



The GROUND SHEET

THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF
THE WESTMINSTER REGIMENT ASSN.

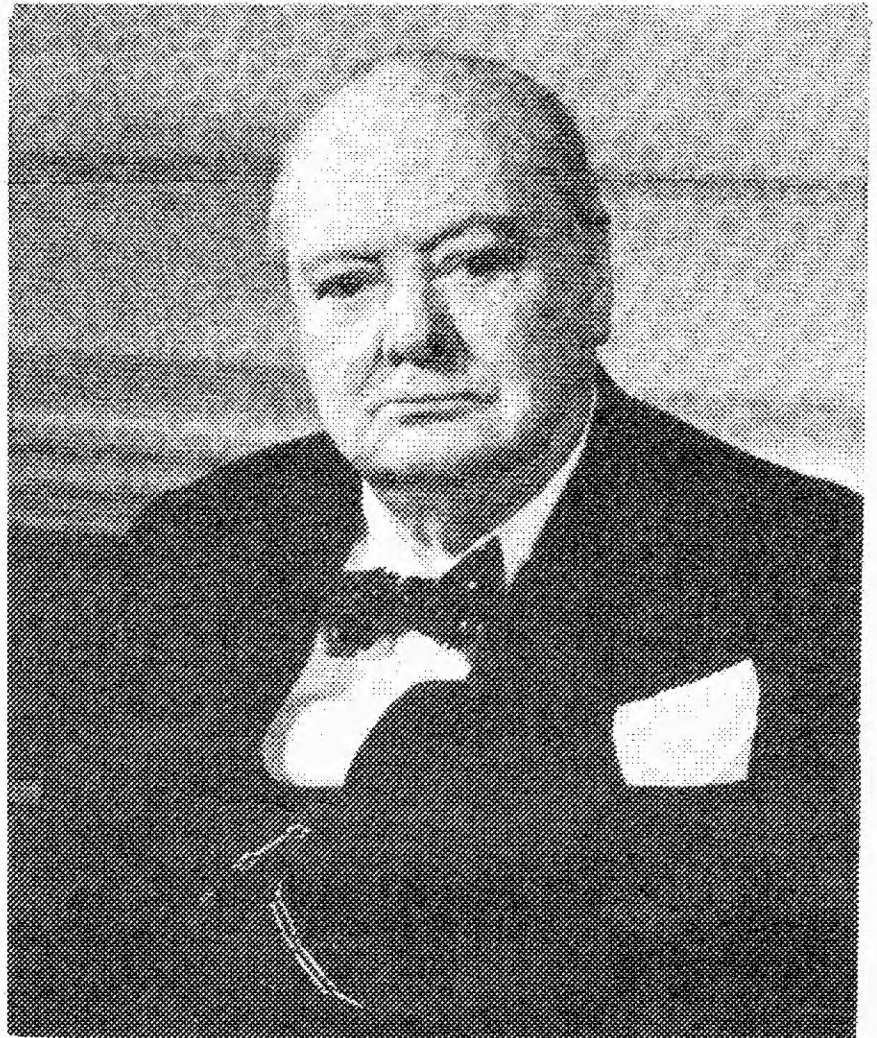
104th — 47th — 131st — The Westminster Regt.

Dedicated to the Ideals and Comradeship We Knew in Two World Wars

Vol. 14, No. 4.

Box 854, New Westminster, B.C.

January, 1965.



"Goodnight then : sleep,"
Your Ninety Years —
Our "Finest Hour."

THE GROUND SHEET

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Authorized as second class mail by the Post Office Department,
 Ottawa, and for payment of postage in cash.

NOW HEAR THIS :

We are somewhat concerned about the dearth of applications for YOUR copy of The Westminster War Diary. True, it was a long time in the making, but it has been accomplished and a mighty fine job it is too.

