

BARRAGE

The RCA Museum News

THE RCA MUSEUM
CANADA'S NATIONAL ARTILLERY MUSEUM



October 2023



Vehicle Display



In September 2023, we opened our WW2 Vehicle Display. Military vehicles provided firepower, logistical support, mobility, and protection for the Canadian Army, enhancing their effectiveness during the Second World War. Canada produced more than 800,000 vehicles for the war effort, with approximately 20% going to the Canadian Army and the remainder to other Allied nations. This exhibit includes military vehicles used by Canadians during the Second World War.

The Canadian Army, including the Artillery, used Canadian Military Pattern (CMP) vehicles, such as the 15cwt Armoured Truck and the 15cwt Cargo Truck, to transport troops, equipment, and supplies to the front lines during WW2.

Armoured vehicles such as the Dingo MK2, Ford Lynx MK2, and Staghound protected soldiers during reconnaissance missions from small arms fire and shrapnel. Additionally, the Stuart Tank saw extensive service with armour units, scouting enemy positions, identifying potential threats, and relaying critical information to headquarters. Armoured vehicles saw action in various theatres of war, including the Italian Campaign and Northwest Europe.

Tanks such as the Stuart and Grizzly provided crucial firepower and protection for Canadian troops. Self-propelled guns, like the Sexton and the Priest, allowed the Canadian Artillery to adjust their location rapidly, engage enemy targets, and respond to changing battlefield conditions.

The vehicles on display are part of the Gregg Collection. We are proud to showcase this collection, which has great symbolic value, representing the bravery, commitment, and sacrifice of the Canadian Forces.

Gerald R. Brown's Shilo Social History Scrapbooks

In 2017, the RCA Museum received four 3" binders full of photos, correspondence, and newspaper clippings, some dating back to the 1940s. Gerald R. Brown, retired librarian and former teacher, meticulously put together and donated this personal collection known as the "Shilo Social History Scrapbooks."

Born in Rossgburn, Manitoba and living in Winnipeg, Mr. Brown's resume is impressive, highlighting his work as a mentor, graduate student, historian, volunteer, and choir director. He taught in rural communities for about a decade, notably in CFB Shilo, from 1959 to 1965. While in Camp Shilo, he taught middle years at Princess Elizabeth School and Greenwood School (formerly part of O'Kelly School), and was a key player in establishing Greenwood School's first library.

Mr. Brown developed meaningful relationships with his colleagues and students while working on the military base. He kept in touch with many of them, collecting mementos from their lives. He organized his scrapbooks alphabetically, dedicating a few pages to each person who contributed to this project by adding their keepsakes. The albums offer an intimate glimpse into the lives of Mr. Brown's kindred, from their wedding photo and baby announcements to their family vacation pictures and social events souvenirs, and in some cases, their obituaries.

The Shilo scrapbooks also feature many old class photos of Camp Shilo schools from as far back as the 1950s. After so many years, it is easy to forget the names of students and teachers featured in the pictures. Determined to identify the nameless faces, Mr. Brown enlisted the help of an online community affectionately named "ShiloBrats." ShiloBrats provides a space to share memories and connect with long-lost peers, no matter which part of the world they find themselves in now. The community also organizes periodical in-person reunions for its members, a few of which Mr. Brown attended in the 2000s. During the April 2017 ShiloBrats reunion, held in Winnipeg, the attendees could view the scrapbooks, pouring over fond memories of their time in Camp Shilo.

These social history scrapbooks reflect Mr. Brown's passion for human connection. While reading through the various correspondence inside, it is easy to see how many lives the octogenarian has touched. Equally important, this collection of memories offers us insight into the resilient character of Camp Shilo, which drew its strength from its sense of tight-knit community. Over half a century later, the base remains strong as a steadfast collective of support and kinship.



Mr. Gerald Brown and his Grade 6 Students from Princess Elizabeth School, early 1960s.



Back row: Bill Gillispie, Diane Gray, Leonard Berquist, Ron Flamand, Jim Davis, Beryletta Samel, Bill Brown, Ches Sheppard, Thereas Poirier, Allan Russell, Don Jordan
Front row: Faye Helgason, Mr. Brown, Lynn Davis, Edith Walker

ShiloBrats Teacher & Student Reunion, 2005.

