



# Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL  
JOURNAL OF  
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

www.cmhsc.ca

July 2016

**At 7:28am on July 1st, 1916 the Battle of the Somme started with explosion of 17 massive 'mines' underneath enemy territory. Lochnagar was the largest of these. It remains "The largest crater ever made by man in anger".**

The British took over the Somme area from the French during July and August 1915. On 24 July, 174 Tunneling Company moved to the Somme front and established headquarters at Bray, taking over some 66 shafts at Carnoy, Fricourt, Maricourt and La Boisselle. Prior to the takeover, La Boisselle had been the scene of much mining activity and underground fighting. No-mans-land just south west of La Boisselle was very narrow, at one point no more than about 50 yards (46 metres), and had become pockmarked by many chalk craters. The French and German forces were constantly mining and countermining in the area.

Nothing changed when the British took over, the underground war continued with offensive mining designed to destroy enemy strong points, and to destroy enemy tunnels. Depths of tunnels ranged from 30 feet (9 metres) down to the deepest at 120 feet (36 metres). Around La Boisselle the Germans had dug defensive transversal tunnels at a depth of about 80 feet (24 metres), parallel to the front line,

For the 1 July 1916 attack two large mines were planned, one to the north of La Boisselle (Y Sap) and one to the south (Lochnagar). Both were 'overcharged' which means that more explosive was used than was necessary to just break the surface, so large rims were formed from the disturbed ground. The tunnel for the Y sap mine started in the British front line near where it crossed the Albert to Bapume road, but because of German underground defences it could not be dug in a straight line. About 500 yards (457 metres) were dug into no-mans-land before it turned right for about another 500 yards (457 metres).

Some 40,000 lbs (18,144 kilograms) of amomonal (high explosive) was placed in the chamber beneath Y sap.

The tunnel for the **Lochnagar mine** was started on November 11, 1915. The shaft for the mine was sunk in the communication trench called Lochnagar Street. It was probably the first deep incline shaft, meaning that it was not sunk vertically but sloped down with an incline of between 1:2 and 1:3, to a depth of some 95 feet (29 metres). It was begun some 300 feet (91 metres) behind the British front line and 900 feet (274 metres) from the German front line (See illustration Page 2)

In the Lochnagar inclined shaft, at about 50 feet (15 metres) below ground level, a gallery was driven towards the German strong point called the Schwaben Höhe. The final depth of the explosives chambers was about 52 feet (16 metres).



After the Blast



The Crater Today

## CMHS Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on

**Tuesday,  
July 19th.  
2016**

**7:00 pm**  
At the  
Petty Officers' Mess  
HCMS Tecumseh

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF 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.

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, July 19th, 2016,**  
**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.

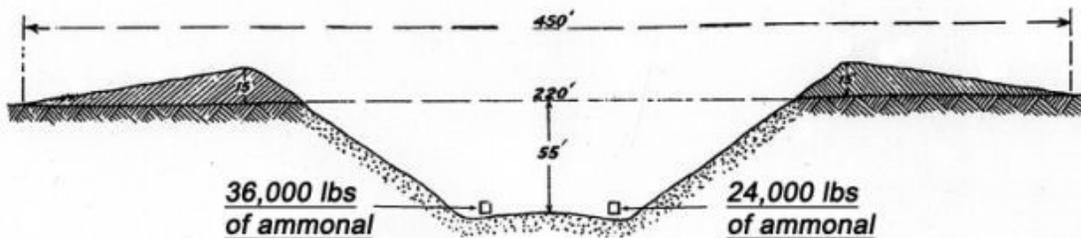
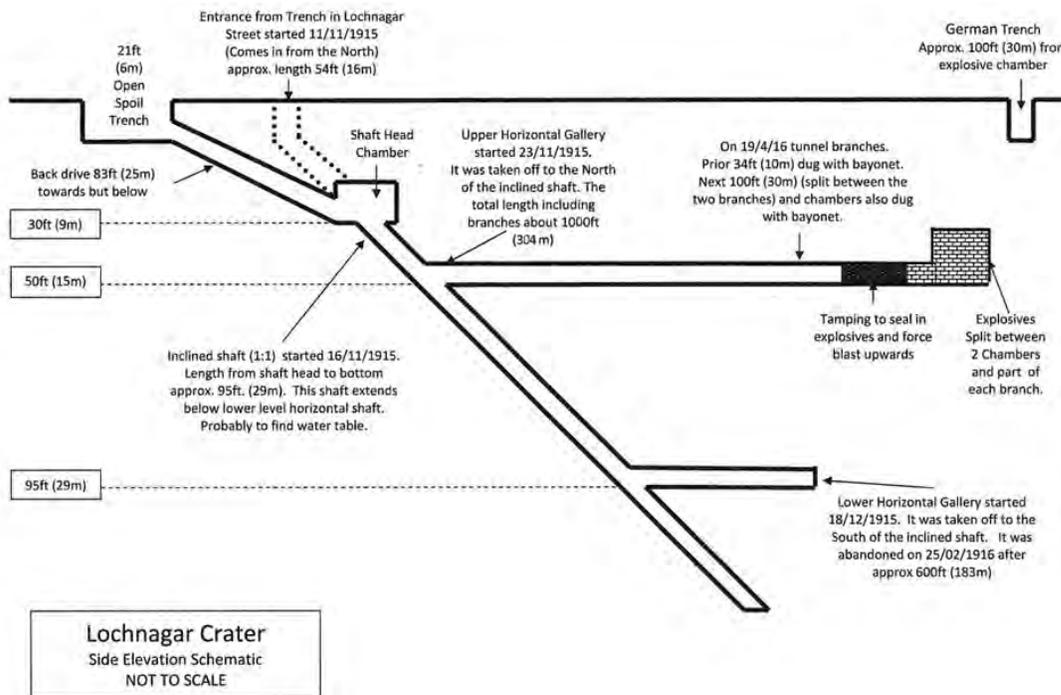
The unofficial agenda of this meeting will be:  
Introduction of guests, Minutes of last meeting Correspondence, Membership report Treasurer's report, Old business / New business Break, Show & Tell  
The President, **Kevin Roberts** would like to invite everyone to remain after the meeting for an informal time of fellowship.

