



**TREASURING THE TRADITION:
The Story of the Military Museums**
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REMEMBER, PRESERVE, EDUCATE

Within a little more than a generation, Calgary had developed a major museum primarily to showcase both its own and Alberta's rich military past. Its exhibits drew from local and worldwide sources to explain the multi-faceted impact of war. What was once an abandoned middle school had become a major tourist destination, heritage and cultural site, and research centre.

Central to the museum's mission is educating young people. Its founders sought to establish this as a basis for reputational excellence. In educating the young, the CMMS identified three major goals: to understand that war affects everyone; that it is a devastating human experience; and that the conflicts Canada participated in profoundly shaped its formation.

Museum educators vigorously pursue connections with schools and post-secondary institutions. This includes establishing curriculum-based museum programming, educational summer camps and sleepovers, organizing battlefield study tours, creating research projects, and bringing mobile displays into schools. By 2010, museum personnel reached some ninety thousand young people, ranging from kindergarten to Grade 12, providing lesson plans accompanying loaned artifacts.

The museum seeks to collaborate with teacher associations and also to attract teachers as volunteers. The museum's Education Committee ties its programming around different exhibits to specific themes and outcomes of the official school curriculum. This has typically related to the social studies component that, depending

Artifact handling program in progress. This program helps the students to understand how meaningful these items are.



on the grade level, focused on topics such as citizenship, global communities, democracy, understanding nationalism, and understanding ideologies.

Innovative and flexible thinking was often evident in this process. An exhibit on peacekeeping with a major component covering “landmines and landmine technology” was linked not only to “Canada and the world,” which was part of both Grade 5 and Grade 10 social studies curricular objectives, but also to “technological change and its impact,” which was aimed at Grade 9 learning expectations and dealt in this case with the horrid toll landmines exacted on civilian populations. High school students were prompted to consider the concept of “sovereignty” in the context of Canada’s leadership in producing the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty (that is, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction) signed by 122 countries, but excluding the United States, Russia, and China.

This led to exploring the extent to which nations should be able to intervene in the affairs of others, even to protect their civilian populations. Encouraged also to organize a debate around the issue of using landmines, students were given arguments on both sides, such as their use by the United States in the demilitarized

zone in Korea to keep the southern half of that long-divided country secure, without the need to commit massive numbers of troops.

University of Calgary Education students prepare many of the lesson plans. Depending on the age group, this could involve trying on uniforms or handling artifacts, teaching mathematics through exploring artillery sound-ranging techniques, or learning how to decode cipher messages.

Before visiting the museum, teachers are sent packages to prepare children with basic knowledge and to familiarize themselves with key content. For instance, with respect to peacekeeping, the teacher's kit included a list of all United Nations military operations in which Canadian forces had participated. Potential class activities have also been included, such as crossword and word-find puzzles linked to key themes and terms, possible essay topics and test questions, and suggestions for class initiatives such as writing to Canadian soldiers serving abroad. So inspired were students from Calgary's St. Ambrose Elementary School that they raised \$800 to send educational supplies to Afghan children, an amount local businesses matched.

When preparing their presentations, educators take care to present a balanced account. While avoiding the glorification of past battles, lessons discuss circumstances where it is essential to put young men, and more recently women as well, in harm's way. Youth are told that the decades of peace we have enjoyed have sometimes been dearly bought by the sacrifices of Canada's sons and daughters in 1914–1918 and 1939–1945, and up to the present day.

Wider societal considerations of what leads to, and the mixed consequences of, armed conflict are examined. In covering the 1885 North-West Rebellion, lesson plans asked students to consider how they would feel as a soldier trying to quash Riel's uprising; whether Riel's trial was fair; and if they could better appreciate Riel's position in light of contemporary western Canadian, and especially Alberta, alienation from Central Canada, such as over national energy policy. In covering Canada's involvement in the Boer War, loyalty to Britain and commitment to protecting the rights of Anglo Uitlanders were noted, but also Britain's economic interests in the region (namely its intent to control gold and diamond mining

Students get to see firsthand many of the items that are referenced in their programs.





One of the unique aspects of the education programs is the involvement of veterans, such as Rose Wilkinson here (a Second World War veteran of the Canadian Women's Army Corps). This creates opportunities for intergenerational engagement and is very meaningful for veterans from the Second World War up to Afghanistan.

operations), its mistreatment of Africans, its use of scorched earth tactics and introduction of concentration camps, and the divisions the war brought to Canada, particularly between French and English Canadians.

Addressing the internment of Ukrainians in Canada during the First World War and the forced evacuation of Japanese Canadians in the Second, school lessons not only detailed the mistreatment of these ethnic minorities, but also asked students to consider whether certain wartime security considerations justified the widespread infringement of civil rights. In lessons on the First World War, students were prompted to assess the roles economics, ideology, nationalism, racism, and human blunders played in causing the conflict.

Detailed programming was established around Remembrance Day for which the museum received the 2001 Museums Alberta Award of Merit. The museum customarily received some three-quarters of its annual school visits between mid-October and the end of November. Lessons for those in Grades 1 to 3 dealt with "The Meaning of Remembrance," which included making a wreath; those in Grades 4 to 6 focused on the poem *In Flanders Fields*, both its themes and the emotions it sought to evoke; Grades 7 to 9 looked at how Canada's wartime contributions created strong and enduring ties with the Netherlands; and those in high school examined the topic of "coming to the aid of friends and allies in times of conflict," which led to discussion of Canada's more recent military roles, particularly in Afghanistan.

