

12 (Vancouver) Field Ambulance  
Museum



Seaforth Armoury, 1650 Burrard Street  
Vancouver

## The 12 (Vancouver) Field Ambulance Museum

The 12 (Vancouver) Field Ambulance is located in the Major-General B.M. Hoffmeister Building at 1650 Burrard Street, Vancouver. Their Museum is in the Seaforth Armory on the same site. The Museum was started in the Jericho Detachment at 1050 West 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue Vancouver until the unit moved to their new building in September 2016.

Honorary Colonel Ernie Bowmer, DStJ, MC, CD, MB and Chief Warrant Officer George Shoebotham were instrumental in getting the museum started. Lieutenant-Colonel Adrian French, CD, MB was the curator of the museum before it left the Jericho site and facilitated the move to the Seaforth Armory where he set up the displays. He had most of the displays made up including using his own money to do so – an outstanding individual.

Needing a long term solution to the management of the museum, Honorary Colonel Robb Watt, LVO, OstJ and LCol French facilitated the move of the museum under the board of the Seaforth Highlanders Museum to allow the professional curator of the Seaforth Museum to take control of the management of the Field Ambulance Museum. Adrian's work can now be preserved for the long term.

The Museum is not filled with medals and uniforms and guns as many military museums (there are a few medals and uniforms) but rather with display boards of military medicine and of 12 (Vancouver) Field Ambulance. A few of those are shown here.



Honorary Colonel Ernie Bowmer, DStJ, MC, CD, MB, FRCPD    Brigid and LCol Adrian French



# 12 CDN LT FD AMB IN N.W. EUROPE 1944 - 1945

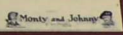


12th LT FD Amb landed in France 28 July. One of its 300 ambulances is seen here in France sometime in August. On the left is Lloyd Smith and on the right is Bill "Butcher" Butler.



B Section sets up its aid post in Belgium in Sept., 1944. Each section would set up about a mile behind the front line and the simple post structure allowed it to be quickly erected and dismantled; thus it could keep up with quickly advancing armoured regiments. Note the dispatch rider's motorcycle. A light field ambulance had four detached sections (A, B, C & D) that generally operated away from the ADS in close support of a particular combat unit.

RANK	NAME	CASUALTY	DATE	REMARKS
Capt	Maslin, Jacob	Deaf of wounds	14-Aug-44	
Cpl	Coleman, William	Wounded	20-Sep-44	
Cpl	Compton, Joseph A.	Wounded	15-Apr-45	
Cpl	Coleman, Donald W.	Wounded	9-Mar-45	
Pvt	Hughes, L. B. J.	Wounded	10-Apr-45	
Pvt	Holmes, John J.	Wounded	14-Apr-45	
Pvt	Holmes, Martin C.	Wounded	14-Apr-45	
Pvt	Francis, Thomas	Wounded	14-Apr-45	Remained in Capt.
Pvt	Gordon, Francis	Wounded	14-Apr-45	Previously injured missing.
Pvt	Henderson, Len	Wounded	14-Apr-45	Previously injured missing.
Cpl	Johnson, Frank J.	Previously Killed	14-Apr-45	
Cpl	McClure, Gerald J.	Wounded	14-Apr-45	
Cpl	Francis, Clifford	Wounded	14-Apr-45	
Cpl	Francis, James H.	Killed	10-Apr-45	Previously injured missing.
Pvt	Francis, A. Joseph	Previously Killed	14-Apr-45	
Pvt	Smith, Reginald	Wounded	14-Apr-45	
Pvt	Smith, Thomas	Wounded	14-Apr-45	
Cpl	Barnes, Philip G.	Wounded	14-Apr-45	



(Cartoon by Les Catlin in "The Maple Leaf Scrapbook")



Last soldier issued guard around one of the ambulances. FD AMB was B.A.C.A.C. (Canadian Red Cross) and it was they who were also given priority status.



FD AMB Cook Jim Barkness progresses a meal in a makeshift kitchen. While in England and in the Netherlands found the address for a local Chinese restaurant. The address was in London, England. The address was in London, England. The address was in London, England.



Allied post on the bank of the Rhine crosses tanks on the crossing which is called "Blauwe Brug".



Traveling along the railroad German border in April, 1945. B Section is seen crossing a typical canal bridge.



