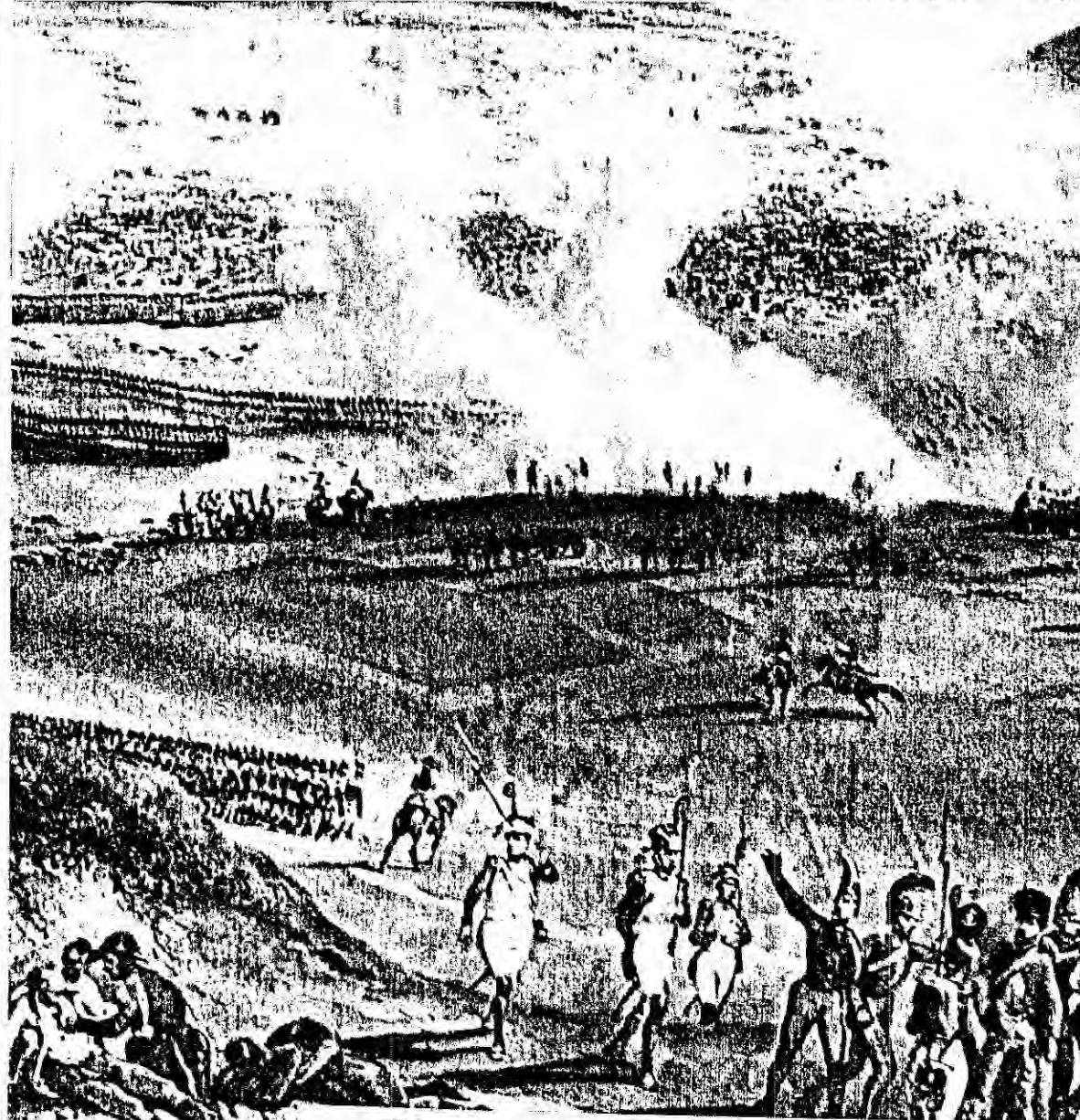



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The GOUNDSHEET



Souvenir Issue



TOAST TO THE REGIMENT MELFA 1987:

FOREWORD:


There appears to be a rebirth, renewal or new interest in Canadian History or, perhaps more accurately, an awakening interest in our heritage. This is evidenced by the increasing number of publications and movie and video presentations throughout the land.

This interest is of much pride for us in THE REGIMENTAL FAMILY OF THE ROYAL WESTMINSTER REGIMENT.