Over the years your constant inquiries have led us to believe that the book would be oversold right off the press. We have even discussed such a possibility as a second printing. It is time now for some reassessment along these lines. The fact is we do need your orders to see our way clear financially. There has been no attempt, nor will there be, from our level, to make a profit. A blank order form will appear in every issue of the Groundsheet for the coming year and we urge you all to return this with your cheques or money orders on receipt of same. Perhaps you do not know just what type of book this is and are dubious as to its quality. Read the following Review from a local Vancouver paper and perhaps it will stimulate your interest. — Ed.



New Westminsters: Civvies Moulded Into Pros in War — by Gus Sivertz

It did not take long for the men of The Westminster Regiment to learn the truth in the precepts of old General Karl von Clausewitz when he wrote that "... war demands resolution, firmness and staunchness; that war is the province of uncertainty and chance."

But these precepts were not in the minds of the young men of the Royal City and the Fraser Valley when they flocked to enlist after the regiment was mobilized on Sept. 2, 1939.

Nor until they had become trained soldiers and were first blooded in the fearful mountain terrain of Italy in winter did they feel the impact of the old German's words.

These civilians in uniform — like all Canadians at war — had learned something else by that time and I shall use the words of Lieut. Col. Jack Mahony, V.C., to illustrate it.

It was on the eve of the Melfa Crossing for which Mahony, then a major, won the Victoria Cross: "The men seemed to have no doubt about the outcome of the approaching battle. They seemed to have in good measure that quality so essential in winning battles — esprit de corps."

This corps spirit; this sense of unity and of comradeship was to run through the history of the "Westies" like a thread of silver.

Now the story of that fine regiment from New Westminster has finally been written and it is well worthwhile.

The book was a long time aborning but was finally produced through the efforts of a tireless group of its veterans. It is called *The Westminsters' War Diary* and the narration is by Major J. E. Oldfield.

But the little book is far more than just a war diary; it is a record of achievement and a fine narrative, replete with the names of the men and officers who forged themselves into a terrific fighting unit.

I like the way the story is told. It is entirely devoid of flag-waving heroics but is rich in describing the conduct of ordinary men under the strange and inexorable compulsion of war. Their conduct was extraordinarily good; the behavior of men with an intense pride in themselves, their comrades and in their regiment.

Their baptism of fire came in the awful defiles facing the monastery of Casimo which had been transformed into a most formidable fortress by German skill. In gorges and ravines that followed no sane pattern, but stretched out in all directions, the Westminsters spent every night on patrol duty. Travel or movement of any sort, indeed, was impossible in daylight for the enemy looked down their necks.

Patrol duty men may sound like not very tough soldiering but only the men who went through it can really assess its dangers and difficulties.

These difficult and often dangerous patrols were a prelude to a major action, the vital crossing of the Melfa River leading toward a break-through in the infamous German Gustav line.

The Westminsters' A Company was selected. It was their job to make a bridgehead on the enemy side of the river. The crossing was made with a minor loss in cas-

ualties, due, the author shows, to the meticulous attention to detail on the part of Major Mahony, A Coy commander.

Here was a young man who, to those who didn't serve under him, might appear to be an unlikely choice for so dangerous a mission.

There was no bluster or boasting about Mahony and he neither cursed, smoked or drank. But his officers and men had no misgiving whatever. They knew him to be tough, intelligent and utterly fearless—a good man to follow. The men knew also that tall, lean Lieut. Col. Gordon Corbould had implicit confidence in Mahony.

This confidence was well-placed and Major Oldfield's story of the Melfa River crossing is one of the best descriptions of a battle that we have read. It is vivid, individual and free of wearying reports of high-level actions not directly related to the battle.

It is filled instead with the conduct of young men cast in the amazing role of soldiers who apparently did not hate their enemy but were simply determined to defeat him.

On the Melfa River the Westminsters became a resource of fighting unit, and in all subsequent actions until the end of the war the regiment wrote a proud record.

The Westminsters' War Diary is a remarkably good book and would be splendid reading for the sons and daughters of the men whose names are on the nominal rolls of the unit.

