

# BARRAGE

The RCA Museum News

THE RCA MUSEUM  
CANADA'S NATIONAL ARTILLERY MUSEUM



July 2019

## D-Day Exhibit Opening

We officially opened our *D-Day '44: Canada in Normandy* exhibit on June 6, 2019. The event went very well. We had ninety guests in attendance. Among the distinguished guests were CFB Base Commander, LCol Dave MacIntyre and incoming Base Commander, LCol Jeff Lyttle. We also had the Mayor of Brandon, Rick Chrest, in attendance and MLA Brandon West, Reg Helwer. Other notables were Chairman of the RCA Museum Board of Directors, Chuck LaRocque, and museum board members Ken Cashin and Kent Forman. Many soldiers were in attendance from Base Headquarters, 2PPCLI, and 1RCHA.



Above is a photo courtesy of the Shilo Stag of the opening ceremony. It shows everyone standing to attention for the playing of O'Canada before the Museum Director, Senior Curator, Chairman of the Board and Base Commander opened the exhibit.

We placed a kitted out WW2 Bren Gun Carrier at the entrance of our museum for the afternoon. We hope that

all the guests enjoyed the opening of our exhibit and will come back with their friends and families.



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## D-Day '44: Canada in Normandy

The D-Day Landing was designed to create a bridgehead upon which the Allies could liberate France and then the rest of Europe. The main Allied armies were the U.S., Britain and Canada on five concurrent sections of Normandy coast. Juno Beach was Canada's section to assault on 6 June 1944. The initial Canadian attack was completed by two brigade groups, the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, over a span of roughly 4 ½ miles.

Allied planning called for heavy artillery support both before and during the invasion. The Artillery

executed a beach barrage over advancing Canadian soldiers. This was a highly coordinated and mechanized landing with the beach filled with vehicles, including self-propelled artillery. On the artillery side, the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Field Regiments supported the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, and the

14<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> supported the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade. These four regiments each had 24 M7 Priest 105mm howitzers. Four Priests were loaded onto each LCT landing craft. LCT landing craft with M7 Priests fired for 30 minutes before the landing. LCS landing craft with 6 pounders engaged enemy positions, while LCA landing craft, full of infantry, stormed the beaches.

The first assault on the beaches came at 0755 or 10 minutes after H-Hour. They sustained heavy casualties from portions of the German 716<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Fourteen thousand Canadians stormed Juno Beach. The landing achieved mixed results. The 7<sup>th</sup> would push 10 miles inward to achieve its

objective of securing up to Caen-Bayeux road and railway line. The 8<sup>th</sup> with the 9<sup>th</sup> would secure the high ground near Caen, including the Carpiquet airfield. By evening, Canadian soldiers were able to link with the British on Gold Beach to the west, but unable to link with Sword Beach to the east. Additionally, 340 Canadians died, 574 were wounded, and forty-seven were taken prisoner.

The RCA Museum opened a new temporary exhibit entitled *D-Day '44: Canada in Normandy* on 6 June 2019. We are displaying a large number of WW2



artifacts, including an M7 Priest 105mm howitzer. Canadians used ninety-six M7 Priests during the Juno Beach landing. To the M7 Priest, staff added a 50 cal. machine gun with ammo box, extra track, wheels, barbed wire, canvas bags, Jerry cans, cables, cam netting, canvas tarps,

gun sight, and 105mm projectiles and casings.

The exhibit features a number of guns and vehicles, including a 2 pounder anti-tank gun and a BSA M20 motorcycle. We included artifacts connected to a number of notable Canadian soldiers, including BGen Griffin who commanded the 14<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment during the D-Day landing, and LCol Buchanan who received the second bar to his Silver Cross for heroic actions after the D-Day landing. Of note the 14<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment began landing on Juno Beach 100 minutes after H Hour or at 0925 on 6 June 1944. We hope visitors will come and see it.



## The General Strange Medals Return to the Royal Regiment

I am very pleased to announce the return of Major-General T. B. "Jingo" Strange's medals to the Royal Regiment. The RCA Museum has purchased the General Strange medals and brought them home. They arrived at our museum on 3 May 2019.

We purchased the medals at auction on 10 April 2019. The RCA Senate raised the funds for this acquisition. 100% of the funds used for the purchase came from private donations. I would like to thank the RCA Senate for raising the money for these historic medals. I would also like to thank everyone that gave funds or helped with this project. In addition, I would like to recognize the Colonel Commandant, Brig-Gen (Ret'd) J. J. Selbie, OMM, CD for leading the fundraising drive.



