



VIMIM Newsletter

Summer 2026

Vancouver Island Military Museum



Our Award Winners



Prestigious Awards for VIMM Volunteers

The extraordinary work of our volunteers has been recognized with four prestigious awards - three national and one municipal. Last year VIMM volunteer Roger Bird was awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medal, and this year four other volunteers were also recognized for their contributions to VIMM and the community at large.

Brian McFadden, VIMM President, was awarded the **City of Nanaimo's Honour in Heritage Award** at a gala ceremony at the Port Theatre. Here is the citation.

Brian McFadden stands as a remarkable champion of Nanaimo's heritage, and his nomination for the 2026 Honour in Heritage Award reflects a lifetime of dedication to preserving the stories that shape this community.

Over nearly three decades, he has become one of the museum's driving forces, researching, designing, and developing many of its exhibits and ensuring that Nanaimo's military contributions and history are honoured with accuracy, compassion, and care.

As a long-time volunteer, director and President, Brian has strengthened the museum's role as a cultural cornerstone through public outreach, guided tours and community relationships. His leadership and tireless service have profoundly enriched Nanaimo's ability to preserve and share its history and heritage, making him an exceptionally deserving recipient of this award.

For further information and a video presentation see: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/awards/honour-in-heritage>

The Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers was awarded to Bruce Davison, Jim Dickinson, and Angus Scully. This prestigious national award is made to a "...living person who is a Canadian citizen and who has made significant, sustained and unpaid contributions to their community in Canada or abroad." See <https://www.gg.ca/en/honours/canadian-honours/sovereigns-medal-volunteers> Here are the official citations.

Bruce Davison, Nanaimo, BC. "Since 2005, Bruce Davison has devoted countless hours to the Vancouver Island Military Museum. His unwavering dedication as a volunteer coordinator and tour guide have helped the museum showcase Canadian military history and the sacrifices of veterans to thousands of visitors annually."

James David Dickinson, Lantzville, BC. "For more than two decades, Jim Dickinson has dedicated his time to the Vancouver Island Military Museum. As a greeter and tour guide, he continues to devote hours to showcasing Canadian military history and the sacrifices of veterans to thousands of visitors annually."

Angus Scully Nanaimo, BC. "Since 2013, Angus Scully has been a dedicated volunteer with the Vancouver Island Military Museum. As a greeter, tour guide and newsletter editor, he has helped the museum showcase Canadian military history and the sacrifices of veterans to thousands of visitors annually. Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary Simon, Governor General of Canada, presented the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers to Angus during a ceremony in the Ballroom at Rideau Hall, Ottawa."

In a ceremony at the museum, Tamara Kronis, Member of Parliament for Nanaimo - Ladysmith, presented Bruce, Jim, and Angus with certificates of appreciation from the Parliament of Canada.



Bravo Zulu Well Done!

The Home Front – Canadian Fashion During WW2

by Heather Neil

Prior to the Second World War mass produced clothes were becoming more available at prices that could be afforded by ordinary working people. The advent of the war temporarily, but drastically, altered the Canadian public's relationship with fashion. Textiles and metals that were typically used in the production of clothing were often redirected from consumer fashion toward the war effort. More functional, practical, and 'patriotic' clothing was culturally encouraged and regulated.

As part of the War Measures Act, the Wartime Prices and Trade Board became responsible for the control of goods and services. Its mandate included supply allocation, manufacturing capacity, labour allotment, product design, product change regulations, distribution of goods and services, and price controls. Originating in Britain, Make Do and Mend became a popular slogan in Canada. It encouraged people to repair and reuse clothing rather than throwing it away.

Despite these restrictions, the perpetuation of fashion nonetheless persisted. Newspapers and magazines continued to publish columns, stories, and features dedicated to opinions and development of new clothing and accessory designs. As women on the home front took up working class roles and jobs traditionally filled by men, the way they dressed reflected it. In the 1941 *Chatelaine* feature titled *How Do We Dress From Here?* Carolyn Damon wrote that we think more seriously, and so we dress more seriously.

As the war progressed, the new simple and stream-lined designs popped up everywhere. Flat or low-heeled 'utility' shoes were made from materials such as rubber and leather. Then there were the wool (or cotton) 'victory' suits – practical, functional and stylish. Skirts went from the calf-length hemlines of the 30's, to knee-length due to fabric shortages and restrictions. Women also had to figure out a new way to cover their legs. As silk and nylon were used by the war effort for parachutes and parachute cord, nylon for stockings was almost impossible for the average home front woman to obtain. Many resorted to colouring their legs with special makeup or used an eyebrow pencil to draw a seam up the backs of their legs.