Many of us are aware of our true beginnings here in the old territory of New Caledonia, later to be the Crown Colony of British Columbia and now as we know it today Beautiful B.C. How many of us know that Derby (on the site of Old Fort Langley) was the original Capital site selected? Do we know that Queensborough, for a short spell, was actually designated as such? It took a proclamation by Queen Victoria to establish what we now recognize as New Westminster, B.C. The Royal City. It has been mooted that some political chicanery was responsible for the relocation to Victoria, B.C. on the union of Vancouver's Island and Crown Colony of British Columbia.

Central to all this is the story of origin of Our Regimental Family. The Royal Engineers who were sent, some 130 strong to secure our boundaries and safety. In 1863 since dissolution of that worthy band there has been a military presence in New Westminster. From Sapperton to 6th St. Armouries, they are with us today. The inimitable Ian Douglas used his great historical knowledge and his equally magnificent speaking voice to present one of the more memorable Toasts To The Regiment we have heard to date. Regrettably it is impossible to capture the rich timbre and theatrical presentation Ian actually made but he has graciously agreed to allow the text of his toast to be printed herein. Ian gives great thanks to Geo Hughes and other Royal City sources in his preparation. Ian's toast is presented in a narrative - episodic manner and sheds great insight into our beginnings and maturation. The Association is privileged to offer this unabridged text of Ian's 1987 Toast To the Regiment.

R.H.



LT. JOSEPH BURR, A notable member of THE WESTMINSTER RIFLES of the 1870 - 1880's, was anxious to get down to "The Shed" where our regimental ancestors drilled. So, he finished his supper and said, "Well, Martha, I'm off to The Shed". (This "Drill Shed" where Capt. Burr intended to escape the dishes was built for The New Westminster Volunteer Rifles, the Regimental progenitor, three years after they were formed that noteworthy year of 1863).

His wife, who was not so anxious, said "Oh, Joe! You were down there last night!"

"Well, Martha, there's a lot to do down there, and The Navy is coming up tomorrow for a shoot."

"Now Joseph Sharpshooter Burr! I do believe that you think more of those old Rifles and that ugly Shed than you do of me!"

"Ah, now Martha," said Joe.

Major Caskey, The Chilliwack Company of The 104th Regiment, was late from church - and he just lived up Westminster Avenue towards The Landing. But there had been a special church parade that day, partly because on that parade the officers had been presented with their swords.

"Take a look at it, Margaret; no toasting marshmallows with that one!"

"Oh", said his wife, "this thing is made of wood!"

"Yes", he said, "They are tokens until the real ones become available".

"Hurray!" said his wife; "I'll bet they're beating their swords into ploughshares at last! Just what we need for Chilliwack!"

But peace was not breaking out in The Fraser Valley. Canada had declared war on the Kaiser, and The 104th— now the 104th Fusiliers of Canada— was promptly called out to begin its vital and extraordinary task in "The Great War". Out of its ranks went immediately at least a company strength to each of

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the 7th and 29th battalions. More importantly, out of The 104th came the majority of officers and men who, within a year, formed the 47th and 131st Battalions.

Off they went on their great odyssey of training sites, and battlefields, and resting places: VALCARTIER, BRAMSHOTT; in England the 131st was broken up, going largely to The 47th, which was off to THE SOMME, not in time for that horrible July First, 1916 but in good time to make its name at THE REGINA TRENCH; on they went, adding ARRAS to their battle honors; then VIMY, THE PIMPLE, HILL 145, THE TRIANGLE, BREWEREY, LA CALOTTE, YPRES, PASSCHENDAELE, LENS, HILL 70, MERICOURT, AMIENS, FOUQUESCOURT, CHALLY, DROCOURT-QUEANT, CANAL DU NORD, BOURLON WOOD, DENAIN, MONT HOUY, VALENCIENNES, and WAVRE.

On November 28, 1917, L/CPL (ACTING CPL) PHILIP KONOWAL performed an act for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross. After the investiture in London in 1918 he met some 47th comrades on leave. He said he'd been to the palace and seen the king. He had pinned on the cross and then shaken his hand. "What did you do Phillip?" "I gave his hand a little squeeze." This ferocious fighter kept his VC for a long time in his pants pocket. He would approach a comrade, pull out the cross, and say, "Would you like to see my Victoria Cross?"

Up in the archives, Rm 209, there is a document written by a 47th officer while the battalion was at WAVRE, near Waterloo, waiting for shipment home. It was addressed to the adjutant of The 104th asking about the possibility of the 47th people, when they got home, of joining The 104th Association. Home for most of the unit was still the Fraser Valley, but there was a strong and nasty rumor going round camp that they were going to be sent back to Canada as a Western Ontario Battalion! There was a footnote: "The men are out getting drunk!"

