

# THE / LE BULLETIN



## Message from the President

By Stuart Beaton, President OMMC

I hope you all survived the past WINTER, and it was a dandy, and are looking forward to our Annual Conference and Course being held in Kingston in mid-June. We have arranged for some really interesting and informative sessions to help us in our museums. We will also be visiting two very well done large museums as well as the historical collection at RMC. Our meet and greet as well as our formal dinner, is being held in the beautiful Senior Staff Officers Mess on the water at RMC.

Looking forward to seeing many of you there,  
Stuart Beaton

## The Amazing Spitfire

By Pat Murphy, Vancouver Island Military Museum

For those fortunate enough to have seen a Spitfire in flight, chances are they would never forget the experience; the sight of this majestic fighter in the air is only surpassed by the sound of the Rolls Royce Merlin engine that powers it.



A shot of the display "Spitfire: As Flown by the Canadians"

Most Second World War RCAF veterans that had boyhood dream to fly had visions of themselves at the controls of a Spitfire. Although thousands realized their dreams, most did not, but those that did had the experience of a lifetime. Some veterans will tear up at the sight of this exceptional aircraft, others will develop goose bumps when a Spitfire does a low high-speed pass. The Vancouver Island Military Museum has the largest model Spitfire display in Canada and honours the service of the many Canadians that flew them.

Each scale model depicts a Spitfire flown by a Canadian in one of the 14 RCAF Squadrons that operated Spitfires during the War or with one of the over 100 RAF Squadrons. Sixty percent of Canadians that received their Wings with the RCAF flew in an Royal Air Force Squadron; some Canadians did their entire wartime service with a RAF Squadron. The Spitfire display features a picture of each pilot, an information card that details the Mk of the Spitfire, serial number, Squadron he served with and the pilot's home town.

Several of the former Spitfire pilots that are featured in the display have been into the museum to see the final product; one pilot celebrated his 90th birthday along with 60 members of his family in the museum. Jim O'Toole flew with 443 Squadron under the command of Squadron Leader Art Sager. A model of Art's Spitfire and O'Toole's are also part of the display. Former Wing Commander James "Stocky" Edwards also attended the birthday event and was reunited with O'Toole. The display features two model Spitfires identical to the originals once flown by Stocky Edwards. Edwards is the highest scoring living ace in the Commonwealth and has provided the inspiration to develop the Spitfire display.



Jim O'Toole (left) and James "Stocky" Edwards

At present the museum boasts 40 models of Spitfires flown by Canadians along with a wartime uniform, flying helmet and flying boots worn by F/O George Aitken of 403 Squadron during his wartime service. A model of Aitken's Spitfire is also part of the display.

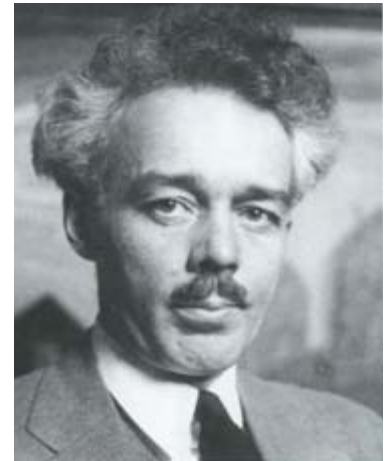


A portion of the display during Jim O'Toole's birthday with Vice president Brian McFadden welcoming the O'Toole family

## Two Brothers, Two Fates: Remarkable Alumni Stories from the Soldiers' Tower War Memorial, University of Toronto

By Kathy Parks, Alumni Relations

Lawren Harris was born in Brantford, Ontario, in 1885 into a wealthy family – the Harrises of the Massey-Harris industrialists. He attended Central Technical School and the private school St. Andrew's College, both in Toronto. Lawren registered at University of Toronto in the 1903-04 session, but only lasted as a student for half a year. His artistic talent was recognized and he went to Europe for training in fine art. After beginning as a private in the Canadian Officers Training Corps in 1916, Lawren soon received his Infantry Certificate and was recommended for appointment as a Lieutenant in the Tenth Royal Grenadiers Regiment. He was taken on as a supernumerary officer, meaning that he would not be sent overseas. While serving as a gunnery instructor in Toronto, one of his assignments was to design targets resembling landscape and buildings. In 1918, Lawren had what is colloquially referred to as a nervous breakdown and was discharged from the military. Lawren would go on to become a world-famous painter in the Group of Seven, producing works which have sold for record-breaking prices.



