



# VIMM Newsletter

Fall 2016

Vancouver Island Military Museum

## WE REMEMBER



## MEMORIAL WALL—PHASE 3

Space is still available! Public demand for more plaques has been answered with the planning of Phase 3 of the Memorial Wall. Over half of the new spaces have already been taken, and we expect that the rest will be soon gone. The cost of the completed and mounted plaque is \$195.00 For more information, call the VIMM office at: 250 753 3814.





# President's Message



*VIMM volunteers Frank Graves (left) and Alan Porter.*

Here we are moving into the last quarter of 2016 and a lot of activities have taken place since our last newsletter. We have had two break-ins and one theft in the museum. This prompted the Directors to initiate the "Fort Knox Protocol" to upgrade our security systems. We installed 16 security cameras (interior/exterior) and upgraded our motion sensors plus adding security bars to the windows and doors. We have added a display on Canada's Black Battalion (No.2 Construction Bn, CEF). We have also enhanced the features on our mannequins thanks to Pat Murphy. On a sad note, volunteers Doug Bamford and George Smith have passed away. Our last cruise ship visit, "Star Princess", took place 20th October which saw 30 plus visitors from the ship drop by. We have the Chrystal Room at the Grand Hotel booked again this year for our 2016 Annual Christmas Dinner scheduled Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> December (11am to 3 pm, cost \$15 per person, same as last year). We are now half way through the sale of plaques for Phase three of our Wall of Honour. The plaques are selling at \$195 each with 30

remaining. Our 40 mm Bofors gun from HMCS Nanaimo II project is moving along with the addition of the concrete pad in front of the museum. We are trying to get a mural painted (by Jeff King) on the back wall next to the gun placement. We expect to get the gun project completed this year. Again, thanks to all the directors and volunteers for their hard work in making the museum operation a successful one. We are 107 visitors up this year over 2015.

*Roger Bus*



*VIMM volunteer Jim Coulthard*





# WE REMEMBER THE GREAT WAR CANADA'S BLACK BATTALION — THEY FOUGHT TO FIGHT



EF soldiers, No. 2 Construction Battalion

By Brian McFadden

During the First World War, Construction Battalions were much in demand. This type of unit is no longer used today but in France during WWI they were an essential part of the allied armies.

Despite official Canadian Government policy, which clearly stated that black volunteers could be accepted—many blacks suffered rejection at recruiting stations. Amazingly, about 1,500 blacks did manage to enroll as non-combatants in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), and after two years of tireless lobbying by black leaders, assisted by supportive whites, the government finally authorized a black unit and No. 2 Construction Battalion became the first and only black unit ever established in Canada. Because of its large black population, the army selected Nova Scotia as the location of the new unit and on July 5, 1916, No. 2 Construction Battalion was authorized and headquartered at Pictou. But, even while wearing their country's uniform, black soldiers continued to suffer segregation.

No. 2 Construction Battalion recruited across the country, making it a truly national unit. One hundred and sixty-three American blacks also joined making up approximately 20% of the battalion strength.

The unit chaplain, The Reverend William White, was one of the very few black officers in the British Empire during the First World War. Born in the United States, he moved to Nova Scotia in 1900 to study Theology at Acadia University, graduated in 1903,



Pte George Alexander Downey and Pte. James Downey of No. 2 Construction Battalion.

and settled in Truro, N.S. Reverend White was the father of famed contralto, Portia White, a classical singer of the 1940's and 50's.

Soldiers from the black battalion served in or near the front lines laying barbed wire and repairing bomb-damaged trenches, coming under both artillery and machine gun fire. Yet, the unit continued to be treated like second-class citizens.

In July 1993, in honour of the No. 2 Construction Battalion, a granite memorial erected by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada commemorating the unit's contribution to Canada was unveiled at Pictou's Market Wharf. Since then, an annual memorial service has taken place at the monument honouring the men of "The Black Battalion," who persevered against deep-rooted prejudice to serve their country with pride. Their determination and dedicated service helped breakdown racial barriers paving the way for black Canadians to freely enlist in the Second World War and subsequent conflicts.

In 2014, Canada Post issued a commemorative stamp in honour of African Heritage Month.





# BOFORS GUN—OUR NEW OUTDOOR DISPLAY

The VIMM has a major new exhibit that will be dedicated to all who served in and are still serving on HMCS Nanaimo (K101) and HMCS Nanaimo (702). It is a 40mm Bofors gun on a Boffin mount, recently removed from HMCS Nanaimo (702).



*The Bofors gun for the VIMM.*

In July, Nanaimo City Council unanimously approved the proposal made to it by Museum President Roger Bird and Vice President Brian McFadden. The City will pay for the construction of a concrete pad for the gun mounting, and DND will transport the gun from Esquimalt where it is currently in storage.

The gun became available when HMCS Nanaimo received a refit and a new gun system. “The gun is taken off and it’s in the workshop at CFB Esquimalt,” said Brian McFadden. “What they’re doing is decommissioning it, taking all the hydraulics off it – doing all the things that they would normally have to do to get it ready to put it in public hands.”

