



# VIMM Newsletter



Summer 2025

Vancouver Island Military Museum

## The Home Front – Air Raid Precautions

By Heather Neil



During World War 2, most countries prepared to protect themselves from the effects of enemy air attacks. In Canada, and many other parts of the British Empire, this was called *Air Raid Precautions* - often abbreviated to “ARP”. These precautions included active fighter defence, early warning radar, blackouts, and rescue/emergency relief organizations. Relying on volunteer groups of men and women alike - often World War 1

veterans - branches of the ARP were formed in communities that were seen as vulnerable. These included cities on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, as well as in the province of Quebec.

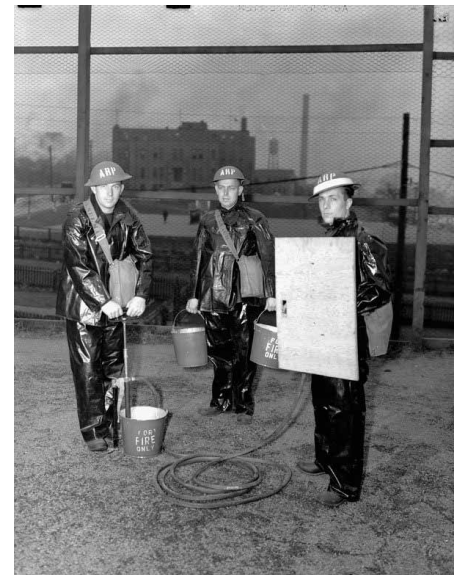
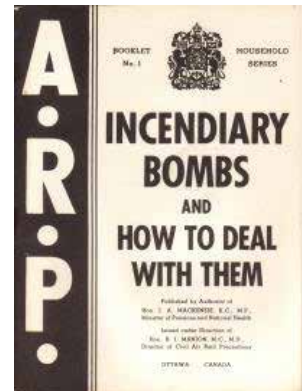
These volunteer individuals were trained to provide first aid, lead civilians in the event of an aerial attack, ensure civilians donned gas masks, fight fires, have knowledge of chemical weapons, and be in command of the general public during major emergency. Regular “blackout” nights were held, during which all city and house lights were to be turned off to diminish enemy accuracy in the event of a bombing attack. ARP wardens would walk through the streets during these practices and ensure that civilians had put out all their lights. If someone repeatedly refused to comply, the Wardens were to report these people to the police. Wardens also carried rattles or noisemakers to alert communities to an air raid.

The ARP Warden uniforms were comprised of different sets of distinguishing gear, involving a hat badge and arm band. The steel helmet MK II was put into production in 1938 for the ARP. Rank was denoted in bright white bold letters on the front: ARP for general use, W for Warden, R for rescue services, and A for

ambulance drivers. (Helmets worn by the ARP were made from less metal than the helmet worn by soldiers on the front line in order to be efficient with resource usage.)

Taking a page from the UK’s playbook, Ottawa’s ARP branch published various instructional pamphlets and newsletters for use by both community wardens and the public. These were meant to educate all Canadians on how to act in the event of an air raid. For example, information on the new strategic bombing being used in conflict, and how to deal with incendiary bombs. Some booklets detailed how to create air raid shelters in one’s own home. Others explained the reasons for nightly blackouts. In 1942, the director of the *Federal Civilian Air Raid Precautions* (Ottawa) and the *Orient Beauty-Skin Hosiery Company* jointly published a 24-page handbook providing women with specific instructions on how to keep the family and home safe against the enemy above. It included advice on what to wear when dealing with (bomb) damage in the neighbourhood.

The Air Raid Precautions program was about ordinary Canadian men and women at home, stepping up to assist in a time of great need.



*Preparing for the unthinkable – an air attack on Canada.*

After World War 2, the ARP’s legacy within Canada was a new awareness of public emergency preparedness and security. Government organizations dedicated to civil defence would expand when the world later entered the era of the Cold War and realized the threat of nuclear attack.

# Vice President's Message



*The VIMM, overlooking Nanaimo Harbour*

The Museum has been around for 39 years and moved to our present location in 2012. It has been set up as a non-profit society and is supported by donations and staffed by volunteers. Since the end of COVID there has been an increase in Vancouver Island Military Museum (VIMM) presentations in the community. The Museum has presented to service clubs like Rotary, and Lions as well as to church groups, and to social clubs such as Probus and Harbour City Newcomers. The objectives for these presentations are to explain who we are, including governance, facility, displays, and to explain our mission statement: Come See, Come Learn, Come Experience History. As a museum, we stress the need to articulate Canada's military history and traditions. These presentations also provide an opportunity to share photos, medals, diaries, artifacts, and individual stories, with the audience. There is always time for questions following the address. It is amazing how many people want to share their memories of relatives who served. In some cases the presentation raises more questions than answers. These talks often get people to investigate their relatives who served – to find personal military records or dig out medals for mounting, to be handed down to a younger generation. Many of the audience take time to visit the museum. On a personal note, following one presentation, I was approached by an elderly gentleman who was German. He took out of his wallet an object which was an American soldier's simple

can opener. He was six years old in 1945. Food was scarce and he had found a can of fruit but couldn't open it. A young GI witnessed his attempts to get at the contents unsuccessfully. The GI gave him this can opener and this gentleman has carried it with him for 80 years. Sometimes you learn more from the audience. If you are a member of a service club or social club, we would be more than happy to give a presentation on the museum.

