

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

April 2019

Two Cool WW2 Motorcycles

It's not artillery, but it's cool! The RCA Museum has two WW2 motorcycles in "as found" condition. They're both tucked away in storage. Curators say neither has been properly displayed in the museum, even temporarily. As director of the museum, I'm always interested in seeing attention grabbing historical pieces put on public display. The two WW2-era motorcycles in the museum's collection are the 1942 Indian Scout Model 640 with sidecar and the 1944 BSA Model M20. Both are not in the best of condition and require some restoration to make them run. However, both are eye-catching.

The Indian Scout was manufactured by the Indian Motorcycle Co. in the United States. Versions of the Indian Scout were built from 1920 to 1949. The Canadian Army purchased 750 solo Indian motorcycles and 550 additional combination motorcycles with sidecar. Note the example of our 1942 Indian Scout 640 with sidecar. In 1941, Indian motorcycles were not well received by the Canadian military overseas. In part because they didn't fare well in off-road conditions. By December 1941, all overseas Indian motorcycles in the Canadian Forces were crated and shipped to Canada. They were to be used for training purposes. We had hoped to use the Indian Scout in our next temporary exhibit on D-Day. However, since it was not used by the Canadian military overseas after 1941, it would not be historically correct.



That brings us to our 1944 BSA Model M20. The BSA was popular with Canadian soldiers overseas, but Canada never made a large purchase of these motorcycles. The BSA was produced by the Birmingham Small Arms Company in the UK. BSA was Great Britain's largest producer of military motorcycles. Due to the close connection with the British Forces, it should be no surprise that some BSA motorcycles found their way into the Canadian Forces.

Back in 1939, Canada started WW2 with a limited number of motorcycles, mostly Triumphs and BSA's. Of the twenty thousand bikes owned by the Canadian military in late 1943, over 70% were Nortons and Harley Davidsons. The BSA M20 was more powerful than the Norton 16H or Harley-Davidson WLC. Note our BSA M20 to the right.

Motorcycles provided rapid and flexible all-terrain transportation for the Canadian military during WW2. Most Canadian officers were required to hold motorcycle certification. Also, dispatch riders and military police, used motorcycles. We will likely include the BSA M20 in our next temporary exhibit on D-Day. It will be displayed "rusty and dusty" adding to its relevance to Canadian military history. Hopefully, displaying cool artifacts such as these motorcycles generates interest.



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WW1 Brass Casings

During WW1, brass was the metal of choice for most artillery casings. Brass didn't rust. It didn't spark, and it sealed the chamber when fired. In turn, shell casings came in many shapes and sizes. A WW1 13 pounder field gun used a 76mm diameter shell that was at least 310mm in length. During WW1, hundreds of millions of similar artillery shells were fired. Over time many of these shells found their way into private collections. Sometimes casings were made into blanks, altered in proportion or made into trench art. In our collection we have hundreds of shell casings. We recently acquired a 13 pounder casing that was modified to load and fire a shotgun shell. The spent primer was removed and bored out to support a large caliber shotgun shell. Note the photo to the right.



Spent brass casings make excellent war mementos. We recently had on display a notable WW1 shell casing. In our *1918: The Last 100 Days* temporary exhibit, which ran from April to December 2018, we displayed the last shell casing reportedly fired by the Canadian artillery during the North Russia Campaign. It was fired by the 67th Battery, part of the 16th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, dated 25 May 1919. This Brigade was commanded by Colonel Sharman. We are fortunate to have Colonel Sharman's military medals also permanently displayed in our National Artillery Gallery.

Some historians say WW1 did not end with the Armistice Agreement signed on November 11th, but continued in Russia until the summer of 1919. This shell casing is part of that story which isn't often told. On the shell it says: "Last shot fired by a Canadian Unit in the war, 67th Battery, 15th Brigade C.F.A. Kurgomen, North Russia, May 15, 1919."

We recently received a donation from France: a Souvenir WW1 brass casing decorated with the Canadian RCA Crest with the inscribed name J. Meehan, 1914-1919. The donation came from Patrick Kocher of France. He said the shell came from his uncle that lived in Northern France, near a region with heavy fighting during WW1. Originally, the grandmother of his uncle obtained it.

