



The Home Front – Knitting for Victory

by Heather Neil

During World War 2, knitting became known as a home front weapon of war. Literally millions of women, children, and even men, in Allied countries, picked up their needles. The craft provided an outlet for the grief and uncertainty of war, and a tangible way to help soldiers (from all branches of service) fighting overseas by knitting sweaters, blankets, headgear, and socks. *Knit your bit* became the rallying cry. According to the *Canadian War Museum*, an estimated 750,000 Canadian women knit more than 50 million garments.

In Canada, all wartime knitting was collected by the Canadian Red Cross. Groups such as the *Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire*, *Women's Institutes*, church committees, and countless numbers of women's organizations hosted knitting bees, knitting teas, and knitting showers.

At the beginning of the war not all Canadians knew how to knit for the cause, so many groups offered classes for the novices. The Canadian Red Cross hired a Mrs. Brown (also known as Mrs. Fix-it) to ensure quality control, particularly for socks. (Untidy stitching and knots led to unwelcome blisters.) If she found mistakes, Mrs. Brown would just rip them out and start again. She maintained she could repair about 200 items a week.



Knitting patterns for soldiers of all branches followed strict uniform guidelines. The only acceptable colours were black, grey, khaki, navy blue, and aviation blue. The Red Cross supplied patterns for sweaters, socks, mufflers, finger-less mitts, toe covers, amputation covers, and various head coverings. A label indicating which chapter of the Red Cross had provided the garment was sewn into each piece. Surviving patterns show that these knitting patterns were typed and re-typed with carbon paper copies and shared among knitters. Many knitters chose to knit the same item in the same size, again and again, so that they could memorize the pattern and produce pieces faster.

Knitters also produced 15-20 foot long stretch bandages. The bandages were knit with 100% cotton yarn in garter stitch. Garter stitch produces a stretchy fabric with flat edges. The finished bandages were sterilized and shipped to medical units worldwide.

So, who were these knitters? They were emergency workers, bus drivers, children, wounded servicemen in hospitals, housewives, cabbies waiting for their next fare. It seemed as if everyone wanted to help.

Knitting wasn't just for soldiers and home front morale. In fact, knitting was also a tool for espionage. What might look like an inconspicuous old lady at her window by a train station in Belgium was actually a spy, using her yarn and needles to send coded messages, knitting stitches in Morse Code or intentionally dropping stitches to mark the movement of enemy trains. One such woman was South African born *Phylis Latour Doyle* (b. 1921 – d. 2023). Twenty-three-year-old Phylis was an agent for Britain's *Special Operations Executive*, who spent the war years sneaking information to the British using knitting as a code.

One of the misconceptions of knitting is that it is a quiet, relaxing pastime. Perhaps it is today. But during World War 2, knitting was more than just a hobby. It was an act of patriotism.





From Our New General Manager

I am pleased to write as the new General Manager of the Vancouver Island Military Museum. I first came to Nanaimo with my family as a teenager from Northern B.C. While the environment up there reminded my father of his birthplace in Northern Sweden, my Italian mother was eager to relocate to a more southern geography. I finished high school at Dover Bay Secondary, and continued on to Vancouver where I completed my Master's Degree in History at Simon Fraser University, started a family, and spent the next decade as an executive in the arts & culture sector.

When I moved back to Nanaimo in 2019, where my parents had continued to live, I remained in the museum and culture sector: as the Curator and Collections Manager at Cumberland Museum & Archives, and now closer to home, as VIMM's General Manager.

I am deeply committed to amplifying museums as cultural hubs, community connectors, and engaging sites of historical storytelling. I value relationship-building and cultivating a cultural space that welcomes diverse communities, multi-generational visitors, and opportunities for meaningful participation.

The Vancouver Island Military Museum is in an exciting period of growth and community engagement, and I am invested in collaborating closely with its Board of Directors as we steward the museum into this next phase. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of VIMM's history.

