



Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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August 2015

Corporal Wojtek: The Bear that fought in WWII



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CMHS Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on

**Tuesday,
August 18th
2015**

7:00 pm

At the
Petty Officers' Mess
HCMS Tecumseh

Wojtek, a Syrian brown bear, was born in 1942 and was adopted by the Polish Army unit stationed in Palestine. The bear was adopted by the 22nd Artillery Supply Company of the Polish II Corps and was named "Wojtek", pronounced Voytek. Less than a year old and having problems with swallowing he was fed with condensed milk from an emptied Vodka bottle.

Wojtek grew up together with soldiers of the 22nd Transport Company whilst spending most of his time with the 4th Platoon. His closest friends were two young soldiers, Dymitr Szawlugo and Henryk Zacharewicz whom also acted as his caretaker. Wojtek was often rewarded with beer, which eventually became his favorite drink. Next to drinking beer and wine, he occasionally also enjoyed smoking cigarettes, wrestling with his fellow comrades and was taught to salute when greeted.



Only a few soldiers dared to take him on in a wrestling match as some times the men would get roughed up a bit by getting scratched or have their uniforms torn. The rest of the men were happy to watch. In Palestine, Wojtek became a hero one night by capturing a thief who had broken into an ammunition compound where the bear was sleeping.

Together with the Company which adopted him, he moved to Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Egypt. In Egypt, when the Polish forces departed to fight with the British 8th Army in the Italian Campaign, Wojtek was officially drafted into

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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, August 18th, 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.

the Polish Army as a Private and got listed among the soldiers of the 22nd Artillery Supply Company to get him on a British transport ship as it was not permitted to transport animals. In the Italian campaign, the Polish II Corps soon prepared to break through the German defenses at Monte Cassino where it successfully captured the stronghold after much bitter fighting. During the Battle of Monte Cassino, Wojtek helped with transporting ammunition without ever dropping a single crate and carrying heavy artillery shells. In recognition of his actions, he was chosen as the official emblem of the 22nd Supply Company (by then renamed to 22nd Transport Company).



During the conflict, Wojtek found himself at the artillery firing line where he was seen to move crates of ammunition close to a truck where he was chained. Henry had been assigned to take care of the bear that day but when he was ordered forward as an artillery spotter, he had to leave Wojtek alone. Always inquisitive and willing to copy what the soldiers were doing, he began picking up the crates and moving towards the cannons. The sounds of gunfire did not concern him and he displayed courage in his willingness to participate in the action.

By the end of World War II he achieved the rank of Corporal. After the War ended in 1945 he was transported to Scotland along with parts of the Polish II Corps. Following demobilization in November 1947, Wojtek was given to the Edinburgh Zoo where he would spend the rest of his days, often visited by journalists and former Polish soldiers, some of whom would toss him cigarettes.

Wojtek died in December 1963, at the age of 21. At the time of his death he weighed nearly 500 pounds (230 kg) and was over 6 feet tall.



Wojtek was a hero of World War II, and there are statues of him and plaques memorializing his brave service in Poland, Edinburgh, the Imperial War Museum in London, and the Canadian War Museum.

Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the meeting held July 21st. 2015

Meeting called to order by Pres. Kevin R. . at 7:04 PM No guests were present.

Minutes of previous meeting questioned by the usual suspects. Declared no errors or omissions and moved to accept by Bob McP. and seconded by Susan E. Unanimous

Newsletter. Discussion of main story and . Various stories about similar planes used as advertisements. Editor points out that storey was taken from various sources and events possibly were exaggerated.

Membership report. Brian H reports membership is at 46 which is down 2 from last year.

Treasures report. Treasurer Brian H. lists donations and funds received and also funds paid out. Lists all costs and all incoming monies with closing balance. Brian moves that the membership accepts his report and is seconded by Floyd S. Accepted by all members.

Old Business.

David G. Thanks Member Tim P for article in newsletter.

New Business

Treasurer Brian H. reminds everyone that fall election will be taking place in September and people should be thinking about how they can contribute to the Society. He also announces that he will no longer take the post of "treasurer" and it will have to be filled. Offers to show new person all details of the job.

David S. Mentions that Cliff Law is looking for Pre WW1 badges and to contact him for details.

Break.

Draw for old books by ticket master Neil.

Show and Tell

Floyd S. New Zealand Air force memorabilia.

Barry E. Book Memories of ware service by a Canadian nursing sister.

Marjorie. WW1 book collection. What to do with them. Discussion about donation to library at Military Museum . Member Bob McP. Informs us that U of C owns library and explains how it happened.

