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THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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June 2015

The King's German Legion and the Battle of Waterloo June 18th 1815



In 1803, Napoleon Bonapart was again at war with Britain but was unable to launch his armies against his foe. Instead the French emperor looked towards Germany and aimed a blow at Hanover, the homeland of the British king George III. A 13,000 man French corps was despatched to deal with the Hanoverians, whose government was in turmoil and unsure of what to do. The government of Hanover sued for peace and were immediately told to surrender its entire 10,000 man army.

One June 3 a Convention of Sublingen was signed. The convention allowed for the occupation of the electorate by the French, who would be paid for by the host country, and the army would be sent to France as Prisoners of War. As good as that seemed for the French, Bonaparte didn't ratify the agreement and so war loomed. A second, more acceptable peace - the Convention of the Elbe - resulted and Hanover agreed to disband its army.

Taking advantage of this mass of trained troops, Britain set out to recruit 4000 Hanoverians for use in British colours and even sent agents there to solicit support. These men later on faced the death penalty if caught in their activities.

The King's Germans were initially set down to be light troops, but within the ranks were many excellent cavalrymen and artillery and so, in December of 1803, permission was given to create an all-arms corps to be known as The King's German Legion.

By 1805 it consisted of two cavalry brigades, a light infantry brigade, two line infantry brigades and its own artillery and engineering units. By 1808 the KGL had been fully incorporated into the British army and had abandoned its own training and language of command.

One of the first expeditions undertaken by the KGL was in 1805 when 6000 of the Legion took part in what was supposed to be the freeing of Hanover from French rule. When the smoke had cleared from Napoleon Bonaparte's victory there Hanover had been ceded to Prussia as part of Austria's peace settlement. British troops were then ordered to return home, albeit with a large huge boost in the number of recruits for the KGL.

Although the Legion never fought autonomously, its units participated in campaigns in Hanover, Pomerania, Copenhagen and Walcheren, the Peninsular War and the retreat to Corunna; the Peninsular Campaign under the Duke of Wellington, including the battles of Garcia Hernandez, San Sebastian, Nivelle, Sicily and the eastern parts of Spain, Northern Germany and G6hrde.



CMHS Meeting

The next CMHS
meeting will be held
on

**Tuesday,
June 16th.
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

Notice of Next Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on

Tuesday, June 16th, 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 Roberts** would like to invite everyone to remain after the meeting for an informal time of fellowship.

In the Peninsular Campaign, the Germans enhanced the veteran core of the British army. At the Battle of Garcia Hernandez, the Dragoons with the KGL performed the unusual feat of smashing *two* French square formations in a matter of minutes.

At the **Battle of Waterloo**, the 2nd Light Battalion — with members of the 1st Light Battalion and the 5th Line Battalion — famously defended the farmhouse and road at "La Haye Sainte."

La Haye Sainte (sacred hedge) is a walled farmhouse compound at the foot of an escarpment on the Charleroi-Brussels road. The road leads from La Belle Alliance, where Napoleon had his headquarters on the morning of the battle, through where the centre of the French front line was located, to a crossroads on the ridge which is at the top of the escarpment and then on to Brussels. The Duke of Wellington placed the majority of his forces on either side of the Brussels road behind the ridge on the Brussels side. This kept most of his forces out of sight of the French artillery. During the night of the 17th, the main door to the courtyard of the farm was used as firewood by the occupying troops. Therefore, when the King's German Legion (KGL) was stationed in the farm at the morning of the battle, they had to hastily fortify La Haye Sainte. The troops were the 2nd Light Battalion KGL commanded by Major Georg Baring, and part of the 1st Light Battalion KGL. During the battle, they were supported by the 1/2 Nassau Regiment and the light company of the 5th Line Battalion KGL.

Both Napoleon and Wellington realized the strategic value of the position and it was fought over and around most of the day.

At 13:00, the French Grand Battery of heavy artillery opened fire. The French managed to surround La Haye Sainte and despite taking heavy casualties from the defenders, they attacked the centre left of Wellington's line. As the centre began to give way and La Haye Sainte became vulnerable. Picton's British Fifth Infantry Division then launched a bayonet charge on the advancing French column. As the French were beaten back from La Haye Sainte, the British heavy cavalry brigades attacked. This action relieved the pressure on the fortress farm.

At 15:00, Napoleon ordered Marshal Ney to capture La Haye Sainte. While Ney was engaged in the glorious but futile 8,000 man cavalry attack, unsupported by infantry or cannon, on Allied squares on the Brussels side of the ridge, he failed to take La Haye Sainte.

At 17:30, Napoleon re-issued orders for Ney to take La Haye Sainte. The French had worked up close to the buildings by this time. At 18:00 Marshal Ney, heavily supported by artillery and some cavalry, took personal command of an infantry regiment (13th Legere) and captured La Haye Sainte with a furious assault. "The light battalion of the German Legion, which occupied it, had expended all its ammunition" and had to retreat. The 5th Battalion of the German Legion was sent to reinforce the farm but were rode down by the French Cavalry with few survivors.

