

THE / LE BULLETIN



President's Comments

By Léon Chamois, President OMMC

I thought our last issue was the last issue before our annual course so I hadn't planned on keeping back any pearls of wisdom for this issue. Thank God I am ably assisted by people like Bethany who manage to keep me on track.

Anyhow, here goes.

I am really looking forward to a week spent discussing large metal exhibits. As a former infantry anti-tank gunner I have always had a love/hate relationship with tanks but I must admit I find them fascinating. They are fascinating both historically and from a museum point of view. And really, who doesn't enjoy riding around in them, with dust in our nostrils and bugs in our teeth? I look forward to learning how to better care for our own exhibit vehicles.

It's been years since I've had the chance to visit the big city of Toronto and all its wonderful museums.

Last issue I mentioned that in these times of financial restraint we should try to help out our fellow museums as much as possible. I know that some of us already do but it would be nice if more of us did. I will have a list of artefacts that I am prepared to pass on to other museums, either by trade or transfer. Maybe we could all show up with a list of 2 or 3 items that we are willing to part with?

See you in Oshawa.

Commentaires du président

Par Léon Chamois, président de l'OMMC

Je pensais que notre dernière édition était la dernière édition avant notre cours annuel, de sorte que je n'avais pas prévu de garder des perles de sagesse pour cette édition. Dieu merci, je suis bien aidé par des gens comme Bethany qui réussissent à me garder sur la bonne voie.

De toute façon, voilà.

J'ai vraiment hâte de passer une semaine à discuter les grands artefacts métalliques. En tant qu'ancien canonier antichars d'infanterie, j'ai toujours eu une relation amour / haine avec les chars, mais je dois admettre que je les trouve fascinants. Ils sont fascinants à la fois historique et du point de vue de musée. Et vraiment, qui n'aime pas à voyager sur eux, avec de la poussière dans nos narines et des bibittes dans nos dents? J'ai aussi hâte d'apprendre à mieux prendre soin de nos propres véhicules d'exposition.

Visiter la grande ville de Toronto et ses beaux musées est quelque chose qu'il y a des années que j'ai eu la chance.

Le dernier numéro, j'ai mentionné que dans ces moments de contrainte financière, nous devrions essayer d'aider nos collègues de musées autant que possible. Je sais que certains d'entre nous le font déjà, mais ce serait bien si plus d'entre nous l'ont fait. A Oshawa j'aurai une liste d'artefacts que je suis prêt à passer à d'autres musées, soit par échange ou par transfert. Peut-être que nous pourrions tous arriver avec une liste de 2 ou 3 items avec lesquels nous sommes prêts à nous séparer?

On se voit à Oshawa.

Camp Borden and the RCAF

By Norm Marion, Coldwater Legion Historian

There is no shortage of military heritage in the County of Simcoe. Most people in villages and rural communities – including here in Coldwater, Ontario - have heard stories about local soldiers joining the army to go fight for King and Country in faraway lands. But how many are aware of the leading role played by the county in the birth and development of Canada's national air force?

Indeed, Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) personnel at CFB Borden are celebrating this month the 100th anniversary of military flying in Canada, something in which their base stood at centre stage a century ago. Military aviation at Camp Borden (today CFB Borden) goes back to early 1917 when a series of aircraft hangars and aviation facilities were built to support the training of aviators for the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). Canada did not have its own air force at the time, so the organisation known as RFC Canada was in fact a British organisation operating in Canada for the purpose of recruiting and training Canadian aviators for service in the RFC overseas. There were other RFC Canada airfields operating in south-central Ontario, but Borden was the main one, home of the headquarters, and the first one to officially open on May 2, 1917. By the end of 1918, a total of 1,184 pilots had completed training at Camp Borden.



