



VIMM Newsletter

Summer 2018

Vancouver Island Military Museum

The Last 100 Days of the Great War Canada's Pivotal Role 100 Years Ago

Of all the victories won by the Canadian Armed Forces, the victories in the 100 days that ended the First World War contend for honours as the greatest. The Battle of Vimy Ridge gets more attention as does D-Day in the Second World War. But the role played by the Canadian Corps 100 years ago in the summer and fall of 1918 was an amazing feat for a country of just 8 million people.

Amiens

On August 8, 1918, the Canadian and Australian Corps formed the core of the Allied attack on the German lines around Amiens in France. These were the shock troops of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and their movements had to be carefully disguised so that the German Army would not suspect the attack. The two corps were rested, highly motivated, well equipped, experienced, and well led. Indeed, Canadian general Arthur Currie and Australian John Monash were the best corps commanders in the BEF in 1918, and it has been rumoured ever since that British prime minister Lloyd George had considered one of them for command of the BEF. The Australians and Canadians were supported by 430 British tanks and 1900 aircraft.

The shock of the Canadian and Australian attack shattered the German defences. Terrified German infantry fled the tanks and rapidly advancing Empire troops. By 11am the Canadians had advanced over 11km and were behind the German lines. Will Bird described his experiences in the battle in his book, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*. Having advanced beyond their objectives, his company was lying in the warm grass (they were well inside German lines):



A British Whippet Tank.

"We were privileged to have ringside seats. Over the slope came our cavalry, the Royal Canadian Dragoons, the Fort Garry Horse, and the Strathcona's, riding like mad, sabres flashing and lances glittering, in perfect formation. They swept by us with a thundering of hoofs and drove at the wood. Following them came the "whippets," small tanks with remarkable speed and guns mounted on top."

The Beginning of the End

General Ludendorff, one of the two top generals of the Kaiser's army, called August 8th the black day for the German Army. Although still deep in France and Belgium with no foreign armies on German soil, Ludendorff realized that German morale was poor and that the Allies, with American troops entering the war in great numbers, would soon win the war. He and others urged the Kaiser to engage in diplomacy to end the war. It would take several weeks for all of the German leaders to realize that they must stop fighting.

By the end of the Battle of Amiens on August 13, the Canadian Corps had advanced 22.5 km. If the victory was a great one, the cost was still high – 11 800 casualties, and Amiens was just the beginning of a series of battles that saw the Corps in almost continuous action until November 11.

Continued...

From the Vice President

In early April we received some very exciting news from the Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce - the Vancouver Island Military Museum had been nominated as one of the finalists in the annual Chamber Tourism Awards. The award is given annually for outstanding commitment to Vancouver Island tourism. The museum was chosen as one of the city's top four tourist attractions, and our visitor numbers during the past few months certainly attest to this. April was a record month and the comments posted on social media tourism sites reflect the positive experiences visitors receive from the museum volunteer staff who work tirelessly to ensure a visit to the Vancouver Island Military Museum is a positive one.

The process of updating and improving our displays continues unabated and currently the focus is concentrated on the story boards in the Army WW2 exhibit.

Several years ago the museum collaborated with the Vancouver Island University (VIU) on the Veterans Affairs Canada Memory Project, and this year we are again working with the university and specifically the third year Graphic Arts students who were given the task of designing a story board about the D-Day landing on June 6th with the emphasis on Juno Beach, the liberation of Belgium, Holland and 1st Canadian Army's "Maple Leaf Route" across Northern Europe. The class accompanied by their instructor spent an afternoon at the museum viewing the exhibits to get a sense of the type of design layout we would need. The assignment for the students would be a map outlining the army's progress through France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany.

I have to say it was a pleasure working with 14 gifted young people who took to the project enthusiastically. My enthusiasm for the project was somewhat dampened when it dawned on me that I would be spending most of the Easter weekend with 14 renditions of the map spread over my living room to proof, mark and critique. Just kidding! I now however have a greater appreciation for the teaching profession. The project culminated with me attending the university to choose the winning design; no easy task I assure you. The upside of the exercise was a request from the course professor to continue the collaboration on future projects in the next semester to give the students practical experience in their chosen field. What a great idea! The thought of having a willing pool of talented graphic arts students to work on future museum exhibits never entered my head!

Brian McFadden VP.



(left to right) Roger Bird, Pat Murphy, Brian McFadden at the awards ceremony.



New story board in our WW2 area.

Museum Directors and Staff

Roger Bird, President

Brian McFadden, Vice President

Phil Harris, Secretary

Pat Murphy, Armoury

Pat Patterson

Jack Ziebart, Computer

Bruce Davison, Volunteer Coordinator

Bill Brayshaw, Acquisitions

Angus Scully, Newsletter Editor

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

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

Continued...

