

BARRAGE

The RCA Museum News

THE RCA MUSEUM
CANADA'S NATIONAL ARTILLERY MUSEUM



LE MUSÉE NATIONAL DE L'ARTILLERIE DU CANADA
LE MUSÉE DE L'ARC

January 2019

Conservation From Above

In 2000, one of our 9 pounder smooth bore cannons was in a vehicle accident. The cannon dates from the mid-nineteenth century. Based on staff knowledge, the gun was on a large military truck returning from Edmonton. It had been in a film. On the return trip, the tarpaulin on the vehicle let go and caught the driveshaft. This damaged the transfer case and caused the truck to roll.

Thankfully, the wooden field carriage did not break in half, but there was some damage to the timber below the brass cannon. During the accident the barrel of the gun likely raised and fell at the tip of the wooden trail causing damage to the timber. Note the damage in the photo to the right.



We've had this cannon in storage. Dirt and grass remain on the gun from the accident. In turn, we added wooden wheeled artillery pieces to our Heritage Gallery. We wanted to include the damaged 9 pounder. To do so, the gun required some conservation work.



Note the photo above of Dayna Barscello, Assistant Curator, working above on a vehicle lift. Dayna decided to put the carriage on a hoist with the trail to the ground. She did this to make her job more effective. This way the conservation epoxy soaked deep into the cracks of the wood. This in turn helped consolidate any accident damage. Well done Dayna! We now have five wooden wheeled cannons, including the damaged 9 pounder, in our Heritage Gallery.

Artifact Storage

The RCA Museum opened to the public in a small H-hut back in 1962. At that time, they already had a significant collection of artifacts. Staff at the museum have been accepting donations since the 1950s. Only a small percentage of our artifacts are on display in the museum. With the majority in storage, it has been difficult finding adequate artifact storage. As we get more artifacts, the problem gets more complicated.

In the 1990s, the RCA Museum had very little storage. Curators packed many artifacts in large tri-wall boxes. Staff placed them in storage around the base, including in the Diefenbaker Bunker that is now permanently sealed. Note the picture of the bunker to the right. Some of these large tri-wall boxes are now housed in our main storage facility called M101. This building is pretty large. It's over two hundred feet long with a total square footage of 22,400. Unfortunately, this building is almost completely full of artifacts.



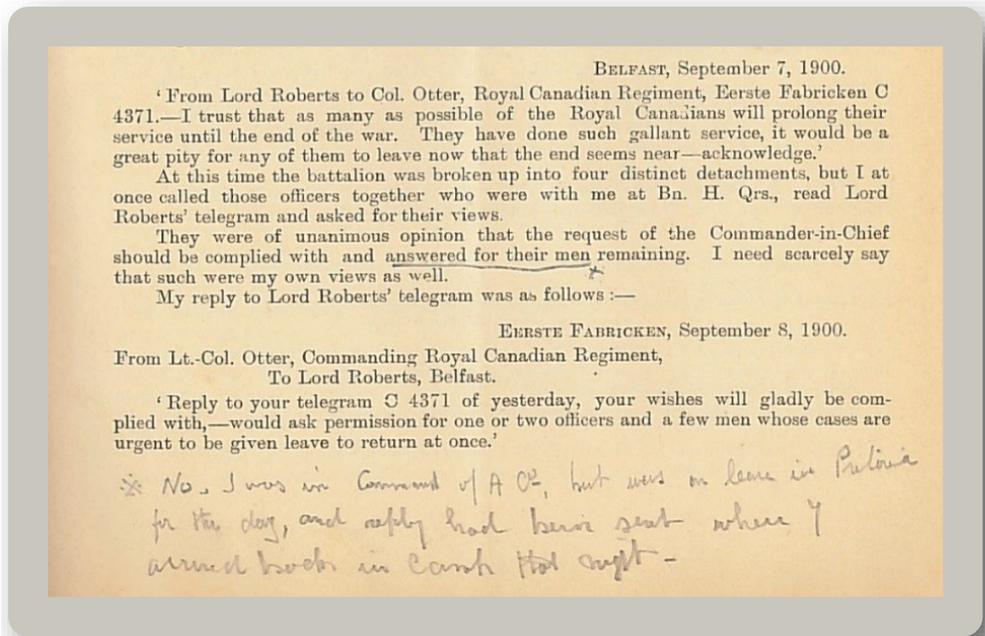
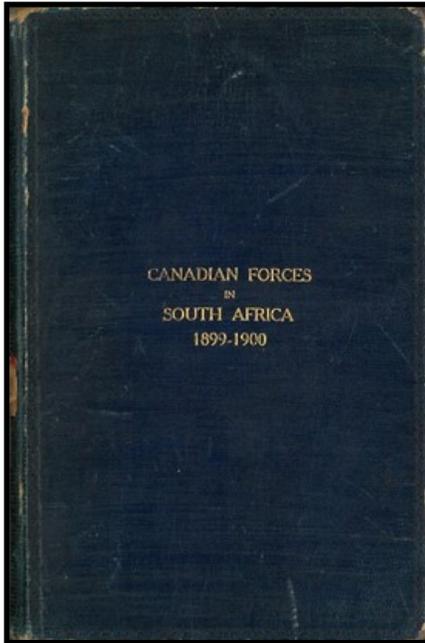
We store the majority of artifacts in boxes. We don't know with 100% certainty what is inside each box. Recently, our Collections Manager, Clive Prothero-Brooks, opened twelve of these large tri-wall boxes. He then transferred them to our moveable storage area. Past curators wrapped artifacts in brown paper as they were placed in storage. Our current curators had the notable task of unwrapping each item. As each item was being unwrapped, there was a sense of excitement similar to opening presents at Christmas time. Sometimes the package would contain something unexpected, and other times, more routine items. Our Collections Manager found or moved hundreds of artifacts. I have added photos of some of the artifacts that came out of the boxes. The first photo on the left shows an assortment of WW1 safety lamps, protractors and signal radio sets. Other artifacts include Morse Code signal sets, headdress tins, and artillery optical sights. The second photo on the right shows officer cocked hat tins, assorted forage caps, RCHA Busby's, and Wolseley artillery helmets. There are also some RCA caps, officer canes and walking out sticks. Clive also found some anniversary SSM Battery wine, an empty military rum bottle, officer mugs, and a presentation model cannon.



