



# VIMM Newsletter



Summer 2024

Vancouver Island Military Museum

## THE RCN in Action - North Korea, 1950

By Greg Devenish

On July 5th, 1950, three RCN ships sailed out of HMC Dockyard Esquimalt on Vancouver Island. As the naval band played *Heart of Oak*, thousands of people lined the shore to witness the historic departure. The destroyers *HMCS Cayuga*, *HMCS Athabaskan*, and *HMCS Sioux* were on their way just eight days after the United Nations called upon members to help stop North Korean aggression. The destroyer task force was commanded by Captain Jeffrey V. Brock in *HMCS Cayuga*.

These RCN destroyers would be, in December, involved in one of the most daring of naval evacuations at the port of Chinnampo (now Nampo), North Korea.

*Athabaskan* was the first to see a mission, doing escort duty and blockading Korean west coast ports. *Cayuga* engaged enemy forces around Pusan and all Canadian destroyers were active in support of the UN forces landing at Inchon. The UN operations were so successful pushing back the North Koreans to the Chinese border, that UN commander General MacArthur was very confident that hostilities would end shortly. Meanwhile, Captain Brock took command of Force T.E. 95.12, which included the three Canadian destroyers plus two Royal Australian Navy destroyers - *HMAS Warramunga* and *HMAS Bataan*.



*Jeffrey Brock was one of Canada's most successful fighting naval leaders.*



Optimism vanished on 28 November when the Chinese Red Army crossed the Yalu River into North Korea. With 300 000 troops, it advanced quickly, forcing UN forces into a full retreat that became known as "The Big Bug-out."

The bad news only intensified when the US 8th Army was ordered to evacuate Chinnampo (see map). Captain Brock received a message from Admiral Andrewes: *5 APA transports have been diverted to Chinnampo to withdraw troops 8th Army ... Defense of these ships is now your primary aim. Blockade is secondary ... military situation serious. Be prepared to act in fire support of Eighth Army.*

Chinnampo (now Nampo) is a port that serves the North Korean capital of Pyongyang. It is on the Taedong River about 85 km, by river, from the Yellow Sea. The river itself is narrow, shallow, and has numerous mud flats - and it was mined. Brock ordered all destroyers fueled up and *USS Forrest Royal* was added to the task force. Captain Brock decided that four destroyers would sail upriver in the morning. Then, during the night, Captain Brock received an emergency message from an American vessel tied up at the dock in Chinnampo. It read, *We are uncovered. Take necessary action immediately. Another signal arrived: Local situation may reach emergency basis Tuesday 5 December forenoon. Presence of destroyers required.*



*HMCS Cayuga in action at Chinnampo.*

Brock's navigator, Lieutenant A. L. Collier, advised that the dangerous trip upriver might be made in the dark, so Brock decided to leave immediately. *HMCS Cayuga*, *HMCS Athabaskan*, *HMCS Sioux*, *HMAS Bataan*, *HMAS Warramunga*, and *USS Forrest Royal* set out to save the evacuation of Chinnampo.

*Cayuga* took the lead to navigate upriver. It wasn't long before *Sioux* and *Warramunga* were caught on sandbars. Lt. Collier required 132 fixes, using marker buoys and landmarks, to keep the ships moving for the four-hour sailing.

Commander Welland on *Athabaskan* remarked, it was one of the blackest nights I have seen. At 0330 hrs the destroyers arrived at Chinnampo. Brock oversaw the defense of the evacuation and the ultimate destruction of the harbour. For the rest of the day, 7000 troops, wounded personal, and even civilians, were loaded on transports and sent downstream. *Athabaskan* with her 4-inch guns destroyed enemy artillery pieces on the north side of the harbour. *USS Forrest Royal* with her 5-inch guns took out concrete buildings while *Cayuga* and *Bataan* focused on railway yards, storage tanks and shipbuilding facilities. The bombardment lasted 75 minutes. Naval historian Edward C Meyers described it this way:

