

BARRAGE

The RCA Museum News

THE RCA MUSEUM
CANADA'S NATIONAL ARTILLERY MUSEUM



July 2021

UBIQUE 150 and the General Strange Medals

This year we are celebrating UBIQUE 150 with a temporary exhibit in our museum and on our website. The centrepiece of the exhibit are the medals that belonged to Major-General T. B. Strange (1831-1925). The medal set includes the Northwest Canada Medal 1885 and the Indian Mutiny Medal 1857-1859, shown below.



Major General Thomas Bland "Jingo" Strange was a larger-than-life soldier who spent ten years establishing Canada's formative professional army and led the last battle on Canadian soil in 1885. He was born in India on 15 September 1831, received his education in Ireland, a commission in the Royal Artillery in Britain, and served throughout the British Empire before coming to Canada.

In early 1872, Lieutenant-Colonel Strange became the first Commanding Officer of B Battery in Quebec City, Quebec.

Strange had an uncompromising manner and established extensive training protocols, holding his Gunners to high standards. He recommended establishing the Royal Military College, the Dominion Artillery Association, and the Dominion Cartridge Factory, which all exist in some form today.

After forced retirement at the age of 51, Major-General Strange moved to Alberta and established a vast cattle and horse ranch. In 1885, Strange remobilized and led the Alberta Field Force during the North-West Rebellion. After the uprising, he temporarily lost his military pension, sold his ranch, returned to England, and then travelled the world as an artillery salesman, remaining active until his death on 9 July 1925.

Major-General Strange is the father of the Canadian Artillery, the first Colonel Commandant of The Royal Regiment, and an extraordinary Great Gunner.

RCA Museum Summer Students 2021

We are very pleased to have two students working in our museum this summer. The summer students complete a vital function processing donations and updating our curatorial database.

Quinn Melnyk is currently one of our summer students at the RCA Museum. Quinn is 23 years old and originally from Russell, Manitoba. She moved to Brandon to attend Brandon University, where she graduated with her 4-year Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in history and minoring in psychology in April 2020. Quinn is in her final year of a Bachelor of Education Degree with plans to teach Early Years after graduation next spring. It's Quinn's second summer working for the RCA Museum; she worked here in 2019 and is excited to return! She is passionate about education and history, and sees the museum as the perfect venue to bring her passions together to help others learn about our military history.



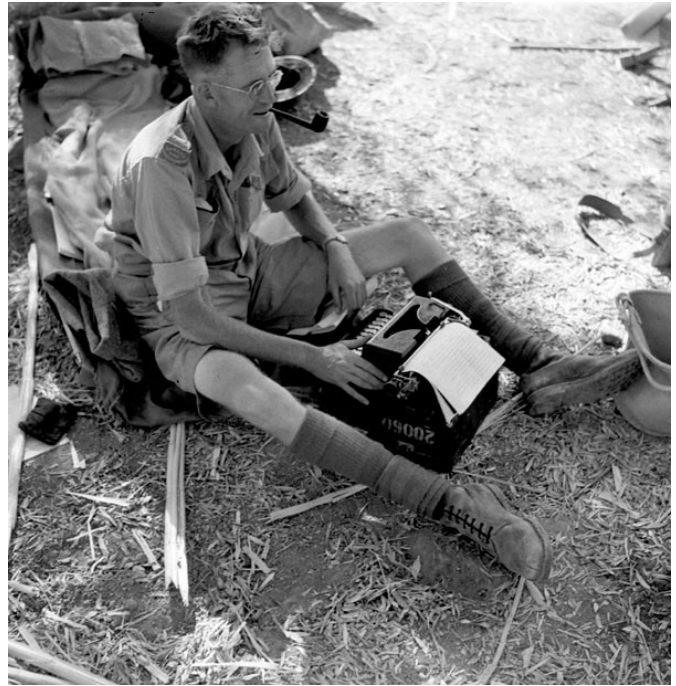
Emma Scott is currently a summer student working at the RCA Museum. She is 19 years old and will be turning 20 within the next couple of months. She was born in Brandon, Manitoba and grew up there, later going to Vincent Massey High School and graduating with academic honours and a fine arts certificate in June 2019. Emma is going into her third year of a 4-Year Bachelor of Arts Degree at Brandon University with a major in English. She hopes to later further her education by teaching abroad. Emma hopes to travel around the world to learn about and experience the cultures of other countries. It's her first experience working at the RCA Museum, and she is excited to learn about Canadian Military history and share her new knowledge with others!



