



Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

w w w . c m h s . c a

November 2013

Lt.-Col. Joan Kennedy More than half a century ago, Joan Kennedy assumed command of the Canadian Women's Army Corps that was formed by her personal initiative, despite official short-sightedness and gender prejudice. From local beginnings as leader of a group of volunteers, she went on to spearhead the national formation of the CWAC, in which women became part of the Canadian army for the first time.



CMHS Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on

**Tuesday,
December
17th,
2013**

7:00 pm

At the
Petty Officers' Mess
HCMS Tecumseh

She was born Joan Barbara Fensham in Middlesex, England, in 1908, daughter of an immigrant banker who became an Alberta farmer. Having contracted malaria during the First World War, Harry Fensham re-settled his family in the gentler climate of Victoria. After matriculation from high school, Joan worked as a telephone switch-board operator, then became an accountant with the B.C. Bond Corporation.

She was a shrewd observer of world affairs and the growing threat of war with Nazi Germany. Early in 1939 Joan Kennedy joined with other like minded women to form the British Columbia Women's Service Corps. And became its commandant. Without any government support, members of the BCWSC made their own military style uniforms and trained themselves in practical skills that would be needed in a war.

The BC women were the first, then similar groups formed in other provinces across Canada. These groups proved their foresightedness and value after war had been declared.

None of the Canadian women at that time expressed the slightest desire to go into front line combat. Nevertheless, they held strong patriotic feelings and were determined to serve in a vital support role opened to them

The idea of women to performing a variety of military jobs caught Kennedy's imagination. Almost single-handedly, she began a determined campaign to persuade the Dominion government to co-ordinate various women's voluntary organizations into a national army unit. For more than two years, she faced total indifference from politicians and downright hostility from military headquarters. Calmly, she kept pointing out the successful example of half a million women already serving in the British armed forces. Attitudes and well-entrenched prejudice towards women prevailed in Canada in those days. One brass-hat spluttered to her, "A petticoat army madness!"

After being turned down by successive ministers of defence, Joan Kennedy's persistent lobbying finally paid off. On August 13th, 1941 the Hon. John Ralston signed an Order-in-Council to authorize formation of the Canadian Women's Army Corps. The unit was suddenly given priority.

Meantime, Joan Kennedy was admitted into the army with the rank of major -- the first Canadian woman to receive an Army commission - and appointed Staff Officer CWAC: Military District 11, head-quartered at Work Point Barracks, Victoria.



The
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
 All are welcome to attend

OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

David Soltess *President*

Susan Elve *Secretary*

Brian Hanning *Treasurer*

David Gale *Editor*

David Gale *Past President*

Floyd Stinson *Director*

Dave Love *Historian*

Notice of Next Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on
Tuesday, December 17th, 2013
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 and Tell

The President, David Soltess, would like to invite everyone to remain after the meeting for an informal time of fellowship.

Even more of a novelty in Canada was the innovative sight of women in military uniform. CWACs were outfitted in well cut khaki tunics, shirts, and skirts, plus trousers usually worn only while on such duties as driving trucks. Each individual woman's clothing measurements were forwarded to Army Central Stores in Ottawa, so individual uniforms were tailor-made. Regulations required female recruits aged between 21 and 40, with a minimum height of five feet, weight no less than 105 pounds, and having no dependents.. They were to have at least Grade 8 education, and be British subjects, as Canadian citizens were at the time. Basic training consisted of squad drill, marching, physical education, and military deportment, but without any weapons instruction.

When critics suggested that rigid army life could turn females into masculine individuals, Kennedy snapped, "No, life in the CWAC will never rob a girl of her charm or her womanly qualities! Whatever tasks they undertake, they'll do them in a woman's way." She was forthright about what were tasks to be expected. "Any woman who goes into this with the idea of finding glamour is entirely misled;" she said. "Her job will probably be pounding a typewriter, scrubbing floors, cooking, or something equally commonplace but necessary."

Kennedy's emphasis continued to be on training women capable of non-combat duties to relieve men for front-line service. Early requirements were for clerks, telephonists, cooks, and drivers. Eventually CWACs were performing scores of demanding military skills, including code-ciphering, motor-mechanics; and mapmaking.

Whatever their rank, women received only two-thirds the pay of a male soldier. female private got 90 cents per day, compared with \$1.30 for a man. Lt. Col. Kennedy's daily pay was \$6.70. (A man in an equivalent position, commanding an entire corps, usually held the rank of general.)

In 1943, after some understandable grumbling about inequality of earnings, CWAC pay was raised to 80 percent of a man's rate



Private Lowry, CWAC, tightening up the springs on the front of her vehicle, Chelsea & Cricklewood Garage, England, July 7, 1944.