With gratitude,
Carina Nilsson



Carina Nilsson



Medal Mounting

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

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President's Message

by Brian McFadden



The Vancouver Island Military Museum overlooking Nanaimo Harbour

As the VIMM newsletter goes to print, the museum staff are preparing for Remembrance Week which, for us, is one of the busiest of the year. Remembrance for the museum normally begins in the weeks leading up to November 11th with requests for tours from local schools, the cadet organizations, and several youth groups from the city and surrounding area. On Remembrance Day the museum is open to visitors following the Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph which is located close to the military museum. We normally welcome over 300 visitors who come to commemorate and pay their respects to those men and women who sacrificed so much during two World Wars, the Korean War, and numerous other conflicts throughout the world.

With respect to visitors to the museum, I can say with confidence that the 2025 summer tourism season for us has been the busiest on record and this appears to be the norm for other establishments in the cultural, history, and hospitality industry. I suspect the reluctance of many to travel south of the border is having a positive effect on tourism across the country.

In the spring Newsletter I made mention of a Co-Management agreement with the City of Nanaimo which would allow the military museum to function in harmony with the other Cultural and History partners in the city. To facilitate this cooperation and to plan the future direction of the museum, the Board of Directors has hired Carina Nilsson as General Manager, who will work collaboratively with the board to provide leadership and management as we transition to a new and sustainable business model. Carina brings to her new position 15 years at a senior executive level in the museum and arts sector and experience in business operations and strategic planning. She joined the management team at the beginning of August, and in a few short months, her presence has had a very positive effect on the day-to-day operations of the museum. On behalf of the board of directors and the volunteer staff I take great pleasure in welcoming her to our management team.

I, unfortunately, must end on a sad note and announce the passing of Clynt Pringle one of our long-time volunteers. Clynt became a volunteer in 1998 after he had served in the Royal Canadian Navy for 21 years as a Submariner. He passed away, which is called "Crossing the Bar" in Naval terms, at the ripe old age of 92 in September of this year. He is survived by his wife Betty who was also a much-valued museum volunteer.

RCAF Super Hero – Our New Comic Book Acquisition

Museum volunteer Richard McGladrey has donated a comic book produced during the Second World War that commemorated the heroism and sacrifice of his cousin George "Scrammy" McGladrey. In this era of super hero movies, television shows, and internet action figures, we too can take pride in this superhero from Chemainus BC. "Scrammy" was 21 years old when his bomber was shot down. He is buried in Jonkerbos Cemetery, Nimegen, Netherlands, and is named on the war memorial in Chemainus. For more information see: <https://militarymuseum.ca/museum/wp-content/>

TRUE COMICS
OUR GOOD NEIGHBOR PERU
BOMBER ABLAZE
THE AMAZING MACHINE
INVESTIGATING SERIES

Real Canadian Hero and Comic Book Hero
George (Scrammy) McGladrey RCAF

A Halifax Bomber of 405 Squadron Royal Canadian Air Force on a bombing raid on Stettin Germany was turning for home when the aircraft was struck by an incendiary bomb. This bomb had been dropped by another aircraft flying in the bomb group formation above. The bomb exploded inside the fuselage and fire quickly spread through the compartment.

Flying Officer George McGladrey, assisted by another crew member, attempted to put out the fire as the pilot struggled to control the plane which was spiralling out of control. George grabbed a fire extinguisher which failed to work properly as he and a fellow crew member battled the flames. McGladrey's parachute pack caught fire as he tried to smother the flames, had the pilot ordered the crew to abandon the aircraft he would have had no parachute! His crew-mate suggested that McGladrey buckle on to his harness and both men could bail out and share the one parachute. Fortunately, the pilot regained control and the bomber limped back to its base at Topcliffe England.

BOMBER ABLAZE

After the plane landed, the ground crew discovered that a second incendiary bomb had struck the aircraft and lodged in the fuel tank, but had failed to explode. If it had detonated, the bomber would most likely have plunged to the ground in a ball of fire. For their actions in saving the aircraft, Flying Officer McGladrey and three of the crew were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC). George was also awarded the Gold Eagle Badge as a member of the Pathfinder Bomb Group. (Pathfinder aircraft would fly at a lower altitude ahead of the main bomber formations to mark the chosen targets with flares.)

