



Sabretache

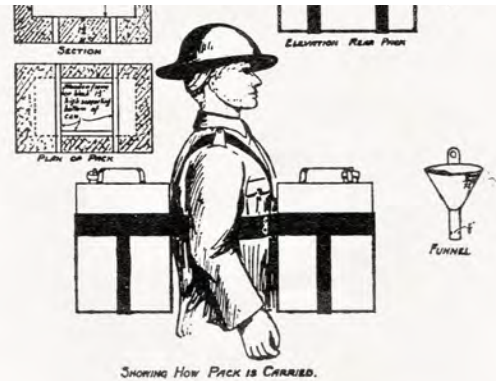
THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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August Extra #2, 2020

During the terrible months of the battles of the Somme, the **Canadian Corps** realized that the morale could be greatly improved if hot soup or food could be brought up to the trenches.

Page 3 Canadian innovation at its best



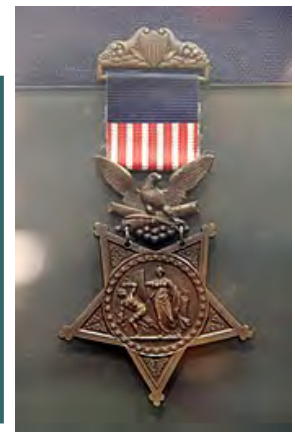
August 18th, 1944

David Vivian Currie, a former auto mechanic, welder, from Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan shows the enemy that they are dealing with a tough guy. And he wins a Victoria Cross for his bravery .

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On February 15, 1862, Senator Henry Wilson, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Military Affairs and the Militia, introduced a resolution for a Medal of Honor for the Army. This was approved by Congress and signed into law on July 12, 1862 ("*A Resolution to provide for the Presentation of "Medals of Honor" to the Enlisted Men of the Army and Volunteer Forces who have distinguished, or may distinguish, themselves in Battle during the present Rebellion*"). This measure provided for awarding a medal of honor "to such non-commissioned officers and privates as shall most distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action and other soldier-like qualities during the present insurrection."

Page 5 A 1947 article from the Canadian Legionary Magazine tells the tale of Canadians who won this award



1942 Fred Bing. A seventeen year old Chinese Canadian, high school student, from Lethbridge traveled to Calgary to enlist. He had already been an Air Cadet and was drawn to the air force.

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Treasures report Page 2

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THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE
CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
The SOCIETY

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August Extra #2 2020

Acknowledgements and Thanks

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The 1st April Extra was by Rory from the Boer War Forum. We thank him for allowing us to publish his work. It was forwarded to us by long time member Mike Clare

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July Extra # 2 by Michael Clare , Indra Teekasingh & Allan Ross

July Extra #3 article contributed by Indra Teekasingh & Allan Ross

August Extra #1 contributions by Indra Teekasingh & Allan ross. Monty's Moonlight by David Gale

Finances report, July end

Opening balance July 3....\$ 1,158.91

Income.....bank interest .01

Expenses....PO Box renewal....\$ 252.00

Postage for reports, PO Box...\$ 3.05

Closing Balance.... \$ 903.87

Include with next Sabretasche please...Cheers...STAY SAFE.....!!!!

...Better 6 feet apart than 6 feet under

Floyd



Knocked-out Churchill
tank on the beach at
Dieppe, France,
19 August 1942

Field Thermos on the Somme

During the terrible months of the battles of the Somme, the Canadian Corps realized that the morale could be greatly improved if hot soup or food could be brought up to the trenches. At first sight this appeared to be a hopeless undertaking - the front line was between 4,000 and 5,000 yards from the point where the limbers dumped the rations. One method, attempted once and never repeated, was to prepare hot soup at the transport lines using regular traveling cookers and then removing the huge cylindrical stew pots, placing them in limbers, and transporting them up the road as far as possible. The pots would then be slung from long poles and a section of eight men would each carry a pot to the line. The result was that the men usually arrived more dead than alive from exhaustion and as the job took most of the night the soup was no longer hot and the benefit was lost. It is believed that one of the reasons this plan was only attempted once was that few of the pots ever reached the traveling kitchen again.