Juno Beach

Quick: Where did the Canadians land during the invasion of Normandy on June 6th, 1944? Most readers of *Barrage* would be quick to answer “Juno Beach,” and many could go on to name the other beaches where British (Gold and Sword) and American (Utah and Omaha) forces landed. But what if you asked a Canadian soldier where he was headed as he waded ashore that day? He might have given one of several answers, but probably not “Juno Beach.”

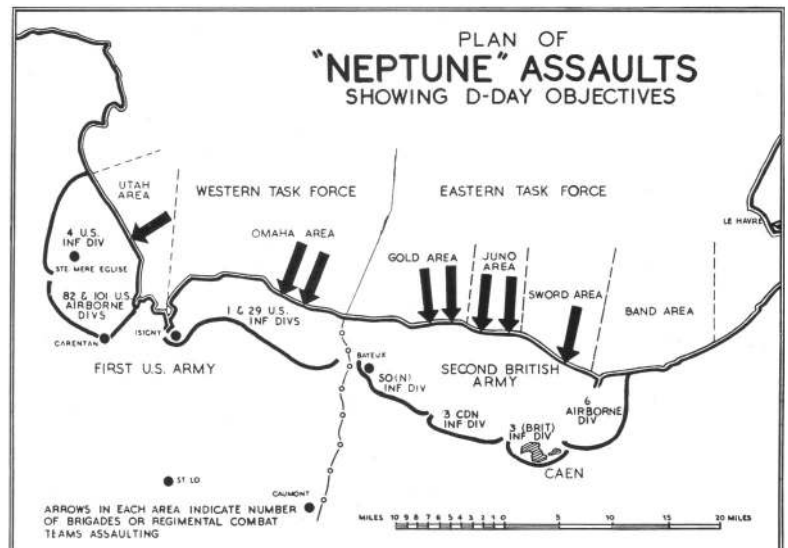
I recently read Ross Munro’s *Gauntlet to Overlord* (1945), which was the first overview of the Canadian Army in World War II to be published. As a war correspondent for the Canadian Press, Munro landed at Bernières-sur-Mer on D-Day with the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division’s Tactical HQ. His gripping, first-hand account of that fateful morning describes where each unit went ashore relative to the Norman towns and villages on the coast. The lack of a reference to Juno Beach struck me as I read this, but I assumed it was because of operational security. Munro was privy to high-level briefings, and I reasoned that the beach code names were a secret in 1945.



CP war correspondent Ross Munro typing a story in the field in Italy, August 1943 (Library and Archives Canada).

The first official history of the Canadian role in Normandy was published just a year later and does not shy away from using these names. In 1946, Col C. P. Stacey, the Director of the Canadian Army’s Historical Section, published *Canada’s Battle in Normandy*. It was one of three short volumes that also describe the Italian campaign and Canadian activities in the UK. In this work, Stacey describes the landing area: “The Canadians’ sector went by the general code name ‘Juno.’ They were to assault on two beaches known as ‘Mike’ and ‘Nan,’ lying athwart the mouth of the River Seulles” (p. 45).

Like the British and American beaches, Mike and Nan were named after letters in a phonetic alphabet. Today, they would be called Mike and November beaches. A map on page 42 of *Canada’s Battle in Normandy* shows the Operation Neptune assaults, as the landing phase of Operation Overlord was known. On this map, the Canadian objective is labelled “Juno Area.” In the official eyes of the Canadian Army, then, Mike and Nan were the “beaches,” while Juno was a “sector” or an “area.”



Map of the D-Day Assaults from *Canada’s Battle in Normandy*, showing ‘Juno Area’ (Stacey 1946: 42).