Indra R. Received 150 cap badges and books from Canadian Legion.

Al. Wedge cap glengarry from Calgary Highlanders.

Mike C. Brass compass U.S. Engineers

Dave L. Shows items received by him from Chaplain General . New Flag. Discusses book stores and finds from Sydney B. C. 1918 Maps , Commonwealth Cemeteries. 1903 English Navy Manual. Brass station pointer.

Bob McP. Ribbon bars and ribbons Austria Hungary, Federal Republic of Germany, Mexico (enamel on medal) and ribbons from Philippines.

Neil P. North Koean and Chinese Medals

Mike C. Pre 1914 B.C. Garrison Artillery , Ceylon mounted infantry (Boer War and after) Medals , Military Cross and MM, WW1 Trio and history of Canadian soldier.

Gary. Research on relative who was in 1885 rebellion by Louis Reil. Photos of Land surveyors' who became part of military force. Looking for equipment from that era.

Darrel K. Sault Ste. Marie regiment, Royal Newfoundland and RCR badges. Post card 31st Cdn. Battalion to relative.

Kevin R. WW2 helmet with insignia from Kangaroo transport unit. Very rare find.

Announcement Military Museum to hold special exhibit of collection of Vic. Taboika on Sept. 21st.

Meeting Adjourned Moved by Barry E and seconded by Mike C.

Squadron Leader Bob Johnson RCAF



Squadron Leader Bob Johnson, who has died aged 96, was a Canadian Hurricane pilot who managed to evade the murderous attentions of the Japanese enemy for 23 days after being shot down on a reconnaissance patrol over the Irrawaddy river in Burma.

On January 14 1945, Johnson, a pilot with No 28 Squadron, RAF, was leading a two-man sortie some 150 miles from base and photographing a boat being loaded with drums of petrol when his Hurricane was hit by an anti-aircraft round. The round just missed his legs but blew a hole in the instrument panel. As his aircraft went down he managed to cross the river and establish radio contact with his No 2, Flt Lt Gawain Douglas, who replied: "Good luck, old chap", just before Johnson bailed out.

Having consulted his maps, Johnson decided to make for a junction of two streams which would lead towards the Allied lines. He set off by moonlight, but was soon driven off his chosen path by the sound of voices coming from a village. For the next six nights he struggled on in what he hoped was the right direction; but finding no water to drink, he became delirious. It was only on coming to some paddy fields that he was able to suck some water from the bottoms of rice stumps. On reaching a pond he drank the dirty water until he was sick, but discovered he could think clearly again while lying down. Later a clear stream enabled him to fill up his canvas water bag.

On the 12th night Johnson became completely lost and had to double back, on one occasion stealing past a sleeping Japanese soldier guarding rafts loaded with bamboo baskets. At 2am on the 18th day he heard a twin-engine aircraft overhead and flashed his name in Morse, but to no avail. Hearing voices at dawn, he hid behind a thorn bush and watched as a Japanese soldier slowly approached with rifle at the ready. Johnson drew his knife and jumped on the soldier. As they struggled on the ground, the soldier dropped his rifle and Johnson plunged his knife into the man's back. Springing up, Johnson then ran along a cart track, ducking behind some more bushes as six bullock carts passed by loaded with Japanese soldiers.

That night he made his way towards a hill where he had spotted a Dakota dropping supplies. But on seeing three Indian soldiers he raised his hands and was greeted by tommy-gun fire – the men apparently having assumed, from the flying helmet he was wearing, that he was Japanese. The next evening he walked to the bottom of the hill, took off his shirt to show his white skin and met four Burmese peasants who were cooking rice. In return for money they reluctantly agreed to take him towards the Allied lines. Finally Johnson met some more Indian soldiers, whom he asked to take him to their CO. He had been on the run for 23 days and was awarded an MC – one of a handful of airmen to be so honoured – for the bravery and resourcefulness he had shown during his escape.

On April 18 1944 Johnson was attacking ground targets over Kohima when his starboard cannon exploded, ripping off all the wing covering and forcing him to land with wheels up at 175mph. He sustained only minor injuries.

After his escape from the Irrawaddy, Johnson never flew operationally again. Instead he was ordered to give lectures on survival to squadrons in India and Ceylon and to personnel on aircraft carriers preparing for the invasion of Japan.

On returning home in 1946 he married Shirley Laver, with whom he had four sons and a daughter.

He joined No 402 (City of Winnipeg) Squadron, flying Vampire jets at weekends for three years while working as an insurance salesman.