



# Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF  
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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November Extra # 2 2020

## [ATTENTION ALL MEMBERS: A MESSAGE FROM MEMBER AL ROSS](#)

To the club membership:

The Military Museums (TMM) is hosting an Exhibit in May 2021 featuring soldiers that fought in their mother country before immigrating to Canada. The idea is to tell stories of other wars and conflicts outside of Canada, but with a link to Canada's diverse nationalities. To help with the exhibit, the TMM is looking for artifacts from various countries. Currently, the TMM is having difficulty acquiring these from the Calgary International Community as most people did not bring these with them to Canada (for a variety of reasons). I suggested to the TMM to reach out to the local collecting club membership to ask if anyone is interested in loaning some of their items.

Attached is Rory Cory's email which has summoned up the Exhibit and the countries that are currently slated for the Exhibit as well as items required for the display. Rory is the senior curator at the TMM as well as coordinating this new Exhibit. The Exhibit also be hosting an Art Display so they are also looking for any Artwork related to this theme.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact club member Al Ross at [aross@telusplanet.net](mailto:aross@telusplanet.net), or directly to the museum curator Rory Cory at [ror-curator@telusplanet.net](mailto:ror-curator@telusplanet.net). (also see details for Rory's contact information).

Thanks for any help we can provide to support our local military museum.

Al

[Continued Page 2 & 3](#)

## Canada's big WW2 Secret; **The Number One Armored Train**



The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and the enemy's successes in the following weeks and months caused great concern on the West Coast of Canada. Prince Rupert was now a strategic port, and embarkation point for US Army Personnel and supplies destined for Alaska. In early 1942 it was decided to build an armoured train to patrol the railway line between Prince Rupert and Terrace, B.C., a distance of 95 miles .

[Continued Page 4](#)

----- Original Message -----

Subject: RE: International Exhibit details  
Date: 2020-11-12 19:57  
From: "Rory Cory" <mor-curator@telusplanet.net>  
To: "Al Ross" <aross@telusplanet.net>  
Cc: "D Love" <dlove@davincibb.net>, "Indra Ross" <alindra@telusplanet.net>

Hi Al –

Thanks very much for offering to network with the collector community for us. We do have an expression of interest document created for the exhibit (see attached). The exhibit runs May to September next year, and TMM covers insurance while any objects are on loan to us. In terms of security, we have 24 hour onsite security staff, all galleries are alarmed, and all objects will be displayed in locked cases. I'm happy to discuss further details with anyone who has concerns.

We'd be interested in representative items such as badges, medals or uniforms from any of the countries we're currently looking at. So far, these include the following: Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Hungary, Italy, South Vietnam, America, and the Ukraine. We're still in the process of pinning down specific stories, so we don't yet know what time periods we're dealing with for these countries, but anyone who has relevant items that they're willing to loan is welcome to come forward and we can work on refining what we need thereafter. I'm sure that the list of countries will expand as we move forward – as you know, we're trying to connect with as many different communities as possible and are still actively engaged in trying to contact others.

If you need anything further for the call-out, please don't hesitate to ask.

Cheers,

Rory

Rory M. Cory  
Senior Curator/Director of Collections  
The Military Museums  
4520 Crowchild Trail S.W.  
Calgary, Alberta  
T2T 5J4

403-410-2340 ext. 2602

## Are you an Immigrant to Alberta with Military Service in Your Country of Origin?

### OPEN CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

Are you or one of your family members a migrant to Alberta, with military service in your native country or elsewhere? Or do you have any ancestors or friends who settled in Alberta, who served in a military capacity with non-Canadian armed forces?

We are seeking individuals with stories to share, relating to non-Canadian military experience: the material we compile will be considered for inclusion in an exhibition at the University of Calgary's Founders' Gallery at The Military Museums in Calgary, summer 2021. Military experience could be formal as part of sovereign armed forces, or informal as part of a militia or guerilla force, and also includes child soldiers or freedom fighters. Our interest is global in scope, historical or contemporary, and we are particularly interested in learning about artworks or artefacts relating to such individuals.

Project Overview: Military Immigration explores and presents diverse stories of immigrants to Alberta, who have undertaken military service in their countries of origin. In addition to shedding light on the wide range of nationalities that have settled in this province, the exhibition will enable learning opportunities about wars and conflicts across the globe, many of which may not have involved Canada. The scope will be both historical and contemporary, featuring first-person accounts, oral histories, art, and artefacts. Planning for this exhibition involves extensive outreach to community associations and ex-pat organizations in Calgary and beyond.

