



# Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE  
CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

www.cmhs.ca

October 2014

Re-strikes are badges made using original dies, sometimes by the original manufacturer, and as such would be nearly impossible to distinguish from authentic period badges. In the realm of Canadian badge collecting, J.R. Gaunt & Sons is legendary as a supposed source of such re-strikes. But is that really the case? A close look at two commonly accepted 'Gaunt re-strikes' says otherwise.

J.R. Gaunt & Sons was a major manufacturer of Canadian badges dating from the militia (pre-WWI) era onward, with their head office and manufacturing facilities in London, and a Canadian sales office in Montreal.

There is a lot of 'everyone knows' conjecture about Gaunt and badges purportedly being re-struck from its original dies. Legend has it that Gaunt's dies in the UK were sold as scrap in the 1980s or 1990s as part of the liquidation of its UK assets when it 'went into receivership'. These dies supposedly then made their way into unknown private hands, who have been merrily banging off re-strikes ever since. The truth is more Rumsfeldian to say the least, full of "known knowns... known unknowns... [and] unknown unknowns".

Gaunt did go bankrupt, but it appears it was *Richard Gaunt*, J.R. Gaunt's father, in 1862 (with his assets being liquidated circa 1872). J.R. Gaunt & Sons was not founded until 1884. The firm is commonly rumoured to have hit hard times when it was bought by the Birmingham Mint in 1973, then by the Firmin Group in 1991. In 2002, J.R. Gaunt & Sons was 're-established' by an unrelated third party, but this iteration is not a continuation of the original firm and it was required to stop using the J.R. Gaunt name. In 2010, the Gaunt family itself resurrected the firm as J.R. Gaunt & Son (London) Ltd. Firmin was then threatened with legal action by the new J.R. Gaunt & Son to prevent Firmin from using the name and warrants of its previously-dissolved subsidiary. The only other "known known" is that Wm. Scully Ltd. acquired any Gaunt dies from its Canadian office when Gaunt folded its tents here in 1984, and none of these dies would have fallen into private hands.



How do I differ? Let me count the ways! An original Soo Rifles badge (top) and a 1960s reproduction supposedly struck from J.R. Gaunt's original dies. Notwithstanding the slider, which the originals never had, the myriad die differences are proof positive this reproduction was not struck from original dies.

## In this issue

- Minutes from the last meeting
- Dispatches from the front
- Notice of next meeting

## CMHS Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on  
**Tuesday,**  
**Oct. 21**  
**2014**  
**7:00 pm**  
at the  
Petty Officers' Mess  
HMCS Tecumseh

## Minutes of the meeting held Sept. 16, 2014

**Meeting called to order 7:15 pm. Attending: 23 members, 2 guests**

**Minutes** of the previous meeting accepted as read, despite usual glaring errors [Bob M, second Mike C.] Carried (Unanimous).

**Introduction** of guests: Ken Wider, Jim Kleih (Tony G.)

### Annual General Meeting commenced

No additional AGM business raised by the membership.

### Executives' Reports to Members

**Membership and Financial Reports** [Brian Hanning, Membership Secretary and Treasurer]

Summary: Membership stands at 47, up slightly from 2013.

Club finances remain stable, with \$1298.00 in the CMHS operational fund.

Majority of major expenses (Christmas party, Post Office Box rental, newsletter and newsletter mailing costs) will be incurred in the next 90 days, however, the Treasurer is of the opinion dues are sufficient at \$20 annually to cover foreseeable CMHS expenses.

Required Annual General Report was filed with Alberta Government, and clearance certificate received for same. Not-for-profit registration for CMHS extended for the coming year.

Motion to accept the Membership and Financial Reports as read [Brian H., second Marjorie N.] Carried (Unanimous)

### President's Report [David Soltess]

Summary: Concerns over static membership/lack of growth;

Reiteration of the importance of website as an awareness tool and source for member recruitment, and encouragement of more member involvement in contributing to same;

Review of meeting conduct and etiquette;

Thanks to fellow executive and members;

Personal highlights from 2013/2014.