Uniforms were created for women who joined the military organizations. These uniforms were meant to look smart and were based on men's uniforms. Rather than keeping items in pockets, women were issued a matching purse so their pockets would lie completely flat. Women in factories were also exposed to new garments. On factory floors, they wore smocks, aprons, overalls, and coveralls. Outside of work, some women covered their hair with turbans, snoods, and scarves, as shampoo became harder to come by. Others cut their hair short or tied it up in practical styles such as buns or "victory" rolls.

Women and fashion never faltered on the home front; rather they both persisted through difficult times. But with sacrifice came change. World War Two dramatically altered the way that women dressed, especially working women. So, in fact, wartime scarcities and societal changes created new dynamics in women's fashion. It led to the growth of the Canadian fashion industry, as designers were forced to create new styles and adapt to the changing needs of consumers.

Today, Canadian fashion designers continue to be influenced by wartime fashion, and the legacy of those Home Front women lives on.



Well dressed in a time of shortage.



Chatelaine Magazine Fashion

Nanaimo Crowds Greet Ray Collishaw – August 1917

by Angus Scully

In Nanaimo, it is unlikely that any star of sports, entertainment, or politics was ever greeted as Ray Collishaw was in August 1917. The great flying ace had been granted leave after months of dangerous aerial combat in Europe. From October 1916 to May 1917, Collishaw had shot down eight German aircraft. Then in June, flying a Sopwith Triplane with Naval 10 Squadron of the Royal Naval Air Service, he had shot down 15, including four on June 10 and three on June 11. Then, 14 more in July. His exploits were reported in newspapers across Canada, and indeed around the British Empire. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for conspicuous bravery and skill in leading attacks against enemy aircraft.

His leave began on August 8, 1917. Once in Canada he travelled across the country visiting the families of pilots he had known that had been killed. Collishaw spoke to Men's Canadian Clubs in major cities on the route. All were reported in the press and the Globe and Mail of Toronto said Collishaw had "...a record rivalling that of Major Bishop." In New Westminster BC, he met Neita Trapp, his future wife. She was the sister of George Trapp of Naval 10. Three of Neita's brothers were

killed in the war – all flyers. Collishaw then took the ferry to Nanaimo for a month at home. The whole city awaited his arrival.

On August 28, 1917, seemingly all of Nanaimo turned out. The approaches to the ferry wharf were crowded. The mayor, city council, a brass band, the Daughters of the Empire, the Returned Soldiers Association, and the Red Cross were among the official groups that were present. One newspaper said that there were also a large number of young ladies eager to see the hero. The dignitaries went on board the ferry to greet the hero and the city alderman



Collishaw in RNAS uniform

then carried him shoulder high behind the marching band, with a storm of cheering from the crowd. A local car dealer supplied a car to take the hero to his family home.

Collishaw was left alone, as far as we can tell from newspapers. The only coverage in the press, and it was nation-wide, was when he attended the wedding of his sister Cicely Gertrude Collishaw, shortly before returning to the war. Ray Collishaw survived the war and was one of the great aces, having shot down 60 enemy aircraft. In Nanaimo, the airport terminal, a street, and the local RCAF Air Cadet squadron are named after him. The Vancouver Island Military Museum has two displays about him and is a centre for Collishaw studies.

COMMANDER COLLISHAW CARRIED SHOULDER HIGH

Distinguished Fighting Son of
Nanaimo is Warmly
Welcomed.

NANAIMO, Aug. 29.—Flight-Commander Ray Collishaw wearing upon his breast the ribbon of the orders with which he has been decorated by the British and French governments for distinguished service with the air squadrons around Verdun and on the western front (included amongst which are the Distinguished Service Order and the Croix de la Guerre), received a hearty welcome home for furlough from Nanaimo citizens last night. The approaches to the C. P. R. wharf were crowded and the appearance of Commander Collishaw who was carried shoulder high by city aldermen, preceded by a band, was the signal for enthusiastic cheering. Mayor McKenzie welcomed the young hero in a few words, promising all Nanaimo would endeavor to make his month of rest a pleasant one, and hoped that it would be profitable and helpful for the duties which awaited him on his return to fight for all of us.