*"The three ships swung broadside and laid out all armament plus whatever Bofors could be brought to bear. Within minutes the entire dockside was a mass of flames. Huge fireballs rose skyward...increasing winds, which fanned the flames, carried the smoke inland as a message to the advancing Chinese. So widespread had the fires become that the entire city seemed engulfed."*

As snow began to fall, the destroyers sailed downstream at 045, and when all ships were clear, Captain Brock reported, *Mission successfully completed.*

The task force accomplished all tasks without a casualty and the RCN crews demonstrated their skills to the fullest. For exceptional leadership Captain Brock was awarded the DSO, while navigator Lt. Andrew Collier was awarded the DSC, and *Cayuga's* coxswain, CPO D. J. Pearson received the British Empire Medal. *HMCS Cayuga* continued to distinguish herself in future operations and earned the nick name "The galloping ghost of the Korean coast." Vice Admiral Charles T. Joy, Commander Naval Forces Far East, sent the following message.

*"Expeditious manner in which ships performed assignment at Chinnampo operation just completed deserves highest praise and commendation in performance of duty. We are very proud indeed of all hands who took part."*



*The ship's crest of HMAS Warramunga.*

**ON DISPLAY AT  
VANCOUVER ISLAND MILITARY MUSEUM:  
"The Korean War"**

# Vice President's Message

## The Chinese Labour Corps Display

One of the most satisfying things about creating a new exhibit or display is having all the pieces you have been researching fall into place and the design layout begins to take shape on paper. In the Spring issue of the VIMM Newsletter we published an article on the Chinese Labour Corps (CLC) during WWI. I have to say, since the issue was published, the number of inquiries, comments, and requests for information about the article have been nothing short of amazing. The saying about a story "Developing Legs" is very appropriate and it's one which has been one of the most interesting and informative projects I've worked on for some time. In early March, David Carrigg, a reporter for the *Vancouver Sun*, visited the museum and, after reading the article in the museum newsletter, asked if he could write a story about the display we were planning for the CLC. His article was published in the newspaper on March 31st and a few days later the same article appeared in the *Victoria Times Colonist*. Within a week our local newspaper, The *Nanaimo News Bulletin*, also requested information on the display and subsequently published their own story. Who was it that said, "No one reads Newspapers anymore?" I think we can safely say they were wrong!

One of the first people to contact me was Jordan Paterson, a Canadian film maker whose film *Secrets of the Dead* about the Chinese Labour Corps won four Canadian Documentary Screen Awards in 2016. Jordan graciously offered to screen the film at the Vancouver Island Military Museum and has since provided a copy of the film for our library. Next, I received a call from David Livingstone, the son of Canadian Army Medical Corps Officer, Harry Livingstone, who was sent in secret from Canada to certify the Chinese labourers fit to travel. David also mentioned a book *Forgotten Men* by Dan Black, about Harry's experiences as a medical officer with the CLC. Finally, Lindsay Ward from Victoria contacted me with information and a selection of photographs taken by her grandfather at the William Head Quarantine Station near Victoria, in 1917.

I think you can see why I said this is a story that quickly developed legs. I would say this definitely qualifies as such.

Brian McFadden.

**The Chinese Labour Corps 1914-1919**  
The forgotten story of Canada and the Chinese Labour Corps.

**Early in the First World War...**

Britain and France recognized the need to recruit a labour force to support troops serving in France and Belgium. The scheme to recruit Chinese men to work as non-combatants was pioneered by the French Government in 1915, however the advantages of such a labour force was quickly adopted by the British as a way to solve the labour shortage of skilled and unskilled workers.

China was officially neutral at the time, however, the Government saw an opportunity to take advantage of the war to position themselves as a new international power. The volunteers were mostly poor Chinese citizens driven by poverty and political instabilities. Lured by the wages offered by the British, each volunteer received a 20 yuan embarkation fee, followed by 10 yuan per month paid directly to their family in China.

