



VIMM Newsletter

Summer 2020

Vancouver Island Military Museum

JULY 1, 1916: REMEMBERING THE ROYAL NEWFOUNDLAND REGIMENT

By Greg Devenish

On July 1, when Canadians celebrate what they have, Newfoundlanders remember what they have lost. The Battle of the Somme lasted from July 1 to November 19, 1916. However, it is the first day that has made the greatest impact in the historical record and on the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Newfoundland Regiment suffered 660 casualties out of 810 engaged in the attack. While Canadians celebrate Canada Day, Newfoundlanders are torn as they mark July 1 as Memorial Day.

In 1914, when war was declared, Newfoundland was a British Colony, not part of Canada. Newfoundlanders answered the call to serve King and country and the Newfoundland Regiment was mobilized. (The term "Royal" was granted in Feb. 1918, the only unit in WWI so honoured.) The regiment earned the nickname "The Blue Puttees" (named after the colour of their ankle wraps).

The Newfoundland Regiment sailed overseas in convoy with the Canadian Expeditionary Force but served separately from the CEF in the Imperial army. Their first action, with 1076 all ranks, was at Gallipoli in Turkey, where they suffered major casualties. In 1916 they were re-formed and sent to France for the "Big Push" on the Somme River.



The chief objective of the Battle of the Somme was to break through the German Lines and put an end to the stalemate of trench warfare. The Newfoundland Regiment was attached to General Rawlinson's British Fourth Army. In June, the regiment had settled into the town of Albert and various practice attacks were carried out. In late June, the regiment moved up to the front near Beaumont Hamel. Prior to the attack, the Newfoundlanders carried out a number of night raids to penetrate German trenches to capture German soldiers for interrogation. In one raid, four were killed and Pte. George Phillips was awarded a Military Medal for bringing back the wounded.

On July 1 at 7:00 am, nearly a quarter of a million artillery shells rained down on German positions. At 7:20 a.m. a massive mine at Hawthorne Ridge exploded marking the beginning of the offensive.

In this colorized photo from 1916, the Royal Newfoundland Regiment are being roused in the reserve trench (St. John's Trench) shortly before zero hour. See modern photo on page 3.

(Continued on page 3)

LIBERATION 75 Victory in Europe VE Day

1945-2020



Vice President's Message

Jubilant Dutch citizen welcoming Canadian soldiers as they enter the town of Zwolle.

For Canadian troops, Victory in Europe Day came after an eleven month bloody slog through France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. First Canadian Army, following the landing at Juno Beach and the Battle of Normandy, was given the job of clearing the channel ports of German forces. The fighting which raged across northern Europe was particularly savage in and around the area known as the Scheldt. This was a major battle for Canadian soldiers fighting to take control of an area on the Belgian and Netherlands border and the gateway to the port of Antwerp which was needed to resupply the advancing Allied armies. The battle was fought over flat, muddy, open landscape that had been flooded by the German Army who had systematically destroyed the dikes.



Ninety-five-year-old Second World War veteran Tony Pearson now retired in Nanaimo was a young man in the front line of combat during the battle of the Scheldt and took part in the liberation of the town of Zwolle. Tony is a frequent visitor to the Vancouver Island Military Museum and a long time friend of retired museum director Jack Zibert.

Brian McFadden

Tony Pearson of Nanaimo took part in the liberation of the Netherlands.

THE ATTACK OF THE NEWFOUNDLANDERS

The Newfoundland Regiment was located in a reserve trench (later named St. John's Trench). They were to be the second wave attack. The soldiers had been told that the artillery barrage would cause major German losses and cut up the wire. The reality was that 30% of the heavy shells were duds and very little German wire was cut. When the shelling ceased the Germans were forewarned of the imminent attack. They simply scrambled from their dugouts and prepared for battle.

At 9:05 am the Regiment got news that the lead British brigade in the first wave had won its objectives. This was false. The Regiment was supposed to move forward to the first line of British trenches, then go over the top and advance to support the British. But the communication trenches used to move up were clogged with supplies and British wounded. Like all troops that day, the Newfoundlanders were also weighed down with nearly 45 kg of kit, plus rifle and ammunition.

In order to get forward to the first line of trenches, the Newfoundland Regiment decided to climb out of the cover of the reserve trenches. They were instantly exposed to enemy fire. The Newfoundlanders had to advance more than 750 yards. Many were killed without ever reaching the supposed starting line. Near a particular tree (nicknamed the Danger Tree), the Newfoundlanders hunkered down. German shellfire was accurate and deadly. A British soldier, who had attacked during the first wave, witnessed the assault.

"On came the Newfoundlanders, a great body of men, but the fire intensified and they were wiped out in front of my eyes. I cursed the generals for the useless slaughter ..."