The 76mm casing, which may be a modified and shortened 13 pounder shell, has the word souvenir inscribed and the date of the war from 1914-1919. The casing certainly appears every bit of 100 years old with a rich dark patina. The engraving most definitely occurred after the Armistice, possibly in 1919 or even in the 1920s or 1930s. More research is certainly needed to identify the name on the shell casing. It's currently a mystery why the name J Meehan, 1914 - 1919 is inscribed on it.



The Militia Act of 1855

In 1854, Britain withdrew most of its soldiers from the Province of Canada. Britain needed the soldiers to fight in the Crimean War. This left the Canadian colonies poorly defended. In response, the Province of Canada created a committee to investigate the need for an active militia. The committee recommended the creation of an active militia for internal and external security.

The Militia Act of 1855 established an active force not to exceed 5,000 officers and men. It called for the creation of sixteen troops of cavalry, seven field batteries, five foot artillery companies and fifty infantry companies. In 1855, in part, the militia formed batteries in Hamilton, Kingston, Montreal, Ottawa, and Quebec City. In 1895, these five were numbered, 1st to 5th Field Batteries, Canadian Artillery. They retained these numbers until the end of WW1. All five celebrated their centenary in 1955.

In 1855, each battery received at least two 6-pounder guns and at least one 12-pounder howitzer. In 1865, some militia batteries received the 9-pounder smooth-bore gun and 24-pounder howitzer. The photo to the right shows a 9-pounder smooth-bore muzzle loading gun from the RCA Museum collection. This weapon was in Canadian service from 1865 to 1876. The gun had no recoil system and jolted backwards after each firing. It had an effective range of 1,400 yards.



In 1855, the Province of Canada ordered 1,250 rifled muskets, 250 carbines and 400 Colt pistols. Birmingham Small Arms Company supplied the rifles and carbines. The photo above shows an artillery carbine, Enfield Pattern 1853, .577" muzzle loader. Between 1855 and 1857, the Province of Canada acquired 275 carbines, 25 more than the original purchase order. The weapon was accurate to 600 yards and could be fired three times a minute. The RCA Museum has one on display in the Gun Vault.

The Militia Act of 1855 was a critical step in Canadian history that led to the establishment of a permanent force for internal and external security.

Gunners in the Interwar Years



I found a collection of photos showing artillery exercises in Petawawa, Ontario dated from 1931. The top photo shows four gun tractors and six sets of 18 pounders with limbers. In the summer of 1925, Petawawa began using gun tractors due to a lack of horses. In 1930, both “A” and “B” Batteries lost their horses. C Battery in Winnipeg lost their horses in 1937. Across Canada many batteries kept their horses until WW2.



These two photos show the firing of 4.5 inch howitzers. It's worth noting the rim of the wooden wheels have a rubberized external layer. Our current museum example no-longer has this layer. On the back of some of the photos, it mentions the soldiers coming into action with the howitzers. Stating they “played it cool in those days,” referring to the light colored military attire.

ILTIS and Modern Peacekeeping

The Canadian Iltis was a lightweight, four wheel drive, ½-ton utility vehicle. The word Iltis is German in origin and means Polecat in English. The Iltis used a 1.7L Volkswagen, 85 horsepower, 4 cylinder engine. Bombardier built 2,500 vehicles for the Canadian Forces. Production ran from 1984 to 1986. The Iltis replaced the M38A1 and M151 vehicles.



(Photo from the Shilo Stag)

The photo above shows an Iltis from the RCA Museum's collection during PPCLI's 25th Anniversary of Medak Pocket in 2018. The Iltis is painted UN white.

The Iltis served in operational use for two decades. However, being a soft skinned vehicle, it was susceptible to mine damage, shrapnel damage, and small arms fire. In Afghanistan, the Iltis was severely under-protected. By the late 2000s, the Canadian Forces replaced the entire fleet with the G-Wagon.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Canadian Forces used the Iltis for UN Peacekeeping in many countries, such as Cyprus, Haiti and the Balkans. Over 25,000 Canadians completed six month UNEF tours of Cyprus from 1964 to 1993. The photo to the right shows the Iltis in Cyprus.