By Venessa Léger

The Story of Captain G. R. E. Nicholls

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In July 2023, the RCA Museum received an excellent collection from Dr. Janice Nicholls Goerzen, a long-time museum patron. Janice generously donated a fascinating array of over a hundred artifacts that provide a unique glimpse into the life and service of her father, Captain George Robert Edmond Nicholls (1910 - 1987). Captain Nicholls, a WW2 and Korean War veteran, served with the RCA for thirty years, including in Shilo during the 1940s and 1950s. As the child of a serving soldier, Janice and her siblings grew up in Shilo, and many of the artifacts have a Shilo connection.

In 1933, George Nicholls joined C Battery, RCHA, in Winnipeg, Manitoba. When war broke out, Sergeant Nicholls arrived in Britain with the RCHA Brigade, renamed 1st Field Regiment, RCA, in December 1939. Nicholls' WW2 overseas service was extensive, with deployments to Britain, France, and Germany. After WW2, the Canadian Forces posted him to the 2nd Field Regiment for occupation duties in Germany, and he returned to Canada in June 1946. He spent nearly seven years in Europe, much longer than most Canadian soldiers.

A notable accomplishment, WO2 Nicholls, was one of the first Canadian Gunners to land in France during WW2. In May 1940, Germany launched a massive offensive against France, catching the Allies off guard. On 12 June 1940, the 1st Field Regiment, composed of 311 personnel, including WO2 Nicholls, embarked for France as part of the 2nd British Expeditionary Force.



Gunner Nicholls at Camp Hughes, 1933.



WO Nicholls, 1954.

During the sea voyage, WO2 Nicholls led a 40-man detachment. He wrote, **“the loudspeaker aboard on three occasions announced that a ship had been sunk in our convoy by enemy action. It sure upset my men who were down in the hold and scared stiff... I said, ‘I don’t know what you guys are afraid of, but I just want you to know that any boat I ever get on just can’t sink.’”** The encouragement did the trick and within 30 minutes the men were on deck talking. They landed at Brest, France 13 June - just as the German Army entered an undefended Paris.

Effectively, France had fallen to the German Army, and on 15 June, British Headquarters ordered the 2nd British Expeditionary Force with the Canadians to return to England. In addition, Headquarters ordered the Canadians to destroy and abandon their newly acquired 25 Pounder Guns. The Commanding Officer, 1st Field Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. Roberts, refused and returned to Plymouth, England, with their 24 guns intact on 18 June. The 1st Field Regiment was the only Allied unit to withdraw from France while retaining their guns.

From 1946 to 1958, the CF stationed WO Nicholls primarily at Camp Shilo with his family. After WW2, Nicholls moved to Shilo as an instructor with the Royal Canadian School of Artillery (RCSA). In 1950, he was the RSM at the RCSA. Starting in 1953, he was the RSM with 3 RCHA, including a post-armistice deployment to Korea from April to December 1954. In August 1955, he was commissioned as Captain, and then in 1956, the first Chief Instructor for the Depot Battery in Shilo until 1958.

After WW2, Shilo was a training base and home to many units, including the 1st Field Regiment, RCHA, that trained airborne, field, medium, and anti-tank batteries. Shilo was also home to the Royal Canadian School of Artillery (RCSA), teaching field, medium and anti-tank Gunners. Shilo had other units for electrical and mechanical, engineering, hospital and dental, military police, and supply.



On the left, WO Nicholls in Korea, 1954.

Post-WW2, Shilo was an army town with no municipal authority, run exclusively by the military. Persons living on base were either soldiers, dependents, or civilian employees. The population varied yearly, with three to five thousand inhabitants. The camp was relatively isolated, especially in winter, yet had a full complement of stores and excellent recreational facilities.

By the early 1950s, Shilo was expanding with a permanent married-quarters residential area. There were several messes on the base, canteens, men's and ladies' social clubs, and many recreational clubs, including badminton, curling, golf, and tennis. Other sports included baseball, basketball, hockey, soccer, swimming, and rifle shooting. Additionally, the base had many organized and supervised children's activities, including Boy Scouts and Girl Guides.

