

BARRAGE

The RCA Museum News

THE RCA MUSEUM
CANADA'S NATIONAL ARTILLERY MUSEUM



October 2020

MUSEUM VISITORS DURING A PANDEMIC



Being struck with a worldwide pandemic has decreased the number of visitors coming to the RCA Museum. What should have been the start of a busy summer, ended up being the start of a lock down of Canadian Forces Base Shilo for three months.

On 2 July, new policies came with the reopening of the RCA Museum. All visitors are now required to book an appointment and answer screening questions before entry. Due to COVID-19 protocol, interactive displays are shut down. To provide a safer environment, hand sanitizer is available for anyone entering the museum. Sanitation staff have been working hard cleaning the museum. Group sizes are now limited, and no guided tours are available until further notice. The Gun Park remains accessible for viewing.

Visitor numbers are down, due to the strict travel guidelines and quarantine restrictions. International travelers haven't been visiting and some Canadians travelling from eastern provinces have been turned away for not adhering to the provincial guidelines. There have been visitors from the western provinces with the majority of visits coming from Manitoba. Seeing so many Manitobans support the museum by visiting during these ever-changing times has been encouraging.

It is reassuring that during a pandemic, people will still strive to support their communities. As fall approaches, hopefully Canadians will continue to explore Manitoba and come for a visit. For the most current museum COVID-19 guidelines, please contact the RCA Museum.

By Anita Michelsen

Life in the Trenches

Hundreds of thousands of Canadian troops fought on the Western Front during WW1. The RCA Museum has three displays related to trench warfare. They display a fortified bunker with a QF 18 pounder field gun. The Canadian Artillery sometimes hid their guns from enemy attack. The museum displays a small dugout built in the wall of a trench. Makeshift dugouts were a standard part of trench warfare. Note the photo of the museum dugout display to the right. They also have a WW1 gas mask display. During the war, the artillery on both sides fired gas shells that caused mass casualties.



The trench was the focal point of life at the front for the majority of soldiers. The men lived and died in the trenches. They did their best to make their existence bearable and livable, but that was not an easy task. Over 200,000 died in the trenches during WW1. The terms "go home" or to "go west" meant to die in action. The dead were not always removed from the battlefield. Maggots and flies would cover them, and the smell was dreadful. The longer the bodies stayed in or near the trenches, the greater the problem. This cycle continued throughout the war.

Death attracted vermin, including rats and cockroaches. The rats came for the dead and then stayed in the trenches. The rats overran the trenches looking for their next meal. Also prevalent were the flies and lice. In the summer and winter, the insects would torment the soldiers. The soldiers had infections leading to scabies and rashes. On dry days, the dirt became a problem. Soldiers became coated in dust. Dust would go everywhere. Worse than the dust was the mud. There was endless mud in the trenches. By day soldiers burrowed in the trenches, and by night they walked them. The mud was everywhere - in their clothes, food, and water. The cold weather caused entire sections of trench walls to crumble. Worse than the crumbling was trying to rebuild the trenches with mud in the cold.

The army had difficulty providing rations, called "rats" at the front. The men did not usually receive fresh meat and bread. Instead, they had hardtack, a long-life army ration, such as bully beef (tinned corned beef) and stale biscuits. They suffered from trench mouth caused by poor dental hygiene. After standing in the mud for days, soldiers lost feeling in their feet. After days, their feet would begin to swell and get infected. Their feet would turn red and burn as though on fire, which led to soldiers being unable to walk or fight. Soldiers had to crawl their way to field dressing stations.



Photo of WW1 Canadian soldiers in the trenches.

Artillery fire made the battlefield a wasteland full of craters. Gas attacks caused fear of the unknown and large numbers of casualties. Men would want to flee the trenches to escape the artillery fire and gas attacks, which resulted in machine-gun fire and further losses. Machine Gunners had their sites pointed at enemy front-lines waiting for an opportunity to fire. Tanks also caused chaos at the front. Soldiers called them land creepers, tin cans, and willies. Monsters that approached, advancing through the mud, caused widespread panic and havoc.