A Freedom of the City ceremony will take place May 17, 2017 to coincide with the 20th anniversary of HMCS *Nanaimo*.

## VIMM Related Displays

- The Navy
- The Battle of the Atlantic
- The Ney Family and Nanaimo Mayor Frank Ney



## THE FIRST HMCS NANAIMO—K101

The first HMCS Nanaimo was a Flower Class corvette, built at Yarrows shipyard in Esquimalt in 1941 and her first commander was Lt Cdr H. C. C. Daubney. She served on the East Coast escorting convoys to Iceland as part of the Western Local Escort Force. She was transferred to Esquimalt in late 1944 for a refit, and was sold at war’s end. Her battle honours are:

- Atlantic 1941 -45
- Gulf of St. Lawrence 1944



## HMCS NANAIMO - I AND II

	K101	702
Displacement	950 tonnes	970 tonnes
Length	61.3 m	55.3 m
Beam	10m	11.3 m
Draught	3.5 m	3.4 m
Complement	85	37



## THE SECOND HMCS NANAIMO – 702

Built in Halifax, MM702 was launched in 1996 and commissioned in Nanaimo in 1997. Reservists train on the Nanaimo and she has taken part in regular exercises with US forces and has been active in anti-drug smuggling patrols. The Nanaimo has also taken part in exercises in the western Arctic



## THE 40MM BOFORS GUN

Originally developed in Sweden in the 1930s by the A. B. Bofors Company as an anti-aircraft gun. Hundreds of thousands were made in the UK and the US. RCN ships were equipped with the gun until the late 1960s and the Army then used them for air defence in Europe until 1990. In 1991 the Navy took them out of storage for use on HMCS Athabaskan and HMCS Terra Nova in the Gulf War. They were then used on the Kingston Class patrol ships, with the intention of destroying floating mines.

### The Canadian “Boffin Mount”

During the Second World War the RCN developed a power mount for a single Bofors gun – the Boffin mount. The Boffin married the power mount for a 20mm Oerlikon gun with the 40mm Bofors.

## VIMM DISPLAYS ON THE TWO SHIPS NAMED NANAIMO INCLUDE—

- Models of both the K101 & 702
- The Battle Honours Board of K101
- A photo display and ship's history of K101 given to the City of Nanaimo by Mayor Frank Ney in 1982 (we also have a display on Mayor Ney)
- A ship's bell and HMCS Nanaimo life preserver ring given to the City of Nanaimo on the commissioning of HMCS Nanaimo in 1997

(The commissioning pennant of the K101 is on display at the Nanaimo Yacht Club)



VIMM displays



# ON DISPLAY – THE ROSS RIFLE

by Angus Scully

The VIMM has two Ross rifles on display. The Ross played an important and controversial part in the military history of the Great War.

When the UK government refused to licence production of the Lee Enfield .303 rifle in Canada during the Boer War, Scottish engineer Sir Charles Ross offered to set up production of his rifle in Canada. He was accepted and the Ross rifle went into production in Quebec, in 1903.

The Ross was a complicated rifle, made of finely machined parts. The sights are still considered to be very good. All of these factors made it highly accurate.

The famous shooting championships held annually at Bisley in England were a showcase of marksmanship. In 1911 William Clifford became the first Canadian to win the King's Prize for best shot in the Empire. He used a



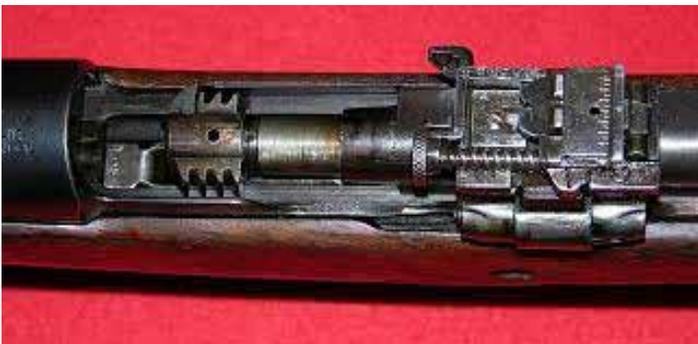
One of the VIMM's Ross rifles, seen in contrast to the shorter Lee Enfield.

highly serious and dangerous problem. Some blamed mud in the complicated, precisely fitting bolt. Some blamed the British-made ammunition that was not as precisely made as Canadian, and jammed in the breech. There were also stories that if the bolt was not properly assembled by soldiers, it could blow back into a soldier's face. Canadian armourers fixed this by inserting a pin

to reduce soldier error, but the Ross rapidly lost the confidence of front line troops who preferred the British Lee Enfield. Even Bisley winner William Caulfield, who was a divisional armourer, called for the withdrawal

ally the Ross was withdrawn and by 1916, replaced by the Lee Enfield. The saga of the Ross contributed to the end of Sam Hughes' career.

