



Summer 2023

VIMM Newsletter

Vancouver Island Military Museum

ENTERTAINING THE TROOPS - WWI

By Angus Scully

They sang and they sang. In a world before radio, television, the internet, and with only silent films, Canadians sang for entertainment and attended live shows at music halls. Whether in school, church (and most Canadians went to church), family gatherings, or theatres, people sang and sang along. Travelling speakers gave talks about current events and travels to foreign lands, using slides to illustrate their lectures. Winston Churchill did this across Canada and the USA during and following the Boer War. For Canadian troops overseas, all of that continued. Silent films were shown for the troops when they were out of the front lines (comedian Charlie Chaplin was immensely popular) and the films were followed by singing. The troops themselves formed entertainment shows featuring comedy sketches, recitals of poetry, and singing.

These shows travelled around the front visiting and entertaining the troops, keeping up morale. One of the first was formed by men in Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. There were no women in any of the shows, but men dressed as women sang romantic songs and danced. The value of the PPCLI show and those operated by the YMCA was quickly recognized and new shows encouraged. The most famous was started in 1917 in the Third Division, taking its name from the Division's symbol of strength, the dumbbell. Calling themselves "The Dumbbells," the troupe entertained throughout the Canadian Corps and for British units as well. They kept together after the war, touring Canada until the 1930s, making records, and even appearing on Broadway in New York in 1921, the first Canadian musical to do so.

The songs were romantic, funny, patriotic. Comedy sketches were irreverent and officers were made fun of, as was the ridiculous side of army life. The song titles give us an idea of their show:



The Dumbbells were all soldiers who had served at the front



The Wild, Wild Women Are Making a Wild Man of Me,
If You Were the Only Girl In the World,
Keep Your Head Down, Fritzie Boy,
Keep Right On to the End of the Road,

I Know Where the Flies Go,
Oh, It's a Lovely War,
Dear Old Pal of Mine,
Roses of Picardy.



Lieutenant Gitz Rice from New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, may have been the most famous single performer. He wrote his own songs and performed before most units in the Canadian Corps. His "Dear Old Pal of Mine" was a monster hit. Rice said he composed the music while on sentry duty, and the song expresses the longing of a soldier for his sweetheart, his pal. The song was "covered" by other performers and records and sheet music sold throughout the Empire and the USA.

SCAN HERE TO LISTEN



► *Gitz Rice's Dear Old Pal of Mine, in a 1918 recording by John McCormack*

OR VISIT

www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/dear-old-pal-of-mine-emc

THE ARMY SHOW - WWII

Continued from page 1

In the Second World War, Canadians still sang and attended live entertainment shows, but their world also included radio and sound movies. Records were widely available too. Entertainment for the troops expanded to the new media with The Canadian Army Radio Show, broadcast nation-wide on the CBC from December 1942 to September 1943. Singers on the show included Roger Doucet, Lois Marshall, and Jimmie Shields. The music director was Robert Farnon. He and Johnny Wayne and Frank Shuster wrote all the music for the show, while Wayne and Shuster wrote all of the dialogue and lyrics.

Visitors to VIMM may notice music playing in the background as they look at WWII exhibits. Often that music is the Canadian Band of the Allied Expeditionary Force, conducted by Capt. Bob Farnon and including soldiers who became, in later decades, famous Canadian entertainers. Among them were Fred Davis on trumpet and Denny Vaughan at piano. The band played on the BBC's Allied Expeditionary Forces Programme. Time on the program was allocated according to the size of the armies. The Americans (Capt. Glen Miller) got 50% of the time, the British got 35%, and the Canadian band, 15%. The full band of 75 musicians and vocalists staged a variety program called The Canada Show. There was also the Canada Swing Show, and Canada Dance Band. After the war, Farnon stayed in the UK and became one of the world's foremost arrangers, composers, and conductors.

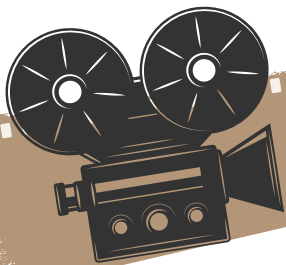
The Army radio show became the Army stage show and toured Canada entertaining troops and raising money for Victory bonds. It split into five groups when it went overseas and performed for troops in Britain, and in France after D-Day. In Britain, one of the Army Show members was Lois Maxwell from Kitchener, who in later decades appeared in thirteen James Bond movies as Miss Moneypenny. The comedy stars were Johnny Wayne and Frank Shuster from Toronto, where they had written and performed in musical revues at the University of Toronto before joining the infantry. After the war, Wayne and Shuster appeared on radio and television for 35 years, achieving national legend status.