B Section poses for an unusual group picture in Germany, February 1945. They are grouped on a road around a captured German Jagdpanzer IV 1/70 (a tank destroyer). Note the Section cook in wearing the white coat.



12th LT FD AMB vehicles parked on a nearby road at a local town (name by name) in N.W. Europe.



A Band of Canadian Army and British Light Grenadiers as they enter a Dutch town at the end.



Company Sgt. Major Robert J. Cook (left) with a soldier representing the British Army, 1st April, 1945. The soldier from the 1st Canadian Army, 1st Canadian Army, 1st Canadian Army.



1st Lt. McNeill (left) and 1st Lt. McNeill (right) in the morning of 8 April are released to hospital. One of the other soldiers were released to hospital. One of the other soldiers were released to hospital. One of the other soldiers were released to hospital.



Photo from the "Maple Leaf Scrapbook".



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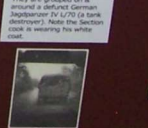


Photo from the "Maple Leaf Scrapbook".



Photo from the "Maple Leaf Scrapbook".

## A GALLERY OF 12th FIELD AMBULANCE CHARACTERS



**West Vancouver-based former Sun journalist dead**  
Siwan McNeill, 38, died in a plane crash in the Netherlands on 14 April 1945. He was a member of the 12th Field Ambulance. He was a member of the 12th Field Ambulance. He was a member of the 12th Field Ambulance.

**Siwan McNeill**  
Editor of "The Panther", unit newsletter



**Sgt Ernie Lillos**  
Transport - NCO



**Major William Bie, MO.**  
(in the dark uniform)



**CAPTAIN ARTHUR BASKIN**  
A 1st Lt. of the 12th Field Ambulance. He was a member of the 12th Field Ambulance. He was a member of the 12th Field Ambulance.

**Capt. Arthur Baskin**  
1st Lt. of the 12th Field Ambulance



The 12th Cdn Lt. FD Ambulance Band in "swing" action at Orlhem. The person on the right is Lt. Smith who later was a musician in Vancouver's "Professional" Club on Seymour Street.



**LT COL E.E. THOMAS**  
Lt Col E.E. Thomas CD of 12th Cdn Lt. FD Ambulance from 1942 to 1945. He was then promoted to Colonel and became a D.M.S.C. 3rd Canadian Division. In 1959 he became the first representative of the combined Canadian Forces Medical Services School.

**Lt Col E.E. Thomas**  
CD of 12th Cdn Lt. FD Ambulance





**There are a few medals on display**



HCol Ernie Bowmer's Summer uniform and ribbons      Some WWI and WWII medals  
Ernie won his Military Cross in Italy with the RAMC in WWII

and some instruments





# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ■ FOUNDED 1844 ■ GLOBEANDMAIL.COM ■ THURSDAY, MAY 5, 2005

**LAST LETTERS:** A series of stories about correspondence from soldiers killed in the final days of the war

## Burly medic remembered for the size of his heart

BY ANTHONY REINHART

Victory in Europe was already in sight by the time Easter Sunday rolled around in 1945. But in the Pacific, a new horror made its debut that day, aboard a British carrier called *Indefatigable*.

It was April 1, 1945, and Alan Vaughan was right where he belonged — in the sick bay, tending to the men he called "my boys" — when a Japanese plane, carrying a 250-kilogram bomb and a suicidal pilot, came out of the clouds.

In a letter home to Toronto 14 months earlier, when he was still in Europe and kamikaze had yet to enter the layman's lexicon, the young doctor had reassured his mother that "we are amply equipped to finish off any fools who might try to attack us from the air."

But once the smoke cleared from the carrier's deck, 14 men lay dead, including the big, burly 29-year-old medic known as Doc Vaughan to the crew, and Beefy to his friends.

"Apparently, there wasn't a mark on him," said his nephew and namesake, Alan Manchee of Toronto. "It was the concussion" of the blast that killed his uncle.

Similarly, *Indefatigable*, the first British ship to come under kamikaze attack, was relatively unscathed, with only a slight dip in its armoured flight deck.

Soon enough, the dent was smoothed over with concrete, but Doc Vaughan's death left a hole that took far longer to fill.

"I guess anyone who dies in combat has a certain amount of heroic quality," said Mr. Manchee, born nine years after his uncle's death, and raised amid his lingering legend. "But with him, he really

seemed a larger-than-life character."