Check out our website [www.vimilitarymuseum.ca](http://www.vimilitarymuseum.ca) and you can reach us at 250-753-3814.

Greg Devenish

## Medal Mounting

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



# Australian Soldier's Fob – Found in Nanaimo!

By Angus Scully

Many articles in this newsletter deal with large events or issues that are related to displays in the Museum. But we have many very small objects and in a small object can be found an important story. Some small objects are mysterious, unidentified, or rare. This article looks at a small gold watch fob that poses a mystery.

***How did a small gold medal, presented to commemorate the return to Australia in 1919 of a veteran of the Great War, end up buried in a garden in Nanaimo?***

Some years ago, a local woman and her daughter came to the museum with a small gold “medal” that the daughter had found in the soil of their home garden. They thought it looked valuable and took it to the RCMP station where the Mounties referred them to us. They donated it to us so that it could be researched and kept safe. And so began the hunt for the origins of this fine little artifact.

What looks like a small medal is in fact a watch fob, used as a decoration on a watch chain in the days when most people still used a pocket watch. On one side are crossed rifles, the shield of Australia, and the words, Welcome Back Empire Defender. On the reverse, the following is engraved:



*Watch fobs were given to many returning servicemen in Australia in 1919. This is one like ours, but complete*

PRESENTED TO  
**Lt. R. M. Taylor MM**  
 By Jellat and Surrounding Friends  
 Jellat NSW Australia  
 June 10 1919



*The front of the medal, framed and on display at VIMM*

The fob is made of nine karat gold and shines up like new. The attaching ring at the top has broken off, and that may be how it came to fall to the ground and be lost. But how did it get from Jellat in New South Wales to British Columbia? A search of Australian records reveals that there were several R. M. Taylors in the Australian Army, but not an officer with the Military Medal, from New South Wales. No doubt more research, and research conducted in Australia, will produce more information.

In the meantime, we keep safe a gift given by a grateful community to one of its returning heroes.

# The Monster of 100 Eyes - The RCAF 's Argus

By Greg Devenish



In 1948 the RCAF requested that Canadian aerospace companies produce a preliminary design for an ASW (Anti-Submarine Warfare) aircraft. The result was the CP-107 Argus, the only maritime ASW patrol aircraft designed and built in Canada and one of the largest and most complicated aircraft ever produced in Canada. It served with the RCAF and CAF from 1957 to 1981.

The aircraft was named after *Argus Panoptes*, the all-seeing monster with 100 eyes.

Canadair based the Argus on the British *Bristol Britannia* prop airliner. The new aircraft was loaded with electronic gear, a 5.49 m tail boom, weapons bay, a huge searchlight, a chin radome, a transparent observer's position at the front of the aircraft, a completely new innovative flight deck and a tactical component. All the drawings had to be Canadianized from British plans. The Argus was powered by four Wright R- 3350 engines.

The prototype rolled off the assembly line on December 21, 1956. Canadair would go on to produce 33 aircraft. These aircraft equipped five squadrons based at Greenwood, Nova Scotia,

Summerside, PEI, and Comox B.C.

The Argus was the first RCAF aircraft with sufficient range to patrol every area of Canada, the Arctic, and the Canadian Economic Exclusion Zone in a single mission. Patrols lasted anywhere from 14 to 18 hours. F/O Bill Misener and crew completed an Arctic ASA reconnaissance mission in Argus 20722 for 30 hours and 20 minutes!

Aviation historian Larry Millberry wrote, *To some Argus crews, long patrols and never-ending roar of the engines were fatiguing. This sometimes worried the crews especially when, after a long patrol, a pilot had a difficult landing in marginal weather.*

In the 1960s, Argus crews spent many hours tracking Russian submarines and intelligence trawlers in the North Atlantic. The CP -107 Argus also deployed from bases in Ireland, Scotland, and Norway.