St. John's Trench at Newfoundland Memorial Park
Beaumont Hamel 100 years later.
(Note the road in both pictures).

To make matters worse, the soldiers wore tin triangles on the back of their haversacks so observers could watch their progress, but the tin proved a reflective target for the Germans. Only a handful of Newfoundlanders reached the German trenches where they hurled their hand-held bombs but were cut down. A Newfoundland historian wrote;
"Where two men had been advancing side by side, suddenly there was only one—and a few paces farther on he too would pitch forward on his face...the leading man of a pair carrying a ten-foot bridge is hit, and as he falls down with bridge and partner. ...the latter gets up, hoists the bridge over his head, and plods grimly forward until machine gun bullets cut him down"

In just 45 minutes the Regiment lost 26 officers and 658 men either killed, wounded or captured. Newfoundland stretcher bearers worked all day under fire to retrieve the wounded.

General de Lisle, commander of the British division in which the Newfoundlanders served, informed the Newfoundland Prime Minister with a simple message; "It was a significant display of trained and disciplinary valour." The whole of Newfoundland was in shock and mourning. Historian Martin Gilbert summarized the Battle of the Somme.

"The Battle of the Somme remains...a somber, powerful and constant memorial, and salutation, to the vast armies of men who fought there....and those the survived with only the mental scars of savage conflict. The agony of war took its toll on the Somme in full measure. The heroism and horror of war were seen there without disguise - unembellished and unadorned."

One can visit the Newfoundland Memorial Park Beaumont Hamel. The land was purchased by the Newfoundland Government and was opened in 1925. The battlefield, complete with trenches, iron picket bars, and craters has been preserved. It is the only land left untouched from the battle of the Somme. A bronze statue of a caribou atop a granite mound dominates the battlefield.



*"Tread softly here!
Go reverently and
slow! Yea, let your
heart go down upon
its knees. And with
bowed head, and
heart abased, strive
hard to grasp the
future gain in the
sore loss! For not
one foot of this dark*

sod but drank its surfeit of the blood of gallant men..."
These words by John Oxenham mark the entrance to the Newfoundland Memorial Park.

75TH ANNIVERSARY - VJ DAY

By Angus Scully



August 15 is VJ Day, marking victory against Japan, and the end of the Second World War. Ceremonies commemorating the end of the war in Europe 75 years ago were severely curtailed because of the corona virus pandemic and marking the end of the war in the Pacific will also be reduced or cancelled entirely. But we can note the significance of these events, and perhaps give some deserved attention to VJ Day which is so often given second place in Canada. Canada's huge contribution to victory in Europe does deserve celebration but let us briefly note how Canada contributed to the war in Asia and the Pacific. The VIMM has several display highlighting Canada's contributions. Canada officially declared war on Japan on December 8, 1941, the day after Japanese forces had attacked

Canadian and other Commonwealth forces at Hong Kong. Of course, Japan had also attacked the United States at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, the same day. Canada's official declaration may have been made before the USA, but the fighting had been widespread across the Pacific and Asia since the morning of December 7

THE ARMY

A brigade headquarters and two battalions of infantry were sent to help defend Hong Kong in the weeks before the Japanese surprise attack - in all, 1 975 Canadians. The Winnipeg Grenadiers and the Royal Rifles of Canada from Quebec were considered only partially trained, but they made a determined stand against the Japanese attacks. For example, Company Sergeant-Major John Osborn of the Grenadiers was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross after he jumped on a Japanese hand grenade to save the lives of his fellow soldiers. Also, the Canadian commander, Brigadier General John Lawson, was killed fighting in front of his headquarters, an act that was mentioned specifically by Winston Churchill to the British House of Commons. On December 25, the British commander surrendered the British, Indian, and Canadian troops who were still holding out. The survivors faced nearly four years of brutal treatment as prisoners of war. The new VIMM display on their experiences is scheduled to open this fall.

Although the Japanese were really incapable of invading Canada because of the distance and logistics problems they would face, there was a real possibility of raids - armed landings, air attacks, or bombardments from the Japanese fleet. Japanese submarines were in the waters off the west coast, and one attacked a radio station and lighthouse at Estevan Point on Vancouver Island. In response, the Sixth Infantry Division was concentrated in British Columbia, and harbour fortifications were hurriedly strengthened. The Pacific Coast Rangers, a militia unit, began patrolling and training for possible "guerilla" warfare.

What is now considered the unnecessary internment of Japanese Canadians began and thousands of citizens were deprived of their property and freedom, in case there were traitors among them. There were not. Decades later compensation and apologies came from the governments involved, after active campaigns by Japanese Canadians and their supporters.