From 1948-1988, 10% of the UN peacekeepers were Canadian or 80,000 personnel. In 1988, Canada won a Noble Peace Prize for its peacekeeping role over the last four decades. These missions relied on military vehicles such as the Iltis.



Canadians, including Gunners, are still serving as UN peacekeepers throughout the world. Since 1947, over 125,000 Canadians have served in UN peacekeeping missions. A total of 130 Canadians lost their lives.

Major-General T. B. Strange (1831–1925)



Major-General Thomas Bland “Jingo” Strange played a role of unsurpassed significance in the early years of the Royal Regiment. He was the first Commandant of B Battery in Quebec City and served in that capacity for eight years. He then moved with B Battery to Kingston. In 1871, B Battery along with A Battery were the first regular elements of the post-Confederation Canadian Army.

General Strange recommended the establishment of three important Canadian institutions: the Royal Military College, the Dominion Artillery Association and the Dominion Cartridge Factory. In 1882, at the age of 51, he retired with the honorary rank of Major-General. His peers considered him the “Father of the Canadian Artillery.”

In 1885, he came out of retirement to raise and command the Alberta Field Force during the North-West Rebellion. The Alberta Field Force, comprised of cowboys, Mounted Police and three Militia battalions, acquitted themselves well. He was widely admired for his direct and uncompromising leadership. In 1925, shortly before he passed away, he became the first Colonel Commandant of the Royal Regiment.

The medal set of Major-General Thomas Bland Strange (Indian Mutiny 1857-59 with Lucknow Clasp and Northwest Canada with Saskatchewan Clasp) will be up for sale by auction at Spink & Son Ltd., London on 10 April 2019.

The RCA Senate and the RCA Museum consider this medal set to be of critical importance to the history of the Royal Regiment. The military medals provide primary evidence of his achievements and would allow us to tell his story through more than words alone. The medals would travel across the country to museums and bases to educate and preserve the heritage of the Royal Regiment. We, therefore, will attempt to purchase them.

Construction at the Museum

Our staff have patiently waited for construction to begin at the museum. There is lots of work to be done. Contractors will replace the internal archive doors with fireproof full steel doors. They will also build a vestibule with a second set of fireproof doors leading to the archives. They will also replace the heating, cooling and humidification units throughout the building.

The first fabricated metal parts started arriving at the museum in mid-January 2019. On February 18th hoarding around the area encompassing the vestibule started. Note the picture to the right. We needed to move a number of artifacts. We moved the Otter armoured WW2 vehicle, M2 Dual 50 cal. Anti-aircraft gun, our ammunition display and two great gunner displays.

We also needed to shift artifacts to create a large pathway for the construction crew. Currently about half a dozen skilled tradesmen are working in the museum framing the vestibule with steel sections. Optimistically, the work will be completed by June when our next temporary exhibit opens.



Play Hard, Fight Hard: Sport and the Canadian Military

We are displaying *Play Hard, Fight Hard: Sport and the Canadian Military* in our temporary gallery. Upwards of 300 artifacts are on display in this travelling exhibit by the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame and the Military Museums of Calgary.



As director of the museum, *Play Hard, Fight Hard* reminds me of my youth and participating in team sports. Personally, I was raised in a family that promoted physical fitness and competition through sport. The exhibit contains many sport and military related artifacts that are geared towards sporting competitions.

A strong connection can be drawn between participation in sport and involvement in the Canadian Militia and Military going back to Confederation. There are artifacts covering many sports from athletics, baseball, basketball, boxing, cricket, curling, football, hockey, polo, skiing, soccer and the program Soldier On. Soldier On is a rehabilitative program developed by the Canadian Forces to help soldiers overcome mental and physical injury through sport.

Each artifact on display has a story to tell. One such artifact is William Parker's cricket bat from the 1880s. While posted with the North West Mounted Police, Parker used this bat in Battleford, Saskatchewan. Certainly cricket has a strong British colonial connection from the 19th century. Parker later joined the Canadian military and fought in the Boer War.

Another interesting artifact is Myrtle Cook's Gold Medal from the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam. We also have a pair of her tiny track shoes on display. This was the first Olympics that woman were allowed to compete in athletics. She became known as "Canada's First Lady of Sport."

The exhibit will be on display until 23 April 2019. All of these artifacts help tell unique stories. Come and check it out.

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