New Technologies

Machine Guns and Armoured Cars

While British tanks played a crucial role in cracking the German lines and in changing the nature of warfare forever, there was another recent technology being used by the Canadian Corps. The machine gun had been paired with the automobile to create the armoured cars of the Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigades (CMMGB). Originally created in 1914 by Raymond Brutinel, a French immigrant who settled in Alberta, these new weapon systems came into their own in 1918. The CMMGBs had made it possible for massive fire power to be moved quickly up and down the lines and had proved invaluable in stopping the German offensives in March 1918. Also called the Canadian Independent Force (CIF), this innovative Canadian organization mounted 6-inch Newton mortars on trucks and thus created an early self-propelled gun. This provided the CMMGBs with useful indirect fire. Equipped entirely with wheeled vehicles (armoured cars, trucks, and motorcycles) attacks by the Canadian brigades were often held up when the Germans cratered roads or destroyed bridges, but not always. On October 22, a CMMGB attack advancing 1.5 km in advance of the Canadian infantry, captured intact a bridge over the Canal de l'Escaut. Although surrounded by Germans and repeatedly attacked, the Canadian motor machine gun unit held the bridge for several hours until marching infantry arrived to secure the area. It was an age of innovation and contrasts – tanks, cavalry, telephones, armoured cars, aircraft, wireless, and horse drawn wagons.

The list of great Canadian battles and victories is well worth further reading. After Amiens were the battles of Arras, Canal du Nord, Cambrai, and the Pursuit to Mons. Fighting took place until the Armistice at 11:00 am on November 11.

On Display at the VIMM: The Victoria Cross

100 days - 30 Victoria Crosses

In the Great War, 73 Canadians were awarded the Victoria Cross. The VIMM display on the Victoria Cross contains a history of the award, reconstructions, and biographies of all Canadians who received the award.



Lieutenant James Edward Tait was awarded the Military Cross for his bravery in the Battle of Vimy Ridge in 1917, and the Victoria Cross (posthumously) for his action during the Battle of Amiens in 1918.



A Canadian armoured car supporting the 43rd Battalion, Amiens, August 8, 1918.

Letters and Cards in the Great War *Crucial for Morale*

For soldiers and their families, the Post Office (Royal Mail Canada) was a critical part of wartime morale. Millions of letters and parcels crossed the Atlantic and the delivery of mail in a timely manner was a major part of the Empire's supply effort. Mail for Canadian troops was sent to London, sorted by the Royal Mail and sent on to the divisions, arriving daily by ration trains. The Royal Mail Canada staffed a railhead post office for each division and had sub-offices where soldiers could buy stamps and money orders. All mail sent by the troops was censored by their unit officers. Letters could not contain information about troop movements, weapons, or morale. As well, "criticism of operations, other branches, allies, and superiors" was forbidden.

Post cards provided a quick way for soldiers to keep their family informed and were provided by service organizations such as the Salvation Army, the YMCA, the Red cross, and church organizations. The famous Field Service Post Cards were designed to be simple and quick – the soldier just crossed out phrases that did not apply or filled in blanks. "I am quite well." Or, "I have been admitted into hospital wounded." When news of a great battle reached Canada, followed by one of these cards, families were relieved.

The colourful silk embroidered cards were made and sold in France and the UK. Soldiers on leave or in rest areas could purchase them, in great variety. They covered the seasons, Christmas, birthdays, and soldiers could choose sentiments appropriate for wives, mothers, and other family members. The brilliant colours have survived the last century and are easily bought and collected. A Google image search "silk postcards ww1" will reveal the wonders of these colourful reminders of the Great War.



The flags of the Allied Powers. The message of the reverse reads, "To my dear wife Annie, from you ever loving husband Sam."



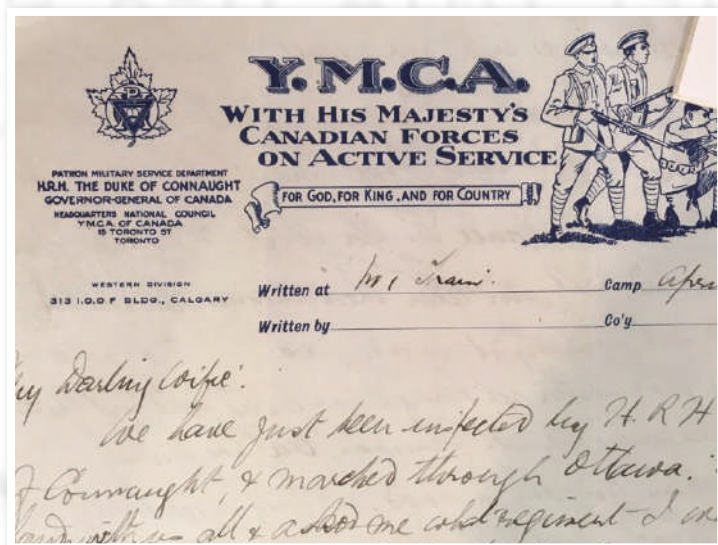
The message on the reverse reads: "To May, with compliments of the season. From Herbert. X" As with most of these silk cards, there is no address on the reverse – they were mailed in a separate envelop to preserve the colourful silk



Millions of cards and letters crossed the Atlantic. Cards with short messages kept soldiers and families in touch and were often kept for decades after 1918.



