



Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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March 2015

The amazing Dr. Campbell Mellis Douglas

Campbell Mellis Douglas was born in Grosse Île, Québec, on August 5, 1840, and educated at St. John's College and Laval University. He attended the Edinburgh School of Medicine, where he received his Doctor of Medicine degree in 1861. He then joined the British Medical Service in 1862 and was posted to the 2nd Battalion of the 24th Regiment of Foot (South Wales Borderers) at Rangoon, in Burma. By 1867, he had risen to the rank of major and was serving as Assistant Surgeon.

Late in April, 1867, a British naval frigate, Assaw Valley, put in to the island of Little Andaman in the Bay of Bengal, at the time a British protectorate of Burma. Some of the crew of the ship ventured ashore to reconnoitre the area. When they did not return after several days it was feared they might have been murdered by natives. The Burmese chief commissioner ordered an army detachment to go ashore and investigate.

A contingent of Campbell Douglas's 2nd Bn. of the 24th Regt. of the Foot sailed from Rangoon, arriving off the island on May 7. A small contingent landed on the island and was immediately set upon by natives. Meanwhile a heavy storm blew up, turning the surf into a boiling sea, cutting off the soldiers ashore and placing them in grave danger.

Douglas and others aboard ship could do little but watch. Soon, frustration and concern moved Douglas to act. A lifelong and avid canoeist, the Canadian surgeon took the helm of a rescue rowboat and set off for shore with four soldiers. High, rolling waves thwarted their first effort to reach the besieged soldiers, but a second attempt an hour later succeeded.

"This time the doctor stood in the gig's bows, keeping it on an even keel by shifting his weight from side to side. In two trips to the island, Douglas and crew removed 17 of the stranded soldiers; one drowned in the surf. All five rescuers received the Commonwealth's highest award for gallantry, in spite of the fact the Victoria Cross was normally awarded only during a declared war. For his part in the drama, Douglas, surgeon cum seafarer, was awarded the VC for acting "in an intrepid and seamanlike manner, cool to a degree, as if what he was doing was an ordinary act of everyday life." In addition to the VC he was also awarded the Royal Humane Society Silver Medal. **Continued Page 2**



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CMHS Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on

**Tuesday,
March 17th,
2015**

7:00 pm

At the
Petty Officers' Mess
HCMS Tecumseh

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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.

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

Notice of Next Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on
Tuesday, March 17th, 2015
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:

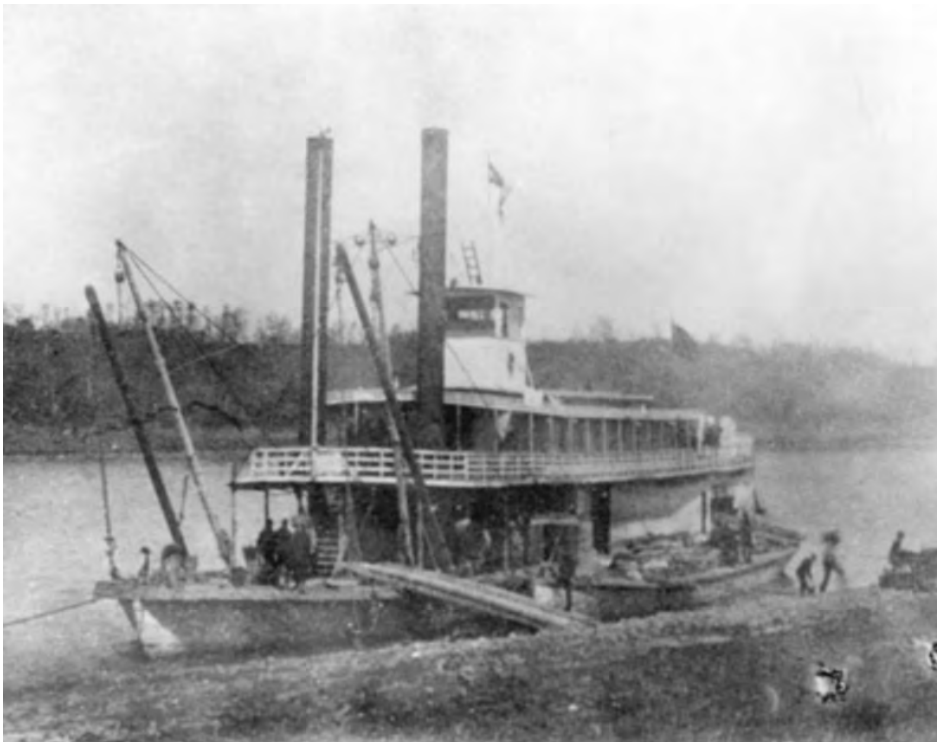
- Introduction of guests, Minutes of last meeting
- Correspondence, Membership report
- Treasurer's report, Old business / New business
- Break, Show & Tell

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

He later achieved the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and served on the Northwest Frontier in India. He retired from the army in 1882 and returned to Canada to launch a private practice in Lakefield, Ontario. Then at age 42 he then turned his back on medicine and filled his days designing and marketing sporting goods. In 1880 he filed patent applications in Canada and the U.S. on a collapsible canoe. He spent time testing and sailing all kinds of watercraft.