As the tunnellers drew nearer to the German line, progress was slowed due to the need to be as silent as possible whilst working. Pick axes could not be used, progress was made by lumps of chalk being prized out with a bayonet, caught without hitting the ground and passed back for disposal. Miners worked without boots, walking on sandbags, and talking was limited to a whisper.

They could hear the Germans who were working below them in a transversal tunnel. When about 135 feet (41 metres) away from the Schwaben Höhe, the tunnel was forked to form two branches, the end of each branch was then enlarged to form a chamber for the explosives, the chambers being about 60 feet (18 metres) apart and 52 feet (16 metres) deep. When finished both chambers were overcharged, the left hand chamber with 36,000 lbs (16,330 kilograms) of ammonal and the right hand chamber with 24,000 lbs (10,886 kilograms) of ammonal. As the chambers were not big enough to hold all the explosives, the tunnels that branched to form the 'Y' were also filled with explosives. The tunnels did not

quite reach the German front line, therefore the explosives were not directly under the trenches, but the blast dislodged enough material to form a 15 foot (4.6 metre) high rim and bury nearby trenches.

**Captain James Young** pressed the plunger at 0728 (local time), the two charges combined formed one massive crater. Spoil from the blast spread over a diameter of 450 feet (137 metres), obliterating some 300 to 400 feet (110 to 122 metres) of German line and nine dug outs. How many were killed? Who knows! However, it is said that it covered nine deep dug-outs, each capable of holding an officer and 35 men, a total of nine officers and 315 men.



**Two charges placed about 60 feet apart**

## Minutes of the last meeting

### Minutes of the meeting of the **Calgary Military Historical Society**

#### Meeting held on June 21, 2016 at the Petty Officer's Mess, HMCS Tecumseh

**Meeting called to order** by President Kevin R. at 7:10 PM. 23 members and 2 guests, Joel and Garry Lapp, in attendance.

**2. Minutes of Previous Meeting.** Discussed and call for approval by Member Susan E. moves that the Previous Meeting Minutes be accepted. Seconded by Alan R. Approved, Unanimous.

#### **3. Newsletter.**

No omissions or corrections.

#### **4. Treasures Report.**

Report by Floyd S. Lists of monies collected from book auctions, donations etc. Listing of expenditures. Member Mike C. moves that the Treasures report be accepted as reported. Seconded by Tony G. Approved, Unanimous.

#### **5. Membership Report.**

Report by Floyd S. Total 49 members (2 Life, 1 Hon., 43 regular). Member Mike C. moves that the Membership report be accepted as reported. Seconded by Member Tony G. Accepted, Unanimous.

#### **6. Old Business.**

- Victor Taboika collection meeting cancelled. Society members present queried and with majority show of hands still agree to view the collection. Potential evening event costs discussed. Society will give Member Alan M. adequate time to coordinate re-booking of event, tentatively in August.

- Motion tabled to issue a \$200.00 donation to the Military Museums of Calgary. Members present vote and with majority show of hands vote to issue donation.

#### **7. Announcements:**

None

#### **8. Correspondence:**

None

#### **9. New Business:**

- To manage and conduct book and magazine draw, David G. needs to get books and magazines from Neil.

- Tony G. donates 2 books that were auctioned off for a total of \$20.00

#### **10. Break**

#### **11. Show and Tell:**

Garry M. - MCCof C Calgary Chapter's Award medal, 45cal British Navy flintlock pistol (repo).

Gary L. - WWI British officers trench cap.

Stewart E. - RCN ration pack 1045, RCAF survival ration pack 1959.

Daryl K. - WWI CEF Forestry unit cap badges, WWI Brody helmet (flat rim), US M3 fighting Knife.

Mike C. - Father & Son medals set displays. Father, Thomas Worth, police service 1869-1895 retired as Commissioner and Boer War 9<sup>th</sup> Lancers. Son, Thomas Worth, police service 1904-1930. 3<sup>rd</sup> son Percy Worth, police service 1910-1947 retired as City of London's Detective Chief Constable.