One of the highlights in the career of the Argus was during the Cuban Missile Crises in October 1962. The USA had blockaded Cuba so Russian ships and submarines could not supply nuclear weapons and support Russian activities in

Cuba. The world was on the brink of nuclear war. Prime Minister Diefenbaker was unwilling to put maritime forces on alert status. Admiral Dyer of the RCN ingeniously activated a naval exercise which called for a *Sub-Air Barrier* across the UK, Iceland and the Greenland gap. This was extended further south all the way to the Azores. As a result, Argus aircraft, fully weapon loaded, were continuously on station and reporting Russian ship movements. S/L Hi Carswell wrote:



*I was a fairly new Flight Commander of 415 Squadron...so the possible combat action brought some excitement...all the squadron members were enthusiastic about putting their extensive training to use...there was...tension in the air as squadron members recognized the seriousness of the situation. The Americans had naturally moved their maritime emphasis south...so Canadian ships and aircraft moved to fill in the gaps. This meant longer patrols. I remember going on a 24-hour patrol...When it was over there was relief...and a sense of pride that we had done what was expected of us.*

Throughout the 60s the Argus was deployed around the world - from Alaska to Greenland to Bermuda to Portugal. There were some mishaps including a crash of Argus 10737 in March 1977 and the loss of three crewmembers. The most serious incident occurred on 23 March 1965, when Argus 10727 plunged into the ocean off Puerto Rico. The entire crew of 16 members perished.

The Argus last flight occurred on November 10, 1980. Today a few of the remaining Argus serve as gatekeepers at various RCAF bases and one is preserved in the National Aviation Museum in Ottawa. The Argus served Canada well for over

twenty years and in the early years was the most technologically advanced anti-submarine aircraft in the world. Major - General Ian Patrick summed it up best when he wrote:

*Flying this aircraft was very special. Although like good wine the flying improved with age. "Engineer, wet power," were the magic words for flight engineers that we pilots used to unleash 14 800 raw*



*Crew members from 404 Buffalo Squadron manning the various sensor stations in the Argus*

*horsepower. In my 42-year Air Force career, nothing curled the hair on the back of my neck like those words. The many who flew her may not all have loved her but the respect for her was unanimous. The Argus was one of the greatest aircraft ever built, and I was thankful for the rich experience of flying her.*

A documentary video about the Argus can be found at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRwsKD6BaiI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRwsKD6BaiI)



**OR SCAN HERE TO  
WATCH THE VIDEO**

# Women's War Work - Recipes with Rationing

By Heather Neil

Everything was militarized during the Second World War - even the recipes that fed the families on the Home Front. Women, in and outside the home, became Housoldiers and their job was to prepare "appetizing and nourishing meals that protect and preserve the health of families."



*Cook books to help prepare meals with rationed food were widely available*

ensuring that Canadians were kept strong and well-fed, while respecting the restrictions on food items such as meat, sugar, butter, tea, and coffee.

But having ration coupons didn't guarantee the desired items would be available. By 1943 food was in short supply, specifically certain recipe ingredients. Cafeterias and restaurants were also subjected to regulation in the name of the war effort. By establishing "meatless Tuesday" - imposed by the WPTB - food establishments set an example to communities by following food restrictions while still catering delicious meals.

A common message to the Canadian civilian population during the war was that their responsible food consumption was as important to the war effort as any other wartime activity. While soldiers fought overseas, Canadians at home could do their part in securing victory by adhering to coupon rationing and abiding by the restrictions imposed by the Wartime Prices and Trade Board.

Donald Gordon, Chairman of the WPTB, emphasized the

important role of homemaker in

So, what to do?

New cookbooks full of inventive recipes for Canadian homemakers appeared everywhere. They were published by both private and government organizations. In 1943, Vancouver's Edith Adams prefaced her own *Wartime Cookbook* by saying: *The*

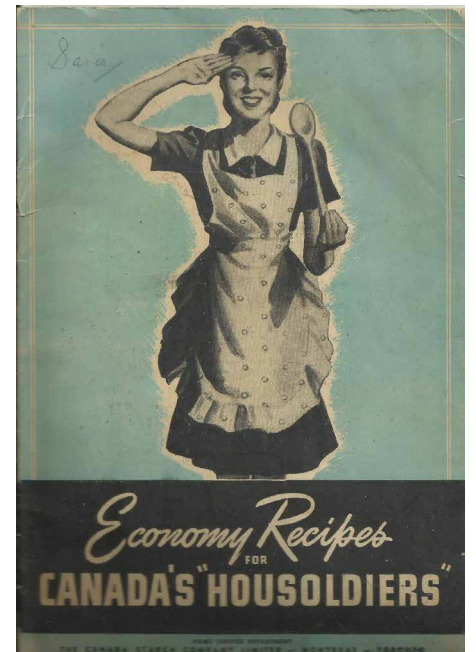
*recipes in this book were chosen because they call for only materials available on our markets. A section is devoted to the current problem of packing lunch buckets and parcels for men in service, both overseas and in Canada. A large section is devoted to home canning, a chore which has become of greater importance, since we cannot depend on the buying of commercially canned foods.*

Imagine going into a grocery store today and not buying a single pre-packaged or prepared item. Everything had to be peeled, chopped, dried, and made from scratch - in a lot of cases with substitutions.