Cadet Hilliard Bell stands in front of a Curtiss JN-4, the main trainer aircraft for the 1917-18 RFC Canada training program (DND archives RE-19006-6)

After the Great War, Camp Borden became the central point around which military aviation would develop in Canada. In 1919, an Imperial Gift of over one hundred war surplus aircraft found its way to Canada, most of the aircraft going to Borden to provide the nucleus of a national air force. Following the creation of the Canadian Air Force in 1920, Camp Borden was once again selected as the main training centre for aviation. During the Twenties, Camp Borden saw the birth of the RCAF and claimed many firsts including the graduation of the first RCAF pilots in 1924. Camp Borden was also home to the first RCAF aerobatic team, the Siskins, in the early Thirties.

Camp Borden continued to lead during the Second World War, opening the first Service Flying Training School (No 1 SFTS) as part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. Thousands of pilots from Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New-Zealand, and other Allied countries were trained at Camp Borden.



One of the 15 original RFC Canada hangars in Borden (DND archives RE-199722)

After the war, Camp Borden scaled down flying activities and concentrated on the training of aircraft technicians and other RCAF trades. Today, members of 16 Wing Borden take pride in preserving such a long tradition of excellence in training Canada's air forces. The Wing is responsible for coordinating the activities of six RCAF schools, two of which are co-located in Borden.

A century after their construction, many of the RFC hangars still stand, one of them being home to the Air Force Annex of the Base Borden Military Museum. Collectively, the hangars have been declared a national historic site. They are the only remaining witnesses of so many great moments in the history of the RCAF and its "birthplace", Camp Borden.

Follow in the Footsteps of Vimy at The RCA Museum

To mark the centennial of the Battle of Vimy Ridge that was fought on Easter Monday morning in 1917, the Royal Canadian Artillery Museum will feature a temporary exhibit called “In the Footsteps of Vimy”, from April 7 to Nov. 30.

This is the third exhibit the museum has hosted since the beginning of the centenary of the Great War. The first exhibit, “The Great War: 1914-1915” followed the experience of new recruits from civvie street to the first battles in the Ypres Salient. The second exhibit, “The Somme: Mechanization of War”, focused on the Battle of the Somme as a pivotal moment in human history and warfare, where the machinery of war could crush the effort and ability of men meeting in battle.

In this third exhibit, “In the Footsteps of Vimy”, visitors have an opportunity to interact together or independently in an engaging and informative WWI experience from the perspective of the Canadian soldiers of the 1st Division, one of the four that fought together at this turning point of the war and for Canadian history.



In the winter of 1917, as the home front reeled from the 25,000 casualties at the Battle of the Somme, the Canadian Corps was preparing to meet the challenge given to it by the armies allied against Germany in France. It was now a heavily fortified ridge, held by the German Army since October 1914. Attempts to retake it by the French and the British had ended in failure. It was coldest winter of the war, with morale at its lowest at home and new recruits arriving every day. The four Canadian Divisional Commanders, led by Lieutenant-General Julien Byng, were determined to put to the test those innovations that were beginning to show promise for the Canadians at the end of the Somme. New tactics for the artillery, intense training for every soldier and coordination from the lowest ranks to the highest positions at Headquarters were honed behind the lines and in the forward trenches.

If the war was to finally turn in the favour of France, Britain and her allies, then Arras in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of France needed to be where they at last broke through the German lines. But for the Canadian Corps, just north of Arras, the place was Vimy Ridge, and the time was Z hour at 5:30 am on 9 April 1917.

The successful taking of Vimy by the Canadians is considered Canada’s entry on the world as a mature sovereign nation on the international stage.

This exhibit includes a large interactive aerial view of the ridge provided by Kingston’s Military Communications and Electronics Museum, a mockup of an underground tunnel with chalk carvings and the opportunity to create your own graffiti, animated films of the attack and a role playing experience over a large scale map of the 1st Division’s objectives during the battle which dominates the exhibit space. Artillery guns, WWI weaponry, uniforms and other equipment of both the Canadians and the Germans are also on display as well as artifacts borrowed from other museums and collections. It runs from 1 April to 30 November.