Col Stacey followed this up with a one-volume official summary of WW2 published in 1948 and called *The Canadian Army 1939-1945*. Despite the chapter dedicated to the planning and execution of Operation Overlord (pp. 168-184), Stacey here avoids code names and, like Munro three years prior, locates the landings with reference to towns like St Aubin-sur-Mer and Courseulles-sur-Mer. The same is true for the map of the Normandy beachhead, opposite page 194. There is no mention of Mike, Nan or even Juno.

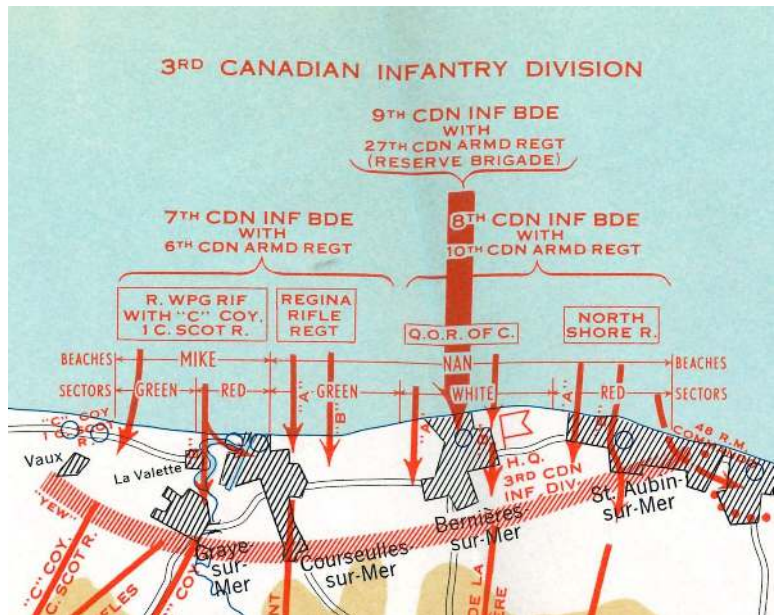
The Canadian Army completed a more detailed, four-volume official history of its involvement in WW2, with the D-Day landings covered in the third volume, *The Victory Campaign* (1960), also written by Col Stacey. In this work, Stacey turns his 1946 terminology on its head: "... the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division ... was to make its D Day assault against 'Juno' Beach, in the centre of the sector allotted to the [British] Second Army. ... The Canadian attack was to be made on a two-brigade front, through sectors known as 'Mike' (right) and 'Nan' (left), including the villages of Courseulles-sur-Mer, Bernières-sur-Mer and the western outskirts of St. Aubin-sur-Mer" (p. 76). By 1960, it seems that Juno had become a beach, while Mike and Nan had become sectors of the beach, reversing the previous terminology.

Stacey continues calling Mike and Nan "sectors" in *The Victory Campaign*, but the situation becomes more complicated when considering their subdivisions. Planners divided Mike into two parts (Green and Red) and Nan into three parts (Green, White and Red). They chose these colours because they reflect the directional lights on an aircraft or boat: green for right, white for the centre, and red for left. When it comes to these subdivisions, Stacey also calls them beaches. For example, he writes that "The Royal Winnipeg Rifles ... landed on 'Mike Red' and 'Mike Green' Beaches ..." (p. 102).

On the other hand, Map 2 in *The Victory Campaign* contradicts Stacey's text. This map of the Canadian actions on D-Day clearly labels Mike and Nan as "beaches" and their Green, White and Red subdivisions as "sectors." In all, the terminology of this work is hopelessly muddled when it comes to these landing zones: Juno is a beach, Mike and Nan are sectors or beaches, and their colour-coded subdivisions are also sectors or beaches.

Of course, a beach can be any length of the sea-shore. Today, history and commemorations of the D-Day landings consistently refer to the Canadian objective as Juno Beach, regardless of whether that term was used in 1944. There is no "Juno Sector Centre" to visit, for example.