Before he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve in 1941, Alan Vaughan had distinguished himself not only as a medical student at the University of Toronto, but also as a gregarious and impulsive young man, with an iconoclast streak.

"He was a bit of a maverick," Mr. Manchee said, recalling tales of Uncle Alan driving to Muskoka, where the family had an island cottage, and swimming to it if there was no boat waiting for him.

**Listen On-line:**  
Hear veterans discuss their Second World War memories as part of a special V-E Day interactive presentation, only on our website.  
[globeandmail.com](http://globeandmail.com)

The aspiring doctor raised his university tuition by creating and operating a summer camp for boys, on that same island.

Just before the war, while interning at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children, Dr. Vaughan proposed to a woman as they rode in a car along University Avenue. When she turned him down, "he took the ring back and threw it out the window," his nephew said.

Overseas, similar antics and a deft bedside manner made an impression on the sailors and armen around him. That much is clear from the vast collection of letters and raised amid his lingering legend.

"But with him, he really seemed a larger-than-life character."

tor's only sister, died last autumn.

Many were written by shipmates after the *Indefatigable's* captain put out a call for condolence letters from his 2,200-member crew, and was flooded with about 300 replies.

In one, an air gunner recounted a jungle-training trip ashore in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), for which Dr. Vaughan volunteered after an airman dropped out due to illness.

The letter-writer, surnamed Sage, was skeptical of an officer who would stoop to such grueling duty. "The Doc, as I studied him, appeared comical and definitely out of place there," he wrote, describing "a large, perspiring, but very cheerful character with a soft Canadian drawl."

But when the Doc volunteered to cook and clean at the campsite, and managed to match the airman's pace as well as their constant jibes, "this really gripped me," he writes.

"Doc's body may have been big, but his heart was surely bigger."

Another shipmate of lower rank wrote of going through a mental breakdown at sea, and that "after a few minutes with Doc Vaughan, I felt as though I were talking to my own brother."

These letters were forwarded to Dr. Vaughan's family in Toronto, who were deep in grief and exchanging their own poignant correspondence as the wider world celebrated victory in the war in Europe.

The eldest sibling, Bryan Vaughan, was in Toronto and unable to serve overseas, but sister Charmian (Mr. Manchee's mother) and brother Denny, the youngest, were in different parts of Europe.

Denny, a musician who went on to renown as a bandleader, heard the bad news first, then telegraphed



Alan Vaughan, a Toronto doctor and sailor, died in a kamikaze strike on the British carrier *Indefatigable* on April 1, 1945, in the Pacific.

home on April 14, 1945: "Dearest Mom and Dad. Don't know what to say or do. All my sympathies with you."

Charmian, in Italy working for the Red Cross, had heard only that her brother had died, and for several agonizing days, didn't know which one. On April 21, she sent this message home: "How is Mum. If necessary will try to get home immediately. All my love."

A week later, Bryan sent his sister the first of several dispatches that spring and summer, with updates on how their parents were coping.

"Sitting on that wide windowsill in the sun, Easter Sunday, you were thinking of us, as we were thinking of all of you, who are away from home," he wrote. "But much as each of us was in the other thoughts, little did we dream what good old Al was up against."

Bryan went on to reveal his own burden, hinting at survivor's guilt and unrealized potential: "I'm almost ashamed to say it's been an inspiration," he wrote of Alan's death. "Now I feel I have to do the job of two, and what's more, have the

### Calling Ontario vets

Between Sunday's 60th anniversary of V-E Day and Remembrance Day, 2005, the Dominion Institute will co-ordinate eight "Memory Project" road shows in cities across Ontario.

The road shows aim to bring together Ontario veterans of all conflicts with young people, archivists, historians and community members to digitize the oral histories and personal memorabilia of 500 Ontario veterans.

The first takes place Sunday in Toronto at the Canadian National Exhibition from noon to 6 p.m. This new legacy project is sponsored by the Ontario government. For more information, visit [www.thememoryproject.com](http://www.thememoryproject.com), or call 1-866-701-1867.

power to do it. And I've pledged myself to try."

As a young man, weaned on epic tales of his uncle's exploits, Alan Manchee felt a similar obligation, and even tried to steer himself toward medical school.

"It was not the right thing to do," said Mr. Manchee, now a senior communications adviser for Hydro One, "but he was such an important person in my mother's life."