*[Note: any member wishing a complete Financial Report may request same from the Treasure. The President's Report will be available in its entirety on the CMHS website.]*

### Setting of Membership Dues:

Discussion to establish dues for the coming year. Moved that the dues for Calgary Military Historical Society remain at \$20 per member per year [David L., second Marjorie N.] Carried (Unanimous).

## Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL  
OF THE  
CALGARY MILITARY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

David Gale: Editor

CALGARY MILITARY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. Box 205, Station M  
Calgary, AB T2P 2H6  
Canada

[www.cmhs.ca](http://www.cmhs.ca)

© Calgary Military Historical Society

## The Calgary Military Historical Society

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.

### OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY:

Kevin Roberts, President

David Gale, Secretary

Brian Hanning, Treasurer

David Soltess, Past President

David Gale, *Sabretache* Editor

David Love, Historian

Members at large: Floyd Stinson

Indra Ross

Don Skinner

Darrell Knight

Susan Elve, Librarian/Archivist

The CMHS meets once every calendar month at:

Petty Officers' Mess

HMCS Tecumseh

1820 - 24 St. SW

Calgary, AB T2T 0G6

## Minutes of the meeting held Sept. 16, 2014 (cont'd)

### Election of the Executive:

Single candidates stood forward for each of the executive positions, and all accepted by acclamation: **President:** Kevin Roberts; **Treasurer/Membership Secretary:** Brian Hanning; **Secretary:** David Gale

### Business of the Annual General Meeting concluded.

Chair surrendered to incoming President. Thanks offered to, and many giddy sighs of relief heaved for the departing president.

### Brief break.

### Appointment of CMHS officers:

Sabretache Editor: David G.

Librarian/Archivist: Susan E.

Historian: David L.

Members-at-large: Floyd S.; Indra R.; Darrell K.; Robert S.

**Reminder:** Thorncliffe Gun Show, Sat. Sept. 20

**Book draw** (Neil): Happy winners but slim pickings. Disappointment ensues.

### Show-and-tell:

Guest Ken W. Personal collection of Canadian and foreign military aircraft photos, including US B52 bomber, Russian Mig 29 fighters at Winnipeg, and last flight of Canadian DC3 Dakotas.

Garry M. Displays of 15 ancestors, including brief biographies, their service records and medals, and "20<sup>th</sup> Century Conflicts" display of ancestors. Brief discussion of genealogical research methods.

Darrell K. Frame of new badge acquisitions, including Pacific Coast Militia Rangers; three books (*Pacific Coast Militia Rangers*, which details Japanese balloon bombings along the West Coast during WWII; *Century of Service: The History of the South Alberta Light Horse*, and *The Damned: The Canadians at the battle of Hong Kong and the POW experience, 1941-45*).

Mike C. Wedge cap and original dark-finish RCMP badge (1<sup>st</sup> Coy., Cdn. Provost Corps); wedge caps for the RCEME and RCAF (WWII); a book on self defense for women, *Hands Off!*, written by Lt. Col. W. E. Fairbairn; "\$1 finds" — rare set of 5 s., 10 s. and 1 £ postal money orders used as currency by Boers during the Boer War.

Neil P. Bound collection of *Chicago Sun* newspapers, complete month of October, 1944.

Bob M. 1939-1945 New Zealand War Service medal; 1893 28<sup>th</sup> National Encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic medal with intact ribbon; unusual 5 million mark 1923 German coin; read *Two Sides of War*, a poem by Grantland Rice, US journalist and war correspondent

Dave L. Discussion of original gems dredged from a sea of eBay reproductions and importance of knowing one's field; extremely rare, original WWII and WWI German chaplain's arm bands grabbed for a song.

Robert D. Collar dogs to 14<sup>th</sup> Canadian Hussars and Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa.