In 1958, Captain Nicholls moved the family to Lethbridge, Alberta. He was the Commander of the Instructional Staff, Headquarters, Western Command, No. 10 Personnel Depot. He retired from the Canadian Forces in 1963 and died in 1987.



Photo of WO Nicholls in Shilo, 1946.

Janice saved many of her father's military artifacts, and our museum will display some of them in the Manitoba Gallery. The collection has artifacts from the 1930s, including bits, spurs, and stirrups for horses from C Battery. Gunners relied on horses to pull the guns until they had trucks in WW2. Other early artifacts include photos of C Battery and a hockey team championship photo from 1936-37.

The collection includes WW2 binoculars, buttons, cap badges, currency, manuals, patches, and photographs. There are unique artifacts, including a 1940s Battery Fund Box or lockbox made in England. Artillery batteries had these lockboxes to store non-public funds for service members. The collection includes many photos taken during WW2 and in Korea during his deployments, a pace stick from the 1940s and a swagger stick from the 1950s.



C Battery Hockey Team, Winnipeg, 1936-37.



Runners-Up, Curling Team, Shilo, 1958.

Janice donated many artifacts with a Shilo connection, including base brochures from the 1940s and 1950s. Our museum did not have any Shilo pamphlets from the 1940s. Other Shilo-related artifacts include buttons, medals, newspapers, sports photos, sweater patches, and trophies.

The collection had Gunner-related items, such as artillery board templates, gun manuals, mortar rounds, and uniform components, such as battle dress pants, belts, coveralls, and neckties. Janice included an 1862 Snider-Enfield Rifle, Mark 1. The Canadian Militia issued this model to troops from the 1860s to 1901, notably during the Fenian Raids (1866 to 1870) and the Red River Expedition (1870). At my request, Janice kindly added her father's military decorations, which we placed on display in the Manitoba Gallery.

Captain Nicholls spent thirty years in the Canadian Artillery, half his time in Winnipeg and Shilo, and seven years overseas during WW2 and the Korean War. His collection is extensive and significant in scope. We want to share his story in our museum, showcasing his time in Shilo and overseas deployments. We hope the display honourably reflects his service in the RCA and helps tell the story of the Canadian Gunner.

By Andrew Oakden

The History of the Poppy

Every Remembrance Day, people worldwide wear red poppies near their hearts, commemorating war veterans. Armistice Day ceremonies usually include reading John McCrae's world-famous poem, "In Flanders Fields." Often less known is how the red flower became a universal symbol of remembrance for soldiers. McCrae's poem certainly was the catalyst, but the efforts of two humanitarian women popularized the poppy in many Commonwealth countries and the United States in the early 1920s.

During WW1, Lt Col John McCrae, a medical officer with the Royal Canadian Artillery, fought in the Second Battle of Ypres in Belgium. After burying a fellow soldier in May 1915, McCrae found the fields of Flanders filled with red poppies growing around the graves of the fallen. The landscape and grief led him to pen the poem "In Flanders Fields." His colleague, Maj Gen Sir Edward Morrison, encouraged McCrae to get his poetry published, and once he did, it became a sensation, eventually translated into multiple languages. Shortly before his death, McCrae gave a handwritten copy of his poem to Morrison, who made the note into a metal printing plate and sold the handwritten prints for charity. The RCA Museum has been home to this original printing plate since its opening in 1962.