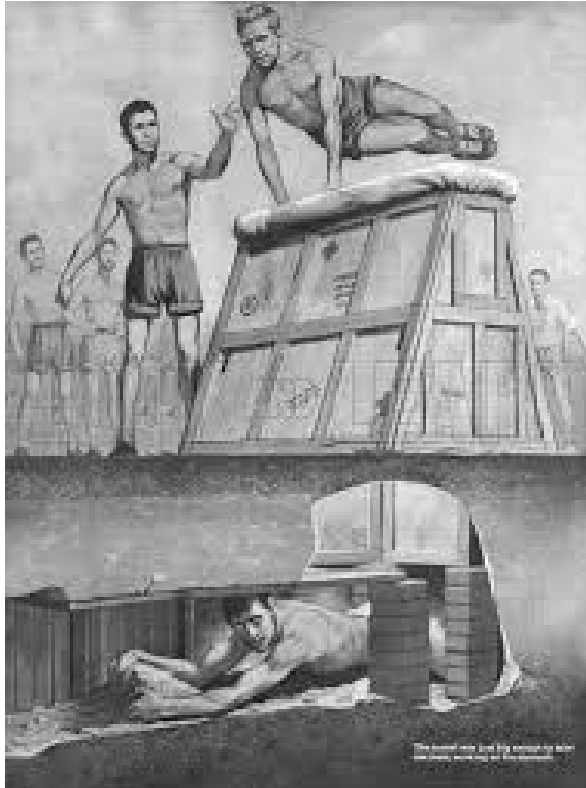
The conquering hero welcomed home to Nanaimo.



The young hero

Oliver Lawrence Philpot and The Wooden Horse Escape

by Greg Devenish



Volunteers were used as vaulters while the escapees dug the tunnel. Vaulting created enough vibration that the tunnelling noise could not be picked up by German microphones.

barbed wire surrounding the camp. After a few days of legitimate vaulting, Williams and Codner started to dig a tunnel in the exact spot every day. One man was carried out inside the horse and started digging a shaft. After each vaulting session, care was taken to secure the top of the shaft and to cover the surface sand on top. The digger and the dirt excavated were carried back, inside the vaulting horse. It took 114 days to dig the tunnel. The three escapees were provided with forged documents, rations, some German money, and civilian clothes. Once outside the camp, Philpot travelled by train to Frankfurt, Germany, and then on to the port of Danzig. There, he smuggled himself aboard a Swedish merchant ship, *Aralizz*. In neutral Sweden, he was turned over to the British legation. It had taken him just five days to escape. A week later Williams and Codner reached Sweden and met up with Philpot who returned to England and served out the war working in the Air Ministry. Philpot was awarded the Military Cross in May 1944. Another great escape.

The three prisoners of war inside the tunnel worked feverishly to finish the final few feet of the tunnel. The cramped working space and lack of air made tunnelling almost impossible. Michael, at the face, used a trowel and pushed the sand back to Eric, who in turn pushed back to Oliver, who banked it as a solid wall behind the escapees. If the tunnel collapsed, they would be trapped. When they estimated they had gone far enough, all three broke up to the surface. They found themselves outside the POW camp and crossed a road into the forest. At the same time, a loud diversion was arranged in one of the POW huts inside the camp to cover their escape. These three men were involved in one of the most audacious escapes in WWII. One of them, Oliver Lawrence Philpot, was a Canadian from Vancouver.

Oliver Philpot was born in Vancouver on March 6, 1913. At the age of 12 he attended a private school in England, and then Oxford University. His first job was working for the British company Unilever, in Germany. He learned to speak German fluently which came in handy after the escape. In 1939, he joined the RAF and was posted as a pilot to 42 Squadron in Coastal Command. Philpot flew Beaufort bombers during the Norwegian campaign. He was awarded the DFC and promoted to Flying Officer. In December 1941 he was shot down over Norway, captured, and sent to the German prisoner of war camp, Stalag Luft III.

In June of 1943, two RAF officers, Lt. Eric Williams and Lt. Michael Codner approached Philpot about an escape scheme involving a gymnastics vaulting horse constructed from plywood, with escapees hidden inside.

Every day, the POWs carried the vaulting horse to a spot near the



A scene from the film about the escape – *The Wooden Horse*, 1950.