But Canadian women, as always, rose to the occasion and prevailed. They were our *Housoldiers on the Home Front*.



*Jellied salads were popular.*



*Housoldiers were part of a total war effort*

# The Caterpillar Club and the Goldfish Club

The gift to the museum of a pilot's uniform revealed the heroic exploits and miraculous survival of a Spitfire pilot from Edmonton. Flight Lieutenant George Aitken AFC served with 403 Squadron RCAF. On June 2, 1942, on a fighter sweep over France and the English Channel, Aitken described his ordeal when being shot down.

*Holding stick with left hand, I undid straps, slid [canopy] back then changed hands and removed helmet with my left hand, opened door and throttled back and pulled the nose back and then held onto stick and put my left leg on the wing, pulled rip cord and fell backwards out of the [aircraft]. My chute opened and almost caught tail. This was at 1,000 feet. As I went down, I saw [aircraft] hit with a hell of a bang and then sink immediately. Inflated*

*my Mae West and turned my quick release and it seemed no time until I hit water. I had hold of my dinghy straps as I cannot swim. I hit water facing wind and parachute pulled me along on my back. I struck quick release and holding dinghy strap and then gave dinghy a hard jerk to free it from parachute and swallowed water; pulled out dinghy, got*

*hold of bottles and slowly turned handles to inflate, then climbed in, grabbed*

*paddles and looked for shore.*

Aitken was picked up by a rescue launch and survived the war. His escape on 2 June earned him membership in two exclusive clubs.

**The Caterpillar Club** was formed in Ohio in 1922 when Harold Harris made an emergency parachute jump from an aircraft using an Irvin Company parachute. The company started the club and gave to every successful jumper a small caterpillar pin to represent the silk worm that made the silk for the 'chute, and a membership card.

Over 30 000 club memberships were given in WW2. The GQ Parachute Company had a similar club and in Australia there was the Roo Club for those who used an Australian "Dominion" parachute.

**The Goldfish Club** was started in England by "Robbie" Robertson of the P. B. Cow Company, maker of rubber dinghies and life vests. Aircrew who survived a wartime "ditching" were given an embroidered badge and a membership card. Over 9 000 were issued during the war.

Air Force regulations about uniforms

prohibited the open

wearing of the club badges, but members got around that by wearing the caterpillar and goldfish under their lapels.

For more information see:

**Danny Danziger. The Goldfish Club.**

**(Sphere Publishing 2012) and**

**[www.vicnews.com/community/remembrance-day-goldfish-caterpillars-and-close-calls-45982](http://www.vicnews.com/community/remembrance-day-goldfish-caterpillars-and-close-calls-45982)**



*On display at the VIMM, George Aitken's Goldfish Club badge under the left lapel of his uniform*



*George Aitken's Caterpillar Club pin under the right lapel of his uniform. Photo: Chris Bush*



*George Aitken, Spitfire pilot, 403 Squadron*

# DISPATCHES

from VIMM



## NANAIMO FLAG AND AFGHANISTAN

The Nanaimo City flag on display at VIMM was proudly flown at a Canadian base in Afghanistan.

For the whole story visit:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=e068hvt5CKE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e068hvt5CKE)

OR SCAN HERE TO WATCH THE VIDEO



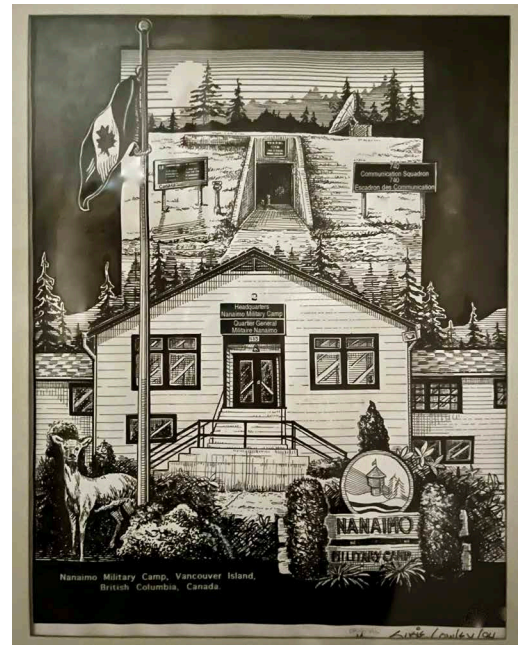
## NEW ARTIFACTS ON DISPLAY



A trench club used by Canadian troops in the First World War.



An escape map and phrase book issued in the Second World War to aircrew, in case they were shot down behind enemy lines, or landed in Russian controlled territory.



Nanaimo Military Camp and "The Bunker"

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