In the end, what has this foray into first-hand accounts and official histories provided us? For one thing, it warns us that we need to be cautious when working with different sources because terms can change through time, even for the same author. It also reminds us that history is a process of negotiation that takes time, as society and historians digest the present into the past. Most importantly, for the Canadian soldier on that faithful June morning in 1944, whether his objective was called a "beach," a "sector," or an "area" was immaterial to the job at hand. Where was he headed? I like to think his answer would be "Berlin!"



A detail of the map showing the Canadian assault on D-Day from *The Victory Campaign*, showing Mike and Nan Beaches and their sectors (Stacey 1960: Map 2).

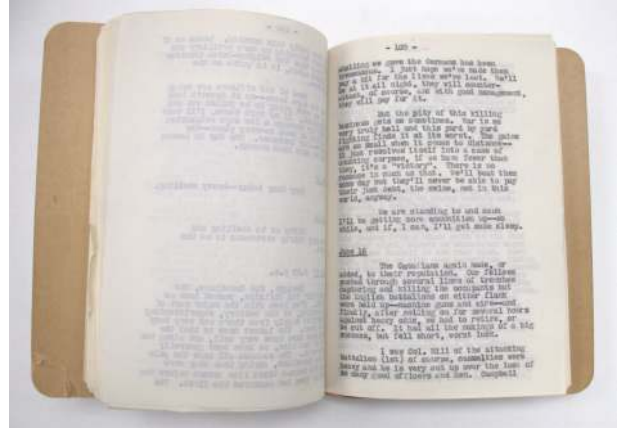


Personnel of the Canadian Military Headquarters Historical Section, with LCol C. P. Stacey in the centre (Library and Archives Canada).

The Mysterious Artillery Journal

History can be extraordinary, and sometimes artifacts have amazing stories to tell. One of our museum volunteers found a 127-page journal belonging to an unidentified Canadian Artillery officer, documenting his wartime experiences from August 1914 to November 1915. The journal is old, with yellowing paper, likely transcribed with a typewriter in the 1950s or 1960s. Based on the notes included, past museum personnel had difficulty identifying the author and authenticating the document. The name of the author is noticeably missing from the manuscript.

The journal includes facts that help to narrow the identity of the author. I read each page and noted facts about the young officer. The officer came from the 4th Battery, CFA, Non-Permanent Active Militia out of Hamilton, Ontario. He volunteered for the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Toronto. He left with the first Contingent and served with the 3rd Field Artillery Brigade in France. He mentioned dating a young woman named Verse.



The 26-year-old junior officer was enthusiastic, intelligent, and a good writer and storyteller. He spoke of daily routines, the excitement of battle, the eagerness to fight the Germans, and the painful certainties of trench warfare. He lost his share of friends at the front and adapted to the landscape. One of his tasks was reviewing outgoing letters and censoring content, yet in his journal, he painted a vivid and dark picture of the frontlines during WW1. In one passage, he wrote, "War is so very truly hell and this yard by yard fighting ... just resolves itself into a case of counting corpses. ... There is no romance in such as that," (page 103). He transformed from a young, naive, jingoistic reservist who trained during the summers at Petawawa, Ontario, to a coolheaded and self-composed battlefield-hardened officer.

On page 75, he said he received a gift from his cousin, Alice Crerar, which helps to identify the mystery soldier. With a bit of research, the girlfriend, Verse, in the journal was Verschoyle Cronyn from Toronto, who married then Captain D. G. Harry Crerar on 14 January 1916. In *A Thoroughly Canadian General* by Paul Douglas Dickson, the author wrote that Crerar kept a journal from August 1914 to November 1915. Dickson notes that *Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Crerar Papers, Volume 15*, contains the WW1 journal. All of the information matches, except we have an edited and shortened version with omitted names.



Based on the details above, I can confirm the author as General H. D. G. Crerar. General Crerar was a junior officer in the Canadian Artillery during WW1. He fought in the trenches at the Second Battle of Ypres, Vimy Ridge, Amiens, and the Last Hundred Days. During WW2, he commanded the First Canadian Army, leading the Canadians during the Normandy Campaign, the Rhineland Offensive, in Holland and Germany, and concluding with victory in Europe. He helped shape and define the Canadian Army during WW2.

