



# Sabretache

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February 2017

## FIREMEN GO TO WAR. The Story of the Canadian Overseas Fire Fighters

Following a visit to the United Kingdom in early 1941 by the Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. W.L. Mackenzie King, the Canadian Government, at the request of the British Government, agreed to form and maintain a Corps of Canadian Fire Fighters who were to serve in Britain.



London on fire during the Blitz

This was the opportunity for which personnel of the Canadian Fire Service and civilians alike had been waiting since first hearing of the magnificent work done by the British Fire Service during the Battle of Britain. The response to the first announcement was spontaneous as is proved by the fact that the corps has representatives from the nine Canadian provinces and 107 Canadian municipalities, Thirty-five percent of the members were professional firemen, and Thirty-five percent more were volunteer firemen who did not need much train, The remaining thirty percent were men with no experience whatsoever but with the desire to become firemen. The personnel of the Corps signed up for the duration and could not resign. They received army rates of pay, army clothing with "Canada" shoulder patches, army food and were even finger-printed by the army and carried army identification cards, as well they were subject to army discipline. .

Members of the corps received a complete medical examination prior to reporting at Ottawa and, upon arrival, a final medical examination was given, including inoculation and vaccination, similar to the Canadian Active Service Forces. After being enrolled in small groups, the members began preliminary training in Ottawa during the time they were waiting to be supplied with uniforms and equipment prior to embarkation for overseas.

The advance party arrived in Great Britain by air on May 24, 1942-Victoria Day, a Dominion holiday, and the first contingent arrived exactly one month later. Completing its training - the trailer pump to the Canadian firefighter in the Dominion is essentially a British appliance - this first contingent assumed active duty on August 1, 1942. The final contingent arrived on December 19, 1942, and, six weeks later, was in its operational stations.

Their presence in the United Kingdom did not go unnoticed. The Manchester Evening News edition of Saturday, 15 May, 1943 referred to them as "a blood transfusion for a sorely wounded warrior." After a four week course following arrival in England, mainly of blitz firefighting, rescue work and drill, the contingent was assigned to two fire stations in Southampton, two in Portsmouth, one in Plymouth and one in Bristol and a small group went to London as administrative staff.

The Fire Fighters attended all the lull-period fires in their district as well as fires caused by enemy action. They did fire duties in the docks anytime the ships were loading munitions, T.N.T., petrol or any other dangerous cargo. Many fires were stopped on ships by their quick action.



Canadian Fire Fighters WW2 Badge

### CMHS Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on

**Tuesday,  
February  
21st.,  
2017**

**7:00 pm**  
At the  
Petty Officers' Mess  
HCMS Tecumseh

is a non-profit registered society  
which fosters the study of the  
military and the police, and the heritage of  
Canada, the British Empire, and the world  
as well as the preservation of military  
artifacts and records.

The CMHS meets once every calendar month  
at: Petty Officers' Mess  
HMCS Tecumseh  
1820 - 24th Street SW  
Calgary AB T2T 0G6

## Notice of Next Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on  
**Tuesday, February 21st., 2017**  
**19:00 (7:00 pm)**

At the Petty Officers' Mess, HMCS Tecumseh.

Members are reminded that an offering of foodstuffs for the Legion Food Bank is considered your unofficial entrance fee to our regular scheduled meetings.

The unofficial agenda of this meeting will be:

Introduction of guests, Minutes of last meeting Correspondence, Membership report Treasurer's report, Old business / New business Break, Show & Tell  
The President, **Allan Ross** would like to invite everyone to remain after the meeting for an informal time of fellowship.



### CANADIAN FIRE FIGHTERS AT WORK

One Londoner died under the buzz-bomb wreckage, but four were rescued by Canadian firefighters, Chief Huff, O.B.E., M.M., is the third person from the left, beside the trapped and injured man.

During this period the cities where the Corps was stationed were subjected to heavy air raids. The fires started by the bombs had to be dealt with and those buildings which were destroyed but where no fires occurred made for unique rescue situations. Also, the number of alarms to be dealt with was far beyond those experienced in more peaceful times.

Some of the men were commended for their excellent services at rescuing RCAF officers who were trapped in their blitzed building at Bourne-mouth. There were numerous injuries to Corps members, but few were serious. Only three members lost their lives; one in a traffic accident In the course of training and the third due to a robot bomb. In addition, only three other members were seriously injured during their tour.

Corps members were awarded: 1 Order of the British Empire (Commanding Officer Huff), 1 Member of the British Empire, 2 British Empire Medals, 1 Royal Humane Society Testimonial on Parchment and 2 Royal Humane Society Testimonials on Vellum. As well, all who served were awarded special badges signifying their service.

In July of 1945 a special **Canadian Fire Fighters Canada and Overseas war service badge** was distributed to members of the Corps, (as civilians, they were not entitled to receive or wear military honours.)



**OVERSEAS WAR SERVICE BADGE**

There was something else that they were not entitled to: Veterans' benefits. One of the immediate annoyances was that they were charged income tax on the money they earned while fighting overseas, something members of the military did not have to pay. The package of benefits also included relocation credits, healthcare, disability and pension provisions.

The firefighters had a great deal of support in newspaper editorials from across the country and from organizations such as the Legion and ANAVETS. There was some initial action in Ottawa on a couple occasions in 1945 (also) and again in 1947 but nothing came of them. Decades later they were still seeking recognition as Veterans.

It wasn't until March 2000, eight years after the Merchant Navy, that they became entitled to these benefits.