Frank C. - Australian Military Commonwealth Forces collar badge.

Bob M. - Assorted medals, Hungary 30yr military Service, Bulgarian Order Sept. 9, 1944, US Germany Occupation post WWII. Mormon Church & Boy Scouts of America, Model Bi-plane UK WWI

Dave L. - Discusses Chaplain Service history in Canada, UK Cross Belt w/cap badge and dress waist sash.

Alan M. - City of Calgary Police cap badges, current issue and the Vimy Commemorative.

Alan Ross - Indra's cap badge display mostly WWII, 10<sup>th</sup> Gurka Rifles wedge cap & medals to a 10<sup>th</sup> Gurka Rifles member in WWII.

Dave G. - 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders of Canada cap badges: WII badge on kilt patch clan Davidson, 1951 Inglis marked

Tony G. - Cdn Navy history book "The Sea is at our Gates" by Tony German. Discusses Cdn. Navy in WWI & II

Floyd S. - German Eagle Order 1<sup>st</sup> Class WWII

Kevin R. - Discusses item & collection "Full Proof" appraisals.

Martin U. - US Army Vietnam service, Summer Khaki shirt complete with insignia, medals, awards and qualifications.

#### **12. Adjournment:**

President Kevin R. calls for motion to adjourn. Seconded by Dave G.

Meeting Adjourned. 21:15



*Richard Dunning owner of Lochnagar Crater and Founder of The Friends of Lochnagar*

At 7:28 a.m. hundreds of people are expected to gather around an asteroid-sized crater in the French farm country north of Paris to hear a bugler sound the Last Post, a haunting salute to our war dead.

It was at that moment a century ago that the monumental World War I Battle of the Somme opened to the detonation of 30 tons of explosives that British tunnelers had secretly placed beneath the German lines.

Today the crater that resulted is, in a sense, ground zero for the rites marking the centennial of the start of the great battle near the river Somme, which killed 131,000 British soldiers and devastated the nation. A "sacred shell hole," historian William Philpott called it — a place of death for both British and Germans.

But its preservation is mainly due not to the governments of Britain or France but to the son of a London bus mechanic. **Richard Dunning**, 72, of Guildford, owns the crater.

He bought it on July 1, 1978, after reading about the place, visiting and fearing that it was about to be filled in and lost to posterity. "I knew that it was such an iconic and valuable piece of Great War history, it had to be saved," he said.

He won't say what he paid for it and has never charged for access. He said he could never face the ghosts of soldiers killed there if he did. "I couldn't look them in the eye and say, 'I charge people money to see the place where you

bled to death,'" he said. Dunning's preservation of the site "is of massive importance," said Martin Middlebrook, author of the classic military study "First Day on the Somme." He states that he had tried three times to get some kind of official commendation in Britain for Dunning, but hasn't been successful yet. The so-called Lochnagar Crater, named for a nearby trench in the British lines, was in 1978 a forgotten scar on the French countryside outside the village of La Boisselle. Dunning, who said he is retired from the advertising business, was mesmerized by the crater and its story. He said he had first read about it in the book poet John Masefield wrote after touring the battlefield in 1917.

*"One summer with its flowers will cover most of the ruin," Masefield wrote. "In a few years' time, when this war is a romance in memory, the soldier looking for his battlefield will find his marks gone."*

But the crater withstood the seasons, and the first time Dunning saw the place, "it got me," he said. "It is awesome and breathtaking," he said. (It is so big it's visible on satellite images.) "I went back as often as I could. Sometimes for a day. Sometimes for two or three days." Dunning said at first he was interested in purchasing only a small parcel of the crater. But when the owner offered to sell him the whole thing, he bought it.

"It would have disappeared if I hadn't," he said. "Bulldozers would have descended on it and it would have been gone in a week."

On Oct. 31, 1998, visitors to the crater spotted what appeared to be human remains sticking out of the ground, according to news reports. Authorities were notified, and a skeleton and a soldier's belongings were unearthed.

The remains were identified as those of Pvt. George Nugent, 28, of Newcastle. He had been part of the attack on July 1, 1916, and went missing in action. On July 1, 2000, he was buried in a local cemetery, 84 years after he was killed.

For this year's crater ceremony — one of numerous July 1 commemorations — Dunning said the bugler and bagpipers will play, and singers will perform the grim marching ditty "Hanging on the Old Barbed Wire." In addition, participants will blow trench whistles like the ones used as a signal to launch the attack — the shrill call for the men to leave the protection of the trenches and go "over the top." It's "a seriously evocative sound," Dunning said. "It does make the hairs go up on the back of your neck."

The Lochnagar Crater receives no official government funding or support, with all finance provided by the generosity of individuals. Lochnagar now has in excess of 200,000 visits a year, many of them British and French School children.

In 1986 a large cross of medieval wood was erected close to the lip. It was made of roof timbers from an abandoned, deconsecrated church close to Durham — most likely a church used by some of the soldiers from Tyneside who themselves fell at Lochnagar

