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2020-02

# Treasuring the Tradition: The Story of the Military Museums

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University of Calgary Press

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Bercuson, D. J., & Keshen, J. (2020). Treasuring the Tradition: The story of the Military Museums. Calgary, AB: The University of Calgary Press.

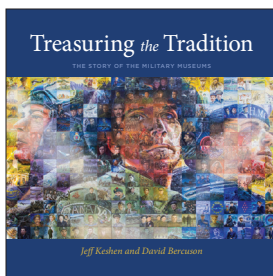
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**TREASURING THE TRADITION:  
The Story of the Military Museums**  
by Jeff Keshen and David Bercuson

ISBN 978-1-77385-059-7

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## OPERATING THE MUSEUM OF THE REGIMENTS

With the completion of the Museum of the Regiments in September 1991, the old school building had been completely transformed. It made a striking appearance along Crowchild Trail. As visitors approached the main entrance, they encountered a number of military vehicles that included a Lynx reconnaissance vehicle, a five-ton Universal Carrier, a Centurion tank, and a 39-ton Churchill tank with a mounted flame thrower.

Inside the main atrium were exhibits on a lower floor showing scenes from the Second World War. One was a Sherman tank from the Strathcona's that required a special heavy duty crane to lower into position. On the main floor were five principal galleries. Reflecting the different size of the regimental collections, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry had the largest, followed by Lord Strathcona's Horse. Later, the Army Museum of Alberta gallery was added to display other aspects of regional military history, such as relating to Indigenous peoples, the 1885 rebellion, and the massive presence of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in the province. A small gallery for touring exhibits, or temporary ones organized by Museum staff, sponsored by Imperial Oil, took up the remainder of the space.

Within a couple of years of opening its doors, the museum was drawing some fifty thousand visitors annually. About two-thirds were Calgarians, 15 per cent from the rest of Alberta, 10 per cent from other parts of Canada, and the rest from the United States and other nations. It was also not long before tens of thousands of



(ABOVE)  
Colonel Donald Ethell in his United Nations Association blazer. Ethell later became Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Alberta.



(BELOW)  
George Milne wearing regalia of the Honourable Guard at the museum.

school children were visiting annually for tours and lessons relating to the provincial curriculum.

Many Calgarians worked hard to create the original Museum of the Regiments, including by raising funds and collecting artifacts. Few were more involved than George Milne. Born in Toronto, George had established himself as a marketing genius by the time he moved to Calgary with his family in 1986 to take an executive position with Petro Canada. With the Calgary Winter Olympics coming in 1988, and Petro Canada a major sponsor of the event, George initiated the highly popular Petro Canada Olympic glasses hand-out and the Olympic Torch parade. He also became the Regimental secretary for the Calgary Highlanders after he retired from Petro Canada, working with Fred Mannix and others to come up with new and imaginative fundraising initiatives such as elaborate dinners organized for a Chinese general and the Maharajah of Jaipur. George also worked on several exhibits such as that covering the Highlanders' involvement in the 1944 Battle of the Walcheren Causeway, as part of the Battle of the Scheldt Estuary.

Until 2001, Milne spearheaded the museum's fundraising operations. Among his innovations was the creation of the Museum Honourable Guard, which was used to connect to prominent local people. Adopting a military theme, the Guard had its own colours, with jacket, vest, and trousers patterned after Calgary's 103rd Regiment. It established ranks—Members, Escort to the Colours, and Honourary Commander—linked to the level of money paid for a membership fee. Its numbers quickly reached some three hundred and included a number of Calgary's most notable people such as the Chief of Police, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, and industry leaders. Members received advance access to exhibits and invitations to social activities like international wine and cheese tastings or mess dinners. When the building was finished and paid for, fundraising by Milne and others went to support extensive educational programs.

The Museum also grew its profile by becoming the focal point for Remembrance Day ceremonies, taking over this role from the Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium. What started in 1993 with a few thousand spectators became, in the following decade, a gathering attracting ten thousand or more people, with official representation from the four regiments, provincial and municipal governments, police, fire fighters, cadet corps, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, and military bands and choirs.



Among the museum's events, organized twice in the late 1990s, were outdoor concerts involving military bands, including the King's Own Calgary Regiment Band, and the Regimental Pipes and Drums of the Calgary Highlanders, as well as Highland dancers. Besides rousing music, antique cars were displayed, along with face-painting and clowns to entertain children. The museum also established a public lecture series covering topics of general interest such as the major battles in which Canadian soldiers fought in the First and Second World Wars. Another highly successful venture was organizing a version of the famous British television program, the Antiques Roadshow. With expert assessors from both the Museum of the Regiments and the Canadian War Museum, some two thousand people arrived with medals, diaries, photographs, paintings, and weapons, including a US cavalry sword from the 1860s, a Brown Bess Musket from the early 1800s, and a bayonet from a First World War Pritchard pistol.



(LEFT)  
North-West Mounted Police  
Commemorative Association  
band standing in front of the *Mural  
of Honour* inside the Museum's  
main hall.