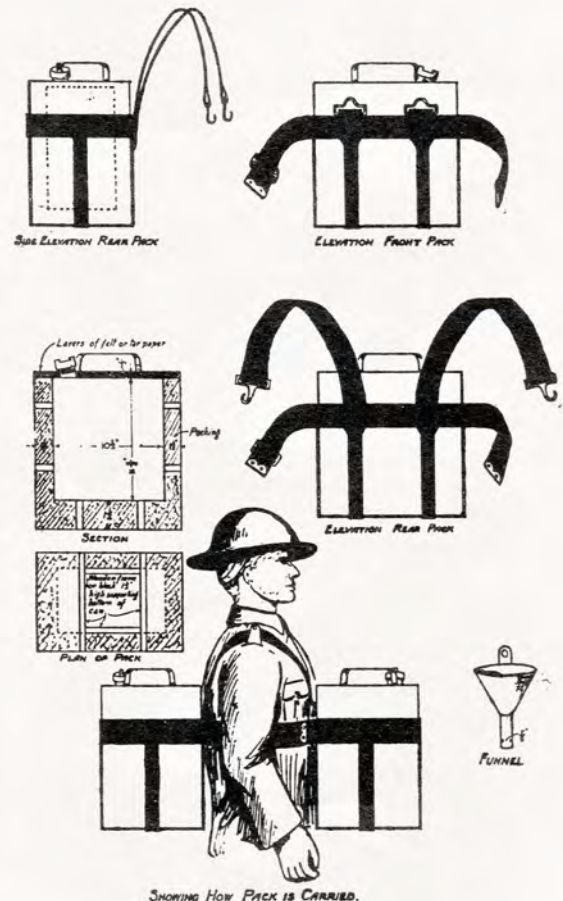
A second experiment proved equally unproductive. This one required that a soup kitchen be built in the support area and hot soup prepared and carried the short distance to the lines. To do this a "cut in" was dug off the main support trench large enough to construct a shelter to hold five Soyer stoves, a fifty-gallon tank for water, supplies of charcoal and ingredients to make the soup. Whether the Germans thought that this covered area was a headquarters or a stockpile of materiel for an upcoming offensive is unknown, but on the second night of operation the kitchen was shelled, resulting in the loss of all equipment and the loss of the five men, three of whom were killed.

The solution to the dilemma was found by the pioneer sergeants of the four units in the brigade most affected - a field-produced thermos can. The ordinary petrol can, which had become the standard water carrier of the troops, was utilised as the most convenient base. This was due to the need to keep the thermos to a size that was not too bulky or heavy to carry, which required a small amount of work to produce and would keep the soup hot enough to make the effort of transporting it from the rear lines worthwhile.

The materials used consisted of petrol cans, tin to produce an inside casing, solder, felt or tar paper, old newspapers and bits of wood. The tin was recycled from old biscuit tins, the solder by melting it off bully beef and other tins and the other items were easy to obtain.

In order to carry the "thermos pack" with the least effort, and to leave the hands free, a special harness was made from salvaged webbing. This rig allowed one man to carry two packs, one on his chest, the other on his back. As each tin held about 16 rations, this one man could easily handle the needs of a whole platoon. One of the few difficulties with the field produced thermos was to ensure that the tins, with stoppers, came back immediately after use and were properly cleaned for hygienic reasons. This was solved by forming special parties to return the tins. The cleaning was made a matter of routine and was ably handled by "the quartermasters, who were all efficient officers". Within a short time a large supply of these "packs" was made by brigade units and the supply of hot soup to the front line was solved. In fact they were used during the battle of Vimy Ridge and the First Army Administrative Report on the Vimy Ridge Operations referred to it as a "useful device".

