



The Cannon Speaks

Newsletter of the Elgin Military Museum
Summer 2006

Going - Going – Gone!

After literally years of speculation, study and discussion, the Elgin County Museum has finally moved out of the 32 Talbot Street location to new digs on the fourth floor of the County Administration building.

July 10 and 11 were busy days around the County Museum as volunteers and staff worked to load the collection in a series of moving vans for transfer to the County building and other storage facilities around the County.

The Executive Committee of our Museum has met with the County Warden and staff to discuss the possibility of our Museum taking over the former County museum site 'for a nominal fee'. These discussions are ongoing, and when and if a deal is struck, the membership will be advised and asked to give a final 'yea or nay' to the offer.

Did You Know ?

Many readers may be surprised to learn that a number of members of the Elgin Regiment (31 CER) are currently serving with Canadian Forces in Afghanistan.

There has been little fanfare for their troops leaving for service, but it is nonetheless important that we

appreciate their efforts and give them the support they need and deserve.

Those interested in showing their support in a visible way here at home can display a "Support our Troops" ribbon. This magnetic symbol attaches easily to any vehicle or other similar surface, and helps to demonstrate that you support their efforts, wherever they may be serving.



The magnetic ribbons are available at the Museum, at the very reasonable price of \$5.00 each.

'Care Packages' to be sent

The Elgin Regiment is organizing 'care packages' to be sent to Afghanistan, and contributions from the community would be appreciated. If it is possible to make more packages than needed for our Regimental members, the additional

packages will be given for general distribution amongst other Canadians serving in Afghanistan.

If you would like to make a contribution, please contact the Museum, and the staff can provide full details.

New Booklet Planned

In 1914 a local farmer named Ellis Wellwood Sifton joined the military to do his part in the war effort. He would later be involved with the action at Vimy Ridge on April 1917. From the time he enlisted, to a few days before his death at Vimy, Sifton wrote letters home to his sisters. His actions at Vimy cost his life and earned him the Victoria Cross.



Ellis Wellwood Sifton, VC

Coming next spring the Elgin Military Museum will release a booklet entitled *"All is well with Ellis tonight."* The booklet will have all available letters written by Sifton to his sisters, over 60, as well as an interlude between the letters of his battalion's actions. Pictures and maps are expected to be included with the project.

Museum Assists with Special Exhibit in Quebec City

The Museum was recently approached by the Naval Museum of Quebec for assistance with a special exhibit they are producing on *HMCS St. Thomas*, and its role in the sinking of U-877 on December 27, 1944.

The Naval Museum is located in Quebec City, and is also known as the Stanislav Dury Museum. Mr. Dury was a great benefactor to their museum, and served as the Second in Command of *HMCS St. Thomas* during her brief wartime career.

Earlier this year, our Museum was approached by the Naval Museum of Quebec to assist them with their exhibit. Following approval by the Executive Committee, and completion of loan forms, a number of items were shipped to Quebec City. The list included the ship's bell and a White Ensign that had once flown on *St. Thomas*, a German submarine escape lung believed to be from *U-877*, and a white *HMCS St. Thomas* silk scarf.



A chart of the action, donated to the Museum by Bill Vidler, the youngest crewman on *St. Thomas*, was considered to be too fragile for

shipping, but a copy was made by museum staff, and sent along in the parcel.

The exhibit will run until December at the Naval Museum of Quebec, and we are currently in discussions with their museum to see if their exhibit could come to our museum in 2007.

Editorial

EDUCATING OUR MILITARY HISTORY TO OUR YOUTH

By Jeffrey Booth

I have worked in the heritage sector, done volumes of volunteering, done workshops and educational programs, designed an educational package, written heritage articles – booklets and had dealings with all those involved along the way. I believe I have acquired knowledge about educating our youth about our heritage. What are the best options for educating them? Who should be responsible to educate them?

“The public school system” say most. What about the local aspects of history? With the amalgamation of local boards to mega-boards the local feel and ability to have a “LOCAL PROGRAM” has become unimportant. The use of a standard curriculum seems to be the only driving concern.