These photos represent only a small fraction of the artifacts taken out of the tri-wall boxes this summer. In total, the RCA Museum has about sixty-five thousand artifacts in our storage areas. As director, I'm excited to see which artifacts will make it into our next temporary exhibit.

Mystery Note

In an out-of-the-way folder, I found an old book entitled: *Canadian Forces in South Africa 1899-1900*. On page 27, there is a hand written, unsigned note at the bottom. The mystery writer stated: “No. I was in Command of A Co, but was on leave in Pretoria for the day, and reply had been sent when I arrived back in camp that night.” The writer was responding to the published report. Lt-Col W. D. Otter, the Commanding Officer of the 2nd Special Service Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment, wrote the report. The mystery writer voiced his opinion on the prolongation of service during the Boer War.



On 7 September 1900, Lord Roberts, the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces sent Lt-Col Otter a letter. He stated, in part: “I trust that as many as possible of the Royal Canadians will prolong their service until the end of the war.” Lord Roberts added: “it would be a great pity for any of them to leave now that the end seems near.” In response, Lt-Col Otter: “called those officers together who were with me” at Base Headquarters to discuss the matter. Lt-Col Otter said the officers “were of unanimous opinion” that they should stay in South Africa until the end of the war. Our mystery writer said “No” this was not the case. One officer who commanded A Company, never voiced his opinion on the matter.

The First and Second Canadian Contingents only signed for up to one year of service. The majority of the First and Second Contingents arrived in South Africa from December 1899 to March 1900. The majority left the county by December 1900. Some transferred to the South African Constabulary and continued their service until the end of the war. It’s likely that soldiers of all ranks debated this topic. So this mysterious notation at the bottom of page 27 is notable.

The Commander-in-Chief of the British forces, Lord Roberts, wanted the Canadians to stay. By 9 September 1900, Lord Roberts had written Colonel Otter requesting: “one or two officers and a few men whose cases are urgent to return at once.” Later that same day, the Canadian War Office wired a message to Lt-Col Otter. “All men of Canadian regiment engaged to serve one year’ whose service expires in October, and who do not voluntarily extend their services, are to be sent to Canada as soon as possible.” This decision likely paved the way for the Second Canadian Contingent to come home as well. On 12 December 1900, the majority of the Second Contingent departed South Africa for Canada. This included the Canadian artillery. The Boers surrendered on the 31 May 1902. Canada lost a total of 270 troops during the South African War.