Field Force during the North-West Rebellion. This force fought in the last battle on Canadian soil. Strange helped open up the West and was a larger-than-life figure in Canadian history. In 1925, he became the first Colonel Commandant of the Royal Regiment. Strange is the "father of the Canadian artillery" and the first "Great Gunner." These facts make his military medals an exceptional acquisition.

The Royal Regiment and the RCA Museum will honor his legacy. In Shilo, we have General Strange Hall named after the great man, but there is little else in Canada to honor him. These medals help explain Canadian military history; a history that sometimes forgets its military heroes. His medals are evidence of his achievements and of our common heritage.



Photo of the Major-General T. B. Strange Medals: Northwest Canada Medal 1885 & Indian Mutiny Medal 1857-59.

The Maj-Gen T. B. "Jingo" Strange medals are invaluable to the Royal Regiment. General Strange had many accomplishments. In 1872, he was the first Commandant of B Battery and served in this capacity for ten years. He helped found and transform the Post-Confederation Canadian militia. In 1885, Strange came out of retirement and commanded the Alberta



RCA Museum Board Chairman, Chuck LaRocque and B Battery Soldier hold General Strange's medals during the unveiling on 6 May 2019.

We repatriated these medals to Canada. They will stay in Canada at our Regimental museum. We will also create a traveling exhibit featuring the great man and his medals. As new generations of Canadian Gunners come they will learn about the man and see his medals. We are very grateful to have these medals and we look forward to telling his story.

## The 67<sup>th</sup> Battery Association Gun

From 1930 to 1974, veterans of the 67<sup>th</sup> Battery Association met every summer at the “Chateau de la Haie” near Sturgeon Lake, Ontario. The 67<sup>th</sup> “Varsity” Battery was, in part, raised from students from the University of Toronto. The men from the 67<sup>th</sup> Battery would go on and fight in the Great War. They certainly shared a unique bond, and after the war, they established the 67<sup>th</sup> Battery Association.



This cabin at Sturgeon Lake has a noteworthy history. The original log cabin was built in the 1830s. It was the pioneer home of Jabez Thurston and family. In 1930, the cabin was acquired by the 67<sup>th</sup> Battery Association and given the name “Chateau de la Haie” in honour of a stately chateau in France that had served as Canadian Corps Headquarters in WW1. After WW1, hundreds of German war trophies came to Canada and were distributed to communities across the country. One of the war trophies, a 15cm German heavy artillery long-barrelled howitzer went to the Varsity Stadium at the University of Toronto. The gun stayed at the stadium for approximately 20 years before the 67<sup>th</sup> Battery Association acquired it and moved it to the Chateau de la Haie at Sturgeon Lake in 1939. In discussions with the Soldiers’ Tower & Carillon at the University of Toronto, who honour the memory of the 67<sup>th</sup> “Varsity” Battery, more than 100 U of T students, including some from the 67<sup>th</sup> “Varsity” Battery, also served in Russia and Siberia during the North Russia Intervention (1918-1919).



Photo from the RCA Museum Archives of the 67<sup>th</sup> Battery.

The gun itself is a 15cm sFH13 designed by Krupp Co. in Germany. 3,409 were built from 1913 to 1918. The howitzer had a horizontal sliding-breach block and a basic hydro-spring recoil mechanism. There were three variants including the original sFH13 with short barrel, the lg. sFH13 L/17 with long barrel, and the simplified lg. sFH 13/02. This particular gun is the original 15cm sFH13 with a replacement L/17 long barrel. The barrel would need replacing after firing 20 to 25 thousand rounds. The Allies referred to the gun as “Fine-Nines” or “Five Point Nines” due to the internal diameter of the barrel at 150mm or 5.9 inches. These guns delivered heavy firepower with a shell weighing approximately 42 kilograms and an effective range up to 8,800 meters. They continued to be used after WW1, until the sFH18 was introduced in the 1930s. The RCA Museum has a sFH18 displayed in our Gun Park.