If you are a museum or heritage-institute with relevant stories, artwork, or artefacts in your collection and are interested in participating in this project, your support is also welcomed. If you have a story you would like to share or would like more information on the project, contact:

Curatorial Coordinator, Dick Averbs, at [dick.averens@ucalgary.ca](mailto:dick.averens@ucalgary.ca) or (403) 410-2340 ext. 2630.

Senior Curator/Director of Collections, Rory Cory, at [mor-curator@telusplanet.net](mailto:mor-curator@telusplanet.net) or (403) 410-2340 ext. 2602. For more information on The Military Museums, including our mandate, visitor information, education programs, and events and exhibitions, please visit <https://themilitarymuseums.ca/>

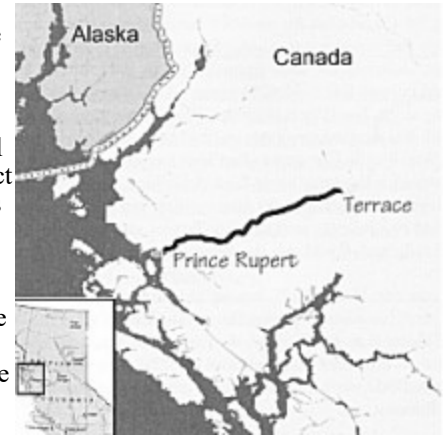
We look forward to hearing your stories!



## CANADA'S ARMoured TRAIN

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, and the success of the Japanese fleet in the south-east Pacific, there were fears in Ottawa that the Japanese High Command would attack the port of Prince Rupert, British Columbia. Prince Rupert was, at that time, connected to the interior only by a railway which ran for ninety miles along the navigable Skeena River. To discourage any sudden descent by the "Yellow Peril" on the port, the Department of National Defence decided to construct an armored train to patrol the railway link. Its mission was to act as a rapid striking force to obliterate any sudden Japanese assault on Prince Rupert. Here was a case where the Dominion Government did do something "first."

In early 1942 it was decided to build an armored train to patrol the railway line between Prince Rupert and Terrace, B.C., a distance of 95 miles. The train was assembled at the CNR Transcona Workshops in Winnipeg, Manitoba and consisted of seven pieces of modified, armour plated, rolling stock pulled by a steam locomotive. The first hitch, recalled by one workman, was the weight, or perhaps overweight, of the engine to be fitted with armor plate. The engine could bear the weight, but the tracks could not. The tracks were ripped from the railroad ties. Its maiden run had to be cut short at Dugald, just a few miles east of Transcona.



The problem of engine weight remained throughout the existence of No. 1 Armored Train. The Department of National Defence wanted two diesel-electric locomotives (one for a backup). Unfortunately, the two locomotives selected did not have any engines. Undaunted by this setback, the Department approached the United States Navy for replacement engines.

On July 21 the new armored train, drawn by a regular unarmoured steam locomotive, arrived in Terrace. There was no welcoming fanfare or press release; most residents did not even know of its existence. The train arrived not a day too soon. Just a little over a month before, a Japanese submarine had shelled the rocks of Estevan Point on Vancouver Island, reviving fears of a Japanese invasion



The train, with armour 8 to 16 mm thick, was made up of eight cars: two armed gondola cars followed by a coach for the soldiers, the locomotive in the centre, then a dining/kitchen car and two more armed gondola cars bringing up the rear. The train was manned by a company from the Winnipeg

Grenadiers and equipped with Bren Guns, 75mm and Bofor guns. The assigned task was to patrol the Skeena river and engage any ships that attempted to sail up the river and, perhaps land troops.

**The Crew..** The CNR train crew consisted of, engineer, fireman, conductor, and two brakemen. Department of National Defence reimbursed the CNR \$100.00 per day for each crew member and \$80.00 per day for rental of equipment. The train at all times was to be in charge of the CNR crew, who in turn were under the orders of the O.C. Troops and move the train in accordance to his instructions subject to the standard of operating rules.

The five officers and 145 Other Ranks were made up mainly of Home Defence conscripts and moral was not high. Major General W.A. Giesbach, Inspector General for Western Canada states that he found them unenthusiastic, even sullen. On the first run to Prince Rupert two went AWOL.

Upon arrival in Prince Rupert, the train was taken over by "A" Company, The Winnipeg Grenadiers, Captain N.K. Gateson, Officer Commanding. In the War Diary of the Armored Train, Captain Gateson describes the first day of operation, July 29, 1942.



