



# Sabretache

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THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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July 2018



## CMHS Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on

**Tuesday,  
July 17th  
2018**

**7:00 pm**

At the  
Petty Officers'  
Mess  
HCMS Tecumseh

## THE MYTH OF THE EMBROIDERED SILK POSTCARD

*("Common Beliefs")* Amid the gloom of the trenches, where every third man was wounded and every tenth killed, a rare glimpse of beauty was available. Delicate, embroidered silk postcards from France and Belgium were purchased by **many Canadian and Allied soldiers overseas**. It's estimated that millions of cards were purchased and hurried words scribbled and sent to anxious relatives back home.

It appears no two cards were alike. The meticulous hand-stitched designs featured flags, butterflies, bouquets or peacocks. Variety of colour appeared to be the main theme, as opposed to accuracy in colour scheme. Butterflies often had the Union Jack emblazoned on their wings and poppies featured the flags of many countries in their petals. Most of the cards included embroidered messages, some patriotic such as "Maple Leaf Forever" or "United for Liberty." Others tended to be more sentimental, perhaps expressing thoughts the young soldier was too shy to express. Phrases like "A Kiss from France" or "For You Darling" were quite common. One of the few advantages afforded the troops during the war was free postal service. This likely contributed to the popularity of the cards.

They are blank postcards onto which an embossed paper surrounding has been glued with a piece of silk in the middle. On the silk, a design is hand-embroidered in coloured thread. They were sold in thin paper envelopes but were actually sent with the post. They were very fragile and, more particularly, they represented quite an investment – **they were not cheap souvenirs**. Thought to cost the common soldier a days pay.

*The hand-embroidery is thought to have been carried out in domestic houses as 'out-work' by civilians in France and Belgium, and in the UK by Belgian refugees.*

**See page 2 for the real story**

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 17th., 2018**  
**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, **Allan Ross** would like to invite everyone to remain after the meeting for an informal time of fellowship.

### Who actually made them?

The designs and texts for the cards were worked in series with colourful, free style embroidery on silk gauze panels. The individual embroideries were cut out and stuck to a card frame that was embossed with a decorative edging. For the embroidery itself, a wide range of stitches were used. These included the back stitch, basket weave stitch, individual cross stitches, herringbone stitch, reverse herringbone stitch (in order to create a shadow work effect), double running stitch (also known as the Holbein stitch), satin stitch, stem stitch, as well as various composite stitches

The questions that has to be asked about these cards, especially as to how the cards were decorated, and by whom. Several different answers were given, the most popular and persistent (and sentimental) was the one that said that the images were hand embroidered by Belgian and French women who had been afflicted by the war.

This explanation is simply not true. Would these women and girls have really been able to hand embroider millions of cards. Impossible!!! An important detail in this respect is that none of the individual postcards upon close inspection show any indication of a drawn or printed design that would have been essential if the embroideries were being made by hand. In addition, large sheets have been preserved (see the illustration) with series of comparable designs, ready to be glued onto the cardboard cards.

The large sheets and the lack of drawn or printed designs, and the sheer number of embroidered cards, indicates that the cards were machine made, but this brings us to the next question, which type of machine was used?



A set of 25 images that were pre-embroidered by machine. The images are ready to be cut out and glued onto a card ground. The main text on the card reads: "Peace 1919"



Detail of postcard showing various embroidery stitches, including the cross stitch, satin stitch and stem stitch

## Minutes of last meeting / Calgary Military Historical Society

Meeting held on June 19, 2018 at the Petty Officer's Mess, HMCS Tecumseh

**1. Meeting called to order** By President Allan R. at 19:05 PM. 22 members in attendance.

**2. Minutes of Previous Meeting.**

Discussed no correction. Member Mike C. moves that the Previous Meeting Minutes be accepted. Seconded by Dave S.

**3. Newsletter.** - Show & Tell listing, Garrett with G not J.

**4. Treasures Report.**

Report by Floyd S. Lists of monies collected from book auctions, donations etc. Listing of expenditures. Floyd reports, with last month expenses, a slight decrease over April balance. Member Mike C. moves that the Treasures report be accepted as reported.

Seconded by Brian H. Approved.

**5. Membership Report.**

Report by Floyd S. Total 48 members (2 Life, 2 Hon, 44 Regular). Member Susan E. moves that the Membership report be accepted as reported. Seconded by Brian H. Approved.

**6. Correspondence:**

- Copies of MCC of C - 2017 Winter & 2018 Spring Journals.
- 2017 Annual Return filed with Service Alberta as per Societies Act.

**7. Announcements:**

- Upcoming Book Series, 10 Volumes, Commonwealth Gallantry Awards to Officers & Enlisted, cost 375 £/volume.

**8. Old Business.**

- Facebook link still under assessment, consultation with Kevin Roberts.
- Martin U. gives Calgary Militaria Shows June 16 event summary.

**9. New Business:**

- Al Deeves wife June has passed. Heartfelt condolences to Al and his family.
- HMCS Tecumseh's firearms policy outlined and discussed.

**BREAK**

**10. Book Raffle & Auction:** - Auction conducted.

**11. Show and Tell:**

Floyd S. - Bronze and Silver Spanish Crosses with Swords

Alan R. - Spanish Condor Legion Memorial Crosses, issued to next of kin, only 315 issued.