In 1974, the cottage was sold. By this time, the majority of the war vets were in their 80s. In 1990, Celia Devov and Robert Bell purchased the cottage which still had the German WW1 artillery piece sitting out front. In June 2018, Celia and Robert contacted retired Brig-Gen Ernie Beno regarding the possible donation of the WW1 German howitzer. In July 2018, I had the opportunity to visit Celia and Robert at their lakeside property. I inspected the gun and it certainly appeared intact and placed in the same spot for every bit of 77 years. The gun has been painted many times, which has protected the metal from rust damage and the elements. Unfortunately, the wooden wheels have not fared well and are in need of replacement. The barrel is fully recoiled and requires some restoration.



Our mechanic feels the gun could be restored. The existing paint needs to be stripped, then the rusted or damaged portions fixed or replaced, and repainted. The wooden wheels would need to be rebuilt. We have agreed to pick up the gun on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Our mechanic will make the long trip from Shilo, Manitoba to Sturgeon Lake, Ontario to collect the gun. Once in our care it will be placed on our restoration schedule with the wheels being the most urgent portion. Once we have the rebuilt wheels, the rest of the gun will be restored. Especially challenging will be moving the breech and tube to the appropriate position. Once restored we will display the howitzer in our museum or Gun Park.

We are very thankful to Celia Denov and Robert Bell for the donation. Having an artifact that belonged to the 67<sup>th</sup> "Varsity" Battery Association will certainly help us to inform visitors about Canada's role during WW1. We will honour the memory and legacy of Canadian Gunners who fought in the First World War and the North Russia Intervention. These guns were used extensively during WW1 and it is currently missing in our collection. We will provide more updates on this gun.



The WW1 150mm German Howitzer in our storage facility.

## Summer Students at the Museum 2019

We have two students working this summer.

### Mackenzie Garden

I have the pleasure of interning at the RCA Museum this summer. I was born in Nottingham, England to two Canadian parents and was raised for the remainder of my life in Brandon, MB. I developed a passion for history as a young person, and was able to explore that passion early on in life by graduating from high school at 16, and moving on to university. In my first year of studies at Brandon University, I was able to focus my academic passion on the organized use of violence in politics as well as how this violence influences culture and political action. In my time at the university, I was also able to explore anthropological aspects of violence and the history of violence in human society. Last year, I transferred to the University of Calgary in order to continue my studies in political science, with the intention of pursuing a law degree, as well as volunteering with UNICEF and the Make-A-Wish foundation. The work I have been involved with at the museum thus far has fed my passion for history, which will definitely aid me in my continued academics.

### Quinn Melnyk

I am 21 years old and grew up in Russell, Manitoba where I attended Major Pratt School. In 2016, I graduated high school with honours. After graduation, I attended the University of Manitoba where I completed University 1. After finishing my first year at the U of M, I transferred to Brandon University. In September, I will start the 4<sup>th</sup> year of a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in history and minoring in psychology. Once I attain my Bachelor of Arts degree, I plan on enrolling in a Bachelor of Education program to become a grade school teacher.

## Origins of the Royal Regiment

There is notable ambiguity regarding the origins of The Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery. While the Regiment of Canadian Artillery was officially established in 1883 and the Regular Force in 1884, the origins of both go back much further.

This history of the Canadian militia covers hundreds of years. The first militia units came from colonists in New France. Militia forces were raised in the event of conflict. After the British conquest in 1763, militia units continued to be raised when needed. The US attacked twice, once in 1775 and another in 1812. Canadian militia helped stop them on both occasions.

With the departure of the British Regulars, Canada required a military to protect itself. The Civil War in the United States (1861-1865) increased the threat of invasion and need for an Active Militia. The Fenian Raids (1866-1871) also established a need for a permanent force. These threats were significant reasons for Confederation in 1867.

Canada passed the Militia Act of 1868, which was similar to the Pre-Confederation Militia Act of 1855. With British Regulars leaving to fight in the Crimean War, the Militia Act of 1855 allowed for up to 5,000 officers and men, trained, equipped and paid at government expense. It essentially raised an Active Militia in the defence of the Province of Canada. The term "Canadian Militia" was used from 1855 to 1940. The term "Canadian Army" wasn't used until 1940.

The Militia Act of 1868 raised Active Militia for

the defence of the new nation of Canada. It established an Active Militia of up to 40,000 men. It created the Department of Militia and Defence. It authorized conscription when required and called for 8 to 16 days of drill a year. By 1869, the Active Militia included 37,170 men. The Canadian Militia was tested early including during the Wolseley Expedition in 1870 and again during the North-West Rebellion in 1885.

