



VIMM Newsletter

Fall 2021

Vancouver Island Military Museum

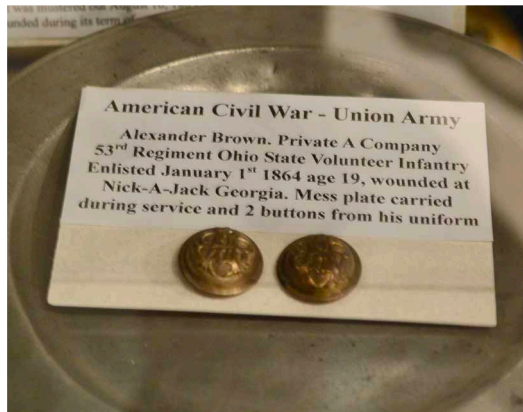
🌸 Canadians Who Served and Died for Other Countries 🌸

By Joe Pighin, Museum Volunteer

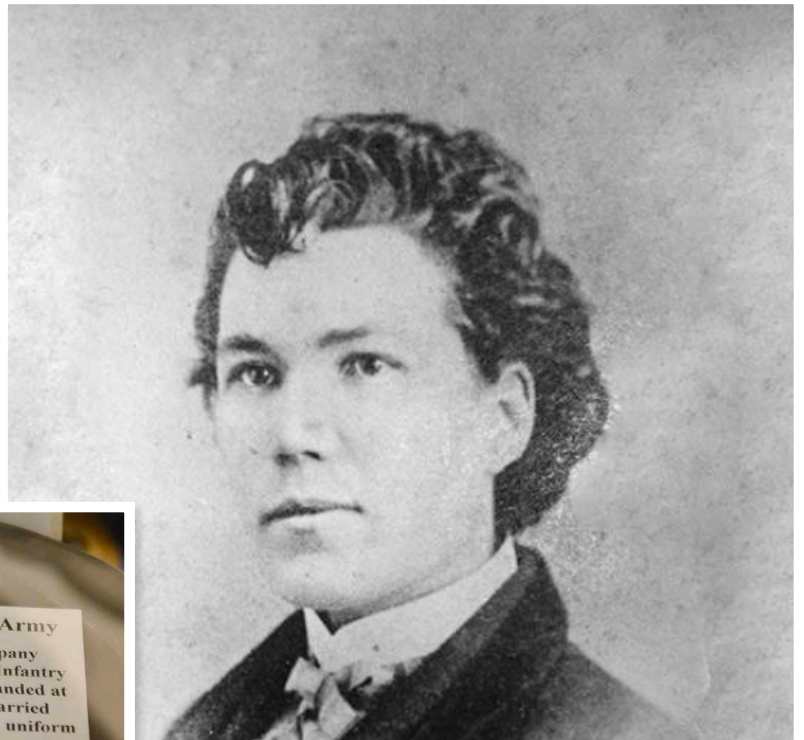
While the VIMM's focus is on the history of the Canadian military, we recognize that tens of thousands of Canadians volunteered to fight in the wars of other countries. The total number killed is not known.

In the American section of the museum are three special small items – a belt buckle with “US” imprinted on it, and two uniform buttons. If they could speak, they would tell the story of more than 30 000 Canadians who joined the Union Army in the American Civil War (1861 – 1865). Four Canadians became Union generals and 29 were awarded the Medal of Honor. Why so many Canadians? It could have been the \$200 bonus for joining, or they were fleeing justice, or dealing with a broken heart, or seeking the thrill of combat, or supporting the anti-slavery cause. Certainly, when the war began, most Canadians were sympathetic to the Union cause. There were also cross border family and personal ties. After all, most Canadians lived within 100 miles of the US border. There were some who sympathized with the Confederate side. For example, Dr. Solomon Secord was

a surgeon with the 20th Georgia Volunteers. He was grandnephew of Laura Secord, famous for her role in the War of 1812. In Halifax, blockade runners supplied the South with war materials. Some businesses even flew the Confederate flag and several family fortunes were made. Confederates in Canada planning raids across the border would have had Canadian help too. An untold number of Canadians were the victims of “Crimps,” American “agents” who were paid to find volunteers. They would seek out young men and get them drunk. Tricked, drugged, and kidnapped, these were not true volunteers.



On display at VIMM



Sarah Edmondson (or Edmonds) from New Brunswick, disguised herself as a man and volunteered for the 2nd Michigan Infantry, serving as a “male” nurse, mail carrier, and even as a spy. For that service she is a member of United States Military Intelligence Hall of Fame.