The men did their best to get through these hardships. Many things were terrible, including the stench, the mud, the lack of hygiene, the lice and rats, the gas, the artillery, the machine gunfire, and the death. These were the realities of the front-line trenches, and the men did their best to cope. They obeyed orders and, on occasion, went over the top of the trenches to attack the enemy. Under these conditions, they suffered together with shared experiences.

By Andrew Oakden

The Kingston Cup

The RCA Museum has on display an old ice hockey trophy. To this day, the Commanding Officer of 1RCHA presents the cup to the winner of the annual hockey game between A and B Batteries. A businessman in Kingston, Ontario, Wallie Cusick, commissioned the trophy in 1927. The presentation of the Kingston Cup is a Canadian Artillery tradition that originates from the 1930s. They play each year, when not deployed, in honour of St. Barbara, the patron Saint of Gunners.

The game of ice hockey has a long history in the British Army that predates the National Hockey League's founding in 1917 and the Canadian Confederation in 1867. On occasion, British Regulars played an early form of ice hockey in North America since the early 1800s. They learned the game back in England and then brought it with them. In 1843, British soldiers played in Kingston, Ontario, noted by Sir Arthur Freeling, a British Lieutenant stationed in Kingston.

The Canadian Military also has a long tradition of playing hockey. Soldiers have traditionally placed a high value on sport to instill qualities such as leadership, teamwork, and toughness. After the founding of A Battery in 1871, the garrison troops played an early form of the game. After the winter freeze, they played on the icy barrack square and on Lake Ontario. Canadian Gunners were pioneers of hockey in Canada.

While hockey was not a Canadian invention, they did help develop the game to its modern form. The first organized Canadian amateur hockey game occurred in Montreal in 1875, and they likely used rules from the local garrison troops. The first Canadian published rules came in 1877. Canadians modernized the game in the 1880s. For example, they reduced the number of players on each side from nine to six.

In 1886, Canadians formed the Amateur Hockey Association of Canada, which lasted twelve years. In 1893, they started competing for the Stanley Cup. In 1909, they started the National Hockey Association, which later became the National Hockey League in 1917. Without a doubt, the Kingston Cup represents part of this uniquely Canadian story.



Garrison Duty in St Lucia, British West Indies

It was garrison duty with a tropical twist during the First World War. In December 1914, the governor representing the island of St Lucia requested British military help. The British, in turn, asked the Canadian government for assistance. Canada accepted the request in January 1915 and raised Garrison Artillery for service in the Caribbean. Captain A. E. Harris, out of Quebec, commanded the Canadian Gunners' contingent at the La Toc Battery Fort, St Lucia, British West Indies (BWI). Volunteers came from Quebec, Halifax, Saint John, Toronto, and Victoria. The original detachment totalled ten officers and 105 other ranks. By November 1918, the totals were 17 officers and 240 men.

The Canadians arrived in St Lucia on 6 April 1915. The British left the La Toc Battery Fort, near the town of Castries, in 1907. For the last eight years, the fort was vacant. It had no stores and the armament consisted of four large coastal defense guns from the 1880s. These guns were ineffective garrison weapons with a range of 3 km. They also had two British 6-inch BL VII naval guns. These were effective garrison weapons with a range of 13 km.

In May 1915, Major Harris became Officer Commanding Troops, St Lucia. For the next four years, the duration of the mission, Major Harris, had many duties. Canadian Gunners operated the battery at La Toc and prepared the island for a possible insurgent attack. They trained part of the British West Indies Regiment, composed of locals who went to the Western Front (36 men from St Lucia lost their lives in WW1). Canadian Gunners conducted sea patrols to defend the port. They also operated the defence lights and the port signal station. Gunners conducted minesweeping operations in the port area. In March 1918, the governor of another island, St. Johns Antiqua, asked for help to quell a riot. Major Harris responded and sent Gunners. When the Canadians arrived, the rioting ended. The Gunners stayed for a month to maintain law and order.

The British had closed the garrison at St Lucia in 1907 due to an epidemic of yellow fever. For a decade, the forest had reclaimed adjacent land near the fort. The land was almost impenetrable when the Canadians arrived. The Canadians cleared the land and oiled the ponds to kill the insects. Despite these actions, it was not uncommon for 50% of the soldiers to be on sick leave. Sanitation measures were strict, but that did not stop the spread of malaria and yellow fever, leading to widespread health problems. Five Canadian Gunners died while serving at St Lucia. They buried the Canadians on a plot of land purchased from the colonial authorities in Choc Cemetery, St Lucia.