Comedians and writers, Johnny Wayne (left) and Frank Shuster during construction.



A rare colour photo of the Canadian Army Show in France, 1944. In WWII women were in the Army and part of the show. Can you spot Wayne and Shuster?



SCAN HERE TO WATCH
A part of the Army Show
can be seen at the 9 minutes
9 seconds mark of Army
Newsreel 38 at

OR VISIT LINK
www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcTEFIQCjha

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



The VIMM, overlooking Nanaimo Harbour

We are now into May 2023 and finished with restricted hours of operation and road closures. Our new hours of operation are Tuesday to Friday 10 am to 3 pm, and Saturday 11 am to 3 pm.

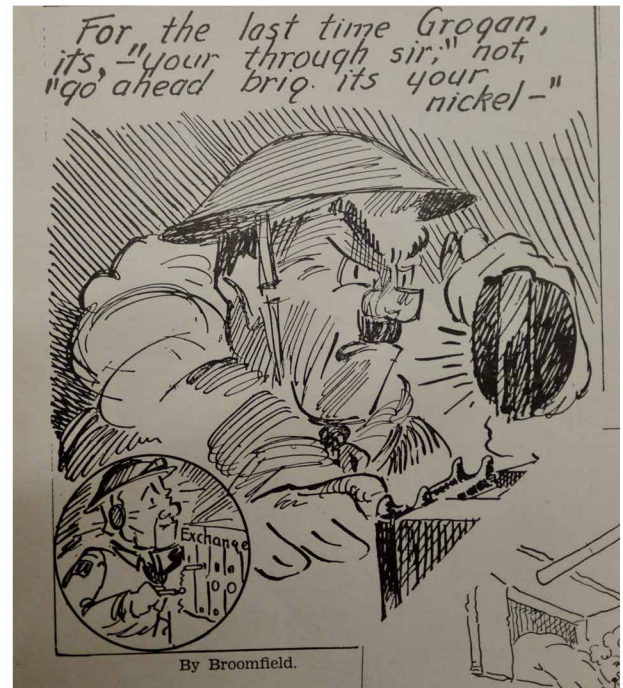
The Marriott Courtyard Hotel next door is fully open and taking reservations. So far this year we have had many visitors from BC, as well as international visitors, which is a good indication for another successful year. We have no news that cruise ships will visit Nanaimo this summer season, much to our chagrin. Our numbers are up compared to last year which is a positive sign. Our financial situation is solvent and good for another year. Hopefully we will get a gaming grant from the province to boost our revenue.

The workshop is still busy with medals and framing, and Heather Neil (my wife) has been added to our workshop staff as a medal fabricator.

Thanks to all the volunteers who stayed with us during the tough times over the past year, and on occasion filled in for extra shifts.

Again, stay safe.

Roger Bird



The art of the cartoon - from the Maple Leaf, the Canadian Army newspaper in WWII.

Medal Mounting

The VIMM will gladly mount your medals in court mounting or in a frame.

Contact us for further information and prices.



Sampson-Matthews, “Art in War and Peace”

By Greg Devenish

There are over 13 000 pieces of art held by the Canadian War Museum. These images chronicle Canada’s involvement in conflict from WWI to the war in Afghanistan. Some of Canada’s greatest artists, including the Group of Seven, captured Canada’s war experience. In WWI, the Canadian War Memorial Fund employed over 100 artists to put on canvas the scenes from the front. Notable artists included were A.Y. Jackson, F.H. Varley, Lawren Harris, and Cyril Barraud.

When WWII began, Canadian artists lobbied the government for another official art program. The Canadian War Records employed 32 artists divided amongst the three services. Molly Lamb Bobak was the only woman war artist. Many of them put themselves in harm’s way to sketch what they had seen. On June 6th, 1944, artist Orville Fisher strapped waterproof paper on his wrist and, after landing on Juno Beach, drew a series of sketches of what he witnessed. The need to capture images of the Korean War continued and more recently in Afghanistan, Gertrude Kearns painted *What They Gave in Afghanistan*.

One of the more interesting programs in WWII was one of the largest art projects in the history of Canada. Four key players led this Canadian Art Project: artist A.Y. Jackson of the Group of Seven; Harry McCurry, Director of the National Gallery of Canada; Charles Matthews, Vice- President of Sampson-Matthews;

and A.J. Casson, Group of Seven artist and chief designer of Sampson-Matthews, the largest producer of silkscreens, colour prints and posters in the country. The goal was to produce high quality silkscreens which would decorate military barracks and government offices, both at home and overseas.