This wonderful card depicts Admiral Nelson's famous message before the battle of Trafalgar in 1805, applied to the Royal Navy of the Great War.



Churches and service clubs provided stationery for soldiers. The VIMM has this letter from Captain Arthur Leighton of Nanaimo to his wife.



The soldier who sent this to Tom Stuart in Peterborough Ontario was on leave in London. He said, "Will write you a decent letter soon."



"Many happy returns darling xxxxx . Jas."



VIMM and VIU Collaborate



As Brian McFadden explains in the VP's message on page 2, we have collaborated with Vancouver Island University to update some of our story boards. The Graphic Design class is shown here along with Daniel Kelly's submission. Thank you to the Graphic Design Class.

Daniel Kelly's submission was selected for display in the VIMM.



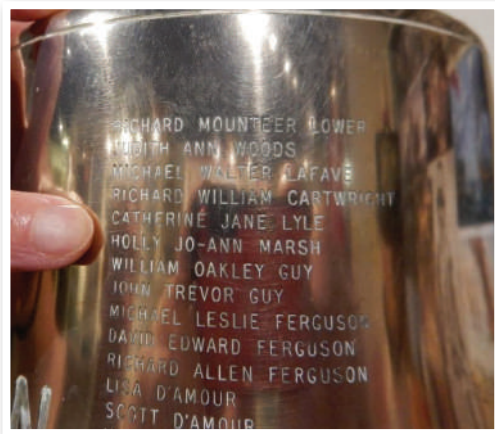
VIU Graphic Design Class with their submissions. Daniel Kelly Front left.



Christening Bell – HMCS Saskatchewan

The VIMM is privileged to be the custodian of the Christening Bell from HMCS Saskatchewan. There is a long-standing tradition that has been preserved throughout the navy – when children of crew members are christened (baptised) on board a ship, the name of each child so christened is engraved on the ship’s bell.

The VIMM has had some of the children christened on HMCS Saskatchewan visit and find their name on the bell. Young children visitors are invited to ring the bell – it’s quite loud!



Christened on HMCS Saskatchewan



Christening Bell – HMCS Saskatchewan.

HMCS Saskatchewan

Named after the Saskatchewan River.



Commissioned	1963
Paid off	1994
Sunk as artificial reef	1997
Built by Victoria Machinery, and Yarrows of Esquimalt	
Length	112m
Beam	13m
Displacement	2880 tonnes
Complement	290
Max. Speed	28knots
Served on west coast	1973 – 1994



HMCS Saskatchewan

This bell is in Nanaimo because, after being decommissioned, the Saskatchewan was purposefully sunk near Snake Island at the entrance to Nanaimo Harbour. The site has become a major diving destination. A mural of the wreck is painted on the side of a building in downtown Nanaimo and is often photographed by tourists. The VIMM also has some engine room controls from the Saskatchewan. Seven de-commissioned RCN ships have been sunk as artificial reefs.



Detail from Jeff King’s mural of the sunken Saskatchewan

DISPATCHES



More and More

Each month so far this year has seen more visitors than in previous years. There were 101 more visitors in April this year than in April 2017. Check us out on FaceBook too.

Wall of Honour Programme Complete

A brief newspaper story about the Memorial Wall being nearly sold out did the trick. The Wall is now sold out and the 77 new plaques will be installed by the end of June.



New Displays

Army in WWII Dambusters Raid
Maple Leaf Route RCAF – RAF Bomber Command

RCMP bicycle patrol uniform and equipment, donated by Constable Dave Scherr, father of VIMM volunteer Logan Scherr.

Welcome New Volunteers

Krista Hamilton Lee Montgomery
Cameron Kiaholz Joe Pighin
Rick Zimmerman Ty Cox
Greg Devenish

And welcome back after 5 years away – Stephen Sharp

Recognizing Long Service

20 years or more service
Roger Bird Gord Buch
Clynt Pringle Jack Ziebart
Special recognition for Pat Patterson who has been a volunteer since 1994.

Well Done Ken McNicoll

After 14 years as a docent, Ken McNicoll retired. Formerly of the Lincolnshire Regiment and the RCMP, Ken has helped hundreds of visitors enjoy the museum while his quiet dignity and charm set an example for all docents.



Ken McNicoll (right) and the Tuesday afternoon crew – Jim Dickenson (left) and Bob Chow.

Models by Rick Zimmerman

New aircraft models by Rick Zimmerman illustrate the aircraft used by 6 Group RCAF in WWII and his model of the Dambuster Raid is superb. It even has a bouncing bomb going over the dam! Rick is also preparing a naval aviation display and updating models for the display on the Cold War.



The Wellington bomber model built by Rick Zimmerman.