During the formative years of this country an important breakthrough was the establishment of "A" and "B" Batteries



A Battery, circa 1870s

of Garrison Artillery at Kingston and Quebec City respectively. Starting in 1871, the soldiers that manned "A" and "B" Batteries were selected from existing militia units on the condition that they re-enroll for a period of three years with their original militia battery. These batteries were the first full-time, regular elements

of the Post-Confederation Canadian Militia. "This was the thin end of the wedge for the Permanent Corps which were afterwards established," *Digest of Services of B Battery R.C.A.*, dated 14 November 1894.

The formation of "A" and "B" Batteries represents something unique and original that had not occurred prior to their establishment. At the time it represented what the Canadian military had become as a fledgling democracy. After Confederation and the Militia Act of 1868, the founding of "A" and "B" Batteries represents the origins of the Royal Regiment and a significant milestone in the formation of the Canadian Army.

## The Bren Machine Gun

Hiram Maxim, the inventor of the modern machine gun, thought his invention would end warfare. It did not. While giving tours, I like to tell visitors that the late nineteenth century saw the perfection of the heavy, water-cooled machine gun. This weapon was effective due to its high rate of fire and formidable cartridge. Early machine guns were used during the Boer War (1899-1902) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) with devastating results.

The early machine guns were not mobile and difficult to operate. They were often mounted on artillery or located in static positions. However, during WW1, lighter, more mobile machine guns emerged. Early mobile WW1 machine guns included the German MG08/15 and US designed Lewis gun. Both were moderately light and designed to be assault weapons. The RCA Museum has examples of both in our collection.

The tactical components of battle evolved during WW1 due, in part, to the introduction of the light machine gun. The change greatly decreased the size of advancing units on the battlefield. Traditional mass formations of infantry disappeared with the adoption of the light machine gun. Gone were the days of infantry massed together, instead small units were deployed with a central light machine gun, with riflemen, Stormtroopers and grenadiers.

In the 1920s, the British recognized the need for increased firing capacity, even in the smallest units, using light automatic weapons. The British required a new machine gun that could be carried on the hip and fired from a bipod or tripod. They needed to replace the Vickers medium machine gun and the Lewis light machine gun. After extensive testing, they advanced the Czechoslovakian ZB 26 air-cooled, gas-operated and magazine-fed machine gun. The British Bren was originally modelled after ZB 26 & ZB 27 machine guns produced by Brno State Arsenal. The Bren and others underwent extensive trials in the UK. After

trials, the Bren was determined to be the best design.

In 1935, the original ZB was converted to use a standard British .303 rimmed cartridge, as used by other Commonwealth small arms, including the Vickers, the Ross and Enfield rifles. Production commenced at the Royal Small Arms Factory in 1937. The Bren could be fired semi or fully automatic with either a 30 round magazine or 100 round drum. The length of the weapon was 45.5 inches and used a quick-change 25 inch barrel. The machine gun weighed just over 22 pounds and fired 500 rounds a minute with an effective range of 600 yards. It was also mounted on vehicles, such as the Universal Carrier (Bren Gun Carrier).



In Canada, the first example, Brno-made ZB guns arrived in October 1936. John Inglis Co. Ltd. secured government approval to manufacture the Bren in Canada. The first order of Canadian made MK1 Bren's came in October 1938 for 5,000 units. Production started in March 1940. The elimination of some

non-essential features of the MK1 led to the MK1 modified (MK1m). Further simplification of features and machining led to the MK2. In total, John Inglis produced 186,000 .303 Bren's for the Commonwealth along with production of 8mm versions for the Chinese and European market.

Light machine guns were widely used during WW2. The Bren was used by Allied armies, including in the Canadian Artillery. After WW2, testing and development was undertaken with various cartridges, notably .280 and 7.62mm NATO. Further testing, in an attempt to modernize the Bren, included belt fed variants. While Britain retained the Bren until the 1990s, Canada replaced them with the FN C2A1 in the 1960s. We have a collection of iconic WW2 Bren Guns behind the black curtain in our Gun Vault, including Canadian and UK versions of the MK1, MK1m, MK2 and two rare 30 calibre examples. We also have two Bren's on display, one in the Gun Vault and another in our D-Day display. Come and check it out.



## Traveller's Day Parade 2019

The RCA Museum partnered with the 26<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Regiment for the Traveller's Day Parade on Saturday, June 8<sup>th</sup>. During the parade, CFB Shilo, Base Commander, LCol Dave MacIntyre and the CFB Shilo mascot JUNO, rode in our parade jeep. We also included a deuce-and-a-half with C1 105mm howitzer. 26<sup>th</sup> Field brought their MSVS Gun tractor with C3 105mm howitzer. They also had soldiers in uniform walking alongside their vehicle.