THE SMOKER — By Bill Robson

We will be able to talk about the snow storm we had on the night of our Smoker for many a year because it was the start of a snowfall that was to become a record for this area. When the Smoker was over we had to brush nearly a foot of snow from the tops of our cars.

Those of us who went there early to help make the function function felt this was to be the night of our biggest meal, it just did not look like a night for the Smoker, it was our guess that we would have to eat all that food ourselves. We were wrong though, for shortly after our greeting tables were set up near the door in walked Al Pradin, the first of one hundred and forty-six guests, and all of them men who at one time or another had served the Regiment. One look outside was enough to convince us these men felt the way we did. Our Drill Hall was nicely set up. There was a little place for the bar and rows of tables on the floor, there was also an

area for the Band; beyond that was a stage on which we had a microphone, on either side were two loud-speakers and in the background two blackboards which were soon to be graced with the names of the winners.

For those of you who have not been to one of our Smokers this is what you find as soon as you enter the door: There is usually a table set up near the door on which are pencils and cards, one of these cards is for the door prize which you fill out with your name and address and place in a specially slotted box nearby, none of this costs anything to you except that you be there to fill it out. The other card is an oblong shape to just fit the breast pocket in your suit. This has your signature near the top and can be read by those not sure of the name. Our door prize was won this year by Bob Carter who said "It's Nice to have some Remedy at this time of the year." The last ticket is a small one, the same type you get at your local theatre. This is for your meal. These tickets get lost all the time but there is always plenty to eat. Most everyone has seconds. The part I like is that once inside you enter a world of friendly handshakes and greetings. This goes on for the whole evening. The beer tastes good and there are pickles, cheese and crackers on the tables any time you wish while the entertainment is on. We were entertained this year by The Westminster Regiment Band under the able direction of Bandmaster A. E. Morris. The choice of music was perfect and their playing excellent. We were pleased they were there to entertain us. Our band looked the part too, in their scarlet tunics and blue trousers with a red stripe down the side. Although the normal complement of the band is forty there were a few who could not make it on account of the deep snow. This however was no hindrance to their making real good music. In the interval between concerts we played a film, "The Fields of Sacrifice." This is a technicolor picture of the areas in which the two wars were fought showing the changes in the countryside since then, using very warlike sound effects. It was well enjoyed by all judging by the quiet as it was being shown. After the film our band played several more fine selections while we listened and quaffed our beer. Shortly it was announced there was clam chowder for everyone and we fell to with a will. It might have been the cold and snow outside that helped make the chowder that good but it sure was tasty. After the coffee we began the draw, the results of which you already know. Because of the response to our Remembrance Day note, we are

again listing the names of those who were at the Smoker. May you relive a moment or two here and there.