DFC

George McGladrey

Sadly, three months after having survived the burning bomber incident, George McGladrey was killed when his aircraft was shot down on a bombing raid on Aachen, Germany. He was 21 years old. He was buried in Jonkerbos Cemetery, Nijmegen, Holland and is remembered on the War Memorial in his home town of Chemainus on Vancouver Island.

Military Cemetery Netherlands

RCAF Hornet Attacks Iraqi Patrol Boat – 1991

by Greg Devenish

On January 13, 1991, Canadian Armed Forces pilots Major Dave “DW” Kendell and Captain Steve “Hillbilly” Hill received a request from an American naval ship to strafe an enemy Iraqi patrol vessel. The two CF-18A fighter pilots became the first Canadian pilots to engage a foreign adversary since the Korean War.

In 1990, Saddam Hussein ordered Iraqi forces to occupy Kuwait. As a response, the U.N. Security Council mandated use of armed force against Iraq. In response to the Security Council Resolutions, the Canadian Government deployed approximately 4500 personnel to the region to support the allied coalition. The operation was code named “Operation Friction”. The Navy provided three ships, including a supply ship, to the Persian Gulf. The Army provided security for the Canadian air contingent and 1 Canadian Field Hospital (530 personnel) served with British forces in Saudi Arabia.



This is a photograph of Cf-18 188741 which was involved in attacking an Iraqi Patrol boat on January 30, 1991. The CF-18 was a modern fourth generation air superiority fighter. It had nine external hard points carrying air to air missiles, bombs and external fuel tanks. It also had a 1x20mm M61A1-Vulcan internal rotary cannon. Maximum speed was 1,127 mph (1,814 km/h), combat range was 330 miles (540kms) and it had a service ceiling of 50,000' (15 000m).



Canadian maintenance personnel were quick to add the “kill” sign of the destroyed Iraqi Patrol Vessel TNC-45 on the fuselage of CF-18, 188798.

The Air Force initially posted 409 Squadron, but this was replaced with an expanded force of 26 CF-18 Hornets from 439 “Tiger” Squadron and 416 “Lynx” Squadron - nicknamed the Desert Cats. At the time, the CF-18 was a modern fourth generation jet fighter and certainly one of the most capable fighter aircraft in the world. The Air Force also deployed a Boeing CC-137 air to air refueling aircraft, CC-130 Hercules and CC Challenger transport aircraft. Canadian aircraft operated out of Doha, Qatar.

The initial mission for the CF-18s was Combat Air Patrol (CAP). The CF-18s patrolled between the allied ships in the Persian Gulf and an anticipated threat from. A typical sortie included a half hour flight north or northwest over the CAP. Once there, the CF-18s would fly a pattern of high altitude and direct their radars westward to look for any threats. During the war, there were no engagements with the Iraqi Air Force. However, on January 30th there was an engagement of a different kind.

On the night of 30 January 1991, “Hornet 13 Flight” consisted of two fighters manned by Captain Steve “Hillbilly” Hill and Major Dave “DW” Kendall. Both were experienced pilots from



CF -18 is returning to Doha after a Combat Air Patrol over Persian Gulf. If you look closely, you will notice the false black canopy over the front wheel.

439 Squadron. They were flying CF-18 Hornets 188741 and 188798. The night was clear with good visibility, a full moon, and calm seas. An allied shipborne controller, "Station Papa Bravo," asked if the pilots would strafe an enemy vessel. The vessel was an Iraqi patrol boat designated as TNC-45. The enemy patrol vessel was armed with anti-ship Exocet missiles and AAA weapons. The ship controller reported that a US Navy A-6 Intruder aircraft had disabled two patrol vessels but had run out of weapons to destroy the third TNC-45.