Parades such as this help bring the community together. It provides the military and our museum an opportunity to promote ourselves and to be seen in Brandon. Note the photos above as our display rolled down Rosser Ave. For many years, the RCA Museum has been participating in the event. This year it was small but certainly noteworthy. The roads were crowded with visitors and it was certainly an excellent outreach event for the museum.



## WW1 and the North Russia Intervention

When did WW1 end? Most sources say it was on November 11, 1918, when Germany and the Allies signed the Armistice of Compiegne that ended fighting on the Western Front. Yet not all fighting ended that day. Allied troops, including Canadians, fought as part of the Allied Intervention of Russia, mainly in North Russia and Siberia. The Armistice did not apply to these soldiers. At times, surely, the Gunners huddled behind their guns. They were cold, homesick, occupying an alien land and fighting in a foreign civil war. From November 1918 to June 1919, the 67<sup>th</sup> and 68<sup>th</sup> Batteries of Canadian Field Artillery, North Russia Expeditionary Force fought in North Russia providing artillery support to Allied forces.



Photo of the 68<sup>th</sup> Battery North Russia Expeditionary Force from the RCA Museum Archives.

It's worth noting that WW1 sparked revolutions and uprisings in many parts of the world, including in Russia. During WW1, while Russia fought with the Allies, Russian generals were reluctant to commit their troops to the war effort. In March 1917, social unrest and ineffective rule culminated in the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and the appointment of the Provisional Government. Chaos and ineffective governance followed which, in part, led to the rise of the Bolshevik Party that wanted out of WW1. The Bolsheviks ultimately negotiated Russia's exit from the war, resulting in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918. Vast territories were succeeded to the Central Powers. In response, the Allied Powers pursued a small-scale invasion of Russia, in part, to stop Germany from acquiring these Russian resources, and also to openly support the White Russians in the Russian Civil War against the Bolsheviks.

Canadian soldiers participated in the Allied Intervention of Russia on two fronts. Canada sent an infantry brigade, including the 259<sup>th</sup> and 260<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalions, a NWMP detachment and a machine-gun company to Siberia. The Siberian continent did not see much action. However, Canada also deployed the 16<sup>th</sup> Artillery Brigade, composed of the 67<sup>th</sup> and 68<sup>th</sup> Batteries, North Russia Expeditionary Force to North Russia, each battery with six 18 pounders. Both batteries formed for service in Russia on 12 August 1918. Together they were composed of almost 500 gunners. Led by L-Col Sharman, the 16<sup>th</sup> Field Brigade played a decisive role in the North Russia Intervention. The 16<sup>th</sup> Brigade was deployed out of the port of Murmansk, Russia and provided vital artillery support to Allied forces including, U.S., British and French forces.

The first battle against Bolshevik forces came on November 11<sup>th</sup> near the village of Tulgas, North Russia. A force of 500 to 600 men attacked Allied forces including the 67<sup>th</sup> Battery. Canadian Gunners fought bravely and counted 60 Russian killed or taken prisoner. Two Canadians died including Cpl. Stanley Wareham and Driver Walter Conville. Two days later, another two Canadians from the 68<sup>th</sup> were killed in action. The guns performed well, but they were often outranged. On December 27<sup>th</sup>, L-Col Sharman wrote in the official war diary, "We have only been in the country three months and two sections at different times have had hand-to-hand scraps with the enemy."

From a letter dated 22 January 1919, Sharman praised his men, writing in part, "All Canadians are fit and well, and doing all (and more) than could be expected of them." Both batteries would see considerable action from November 1918 to June 1919 when all Canadian soldiers left Russia. Over the next seven months, an additional 22 Canadians would die in North Russia.

At the time, the Allied Intervention of Russia was not popular. The Canadian public was war-weary and there was little interest to get involved a Russian revolution. After November 11, 1918, the main reason to fight in Russia no longer existed: Germany had surrendered and protecting supplies was no longer vital. Allied troops were withdrawn from Russia starting in 1919. The 16<sup>th</sup> Brigade left Russia without their guns; they were turned over to the White Russian forces. Lastly, the 16<sup>th</sup> Artillery Brigade honourably served their country – both before and after the Armistice of 11 November 1918.

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