The mystery of the handwritten notation was easy to solve. On page 29, Lt-Col Otter listed the officers that commanded each company, including A Company. One of our Great Gunners commanded A Company: Lt-Gen Sir H. E. Burstall, KCB, KCMG (1870-1945) – shown to the right. On 7 September 1900, Captain Burstall was in the Royal Canadian Regiment in South Africa. Late in 1900, Burstall seconded to the South African Constabulary until the end of the war in 1902. In September 1914, Lt-Col Burstall commanded the artillery of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in WW1. By September 1915, he was a Brig-General commanding the Royal Artillery of the 1st Canadian Corps. In December 1916, the Major General commanded the 2nd Canadian Division. He retired from the army in 1923. We currently display his military medals in our National Artillery Gallery. Burstall donated this book to the Officers' Mess Library in Kingston, Ontario in 1912. How it came into our possession, I do not know.



Santa Claus Parade Entry

On 17 November 2018, the RCA Museum participated in the Santa Claus Parade in Brandon. We have participated for four years in a row. This year our staff converted an aircraft Mule into a float for the Santa Claus Parade. For the second time in four years, we received the “Best Decorated Vehicle Award”. Note our entry pictured below.



Our staff enjoy decorating vehicles for the parade. They covered the vehicle in colorful lights. After the parade, we left the float outside our M101 storage facility for the holiday season. At night it's a festive display. We participated in the parade to generate interest in our military museum. It's free and effective advertising for us. Thanks to the RCA Museum team for putting this together.

LCol Norman Bruce (Ike) Buchanan, MC with 2 Bars, ED

On 15 September 2018, dozens of Gunners and other guests attended an induction ceremony at the Royal Military College Wall of Honour. They came to recognize the military career of LCol Norman Bruce (Ike) Buchanan, MC with 2 Bars, ED. As well as a permanent brass plaque, they had on hand a shadowbox containing three replica Military Crosses. After the event, Brig-General (retired) Ernest Beno shipped it to the RCA Museum. The memorabilia is currently in my office. We plan to display it in our Juno Beach temporary exhibit scheduled to open in June 2019.

Born in St. Stephen, NB in 1915, Ike attended the Royal Military College and graduated in 1939. Ike served in World War II from 1940 to 1945. In 1940, Ike traveled to Great Britain and then seconded to the British 1st Army. In 1942 and 1943, Ike served in North Africa with the British Army as a Forward Observation Officer (FOO). In 1943, Ike served with 1st Field Regiment, RCHA, 1st Canadian Division in Sicily and Italy. He then moved to the 14th Field Regiment, RCA, 3rd Canadian Division. He landed on Normandy and remained in action until the liberation of Europe.

Ike displayed exceptional heroism during WW2 and received the medals to prove it. Ike received his first Military Cross for gallantry during the North African Campaign on 22 February 1943. He received the first bar for action during the Italian Campaign on 17 October 1943. He received the second bar for action during the Normandy Campaign on 7 June 1944.

Ike's WW2 accomplishments are significant. Only 23 Commonwealth soldiers have received the MC with two bars. He is the only graduate of the RMC and the only Canadian Gunner to hold this honorable distinction. King George VI presented Ike with the Military Cross with Two Bars. Note Ike's medal set.



Ike was a family man that married Janetta (Netta) C. (Wilson) in 1944. After returning to Canada, he applied his engineering knowledge to public works projects. In 1952, Ike joined the Legislature of New Brunswick. He served as Minister of Lands and Mines from 1952-60. In 1965, he became the Mayor of St. Stephen and served until 1966. Also in 1965, he formed a business partnership, establishing a sporting goods company called WinWell. He served with the Militia and became the Commanding Officer of the Carleton and York Regiment. He motivated and inspired his troops, and led them during public ceremonies.

Ike excelled in amateur sport. In 1936, Ike was a pitcher on the championship winning St. Stephen – St. Croix team that was later inducted to the New Brunswick Sports Hall of Fame. Of note, Ike pitched against Babe Ruth during an exhibition game in Halifax. After the war, he was on a curling team that won the New Brunswick title, and he curled in the Brier. Ike and his business partner, Norm MacLeod, invented the fiberglass hockey stick used worldwide.