One Canadian volunteer was Sarah Emma Edmondson, a New Brunswick farm girl who had fled an abusive home situation and arranged marriage. She moved to the US and disguised herself as a man, “Frank Thompson,” to avoid being found by her family. She joined the 2nd Michigan Infantry Regiment under her disguise and spent two years in the Union Army. After the war, and once revealed as a woman, her former comrades helped her get a pension. She was the only woman to receive a full army pension of \$12 a month. She remained in the US after the war, married, had three children, and died in Texas in 1898. **Continued page 7**

From the President

The museum is now open to the public after some closures due to Covid-19 restrictions. We are still enforcing the Covid protocols for our staff and visitors. Our attendance has picked up during the summer with most visitors coming from the mainland and other parts of Canada. We did have some visitors from Italy recently. We are experiencing some Cameron Road closures and parking congestion due to the new Marriot Hotel construction. Our hours of operation have changed to Wednesday to Saturday, again due to the hotel construction.

Volunteers Betty and Clynt Pringle have retired due to health issues, and we wish them well. We have welcomed back Steve Sharpe and Reece Kuhn as volunteers.

We are doing well financially with recent and welcomed donations. Our Christmas Dinner event is doubtful this year because of the restrictions. We will revisit this event and try for a gathering in the spring or even next summer. All in all, we have weathered the Covid storm so far, thanks to the volunteers and staff. Stay safe all.

Roger Bird

Medal Mounting

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



A Visitor's Comment



I have just spent an informative and enjoyable time in your museum today. I was welcomed by Robert Muir, and we exchanged stories of common acquaintances. The museum is very impressive. I served seven years in the RCAF, five years in West Germany flying the F-86 Sabre aircraft. I have travelled extensively as a captain with Air Canada for 35 years and have visited many military/war museums around the world. Your VIMM ranks as one of the best I have visited. I particularly liked the display of the Canadian recipients of the Victoria Cross. That is something all Canadians should be proud of. Thanks again for the visit. Good luck in the future with your excellent museum.

Warren Wallace



Engraving on Osborne Orr's Distinguished Flying Cross

A Generous and Important Gift

Readers of this newsletter have been kept informed about the story of Osborne Orr DFC, the once ignored, and even lost, fighter ace from the First World War (back issues are on our web site). A year ago, his name was added to the Nanaimo cenotaph. In May, a display about Orr was added to the Museum, summarizing his family's Nanaimo connection, his training with the Imperial Royal Flying Corps in Toronto, and his career as an ace. The display features a photo of the impressive locket and painting of Orr that had belonged to Caroline Orr, mother of the ace. She had it made after his death and wore it every day for the rest of her life. This object by itself tells of the impact of loss on families of the fallen. It is very precious object.

The locket is in Seattle, in the possession of Jim Thayer and Connie Thayer, relatives of Orr. Their interest in their hero ancestor has greatly helped the research done at the Museum. They have also provided one of



Lieut. Osborne Orr DFC. This painting in a silver locket was a personal commemoration by his mother Caroline Orr. It was made after Orr's death, showing him in his RAF uniform, wearing the DFC ribbon. Photo courtesy of James Thayer, Seattle.

Osborne Orr's DFC in the original case, as it was found in Seattle earlier this year by Jim Thayer and Connie Thayer. Their thoughtfulness and generosity deserve thanks from all Canadians. Their gift also includes Orr's service medals and the original documentation from 1920. The RFC wings were earned by Orr in Toronto in 1918, shortly before the RFC became the RAF.



The new Osborne Orr display, next to the Raymond Collishaw display. Plans are progressing to add displays on Joseph Fall and Charlie Hickey, also First World War aces from Vancouver Island.

only two known photos of Orr, which also appears in our new display. In January of this year, they were astounded and excited to find Osborne Orr's medals among the effects of their recently deceased brother. Jim and Connie then made a most generous offer – to repatriate these rare objects to Canada, to the care of the VIMM. We accepted, and the medals duly arrived, to be reverently inspected. This newly found Distinguished Flying Cross, for a Canadian Ace in the First World War, is a rare object of historical importance. The VIMM is privileged to have it in our care.



