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THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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February 2020

Some interesting Albertans

Margaret Elliot Thomson McNally 1887-1987

A combination of circumstances and choice brought Margaret Thomson to Canada. Born in the North Sea city of Aberdeen, Scotland, she was orphaned as a teenager. She went to live with prosperous relatives, continuing her education but when she was admitted to Cambridge University, her guardian felt she was too young to attend.

After the war began, she became a nurse's aide, joining the Volunteer Aid Detachment (VAD) in July, 1915. She assisted the Royal Army Medical Corps in the 2nd London Hospital (Chelsea) and then was transferred in 1916 to a military hospital in France. By the end of her service in 1919, she had been awarded the honour of a scarlet efficiency stripe which denoted competence.

VAD members, mostly women, were trained volunteers who assisted professional nursing staff and provided operational support for medical facilities. Their work was administered by the British Red Cross and Order of St. John. By the end of the war, over 90,000 women had registered to serve in the VAD.

During this service, Thomson met her future husband Captain Alfred McNally, a widowed Canadian doctor seconded from the Royal Canadian Surgical Corps to the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1915. McNally was a graduate of the University of Toronto who had established a medical practice in Lethbridge in 1907.

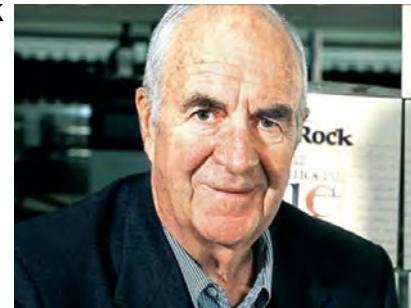
Margaret Thomson became his war bride in 1919 at Leeds and moved to Lethbridge, a city that could not have been more different from Aberdeen, Scotland. Nonetheless, she adapted well to her new location becoming a homemaker and mother. .

Unfortunately Alfred, who had not been well, died in 1935 leaving Margaret to raise their three sons. She encouraged all three to complete their university educations.

One of her sons was Ed McNally who would go on to become one of Alberta's leading entrepreneurs. One of his endeavours was the establishment of the Big Rock Brewery in 1985. It would become one of the largest North Americas craft breweries.

In 2007, Ed McNally, established a generous memorial nursing scholarship at the University of Lethbridge to honour his mother's contribution during the war.

Margaret Elliot McNally (Thomson) Graduate Studies Scholarship



CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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 18th , 2020 19:00 (7:00 pm)
At the Petty Officers' Mess, HMCS Tecumseh.

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, **Dave Love** would like to invite everyone to remain after the meeting for an informal time of fellowship.

Harry Northover Reeves 1898-1984

Harry Reeves enlisted as soon as he could. Just 10 days after turning eighteen, the minimum age without parental consent, he joined the 175th Battalion at Medicine Hat in 1916.

Eight years before, the Reeves' family had moved to Alberta from Newfoundland to become dry land homesteaders at Carlstadt, Alberta. But like nearly half of those who tried homesteading in Alberta, they failed and were unable to prove up their quarter section. So with two years of experience in the 21st Alberta Hussars, Reeves volunteered to serve.

Initial battalion training took place at Calgary's Sarcee Camp followed by more extensive training in October in England. Shortly Reeves became a reinforcement with the 31st Infantry Battalion, known as "Bell's Bulldogs."

He was sent to France in January, 1917 subsequently seeing action at Vimy Ridge and nearby Lens. During heavy shell fire in July, 1917, Private Reeves experienced heart problems and was later declared medically unfit. He was transferred to the labour pool and was discharged in February, 1919.

On returning to Canada, he applied for a land grant near Killam, Alberta under the Soldiers' Settlement Act but found that farming wasn't his strong suit. He was, however, a talented carpenter and painter and plied these trades in Banff and then Waterton Lakes National Park. He took a liking to Waterton and spent the rest of his life in the park, marrying Sybil Kemmis, a local teacher, in 1936. As a wedding present his mother-in-law handed over operation of the Kilmorey Lodge which she owned and he quickly fit into the community.