Introduction – Caitlin Wareing-Oksanen

by Caitlin Wareing-Oksanen



I am delighted to introduce myself as the new Education and Public Programs Coordinator at the museum. I'm originally from the Island (born and raised in Comox, BC), and for as long as I can remember, I've been passionate about history. I followed that passion to UVic, where I completed a BA in Art History and Visual Studies, and then to Scotland, where I did my master's in History of Art, Heritage and Curation, focusing on the decorative arts and material culture of the eighteenth century.

Over the past six years, I have worked at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Parks Canada, Comox Lake Park Society, the Royal Scottish Academy, and most recently, with the Royal Air Force Museum in England. Growing up in Comox, I was attuned to the importance of our armed forces, but it was at the RAF Museum that my appreciation for military history really blossomed. As a curator, I had the opportunity to work with countless historic objects, ranging from tankards to uniforms to aircraft, and collaborate with many fantastic people to make the collections and their stories accessible to the public.

At the Vancouver Island Military Museum, I am committed to sharing our incredible local history, amplifying under told stories, and expanding our educational and programming offerings. It is a privilege to join such a passionate and knowledgeable team, and I look forward to continuing to learn from, and work with, you all.

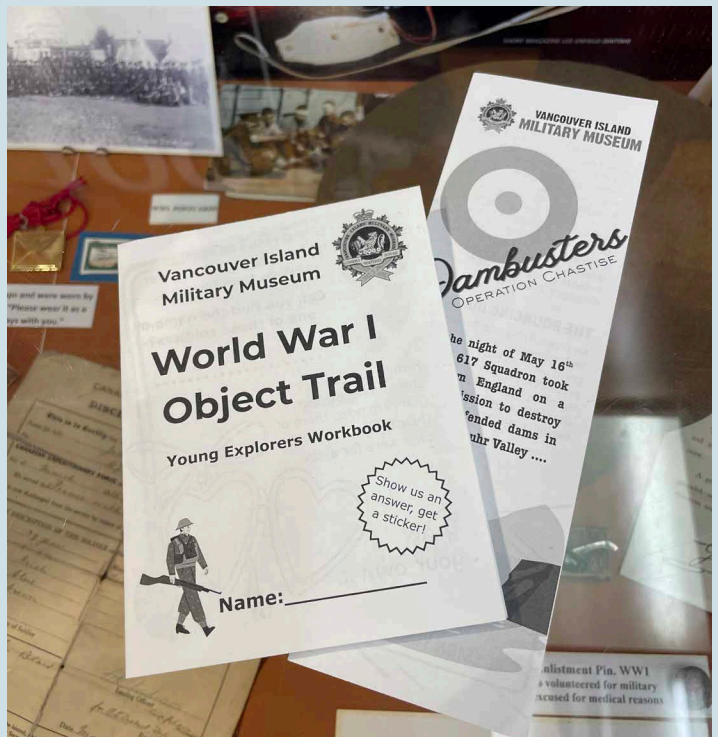
Thank you,
Caitlin

New from Caitlin

Have you seen our object trail?
What about our Dam Busters leaflet?

Every month we will feature new activity sheets and challenges designed to encourage visitors to engage more closely with our exhibits.

Keep an eye out for next month's challenge!



DISPATCHES

from VIMM



Annual BBQ

The date for the Annual Summer BBQ is August 6, starting at 11:30 am at Legion 257.

Thank You!

We thank Gretchen Whetham for her generous donation of a photo scanner. We have lots of work for it, including the recently acquired Joseph Fall collection.

Get Well!

Long time volunteer Robert Muir has been ill, and we wish him well. He is missed at the Thursday morning "world affairs seminar."

Names From the Front Page: Our Award Winners

Brian McFadden, President, Vancouver Island Military Museum	Angus Scully, Her Excellency Mary Simon, Governor General of Canada	Ian Thorpe, Nanaimo City Councillor
Jim Dickinson	Angus Scully	Bruce Davison
Tamara Kronis, MP, Bruce Davison	Medal	Brian McFadden

John Diefenbaker

He was the 13th prime minister of Canada, serving from 1957 to 1963. Keep that thought for our Fall Newsletter, due just before Remembrance Day.

New Aquisitions

The smallest items are among the most interesting. Identity disks and tags can tell us about the wearer and about the place they served. Can you spot the ones issued in Germany to POWs?

Museum Directors and Staff

Brian McFadden	President	
Greg Devenish	Vice President	
Roger Bird	Past President/Secretary Treasurer	
Carina Nilsson	General Manager	
Caitlin Wareing-Oksanen	Education and Public Programs Coordinator	

Bruce Davison
Angus Scully
Jim Dickinson