Notes: National Archives, RG24 Vol.1847, file GAQ 11-63
Fig. 7-Detail Of manufacture and straps. This illustration first appeared in the Canadian Defence Quarterly, 1929.



Victoria Cross recipient and Second World War tough guy: Major David

Vivian Currie

Seventy six years ago, on August 18, 1944, Major David Vivian Currie led 200 men and a dozen M4 Sherman tanks into the town of St. Lambert-sur-Dives, France in order to block the escape route of the German 7th Army out of the Falaise Pocket. Though hugely outnumbered by a detachment of the German 2nd Panzer Division, the actions that Currie and his men took effectively sealed off the only escape route for the Germans. For his efforts, Currie earned the Victoria Cross, the highest military gallantry decoration in the British Commonwealth.

Major Currie was born in Sutherland, Saskatchewan in 1912 and trained as an auto mechanic and welder. A major in the 29th Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (South Alberta Regiment) in 1944, Currie had only ten days of combat experience when he was tasked with capturing, cutting off, and holding the road through St. Lambert.

Currie was leading “C” Squadron, a small force of tanks and anti-tank guns, together with two infantry companies of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, with no artillery support and little reconnaissance. When his first attack was repulsed, Currie snuck into the village on foot, surveyed the German defences, and rescued the crews of two disabled Canadian tanks. The following day, he had seized and consolidated a position half-way inside the village. Over the next 36 hours, Currie so skillfully organised his defences in the face of near-constant counterattack that he not only held the unit’s position but inflicted disproportionately heavy casualties on the German forces.



Major David V. Currie (third from left with pistol in hand) of The South Alberta Regiment accepting the surrender of German troops at St. Lambert-sur-Dives, France, August 19, 1944

The Germans attempted their final breakthrough of the Canadian positions on the evening of August 20th but were routed by a surprise Canadian assault. Over 2,100 German soldiers were taken prisoner by Currie’s force of less than 200. Currie then completed the capture of the village, thus denying the remnants of the German armies their last escape route from the Falaise Pocket. The battle of St. Lambert was to be the final battle of the Normandy Campaign.

In the months following St. Lambert, Currie participated in the Battle of the Scheldt and the liberation of the Netherlands. He later achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel and served as sergeant-at-arms in the Canadian House of Commons from 1960 to 1978. He died in 1986. The armoury in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan is named the Lt. Colonel D. V. Currie Armoury in his honour, as is Currie Avenue in Saskatoon.

[Library and Archives Canada Blog](#)

CANADIAN MEDAL OF HONOUR MEN

* * *

By George T. Ness, Jr.

The Little-known Saga Of Canadian Fighting Men Who Won The Congressional Medal Of Honour — The American V.C.

THE decoration of Sergeant Charles A. MacGillivray with the Congressional Medal of Honour by President Truman was not the first occasion on which a native of British North America has been so honoured. MacGillivray, a native of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, had followed the tradition of valour set by at least 27 others who in years gone by had received that coveted award.

ESTABLISHED IN 1862

The Congressional Medal of Honour was established in 1862 and is awarded by the President of the United States, in the name of Congress, for gallantry in actual combat with a foe, at great risk of life over and beyond the call of duty. A recipient rates a salute from anyone, regardless of rank or position.

Perhaps the most prominent of the earlier Canadians to receive the decoration was Martin T. McMahon, who was born in Laprairie, P.Q., in 1838. After studying law in New York he moved to California where he was employed until the Civil War commenced in 1861. In October of that year McMahon was commissioned a captain in the United States forces and served successively on the staffs of Generals McClellan, Franklin, Sedgwick and Wright. Promotion to major and lieutenant-colonel came in the course of the war as did brevets to colonel, brigadier and major-general.

