



Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL
JOURNAL OF
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

w w w . c m h s . c a

April 2019

A Canadian MkII Helmet with a Story

By Roy Akins

John Stewart MacDonald was born in 1925 in Port Hawkesbury, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. In 1942 at the age of 17 he left school and found work in a local shipyard as an Acetylene Burner. In June of that year he joined the Cape Breton Highlanders Militia. On 30 July 1943, having reached the age of 18, he volunteered for active service.

Two weeks later MacDonald was sent to A4 Royal Canadian Artillery Training Centre in Brandon, Manitoba. While there, he applied for service in the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion but was found unsuitable. He continued training and became qualified as Driver I.C., Class III (Wheeled).

Brandon Manitoba, October 1943

First row, left to right: McDougall, Keeting, John S. MacDonald, McCurdy.

Second row: Bob Rae and Bob Gates.

Photo Courtesy John S. MacDonald



On October 20th, 1944 MacDonald embarked for the UK and was attached to 1 Canadian Army Reinforcement Unit. On January 6th, 1945 he volunteered for the Infantry. Two days later he disembarked into NW Europe and was "Taken on Strength" with The North Shore Regiment. (NSR)

The NSR had landed at Juno Beach on D-Day and fought at the Battle of the Scheldt in the Netherlands. At this time they were badly in need of reinforcements.

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, April 16th, 19:00 (7:00 pm)
At the Petty Officers' Mess, HMCS Tecumseh.

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 meet-
ing for an informal time of fellowship.

Group portrait of soldiers of The North Shore Regiment near Zutphen, Holland. January 1945.

Photo Courtesy John S. MacDonald



In February 1945 MacDonald and the NSR moved into Germany by amphibious landing. The Regiment fought in the Rhineland, the Hochwald, and then it doubled-back to the Netherlands and conquered the Twente Canal and liberated Zutphen, where it met its most brutal urban fighting since Caen. It then moved back into Germany in April and it ended the war on German soil.

Wanting to stay in the fight, on 15 June 1945 MacDonald volunteered for the Pacific Theatre. He was attached to the Canadian Army Pacific Force but the war ended before it was dispatched. He was discharged on 5 October 1946 and received the France & Germany Star, Defence Medal, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal w/clasp and the War Medal.

After the war MacDonald joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and became an Aircraftsman and certified Electrical Technician. He retired a Sergeant, and received the Canadian Forces Decoration and Special Service Medal (NATO).

Continued Page 4

Minutes of General Meeting held on March 19, 2019
Petty Officers Mess: HMCS Tecumseh

Meeting called to order by President Alan R. at 7:07 pm.
21 members present and 0 guests.

Minutes of last meeting. Acceptance moved by Mike C. Second by Neil P. Approved.
Newsletter – once again thanks for the great article.
Treasurers Report provided by Floyd. Moved acceptance by Martin U. Second by Barry E. Accepted.
Membership - Currently 37 regular members. 3 Life members 2 Honorary. Approval moved by Mike C.
Seconded by Brian H. Approved.

Correspondence: Letter from Alberta Societies

OLD BUSINESS:

Alan M. provided address for food bank to our treasurer.

NEW BUSINESS:

- AACCA Easter (March 30 & 31) Gun Show reminder with setup Friday March 29th at BMO Center
- Call for volunteers.
- Sikh Heritage Display at Military Museums starting on April 2nd to 30th
- May display is D-Day Dodgers
- David G. will be moving away so we will need a new editor.
- Bob M. donated his display from Victoria show to the club.

BREAK: Raffle conducted by Dave G.