Al Pradine, C. A. Morrison, L. Prince, B. C. Parsons, M. S. Low, Fred Murray, W. A. Nannis, George Gibson, Peter Beckman, Jack Graham, E. A. Morris, N. A. Snaddon, Bob Black, John Tyler, E. F. Cavanaugh, Ted Bowyer, Danny Tait, Andy Storie, S. R. White, A. B. (Bun) Noble, K. Schiebler, Wally Cosman, C. Hartley, Henry Goertson, W. H. Fulton, A. L. Watts, Doug Glenn, Bill Johnson, E. R. McLean, B. C. Jones, Walter Hogg, David Auld, Jack Usher, B. I. Barton, Bob Reynolds, Bert Hoskins, W. N. Hutchinson, Colonel McKinnay, Cliff Rong, H. Passmore, Frank Sullivan, H. Drummond, A. A. Krieger, Ted Hammersley, L. C. Towel, Bill Redman, John Greener, R. Sculchorfe, George W. Wright, W. Sholz, Ken Redman, Peter Tonkulack, M. Crispin, Stan Moorhouse, Bob Carter, Walter Lyle, J. D. Van Horn, Walt Tyler, R. N. McGregor, Jack Hogarth, George Boucher, Pete Bailey, Everett Downing, Copper Newitt, Ray Pattendon, Bud Fraser, A. Munro, Curly Donald, P. W. Grover, Robert Cosman, Norm McAskill, Johnny Ford, Sam Martin, R. E. Anderson, E. W. Markle, R. Delisser, E. McInroch, Ed Shannon, R. C. Shannon, John Ratchford, F. E. Turpin, H. L. Jones, H. Kingsnorth, B. Roberge, Max Mathews, Lorne Lindsay, Maurice Fox, Kevin Fox, E. E. Anderson, R. Salisbury, Sid Burton, Ed Zimmer, E. Williams, Dick Armstrong, Ed Davies, Frank Bower, Dake Liversidge, W. C. Henderson, John Moore, L. H. Taber, Buster Lynch, Ernie Wood, M. Delamont, F. F. Mercer, Dick Carter, Brian Staton, Terry Rempel, Gus Audet, W. J. Sargent, E. F. Staton, M. Dragan, T. G. Forman, Geo. S. Johnson, E. Drake, Bob Norris, Art Miller, M. Purves Smith, W. J. Williams, Ian Douglas, A. N. Davies, Ron Hurley, E. V. Ardagh, John Barker, Bruce Lovell, K. Collier, Bert Stephens, McClaryn, L. W. Grasley, J. N. McPhee, D. J. Lucas, Nelson Scott and Bill Robson!

BRAUAY, DECEMBER, 1916—by Eun Noble

When I was asked by President Walter Hogg to write something about "Christmas in the Trenches" with the 47th Bn. I wrote it. Then inspired by memories, said that I would try in the next issue to tell more about our "rest" at Brauay after coming out of the Somme.

Since then, "The Westminster War Diary" has been published and distributed. Now I feel different about reciting older history when the reading of the thrilling

and heroic exploits of the younger battalion of the regiment is still fresh in my mind. They were marvelous, even awesome. But I did promise more of "Brauay" so . . .

In December, 1916, we came in first class style by train from Albert in the Somme to Brauay, back in Pas de Calais with the remainder of the 4th Div. I should repeat that all units were just skeleton crews. We stopped about ten days in Brauay.

Brauay was divided into upper and lower towns. Upper town was where the coal mines were and where the miners lived. Lower town was the business district and railroad centre, etc. The 47th Bn was billeted in upper town in miners' cottages and vacant shops, whose owners were in service with the French forces.

I was billeted in a miner's cottage with Jack Crispin, who at that time was C.S.M. of "D" Coy. He had recently taken over from C.S.M. "Windy" Taylor who had originally joined the 47th with the other personnel from Victoria. Windy had been killed at the Somme.

I was Medical Sgt. in the 47th at that time and was called throughout the Div. by those who knew me as "Doc." My experiences as "Doc", especially with the civilian population would fill a book. All my buddies assured the people that I was a fully qualified Medical practitioner (me 20 years of age). There were some interesting experiences.

At the cottage where Jack and I were billeted the family consisted of a husband about 40, exempt because of a withered arm, his wife about 35 and a boy and girl about nine and ten. They made a most comfortable bed for us out of a white cotton mattress filled with straw. The bed was in the living room and we were not ashamed to sleep there as we had just had a bath in the miners' bathhouse. Jack and I would sneak in with other troops and have a fresh bath every day.

Around the corner from our billet the Q.M. stores N.C.O.'s were quartered in a large house. There were R.Q.M.S. Bill Sloan, C.Q.M.S. Charlie Nee of A Coy, Bob Wilson of B Coy, Earle Selkirk of C Coy and C.Q.M.S. Bob Douglas of D Coy. Needless to say these people all are well and any of us privileged to be invited were glad indeed.