**THE LABOUR CORPS WOULD UNDERGO HARSH, DRY CONDITIONS, WORK ON ROADS AND RAIL CONSTRUCTION, AND ALSO HELP BUILD THE FRONT LINES. IN TOTAL, BRITAIN AND FRANCE RECRUITED NEARLY 140,000 CHINESE LABOURERS DURING WWI.**

Once the scheme was approved, Captain Harry Livingstone from the Canadian Army Medical Corps was ordered on a top-secret wartime mission to a dusty recruitment depot in Northeastern China. Livingstone had been instructed not to discuss his assignment in case word leaked out about the Canadian Government's involvement (Harry was the Grand-Nephew of the world-famous African explorer, Dr. David Livingstone).

The labourers were transported to Europe by ship across the Pacific to British Columbia on Canada's West Coast, then by train to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and finally, by ship to France. The men travelled in guarded and sealed railway cars to prevent them from leaving the train during the six-day journey. Some died en route, due mainly to the cramped and crowded conditions, and were buried in unmarked graves in British Columbia and Ontario.

**THE GOVERNMENT WANTED THE TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS KEPT SECRET TO HIDE THE FACT THAT A LUMP OF \$2000 NORMALLY CHARGED AS A FINE FOR ALL ARRIVES ENTERING THE COUNTRY, WAS WAIVED FOR THOSE WHO VOLUNTEERED TO SERVE IN THE LABOUR CORPS.**

When the men reached their destination, they were formed into companies, and depending on their level of skills, were assigned various tasks under the direction of British Officers. The Chinese were often subjected to racism, cultural misunderstanding, and ignorance, and though not combatants, the Labour Corps were still subject to British Military Law and discipline. The work was hard and often dangerous, and more than 2,000 died from shelling, landmines, or stray bullets. Several Chinese labourers were awarded the Meritorious Service Medal for bravery. Winston Churchill, who at the time was the 1st Lord of the Admiralty approved the awarding of the British War Medal for those who had served in the Labour Corps.

Those killed while serving in the labour corps were classified as war casualties and are buried in Military Cemeteries, the largest being of Noyelles-sur-Mer on the Somme in France. The graves are tended by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. After the war the Chinese labourers were transported back to China, however, still rarely they received little or no recognition for their contribution and sacrifices during WWI. After more than 100 years a memorial is being built in the Chinese city of Wei Hai in Shandong Province and in England, The "Ensuring We Remember" campaign will erect a memorial to the labour Corps, in a park at the Royal Albert Docks in London.

**CHINESE LABOUR CORPS, WORK PARTIES**

THE LINGERING  
UNLOADING COAL  
TRANSFERRING MUNITIONS  
BRITISH WAR MEDAL  
MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL

**A GROUP OF 400 BY CANADA, STARTED IN 1914, WAS DECORATED IN PARIS AT THE END OF THE WAR, DEPICTING FRANCE SURROUNDED BY THEIR ALLIES, INCLUDING THE CHINESE LABOUR CORPS. IN 1928 THE MEDALS WAS PURCHASED BY UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT AND CHOSEN TO INCLUDE THE CHINESE LABOUR CORPS PRIOR TO THE MEDAL BEING BESTOWED IN MEUSE-ARGONNE CANADA.**

## Medal Mounting

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



# “Our Little Warriors”

## Children on the Home Front

By Heather Neil



During the Second World War, Canadian children genuinely wanted to be a part of the war effort, and their enthusiasm turned them into valuable assets. Schools, churches, governments, and other organizations harnessed all that youthful energy, and put it to work.

Encouraged by their parents and teachers, they learned to search for old metal, paper, rubber, fat, and grease. These materials were in short supply and were recycled into weapons and ammunition. (It was said that the streets never looked so good, stripped of bottles, cans, and other refuse.) Some children even donated their toys for metal salvage. They also used their hard-earned nickels and dimes to buy War Savings Stamps which they stuck in special booklets for post-war redemption. In their home victory gardens, very small children were taught the important difference between a weed and a vegetable.

