



# Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL  
JOURNAL OF  
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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May 2019

## A Canadian in the Airborne Artillery

By Roy Akins

Donald Hugh McMillan was an accounting clerk when his country called and he volunteered for service with the Royal Canadian Artillery on 29 July 1940.

McMillan was a Sgt. at # 13 District Depot (Mewata Armoury) Calgary when on 13 November 1941 he was posted to Gordon Head Officer Training Center in Victoria, BC. He was promoted to Lieutenant on 13 February 1942 and proceeded to A3 Artillery Training Centre at Fort Garry, Manitoba.

On 5 December 1942 he was posted to A23 Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery Training Centre at Eastern Passage (Halifax) Nova Scotia. McMillan returned to A3 Artillery Training Centre (now relocated to Camp Shilo, MB) on 29 April 1944.

Lieut. McMillan embarked for the UK on 25 June 1944 and was attached to 1 Canadian Army Reinforcement Unit (1CARU) and over the next six months he completed additional artillery courses.

In late December 1944 he volunteered for duty in 2 Forward Observation Unit, Royal Artillery (Airborne),

*“Just before Christmas, 1944, I was called out of a gunnery class at Borden {England} to go before the C.O. along with Curt Nicholson. We were asked if we’d like to go “Fouring” (Forward Observing) and it might mean some parachute jumping in the British Army in a new unit of which we knew nothing...I came to the conclusion that opportunity only knocks once”.*

The next  
CMHS  
meeting will  
be held on

**Tuesday,  
May 21st.  
2019**

**7:00 pm  
At the Petty  
Officers’**

This unit had been created 1 August 1944 as part of 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division,

*“No. 2 FOURA (Airborne) had two main jobs: (a) the observing, calling and directing artillery fire for the Regiments of Artillery assigned to the Division, and (b) manning counter-mortar observation posts and taking bearing and reporting on enemy mortar and artillery fire”.*

The make-up of this unit was unique, in that it was one-third Royal Artillery, and two-thirds Royal Canadian Artillery.



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, May 21st. @ 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.

On 28 December 1944, McMillan embarked for France to join 2 FOURA in the Ardennes Offensive. Lt.-Col. Harry Rice, commander, 2 FOURA describes,

*"...the bitter cold and snow of the Ardennes in December and January and, in particular, the vicious little battle for Bure, where 13<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion had heavy casualties and 2 FOU's counter-mortar organisation succeeded, in its first engagement, in successfully directing the fire of our own artillery and silenced the heavy German mortar fire which was being aimed at the Battalion in the Village...the strange interlude for most of February 1945, when the Division held the line of the river Maas in Holland between Roermond and Venio while the great battle raged in the Reichswald not very far away. 2 FOU had observation posts established in the villages along the river"*.

On 24 March 1945 McMillan took part in The Rhine Drop (Operation Varsity) while attached to the 8<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Brigade commanded by Brigadier James Hill. The 8<sup>th</sup> would be one of the first units dropped, along with 1 Canadian Parachute Battalion.

Capt. McMillan recounts some of his experiences on the day of the Rhine Drop,

*"I hit the dirt...I was on German soil. I glanced up to see a Dakota with one engine ablaze and another with both engines on fire...and realized that the pilots and crew wouldn't have much chance for survival. Some nut was peppering away at us with a rifle...the bullets were whizzing by. One could see the shell holes from the artillery's preliminary bombardment. How lucky we had been not to land near a machine gun or in the trees. Bittlestone dug a shallow trench. By now the gliders were coming in...Mortar fire was coming down a few yards away. Bittlestone yelled 'Look out' and pulled me into the slit trench. Just then, there was an awful crash beside us; as I looked up, a man tumbled out of the glider that had come crashing into the trees. One wheel of a jeep in the broken glider hung over our shallow trench.*



James Hill (left) with Major Don Wilkins of the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, 19, May 1944. IWM Photo

**Meeting called to order by President Allan Ross at 7:05 PM.** 19 members attended.

**Minutes** of last meeting in March were discussed and accepted. Approval by Bob McP. And seconded by Michael C.

**Newsletter** discussed and no problems found.

**Treasures Report** by Floyd S. Lists expenses paid out for newsletter, bartender etc. and monies accumulated. Accepted by Martin and seconded by Brian H. Approved.