Wally Floody: The Forgotten Tunnel King

By Greg Devenish, VIMM Volunteer

On March 1, 1944, during the daily morning roll call at the German prisoner of war camp, Stalag Luft III, the German adjutant called out the names of twenty allied prisoners who were to be transferred to another camp. Among them was RCAF Flight Lieutenant Wally Floody. Nicknamed “The Tunnel King,” Floody was a major contributor to the X Organization building escape tunnels, and to what would be forever called, the “Great Escape”. Had the Germans gotten wind of the plans?

Wally Floody was born April 28, 1918, and raised in Toronto. After leaving school, he had a number of jobs as a carnie, cowboy, lumberman and as a miner in Kirkland Lake, Ont. All these later contributed to his role as escape artist. A Senior RAF officer said of escaping: “...you have to be a combination miner, actor, linguist, thief, and all-around tough guy.”

Wally Floody joined the RCAF in 1940 and after his training, was posted, in September 1941, to RCAF 401 Squadron flying Spitfires. Wally completed several missions over France called “circuses” or “rhubarbs.” These were flown low to the ground, targeting trucks and locomotives, and tried to lure the Luftwaffe into combat. On Oct. 27th, 1941, Wally was shot down, captured, and eventually sent to Stalag Luft III, which held 10,000 prisoners.

The camp was deemed escape proof. There were two high barbed wire fences, search lights, guard towers every 100 meters, and a warning wire inside the fences, that kept prisoners away from the main fences. Those who crossed would be shot. Inside the compound were wooden barracks, a theatre, sports fields, and a hospital. German guards (called “Goons” or “Ferrets” by the prisoners) patrolled the outside as well as inside the compound.

As soon as Wally arrived, various tunnels were started but the poor sandy soil made tunneling difficult and the guards used sound detectors as well as heavily laden trucks to collapse the tunnels. Those caught were sent to the “cooler” for two weeks.

Things changed with the arrival of Roger Bushell, a RAF pilot who became the head of the “X Organization,” with the goal of getting out 200 POWs, complete with rations, maps, forged travel documents, and civilian clothing. The X Organization set up departments in charge of forgery, security, clothing, and construction.

Those POWs who could speak German befriended a ferret, to cultivate them and then blackmail them to provide cameras, film, documents, guard timetables etc. Wally was selected as the person in charge of tunneling. There were three 300 feet tunnels code



named Tom, Dick, and Harry. Wally made it clear: “First you have to find a place to sink a shaft. Next, you’ve got to build a tunnel very deep so Germans can’t hear any digging. You’ve got to dispose of the sand. And most important, you’ve got to be able to do all of this under the very nose of the Germans.”

There were 30 ft. vertical shafts down to the tunnels. Wally organized two-man teams to dig, and security was essential so that digging could continue for long periods of time.

The trap doors to the tunnels were placed under a hot wooden stove, a sunken drain, and a concrete pillar. Wood for shoring up the tunnels was provided by bed boards, rafters, furniture, and even wooden panels. Electric lights were installed using stolen copper wire. An air duct system made from old milk cans provided fresh air. Wally designed a cart and rail system to move the sand from the digging site to the bottom of the shaft. From there the sand was moved by “Penguins” (POWs) to disperse the sand to rafters, under the theatre, and even in the compound.

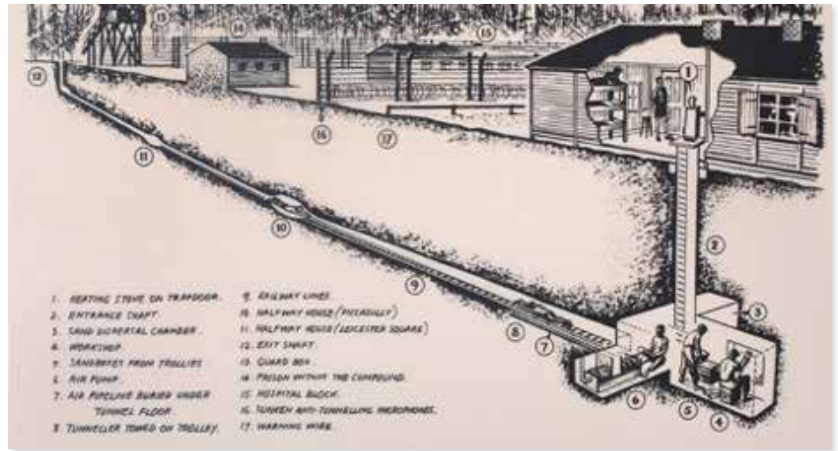
On September 8th the entrance to “Tom” was discovered and digging was stopped, but in January 1944 “Harry” was re-opened and digging continued. The escape was planned for March 24th.

