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THE OFFICIAL
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THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

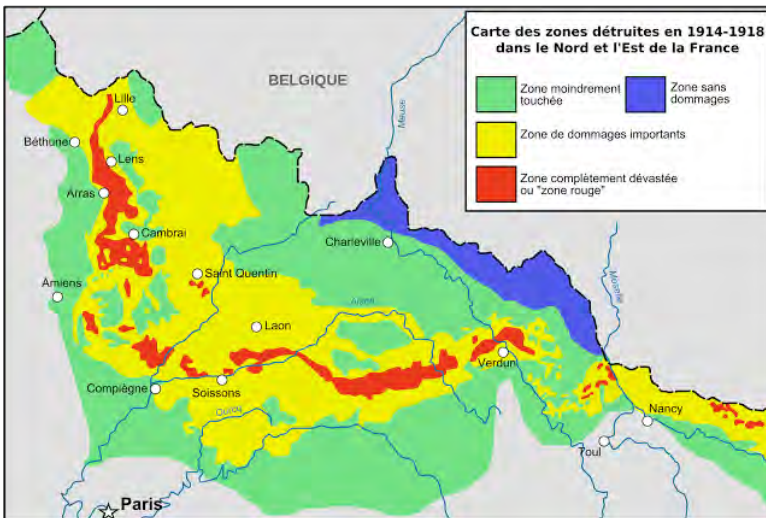
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November 2016

The Real "No-Go Zone" of France: A Forbidden No Man's Land Poisoned by War

The zone rouge (red zone) is a chain of sporadic areas throughout northeastern France that the French government isolated after the First World War. The land, which originally covered more than 1,200 square kilometres (460 sq mi), was deemed to be physically and environmentally too damaged by the conflict for human habitation of any kind.

Rather than attempt to clean up these former battlefields, the land was allowed to return to nature and though the size of the zone has shrunk over the last hundred years, astoundingly, restrictions within the zone rouge still exist today and the areas just as dangerous and just as tightly controlled as they were in 1918.



The "zone rouge" was defined just after the armistice as "Completely devastated. Damage to properties: 100%. Damage to Agriculture: 100%. Impossible to clean. Human life impossible".

Under French law, activities such as housing, farming or forestry, are permanently forbidden in the zone rouge, in some areas, access of any kind is permanently prohibited. This is because of the vast amounts of human and animal remains and millions of items of unexploded ordnance still contaminating the land. Six villages, finding themselves in the middle of the worst areas of the red zone around Verdun, were never permitted to rebuild after the war and today remain uninhabited.

The French government have formed a special agency dedicated entirely to the ongoing munitions clearing, called the Department du Deminage. Over the decades they have managed to reduce the size of the red zone and return less affected areas to civilian and agricultural use. Until the mid 1970s, however, much of the 'clean-up' was only done superficially, destroying hundreds of thousands of unex-

amined WWI chemical shells without considering the leaks and contamination to the soil and water. The worst affected areas remain full of unexploded shells (including many shells), grenades, and rusty ammunition. Soils remain heavily polluted by lead, mercury, chlorine, various dangerous gases, acids, human and animal remains. Some areas are also littered by ammunition depots and chemical plants.

Each year dozens of tons of unexploded shells are recovered and, according to the Sécurité Civile agency in charge, at the current rate no fewer than 700 more years

[Continued Page 2](#)

CMHS Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on

**Tuesday,
November
15th,
2016**

7:00 pm

At the
Petty Officers'
Mess

Some of the huge artillery shells shown above are still live - as you can tell by the presence of the metal bands around the base - indicating that they were never fired. It is estimated that 1 of every 5 shells fired during the war was a "dud." Often, the shells would plow into the ground and then fail to explode. So, they are buried and still filled with explosives



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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, November 15th, 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 re-
port Treasurer's report, Old business / New business Break, Show & Tell
The President, **Alan Ross** would like to invite everyone to remain after the meeting
for an informal time of fellowship.

will be needed to completely clean the area. Some experiments conducted in 2005-06 discovered up to 300 shells / 10.000m² in the top 15cm of soil in the worst areas.

Some areas remain off limits (for example two small pieces of land close to Ypres and Woevre) where 99% of all plant life still dies as arsenic can amount up to 17% according to recent detailed soil samples -tens of thousand times higher than levels typically found previously within the red zones.

Cleaning up the areas doesn't necessarily mean that they're safe either. Nor are areas that were not included in the original Zone Rouge; the Iron harvest, which uncovers unexploded ordnance, barbed wire, shrapnel, bullets and congruent trench supports, still occurs every year across North France and Belgium and continue to turn up new finds.

Farmers in less dangerous re-populated "yellow" and "blue zones", still hit shells every year, detonating under their tractors and narrowly escaping death by the



remains of a hundred year old war. In Verdun, there are road signs to indicate official dumping grounds for farmers to leave the shells they've plowed up on their land to be collected by the authorities.

British, French, American, and German armies fired approximately 720 million shells and mortar bombs on the Western Front between 1914 and 1918. Military experts estimate that as many as one in five rounds of ammunition fired by either side failed to explode.

Since the end of the war, almost 1000 people have been killed by unexploded WW1 ordnance across France and Belgium, with the most recent deaths as late as 2014 when two construction workers were killed by an unexploded bomb on a building site in Belgium.

Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the meeting of the **Calgary Military Historical Society** Meeting held on **October 18, 2016** at the **Petty Officer's Mess, HMCS Tecumseh**

1. **Meeting called to order** by President Kevin R. at 7:10 PM. 20 members in attendance.
2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting.** No new letter with minutes received. Review required.
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. Financial Statement issued to Gov. June 6, 2016 as per Societies Act.
Member Floyd S. moves that the Treasures report be accepted as reported. Seconded by Dave S. Approved.
5. **Membership Report.**
Report by Floyd S. At year end, Total 50 members (2 Life, 1 Hon., 47 regular). Membership up from last year. Member Floyd S. moves that the Membership report be accepted as reported. Seconded by Member Mike C. Approved.
6. **Correspondence:** None
7. **Announcements:** Martin U discusses a militaria show in Calgary on March 4, 2017 at the Hillhurst Sunnyside Community Center, 6' tables set at \$20.00. Show in planning, details & registration to follow.
8. **Old Business.** None
9. **New Business:** - Maurice Harvey Award tabled with a vote held. Susan E. to get retrieve trophy from Brian H and oversee new recipient engraving. - Ene** kit at the Elve's.
- Christmas Soiree once again at Horton Legion, tentative date Friday Jan. 20, 2017 pending availability and booking.

11. 2017 Executive Election

- **The following members accepted positions on the CMHS Executive for 2017**
 - **Alan R. elected as President**
 - **Floyd S. elected as Treasurer by acclamation**
 - **Martin U. elected as Secretary by acclamation.**

12. **Auction** No auction conducted.

11. Break

12. Show and Tell:

- Garry M. - Discusses 8-day trip to Hamilton Ontario and area. Research for his historical novel.
- Alan M. - 2 WW1 German helmets, 1 Pickelhaube and 1 Stahlhelm with side-mounted ventilator lugs.
- Daryl K. - US P-17 Enfield bayonet/scabbard; Can Army WW2 helmet netting; 80mm shell proximity fuse; Photo selection Major John Campbell Calgary Highlanders.
- Dave L. - Discusses Rev. Kennelm Eaton, Chaplain PPCLI WW2 Italy. Communion Kit box containing a large selection of his personal items including uniform, accessories, books, booklets and paperwork.
- Bob M. - Korean War, Columbian 1952 Valour Star for Mount Baldy Infantry Action; French 1860 China Campaign medal.
- Mike C. - 2 swords; Victorian infantry sword S#2087 (1876), blade 1874, hilt 1895 pattern; 1 US pattern 1851 cavalry sword with oriental pattern hilt. Japanese manufactured base on US pattern? 1880s-90s?
- Al D. - Austria's government announces Hitler's childhood home in Braunauto to be demolished and site redeveloped.
- Floyd S. - WW1 items to C. Lund, 16th Battalion CEF, DCM St. Julien 1915 includes glengarry With silver 2-piece cap badge; Co Sgt Maj rank insignia and sporran all named.
- Alan R. - WWI hate belt with Commonwealth cap & collar badges (Britain, Canada, Australia).

13. Adjournment:

President Alan R. calls for motion to adjourn. Member Mike C. moves for adjournment. Seconded by Barry E. Motion Approved.

Meeting Adjourned. 21:00



An old photograph of the aftermath of a French battlefield



More than a century later, there are still large quarantined parts of the red zone where 99% of plant and animal species perish.

Laurent Flauder and Dominique Milesi from the Département du Déminage take a German 155-millimeter shell from the forest and place it in their Land Rover . They drove this shell and a few others some sixty kilometers to a depot in another part of the forest utilized specifically for storing old battlefield munitions. They travel along tirelessly pretty back roads, past the numerous cemeteries of French, German, and American war dead. On reaching the depot, they unlock the thick steel doors of a bunker, one of five high-ceilinged, windowless concrete structures. The two men in their static-free blue jumpsuits lift the shell from the Land Rover using a specially made contraption and walk with the shell between them toward a wooden pallet placed on the concrete floor.

All that remained whole of the men were the soles of their feet, bonded to the rough concrete, each pair facing the other in exactly the position they were in when the shell had suddenly and without warning detonated.

In recent years Paris auction house **Artcurial** has risen to elite status like the other globally-recognized auctioneers such as Christies and Sothebys, the biggest players have all auction something extraordinary from time-to-time. In September Artcurial held its D-Day Sale where the entire contents of the Normandy Tank Museum went under the hammer. Numerous world price records were broken and the perspective of the military collectibles market was slightly shaken at the values achieved. The sale fetched a total of €3,714,675 (US\$4.14 million), which was much more than the top estimates of all the lots combined. That's very hard to do without a voracious marketplace, so the rise of the military collectible as an alternative wealth creation asset class is now infecting yet another auction genre. Not surprisingly, tanks filled the top six most expensive lots sold, with three motorcycles setting world record prices.

The Cushman M53-A motorcycle was specifically built to be delivered by glider or parachute behind enemy lines, and to give American marines instant 40 mph mobility and a range of 100 miles. The D-Day sale saw Artcurial set a world record price for the Cushman M53-A EUR €142,600 **US\$159,101** against a pre-sale estimate of €10,000 to €20,000. The bike is now one of the 100 most expensive motorcycles ever sold at auction.