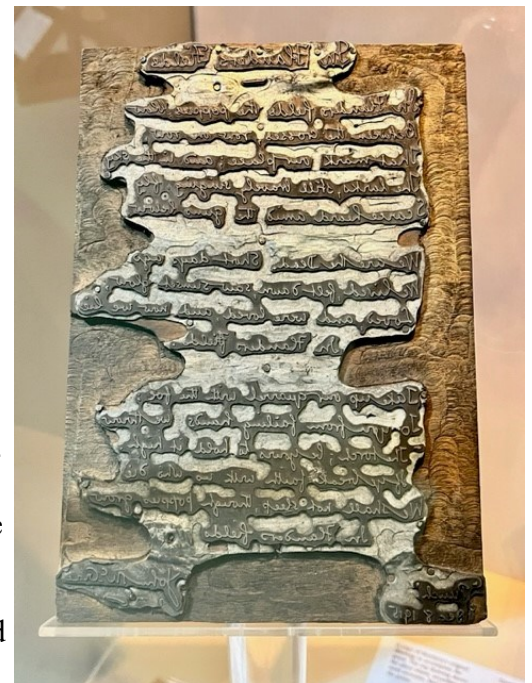


Lt Col John McCrae

McCrae's poem inspired two women to roll up their sleeves and help those in need during and after the war. One of them was Moina Michael, an American teacher who, in 1917 volunteered to assist at training headquarters for overseas YWCA workers in New York. After reading the physician's poem, Ms. Michael responded with a poem titled "We Shall Keep the Faith." In the last stanza, she vows to wear a red poppy in honour of those who served. After returning to teach disabled veterans post-war, she quickly realized the need for funds to assist the broken. She began raising money for the cause by selling red silk poppies. By 1921, The American Legion Auxiliary adopted the poppy as a symbol of remembrance for those who served in the war. Throughout her life, Ms. Michael, affectionately named "Poppy Lady," received many awards and was even featured on a U.S. commemorative stamp.

Meanwhile, French teacher Anna Guérin, also in America, fundraised for the impoverished by the war by selling red fabric poppies. Having also been moved by McCrae's poem, she began encouraging people to wear the flower in honour of veterans. Guérin brought her idea to England, and Earl Haig's British Legion Appeal Fund (now the British Legion) designated the poppy as a symbol of remembrance. Her initiative to adopt the poppy as an emblem rapidly spread into France, and other allied countries, Canada included. On July 6th, 1921, the Great War Veteran Association (known today as Royal Canadian Legion) adopted the red poppy as a commemorative symbol.

The origin story of the poppy is a testament to the extraordinary power of poetic words. John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" impacted these two women so much that they were motivated to commemorate fallen soldiers. Their dedication created a wave that spread from the U.S. to England, Canada, and other allied countries, establishing the poppy as the emblem of veterans worldwide. The RCA Museum is fortunate to display McCrae's immortalized words on the metal printing plate, representing the beginning of the poppy story.



In Flanders' Field Printing Plate

The 60 Pounder Gun

While the 60 pounder gun covers a lot of floor space at the RCA Museum, it needs to receive the attention it deserves. Years ago, our 60 pounder gun must have been placed on the range because there were small-arms strikes on the barrel. Today, visitors walk under the gun's barrel as they exit the Heritage Gallery and enter the First World War Gallery. The Canadian Militia used the 60 pounder extensively during the First World War and interwar.

The British developed the 60 pounder gun out of necessity. During the Boer War (1899 to 1902), the Boer's heavy field guns out-gunned the British artillery. While the British deployed the naval 4.7 inch gun with an ad-hoc carriage during the war, it proved largely ineffective against their adversary's technologically superior long-range artillery systems. From their battle experience, the British learned to increase their firepower to fight at ever-increasing distances.

Early in 1903, the Ordnance Committee in London approved portions of an Armstrong Co.-designed 60 pounder gun that could fire a heavy projectile, including gas, high explosive and shrapnel rounds, at least 10 kms. The Canadian Militia ordered twelve 60 pounders in late 1903 and started to receive them in 1908. The Canadian Militia used the gun with a limber, two ammunition wagons, ten gunners, eight drivers, and upwards of 18 horses. The 60 pounder gun was one of the first modern heavy guns with hydraulic recoil mechanisms allowing it to fire continuously without reaming.

During the First World War, Canada deployed twelve 60 pounders on the Western Front (six in the 1st Canadian Heavy Battery and six in the 2nd Canadian Heavy Battery). The gun proved its worth in counter-bombardments, including with gas shells from 10 kms to 15 kms in range. For example, during the bombardment phase of Vimy Ridge, Canadian Gunners fired the gun day and night for three weeks. The 60 pounder, with one thousand other guns, helped eliminate most of the German defences, making it possible for Canadian soldiers to take the ridge.

Twelve 60 pounder guns returned to Canada after the First World War. Of note, the 67th Brigade in North Russia operated three 60 pounders in 1918-19. The Canadian Militia used these guns throughout the Interwar Period, as shown in the photo. In 1939, Canada still had twelve 60 pounders in operation. For over thirty years (1908 to 1941), the 60 pounder remained in service, providing a long-range counter-bombardment function, then in a training role until 1944. The 4.5 inch howitzer and the 5.5 inch howitzer replaced the 60 pounder.