“The veterans groups” say others. Just how many veterans do we have to go around! Many of the over 45 crowd remember the days when a veteran would come in on Remembrance Day and talk to the class. These days we have few war veterans able to do such volunteering.

“The government”, some say. The government is for the operation of the

country today and the future. The government will never put many resources into military heritage education. I do admire the small efforts that are done, but in the over all realm of things it is but a pittance of an effort.

“Museums and those interested in the history should do it”, I say. We have the desire and the mandate to do this. We The Elgin Military Museum must do it! We are doing it and who could do it better. I see a greater role in children’s education for us in the future. As we take up this role in more depth our approach will change, our demand will change. A time is coming when we will no longer have veterans at Remembrance Day services. We will not have veterans for children to talk to. We will not have first hand knowledge of yet another war. We must prepare now to help educate our youth more so as we do not break faith with those who gave their tomorrows for our todays.

***“For King and Country”* Elgin’s 91st Battalion Left St. Thomas for Flanders Fields 90 Years Ago**

Was it a different time, with different values? Was it a time of innocence and naivety? Was it a time like we will never see again? It was a time of great importance for all Elgin County residence living then and living now. The time was June 25th, 1916, and the event was the departure of some 940 men, destined to fight in the trenches of France.

The men were mostly local and had volunteered for active service in WW1 joining the 91st Battalion. A unit raised, trained and sent off by

our community to do what was needed.

People can debate the merits of going off to war in past times and they can critique the manner in which it was done. We were not there in 1916, during the Empire's time of need. We were not raised in a young Canada just freshly made a Dominion in our father's time. We see events differently, through different eyes with different experiences and values. We need to remember those times were different and our forefathers were people whose values came from their time, not ours.

Today few understand what took place 90 years ago to make our forefathers act the way they did. What we do know today is our forefathers acted with devotion, dedication and with a sense of personal pride en masse. What would move us today to take similar action?

On Sunday the 25th of June 1916 20,000 local men, women and children came out to say goodbye to 940 soldiers going overseas. So many to volunteer and so many more that came to say goodbye! What ever motivated this to happen was a fantastic thing, an event unparalleled in local events. Never before or since have so many people came together in downtown St. Thomas. Never in our history have so many locals come to one spot for such a short moment in time to share an experience.

No matter one's views on war, politics, history or social conscience, we all must acknowledge that this event, on this day, marked a special time in our community's history. A special time for our forefathers. A special time for us.

All of us no matter who we are should be proud of our community's involvement, and those of us who can, should say "*Yes, my grandfather was there.*" Everyone should know that on Sunday June 25th, 1916 the 91st Battalion from Elgin County, "*The Elgins*", left to do their part and 20,000 local men, women and children came out to say goodbye.

Of the 940 that left that day 172 died while in service and 58 were decorated for their actions. Today, none are left to tell us in their own words the reasons for such devotion.

It's Like a Broken Record . . .

It just keeps repeating itself. For those of us old enough to remember records, or perhaps to old to understand CD's and MP-whatevers, the memory exists of that recording (usually a favourite, and also at either the best or the most annoying part), with a big scratch that caused it to continually repeat on small section, over and over and over. This is that part of the newsletter – the part where we explain, once again, how vital your support is to the Museum.

The part that it is important to keep the Museum operating for future generations, so that, while the old

soldiers may have faded away, the memory of their achievements and sacrifice for us remains strong.

The part that points out that neither the City of St. Thomas, or the County of Elgin provides any financial support (although the City does cut the grass and plow the snow, for which we are very grateful).

The part that says we need your financial support to make the Museum a continuing success.

Help keep the memories alive !

Donations can be made by mail or in person, by cash, cheque, debit, Visa or MasterCard, and a tax receipt will be immediately issued for the full eligible amount of the donation.

“Please be generous, please be generous, please be generous, please be generous . . .”

“Thanks, Canada”

David Meadows | April 27, 2006
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On April 22, 2006 four Canadian soldiers were killed in Afghanistan by a roadside bomb. Respects and heartfelt sadness go to the families of those heroes who stand alongside the U.S. in the Long War half a world away. While we focus on the war in Iraq, the fighting continues in Afghanistan where side-by-side the U.S. and one of its most loyal allies, Canada, engage the re-emergence of the Taliban.