The mother of the house was a jolly rotund woman about 40. She was a wonderful cook when she had any-

thing to cook with. It was rumoured that we might not remain in Bruay until Christmas and so she proposed a Christmas dinner right then. She gave me the job of going to the N.A.F.I. in lower town and buying some cans of Bird's Custard Powder. What she did with this and other provisions supplied by our Q.M. still makes me marvel. How nice it was.

We also managed to obtain several bottles of champagne at 8 francs per bottle. I shall cherish that dinner. Bill Sloan (later to lose his arm) danced around the table with "Mother" in quite high spirits.

Back in our own billet Jack Crispin and I hoping we would still be there for Christmas had contrived a Christmas tree and present for "our" family. It was a wonderful evening. Jack had fashioned special lighting with candles and printed paper. He was Santa Claus and we know Santa Claus was quite a new experience for the French. Poor Jack was almost blown to bits later and they brought him back in sandbags with nothing much left of him but an iron will to live — which he did for more than twenty years after in New Westminster.

FROM THE POST

Our very capable secretary, Bob Carter, inserted a short notice in the magazine "Legionary" re Groundsheet and History. The response to this was overwhelming and we are delighted to have heard from so many new sources. The correspondence is too great to publish in its entirety but will do our best to mention all concerned. — Editor.

From Box 230, Chase, B.C. J. D. (Al) Manuel. Try to get down in May Al. Would like to see you again.

Greetings from A. Guetre, St. Georges, Man. Bob Eacrett of the Army Medical Staff. Herb Timpe of Biggar, Sask. W. Woods of Kelowna. G. B. Eaton of Box 31, Devon, Alberta. Nice to hear from you, Bruce, and thanks for the fine compliment. From Wick Stewart of Kitimat, B.C. From W.O. 2 Gordon Berry, B Coy, 1st Bn Black Watch (R.H.R.), St. Andrews Barracks Camp, Gagetown, N.B. Thanks for the note, Gordon, and hope your wishes are soon fulfilled. A note from ex 47th David C. Wood, Box 153, Innisfail, Alberta. Your request is noted and we are pleased to add your name to the

mailing list. From Jim Oldfield. (You should all know this gentleman; he is responsible for the fine job done on the compilation of your published War Diary.) Thanks for the greeting, Jim, and we respect your modesty. Jim lives at 1325 North 15th Street, Corvallis, Oregon, U.S.A. An interesting note from Mr. C. A. Vermoen of 381 Olive Ave., Oshawa, Ont. Many thanks for your remarks and we hope that you find this "Groundsheet" considerably more interesting than the one you were familiar with back in "Vinny." Another newcomer in the person of Chas. "Multi" Watson of 44 Beverly, St. Galt, Ont. Yours was a most interesting letter and we hope you will enjoy your future issues of the Groundsheet. Again from Ontario at Box 643 Oakville, a letter from Dean M. Paul, formerly of B Coy. Dean's mailing address is 1610 S. Sheridan Way, Port Credit, Ont., and glad to have you with us. Further east to New Brunswick a word from former C Coy man Philip A. McCaffrey of R.R. 2, Lancaster, N.B., and a hearty welcome to you. A big thank you re compliments to your Editor to Ernie Dayton of 721 Furby St., Winnipeg, Man. Enjoyed your little paper Ernie and do try to visit us soon. Does the above answer your question, Jack Laing?

A note of appreciation to Bun Noble for his Christmas article from old comrade Frank Hall of 7011 Randolph Ave., Burnaby 1, B.C. Glad you enjoyed the memories and will try to bring more of same. A request for the Groundsheet from Mr. Harold S. Scribaer of Jacquet River, N.B. We note you are a member of the old 104th and welcome to our list of readers. Welcome to new member Clarence T. Smith of Glamis, Sask. Hope you find the future issues of the Groundsheet interesting. Another member from the Armed Forces at Camp Gagetown, Lt. Howard Mansfield. Note that you are Camp Provost Marshal. No Westies in any difficulties I trust. Nice to hear from Bob Jobastone of 2120 E. 46th, Van. 16, B.C. Sorry to hear of your illness Bob and hope this finds you much improved. Best of luck to Steve Andrews and pleased to hear you are on the mend. A word from la belle provence, Quebec, from Fred Meads of Bishop-ton. Hope you continue to read our paper and renew old acquaintances again. Nice to hear from A. P. Charlie McCarthy of 109 Trinity St., Toronto 2, Ontario. Charlie, this old Editor was back in Toronto a year or so ago, had a wonderful time with chaps like Alf White, Bill Majury, Geo. Graham and Ed. Lahser. I will endeavor to find a host of Ontario addresses for you and I am