Photo of the 60 pounder in the RCA Museum.



By Andrew Oakden

RCA Museum History

The origins of the RCA Museum started well before its official opening in 1962. After the Second World War, senior officers in the Canadian Artillery wanted a centralized museum to honour the service of the over 200,000 Canadian Gunners that served in peace and war since 1855. However, it took roughly two decades to acquire the necessary approval to establish a Regimental Artillery Museum in Shilo, Manitoba.



Outside and inside the RCA Museum in 1965.

Since the 1940s, Shilo was primarily a training base, headquarters for the RCA, and home of the Royal Canadian School of Artillery (RCSA). In the 1950s, Shilo had three thousand permanent residents, including military personnel and their families. In addition, the RCSA, local messes, and base headquarters had already collected thousands of artifacts.

In museum archives, the first reference to the proposed "RCA Museum" or "Gunner Museum" came in a letter from the Director, Royal Canadian Artillery, Colonel G. P. Marriott, addressed to the Commandant, Royal Canadian School of Artillery, Colonel H. E. Brown, dated 10 February 1954. Colonel Marriott stated that the Vice Chief of the General Staff in Ottawa was "pressing for the development of a Gunner Museum at Shilo" and requested saving one of each piece of equipment for this purpose.



On the left, Colonel G. P. Marriott.



Colonel A. J. B. Bailey

In a letter dated 23 December 1954, Colonel A. J. B. Bailey, the Director of Artillery, Army Headquarters, Ottawa, wrote Colonel H. E. Brown stating that at the end of WW2, the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery established a significant memorial fund for Gunners that gave their lives during the Second World War. Colonel Bailey recommended using a portion of those funds annually to establish an "RCA Memorial Museum."

Colonel Brown, the RCSA Commandant, responded to the letter on 10 January 1955, stating he was in complete agreement, mentioning that he spent "considerable time... trying to get the museum into operation." He established a museum committee consisting of himself, Major Hoover, Major Balfour, and Major Roscoe and recommended using the RCA Memorial Fund for the project.



Colonel H. E. Brown

In June 1956, Colonel Brown requested allocation through Shilo Base Command of Building L1, the old RCA Officer's Mess, as a suitable location for a new centralized Artillery Museum. The Commander of Shilo Garrison, Colonel J. M. Houghton, approved the request but delayed any potential development of the RCA Museum until establishing a new mess. In 1961, Base Command changed and recommended a smaller building, a WW2 Roman Catholic Chapel, Building HP 18, as the first location for the RCA Museum. The first building was small, with approximately 1,000 square feet of display space.

The original staff of five were all military personnel. The first curator of the RCA Museum, Major M. S. M. Ferguson, kept a detailed record of the events. Major Ferguson wrote Captain J. I. Moldaver, Directorate of Manning, Army Headquarters in Ottawa and provided an update dated 17 July 1961. He mentioned developing a "Regimental Museum" in the old "RC Chapel on Engineer Road" and sorting and cataloguing artifacts for eventual display. He said the chapel was "much too small," yet they had a location to start building museum displays. They began by presenting fuzes, projectiles, and cartridges and arranged them chronologically.



Major M. S. M. Ferguson

The first RCA Memorial Fund contribution was \$300 for the 1961 calendar year. On 11 May 1961, Major Ferguson asked for additional funding of \$5,000 to cover the first five years of operation. On 10 July 1961, the RCA NPP Central Fund, approved by Colonel E. M. D. Leslie, Commandant of the RCSA and President of the Central Fund Committee, contributed \$2,000 towards developing the RCA Museum, including \$1,500 for display cases and \$500 for miscellaneous items, with all funds coming from the original WW2 Memorial Fund.

Colonel E. G. Brooks, Director of Artillery, in a letter to Curator Major Ferguson, dated 2 August 1961, confirmed that "the Senior Serving Gunner and D Arty agreed to a proposed organization for the RCA Museum." The original intent of the museum was to display the history of the RCA and the military history of Canada. In 1961, in a general letter, Colonel E. G. Brooks stated, "As a Regimental institution, the principal function of the museum will be to provide a



Colonel E. M. D. Leslie

tangible record of the development and achievements of the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery. However, it is not intended to limit the range of interest, and we propose to cover all aspects of military history." Many of the original documents stress the importance of embracing "all aspects of military history" while emphasizing the history of the RCA.