Lawren Harris. Credit: Lawren Harris. *An Introduction to His Life and Art*, Joan Murray, Firefly Books, 2003.

Mural of a Belgian Village at Hart House, University of Toronto, designed by Lawren Harris and used by the School of Musketry for target practice, 1915. Credit: U of T Archives.



CAPT. H. K. HARRIS  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

H. K. Harris. Credit: Varsity Magazine Supplement, Students' Administrative Council, 1918.

Lawren's brother, Howard Kilbourne Harris was born in 1887, also attending St. Andrew's College in Toronto. A high achiever, he attended University College at U of T and was a member of Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity. After receiving his B.A. in 1909, he entered law school, and was called to the bar in 1912. He began a promising career in the Bankers Bond Company and served as a Lieutenant with the 48th Highlanders of Canada. After the outbreak of war, Howard traveled to England and obtained his commission in the 11th Essex Regiment. In France he served on the Somme and Ypres-Passchendaele fronts, was promoted Captain and awarded the Military Cross for successfully directing with great coolness and skill an attack on the enemy's trench near Albert. Like so many of the best and brightest, in a war which claimed the lives of so many junior officers, Howard was killed in action in February 1918 while making a reconnaissance on an advanced German post near Bapaume. Carillon bell number IV at the Soldiers' Tower is dedicated in the memory of Captain Howard Kilbourne Harris. The inscription reads: In memory of Capt. Howard Kilbourne Harris, MC, Essex Regiment, killed in action between Mouchies and Peronne, February 22, 1918.

## French Army Roots in Manitoba

By Bruce Tascona, Manitoba World War One Museum

Recently the Manitoba World War One Museum acquired a French Army “Bleu Horizon Tunic and Coat” of the First World War. The tunic was found at a flea market type of shop east of Portage la Prairie. Where and how did these two artefacts find their way to this side of the ocean?

What I discovered was that there were significant numbers of volunteers of French origin who left their homesteads in Manitoba to join the French Army. In fact whole communities were settled in the 1890's who arrived directly from France. Not Quebec as one would presume. Like the British immigrants who arrived prior to the First War these French immigrants were regarded as Reservists of the French Army.



In our research we discovered that there are two significant war memorials located in Manitoba dedicated to the Poilus of Manitoba who went back to rejoin their Units. In St. Boniface on the grounds of the Basilica is a monument of the Poilus—the bronze tablets indicate over 500 volunteers from Manitoba that went back to France of which many did not return. In the St.



Boniface Cemetery are some Veterans Affairs Canada headstones with names of some of those who survived the Great War that add further proof of the legacy of these French Army veterans.

The St. Claude War Memorial has a centre piece of Marshall Foch as well as a Canadian Statue and a Poilus. The originals who went over in 1914 and 1915 rejoined their Regiments. The younger villagers born in Canada after 1896 appear to have joined units of the CEF. There is no distinction on these monument's bronze tablets indicate whether the fallen were CEF or French Army. They reflect the somber memory of their fallen.



The mystery of acquiring a French Army Uniform can now be explained with enough provenance to justify having this type of uniform on exhibit in the Manitoba World War One Museum. They are part of the Manitoban experience in the Great War, 1914-19.

## Skinner Family to get WWI Death Penny Returned by Total Stranger

By Amanda Lefley, The Selkirk Journal/Sun Media



David Wawryk holding the death penny.

A family heirloom a Selkirk family didn't even know was missing will soon be returned to them. David Wawryk, originally from the Netley area, had three uncles who fought in the Second World War. That is where his interest in war history stems from. Currently, he is an archivist for The Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum, as well as a collector and researcher. His passion brings him to garage sales, pawn shops and flea markets seeking memorabilia from both the World Wars. His basement, at his home in Winnipeg, is like a museum. It is filled with artifacts from the First and Second World Wars. However, one of his more recent flea market finds won't be added to his collection.