Wally and the nineteen members were disappointed in their transfer to the other camp just prior to the breakout. They waited for news of the escape and finally learned that 76 men had broken out and 70 000 Germans were trying to hunt them down. Three escaped to freedom, but 73 were captured. Fifty of these escapees were executed by the Gestapo, including six Canadians.

Wally spent the remainder of the war in a POW Camp. As the Russians approached from the



The tunnel measured 2 feet by 2 feet. The trolley was used to haul sand from the digging face. Note the rails. This was designed by Wally Floody.



A sketch of the tunnel "Harry". Note the air pump (#6) to provide air to the tunnellers. The vertical shaft was dug 30 feet down to avoid sound detection.

the tunnel scenes were filmed. Wally passed away from lung disease in 1989.

In 1946 Wally was awarded the Order of the British Empire. The citation read, "*Flight Lieutenant Floody made a very thorough study of tunneling work and devised many different methods and techniques. He became one of the leading organizers and indefatigable workers in the tunnels themselves ... Time and time again, projects were started and discovered ... but he persisted and showed a degree of courage and devotion to duty.*"

The VIMM has a display on Prisoners of War, in Europe and in Japan. There are also artifacts made by German POWs in Canada.



Wally Floody, centre, technical advisor, on location during filming of *The Great Escape*.

The Tin Man John Colwell of Nanaimo

The Great Escape of March 1944 from Stalag Luft III has been immortalized in film and historian Paul Brickhill's book, *The Great Escape*. While many servicemen from the allied countries were involved in the escape, there was a huge contribution by Canadian POWs. One of them was John Colwell from Nanaimo, B.C. Born in India, his father moved the family to Nanaimo in the mid- 30s. He joined the RCAF and was a navigator on a Halifax bomber with 405 Squadron. Colwell's aircraft was shot down over Rotterdam. He was captured and interned in Stag Luft III near Sagan, Germany. He played an important role organizing Penguins, a term used for POWs who distributed the sand from the tunnels. Nicknamed the "The Tin Man," Colwell could build anything out of Klim tin cans including kettles, compasses, and air ducts for the tunnels. He survived the war and settled in Lantzville, B.C. He kept an in-depth diary of life at Stalag Luft III which he donated to the Air Museum in Comox B.C.

East, Wally and his mates were forced marched west closer to Berlin in the middle of winter. Many died from disease, hunger, and the cold. At the end of May 1945, Wally finally was escorted by the Russians to the American sector. He said, "*By God...we made it.*"

After the war Wally had a successful career in business and raised a family. He founded an Ex-POW chapter in Toronto and worked tirelessly for the Canadian Cancer Society. Certainly, a highlight for him was working as a technical advisor on the very successful film, "*The Great Escape*." Although Wally's character was never in the film and while there were some inaccuracies, he enjoyed the film and was pleased with the way

After the Arrow - Continued Air Defence

By Angus Scully

The development and the 1959 cancellation of the CF-105 Arrow fighter continue to generate controversy, and indeed the story seems to take up much more space in our history than what happened in Canadian defence afterwards. While the Arrow entered a world of endless argument and myth, the reality of defence had to be faced. Aircraft and missiles were bought, and huge facilities designed to withstand nuclear bombs were built. Tens of thousands of Canadians in the RCAF and civilian world were involved, and Canadian companies made significant contributions. Today, the RCAF still monitors and defends our air space.

After the Arrow, the Government bought CF-101 Voodoos from the US Air Force and five RCAF squadrons flew Voodoos as part of NORAD air defence. They were retired from the Canadian Forces in 1984 after 24 years of service. The Canadair Sabres on service in Europe were replaced by the American CF-104 Starfighter. An order for 200 CF-104s (at a price of \$1.90 million each) was placed with Canadair Aircraft, Montreal, Quebec who built them under license from Lockheed, USA. An additional 38 two-seater CF-104Ds were ordered directly from Lockheed in California. After the RCAF production order was filled in June 1963, Canadair produced a further 140 aircraft for other NATO countries.