The Allies suffered months of defeat and retreat in 1942. Japanese forces attacked northern Australia. Japanese armies approached the border of India and conquered South East Asia, Indonesia, Papua-New Guinea, and much of Polynesia and Micronesia. The Alaskan Aleutian Islands of Attu and Kiska were invaded and occupied.



Sergeant-major John Osborn, VC.

- THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Slowly the Allies re-organized and began to push back. A brigade of troops from the Sixth Division trained on Vancouver Island for combined amphibious operations and took part in the counterattack on Kiska. Fortunately, the Japanese had retreated. That ended the Army's participation outside of Canada in the Pacific war, although after VE Day in 1945, a division was being prepared for the invasion of Japan. The war ended before it was sent.

AIR FORCE

Japanese air and naval raids on the west coast were certainly possible in 1942, and the RCAF stepped in with fighter squadrons and long-range reconnaissance aircraft. RCAF aircraft were deployed on American soil to help defend Alaska, an unprecedented event. RCAF fighters took part in the Aleutians campaign. Later in the war, RCAF fighters were on patrol over Vancouver hunting for Japanese balloon bombs.



Len Birchall board his flying boat, shortly before being shot down.

In March 1942, RCAF 413 Squadron, flying Catalina flying boats, were sent to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) to carry out patrols looking for the Japanese navy. Squadron Leader Len Birchall's plane spotted a Japanese fleet heading to Ceylon and managed to send a warning broadcast before being shot down by Japanese aircraft. Three airmen were killed, and Birchall and the rest of his crew were taken prisoner. They did not know it until after the war, but they were called, "The saviours of Ceylon."



In the British led campaign in Burma, RCAF 435 and 436 Transport Squadrons carried food, ammunition, and troops to support the ground forces. Hundreds of RCAF air and ground crew, including radar units, also served in South East Asia with the Royal Air Force.

Major Charles Hoey of Duncan BC had joined the British Army before the war. He was awarded the Military Cross for bravery in 1943 in Burma. In February 1944, Hoey was killed leading his company in an attack, despite being wounded in the leg and head. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. This monument is in Duncan on Vancouver Island.



Lieutenant Hampton Gray of Nelson in the interior BC, was a pilot with the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm. He was killed after sinking a Japanese destroyer in 1945 and awarded the Victoria Cross.

THE NAVY

At the beginning of the Pacific war, The Royal Canadian Navy was involved in hunting Japanese submarines off the west coast. West coast fishermen were organized to patrol the coast. This Fisherman's Reserve had 17 vessels and 150 officers and men. Once any threat of Japanese attack disappeared, Canada concentrated naval operations in the Atlantic. RCN ships took part in the American attack to liberate Attu in the Aleutians operation and at the end of the war, the cruiser HMCS Uganda did take part in naval operations around Japan. While Canada's main war effort was directed at Europe, defending the west coast absorbed great resources. Overseas in the Pacific and Asia, 10 000 Canadians served, and hundreds died.



Chinese Canadians served with the British secret Force 136, dropping by parachute behind Japanese lines. The first of the Force 136 recruits were: Back row (left to right): Douglas Jung, Jim Shiu, Norm Wong, Hank Wong, Louey King. Front row: John Ko Bong, Ed Chow, Roy Chan, Wing Won (in front), Norm Low, Roger Cheng, Tom Lock, Vincent Leung, Ray Lowe. (courtesy Chinese Canadian Military Museum)

REAL HERO ... AND COMIC BOOK HERO GEORGE "SCRAMMY" MCGLADREY, DFC



VIMM volunteer Richard McGladrey owns a remarkable comic book from the Second World War, featuring his cousin. True Comics described the incident when an incendiary bomb from another RCAF bomber hit George McGladrey's plane and ignited inside.

The Halifax bomber of 405 Squadron was on a mission to bomb Stettin Germany in April 1943. Flying Officer McGladrey and the rest of the crew tried to put out the fire and throw the bomb out, while the pilot struggled to keep control. Eventually they succeeded in gaining control and got their severely damaged bomber home. McGladrey was credited with throwing overboard most of the burning material with his gloved hands. McGladrey and three other crew were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Three months later, George McGladrey was killed when his bomber was shot down on a raid on Aachen, Germany. He was 21 years old.

George McGladrey is remembered on the war memorial in Chemainus on Vancouver Island. A true superhero.



THE NORTH BRITISH COLUMBIANS 102ND BATTALION



This dedication appears on a small monument in the beautiful Vancouver Island city of Comox. The 102nd Battalion was recruited in 1915 and 1916. Originally the men were to be from the Comox-Atlin federal constituency on Vancouver Island, but men from all over British Columbia were actively sought. The battalion departed Comox on June 10th, 1916 under command of Lieutenant Colonel J. W. Warden DSO, a Boer War veteran who had been wounded with the first contingent of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in 1915.