Wawryk came across a death penny, also known as a memorial plaque, from the First World War at a flea market and purchased it. The penny reads the name of the soldier, Morden Earl Skinner. "This was the acknowledgement that the soldier died. What a lot of people did is, they would either frame it and put it in a glass or they would stick it right on the grave," Wawryk explained of the death penny. Wawryk explained when he finds an artifact he immediately researches it because there is always a story behind it. He discovered, in a University of Manitoba Roll of Honour, that Skinner was a philosophy student in Winnipeg. He also found that Skinner hailed from the Selkirk area and was very athletic, as his picture is hanging in the Selkirk arena from playing hockey. He also knows Skinner was a sergeant in the war at one point, and was possibly demoted to a rifleman.

At the age of 23 Skinner enlisted into the Canadian Army. He was a part of the 108th Overseas Infantry Battalion, and then transferred to the 43rd Infantry Battalion Cameron Highlanders. He was one of the tens of thousands of soldiers who fought in the Battle of Passchendaele in Belgium, where he died on his 26 birthday on Oct. 26, 1917. The battle itself started at 12:15 a.m., and had around 20,000 Canadian soldiers battle in the rain and the mud. Wawryk noted, in a two-week span the Canadians were able to take the high ground from the Germans; the battle was so loud it could be heard in London; there were nine Victoria Crosses handed out from this particular battle; and the location has one million shell holes within one square mile.

Through his research, Wawryk has contacted family members of Skinner. From the family historian, Karen Skinner in which Skinner is her grandfather's brother, he learned the death penny in his possession was stolen off the soldier's tombstone from a St. Clements cemetery. "Somebody obviously stole it years ago, and apparently there are a number of headstones there with them missing," said Wawryk, adding Skinner's father was a lawyer in East Selkirk. "They (the family) were totally surprised, and the circumstances under which I got it as well, buying it at an antique shop and everything."

Wawryk intends to return the death penny to the family, as well as construct a look-a-like to place on the empty slot on Skinner's headstone. He said returning the plaque is a way to honour the soldier and his sacrifice. And, with this year being the 100th anniversary of the First World War, Wawryk says the situation in an emotional one for him. "It's the right thing to do, to put a piece of history back in its place," said Wawryk. Although Wawryk is returning the death penny, he still intends to continue to research Skinner. He asks that anyone with information, especially pictures of Skinner in uniform, contact him by emailing [jdawryk@shaw.ca](mailto:jdawryk@shaw.ca).

## Book Review: Lettres des Tranchées

Submitted by Bruce Tascona

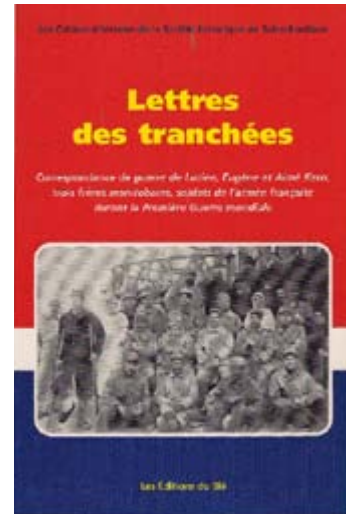
Lettres des Tranchées: correspondance de guerre de Lucien, Eugène et Aimé Kern, trois frères manitobains, soldats de l'armée française durant la Première Guerre mondiale

ISBN # 9782921347563

Les Editions du ble

Published 2007

<http://ble.recf.ca>



An account of three brothers who left St. Leon, Manitoba, in August 1914 to join the French Army—over three hundred letters were sent home to their mother and sisters—as well as some very descriptive letters that were published in the local provincial French Newspaper “La Liberte”. What struck the reviewer about this book was that little or no censorship was practiced by the French Army—unlike what is found in many letters in the Canadian Army. The Kern Brothers (Alsatian origin) were very motivated with revenge after the defeat 1870.