Canada is like a close uncle who constantly argues, badgers, and complains about what you are doing, but when help is truly needed, you can't keep him away: he's right there alongside you. We have a unique

relationship with Canada. We have different political positions on many issues, but our unique friendship has weathered world wars, global crises, and the ever-so-often neighborhood disagreement.

Canada has been with us since the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism. In February 2006, without fanfare Canada, leading a multinational force combating growing Taliban insurgency, increased troop strength in Afghanistan to 2,300. With the American military stretched thin against rising instability in both Iraq and Afghanistan, an ally that increases its troop strength is inspiring and deserves our respect.

Katrina was another example of our close family-like relationship. Katrina struck the Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005. Two days later, the Vancouver Urban Search and Rescue Team rushed from British Columbia, Canada to Saint Bernard Parish, Louisiana. In this Parish of 68,000 Americans, the first responders were Canadians. Overall, within the devastated Gulf Coast area, it appears Canada was the first responder outside of local efforts. They worked 18-hour days, going door-to-door alongside Louisiana State Troopers, rescuing 119-Americans.

While FEMA ramped up to surge into the catastrophe; while the administration and Louisiana fought for the politically correct way to respond; Canadian aid was already at work.

The Canadian Forces Joint Task Group 306 consisting of the warships HMCS *Athabaskan*, HMCS *Toronto*, NSMC *Ville de Quebec*, and CCGC *William Alexander* sailed to the Gulf Coast to deliver humanitarian supplies. They stayed, working alongside U.S. Navy and Mexican warships, to provide aid to Katrina victims.

Katrina was not an anomaly of our close relationship. When Hurricane Ivan devastated Pensacola, Florida in October 2004 Canadian humanitarian help was there also. Canadian power trucks roamed the streets and countryside helping restore electricity where Americans had a unique experience of running into workmen who only spoke French.

Canada took a lot of undeserved flak for failing to leap into Operation Iraqi Freedom when our administration sent us galloping across the desert. But Canada remains one of our staunchest allies in the war. When United States military forces were fighting up the highways in Operation Iraqi Freedom, Canada quietly increased troop numbers in Afghanistan and continued Naval operations with U.S. warships in the Persian Gulf.

I was at the Pentagon on 9/11, stationed on the Joint Staff. During the early hours after the attack, the United States closed its air space and ordered every aircraft within our borders to land immediately at the nearest airfield. Canada immediately stood up an Operations Support Post.

With civil aviation grounded, aircraft destined for the United States were forced elsewhere. Most landed in Canada. Re-routed travelers and flight crews were hosted at Canadian Forces facilities in Goose Bay, Gander, and Stephenville, Newfoundland; Halifax, Shearwater, and Aldershot, Nova Scotia; Winnipeg, Manitoba; and, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories.

Canada rapidly mobilized its forces. Within hours, the Canadian Navy was on alert with ships preparing to cast off immediately for any U.S. port to help victims of the 9/11 attacks. Canada's Disaster Assistance Response Team prepared to deploy from Trenton, Ontario. Canada dispersed CF-18

fighter aircraft to strategic locations throughout Canada. No politics. No negotiating. No questions. They were just there. Canada would have fought any adversary that approached the United States that day.

Canada has been such an integral partner with the United States in the Global War on Terrorism that on December 7, 2004 when President Bush awarded the Presidential Unit Citation to Commander Joint Force South for combat success in Afghanistan, he was also recognizing the secretive Canadian Joint Task Force 2 commando counter-terrorism unit.

The U.S. Department of Defense has awarded 30 Bronze Star medals for heroism in combat to Canadian Forces personnel. Some of those 30 died in action. Many of the others were wounded. These Canadians earned this American medal for heroism fighting alongside Americans. When we recall our own dead heroes, we must remember that these warriors gave their lives not only for Canada, but also for the United States.

Canada is more than a neighbor. It is a close family member with the gumption to disagree with its brother to the south but always there when disaster strikes and America needs help. For that, I salute you, Canada, and extend my respect for the sacrifices given by members of the Canadian Forces.

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