Silkscreens could be produced in quantity and at a very reasonable cost. Private sponsors were found to subsidize the program and it was carried out without any cost to the government. In June 1942 A. Y. Jackson wrote to McCurry:

If we can get twenty or thirty typical examples of Canadian art scattered through all the camps in Canada, we will have accomplished a lot, cheered up the camps and made the boys familiar with our work for the first time in their lives.



*A.Y. Jackson was a Group of Seven painter and served in WWI. He captured many images on canvas in WWI. This one is entitled *A Copse, Evening* (1918). A.Y. Jackson played a prominent role in Canada’s Art Project in WWII.*



Sugar Time Quebec by Albert Cloutier

Thirty-six images were selected and produced as silkscreens during WWII. Records from the National Gallery of Canada indicate that the RCN received 1781 silkscreens; the RCAF and the Canadian Army received 3000 pieces, and the Auxiliary over 2700 pieces. Art historians claim that over 50 000 silkscreens were produced. The program was so successful that the British Army ordered 2000 prints and the RAF 1000 pieces. In 1943, the artwork was sent to Canadian public schools for display.

The Toronto Star Weekly wrote ...how the Nazis had used banners and monuments and architecture as propaganda ... Art is a weapon ...and at last Canadian artists have persuaded the authorities to let them fight the best way they know how - with brushes. Colonel C.R. Hill, director of Special Services wrote: ...for men who have been away from Canada for two or three years, the display of Canadian scenes will make them conscious of the land and cause for which they are called upon to fight.

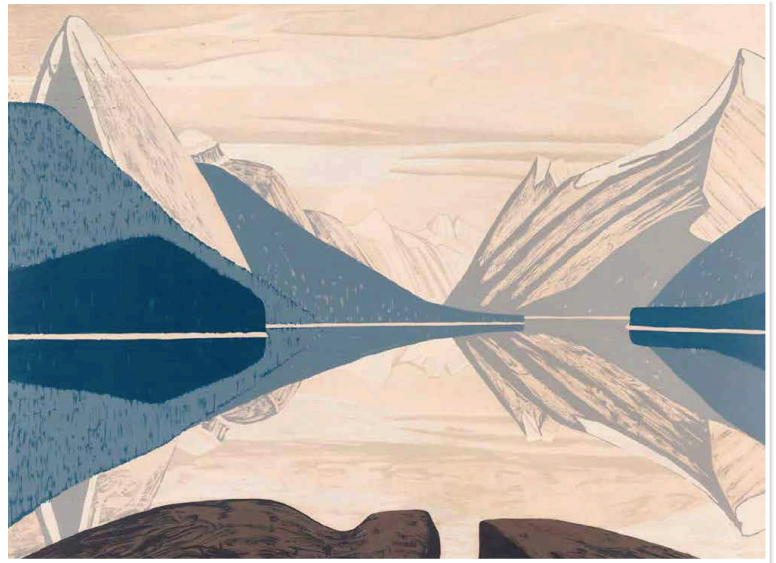
Following the war, Sampson-Matthews continued printing silkscreens and expanded the program. A.J. Casson continued with the company supervising the silkscreens and said it was one of the most rewarding art projects he was involved with. Silkscreens were displayed in schools, banks, and public buildings. The project continued till 1963, but, with changing tastes and technology, the company went out of business in 1965.

Very few of the art works are left and, recently, there has been a resurgence of interest by art enthusiasts and the cost to purchase the few remaining prints has climbed. The National Art Gallery never received any of the silkscreens and only in the 1990s did they begin to purchase some of the prints. The Canadian War Museum

has a small collection and some of them remain with private collectors and galleries. In looking back to the importance of this art program it is best summed up by an American publication, American Artist,

... the generous size and sparkling color of the pictures will help to reduce the atmosphere of military sternness in military camps ...and it is reasonable to believe the artists who are represented are reaching a new and enthusiastic audience, that will remember the war is over. American Artist salutes these patriotic artists over the border, who have made a notable contribution in this project to engender a love of art in the hearts of men who are giving so much to the winning of this war.

*There are two valuable sources on this topic. Canvas of War (2000) by Dean Oliver and Laura Brandon and Art for War and Peace (2015) by Ian Sigvaldason and Scott Steedman.