SHOW & TELL:

Jack D - 6 uncles in war and one wrote his memoirs presented here. Corps
Brad M. – Picture from bomber command museum @ Hendon
Gary M. – Is pleased with results from hired researcher. Will pass along name on request
Mike C - Memorial plaques from Boer war in 3 sizes mostly made by Spinks and old packages of tobacco from 1917 to 1920.
Bob M. – Italian breast badge. Native Canadian Society Victorian crown badge in heavy silver
Dave L – looked for service records of man enlisted in 1939 for friend with 315 pages of results
Alan M – Irish brigade in the Civil War on Smithsonian Channel
Frank – Military plane photos.
Indra – Question on research of soldiers KIA
Dave S – Facebook posting – questions answered for lady re Canadian Medical Corps
Marj N – Mothers WW1 autograph album with unique entries
Al D – Researching family from Redcliffe AB and mothers brother.
Floyd S – Allied victory medals from Romania and Japan
Al R – Masonic medal 1930

Moved to adjourn at 8:30 pm by Mike C
Seconded by Barry E.

The next
CMHS
meeting will
be held on
**Tuesday,
April 16th.
2019
7:00 pm**
At the Petty
Officers'
Mess HCMS
Tecumseh

**This story and all captions and pictures
were supplied by Member Roy Akins of
St. Albert, Alberta “Thank You”**

John MacDonald Interview Transcript

Courtesy The Memory Project

Well, after D-Day the infantry needed a lot of men and they asked artillery people if they wanted to go to the infantry. And I volunteered to go to infantry and I thought I was going to go to the North Novas [The North Nova Scotia Highlanders] but I ended up North Shore [The North Shore Regiment], which I was just as happy because we were, us and the Eight Brigade [8th Canadian Infantry Brigade] and North Novas, I think in the north, the Ninth Brigade [9th Canadian Infantry Brigade], were all in the Third Div [3rd Canadian Infantry Division]. And all the infantry regiments, all armies stuck together and you looked after one another and you more or less depended on whoever was beside you.

We had training in Aldershot but we had good training in Brandon, Manitoba, real infantry training and marching every day for the first six months and then the last six months when I was in, it was mostly artillery training but we did in the morning, every morning, we always did parade square. And everything was on the double. It is difficult training for a lot of people. A lot of people couldn't march because they had flat feet or something but for me, it didn't bother me one bit.

We only had, like I was in Dog Company [D Company], and we only had two men, both boys from Northern New Brunswick, Savoy Brothers. And they were in since just after D-Day and so the rest of them, we had men coming in. I remember two days after we were in action, we lost three or four men, mines and from snipers. And every day you lost two, maybe one, two, three men of your squad.

There's only once, going into a city in Holland we were going up along the dike and I got four, excuse me, I got three bullets in my small pack. And we made it to a railroad crossing trestle and they started shelling us and we got underneath the steel girdles and we were there for about an hour or two before our own artillery start pounding them.

When I took my small pack off and looked inside to the mess tin that I had and there's three bullets in the small pack, whoa, man, that's when you get, well, you're scared everyday anyway and you know, but you go ahead with all the rest of them.

I don't know. I guess I was young and foolish and I didn't realize, I guess I realized but I, you did what you had to do. We were the first Canadian troops across the Rhine River and after we crossed the Rhine River, we went up along the other side, Emmerich, Millingen and that, and then we crossed back into Holland again and we were in there for a while and then we went back into Germany. And when the war ended, there was two of us sent out in the woods, at the edge of the woods to watch. And then this young fellow came through and we saw him coming and he went and when we yelled halt and he said, he put his arms up and he said, Vertig!, war is Vertig!. So we didn't know whether to believe or not, if there was going to be a counterattack or anything. So we discussed...Portay was the guy's name and both of us young and who's going to go back with him. And we didn't know if it was going to be him or I.

So anyway, he decided he'd go back and I stayed there and I had the Bren gun, because I had the Bren gun all the time I was in there. And I put my back to a tree and I just had the Bren gun and I could hear noise in the woods. I thought it was squirrels and other animals, I thought it was people going, for an hour before they came back to get me, to relieve me. And it was a horrible, horrible evening. About 1:00 in the morning, I say, it wasn't evening.



**John Stewart MacDonald, Edinburgh
Scotland, summer 1945**

Photo Courtesy John S. MacDonald

**John MacDonald's
Mk II Helmet**