"The Armored Train made first trip from Terrace, B.C. to Prince Rupert, B.C. and returned. Distance 193 miles. The train speed was 25 mph and found to be a little too fast. It was cut to 20 mph so that equipment would not be shaken"

Capt. Gateson was happy to note that all the guns and mountings cleared the tunnels, bridges and wires along the way. He was less pleased with the knowledge some of his men had of the weapons they were supposed to operate. He also didn't reveal all the shortcomings of the road bed. In fact for curves the train had to slow to 10 mph, slower than a person can run and there are many curves in those 90 plus miles of railroad. By the third day of operation Capt. Gateson was noticing that the soldiers were exhausted from lack of sleep and the thirteen hour round trip. The troops also had to contend with the guns which, when swivelled, would knock crew members off the train.

## Design flaws

On the first trial run to Prince Rupert on July 29, 1942, a number of problems became apparent. The armour plating made the train very heavy, forcing it to operate much slower than expected. The track was in poor shape and the many curves slowed the train even more, down to less than 10 miles per hour (16 km per hour). The severe vibrations of the train caused bolts to loosen on gun mounts. The bulbs and the reflectors for the headlights had not yet been installed and there were problems with the searchlights. The crew had not been trained in advance, and the Major General found them sullen and unenthusiastic. The troops disliked the close quarters and confined space; some went AWOL upon their arrival in Rupert. The radios went dead when the whistle sounded. The sighting scopes were hazardous to look through as the train was vibrating along the tracks. The weight of the train actually damaged the track and derailments occurred. But one major success was realized on that first run: despite much doubt, the gun mounts did clear the tunnels.



**More Problems...** To add to the problems the rail bed was in need of up grading. Ties were rotting and some spikes were so loose they could be removed by hand. The resulting vibration necessitated lowering the speed to 10 to 15 mph. The vibrations played havoc with the search lights and gun mountings which were attached solidly to the floors of the rail cars. The cars had to be sent to Vancouver for upgrades and returned in November. Changes were recommended to improve the train: raising the gun mounts so they could fire towards the ground; providing safety chains to the men on top of the rail cars; fitting rubber eye cups on sighting scopes and providing better searchlights.

## Roof Mounted Gunner



**More Problems..** For security reasons the train did not adhere to scheduled runs. As a result it ran over a man asleep on the tracks severing both his legs. It was determined that he was a local sleeping off a binge. Two CNR rail line workers were killed when the train hit them when they were using jackhammers. Due to the non scheduled runs they were not expecting the train and they did not hear it approaching over the sound of jackhammers. Due to the status of the roadbed, the train was located at Tyee, close to the mouth of the Skeena River.

Use of the guns meant other problems as well. Another railway workman recalled that after a trip to Vancouver for repairs, a request was made to fire the AA guns outside of Vancouver. Permission was granted to fire them into some sand hills outside the city, but all the spent shells had to be dug out afterwards. Capt. Gateson elected not to hold gunnery practice that day. By the end of 1942, when the new and improved armoured train operated between Tyee and Prince Rupert, the Japanese threat to the west coast was lessening. By January of 1943 the No. 1 Armoured Train ran only once a week. During their days off, the crew carried out training exercises and target practice.

No. 1 Armored Train's career was short-lived. It died from neither enemy action nor excitement. Its termination was largely due to the efforts of the U.S. Navy, which put an end to any designs the Japanese High Command may have held on Prince Rupert.

On September 10, 1943, the long-awaited diesel electric was finally ready, but was held in Transcona on order from Ottawa. By the end of September, fourteen months after it commenced operation, but only three months since the Government and the CNR had signed the contract outlining the terms of its use, the train itself was put on the inactive list and its steam locomotive, having survived in spite of its lack of armor-plating, was reassigned. Then, on October 5, the train was moved to Vancouver for dismantling, although it wasn't actually dismantled until it arrived back in Transcona Yards in Winnipeg, in September, 1944.

## WAR STORY

# Canadians with too much time on their hands?



Improved by the Canadians in 1944, this consisted of 14 PIAT projectors mounted on a frame at the rear of the carrier in two series of seven. Each row could be fired simultaneously by means of a mechanical contrivance of steel rods attached to the firing triggers. A few vehicles so fitted were used in Europe in 1944-45.

The PIAT Battery in question was part of 16 Field Park Company, Royal Canadian Engineers, in Zutphen, Netherlands, 1944. Yes, they were used in action, to good effect. They were mounted on brackets on the rear of the carriers in two rows of seven, with a crowbar tack welded to the triggers of the PIAT, to provide a uniform firing mechanism.

### **Sabretache**

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The 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

Contact Editor: David Gale [david@sunnyspotservice.ca](mailto:david@sunnyspotservice.ca)