Crerar did not write an autobiography, nor did he want his papers published. After he died, many of his letters and correspondence did not survive. Did General Crerar have this journal prepared possibly to publish? It is impossible to say at this time. However, someone went through the trouble of transcribing, editing, and shortening his original journal. We also have no record of this journal in our database and no documentation that it belonged to General Crerar. Unquestionably, the journal is a fascinating first-hand account of trench warfare from one of the greatest Canadian Generals. It helps redefine our understanding of the past, and we are thrilled that it survived.

By Andrew Oakden

Harry Venne's Airborne Gunner Uniform

The RCA Museum has one Airborne Gunner WW2-era uniform with the 6th British Airborne Division (Pegasus) patch, the Royal Artillery patch, the Canada patch, the Canadian Parachute Wings patch, and an artillery signalers patch. The image on the right shows an olive drab battle dress blouse with two pleated breast pockets, including ribbons; 1939-1945 Star, France and Germany Star, Defence Medal, and Canadian Volunteer Service Medal. After some research, I learned that Harry Venne donated this uniform and wore it during WW2. Additionally, L/Bdr Venne was a member of the 2 Forward Observation Unit (2 FOU), part of the 6th British Airborne Division.



In July 1942, Canada went Airborne with the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion in non-artillery roles. In August 1944, Canada went Airborne in artillery roles with 1, 2 & 3 FOU, part of the British Airborne Divisions. Their role was to direct the fire of ground force artillery and assist with counter-mortar operations against German mortar positions. Canada supplied artillery officers, signallers, and techs, to 1, 2 and 3 FOU. All three units saw significant action during the latter stages of WW2.

On 1 August 1944, Canada and Britain raised 2 FOU with Gunners from both nations. They trained at the Salisbury Plains in the fall of 1944, including parachute training for those without their Parachute Wings. They first saw action with the 6th British Airborne Division during the Battle of the Bulge (the Ardennes Counteroffensive) in Belgium from December 1944 to January 1945. 2 FOU employed counter-mortar operations to silence the German mortar fire which proved instrumental in stopping the German advance. On 24 March 1945, 2 FOU participated in the airborne assault across the River Rhine (Operation Varsity), dropped miles ahead of commandos and other assault troops. 2 FOU directed the fire of divisional artillery on nearby enemy units, including mortar batteries. In May 1945, in Wismar, Germany, they helped the Allied Forces secure control of the region, accept the surrender of the German troops, and halt the advance of the Russian Army. They returned to England in June 1945 and to Canada in July 1945.

Only 46 Canadians belonged to 2 FOU. They wore the 6th Divisional patch, the Canadian Parachute Wings, the Glider Troop patch, a trades badge, and service stripes. They also wore the Royal Artillery patch and the Canada patch. Our museum battle dress artifact has all these patches in the correct location, minus the L/Bdr chevrons - it is L/Bdr Venne's 2 FOU uniform, circa 1944-1945. We also found a photo of Harry Venne dated May 1945. On the right is Harry Venne in uniform with all the appropriate patches worn by 2 FOU.

The Airborne Gunners of 2 FOU volunteered to be dropped in enemy territory and then call for artillery fire on enemy targets. Only a small number of Canadian Gunners participated as Airborne Gunners during WW2, making this particular uniform extremely rare. We are pleased to share this story on 2 FOU and L/Bdr Venne's Airborne Gunner uniform.



By Andrew Oakden

The Officers and Men of A Battery (Part 2)

About half of the original contingent of A Battery came from the Kingston Field Battery. It started as the Volunteer Militia Field Battery of Artillery in 1856. The militia renamed it the Kingston Field Battery in 1894, then the 32nd Battery, CFA in 1920, which changed names again in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1954, they joined with the 60th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RCA. A significant portion came from the Toronto Field Battery. There had been batteries of artillery in the Toronto region during the War of 1812. They established the Volunteer Incorporated Artillery Company in 1813, which continued into the Rebellion of 1837-1838. With the Militia Act of 1855, the name changed to the Toronto Field Battery. In 1895, they switched to the 9th Field Battery. The 11th Field Regiment of Guelph also provided several new gunners. In 1857, pre-existing military units became the 1st Wellington Battalion. In 1866, the Guelph Garrison Battery became part of No. 1. Company of the 30th Wellington Battalion. In 1871, it became independent and renamed the Wellington Field Battery.