I'm enclosing a cutting from the COLUMBIAN "Auld Lang Syne" column which I hope you will re-print in the GROUND SHEET.

Dear Ross:
New Westminster
614 Fourth Ave.
Jan. 16, 65.

sure you could find enough members to start a charter branch. A big hello to Jim Delaney of 1183 Godin Ave., Verdun, P.Q. Thanks for your message, Jim, and there is no reason why you can't get every issue of the paper. Barney Jones sends his regards too. A very pleasant note from W. J. Keeves of 1819 Park Ave., London, Ont. Mr. Keeves was a member of the 104th, the 131st and the 47th, so there should be lots of old comrades around who remember him. From Hamilton, Ont., at 315 West St., a word from Stewart Reid. Glad to hear from you and also from 51 Dunkirk Rd., Welland, Ont., a word from W. G. Hill and from W. S. Baughin in Stevensville, Ont., and Ontario again in the person of former 104th Bn., Mr. C. A. Van Norman, 1 Bond St., Galt, Ont. I am sure you will find many old buddies through our Groundsheet Mr. Van Norman, John McKee from 4127 Pender St., N. Burnaby (former 47th), writes for the paper to be sent as does Ex 47th Co., Ward of 12142 7th Ave., Haney, B.C., and another ex 47th Fred Moody of 1969 96 Ave., R.R. 1 Port Kells, B.C. Ex Wente W. Deavill writes from Dewberry, Alberta, and requests the Groundsheet (only \$1 a year Bill). A big thank you to Kay Le Brun of Box 214, Ananias, Wash., U.S.A. Glad you enjoyed Ben Noble's story and we would be most pleased to receive more articles of the type you have sent. You can be sure that they will be published in the future. A word of thanks from Little Conker, Narmanu, B.C., and expect to see you here in May. A kind word of appreciation from Mr. Art McKay to his Christmas Bonus. Art lives at 123 Cook St., Chilliwack, B.C. Congratulations Art and thanks for your report. A nice letter from Walter Lyle which I printed verbatim along with an interesting clipping from the files of the Columbian in New Westminster. Thank you, Walter, and we hope your letter will stimulate sales of The War Diary. Congratulations to Walter and Emily Lyle also on the Christmas addition to their family and we trust you are both sharing in the floor walking.

PLEASE DO IT NOW!
All current membership cards for 1965 have been mailed. If you have not sent in your bank

All members who have reached the age of 60 are eligible for Life Membership for the sum of \$1.00.

NOTE

The Rifle Corps — The New Westminster Volunteer Rifle Corps was inspected by His Excellency Governor Seymour in the drill room. It is a matter of regret that there was not a larger number on this occasion. Although the roll exhibits sixty members, it is unacceptable that the corps should only have mustered thirty strong upon such an important occasion. The institution is an important one and possesses a special interest as the first volunteer military organization on the British Pacific. Let it not be said of New Westminster that such an institution could not be sustained in it.

AULD LANG SYNE—from the files of the Columbia, January 7, 1965.

It reveals that problems of "sustaining interest" are certainly not new. And yet in spite of that "poor turnout" of one hundred years ago, and we must admit, of some equally "poor turnouts" from time to time ever since, we can say, in 1965, "so what? . . . for we're very much alive both as a regiment and as an association now. Obviously there's been some meaningful interest somewhere.