Boy Scouts and Girl Guides conducted fundraising activities. For example, the 10th Toronto Scouts collected 510,000 pounds (231 322 kg) of salvage, and used the money they earned to buy a truck, an ambulance for the

Royal Canadian Air Force, and Victory Bonds. Something else of note: of the \$5.5 billion raised in the Victory Loan appeals, millions were contributed by children.

Teachers often had children write letters to Canadian military members overseas, telling them about what was happening back home. In industrial arts classes in Montreal 15,000 splints were made for the Red Cross, and 40,000 boys in high schools across Canada built scale models of fighting aircraft to be used by pilots, observers,



But sometimes, even their “play” was sacrificed. To save scarce US dollars, the government barred all non-essential products from entering Canada. This embargo included children’s much-beloved comic books. In 1941, the Canadian publishing industry stepped in to fill the void, but they could not afford colour printing, so they printed in black and white. They were known as “Canadian Whites.” All 52,000 first-run copies sold out.

In the end, the considerable efforts, and the hardships and sacrifices made by the children of that time, serve as a reminder of what Canada’s youth can do when they willingly put their mind to it.



Children learned to knit socks, scarves, and mitts for the troops.

ON DISPLAY AT  
VANCOUVER ISLAND MILITARY MUSEUM:  
“The Home Front”

# Fit to Fight - How Would You Do?

By Angus Scully

Physical fitness in the Armed Forces is essential. By 1944, soldiers training in Canada had to meet the following standards before going overseas.

## Battle Efficiency Test

Dressed “as for battle,” (which included carrying a rifle, steel helmet, bayonet, 50 rounds of ammunition, a full water bottle and other standard equipment), a soldier must complete five of seven tasks, one from each section (including the firing range practice), in two hours.

### Agility

- With a run, surmount a six-foot (1.8m) wall with assistance.
- Jump a ditch 9 feet (2.7m) across, landing on both feet.
- Sprint 80 yards (73m) to a firing point, load rifle with 5 rounds and fire at a target 30 yards (27m) away, scoring three hits in sixty seconds.

### Strength

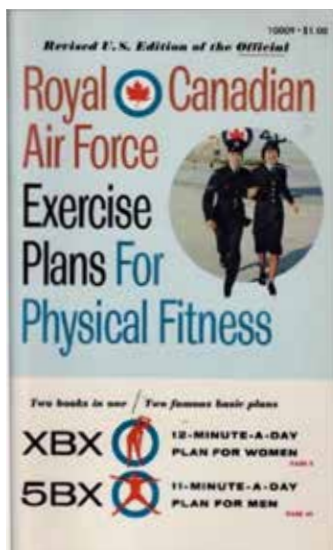
- Carry a man 200 yards (182m) by means of a “fireman’s lift,” on the flat, in one minute 45 seconds. The man to be carried must be approximately the same weight as the carrier and must be wearing full service marching order. The carrier will carry both rifles.
- Climb a vertical rope twelve feet (3.6 m) high, then traverse a twenty-foot (6m) span of horizontal rope and come down with the aid of a rope.

### Endurance

- Run two miles (3.2km) on roads in 18 minutes.
- Cover 10 miles (16 km) on foot and then complete a firing practice like No. 3 above.



*In 1943, men from the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada pose for the camera. Some are dressed for PT. Front row, third from left is Sergeant Frank Bridge and next to him, Capt. Charles Dalton. A lean looking group.*



*The 5BX fitness plan was developed in the late 1950s by the RCAF to help flight crew keep fit. Soon, the 5BX and 10BX plans became widely popular in Canada and around the world and is still followed by many today. The King was, and is, a follower of 5BX. This is the cover of the book sold in the USA.*



*Aubrey Cosens, then with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, posed at Camp Nanaimo on a PT instructor's course in 1943. Later with the Queen's Own Rifles, and a sergeant, he organized a sports day for his company the day before they went into action in the Battle of the Rhineland. Cosens was killed in action in February 1945 and, posthumously, awarded the Victoria Cross.*