Curious Artifacts in Manitoba

By Bruce Tascona, Manitoba World War One Museum/ Legion House Museum, Military History Society of Manitoba

In the centenary period of the Great War, the idea that battlefield relics may come your way is almost a certainty. Recently this curious object came through our door. Visitors going to the battlefields will no doubt come across relics being sold at flea markets or specialty stores and sooner or later they will appear at your door.

So what was this relic?

It was fairly heavy, and the driving bands near the base proved that it was fired from an artillery piece. The artillery rounds that I am most familiar with are the shrapnel or high explosive ones. However, the spider pattern from its detonation made it unusual compared to typical artillery rounds, so I sent out photos to some of my more knowledgeable acquaintances that exist on social media.



It is a chemical gas shell, made by Peugeot, so this piece is French Army. A photograph from the Suippes Museum in France confirmed that they had an exceptional (and nearly identical) example. This type of shell was designed to split like a banana and the gas would dispersed. All too often both sides used these shell to bombard enemy artillery batteries or rearward positions causing many casualties

We know of chemical gas being discharged by gas tanks and hoses if the wind was right. But as the war went on all sides used artillery to deliver pin point gas attacks. We know of the Liven Projector a giant mortar capable of delivering barrels of smoke, gas or even fire but now we have something to explain gas warfare apart from using a gas mask or a rattle. Overall an excellent artefact to discuss one aspect of a terrible war.



Before leaving on winter holidays I received a phone call on a different matter from a local civic officer in southwest Manitoba. They wanted to part with some archival material to our library.

As usual, some chatting took place and this individual had mentioned they had a flag in their town office, I was not too excited because I thought it was just a pennant. Imagine my surprise when the attachment turned out to be the actual Battalion colour of the 222nd Battalion CEF.

This one is not in "Old Colours Never Die". Apparently, it hung in a church according to tradition to rot away as custom demands. The church was torn down years ago.

But the Colour was recovered and is sitting in their civic office. For now, it will remain anonymous until we can get it conserved properly. I will send periodic updates of this newfound national treasure.

The Vimy Ridge Gun: Restoring a Part of Canada's History

By Jay Strauss, Lincoln and Welland Regiment Foundation

The Vimy Ridge Gun is a captured German howitzer. Volunteers and donors from the Lincoln and Welland Regiment Foundation have worked since 2009 to restore this piece of Canadian history, and it will find a permanent indoor home at the new Niagara Military Heritage Centre in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The gun is a 105-millimetre leFH-16 (Leichter Feld Howitzer, or light field howitzer) produced by Rheinmetall. Introduced in 1916, the 2,447-pound gun could fire 34-pound shells over a distance of roughly 10,000 yards.



On April 9, 1917, the Battle of Vimy Ridge began. During the battle, Canadian forces of the 7th Battalion (1st British Columbia), Canadian Expeditionary Force, captured the gun outside a small farming village called Farbus, a mile south of the village of Vimy. The gun may have been abandoned days earlier, when German gun crews proved unable to move their artillery after their horses were hit by a gas attack. The gun is one of four howitzers and a naval gun captured on April 13. On that day, the Battalion's intelligence officer, Lt. Frederick A. Fraser, reached the rail line east of Farbus and discovered the guns abandoned and in good condition.

By April 14, Canadian troops, unable to move their own artillery forward, had captured several enemy guns and used a number of them to attack the Germans with their own shells. The Vimy Ridge Gun seems to have been one of those guns: Canada's War Trophy records note that the gun was used by the 23rd Howitzer Battery.