The publishing of the DIARY points this up. While it records only the exploits of our Regiment during the Second World War and is therefore only a part of our history, it is, after all, the only part so published. So every individual ever connected with the unit should own one, just as a matter of course.

Those of us who were part of the events described in the book have, of course, the most personal interest in it.

In my own reading of it, I kept remembering, as it spoke of the doings of other people, what I myself was doing at those self same times. If there is one criticism I would offer it is that it is not a "diary" at all. It is instead an absorbing well-written story. The Westminster story, which taking the back twenty years made me 20 years younger.

Walter Lyle.

LEST WE FORGET



E. F. McDonald, Queensboro,
New Westminster, B.C.
Dr. J. Margulius, New Westminster, B.C.
Steve Adamson, North Surrey, B.C.
C. E. Poole, Langley, B.C.
W. S. Camon, Ex 47th, Vancouver, B.C.
Councillor Stuart Thomas, Richmond, B.C.

TEAR OUT HERE

CANADIAN MILITIAMEN
VICTIMS OF RAW DEALS

Although the recent reshuffle of Militia establishments left our proud Regiment intact, such was not the case for many other famous units. Read what noted soldier Major Gen. F. W. Worthington has to say on this subject.

Recent proposals for reorganization of the Canadian militia provoke frustrating memories over the 50 years I have been associated with the militia.

Such "reorganizations" by the Canadian government crop up every so often with bewildering changes in role and status. None of them so far has resulted in encouragement or material aid to those who are too often disparagingly called "Saturday night soldiers" and "social-status-seekers".

After nearly half a century's experience with Canadians of all ages, I have found that the men and women who make up the militia and reserves of the Navy and Air Force are among the most dedicated people in this country.

THE BEST. Let us examine the record as I have known it:

The Canadian Corps in the First World War was entirely militia except for one battalion. By the end of the war this army, predominantly volunteer, was recognized as the best Allied formation for its size on the Western Front.

After the First World War the militia was "reorganized" by slashing and cutting the permanent and non-permanent units, starving them of equipment and training aids.

POOLED PAY. In the 20 years between the First and Second World Wars, financial grants were so stringent that the officers and men of militia regiments pooled what little pay they were given to keep their units alive.

The militia had virtually nothing. The Hon. George Drew was not far wrong when he referred to Canada's "bow and arrow army" just before the Second World War.

Yet militia units all over Canada struggled to keep alive and train, giving up evenings, week-ends and annual vacations to learn what they could in preparation for the war they could see ahead — while those in high places closed their eyes or turned away their faces.

NEGLECT DECAYED. Twenty years of neglect had brought about a state of almost complete disarmament.

RICHMOND
361 N.W.
E. O.
*

From THE WESTMINSTER
P. O. Box 854, New Westminster

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Communication Mode
Authentication Type
Encryption
Network Channel

Again the militia responded, providing bodies for the infantry element of the first contingent as well as a first NATO contingent in Europe.

AXE FEEL AGAIN. Once more the axe fell and most of all equipment for training was withdrawn. In 1917 another "reorganization" added much to injury by relegating the militia to a civil defence role called National Survival.

It all but killed the militia, for survival training had no appeal to young men who join the militia to learn something about driving, welding, gunnery, fighting and tactics — and are motivated by a sense of adventure and a rarely-recognized crusading spirit to serve a cause.

Now the militia is faced with another reorganization.

After that war, another reorganization took place. This time the government advocated a policy of "togetherness" for the active army and the reserve army, as the militia was now to be called.

At that time I was GOC Western Command, an area covering British Columbia, Alberta, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. Interpreting government policy internally, I organized where feasible citizens' committees to support local reserve army groups.

PRIDE TAKEN. There was enthusiastic response throughout the command and committees took pride in helping their own unit or detachment, financially and morally.

But Ottawa was not interested and after my retirement in 1947 the citizens' committees dispersed, units waned, and the old difficult struggle for recognition and support was repeated.

The Korean War was a temporary shot in the arm.