At 19:00, thanks to the French garrison in La Haye Sainte, the Imperial Guard was able to climb the escarpment and attack the Allies on the Brussels side of the ridge. This final attack was beaten back and became a rout around 20:10 as the French forces realised that with the arrival of the Prussians from the east, they were beaten. During the French retreat, La Haye Sainte was recaptured by the Allies.

Note: This is one small episode in a historical battle that spanned 4 days, between 3 armies, 3 battles, and thousands of skirmishes. Many hundreds of books have been written and are waiting for you to read them.

Minutes of the last meeting

CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Minutes of General Meeting held on May 191, 2015

Petty Officers Mess: HMCS Tecumseh

Meeting called to order by President Kevin R. at 7:10 pm.

16 members present and 0 guests.

Minutes of last meeting accepted after correction noted. Approved.

Treasurers/Membership- Currently 45 members. May filing due to government. Statements presented to membership. Approval moved by Neil Seconded by John E. Approved.

Secretary absent so minutes by Susan E.

Correspondence: no report

OLD BUSINESS:

NONE

NEW BUSINESS:

-Books from John McLeod's estate will be auctioned at our next meeting. Many books have been donated to the air force museum and excess of their library needs will go to their shop.

-Maurice Harvey award was not presented for 2014. How shall we proceed?

-Spitfire article read by Brian.

-Springbank antique show has been cancelled for 2015.

BREAK: Raffle conducted by Neil.

SHOW & TELL:

Darryl - Bronze can for carrying blasting caps

- Swiss army helmet, Mounties boots, circa 1956, Ross rifle bayonet and Air crew Europe medal

James - Netherlands gallery open at the Military Museums has Dutch post cards with Canadians.

John E. - Grenades and 2 entrenching tools with webbing.

GaryM - Book - Cowboy Cavalry story of the Rocky Mountain Rangers.

Bob M. - UN Korean War collection of medals in various languages.

Dave L - discussion of how people (collectors) get known by reputation

- Unit challenge coin - Canadian Armed Forces owned by Chaplain General in 14k gold.

Don S. - Battle of Waterloo Bi-Centennial discussed.

- Showed old book signed to a member of the royal family by the author.

Al R. - Medal, French tax collection.

Indra - Cap badge collection she has started

- Palestinian Brigade badge identified.

Motion to adjourn at 8:50pm.



Farm house at Laye Sainte today

Battle of Waterloo skeleton found.

The 200-year-old skeleton found at the site where the battle of Waterloo took place turns out to be the skeleton of 23-year-old Friedrich Brandt, a German soldier who fought alongside the British and Dutch troops and who was killed by Napoleon's forces. As reported by [The Sunday Times](#) on April 6, the 200-year-old skeleton was found in 2012, but it took nearly three years to determine its identity. The meticulous and painstaking effort of identifying the skeleton and finding the story behind the soldier provides an amazing insight into a world 200 years ago. The skeleton of Friedrich Brandt was found in June 2012 when an archaeologist excavated a car park near the Lion's Mound area at Waterloo battlefield just



south of Brussels. The skeleton was found with a musket ball between its ribs in the chest area. Next to the skeleton were 20 German and French coins (about a month's worth of a soldier's wage), an iron spoon, and a piece of wood displaying the date 1792 and the initials CB

The date and the initials CB were crucial for 54-year-old Gareth Glover, a former Royal Navy officer and historian, who was involved in the identification of the skeleton. Glover and other researchers discovered that the initials CB were originally FCB, with the F having faded out over time. Only two soldiers with the initials FCB were at the Waterloo battlefield where the skeleton was discovered, and only one of those two soldiers earned the same amount of money that was found with the skeleton. By comparing troop formations at the skeleton's location, Glover was able to determine that the soldier was a member of the German Legion and that he was likely killed at Lion Hill between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m.

According to a video, which was released after the 200-year-old skeleton was first found, the soldier was covered in only 15 inches of soil about 100 yards behind enemy lines indicating that he was shot but tried to move back. The 15 inches of soil show that his fellow soldiers tried to bury him in a hurry.



In regard to the found 200-year-old skeleton, Glover also discovered that the soldier was a hunchback, a private in the Legion's second line battalion, who would have never been able to serve under modern standards. The soldier's age was determined based on its deformities which showed severe spinal issues. Since no one ever claimed the soldier's wage and no relatives ever came forward, DNA identification was impossible. About 50,000 soldiers died at the battle of Waterloo. Some of those soldiers' bodies were sold commercially as fertilizer, their teeth sold as dentures, or they were burnt or buried in mass graves. Friedrich Brandt's 200-year-old skeleton is scheduled to be shown at Waterloo in May. .

Horror and heroism: French cuirassiers charging a British square during the Battle of Waterloo