After WW1, the Canadian Military decided to close the garrison at St Lucia. Due to the men's weakened state, they travelled to Canada after the harsh Canadian winter of 1918/19. Colonel Harris arrived on the last ship to Saint John, New Brunswick, on 10 June 1919. Harris led the St Lucia campaign from start to finish - a notable accomplishment during WW1.



Photo of the La Toc Battery with one of the coastal defense guns. Photo Credit to David Stanley ©, 2018.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/davidstanleytravel/46171772944>

By Andrew Oakden

5.5 Inch Howitzer MK III

The RCA Museum has a 5.5 Inch Howitzer MKIII located across from the museum entrance. Our gun includes carriage #863 and barrel #7041, made in 1942. It is an imposing gun with a distinctive set of vertical metal springs below the cradle. The 5.5 Inch Howitzer is commonly absent from the discussion about Canada and the Second World War. In my view, the 5.5 Inch Howitzer, along with the Canadian Medium Regiments, had pivotal roles to play during WW2.



Shown above, the 5.5 Inch Howitzer in front of the RCA Museum.

In 1939, General McNaughton's long-term war plan called for six Medium Regiments of Canadian Artillery. Medium Regiments proved instrumental in bringing dense concentrations of fire on the enemy. The ability to target the enemy with dense artillery fire became a hallmark of the 1st Canadian Army, which started with the formation of the 1st Medium Regiment after the outbreak of the war. The 1st Medium Regiment arrived in England with obsolete 6 Inch Howitzers in December 1939. However, they needed new artillery to be effective in the war effort.

In 1939, Great Britain designed two potential models for the Medium Artillery: the 4.5 Inch Howitzer and 5.5 Inch Howitzer. The 4.5 Inch Howitzer fired a 55-pound projectile 20,500 yards. The 5.5 Inch Howitzer fired a 100-pound shell 16,200 yards. During WW2, the Canadian Medium Regiments used the two guns. General McNaughton explored the possibility of manufacturing the 5.5 Inch Howitzer in Canada. He decided against it due to it being impractical. The Canadian National Railways Munitions Ltd. did produce three hundred 5.5 Inch Howitzer / 4.5 Inch Howitzer carriages. The carriages were interchangeable between the two guns.

By 1943, Canada had six Medium Regiments. General McNaughton equipped the Medium Regiments with the new 4.5 Inch Howitzers and 5.5 Inch Howitzers. The 5.5 Inch gun started to come off the assembly line in the summer of 1941. Canada received its first batch of four trial guns in August 1941. The 5th Medium Regiment conducted the Canadian trials on the 5.5 Inch gun; B troop from the 1st Medium Regiment also participated. By September 1941, the 5th Medium Regiment had received twelve 5.5 Inch Howitzers. The first British units received 5.5 Inch guns in the summer of 1941. British also equipped armies from Australia, France, India, Poland, and South Africa. Each received their guns at various times during the war. The 5.5 Inch Howitzer had only four Marks or versions. They produced three Marks during the war with only minor differences, including welding and riveting.

After initial testing, the design required some changes. The designers called for vertical hydro-pneumatic-cylinders, which were not effective during initial testing. The designers replaced the hydro-pneumatic-cylinders with heavy-duty metal springs. The springs worked, but they were hard to produce. The range of the gun proved ineffective at 16,200 yards with a 100-pound projectile. Designers solved this problem by introducing a lighter projectile. Using an 82-pound shell increased the range to 18,100 yards. While the projectile weighed less, it contained an additional 1.5 pounds of explosives compared to the 100-pound shell. There were several types of shells used during WW2, including smoke, flare, and high explosive.

The Canadian Army formed brigade-sized artillery formations called Army Group Royal Artillery (AGRA). They centralized the medium and heavy artillery to the Corps and Divisional level. They also assigned the Medium Regiments to support smaller functions as needed. The Medium Regiments were at full strength with 16 guns. The six Canadian Medium Regiments served in England, Italy, and Northwest Europe during WW2. The six regiments included the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 7th.



A photo of the 1st Medium Regiment in England dated 1943.