In a letter dated 20 July 1961, from Colonel E. G. Brooks, Director of Artillery, to Colonel E. M. D. Leslie, the Commandant RCSA, mentioned headquarters files "show no record of authority for the establishment of the RCA Museum at Shilo." Major Ferguson responded to the letter on 28 July 1961 and confirmed that they "could not locate an authority for the Museum in the RCSA files" and mentioned actioning this item up the chain of command. In a request to Army Headquarters, Ottawa, dated 8 September 1961, Colonel Leslie asked for approval to continue operations of the "RCA Museum," with Major Ferguson as the Curator.



Colonel E. G. Brooks

On 26 January 1962, the Colonel Commandant of the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery, Brigadier P.A.S. Todd, officially opened the museum to the public but not without debate and controversy over the title of the museum. On 11 January 1962, Army Headquarters in Ottawa approved the establishment of "The Central Museum of the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery," abbreviated "RCA Museum." However, in the original constitution documents from 1962, the official title was "Royal Canadian Artillery Museum," with the abbreviated name "RCA Museum."



Brig P. A. S. Todd, Colonel Commandant, opening the RCA Museum on 26 January 1962.

In 1962, only some officers agreed on the museum's full title. During the 1980s and 1990s, the museum had signage listing the full name as "The Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery Museum" and the abbreviated "RCA Museum." In the early 2000s, staff added: "Canada's National Artillery Museum." The short title "RCA Museum" has never changed over the past eighty years.

Initially, senior officers planned to move the RCA Museum to a more significant urban centre, in Kingston, Ontario. In 1964, the curator at the Museum, Captain F. R. McCall, wrote in an annual report, "The museum should be located in Shilo until the work of collection and restoration of historical items is nearly complete. This should take five to ten years. Kingston has been suggested as a suitable location."

The first location, the WW2 Roman Catholic Chapel, Building HP 18, hosted the RCA Museum from 1961 to 1964. In 1964, staff moved the collection to Building C2, a small WW2 H-Hut, which provided more room for growth with approximately 2,000 square feet of display space. The RCA Museum stayed at Building C2 from 1964 to 1980 before moving to a larger building, the old Officer's Mess, Building C1. The Officer's Mess was 9,500 square feet, with half for exhibit display.

In 1986, the museum moved once again to Buildings A12 (exhibit display) and A16 (office space). They acquired new artifacts, including the Gregg Collection, containing forty WW2 vehicles. In the late 1990s, base safety condemned the museum buildings due to old age, which justified a more prominent location. By 2000, the RCA Museum had 30,000 artifacts, including an extensive collection of artillery and WW2 vehicles.

Regimental Headquarters, RCA, managed the museum until 2001, then transferred oversight to civilian personnel, with a Museum Director in charge, in line with Canadian Forces Museum Policy. They also added a volunteer Board of Directors responsible for good governance and general oversight. In 2001, Base Command approved renovating the old 1 RCHA Gun Park, Building N118, which included 18,000 square feet of display area and 5,500 square feet of storage. Museum staff acquired non-heated storage sheds at the former GATES Target Shop Complex, and the fourth version of the RCA Museum opened in 2004. Base Command approved a sizeable, heated warehouse, Building M101, to store guns, vehicles, and artifacts beginning in 2009.

The RCA Museum did not just start in 1962. Instead, since the end of WW2, senior leadership within the RCA pushed hard to establish a centralized Regimental Museum in Shilo. Officers from the RCSA collected thousands of artifacts, acquired the necessary approval, funding, and staffing, and opened the first RCA Museum in 1962. Since then, museum personnel moved the museum four times and built one of the largest collections of Canadian military artifacts, including the most extensive collection of artillery systems and WW2 vehicles in Canada. The RCA Museum continues to develop, displaying Canada's military history and telling the ubiquitous story of the Canadian Gunner.



The RCA Museum in 1993.



The RCA Museum in 2023.

By Andrew Oakden

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