Over 400 000 Ross rifles were made. The Ross continued to be used as a



The straight pull bolt of the Ross was easily jammed with mud and hard to clean.

Ross. In 1913, W. A. Hawkins, another Canadian, won the King's Prize, again using the Ross. Certainly, with a war on the horizon, the Canadian Army seemed to have a superior weapon.

The Canadian Expeditionary Force was equipped with the Ross, but once it went into service in the trenches problems appeared. The rifle jammed – a

of the Ross. The British Lee Enfield was more reliable in the trenches.

Criticism from the front lines rocked the government in Ottawa. The Minister of Militia, Sam Hughes, defended the rifle and insisted it be retained. However, the controversy grew. The troops picked up Lee Enfields whenever they could. Eventu-



An improperly assembled Ross bolt could hit the soldier in the face.

ally the Ross was withdrawn and by 1916, replaced by the Lee Enfield. The saga of the Ross contributed to the end of Sam Hughes' career. Over 400 000 Ross rifles were made. The Ross continued to be used as a sniper rifle through to the Korean War. In the Second World War they were issued to the RCN and the British Home Guard. They can still be bought today and there are interesting demonstrations of its problems on *YouTube*. Film buffs can see Clint Eastwood firing a Ross in the film *Joe Kidd*.



# A GREAT STORY TELLER



A Sherman like the one John Pierce drove – on display in Vancouver

Anyone who has worked with VIMM volunteer John Pierce has enjoyed his dry wit and story-telling. After retiring from the Royal Canadian Dragoons, John wrote for the RCD Association News. Here is part of one of his articles from November 1983 that is typical of John's repertoire. It tells of his time with the RCD in Korea as driver of a Sherman tank.

## Ridge-running in Korea

I've had a few requests for the ridge-running story so while we await the reports from Ottawa, here it is. You may recall I said there were two types of ridge-running. One form was done with the tanks so let's cover that first.

Possibly one of the finest descriptions of the Korean terrain ever coined was, "45 per cent up, 45 percent down, and 10 per cent level ground." Any time we moved off-road we were either going up a hill or down. And the hills were not the rolling type we of Eastern Canada know. They were steep (almost vertical in places) with a sharply pointed crest.

The steep slopes made it impossible to travel along the side of a hill so if you wanted to move laterally it was necessary to do so on the crest. In order to do this the driver required a great deal of dexterity with the tank controls. It was a matter of approaching the crest slowly in bull-low until nothing but sky was visible to the crew, and making a hard left or right turn. This put one track on each slope and usually the crest was scraping the belly of the Sherman. The

movement from one hill to another was known as ridge-running. Thrilling to say the least.

The other form of ridge-running was done on the narrow paths between rice paddies around the local villages. These locations were out of bounds to all UN troops, but as with all soldiers waving regulations at Canadian troops is like waving a red flag at a bull. We all (or nearly all) decided at one time or another that it would be great fun to down a few cold ones at a local establishment or shop the local market for souvenirs. On many occasions the only way of leaving these villages was along the rice paddy dividers at top speed (or on foot) with a big mean-looking Provost hot on your heels. As with the other form of ridge-running a wrong turn could be disastrous. If the MP didn't collar you, it was still a long trek home, soaking wet and smelling slightly less pleasant than a rose. All in all ridge-running with a tank was a lot safer.

'Til next week, good shooting.

*John Pierce*

RCD Sherman Tank and crew in Korea.



# FRAMING & MOUNTING SERVICE

Let us help us help you care for your history and family heritage. The *Vancouver Island Military Museum* can mount orders, decorations,, medals, and mementos with the respect and dignity they deserve. Our experience ensures that you receive the highest possible quality and accuracy for you medal set. Your medals can be court or swing-mounted on brooch or push pins using the finest regulation ribbon. We have many example you can choose from.

Contact the Museum to discuss how best to care for and preserve your history.



Sample decoration and medal mounting – this shows the Military Medal (MM) and other medals that were awarded to Otomatsu Yamamoto of the 50<sup>th</sup> and 175<sup>th</sup> battalions of the *Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF)* in the First World War. They are on permanent display in the VIMM.

His Attestation Papers show that Private Yamamoto was born in Wakagama, Japan, in 1883. When he volunteered for the Army in August 1916 in Calgary he was married, and gave his occupation as a labourer.

## VISITORS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Our guest book reveals that so far this year our visitors come from all Canadian provinces, 16 American states, and the following countries:

Australia  
Austria  
Belgium  
China  
Colombia  
Estonia  
Germany  
Israel  
Italy  
Japan  
Mexico  
New Zealand  
Norway  
Philippines  
Saudi Arabia  
Sweden  
Switzerland  
Taiwan  
Thailand  
United Kingdom  
Uzbekistan



## VANCOUVER ISLAND MILITARY MUSEUM DIRECTORS AND STAFF

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