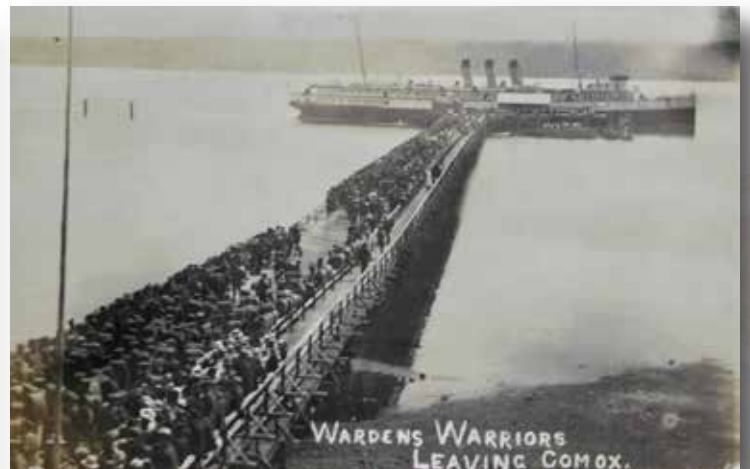
Styling themselves "Warden's Warriors," 1005 men left for France from the Comox docks. By the end of the war, 3863 men had served with the 102nd, 676 were killed, 1715 were wounded, 287 were decorated for gallantry, one was awarded the Victoria Cross.

Among the Battalion's battle honours: Somme 1916, Arras, Vimy, Hill 70, Passchendaele, Amiens, Hindenburg Line, Canal du Nord, Valenciennes.

**IN GRATITUDE
TO ALMIGHTY GOD
THROUGH WHOM ALONE
VICTORY IS SECURED
TO COMMEMORATE
FOREVER
THE COURAGE AND DEVOTION
OF SIX HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SIX
OFFICERS AND MEN
OF THE 102ND BATTN
NORTH BRITISH COLUMBIANS
WHO SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES
FOR LIBERTY AND JUSTICE
LAMENT NO MORE WE REST CONTENT**



Dearest Mother, Here is a photo of a baseball game, taken a week ago. I happened to be watching. I marked myself with a cross. I am looking up at the ball. When I get my new uniform, I am going to get my photo taken and will send some home. I have not heard from Colin since he came back. This Comox is an awful place. Nothing to do or anywhere to go in spare time. Love Geoffrey.



DISPATCHES

from VIMM



Update on Osborne Orr, Fighter Ace

In the Spring 2020 Newsletter, we described the work being done to recognize Osborne Orr, a local man who became an Ace in the RAF and was killed in action in 1918. The plaque to be added to the Cenotaph is finished and arrangements for the ceremony on November 11 are complete. Relations of Orr's mother have been found, in Seattle, and they are excited to find there is a hero in the family. If the health emergency allows, they will attend the Remembrance Day ceremony. Caroline Orr (nee Stewart) was from a large Nanaimo family. The photo provided by her Seattle descendants shows her as a young woman, with a clear resemblance to her son! The Family has offered artifacts and photos related to Osborne Orr for the VIMM display on Orr. The museum modeller Pat Murphy is building a WW1 Sopwith Camel with the correct aircraft markings for a display honouring Lt Osborne Orr DFC.



Osborne Orr, 1917. A clear family resemblance!



Caroline Stewart (left) with her mother and sisters. Photo taken in Nanaimo in the 1880s.

Medal Mounting

The VIMM will gladly mount your medals in court mounting or in a frame. Contact us for further information and prices.



The Challenge of the Pandemic

On March 15th we closed our doors in compliance with the City of Nanaimo's Health and Safety guidelines, as did most establishments involved in Culture, Heritage, and Tourism. The museum directors established a routine whereby we could attend the museum during the week to deal with housekeeping duties such as mail, internet correspondence, cataloguing, and the dozens of small jobs that needed doing but somehow always end up on the back burner. The good news is we were back in full operation on June 15th and with a full slate of

Volunteers ready to greet visitors and we will continue to adhere to the safety protocols as the summer progresses.



Bruce Davison, Volunteer Coordinator, with some of the mandated health precautions evident.

Museum Directors and Staff

Roger Bird, President
Brian McFadden, Vice President
Phil Harris, Treasurer
Pat Murphy, Armoury/Security
Greg Devenish, Secretary, Library

Bruce Davison, Volunteer Coordinator
Bill Brayshaw, Acquisitions
Angus Scully, Newsletter Editor

100 Cameron Avenue, Nanaimo, BC, V9R 0C8 250-753-3814 | ois@vimms.ca | www.vimms.ca

Back issues of the VIMM Newsletter are available on our web site