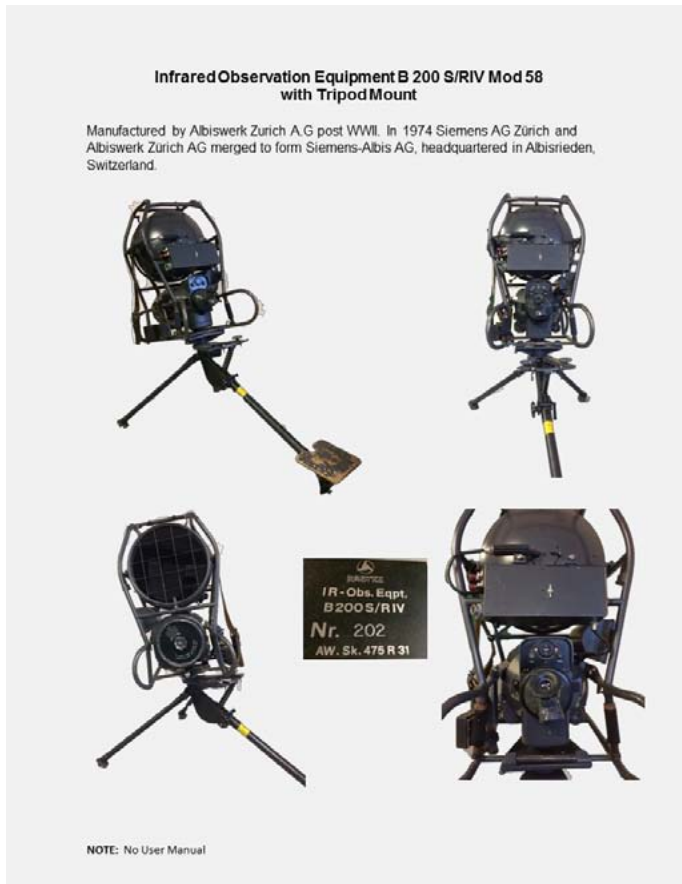
Among these trophies was our Vimy Ridge Gun. It was sent to Niagara, to what was then the Village of Queenston, today part of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. It's unclear when the Vimy Ridge Gun arrived in Niagara, but it's believed to have arrived in 1920 or 1921, being placed in front of the village school in Queenston. In 1926, the village cenotaph was unveiled; the gun was moved there at some point later, where it remained for decades.

Eventually, road improvements near the Cenotaph raised concerns for the gun's safety. In 1992 the gun's custodianship was turned over to what is now the Niagara Artillery Association, which committed to restoring the weapon and finding a new place to display it. However, the Association did not have the resources to do more than sandblast and paint it, and in 1997 the gun was moved to Butler's Barracks in Niagara-on-the-Lake and placed next to the gun shed.

In 2009, volunteers from the Lincoln and Welland Regiment Museum moved the gun indoors. The Foundation, the NAA and Parks Canada agreed that the Foundation would take over custody of the gun and restore it, with the aim of finding an indoor location to display it.

Over the next few years, volunteers from the regimental museum dedicated their time and effort to restoring the Vimy Ridge Gun. Numerous volunteers from the regimental museum helped restore the gun. The Gun's final stop is intended to be the Niagara Military Heritage Centre, planned for the old Rifle Range site on Lakeshore Road in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Artifact Available



The Ashton Armoury Museum is looking for a new home for some Infrared Observation Equipment B 200 S/RIV Mod 58 with Tripod Mount manufactured by Albiswerk Zurich A.G post WWII which is surplus to our requirements. Happy to donate to an OMMC museum, so if you're interested or have any questions please contact Wayne at ashtonarmourymuseum@shaw.ca

Le Ashton Armoury Museum est à la recherche d'une nouvelle maison pour un équipement d'observation infrarouge B 200 S / RIV Mod 58 avec trépied fabriqué par Albiswerk Zurich A.G après la Seconde Guerre mondiale qui est excédentaire à nos besoins. Nous serons heureux de faire un don à un musée de l'OMMC, alors si vous êtes intéressé ou avez des questions, veuillez contacter Wayne à ashtonarmourymuseum@shaw.ca

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