

Students deliver 'fresh perspective' on PPCLI exhibit

One of the most intriguing artifacts on display at the CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum is a black-and-white image from Nov. 14, 1939.

The snapshot in time shows members of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry's (PPCLI) 'B' and 'D' Company on parade and marching from Work Point Barracks and past a familiar site, Victoria's famous Empress Hotel. The soldiers, marching in columns, passed by the hotel while going to the Steamship terminal and then to Winnipeg for deployment in the Second World War.

The photo is part of an exhibit celebrating the PPCLI's legacy and strong connections with the City of Victoria.

"Looking through a half-dozen photo books from the regiment and artifacts preserved by PPCLI members, some of them as old as 103 years, you really get a sense of what a regiment can mean to its members," said Jakob Svorkdal, a third-year History Honours University of Victoria (UVic) student.

Svorkdal has been working alongside Cas Stevens, a fourth-year student at the UVic's Writing program, on leading the exhibit's makeover, spending the lion's share of their summertime placements updating and redesigning the display.

Both historians are brimming with pride about their work.

"We have tried to make the exhibit more accessible for the layperson to appreciate," Stevens said. "Our focus is shifting towards people who may not have lived in Victoria while the PPCLI were here; it's still an important part of local history."

The duo concluded their three-month work-study placements at the end of August and returned to class in September.

The updated exhibit showcases a variety of items from both World Wars, the Korean War and peace-keeping missions, along with

historic photos of the unit during its time in Victoria and elsewhere. Improvements offer a more detailed and chronological history of PPCLI and the three occasions it was stationed at Work Point barracks in Esquimalt. Each item on display includes a written passage identifying the item and its historical significance.

Besides the black and white snapshot, other fascinating items include a large-framed coin measuring over 15cm in diameter a First World War Memorial Plaque, also known as the 'Dead Man's Penny'. According to Stevens, the Dead Man's Penny is a long-forgotten item by most Canadians which was issued to next-of-kin of commonwealth personnel who died during the First World War. The students also point to a ceremonial swagger stick gifted to PPCLI Major MacMillan by the City of Victoria in 1958. It was presented to MacMillan on parade with the 5th Field Regiment at the B.C. Legislature. The swagger stick was carried by a figure of authority as part of their uniform, especially while walking out on duty.

However, the most eye-catching item is a First World War recruiting poster replica. Printed at the behest of the founder Andrew Hamilton Gault, it provides a historical record of how PPCLI was the first privately raised unit in the British Empire. PPCLI was established with a massive \$100,000 donation by Gault, a former military officer of the 2nd Royal Canadian Dragoons. With eye-catching dark red and blue bold typeface, the poster proclaims, 'Recruits Wanted!' and says PPCLI 'will be equipped as soon as possible and placed at the disposal of Imperial Authorities'. The poster also mentions how 'preference will be given to ex-regulars of the Canadian or Imperial Forces who saw service in South Africa [The Second Boer War].'

Tatiana Robinson, CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum Curator says the student's Co-Op

placement and work on the exhibit has been very beneficial for day-to-day and future operations.

"It's always enjoyable to have a fresh perspective of student employees as they notice areas where we could improve our visitor's experience," she said.

COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

Over the years, the exhibit has been maintained and updated by former PPCLI and other veterans. One of those volunteers is Jack Bates, who operates a historical society and website focused on the Canadian Army's rich history on Vancouver Island and the lower mainland called the Organization for Preservation of Canadian Military Heritage (OPCMH).

Bates thinks PPCLI veterans who visit the museum will be delighted with the student's improvements to the exhibit, noting their input was always thoroughly professional and scholarly.

Bates served in the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals in the 1960s and has volunteered at the Base Museum for several years. He advised the students on their work while contributing some items of interest for the exhibit. One item offered up by Bates was a stained-glass window from the PPCLI's former Protestant Chapel that previously existed at Work Point. Another is a bronze plaque commemorating the departure of 3 PPCLI from Work Point in June 1994.

The student's work has focused on more than PPCLI, though. During their Co-Op placements, they also engaged visitors at the museum. They answered their questions, worked on databases and other museum displays and participated in an outreach event with the British Columbia Aviation Museum.

The PPCLI exhibit is open for museum visitors, but the finishing touches, including proper artifact description, will be completed in September.



University of Victoria Co-Op students (left) Cas Stevens and Jakob Svorkdal stand in front of the PPCLI exhibit. The two students spent the summer months improving the exhibit as part of a work-study program. Photos: Peter Mallett/Lookout Newspaper



Some of the items on display in the recently updated PPCLI exhibit at the CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum.



A First World War memorial plaque, also known as a 'Dead Man's Penny', is one of the fascinating items on display in the PPCLI exhibit at the CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum.



A First World War recruiting poster provides an historical record of the philanthropy of the unit's founder, Andrew Hamilton Gault.



PPCLI is one of three Regular Force Infantry Regiments of the Canadian Armed Forces. Formed in 1914 and Named for Princess Patricia of Connaught, the daughter of the then Governor General of Canada. It is the central Lodger Unit of CFB Edmonton, and its three battalions are independent operational entities under the 1 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group (1 CMBG).

PPCLI operated out of Work Point barracks on three separate occasions in the 20th century. 1920 to 1939 (B Company), 1957 to 1963 (First Battalion) and 1970 to 1994 (3rd Battalion). The updated museum exhibit presents visitors with an enhanced chronology of PPCLI, including a precise timeline of its activity in the provincial capital.