When Canada sent troops to quell the Metis uprising on the prairies in 1885, officials recruited Douglas to take charge of two field hospitals sent for support. Due to political infighting he soon resigned his position. The Defence minister again contacted his and put him in charge of #1 Field Hospital. He arranged the transport of the field unit, staff and equipment to be shipped to Swift Current. This was done by rail via Chicago and Minneapolis. Campbell then headed to Calgary with a small staff to assign them to General Strange. When he arrived back in Swift Current he found that the Field Unit had been loaded on the steam paddle boat the "Northcote" and had sailed without him. To make matters worse the boat had gone missing and nobody knew where it was.

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During the Riel Rebellion of 1885 The Northcote served as a troop transport and gunship at the Battle of Batoche then served as a troop and arms transport in the fighting against Big Bear and Poundmaker. After the Battle of Batoche she carried the wounded to a field hospital in Saskatoon then returned to bring Louis Riel to Saskatoon on his final journey to Regina for trial and subsequent execution.

SS Northcote

Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the meeting held Feb. 17, 2015

Meeting called to order 7:05 pm. David S. acting chair/secretary. Attending: 21 members, 0 guests

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

Summary: **Membership:** total 43, down from 47 in 2014.

Finances: Opening balance \$942.21 Revenue \$85.02 Expenses \$238.40 Closing balance \$788.03

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

Charitable donation: Moved that CMHS make its annual charitable donation for 2015 to the Calgary Interfaith Food Bank, in the amount of \$406.50 [Brian H., second Bob Mc.] Carried (Unanimous)

Old Business: Dave L. still working to arrange member get-together with family of long-time collector, the late Ken Taylor.

Announcements: Alf Savage, long-time collector and friend to CMHS, has passed away [Alan Mc.]

The 2015 Military Collectors Club of Canada (MCC) annual convention, hosted by their Calgary Chapter, coincides with the 2015 AACCA Calgary Easter Gun Show. MCC banquet and auction to be held April 3 (Good Friday), Heritage Room, Blackfoot Hotel.

All CMHS members invited to attend [Alan Mc.]

Full service records for all New Zealand armed forces personnel up to and including WW2 are now available online [Mike C.]

Calgary Mosquito Society's Richard de Boer's recent talk on the ongoing Mosquito restoration highly praised. This society meets 2nd Wednesday of every month (info: <http://calgarymosquitosociety.com/>) [Alan Mc.]

Related: Canadian Aviation Historical Society meetings held on the 3rd Thursday of every month at Southern Alberta Institute of Technology's Art Smith Aero Centre. Attendance highly recommended, as each meeting features excellent speakers (info: <http://www.caahs.ca/>) [Don S.]

Royal Canadian Legion #285 (Kensington) to stay and rebuild in some form [John E.]

Request from members for any and all unwanted Korean War medals [Bob Mc.]

Special announcement and bequest:

The CMHS received a bequest of nearly 100 military books from the estate of James Paul Lafleur. Books were distributed to the members with the understanding that they are to be recirculated amongst the Society members. In accordance with the wishes expressed in the following letter, an appropriate toast was raised to James Paul Lafleur, with the grateful thanks of the membership.

To the Calgary Military Historical Society

I would like to donate a small library of books to your members in memory of my brother, James Paul Lafleur, who passed November 9th, 2014. Jim was a veteran of 22 years of service in the Airforce, serving in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Cold Lake, Alberta, Baden, Germany then back to Cold Lake before retiring from the military.

To say Jim loved his time in the military would be an understatement. To him, he saw his time as a true service to his country; a country he loved. Always the first to volunteer for anything that came down, he took pride in his work and went to the end of the Earth to fulfill his role. Jim, as two of his brothers in our family did, followed in our Father's footsteps, who served 20+ years before his death in 1974. While each one of us took pride in our time served, Jim took just that much more pride in every day and every task he completed.

With his love of all things military and appetite for reading, he gathered this donation over many years. When he wasn't designing golf courses on his always-present pad of paper (another passion in his life) he was designing his ideal military force, right down to the man, equipment, rank and uniform, based on the knowledge he gained within these many pages. His love of the military was just that much.

I am sure that within your membership, this donation will be accepted with grace and interest. All that I ask of you in return is to offer a small toast to Jim over a beer. He would like that.