Minutes of the last meeting

Calgary Military Historical Society Minutes of Meeting held on October 16th, 2013

Meeting called to order at 7:18 PM by President David S.

Minutes-no errors or omissions other than the usual complaints. Moved by Bob McP. and seconded by Susan E. All in favour.

Treasures Report-Treasurer Brian H. lists expenses and donations. Brian H. moves that report is accepted. Seconded by Mike C. Approved by members.

Membership Report. Membership report by Brian H. Total of 33 members. Looking for renewals.

Old Business

Pres. David S. reports and discusses with member on the Annual New Years soiree. Making arrangements for the group to meet at Legion on second Friday of January.

Pres. David S. discusses "Constitutional Amendments. Discussion of issues and member are to check it over. And more ideas or changes and members should pass these on to the Dave L. To be returned to next meeting for final input.

New Business,

David G. Mentions the "Vimy Foundation" and the work they do. The organization is involved with sending Canadian students on tours of Vimy and other sites. They are also involved with building a new interpretive centre at the memorial. Discussion of how we can get involved and help follows. Suggestion of funding or partially funding a local student is brought up by other members. David to contact member James B and find out more about the group.

Pres. David S. discusses Maurice Harvey Award and notifies members that they will vote on awarding this to a member at the next meeting. Also wants our book auction renewed with new books. **Members are asked to donate new books for the next meeting.**

Auction—Books donated by members are auctioned off and proceeds to the Club.

Break. Draw by ticketmiester Neil. Many happy winners.

Show and Tell

David G. Shows Chinese presentation certificates and medals awarded to a pilot of the 436 Squadron for his work in the Burmese part of WW2.

Barry E.—3 different Lord Strathcona badges. Discusses original badges and Booker's book. Mentions how militia badges were used until the group ran out of them even if there were changes in that time to the official badges.

Alan Mck.—QSA medal discussion. Also comments on his poor marksmanship during a recent elk hunt at the Suffield Station in Southern Alberta.

Bob McP.— Shows WW1 German, Prussian Medal group and explains it. Also shows Scottish Merk 1682 and Japanese coin 1862.

Mike C.—2014 Medal Yearbook. Medals found in England. Boer War Q.S.A's for different units. Coronation pass 1902 and US War Correspondent badge. Etc.

Darrel K.—Discusses Russ Boyles and family medals. Korean War Memorial Cross and papers.

Motion to adjourn. Moved by Stuart E and seconded by Barry E. Meeting adjourned at 8:37 PM.





The first draft of 350 CWACs went overseas in November, 1942, to serve in London, England, and eventually 3000 served overseas. They bravely endured Luftwaffe bombing raids, and in Northwest Europe, the first female Canadian soldiers to come under fire. Later in the war, 43 CWACs served in Italy, 156 in Northwest Europe, and eventually 4,000 were stationed overseas. During the war, 25 CWACs died in WWII, as result of accident, injury, or disease. No CWACs were killed by enemy action, but four were wounded by a German V2-missile attack on Antwerp in 1945.

The CWAC was disbanded in September, 1946, then reformed three years later, including a local Victoria platoon of women in 155 Coy., RCASC, later the 11 (Victoria) Service Battalion. After Canadian unification of the three armed forces in 1968, women blended into the ranks of most units, becoming simply soldiers, sailors, and air force personnel. Finally, in 1989, the Human Rights Commission ordered that women were to be fully integrated into all aspects of the military.

tary.

Meanwhile, Joan Kennedy herself had been let go from the army in 1946. She returned to Victoria, obtained a divorce, and quickly adapted to home-town life again. She took mischievous fun in telling how previous military comrades of both sexes often passed by without recognizing her in civilian clothes.

The post-war years gradually became more difficult for her. Despite her executive skills, she faced an increasing struggle to make ends meet, and ended up trying to build a small secretarial business.

The whole city was shocked when she died suddenly of a heart attack at her home on Oct. 11, 1956. She was only 47 years of age; her early death more than likely the result of strain from overwork during five gruelling years of wartime responsibility.

Joan Kennedy became the only Canadian woman ever to be accorded a funeral with full military honours. Her casket was draped with the Union Jack and home on a gun-carriage flanked by six army officers as pallbearers. The procession marched slowly; through streets lined by Victorians standing to show their respect. Then Joan Kennedy's ashes were laid to rest in an unmarked grave at Hatley Park Memorial Gardens, Colwood, British Columbia. Forty-three years later, in 1999, a special plaque dedicated to her was unveiled at the Ashton Garrison Museum, Victoria, BC, where her personal effects are held. It has become the primary museum of the CWAC, which houses a large collection of female uniforms and related artefacts. Other CWAC related materials are held by the Museum of Esquimalt Naval Base, Victoria, BC.



CWAC's en route to Italy