LCol Norman Bruce (Ike) Buchanan, MC (2 Bars), ED was an exemplary soldier and role model. Ike lived well and passed away in 2008. Ike sought no fame or glory and served Canada with dignity and honour. His life will inspire future generations of RMC graduates and Gunners alike. In January 2019, the Colonel Commandant, Brig-General (retired) Selbie, OMM, CD, plans on nominating Ike to the RCA Senate for Great Gunner status. Then, hopefully, we will have a new Great Gunner to talk about.



Why Gun Shields?

I am asked: “Why are shields on some of the artillery?” Most of the artillery from WW1 onward have shields, but there are no shields on pre-WW1 artillery. There were broad teaching moments during the Boer War for the British Army, and the Canadians. The use of smokeless powder on the battlefield led to changes in military strategy. Before smokeless powder, soldiers could locate enemy fire by spotting the black smoke. With the introduction of smokeless powder, it became much harder to locate the enemy.

The British had not fought an adversary with significant artillery since the Crimean War (1853-1856). The Boer did not engage in a manner expected by the British. The Boer would not duel with the British out in the open at close range. Instead the Boer utilized concealed positions. They acted, in part, as snipers in units composed of two or three guns. The Boer hid their guns. They employed camouflage techniques. They used quick firing field artillery and long range artillery. They put a premium on indirect fire and fought from dug-in trenches. The Boer also used long range magazine fed rifles to great effect. The British were expecting open, over the sights, direct engagements. The Boer did not reciprocate.

During the Boer War, the British used 12 pounders for the horse artillery. They used the 15 pounders for the field artillery. Canadian Gunners deployed the 12 pounder. Both of these guns did not have modern recoil mechanisms. The guns required resetting after each firing which reduced the rate of fire. With modern recoil mechanisms, the guns would no longer need resetting between firing. This improved the rate of fire. The Boer used some modern quick firing guns, such as the Creusot 75mm, a forerunner to the French 75mm.



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(On the left is a 12 pounder and on the right is a 15 pounder from the RCA Museum collection.)

The British and the Canadians prided themselves on their guns. Worse than losing a man, was losing one of their guns. Early in the war the British lost twelve guns, and were only able to recapture two of them. The remaining ten were never recovered. During battles, the Boer would pickoff gunners with long range rifles. At first, even when exposed to small arms fire, gunners were not allowed to kneel while manning the guns. To correct this problem, the British used scouts to ensure that no enemy were within small arms range. Also, officers allowed gunners to kneel while working the guns.

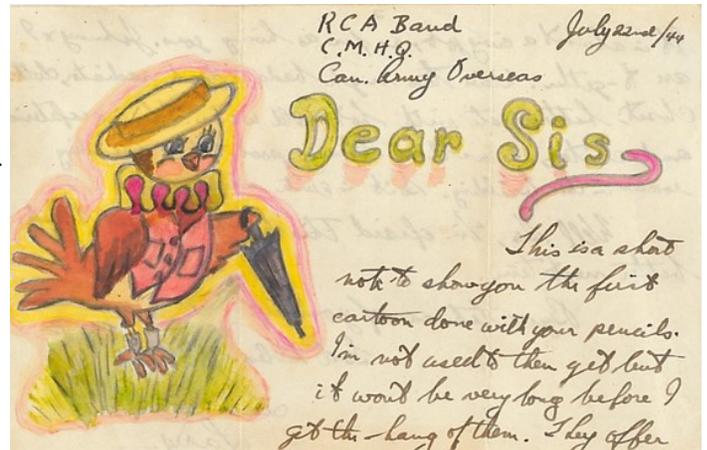
The British, including the Canadians, were expecting the Boer to fight at short ranges, from 1,000 yards and up to 3,000 yards. The British started the conflict with an effective range of 1,800 yards with the 15 pounder. The Boer fired from longer ranges and changed the dynamics of the war. Going into the war, medium distant ranges were from 2,500 to 3,500 yards. By 1902, medium distant ranges were from 4,500 to 6,000 yards. The Boer used the “Long Tom” French made Creusot 155mm which had a range of over 10,000 yards. While they were fortress guns, the Boer managed transport and used them in the field. The Long Tom proved accurate and had a significant moral effect. In response, the British took naval guns from ships and used them as field guns. The British heavy batteries were now using ranges of up to 10,000 yards.

After the Boer War, the British had a Royal Commission to investigate the need for new artillery. The Boer had changed how the British deployed artillery on the battlefield. They no longer expected an adversary to duel under open sights. The Boers used concealment, long range fire and harassing fire to their advantage. The British and the Canadians needed new guns to compete with modern armies. They needed guns with modern recoil mechanisms, indirect sights and gun shields. This led to the acquisition of new artillery. They purchased the 13 pounder for the horse artillery and the 18 pounder for the field artillery. With more artillery to follow. Artillery would become the dominate weapon during WW1.