Martin U. - WW2 1942 - T/5 Corporal Marcelino Aquino, Philippine Scouts, US 26 Cavalry. Chino Kahki Shirt with Insignia, Kelly Helmet, Campaign Hat, M1918 Mills mounted cartridge belt with M1912 Cavalry Colt 1911 swivel holster.

David G. - GSM with Fenian Raid 1866 Bar to Pte. William A. Ryan - Grand Trunk Rifle Regiment.

Barry E. - RCAF manuals, Principles of Radio 1942 & Machinists 1941 and RCAF notebook 1952 named to R.J. Gower; 3<sup>rd</sup> Special Service Police collar.

Garrett L. - WW1 items to L Cpl Herbert J.W. Brockman, RCR, Service Medal Group, Legion Medal, ID tag. Wounded April 9, 1917 at Vimy Ridge, October 1917 exposed to mustard gas.

Dave S. - GG Body Guard brass cap badge, IWM Churchill War Room Guide.

Mike C. - Bronze EII Coronation Medal to Reve CE Caldwell; Silver EVII Coronation Medal to Cpt J. A. Beyon, Strathcona Horse, Boer War; 2 ID card booklets Colonial Troop Club for EVII Coronation.

Stewart E. - A map identifying locations from his service in WW2.

Bob M. - Selection of medals including 2 French Groups one 5 medal & one 7 medal, OBE; Commander, Yugoslavia Order of White Eagle; French Legion of Honour 3<sup>rd</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Republic, both Commandeur 1<sup>st</sup> Class.

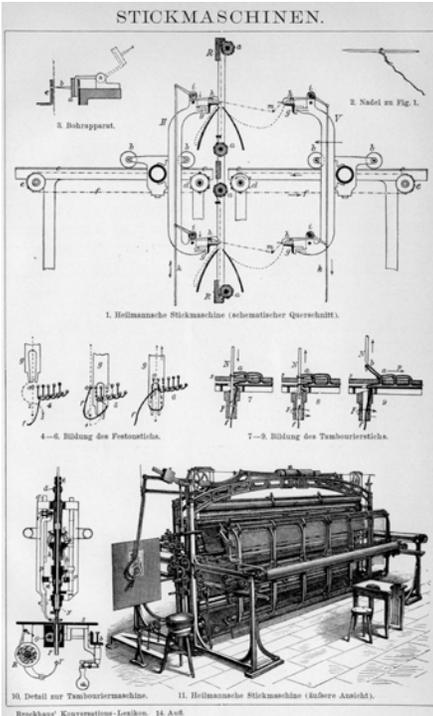
Alan M. - Rhodesian General Service Medal, WW2, issued to reserve units, report of 3500 issued, but records for only 2900, where are the other 600+?

**12. Adjournment:** President Allan R calls for motion to adjourn. Member Barry E. moves to adjourn. Seconded by Susan E. Approved. **Meeting Adjourned. 20:20**

**The hand embroidery machine** The postcards were embroidered by machine. The machine that can do so was invented in 1828 by Josué Heilmann (1796-1848) in Mulhouse, France. The machine was further developed over the following decades by various engineers and companies in Britain, France, Germany and Switzerland. And in various sizes, this type of machine is still used in various factory settings. It is being used among others for haute couture embroidery, but also for decorating delicate handkerchiefs, shawls, table cloths and other embellished items. Switzerland remains an important source for these products.



Woman operating the pantograph of a hand embroidery machine, Textilmuseum St Gallen. Switzerland



Basically, this hand-embroidery machine uses a pantograph to transfer the stitches. Each stitch is drawn out on a large-scale design and then its position is traced by an operator using a point on one arm of the pantograph. A series of needles responds to the movement of the pantograph arm. Each needle has an eye in the middle for the thread, and two sharp ends.

The needle is passed backwards and forwards through the ground cloth using a pincer system (double-sided pincer wagons), so imitating the action and appearance of hand embroidery. Each colour in the design is individually stitched (so all the blue parts, for example, are worked, and then the machine is re-

threaded with a new colour), until the design is complete. Based on surviving examples, it is clear that strips (in domestic machine production) or very broad sheets (in factory production), both of organza cloth, were being embroidered with series of identical designs. Using hand-embroidery machines it was possible to produce hundreds of images on a sheet in one go.

Once embroidered, the strips/sheets were cut up and the individual images were stuck into an embossed card frame. They were then sold to the public, especially the officers and soldiers, at a relatively high price. The companies making and selling these cards could well have made a considerable profit. Perhaps this is the real reason behind the stories of poor refugee women working all hours to hand embroider these cards in order to feed their desperate families.



Detail of a hand embroidery machine in use.



Postcard sent by Patrick Rossitor to his young son from France - "I Carry Hope"

Patrick Rossitor (possibly of the Munster Fusiliers) wrote postcards from France to his son Patrick back home in Leixlip Co Kildare, Ireland and later Stillorgan, Dublin. After the war, Patrick returned home to his wife Kate (nee Keegan) and three children, Bridget, Patrick and Edward.

The reverse of this postcard has the following message to Patrick from his father:

"My Dear Paddy,  
Many thanks for your welcome letter. I am delighted you are such a good boy. I hope you will like this card. Your loving father, P Rossitor, somewhere in France."