Many different types of items are used to engage youth, such as comic books produced in the Second World War, which help them better identify propaganda. To get students more personally involved in understanding the work Canada's military was doing as peacekeepers, they were shown and given the opportunity to make an Izzy Doll, named for Combat Engineer Master Corporal Mark "Izzy" Isfeld who, before he was killed in Croatia in 1994, became known for giving away "pocket sized simple knitted dolls his Mom had sent over that were made to look a little like a UN peacekeeper." Isfeld believed the children he encountered overseas had little to play with and that giving away these dolls built trust and positive relations with the civilian population.

The museum not only attracts thousands to its facility but also connects more broadly through outreach. Starting in the early 1990s, its EduBus, which was actually a donated semi-trailer, began transporting mobile displays. The number of schoolchildren it reached over its first five years climbed annually from thirty-four

thousand to fifty thousand. Given space limitations, particular themes were chosen: one tour in 2003 presented *A Soldier's Life* (1900 compared to 2003) in elementary schools, and for those in high school *Canadians as United Nations Peacekeepers* or *Mine Awareness*. The principal of Calgary's St. Patrick School said that students were "thrilled to experience something on-site that they normally wouldn't have access to."

The museum plays host to Boy Scout troops, Girl Guide companies, and Cadet Corps through specialized programming, exhibit tours, and night patrol games. It established camps for summer and other school breaks where children aged six to twelve learn about the exhibits and practise military drill, handle equipment such as a surgeon's kit, and try on and learn about different parts of a military uniform. Camouflage face painting, tasting hard tack that soldiers in the World Wars ate while in action, and practising military hand signals are common activities at birthday parties and sleepovers arranged at the museum.

University students have been hired as "Living History Players," writing and performing short plays relating to temporary museum exhibits, such as a performance created around a display on the 1885 North-West Rebellion depicting life in Calgary at the time.



Cub Scouts examining documents pertaining to Canadian war dead.



The annual Summer Skirmish is the largest outdoor event at The Military Museums, other than Remembrance Day.

Starting in the mid-1990s, the museum organized periodic contests for high school youth, requiring them to submit an essay or poster explaining the significance of a particular military event for Canada. Typically, a half-dozen winners were sent on an all-expenses paid tour of battlefield sites, at places that included Flanders, Vimy Ridge, Normandy, the Netherlands, and Italy. These were called “Heavy Metal Tours.”

Hosting both local and international scholars, the museum’s lecture series covered an increasingly eclectic array of topics spanning from the story of the Enigma code busters, to the relationship between music and war, to the use of social

media in modern military situations. People were invited to evening events where they learned board and card games popular during the World Wars. In 2017, the museum hosted a showcase of “geek culture icons,” from Star Wars, Star Trek, and Halo, connecting itself to battles fought in the sci-fi universe. The museum also hosts an annual Summer Skirmish on its grounds that involves live re-enactments of Viking raids, medieval duels, gladiatorial combat displays, musketry and cannonades. Militaria and antique shows came to the new facility, as did conventions—even for comic books—thus bringing the museum to the attention of otherwise unlikely visitors.

Members of the 78th Fraser Highlanders (an 18th-century re-enactment group) shooting muzzle-loading rifles outside the museum.



AFGHANISTAN

Canada's overseas commitments in Afghanistan lasted longer than the Second World War and Korean War combined, from 2001–14. Over 40,000 Canadians served, and 158 were killed. All three services (Army, Navy, and Air Force) were represented.

(RIGHT)

Memorial plaque honouring Corporal Nathan Hornberg, killed in Afghanistan.



PHOTO: JULIE VINCENT PHOTOGRAPHY

Canadian Forces' Unit Commendation Award presented to the Calgary Highlanders in 2015 for their outstanding contribution to the Canadian mission to Afghanistan from 2001 to 2011. The award is composed of a scroll and a medallion. A pennant is also awarded, which the unit can fly for one year from the date of award. Collection of the Calgary Highlanders Museum.

(BELOW)

Voting ballot for the first democratic election in Afghanistan following the toppling of the Taliban government. The election of 2004 was an important milestone in the development of the new Afghanistan but was a challenge in a population with high levels of illiteracy. The solution was a ballot that included a name, portrait, and symbol for each candidate. Collection of The King's Own Calgary Regiment (RCAC) Regimental Museum & Archives.



PHOTO: JULIE VINCENT PHOTOGRAPHY



This smock belonged to Corporal (Ret'd) Rob Furlong of the 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. During Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan in 2002, while using the McMillan Tac-50 sniper rifle, Furlong achieved the longest sniper kill in history, killing a Taliban insurgent at 2,430 m (2,657 yd). He held this record until 2009.

Today, The Military Museums houses a vast collection representing Canada's three service branches. It serves as Calgary's main gathering point on Remembrance Day; it contributes immensely to Alberta's education curriculum; and it creates a bridge to build understanding between veterans and museum visitors from all ages and walks of life.

The museum's story speaks to the power of community organization and mobilization. Government did not conceive its creation. The concept, strategy, and fundraising for this facility were led by people with deep roots in the military and the community. They and their legions of supporters shared an unshakeable determination to consolidate and showcase invaluable regimental collections housed in small, often dingy, places scattered across Calgary, where deterioration and permanent loss threatened to occur.

Today's museum attracts visitors from across Canada and internationally. It is a place where children and youth learn about the profound ways in which war shaped experiences, including long after the shooting stopped.

The Military Museums is a source of municipal and provincial pride, and is the largest such facility the Department of National Defence runs. Its prominent presence along Crowchild Trail, announced with planes, tanks, and armoured vehicles on its grounds, boldly asserts that the ways in which the military and the experiences of war impacted and shaped Calgary's past, as well as that of the broader region, will not be lost to future generations. True to its purpose, The Military Museums has fulfilled its mission to Remember, Preserve, and Educate.