The enemy patrol boat was heading north towards the Tigris-Euphrates Rivers delta at about 30 knots. The Cf-18s were told that they required a visual identification and approached the craft from about 17 miles. The two CF-18s passed over the target at about 3000 meters. On the second pass the Cf-18s dropped flairs to assist with identification. An E-2G USN Hawkeye aircraft which was observing the situation cleared the CF-18s to engage the target. Both CF-18s completed a low pass and strafed the TNC-45 using 20 mm guns and hits were observed by Hill and Kendall. On another pass they tried to lock on their air-to-air AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles to the patrol boat. Unfortunately, the heat signature from the patrol vessel was low and this attack proved unsuccessful. On another attempt, Hill was able to get a lock on using an AIM -7 Sparrow missile and fired, but the missile fell short by 20 meters. With fuel running low, the two CF-18s disengaged the target and flew back to Doha.

In the aftermath, the Iraqi TNC-45 was finally attacked by US bombers and sunk. The sinking of the Iraqi TNC-45 was awarded to the US bombers with an assist from "Hornet 13". While Hill and Kendall received hearty accolades from senior military officials, the Commander of the Canadian Task Group, Colonel Romeo Lalonde, was less than pleased. He was critical of the waste of the air-to-air missile. Canadian pilots commended Hill and Kendall. After the attack one Canadian officer said, *We're relieved to finally see some action. Soldiers don't really like to fight, but if anybody else is doing it, you naturally want to participate.*

For more on the Gulf War and the Desert Cats see: <https://militarymuseum.ca/museum/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/vimm-summer-newsletter-2019.pdf>



On Display at VIMM:

*Gulf War Display
Models of CF-18 fighters.*

On The Home Front UK – the Story of Chislehurst Caves



by Heather Neil

With recent news stories about civilians sheltering from bombing in Ukraine and Gaza, we can remember when this happened in England during the Second World War.

In 1940, the German Luftwaffe began its attempt to bomb Britain into submission. We know this as *The Blitz*. Over eight months, the German air force dropped 30,000 tons of bombs and more than half fell on London. As explosives rained down, the residents of south east London sought shelter underground in basements, the Tube network, and even in caves.

Thousands headed to *Chislehurst Caves* in Kent, a man-made disused chalk mine composed of 22 miles of intersecting tunnels 100 feet down. Formerly, in WW1 the caves had been used as an ammunition storage dump associated with the Royal Arsenal at Woolrich. Later in 1939, when war first broke out, anxious locals fitted the caves as an air raid shelter with electric lights, ventilation, and running water.

As the Blitz began, the *Chislehurst Caves* evolved into an underground city, accommodating 15,000 visitors at its height. The caves opened at 19:00 each evening. Families were charged sixpence a week for adults and thruppence for children. Regular visitors were allocated their own pitch.

With so many families living cheek to jowl, minor disputes arose about noise and cleanliness, but these were resolved by 'cave captains' who enforced a list of rules in each section. Such orders included putting rubbish in bins and stopping music by 21:00. Stoves of all kinds were banned for safety reasons. However, the 21:30 curfew wasn't strictly enforced to allow residents to head over after last orders at the local pub.

By 1941 Chislehurst had a cinema, a barber, and three canteens where people would queue with their teapots for tea. Those who fell ill could be treated at the fully functional hospital. It had seven wards and an isolation unit manned by a Red Cross doctor and two nurses. One birth took place – a baby girl called Rose Cavena Wakeman to mark her unusual start in life. Those seeking spiritual support could pray at the cave chapel that had been consecrated by the Bishop of Rochester.