Many of the early gunners in A Battery would go on to have distinguished careers. The first Adjutant, Captain William Henry Cotton, would be the Militia's Inspector-General from 1912 to 1914. Gunner Henry Walters was one of the first to join A Battery and became a professor at Morrin College in Quebec. Another original member of A Battery was Josiah G. Holmes, who later founded C Battery in British Columbia. He went on to have a notable and distinguished military career. Also, among the early A Battery Gunners was Major D. T. Irwin, who provided leadership and training at the school. Irwin would succeed French and become the commanding officer of A Battery in 1873.

Samuel B. Steele was the only original non-officer recruit that became a Great Gunner. Sam Steele was born in Ontario in 1849 and enlisted in the Simcoe Militia, joined the Wolseley expedition, and then enlisted in A Battery in 1871. He was a physically fit, husky, six-footer and quick to master gunnery science. In 1873, Steele left A Battery and joined the NWMP as the third man to enlist. He participated in the Northwest Rebellion and organized a mounted force called the Steele Scouts under Major-General Strange. He gained the title "Smooth Bore Steele" from his drilling days on the 9 Pounder Smooth Bore at A Battery. He led the Yukon detachment during the Klondike Gold Rush and commanded the Strathcona's Horse during the Boer War. The RCA Museum has the original Nominal Role of A Battery. Sam Steele and his brother, Richard, signed with A Battery on 3 November 1871.



Canadian Militia with 9 Pounder RML, 1890s.



A photo of Colonel D. T. Irwin.



A photo of MGen Sir S. B. Steele.

The first soldier to sign the A Battery Nominal Role was Sergeant-Major John Mortimer on 25 October 1871. John Mortimer went on to be the chief assistant instructor and Sergeant Major at A Battery. He came from Shoeburyness, England and was the first British instructor of Armstrong guns. After 22 years of service with the British Royal Artillery followed by compulsory retirement, he immigrated to Canada and enlisted in the Red River Force, then enrolling in A Battery. Many of the 37 ex-British soldiers had completed their maximum 22 years of service before enlisting with the active Canadian militia. A Battery had many first-class instructors, such as John Mortimer. He gained his experience in the British Army and then passed this experience to A Battery's active militia. The recruits would take this knowledge back to militia units across Canada. The schools of gunnery provided the framework for men such as John Mortimer to pass on his wealth of British military experience to Canadian Gunners. Mortimer certainly deserves an honourable mention.

It took roughly three months for both A and B Batteries to get up to strength. In March 1872, Kingston had one Captain, three Lieutenants, one assistant Surgeon, seven Sergeants, four Corporals, four Bombardiers, three Trumpeters, and 110 Gunners quartered in the "Tete-du-Pont" Barracks, for a total of 133 officers and men, not including Lt-Col French. All the officers and men belonged to various militia corps and were attached to A Battery for instruction or education. They gave instruction based on the rank in which they joined from their batteries. They trained gunners to complete all the required duties within their allotted positions. Of note, the Toronto detachment generally gets lost in the discussion about A and B Batteries. A Battery also provided a party to Toronto. These soldiers were permanent and full-time soldiers in Toronto. The initial force included 1 Lieutenant, 1 Sergeant, 1 Corporal, 1 Bombardier, 1 Trumpeter, and twenty Gunners.

A Battery progressed quickly due to the strong leadership and the high quality of the officers and men. From a report dated 10 January 1872, Lt-Col French wrote on A and B Batteries, "from what I have seen; I feel assured that their formation marks a distinct era in the history of the Canadian Artillery." He went on to state that each officer or gunner through training can "learn his duties in a thorough manner, by joining for a long or short period, and at whatever time of year may be most convenient for him." He reported that the conduct of his men was generally exemplary. In 1874, non-commissioned ranks started to receive longer set periods of service with A Battery, for up to 3-years of service, with possible renewals of service. As time went by, they added more permanent staff at A Battery.