Message to our members;

For many years members have contributed food stuffs that were passed on to the local Food Banks and they were greatly appreciated. We now know that we and the Food Banks can get a much bigger bang with monetary donations to them. We now longer accept "food" donations but rather would like a cash donation of a loonie or two . Please consider this as a unofficial entrance fee to our meetings.

Minutes of last meeting / Calgary Military Historical Society

- Minutes of General Meeting held on January 22, 2019 at the Petty Officers Mess: HMCS Tecumseh
-
- Meeting called to order by President Dave L. at 7:05 pm. 19 members present and 0 guests.
-
- Introductory remarks by the President - a further appeal for a Secretary. Rob W. agreed to act as Secretary for the meeting.

December 2019 meeting minutes reviewed. Several errors were noted and corrected. Moved by Mike Clare, Seconded by Allan Ross that the minutes be adopted as amended. Motion Carried.

Treasurers Report by Floyd S. Moved to accept by Barry E., seconded by Susan E. Motion Carried.

Membership report by Floyd S. - 32 regular members. 3 Life members 2 Honorary.

Correspondence – none

OLD BUSINESS:

- Final details given about the annual Christmas dinner – all available spaces now taken.
- Barry E. mentioned the Easter Arms Show starts Good Friday. Due to construction, the show is smaller. Barry encouraged those who wished to get a table to do so ASAP. Dave L. said the CMHS will not have a table but that brochures are being prepared for distribution
- Thorncliffe arms show discussed – indications were that it was successful

NEW BUSINESS:

- Dave L. gave a brief Society history indicating its original purpose was to bring military collectors together. He then discussed what he felt were the attributes of good collectors. He acknowledged this by presenting a small gift of medals and badges to Rob W. whom he felt exemplified those attributes.
- Dave L. proposed that at each meeting a Society member present a short (20-30 min.) informal talk on something of interest to the presenter and hopefully the membership. By way of example, Dave L. gave a talk, with personal anecdotes, on Remembrance Day history, its universality and various ways it is observed.

Break - A book raffle was conducted by Allan R.

SHOW & TELL:

- Dave L. – Queen Alexandra 1914 Christmas Gift Tin
-
- Floyd S. – official 1957 re-issued German Iron Cross
-
- Bob McP. – Military and Civilian Orders of St.Lazarius
-
- Mike C. – McGill WW1 Roll of Honour, Boer War Artillery badge and Natal medals
-
- James B. – Jewish Memorial History, illus. Art Posters by Steven Cameron, Tour Book of WW1 battlefields by Terry Copp
-
- Allan MacK. – plans for trip to Malta in March
-
- Allan R. – German WW2 wedge cap M42 model, 1973 RCMP Commemorative badges
-
- Gary M. – 1840's vintage French military binoculars
-
- Brad M. – WW2 RCAF officer's wedge cap
-
- John E. – British 1939 RAF borehole inspection tool

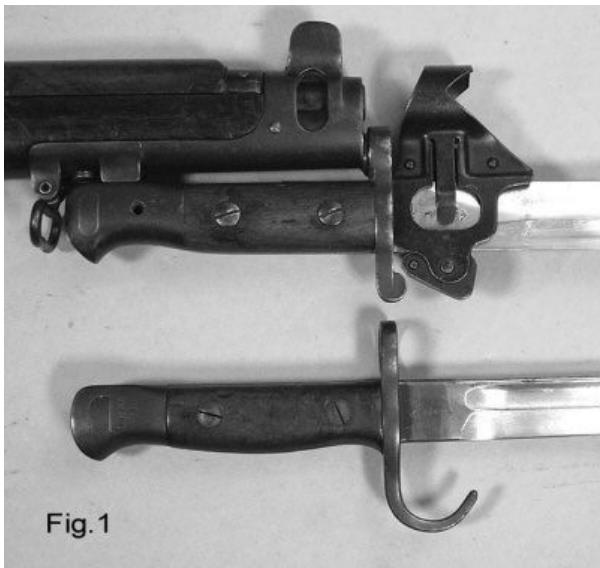
Motion to adjourn by Mike C.