Sincerely, MCpl (Ret'd) Mike Lafleur

Show-and-tell:

In lieu of this month's show-and-tell, Dave L. made a special presentation on researching and interpreting military service records. Dave used a recent "Can We Help?" inquiry from the Society's website as a case study to illustrate how he extracted accurate service information, the pitfalls in obtaining information, and the invaluable need for experience and open-mindedness in recognizing what are often hidden informational clues in piecing together accurate, factual accounts of a particular service history.

Dave's presentation was excellent, and supported with a well-detailed slide presentation.

This particular case proved somewhat more difficult than usual, with factual errors in the various service records available as well as strong biases on the part of the person making the request. Dave overcame both challenges and compiled an accurate history for this serviceman's family, including correcting or filling in several gaps in the questioner's extended family history.

Dave's dedication and good grace in acting as Historian and undertaking these cases is a great service both to the CMHS and to the inquiring public, and does much to raise our Society's profile. Members were unanimous in their appreciation of his presentation, and of the many hours he volunteers in handling these inquiries from the public on our behalf.

Move to adjourn [Mike C.]

Meeting adjourned 8:52 p.m.

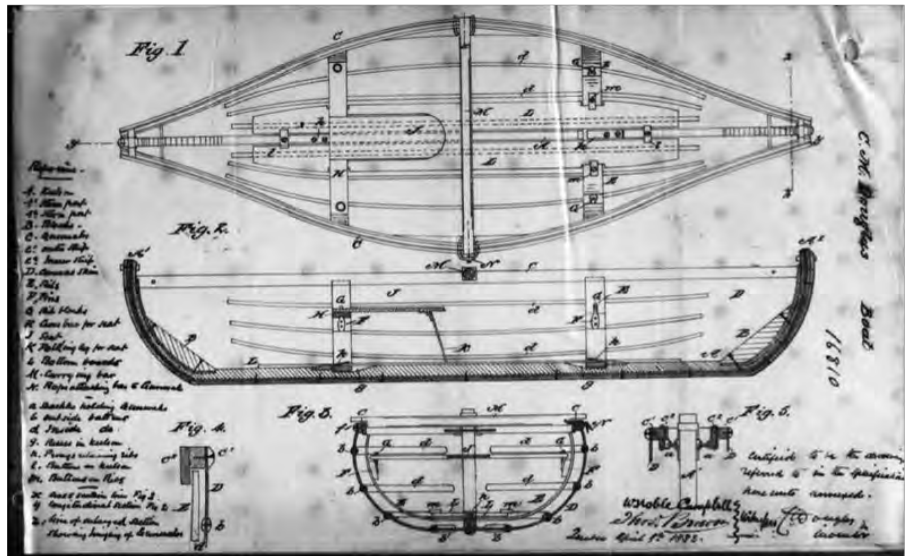
His personal gear was not all loaded on the missing steam boat, which included his famous folding canoe. He approached General Laurie with the idea of him paddling down the Saskatchewan river and looking for the Northcote. Explaining that he would be such and insignificant object that hostile forces would not be bothered with a simple canoeist. Surprisingly he was granted permission. Loading his gear and boat on a horse and buggy he headed for the river. In a comedy of errors his horse and buggy got away from him and he spent the day chasing it across the prairies. Finally capturing it, the next day he made his way to the river and assembled his canoe. The canoe had been built to his specifications by Peterborough Ontario craftsmen the year before. It measured 12 feet long and 2 1/2 feet wide and 1 foot deep amidships. For transport the ribs could be released and each side folded lengthwise into a portable pack. Paddling and portaging took a toll and it was five days later that he finally found the ill fated boat mired on a sandbar. After visiting with his staff and crew he realized that the boat was going nowhere soon so he set out by himself again.

On arriving finally in Saskatoon, he found the town in an uproar. Beside being threatened by Riel the army had suffered a defeat at the Battle of Fish Creek. Not able to await the Northcote, improvised ambulance wagons had been sent to bring Middleton's wounded the same afternoon that Campbell arrived in his canoe. He was immediately put to work. Putting the townspeople to work as corpsmen and nurses. By the next day a exhausted Campbell Douglas was happy to see the arrival by wagon teams of Dr. Roddick and staff with equipment.

Roddick himself was happy to see the doctor, find out about the lost "Northcote" and issued high praise for Campbell Douglas "pluck and endurance". The doctors then prepared for the final battles of the rebellion.

Later Campbell Douglas would return to England and retire. He did take his famous canoe with him and the intrepid mariner even paddled across the English Channel in it. No mean feat in itself.

He died in 1909 and his remains were buried in Wells Cemetery in Somerset, England. His V.C. and other medals were donated to the Canadian Forces Medical School in Borden. They have since been transferred to the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.



Folding Canoe Design