A 1871 RCA uniform with Coat of Arms.



A photo of A Battery with Winter Carriage in Kingston, 1887.

In 1871, the Canadians wore almost the same uniform as the departed British Royal Artillery. One exception was that the Canadians removed the word **UBIQUE** from their Coat of Arms. **UBIQUE** was not worn on the Arms of Canadian Gunners in 1871 because they had not earned the right to wear it. The militia displayed Arms following successive honours and distinctions bestowed upon them first by King William IV in 1832. Batteries of artillery raised in the Province of Canada in 1855 and A and B Batteries in 1871 wore the British Arms, except the word **CANADA** replaced the battle honours **UBIQUE**. In 1925, King George V, to recognize and honour the Canadian Artillery's substantial contribution during WW1, granted usage of the battle honours **UBIQUE**. While becoming more ubiquitous, the Canadian Artillery added the motto **UBIQUE** to their Arms in 1926.



A photo of the Canadian Field Artillery using a captured German howitzer at Vimy Ridge, 1917.



A photo of A Battery, RCHA, in Renfrew, Ontario, dated 3 June 1907.

The Canadian militia designed A Battery based on British Artillery principles and expectations, and it quickly took shape. The school's primary purpose was to train the officers and men and then transfer the skillset to active militia units across Canada. The officers and men of A Battery were seasoned active militia personnel from across Ontario. At least 25% had experience in the British Royal Artillery. Many undoubtedly led fascinating and remarkable lives. Originally, gunners signed up for a year of service, and some stayed for many years. What is more, Canadian Gunners earned the right to wear **UBIQUE** through their participation and sacrifice in WW1, and since then, they have worn the motto with pride. The formation of A and B Batteries and the recruitment, instruction, and return of officers and men to their original units made Canada's Artillery ubiquitous.

By Andrew Oakden

DONATE

Thank you for your support!

I would like to support The RCA Museum with a monetary donation of:

☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$500 ☐ Other: _____

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City/Province: _____

All donations are promptly processed and a tax receipt provided.

Postal Code: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Payment Method:

Please send your donation by cheque payable to *The RCA Museum* – Box 5000 Station Main, Shilo, Manitoba R0K 2A0, Canada.

Your donation is important!

All monetary donations are appreciated and will be recognized in The RCA Annual budget.

Please check the following that apply:

1. I consent to my name being published on the RCA website.

☐ Yes ☐ No, I wish to remain anonymous.

2. I consent to be on The RCA Museum mailing list and receive the Quarterly Newsletter (Barrage).

☐ Yes ☐ No, I do not consent.

Contact Us

Pour nous joindre

Telephone : (204) 765-3000 Ext. 3570
Fax: (204) 765-5289
Email: rcamuseum@forces.gc.ca
Website: rcamuseum.com
Facebook: RCA Museum

**The Royal Canadian Artillery
Museum (The RCA Museum)**
Building N-118
CFB Shilo
P.O. 5000, Station Main
Shilo, Manitoba R0K 2A0

**Musée de l'Artillerie royale
canadienne**
(Musée de l' ARC)
Bâtiment N-118
BFC Shilo
C.P. 5000, succursale Main
Shilo (Manitoba) R0K 2A0

Telephone : (204) 765-3000 poste 3570
Facsimile : (204) 765-5289
Courriel : rcamuseum@forces.gc.ca
Site Web : rcamuseum.com
Facebook: RCA Museum

Director/Directeur
Senior Curator
Assistant Curator/Conservatrice adjointe
Collections Manager/Gestionnaire des collections
Front Desk/Reception

Andrew Oakden
Jonathan Ferguson
Dayna Barscello
Clive Prothero-Brooks
Anita Michelsen

Ext/poste 3763
Ext/poste 3531
Ext/poste 3577
Ext/poste 3076
Ext/poste 3570