**ON DISPLAY AT  
VANCOUVER ISLAND MILITARY MUSEUM:  
“Victoria Cross Recipients”**



# “Beam me up Scotty”

## Lieutenant James Doohan in War and Space

By Angus Scully



*St. Joseph's School, Sarnia. The three friends who volunteered in 1939 are James Doohan, seventh form the right at the back, “Chick” Hewitt looking over his right shoulder, and Frank Pettit, front row, right. All those in the photo were a great generation.*

Jack Pettit of Nanaimo has an interesting family photograph and story that introduces us to the story of James Doohan, famous as Scotty in the Star Trek television series and in movies. Jack Pettit is from Sarnia, ON, where his father Frank was at school with James Doohan.

Jack says his father remembered Doohan as a boy who “acted out in class.” Certainly, in the photo, Doohan looks like a mischief maker. Jack remembers this story from his father. *In 1939, many of the boys from St. Joseph's parish joined the army, including, from the photo, Frank Pettit, “Chick” Hewitt, and James Doohan. The parish priest, Father Joseph McCarthy, said, “If my boys are going, I'm going with them.” And he did, volunteering with his much younger parishioners.*

James Doohan was born in Vancouver in 1920. In 1939 he enlisted as a gunner in the Royal Canadian Artillery. He was quickly promoted to sergeant in the 22nd Field Battery, 13th Field Regiment RCA, in the 3rd Division. In 1940, he was sent to officer training, and by June 1944, was a battery commander. On D-Day, June 6, 1944, his battery landed in support of the Royal Winnipeg Regiment.

That night, in a friendly fire incident, he was shot four times in one leg, and a finger was shot off. During recovery in England, Doohan trained as a pilot for artillery observation. He was posted to 666 Squadron, RCAF, where his flying exploits earned him the label, “craziest pilot in the RCAF.” He later said he learned to mimic a Scottish accent while serving with Scottish troops.

After the war, Doohan worked in radio while studying in London ON and was soon making national appearances on CBC radio. With the CBC and occasional acting jobs in the USA, he performed in 4000 radio shows and 450 television programs. In 1965, he was cast as engineering officer Scotty Montgomery on the science fiction series Star Trek. The rest is history.



*James Doohan, 13th Field Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery.*



*James Doohan as Scotty on Star Trek.*

# DISPATCHES

from VIMM



## THE LAST OF US

The making of the television series transformed downtown Nanaimo and the Museum closed for a day to accommodate vehicle parking. VIMM was well compensated.



## EXECUTIVE PRESENTATION TO CITY COUNCIL APRIL 8

Roger Bird and Brian McFadden made a presentation to Nanaimo City Council on April 8 about the future of the Museum. The presentation was well received by the Council.

You can view this at the link here.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFRUzeXH\\_pg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFRUzeXH_pg)

## PROJECT 44

[Project 44](#) is an online map of the Western Front of the Second World War, co-created by Nathan Kehler and Drew Hannen from the [Canadian Research and Mapping Association \(CRMA\)](#).



The CRMA partnered with museums and partner institutions like the [Library and Archives Canada](#) for over three years to digitize war diaries, maps and aerial photographs so that they could be available on the web map. This incredible feat has made over 7,000 pages of text and 7 million words available to the public.

Aerial imagery of the Normandy front was supplied by the [Institut National de L'information Geographique et Forestiere \(IGN\)](#). The combinations of these primary source documents are distilled into Project'44, an easy-to-use interactive web map which is at the fingertips of historians and the general public.



*Brian McFadden and Roger Bird making presentation to Nanaimo City Council.*



*The battle honours board of the original HMCS Nanaimo, a corvette, is on display at VIMM. HMCS Nanaimo was commissioned at Esquimalt in 1941 and served in both the Atlantic and Pacific during the Second World War.*

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