite buoyant, was used to fill military life jackets. This was more common in the United States, where some areas even offered some small compensation for donating bags of milkweed pods. It took roughly two onion bags of milkweed pods to fill one life jacket vest.



Next time you see a milkweed pod releasing its seeds this fall, think about the people, especially the children, who went to the effort of picking hundreds of seed pods to assist with Canadian and American war efforts. Those who were in warplanes certainly would have appreciated the effort as they strapped themselves into their parachutes.

This photo was sent to CFMAD by Gwen Voth, visitor and student at the time, whose class from Hornby, Ontario, gathered milkweed pods as a group effort during the latter years of the Second World War.

The Organization of Military Museums of Canada

Executive

Marilyn Gurney: President	ommcinc@gmail.com
Stuart Beaton: Vice President	stuart.beaton@forces.gc.ca
Dave Stinson: Secretary	davelach@telus.net

Directors

Don Manley	maridon31@gmail.com
Claude Rivard	rivarcj@mymts.net
Bethany Aitchison	bethany.aitchison@live.ca
Eric Ruel	eric.ruel@cfsj.qc.ca
Greg Gallant	greggallant@pei.sympatico.ca

'The Bulletin' is the official publication of the Organization of Military Museums of Canada. The editor is Bethany Aitchison. Articles can be submitted to bethany.aitchison@live.ca.