Don S. 1<sup>st</sup> Lancers, Hyderabad Contingent (Brit. India) sabretache; 1880s sabretache and "the largest badge ever made," 16<sup>th</sup> The Queen's Lancers (Brit.)

Floyd S. German WWII Panzer Group Cross in gold. Discussion of distinguishing marks missed by reproduction artists.

Martin U. Collection of personal effects named to an Allan Gilmore, Sgt., US Army, 340<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, including wale bone-handled straight razor (circa 1898-1904), and match case dated 1904, decorated with post-Indian Wars eagle.

Barry E. Veteran's Association medal (Fenian Raid)

### Meeting adjourned

Fellowship and frivolity ensued. Fistfights postponed in honour of the new executive.

## Cover story (concluded)

Purportedly, after being purchased by Birmingham Mint, Gaunt dies were sold off as scrap, as part of Gaunt's move from London to Birmingham in 1981, thus fueling the re-strike plague. Either before its acquisition by or under the auspices of Birmingham Mint, Gaunt is said to have struck badges—including some Canadian badges—from its original dies for the British collectors' market. There is a reference containing mention of a British badge dealer's price list from 1972/1973 advertising "NEW STOCK from Gaunt," ranging from "50p to £1.50." As the author of that reference notes: "All appeared to be re-struck from existing dies but the fact that *each had some marginal difference when compared to the original* (emphasis added) leaves no doubt in my mind that this particular exercise was done with the serious intention only of helping collectors and not to cheat them."



An original WWII 1<sup>st</sup> APCR badge (l.) and an early Gaunt reproduction (r.) in gilding metal. Besides the telltale round "O", the reproduction differs in every way — another strike against the 'original dies' theory.

One badge in particular is commonly accepted to have been re-struck by Gaunt from original dies — the 51<sup>st</sup> Soo Rifles. This supposed 'original die' re-strike appears in the late 1960s or early 1970s. However, it seems no one ever really bothered to take a close look at the badge at all—with everyone just *assuming* it was re-struck from original Gaunt dies. A badge collecting urban legend was born, and like the 'truth' behind most urban legends, nothing seems further from fact. If Gaunt did reproduce this badge, they did so from an entirely new die. Multiple, significant die differences between legitimate Soo Rifles badges and the supposed 'original die re-strike' wouldn't confuse a one-eyed mole. The real mystery is why so many collectors and 'experts' bought into, and still buy into this story.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Personnel Carrier Regiment (1<sup>st</sup> APCR or 'Kangaroos') 'Die II' badge also first seems to appear at about the same time as the Soo Rifles reproduction. The Kangaroos were disbanded in 1945, yet "Die II" badges can't be traced further back than the 1960s. Col. Churchill of the 1<sup>st</sup> APCR only ever placed a single badge order with Gaunt, and there were still sufficient badges left from that initial order at the end of the war that he handed them out at post-war regimental reunions. Despite that, and unlike the 51<sup>st</sup> Soo Rifles badge, an entirely different mythos has grown up around the 'Die II' 1<sup>st</sup> APCR badge. Even some badge experts with otherwise impeccable credentials will argue these are legitimate World War II badges.

Now, it's *possible* that Gaunt made up a second die near the end of WWII for whatever reason. The again, *anything is possible*. And if anything ever cried out for the application of Ockham's Razor, or even the wisdom behind the saying, "If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's probably a duck," it's the story behind this badge.

Regardless of wishful thinking and 'learned' opinion to the contrary, the following is fact: there is absolutely no documented evidence of any Die II badge ever being made officially, no documented evidence of it ever being issued and no documentation of it ever being worn by the Canadian Kangaroos in WWII.

If J.R. Gaunt began producing copy badges for collectors in the early 1970s, as exemplified by the Soo Rifles badge they did not use 'original dies' as is commonly thought. And if their dies were disposed of, and acquired by enterprising copyists in the 1980s, it is most likely that it was Gaunt's reproduction dies that were sold off. That would go a long — and straight — way toward explaining the preponderance of a certain other common Gaunt copies. — David S.