Chislehurst Caves were used until the end of the war. They were officially closed after VE Day in 1945 and now serve as a tourist attraction. See: <https://chislehurst-caves.co.uk>



Shelter in the Chislehurst Caves

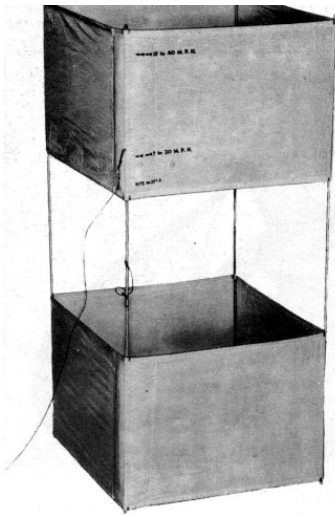


Chislehurst Museum today

WWII Portable Radio and Box Kite Aerial - New Acquisition

In 1941, the German military issued an emergency radio for use in lifeboats. The device was captured by the British and renamed the *Dinghy Transmitter*. In 1942 a second captured transmitter was adopted by the U.S. Army Air Corps who named it the *Gibson Girl* survival radio. It was carried by U.S. aircraft and intended for use in life rafts.

It included a collapsible box kite to raise the antenna. The kite had a 17x7x36-inch frame made of aluminum rods which could be opened up like an umbrella. It was designed to be simple to assemble and could fly in winds from 7 to 40 miles per hour. The yellow cloth which covered the frame was treated with water repellent and part of one section filled with Kapok to add buoyancy if it fell into the water. Later in the war, a newer model kite was introduced which could be separated into two pieces and the whole thing could be stored in a space 2x4x9 inches. Instructions for assembly were printed on the upper cloth section of the kite.



Box Kite Aerial



Emergency Radio Transmitter (Gibson Girl)



A Memorial for a Fallen Flyer



Selby Fred Taylor is buried in Victoria BC.

A recent acquisition at VIMM is a RCAF roundel removed from a crashed aircraft in 1943. John Calhoun, curator of the Seaforth Military Museum, presented the VIMM with the roundel, which was removed from Cornell training aircraft 5248, built by Fleet Aircraft in Fort Erie, Ontario. On Dec 9, 1943, in



RCAF Cornell trainer. A roundel can be seen on the side of the aircraft

Abbotsford, British Columbia, trainee pilot, Selby Fred Taylor of Victoria B.C. was killed when he crashed while flying solo at the 24 Elementary Flying Training School in Abbotsford. A Board of Inquiry indicated that the engine stalled soon after takeoff. With little altitude, Selby attempted to turn back and unfortunately hit the ground. J.C. Calhoun (John's father) was an instructor at the base and cut out the roundel. Selby Fred Taylor was the son of William and Vevanda Taylor of Oak Bay. He is buried at the Royal Oak Burial Park in Victoria. He was 19 years old.



DISPATCHES

from VIMM



REMEMBRANCE DAY

On November 11, the Museum will be open after the conclusion of the Remembrance service at the Cenotaph. There is no charge for admission.



Did You Know?

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cares for the graves of 23 servicemen buried in the Nanaimo Cemetery.

See: <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/search-results/?CemeteryExact=true&Cemetery=NANAIMO+PUBLIC+CEMETERY&Tab=&Page=1>



The grave in Nanaimo Cemetery of Cadet John Scott Rowan of Nanaimo and Gabriola Island. He was killed in a flying training accident in Texas while serving with the Royal Flying Corps in 1918. He is remembered in the VIMM display Ace Island. He was 23 years old.

Renovations Complete

The new office area for the General Manager has been completed and new computer equipment installed. The kitchen renovations are also complete.

Television Interview

VIMM President Brian McFadden was interviewed on Volunteer Nanaimo which appears on Shaw/Rogers community TV. Watch for Brian during Remembrance Week.

Welcome New Volunteers

Cheryl Redquest, John Petrovich
and Julia McCombe



In Memoriam

We remember Clynt Pringle, a volunteer for many years, and veteran of the RCN, who passed away this past summer.

Our condolences to his wife Betty, also a former volunteer with long service.

Museum Directors and Staff

Brian McFadden President
Greg Devenish Vice President
Roger Bird Past President/Secretary Treasurer
Carina Nilsson General Manager

Bruce Davison
Angus Scully

Jim Dickinson
Bill Brayshaw

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