Maligne Lake, by Lawren Harris



A. Y. Jackson in uniform, 1915. Jackson and the other members of the Group of Seven may be Canada's most famous artists

They Were Poets – Soldiers of the First World War

By Angus Scully

TO AN OLD TIN BONNET

Put on your old tin bonnet
With the khaki paint upon it
And we'll fill our glasses to the "Day".
Though it rains, storms and drenches,
We are going to the trenches,
For 'tis our relieving day.

Yes, you need your old tin bonnet
When the shrapnel rains upon it —
If you had'n't got one you would be "fini" —
You'd be planted 'neath the clover
In a spot far off from Dover.
With the decoration — R.I.P.

So here's to the old tin bonnet
With the khaki paint upon it.
It has shielded us from pieces of "H. E."
It is dirty, scratched and dented
But the best thing yet invented
For my comrades — and for me.
B.H.B. Fleetfoot.

TOBACCO.

Tobacco is a dirty weed,
I like it.
It satisfies no normal need,
I like it,
It makes you thin, it makes you lean,
It takes the hair right off your bean,
It's the worst darn stuff I've ever seen,
I like it.

Sister Dorothy's Mail Budget.

ENGLISH CREEK or THE SPIRIT OF THE GLEN

From War's vile visage, and the horrid waste
Of chalk and clay on fertile oil displaced;
From sights and sounds that on the spirit jar,
And typify the madman's game of war
My soul revolts, and with her easy stride
Passes the ocean deep, and prairie wide;
Sets me again beside that sparkling rill
Whose music gladdens all the glen so still —
A stillness too profound for sons of men
Save for thy voice, O Spirit of the Glen!

Again for me the graceful spruce trees rise
Waving their cone-clad tops against blue skies;
Again the willows arching o'er the stream
Blend with the gentle memories of my dream,
As when my soul and body found relief
From grime of toil; from weariness, or grief,
Laved in some silent, peace-enchanted pool
My frame to freshen and my brow to cool
Receiving help beyond our mortal ken
Thy balm and solace, Spirit of the Glen!
Pte. C. Morgan 160479. 1st B.C.

The Great War was an age of poetry and, perhaps, the most famous poem of the war is *In Flanders Fields* by Canadian John McCrae. Canadian soldiers had grown up surrounded by poetry. They memorized and recited it at school, it appeared in newspapers, and books of poetry sold very well. They knew the modern poems of Rudyard Kipling, Arthur Conan Doyle, Gilbert Parker, Jack London, and H.G. Wells, as well as the classics such as Shakespeare, Walter Scott, Keats, and Tennyson. In the trenches then, it was natural for them to read and write

poems and poems were written by men in all ranks. Some were of high quality, some were simple, and some were just bad. Poems expressed humour, patriotism, loss, anger, indeed the whole range of human emotion. They tell us about state of mind, and stress can be seen very well in many poems, as can resilience. All of this is seen in the trench newspapers that the men produced such as *The Dead Horse Gazette*, *The Iodine Chronicle*, *The Growler*, *The Brazier*, and *The Silent 60th*. They all had pages of poems submitted by soldiers. The poems reprinted here are from *The Listening*

Post, the trench paper of the 7th Canadian Infantry Battalion (1st British Columbia). This was the best-selling newspaper on the Western Front, in any army. One soldier said of it, "The L.P. just smells of the trenches." A dozen or more poems appeared in each issue.

**You can read
34 issues of *The
Listening Post* at
[www.canadiana.ca/view/
oocihm.8_06774](http://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_06774)**



* or scan this QR code.

High Flight by P/O John Gillespie Magee, RCAF

By Greg Devenish

John Gillespie Magee Jr. was born in Shanghai China, to missionary parents, on June 9, 1922. His father was American, his mother, British. When he was old enough, he was sent away to attend the Rugby School in England, where he won the school's poetry prize in his final year. John was in the US when war was declared in Europe, and he sought a visa to go to Britain and join the RAF but was turned down by American isolationist authorities.