Operation Husky in Sicily started on 10 July 1943. It soon became apparent that the long-range medium guns (4.5 Inch Howitzers and 5.5 Inch Howitzers) could engage distant targets that the 25 Pounders could not reach. The new wartime doctrine stressed the centralization of artillery. In late 1942, General Montgomery ordered the Divisional CRA to have centralized command of all divisional artillery, including the Medium Regiments. Canada created the 1 Canadian AGRA in October 1942, which allowed for the concentration of overwhelming fire on enemy targets.

In the fall of 1943, three Canadian Medium Regiments went to fight in the Italian Campaign. By December 1943, each had its full detachment of sixteen 4.5-inch guns or 5.5-inch guns. In Italy, the 1st Medium Regiment received old guns from the British Eighth Army in January 1944. The British, unfortunately, gave Canada worn-out, cast-offs, instead of new guns. Due to heavy travel during the North Africa Campaign, the carriages were falling apart. Regrettably, the 5.5 Inch Howitzers had many premature bore explosions. After a couple of thousand rounds, the projectile would rattle up the barrel and explode. The barrels were prone to excessive wear, and the guns required new barrels after 2,400 rounds.

The Canadian divisional artillery participated in a two-brigade assault at the battle of Valguarnera starting 17 July 1943, which entailed a rapid advance of artillery behind the withdrawing enemy. The Medium Artillery augmented fire from the field artillery, which resulted in greater fire efficiency and dense concentrations of fire on enemy targets. In the future, the divisional artillery played a leading role in the war. During this battle, 88 guns fired an average of 68 rounds, totalling almost six thousand shells, which was the highest Canadian concentration of fire since WW1.

The Sicilian Campaign was the first divisional-level combat operation with participation from the Canadian divisional artillery. Operation Husky included Canadian Gunners in the hills of Sicily, developing their winning formula. Canadian Gunners started with no combat experience and developed a wartime formula that succeeded in mainland Italy and Northwest Europe. The 5.5 Inch Howitzer added a much-needed punch against the German forces and proved instrumental in the war. The Allies fired over 2,600,000 rounds with the 5.5 Inch gun between D-Day and VE-Day.



A photo of the 4th Medium Regiment with two 5.5 Inch Howitzers in England, 1943-44.

Canada sent nine 5.5 Inch guns to Canada for training during the war. Another 85 went to Canada after the war. These guns formed the backbone of the postwar Medium Artillery in Canada. In 1947, Canada had 32 guns with the Regular Force, 30 with the Reserve, and 32 in storage. It is worth noting that Canada took the 25 Pounders and 4.2 Inch Mortars to Korea, but not the 5.5 Inch gun—likely due to post WW2 operational restraints. The British did use the 5.5 Inch gun in the Korean War. In February 1954, Canada decided to replace all 5.5 Inch Howitzers with more modern 155mm M1A1 Howitzers. Canada shipped fifty-five 5.5 Inch Howitzers to NATO countries.

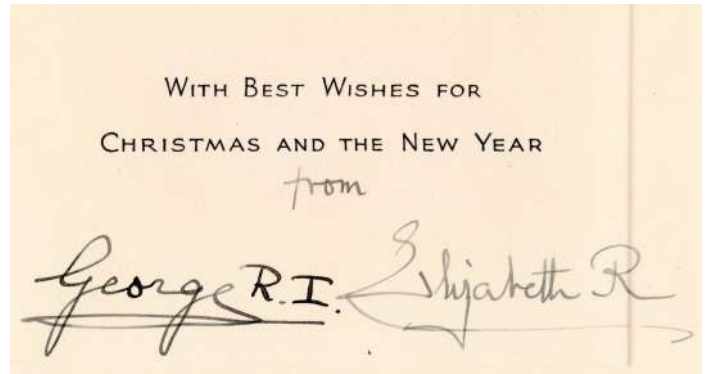
After WW2, there was a lot of nostalgia for the 5.5 Inch Howitzer. Gunners praised it. While they may have been happy to see it out of service, they also loved the gun for its contribution during WW2. The story of the 5.5 Inch Howitzer, along with the Canadian Medium Regiments, reinforces the importance of treating the past with the respect it deserves.