Largely forgotten today is the reality that these weapons systems were designed to use atomic bombs. The CF-101 carried Genie nuclear armed rockets and the CF-104 was used to drop nuclear bombs in high-speed low-level attacks. The atomic bombs were American owned and



CF-104 Starfighters on station in Germany. Capable of speeds more than twice the speed of sound, these aircraft were used for low level attacks. In 24 years of operation with the RCAF, 113 Canadian aircraft lost, and 37 pilots lost their lives.

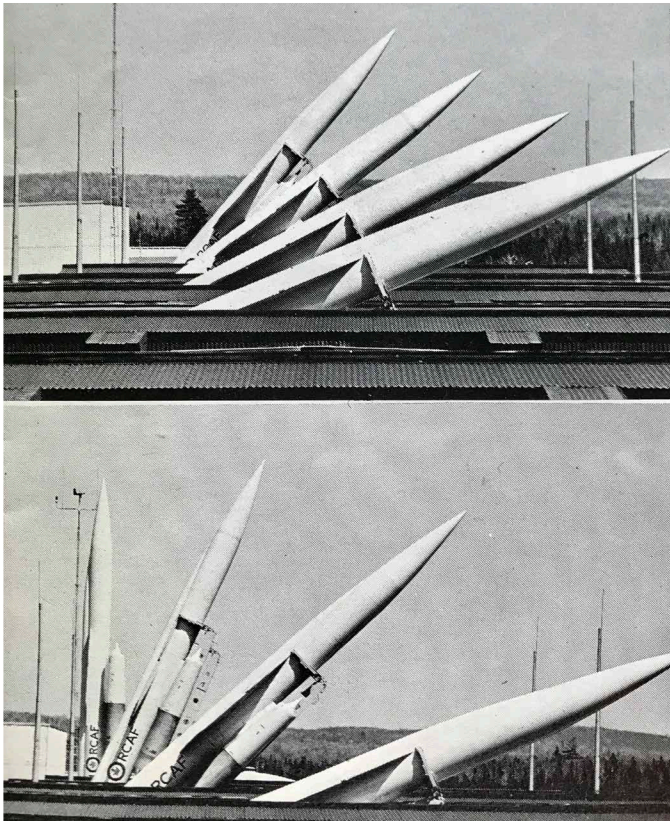
controlled. They could not be used in action by the RCAF unless American officers armed them.

The RCAF was also equipped with the Bomarc missile, a surface-to-air rocket that was guided to its target by ground-based radars. The Bomarcs had a range of about 700 km and were designed to explode within a kilometer of targets. Their 10 kiloton American controlled nuclear warheads had two-thirds of the strength of the weapon that destroyed Hiroshima. In total, 56 Bomarc missiles were based in Canada, and were operated from 1960 to 1972 at La Macaza, Quebec and North Bay, Ontario. The use of nuclear warheads was highly controversial and caused a political crisis in Canada in the early 1960s.

North Bay was also the home of a fighter base and the location of Canada's underground air defence headquarters. Opened in 1963, the Under Ground Complex (also called "The Hole") is 207 meters underground and was built to withstand a 4-megaton nuclear bomb hit. Up to 700 RCAF and USAF personnel were stationed in two huge caverns that were independent of outside supplies. A 2 km tunnel connected the Hole to the North Bay air base. The SAGE computer systems operated 24/7 and detected aircraft approaching Canada. In case of a Soviet attack, the CF-101 Voodoos and Bomarcs would be used.

When it was thought that the Cold War had ended, the headquarters for Canadian air defence was moved above ground at North Bay, and still operates 24/7. All aircraft and satellites entering Canadian air space are monitored by 21 Aerospace Control and Warning Squadron, RCAF. In 2013, with the launch of the Sapphire satellite (Canada's first military satellite), members of 21 AC&W Sqn. track, identify, and catalogue objects in space, including debris within a range of 5,500 km to 55,000 km.

A display at VIMM features the history of the air defence of Canada.



Bomarc missiles rise from their bunkers at North Bay.

Canadians Who Served and Died for Other Countries

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Two items in the VIMM are helmets from the First World War, one a French helmet, and the other Italian. They were both picked up on a battlefield that most Canadians have never heard of – Fuentes de Ebro. In fact, the helmets belonged to Canadians serving with the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion in the Spanish Civil War (1936 – 1939). The battalion does not exist in the history of the Canadian Army. It belonged to the XV International Brigade of the Spanish Republican Army. The “Mac-Paps” is one of the unique military units to be found in the annals of war.