The original letters are found in the archives of St. Boniface Historical Society. The descriptions of trench warfare are almost poetic. The prime letter writer had a sense of history and wrote to ensure his life experiences were known to his friends and family. One brother was presumed missing and declared dead, the prime writer was wounded twice and was sent home to St. Leon, Manitoba, while the third brother never returned to Canada. The prime letter writer Lucien Kern is buried in St. Leon—he died in 1920 of the Spanish Flu.

Today he rests in the cemetery of St. Leon—two ceramic plaques were added after this work was published in 2007.



## Recent Evaluations on Museum Acquisitions

By Dick Malott

Recently I was requested to evaluate four very important military collections for OMMC Inc. military museum members. If anyone requires the evaluation of any military items for income tax purposes I would be pleased to assist you.

Claude Chamberland, Co-ordinator/Curator of the Air Defence Museum at 3 Wing Bagotville, Québec, received a donation of eleven Avro Arrow and Orenda Iroquois Engine items from a dedicated collector and researcher on the aircraft and engine system. Included in the collection were the control stick for the RL-205, a tail light, a wing tip light, an Orenda Iroquois Engine blade and a helmet and oxygen mask of the renowned test pilot "Spud Potocki". The scarcity of these items is the result of the decision of the Diefenbaker Government to totally destroy six completed Avro Arrow aircraft along with spare parts and documentation. The decision to cancel the Avro Arrow project has been a highly debated subject ever since that "Black Friday", 20 February 1959. The Air Defence Museum is preparing a new exhibit on the Avro Arrow and the Orenda Iroquois Engine.

The next two evaluations were for two toy soldier collections donated to the Stewart Museum on St. Hélène's Island, Montreal. Working with Bruce Bolton, Director of the Museum and The Lake St. Louis Historical Society, one large collection of French Napoleonic mounted figures was examined - the figures marching bandsmen in vivid hand painted colours based upon historical research. The other collection was located in a toy soldier study in Outremont. The collection of remolded Britain's metal figures, mounted and marching figures were again hand painted with no deteriorating metal. Included were several dozen groups of Canadian regiments and cavalry units. These two collections were a sight to see. Supporting the colour schemes of all the soldiers was an extensive library with personal research done in Paris, France, by the donor. The other collection, already located at the museum, was of recently issued military figures, aircraft and artillery units. The most imposing items were a set of 21 ten-inch figures of various British regiments, from 1670 to 1902. Special exhibits depicting most military events can be presented using toy soldier figures and equipment when actual artifacts are not available and where space is a problem. Britains are producing an interesting array of figures for the 100th Anniversary of World War I.

The fourth evaluation was done for Debbie Towell, Director of the Naval and Military Museum of Esquimalt, Victoria, British Columbia. The donation of the Vice Admiral Nigel D. Brodeur, CMM, CD, RCN Fonds caused an unparalleled excitement among the naval historians at the Naval Section of the Directorate of History and Heritage at DND. Dr. Michael Whitby, Senior Naval Historian at DHH stated that the Brodeur Fonds on RCN history are the best recorded in 25 years. The current history of the RCN is being prepared now and the Brodeur Fonds contain detailed information on his extensive career in the RCN, training details for weapons, electrical systems, submarine warfare, unification problems, policy formation and many other RCN subjects. The Fonds were formulated into excellent reference condition by a professional archivist hired by VAdm Brodeur and then sent to DHH for study in relationship to the current writing of the RCN history. The Library and Archives Canada are unfortunately in an accessions moratorium, which is why Debbie obtained the donation from VAdm Brodeur who resides in Victoria, BC. If there are interesting military figures in your area why not investigate obtaining Fonds as Debbie did to enhance the importance of your military museum.



## May is Museum Month!

International Museum Day is May 18th

Is your museum doing anything for these events?  
Special exhibits, open houses or historical  
lectures?

Be sure to send in your photos of special events to  
'The Bulletin' for publication in the next issue.

## The Organization of Military Museums of Canada

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