*Winnipeg's, Senior Firefighter, John Stewart Coull, killed in a V-1 Rocket attack, near Wimbledon.*

## Minutes of last meeting / Calgary Military Historical Society

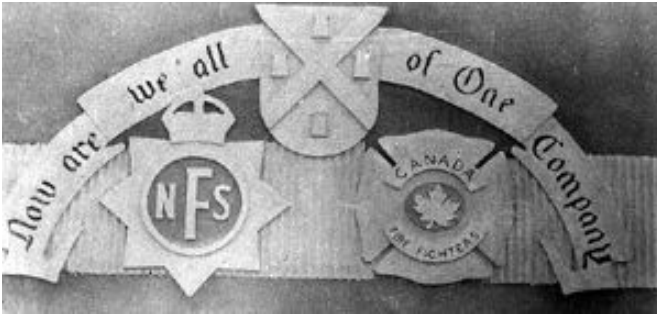
Meeting held on January 17th, 2017 at the Petty Officer's Mess, HMCS Tecumseh

1. **Meeting called to order** by President Allan R. at 7:05 PM. 26 members in attendance.  
Including an appearance by Brad Mummery.
2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting.** Corrections, spelling in Show & Tell - Garry M. not of Gary S. and Glenbow Museum not Glenmore Museum. Member Barry E. moves that the Previous Meeting Minutes be accepted. Seconded by Indra R. Approved.
3. **Newsletter.** No omissions or corrections.
4. **Treasures Report.**  
Report by Floyd S. Lists of monies collected from book auctions, donations etc. Listing of expenditures. Member Mike C. moves that the Treasures report be accepted as reported. Seconded by Susan E. Approved.
5. **Membership Report.** Report by Floyd S. Total 42 members (2 Life, 1 Hon., 39 regular). Member David S. moves that the Membership report be accepted as reported. Seconded by Member Kevin R. Approved.
6. **Correspondence:** Membership renewal from the Lancaster Society. To be renewed.
7. **Announcements:** None
8. **Old Business.**
  - Thorncliff reports. Show well attended, most vendors did well.
  - Holiday soiree this Friday, dinner \$14.75/person.
9. **New Business:**
  - Martin U. - Calgary Militaria Show Mar. , 2017 update. Tables available, 51 booked so far.
  - Military Museums of Calgary is calling for artifact loans for proposed Vimy Ridge display.
  - Indra R. - PPCLI museum computer has crashed, thoughts?
  - Indra R. has access to military service data at the Military Museums.
  - Brad M. discusses April 30, 2017 Ciney Belgium Militaria Show.
  - **Kevin R. was awarded the 2016 Maurice Harvey Award.**
10. **Ticket book auction conducted.**
11. **Break**
12. **Show and Tell:**
  - Allan R. - Lt. RJ Downey's WWII Calgary Highlanders glengarry, S Silver officer/piper badge and service records.
  - Kevin R. - WWI British machine gunner's ½ tunic.
  - Garrett L. - WWII RCAF - Husband & Wife medals and insignia display.
  - Dave G. - 15<sup>th</sup> Light Horse - Scully made, Officers cap & collar insignia displays, Menu from the ship Empress of Australia dated Sept. 3, 1940.
  - Barry E. - Upper arm badges, unknown?
  - Dave S. - Grandfather's WWI paybook with a post card picture of Austria/Hungary soldiers. WWI grouping for Herbert Stollart including photos, medals, death penny, correspondence with his wife etc.
  - Alan M. - 1972-82 BSAP dinky car toy from Russia, selection of photos from his Rhodesian police service.
  - Dave L. - Chaplain UK & Canada coloured field service caps with badges.
  - Bob M. - US Civilian Medal of Merit, last awarded in 1952. 1948 Syria/Palestine campaign medal.
  - Mike C. - South African medals to Navy personnel, 3 sets Robin Class river gunboat service.
  - Gary M. - Gold medallion to commemorate Jesse D. Elliott's role in the 1814 Battle of Lake Erie.
  - Brad M. - His Uncle's South African Special Forces beret.
  - Darrell K. - Brand new unissued FN bayonet, French Army M1951 helmet, Canadian Airborne Centre rigger's bag.
13. **Adjournment:** President Allan R. calls for motion to adjourn. Member Mike C. moves to adjourn. Seconded by Susan E. Approved. Meeting Adjourned. 20:25



A local Plymouth newspaper carried the following story.

### Building Their Own Fire Station



Forty firemen are engaged on building a Fire Station for the N.F.S. on the outskirts of Plymouth. According to present plans, it will be opened at the end of the month by a distinguished visitor. About half of the men who have taken on this job are Canadian Fire-fighters, who have no previous experience of the building trade, but have dug foundations and done concreting and labouring work. Only a small proportion of the N.F.S. men involved are skilled, but these direct the operations of their colleagues, who are now going "full steam ahead" to get their new home completed on schedule. The building, which is 114ft. long, looks at present something like a huge garage, which has still to have a lot of flesh added to its bones.

**Ten Fire Engines** It will accommodate 10 fire engines and will, on completion, be manned wholly by Canadians. Living quarters, and a boiler-house, providing a hot water system, are included in the scheme. The building, although classed as "temporary," will, in the opinion of the firemen working on it, be "good for a few years." It will have concrete pillars, brick piers, and an English timber roof covered with asbestos. An N.F.S. officer told a "Western Independent" reporter that firemen were being employed to do the work, as, owing to the acute labour problem, they could not expect a contractor to take it on.

**Dormitory For 50** "The Plymouth station will have a dormitory large enough for about 50 men, while there will also be separate sleeping quarters for six women."