By Andrew Oakden

A Christmas Card

Sending Christmas cards is a tradition that started in the early 19th century. It's a small gesture that can mean a lot - a handwritten touch to show you care. When the card contains a photo, it acts as a snapshot in time and provides the recipient with a reason to keep the card. The RCA Museum has an extensive collection of postcards, including Christmas cards. In our archives, we have a unique Christmas card addressed to the Commander of the Canadian Overseas Force in England dated December 1940.

In December 1940, Lieutenant General A. G. L. McNaughton C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., a great Canadian Gunner, commanded the Canadian Overseas Force or VII Corps, which became the 1st Canadian Army. General McNaughton likely exhibited the card at headquarters. Any letter addressed to General McNaughton is surely notable, and this one is particularly special. On the inside of the card, it says: "With Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year," signed King George V and Elizabeth R.



The card also includes a photo of the King and Queen in front of Buckingham Palace after a bombing raid, dated 10 September 1940, shown above. Possibly, the card helped the monarchy stay connected to the war effort.

Raphael Tuck & Sons Ltd., who were publishers to their Majesty the King and Queen, produced the card. They published the card under difficult and challenging conditions. While the enemy bombed Buckingham Palace, they could not stop the Allies from celebrating Christmas. It was a thoughtful way to maintain British traditions during challenging times. It's undoubtedly a notable piece of WW2 Canadian Gunner history.

By Andrew Oakden

ICCS Vietnam – 1973

Not all Canadian peacekeeping occurred under the UN mandate. One such mission occurred in Vietnam from January to July 1973 – called Operation Gallant. In the RCA Museum archives, I found collected photos of Canadian peacekeeping during the 1960s to 1970s. Two images caught my attention with the inscription on the back ICCS Vietnam.



The image on the left shows an ICCS UH-1 helicopter with Canadians on board flying over Saigon in 1973. The photo on the right shows ICCS headquarters in Saigon.

While Canada did not fight alongside the US in the Vietnam War, upwards of thirty thousand Canadians joined the US Forces from 1955 to 1975. Twelve thousand of these men fought in combat roles in Vietnam, and 134 died. Canada did send observers and peacekeepers to Vietnam, outside of the United Nations mandate. Canadians first went to Vietnam in 1954 as part of the International Committee for Security and Control (ICSC). They participated in this committee until 27 January 1973 when North Vietnam, South Vietnam, the United States, and the Republic of South Vietnam signed the Paris Peace Accords. The document included the creation of the International Commission for Control and Supervision (ICCS). Canada volunteered to participate as one of the four neutral party nations to help restore peace in Vietnam. Starting on 29 January 1973, Canada sent 240 Canadian Forces personnel and 50 civilians from the Department of External Affairs to monitor the cease-fire. Canada chose participants from all branches of the Canadian Forces, including Gunners. One such Gunner was LCol D. Moreside, an ex CO of 1 RCHA.

ICCS included representatives from four nations, including two communist countries - Hungary and Poland, and two democratic countries - Canada and Indonesia. Their mandate was to supervise the cease-fire, investigate compliance, and to monitor the enforcement of the peace agreement. They were to report violations of the agreement, such as the killing of civilians and military personnel. Unfortunately, while the US withdrew 95% of their troops in 1973, the war between North Vietnam and South Vietnam continued. Both sides violated the treaty on thousands of occurrences, with the Americans mainly remaining silent. ICCS, for its part, failed in its mission. The communist members disagreed with democratic members' findings, and ICCS lacked the authority or unity to issue violations. Canadians, in turn, became frustrated and lacked the power to stop violations of the peace agreement.

Canadian observers travelled by air due to safety concerns. ICCS contracted Air America, which painted their helicopters white, such as the photo above. On 7 April 1973, the North Vietnamese shot down an ICCS helicopter, killing everyone on board, including one Canadian, Captain Charles Laviolette of the 12th Armour Regiment. This event, in part, pushed the Canadian government to withdraw its observation force. The Canadians left on 31 July 1973, replaced by an Iranian force. Canadians reported upwards of 18,000 violations and tens of thousands of Vietnamese casualties. Canada was not monitoring peace; they were witnessing the escalation of the Vietnam War. ICCS stayed in Vietnam until the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975, ending the Vietnam War.

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