(RIGHT)  
German brass bugle captured at  
Vimy Ridge on 9 April 1917 by PPCLI,  
No. 2 Company. A "Marguerite" cap  
badge and inscription have been  
added. Collection of PPCLI Museum  
and Archives.

## CALGARY HIGHLANDERS MUSEUM & ARCHIVES



Calgary Highlanders advance through intense fire on the Walcheren Causeway, Scheldt Estuary, Holland, 31 October 1944. Robert Johnson, acrylic on board, 1993. Collection of the Calgary Highlanders Museum and Archives.



(ABOVE, LEFT AND RIGHT)  
Wooden bass drum shell of the Calgary Highlanders pipes and drums, ca. 1941. Note the painted Battle Honours of the 10th Battalion, the Great War unit perpetuated by the Calgary Highlanders. The names of the wartime Calgary Highlanders pipers and drummers were written and are now preserved inside the bass drum shell. Collection of the Calgary Highlanders Museum and Archives.



PHOTOS: JULIE VINCENT PHOTOGRAPHY



(RIGHT)  
Miniature silver presentation cup awarded to Bugler George Alfred Webb, of Calgary's 56th Battalion, for assistance in the defence of Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, during the 1916 Sinn Fein Easter Rising. Collection of the Calgary Highlanders Museum and Archives.

PHOTO: JULIE VINCENT PHOTOGRAPHY

## GUNS IN THE MUSEUMS



PHOTOS: JULIE VINCENT PHOTOGRAPHY

Lee-Enfield No. 4 Mk. 1 (T) sniper rifle in its original box, complete with No. 32 telescope and other tools. This was the standard sniper rifle used by Canadian snipers in the Second World War. Collection of the Army Museum of Alberta.



(ABOVE)

7.92-mm German Maxim machine gun captured by the 10th Battalion during the Battle of Hill 70, France, 15 August 1917. Weighing 55 lbs, the gun has a belt capacity of 250 rounds and fires at a rate of 400–500 rounds per minute. Collection of the Calgary Highlanders Museum and Archives.

(BELOW)

The Fallschirmjägergewehr 42 (FG-42) was specifically developed for German paratroopers during the Second World War. Its rate of fire is 900 rounds per minute. A 7.92 x 57 mm Mauser, it

has a rotating bolt, a fixed bi-pod and an internal bayonet. It is much less common than the infantry version (MG-42). Collection of PPCLI Museum and Archives.



## THE AIR FORCE MUSEUM OF ALBERTA

(ABOVE)

German 6 x 30 Dienstglas binoculars, ca. 1945. These binoculars were “liberated” from a German factory in 1945 by Flight Lieutenant William James Fowler. When lingering German soldiers opened fire on the group leaving the factory, they dropped another box of binoculars. Fowler only retained this pair, which were hung around his neck! Collection of the Air Force Museum of Alberta.

(BELOW)

Four-barrelled flare pistol, 1917. This extremely rare pistol was brought home by William Addison Henry as a souvenir. It was designed to illuminate large airfields without the need to reload. Over 2,500 were manufactured by seven different German companies, but only a few dozen survive to this day. Collection of the Air Force Museum of Alberta.



Royal Air Force Tunic, ca. 1918–1919. This tunic belonged to H.H. Gilbert, a Canadian pilot. After the formation of the Royal Air Force in 1918, new uniforms were needed. The signature blue fabric came from a surplus of blue twill originally intended for the Imperial Russian military. Collection of the Air Force Museum of Alberta.

PHOTO: JULIE VINCENT PHOTOGRAPHY



PHOTOS: JULIE VINCENT PHOTOGRAPHY

(LEFT)  
'36 Pattern Flight Boots, RAF.  
These boots were worn by W.F.  
Young during his service with  
the RAF. They are a rare, early-  
war type. Collection of the Air  
Force Museum of Alberta.



(RIGHT)  
This sewing kit belonged to  
Daryl 'Doc' Seaman from  
Calgary. He flew with RAF  
500 Squadron in North Africa  
during the Second World War.  
Collection of the Air Force  
Museum of Alberta.

(RIGHT, ABOVE AND BELOW)  
Royal Air Force Survival Kit,  
ca. 1939–45. This survival kit  
contains sunscreen, a button  
compass, a water purification  
sack and tablets, and Horlicks  
tablets, among other things. It  
was intended to help downed  
aircrew while awaiting rescue  
or trying to make their way back  
through enemy lines. There are  
few intact examples of these  
kits still in existence. Collection  
of the Air Force Museum of  
Alberta.

(BELOW)  
Identity discs were issued to  
all servicemen and used in the  
event of death to identify the  
body. The green tag would  
remain with body while the  
red would be taken for official  
record purposes. This grouping  
belonged to Airman F.S.  
Reynolds. Collection of the Air  
Force Museum of Alberta.





Crew members on the mess deck of HMCS *Winnipeg*, an Algerine-class minesweeper that served in the Royal Canadian Navy during the Second World War. Ken Macpherson photographic collection.