When the men did get home to B.C. in 1919, times were hard. If you were broke in the army you tried your luck, finally, with the paymaster. Capt. T.S. Annandale was the very-long-serving paymaster, of The 47th. In the archives is "The Annandale Collection", which is comprised of correspondence between 47th men and two of their officers, Annandale and Capt. K.C. McGowan, a company commander. These two New Westminster men found that there were many old 47th having real trouble in getting food for the family table; so,

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they set up a fund with their own money to lend old comrades who had written for help.. This private DVA — a rare source of help in those years — was available until 1929.

It is worth examining Capt. McGowan's service tunic in Case #5 in The Museum. The ribbon of his Military Cross has TWO "bars" on it! It is believed that only one other Canadian soldier has won the MC three times.

Captain Fred Simpson, Westminster Regiment, was writing his regular news letter to the ANTELOPE, the quarterly of The Royal Warwickshire Regiment with which The Westminsters were affiliated. Capt. Fred (to command The Regiment ten years later) said, after his usual full account of the unit's training, "We are doing our best to maintain regimental training standards; we have a good cadre of officers and NCOs, but it is hard to sustain a militia battalion in the face of the indifference of the general public and, shamefully, of our own government!"

People like Fred Simpson should be remembered gratefully. Perhaps forty other names could be remembered of other men, all ranks, who kept the unit going in the "dirty thirties". When it was called out, a week before declaration of war, August, 1939, The Westminster Regiment, M.G., had a genuine military structure on which to build a battalion, quickly.

Late in August of that turbulent year LCol. Loat, The CO, received an order from NDHQ: all recruiting would cease at the end of September. The CO decided against indiscriminate recruiting to swell the parade state and hid the order under his blotter. The result was that by October the unit numbered 412, all ranks, no more, and stayed that way for some months. The limitation was very frustrating to many at the time, but eventually it was agreed that the restraint was a critical factor in producing in The Westminsters the best cadre of NCO's to be found in the Canadian militia.

In the spring of 1940 the second great ODYSSEY of The Westminsters began. Off to Dundurn, Sask.; then France fell; the Vickers were taken away; back then, humbly, to the HOTEL VANCOUVER! But soon, as a motor battalion, off to Camp Borden; then Sussex, N.B., waiting for a ship; observed the November 11 ceremony aboard The ANDES, HALIFAX; with U.S. Navy escort off to

ALDERSHOT, a week before PEARL HARBOR. Up and down that great, beautiful, unsinkable island, month after month, training, training, learning.

On a snowy March morning on a rigorous West Coast of Scotland chunk of rock and heather the chief instructor of a rigorous assault course ran his class through a stream and out along the loch for an hour or so, hard. It was their second day. At the first break they flopped down on the shore, and the Brit next to Art Miller groaned, and said to him, "The things we do for England! What's your unit?"

"The Westminster Regiment", said Art.

"Canada?"

"Yes, Canada," said Art (without puffing).

"OK", said the suffering Brit; "Carry on, CANADA!"

Then, suddenly, the great journey picked up pace again. Embarkation at LIVERPOOL: destination NORTH IRELAND. But somehow they missed Ireland intoirly and landed at ALGIERS! Then Phillipville; over then to NAPLES and SUNNY ITALY. And the litany of battlefields and resting places began; AFRAGOLA, MATERA, CRECCHIO, SALAROLA, TANK HILL, CHIAMATO PIANO, The SANGRO, AQUAFONDATA, VALLEROTONDA, The RAPIDO, INTERNATIONAL POST, PIGNATARA IN CAPUA, The LIRI VALLEY, a nod to CASSINO, THEN THE MELFA!

JOHN KEEFER MAHONY - unaware of his own greatness then, and as ever - was needing a cup of tea on May 25, and came back to his HQ looking for his batman. He found that courageous lad, crying. It developed that he had just been told that his brother had been killed the day before. "But I'll get your tea, sir," he said.

And on to CEPRANO, ROFI, The FOGLIA RIVER, TOMBA DE PESARO, BOBBY CLARKSVILLE, MISANO, BESSANICO RIDGE, MISANO RIDGE, CORIANO, SAN VITO, THE RUBICON, THE USO, MONTIONE, SAN PANCRAZIA, PIANGEPANE, The LAMONE RIVER, VILLANOVA, The NAVIGLIO, FOSSE MUNIO, out for Christmas dinner at RAVENNA; then back to The SENIO, CONVENTELLO, LAGO COMMACHIO, over to LEGHORN, and goodbye to Sunny Italy!