**Membership report.** By Floyd S. 44 members. Reports on new membership that was taken at Gun Show . Accepted by David S. and Seconded by Michael C.

**Correspondence.** None received.

**Old Business:** Pres. Allan discusses the “Sikh” Exhibit that was shown at the Military Museum. which was well attended. Discusses recent Gun Show and receives comments.

**New Business.** Martin U. of various M.C.C. of C. events and presents President Allan Ross with an award. “Silver Badge for Distinguished Service.

**Break**

**Book Raffle;** by ticketmaster Dave. Many happy winners.

**Show and Tell**

Allan R.—2 WW1 Garrison caps. One is a US marked but made in Manchester England. Member suggests that the US did not have a garrison cap when it entered the war in 1917 and had to have them made in England.

David G.— Magazine with story on Canadians shot in WW1 for crimes.

David S.— Small broch found at gun show showing 4 maple leaf's. WW1 “Son’s in service” 1 leaf is red showing one son KIA.

Alan Mck. Discusses and shows his display on the “UDI Rhodesia” Shows pictures of the display . Tells of people he met that were also in Rhodesia then.

James B.—Discusses his vacation in California and some interesting finds in books etc. that he found. Also mentions “Trench Art” exhibit that will be at the Military Museum soon. (June 7th)

Dave L.—Discusses how people make icons of items that they hold dear to their hearts. Example is Princess Marry tins and how people made displays showing them off. Shows excellent WW1 Field Surgeons Kit found at gun show. Many items in pristine conditions.

Bob McP.— Scroll showing Canadian Roll of Honour that could be filled in by family.

Michael C.— Trophy Award found at Gun show dated 1899 “Stretcher Section Competition “ Discusses people who donated it. Surgeon Major Birkett and all his accomplishments. Also Surgeon Lt. Yates 2nd in command who died while on duty in France.

James— Talks of GRANDFATHER who left WW1, 100 years ago.

John E.—Discusses helmet shown in newsletter. Over 1 million made between 1938 and 1945. by General Steel Ware and Liners were made by “Viceroy Manufacturers” Garage sale finds. Money belt from WW2 and box containing mechanisms to sight 303 guns on a “Spitfire fighter”

Brad M.— Plastic card with ID and rules that were used on a US military base in the 60’s Brass bullet lighters that he found in India.

Gary M— Discusses information and research.

1937-1901 Book of Uniforms and Badges.

Northwest Medal from Riel Rebellion. Picture of Land Surveyors Intelligence Corp. that shows a relative.

Discussion by Members on Victoria Cross.

**Call to adjourn meetings.** Moved by Neil and seconded by Brad. Adjourned at 817 PM



*Another Member of this unit: Harry Rice on 17 September 2014, holding a picture of himself as a private soldier at age 17. Daily Mail Photo*

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

*The Lieutenant, Battalion Intelligence Officer, pilot and co-pilot were dead....the Jerries were firing into the wrecked glider to set it on fire."*

The following day, McMillan was made Captain and assigned to 1 Can Para when 2 FOURA Captain Ken Boss, MC was mortally wounded. Capt. R.C. "Bob" Hamilton, Commander, No. 5 Section, 2 FOURA describes the events,

*"On March 25, when 1CPB (3 Brigade) was heavily attacked, Capt. Ken Boss, R.A. M.C., called for fire. To improve his view of the target, he stood on top of his slit trench. According to 1CPB, his fire spared them from a dangerous counter-attack. Ken was seriously wounded and died later. Boss received the M.C., Capt. Don McMillan, R.C.A., immediately replaced Boss as FOO [Forward Observation Officer] with 1CPB."*

Capt. McMillan survived the war and was awarded the France & Germany Star, the Defence Medal, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp, and the War Medal. Sadly, he passed away in 1996 leaving behind two sons and his wife of 54 years, Isabelle Penelope (Bunnie) McMillan (nee Fraser). Bunnie joined her late husband on 23 March 2011 at age 93.



*Capt. Don McMillan, Wismar, Germany, May 1945. LAC*

*The First 2 FOURA reunion, held in London, Ontario on 21-23 September 1984. Don McMillan is kneeling, far left. R.C. Hamilton*



*Beret and 1944-dated Battle Dress worn by Captain McMillan.  
The wing is a UK-made Type 5.*