The deed for which McMahon was cited occurred at White Oak Swamp, Virginia, in June, 1862, while serving as aide to General George B. McClellan. A valuable Union train of supplies had been abandoned not far from the Confederate lines. Because the material would have been of inestimable value to the latter, it

was essential that it be destroyed. With utter disregard of personal danger, McMahon worked his way through the cover of fire between the United States lines and the wagons, destroyed them and returned without injury.

After the war Colonel McMahon held various public offices and for a time was United States Minister to Paraguay.

ANOTHER CIVIL WAR AWARD

The second Canadian to win the Medal of Honour ultimately attained the grade of brigadier-general. John Curtis Gilmore entered the service as a captain in the 16th New York Infantry within a month after the Civil War had started. In May 1863, at Salem Heights, Virginia, his men became badly disorganized by the galling fire of the Confederates, and Gilmore, now a major, seized the regimental colours and, rallying his men around him, led them forward in the face of heavy opposition.

Gilmore was twice breveted for gallantry, became a brigadier-general in the war with Spain in 1898, and retired with the permanent rank of colonel in the Regular Army in 1907. His son, of the same name, was graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1894.

It would be impossible to describe in detail the services of each Canadian recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honour, but they may be mentioned in passing.

IN HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT

Of apparently combative nature was Sergeant Albert O'Connor, of the 7th Wisconsin, a regiment standing third in total losses in the Civil War. In March, 1865, at Gravelly Run, Virginia, with one comrade he attacked a group of Confederates, making three of them prisoners, and, dispersing the remainder, freed a Union Officer whom they had captured. The next day he seized a stand of enemy colours, killed a Confederate officer in a hand-to-hand combat when he tried to retake them, and only when completely surrounded and forced to yield did he surrender his hard won trophy.

Four Canadians were decorated for capturing Confederate flags in battle. Benjamin Younger took that of the 35th North Carolina at Petersburg, while Denis Buckley seized that of the 31st Mississippi at Peach Tree Creek during Sherman's celebrated march through Georgia. At Sailor's Creek; Virginia, just three days before Lee's surrender, Arsel Hagerty and John Chapman were cited for similar exploits. Chapman was a native of Saint John, New Brunswick, and was a member of the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery, which had the second highest percentage of loss in the war.



Fred Bing

In 1942, at the tender age of 17, Fred Bing enlisted in Calgary. He was drawn to the serve in the air force as he had already been an Air Cadet while in high school in Lethbridge.

Fred took his basic training at Manning Depot near Edmonton and afterwards received the wonderful news that he had been selected to be trained as a pilot – a big endorsement of his skills. However, when Fred learned he would have to wait a full year to begin his training, the impatient young man — who was itching to get overseas — signed up for the next course available. The result was that by September 1943, Fred had his Wireless Air Gunner badge.

His brother, Alan Bing, also served with the Air Force.

After a few months of further training in New Brunswick, Fred and his crew mates sailed off to England to fly B-25 Mitchell bombers with the 98th Squadron 2nd Tactical Air Force.

According to Marjorie Wong, in her seminal book *The Dragon and the Maple Leaf*, November 25, 1944 was a significant day for Fred. “On an operation on the rail centre at Reydt, Germany ... Bing’s aircraft was hit by flak, knocking a hole in the Perspex about the size of a baseball. The powdered sugar-like material hit the pilot but he regained control of the aircraft; they flew back to Belgium, however at a very low level. This was the last flight for the team. Fred Bing flew 40 missions and earned his operational wings.”

Fred lived a long life. Weeks before he died suddenly, at the age of 92, he was still living independently in a condo in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, and was even driving his own car. Fred Bing left this world for his next mission on November, 12, 2016.



Cy, Paul, Pete and Fred at a tent

Fred Bing and his crew mates. From Left to right: Pilot Cy Poissant, Navigator/ Bomb aimer Peter (Doc) Ryan, Wireless Air Gunner Fred Bing, and second air gunner George Olsen.