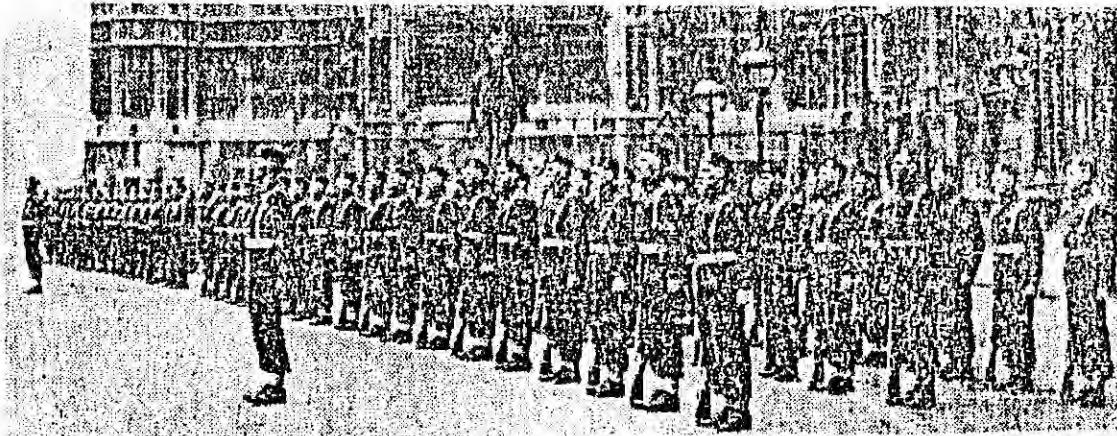
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"B'Jour, MARSELLES, The WALL", and "Hello, HOLLAND!"
NELMEGAN ISLAND, ARNHEM, ARNHEM AIRPORT, OTTERLOO, VOERTHUISEN,
PUTTEN, OUTHUISERMAEDEN, OOSTERWOLDE, WOLDENDORP, RODESCHOL,
TERMUNTEN, TERMUNTERZLIL, NORG, LEEK, ZELJN, VE DAY!

And so that great journey, the second great odyssey,
ended — almost: there was that long, peaceful convoy into
CZECHOSLOVAKIA, and that Honor Guard Mounting in OLD WESTMINSTER
— but no more battles or "resting places" but home!

All those years! Of preparation and doing! Coming up,
November 20, next year, the Regimental Birthday, the 125th!
From the days of "THE OLD QUEEN to our ELIZABETH II. As
infantrymen, artillerymen, VickersMachine gunners, and now
training as paratroopers. "The Queen of Battles" is growing
wings!

The document announcing last year's winning of The
Gazowski Trophy, awarded in competition for "The Best Militia
Unit of The Year", had pencilled on it be someone who knew this
was the second Westie winning — "This could be habit
forming!". In the knowledge that a good habit is just as hard
to break as any other, and observing the undiminished vitality
of the 1987 Wetsies, lets charge our glasses and drink the
health of THE ROYAL WESTMINSTER REGIMENT!



SPECIAL PARADE

SOMME
REGINA TRENCH
ARRAS
VIMY
THE PIMPLE
HILL 145
THE TRI,ANGLE
BREWEREY
LA CALOTTE
YPRES
PASSCHENDAELE
LENS
HILL 70
MERICOURT
AMIENS
FOUQUESCOURT
CHALLEY
DROCOURT-QUEANT
CANAL DU NORD
BOURLON WOOD
DENAIN
MONT HOUY
VALENCIENNES

ALGIERS
PHILLIPVILLE
NAPLES
AFRAGOLA
MATERA
CRECCHIO
SALAROLA
TANK HILL
CHIAMATO PIANO
SANGRO
AQUAFONDATA
VALLEROTONDA
THE RAPIDO
INTERNATIONAL POST
PIGNATARA IN CAPUA
LIRI VALLEY
NOD TO CASTONNO
MELFA
CEPRANO POFI
THE FOGLIA RIVER
TOMBA DE PESARO
BOBBY CLARKSVILLE
MISANO
BESSANICO RIDGE
MISANO RIDGE
CORIANO

SAN VITO
THE RUBICON
THE USO
MONTONE
SAN PANCRAZIA
PIANGEPANE
LAMONE RIVER
VILLANOVA
NAVIGLIO
FOSSE MUNIO RAVENNA
SENIO
CONVENTIELLO
LAGO COMMACHIO
LEGHORN
MERSEILLES
THE WALL
NELMEGAN ISLAND
ARNHEM
ARNHEM AIRPORT
OTTERLOO
VOERTHUISEN
PUTTEN
OUIHULSERMAIDEN
OOSTERWOLDE
WULDENDORP
RODESCHL
TERMINTEN
TERMUNTERZLJL
NORG
LEEK
ZELJN
VE DAY!