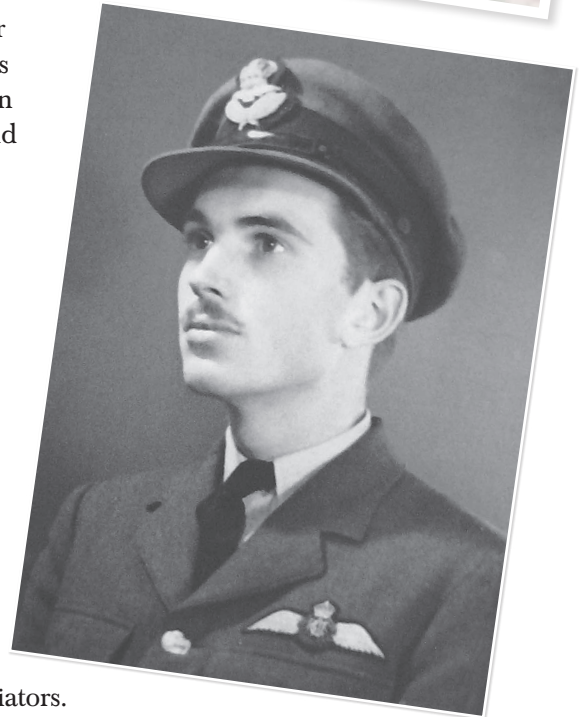
After starting at Yale University in the US, he took a train to Ottawa in October, 1940, and tried to join the RCAF. He was turned down because he did not weigh enough. So, he began a crash course in "non-exercise" and gorged on food. Two weeks later he was accepted. He was posted to 9 Elementary Flying Training School in St. Catherine's Ont. where he learned to fly on Fleet Finches. While there, he wrote to his parents, "an airplane is not to us a weapon of war, but a flash of silver slanting the skies; the hum of a deep-voiced motor; a feeling of dizziness; it is speed and ecstasy." John then flew Harvards at 2 Service Training School in Ottawa and received his wings in June 1941. His instructor noted, "Patches of brilliance; tendency to be over confident."

John was posted overseas to 53 Operational Training Unit in Wales. His first flight in a Spitfire MK. I occurred on 7 August 1941. On 18 August, he flew his Spitfire to 33,000 feet. It was after this that he wrote his famous poem, *High Flight*. Magee was posted to 412 RCAF "Falcon Squadron" in September 1941, at Digby. On 8 November, he completed his first and only operational flight over occupied France, and, of his four-ship flight, was the only one to survive.



On 11 December 1941, John was practicing fighter tactics with other members of 412. He collided with an Airspeed Oxford at around 3000 ft. A farmer on the ground watched as John climbed out the wing of his aircraft and jumped, but his parachute failed to open.

P/O John Magee was buried at Scopwick Church in Lincolnshire, England. He was only nineteen. *High Flight* became one of the most famous poems of the Second World War and is beloved by aviators.



Pilot Officer John Magee was only 19 when he was killed

DISPATCHES

from VIMM



SUMMER LUNCHEON BBQ

Stay tuned for an announcement about the summer luncheon BBQ at the Lantzville RCL Branch 257.



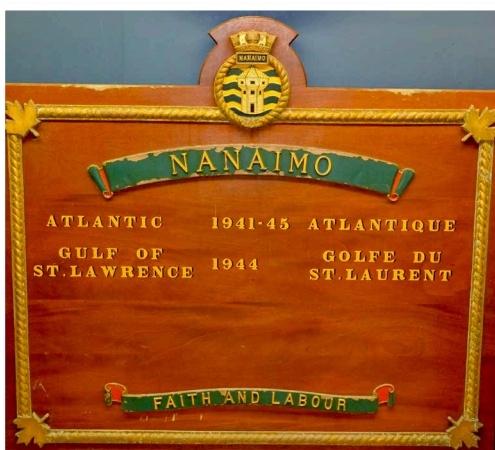
Congratulations to museum Vice President Brian McFadden who celebrated his birthday on May 20.



Best wishes to volunteer and board member Pat Murphy for a speedy recovery from surgery. Get well soon Pat!



Volunteer and board member Greg Devenish has renovated the library and re-organized our extensive collection of books and documents.



The battle honours board of HMCS Nanaimo is proudly on display at VIMM.



This large child's doll in our collection is dressed as a member of the Canadian Women's Army Corps. A true super hero.



Nanaimo Community Safety Officer Adam Collishaw recently stopped by to visit our display about his illustrious ancestor, Raymond Collishaw.

Museum Directors

Roger Bird, President
Brian McFadden, Vice President
Phil Harris, Treasurer
Pat Murphy, Armoury/Security
Greg Devenish, Secretary, Library

Bruce Davison, Volunteer Coordinator
Bill Brayshaw, Acquisitions
Angus Scully, Newsletter Editor

100 Cameron Avenue, Nanaimo, BC V9R 0C8 250-753-3814 | ois@militarymuseum.ca | www.vimilitarymuseum.ca

Back issues of the VIMM Newsletter are available on our web site www.militarymuseum.ca/newsletters/