Ever since the bayonet was ‘invented’, numerous innovations have been attempted over the years to render them more useful by combining functions. Thus ‘sword bayonets’, ‘sawback bayonets’, ‘flint knappers’ and so on.

Perhaps the most exotic and impractical innovation developed during the Great War : the ‘Wire-Breaker’

During the course of WWI, thousands of barbed wire obstacles were installed by opposing sides to protect against advancing infantry. Penetrating these ideal defensive barricades became a major pre-occupation on the Western Front.

Artillery barrages were used to clear barbed wire entanglements prior to massed infantry assault, but by pock-marking the ground with shell holes, it only compounded the difficulties of advance. Ultimately, the newly developed ‘tank’ proved the ideal solution, able to flatten wire and provide effective cover for troops as they advanced behind them.



The concept of a bayonet mounted wire-breaker was simple enough. As the soldier advanced through fields of barbed wire and machinegun fire towards the enemy trenches, it was supposed he would possess a sufficiently level head, and have enough time to ‘break’ through stands of wire individually. To accomplish this he simply had to slide a strand of wire along the bayonet blade until it came to rest in the notch of his Wire-Breaker. In doing so, it was automatically aligned with the muzzle of the rifle. Theoretically, firing a round would be sufficient to break the strand, allowing him to proceed with his advance.

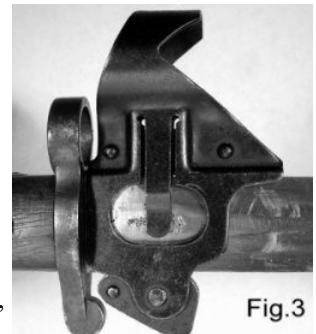
The illustrated Wire Breaker No 1 was approved on 9th May 1912 by the British War Department in anticipation of the needs to come. Manufactured from sheet steel, the wire-breaker was designed to slide along the bayonet blade until it rested against the crossguard. A built-in spring clip held it in place.

British Imperial forces were likely to find they could either be fixing Pattern 1903 or 1907 bayonets to their SMLE Rifles. The blade width of a P1903 bayonet is 30mm, a P1907 bayonet only 23mm. To render the Wire Breaker universal to both bayonets, a swiveling wedge was built into the bottom, providing a snug fit against either blade when moved to the appropriate position.



To help the soldier determine the correct position of the wedge during the heat of battle, the numbers ‘3’ and ‘7’ were stamped into the opposite sides of the body and swivel of the Breaker, corresponding to the pattern of bayonet in use. Matching the two numbers meant the Breaker was in the correct position to fit either the P1903 or P1907 bayonet.

Five further patterns were approved, including one to fit the P1913 bayonet, and all were finally declared obsolete in February of 1921.



Lost, destroyed or recycled over the years, these mass produced ‘penny’ items are now extraordinarily hard to find, and highly desirable to the bayonet collector.



The innovation was further developed by the **Wilkinson Sword** company, incorporating the wire-breaker into the crossguard itself. The ‘catcher’ resting on the back of the blade swivels upwards to provide sufficient clearance for the bayonet to fit into the scabbard. The crossguard must have been an extraordinarily difficult casting to make, and prone to catching in clothing and equipment when sheathed. Never adopted by the War Department, it is probable that only a handful were made.



Like so many bright ideas borne of the times, it is probable that the inventor of the wire-breaker never actually had to apply his idea in practice. One can only imagine the futility of attempting to break through barbed entanglements using this method whilst under enemy fire.