Dear Sis

We recently received a wonderful donation from Wendy MacDonald located in Cornwall, Ontario. She is donating a collection of WW2 artifacts that belonged to her uncle Lawrence (Larry) Tanner. The collection contains many artifacts, including a thick binder of original letters. The collection contains other artifacts such as drawings, postcards, telegraph copies and handkerchiefs.

During WW2, Larry Tanner was in the RCA Band stationed overseas. He was part of the First Canadian Army which joined the Eighth British Army during the Italian Campaign. Larry wrote the majority of the letters to his younger sister Hilda back in Ottawa, Ontario. Larry wrote his first letter to his sister on ship as he was travelling to England, dated 21 June 1941. For the next four and a half years he wrote his sister. Larry returned to Canada after the war in early 1946. Larry included many hand drawn illustrations to his sister back home. To the right is a colorful drawing by Larry.



Wendy MacDonald used portions of the collection as material for a memoir on Larry. MacDonald included the original draft of the memoir "A Funny Thing Happened at the War." Other items include his beret, wartime photographs, published books and music recordings. Also included are WW2 band member lists.

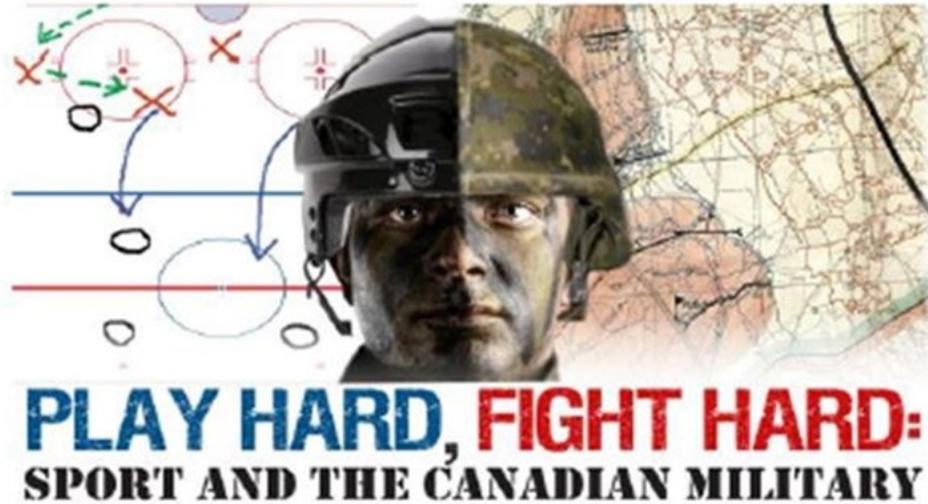
Note the photo of Larry to the left. Soon after arriving in England, he talked about the Blitz and the heroic spirit of the British people. As a drummer in the RCA Band, he mentioned playing all over London. In September 1943, he was in Italy with the Eighth Army. In early 1944, he was back in England. After V-Day he remained in Holland to assist with the reconstruction effort. Larry's letters match up with many important events during WW2.

There is one piece of original Allied propaganda in German. It instructs the enemy to surrender or never see their homeland again. Paraphrased, 1,600,000 enemy soldiers have surrendered. The current situation is hopeless. The pamphlet dates near the end of the war. Note a scan of the pamphlet to the right.

Larry was very creative with a strong sense of humor. He was likely the life of the party wherever he traveled. He was very sociable and wrote about his active social life overseas. Hilda, his sister, loved her brother and always responded to his colorful letters. This collection personalizes and humanizes the experiences of a notable Canadian soldier. We are grateful to Wendy MacDonald and family for donating this wonderful collection.



Coming Attractions: *Play Hard, Fight Hard: Sport and the Canadian Military* (8 Feb to 31 May)



Play Hard, Fight Hard: Sport and the Canadian Military will run at the RCA Museum from 8 February 2019 to 31 May 2019. This is a temporary traveling exhibit produced by the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame in partnership with the Military Museums of Calgary. It contains artifacts and memorabilia that explore the relationship between sport and the military since the 1880's. It showcases the long history between the military and sport. Come and check it out.

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Pour nous joindre