In 1936, a military Junta led by General Franco moved to overthrow the government of the Republic of Spain. The Fascist governments of Italy under the dictator Mussolini, and of Germany under Hitler, supported Franco with money, weapons, and actual military units. The Republican cause was supported by the Soviet Union and by tens of thousands of international volunteers who opposed Fascism. The government of Canada and other democracies stayed neutral. Many Canadians called the volunteers Communists, as indeed some were.

The first 500 Canadian volunteers formed the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, named after the leaders of the 1837 rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada. The Mac-Paps were in a Brigade with the American Abraham Lincoln Battalion, and battalions from Britain and Latin America. The exact number of Canadian who served and were killed cannot be determined because records were destroyed. Perhaps the most famous Canadian who served in Spain is Dr. Norman Bethune, who later died serving with the Chinese Communists and is still a revered hero in China.

Five months after the Republicans were defeated by Franco, Hitler invaded Poland and Canada entered the war against fascism.

Among VIMM artifacts are American helmets and weapons from the Vietnam War era (1960s – 1973). There is also a display on Canada and Peacekeeping. Canada did not take part in the Vietnam War, but tens of thousands of Canadians did, as volunteers in the US armed forces. The only official Canadian participation was in 1973 when Canada provided peacekeepers to the International Commission of Control and Supervision to observe the end of hostilities.

Unofficially, the Canadian Vietnam Veterans Association estimates that over 20 000 Canadians volunteered to serve with American forces. One hundred and ten were killed and another seven are listed as missing in action. They are commemorated on the famous Vietnam War Wall in Washington, DC, and on the North Wall in Windsor, ON. The North Wall also includes the names of four Canadians who were killed serving with the International Control Commission which supervised the 1954 partition of Vietnam.

The Royal Canadian Legion was at first unwilling to accept the returned Canadian volunteers as members. However, in 1994 the Legion officially recognized them for regular membership.

On the other hand, Canada allowed 30,000 to 40,000 American draft dodgers and deserters to enter Canada during the war.



The North Wall in Windsor, Ontario, commemorates Canadians who died serving in US armed forces during the Viet Nam War.

There are two memorials related to the Mac Paps on Vancouver Island. One is in Victoria, and the other is a small marker in Cumberland, which commemorates two local brothers, Archie and Gordon Keenan. They were both miners in a town with a vigorous labour movement. Archie was killed in the Battle of the Ebro. Both men would have known the men who wore the helmets now in our collection.

DISPATCHES

from VIMM



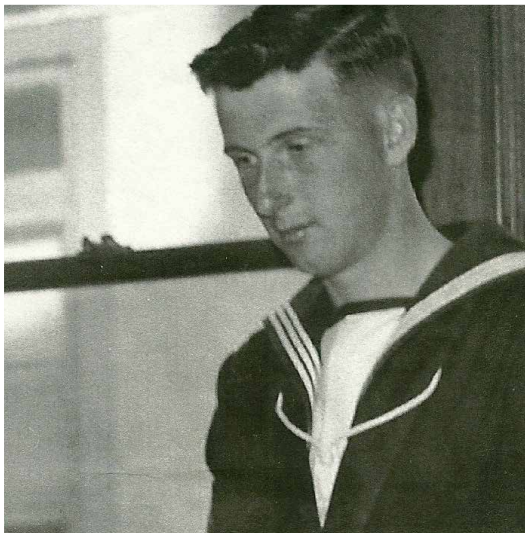
Remembrance Day



VIMM will be open from
11:15 am to 3:00 pm
with Covid protocols in place.

In Memoriam

Museum volunteer Bill Greig has passed away. Bill spent 20 years in the RCN, 18 of them in communications in Esquimalt. He retired as a Chief Petty Officer. He then continued in communications with the Federal Government – on the base! Bill joined the Museum staff in 2009, having been recruited from the Scottish country dancing club by the wife of the VIMM's vice-president. A fine woodworker, Bill made great contributions to the construction of the VIMM's new displays during 2011-12. He was a member of the Friday crew and will be missed.



Retired!

Betty and Clynt Pringle have retired as volunteers, although Betty has promised she will be available as a substitute. Clynt joined us in 1998, and Betty in 2011. Thank you Betty and Clynt, for years of dedicated service.

Friday Volunteers

Fridays can be very busy at the Museum. Visitors will be royally treated by Bill Eubank, Doug Hogg, and Gord Buch.



Bill Eubank



Gord Buch



Doug Hogg

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