Such efforts have since given way to subtler forms of remembrance, most notably in Muskoka, at the family retreat. There, decades ago, Bryan Vaughan climbed the tallest tree and hung one of Doc Vaughan's jackets in it, and the ashes of several deceased family members have since been placed around it.

"Even today up there," Mr. Manchee said, "the children still call it 'Uncle Alan's tree.'"

In conjunction with the Dominion Institute and its Memory Project, we asked readers to submit the last letters of Canadians who died in the final months of the Second World War. This week, we have presented three of the soldiers' stories.

**ONLY DOCTOR ON WESTBOUND ATLANTIC CONVOY IS FACED WITH MENDING HIS CASE**

Sergeant Lieutenant Clayton L. N. Robinson R.C.N.

One of three brothers to all graduate in medicine from Queen's University

After graduating in 1943, Clayton joined the Royal Canadian Navy and after a few months was assigned to the medical officer of a transport ship which received convalescing soldiers from the front lines of the Pacific. On this occasion he was called to the forward deck of the ship to assist in the care of a soldier who was wounded and who had a neck wound which could not be treated from the hospital by another vessel in order to avoid a further trip to the States. Clayton did not have any previous experience in treating wounds and he was called upon to do so and confirmed his appointment to the medical staff of the ship for the remainder of the voyage.

Clayton was pleased to hear the result of the speedy change of course and the arrival of the patient and one of the convalescing soldiers from the New York Hospital - the officer captain survived his ordeal.

When the transport came to an end, Clayton volunteered to be a flight surgeon with the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy in the position of being sent to the United States to the Fleet Air Base at Norfolk, Virginia. To undertake this assignment Clayton was granted a leave from his regular duties and he was permitted to bring some flight gear to the States with him.

Back in Canada in a civilian hospital was established on a liner as a temporary hospital, and Clayton was appointed a Senior Medical Officer of 24 (Overseas) Medical Company.

Left: Clayton, the British Naval Surgeon.

Right: Clayton and his brother Cyril were sent to the Fleet Air Base in 1945.

Years later Clayton was the medical officer in the Fleet Air Base at Norfolk, Virginia. He was called upon to give the patient the last rites on the ship.

"The surgery of the man was successful."



## And some Nursing Sisters

**ANNE (Clark) FRASER**

Joined the R. C. A. M. C. as a nursing sister in December 1942, sailed to join 12 Canadian General Hospital in England and then served in France and Belgium after the Normandy Invasion. These photos are copies from her 1944-1945 collection.

In 1997 she was selected to represent the Nursing Sister's Association of Canada on the pilgrimage to commemorate Canada's famous wartime Dieppe Raid. Her account of the memorable visit follows after the wartime photos.

Left: Anne (Clark) Fraser  
Right: Esther (Hatfield) of 12 Canadian General at Horley, Surrey, Engl before sailing for France summer of 1944.

Christmas in Br in 1944. These German prison their ward for season. Anne beautiful sing

## And Some Multiculturalism

**CHINESE CANADIAN SERVICEMEN VOLUNTEER FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS BEHIND JAPANESE LINES.**

**DENTAL NCO & A MEDICAL ORDERLY ARE PART OF 13-MAN UNIT WHICH TRAINS IN OKANAGAN AND AUSTRALIA.**

**THE DRAGON AND THE MAPLE LEAF**  
CHINESE CANADIANS IN WORLD WAR II  
MARKORIE WONG

**THE DRAGON AND THE MAPLE LEAF**  
CHINESE CANADIANS IN WORLD WAR II  
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**WORLD WAR II THE CHINESE CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE**

**CHINESE CANADIANS IN AID**

**After the war Eddie drove a taxi in Toronto and for a time worked in an electronics industry. He and Tom Luck returned to "Big" Al's home in "Frank" Margrove's home with an about Eddie's housekeeping. It was the practice in Toronto for women from only had to make every morning with carrying cleaning instruments. Frequently it was Margrove's wife who did the work. He and it was Catherine Stone who saw one time Canadian soldier of Toronto. One reason when the time pulled in from the work of war Eddie Stone.**

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## 12 Vancouver Field Ambulance <sup>1</sup>

In World War I, the medical unit from Vancouver was sent to the 5th Canadian Division and stationed with the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada. After WWI, Colonel Leeson setup as a reserve RCAMC unit and the title was the 12th Field Ambulance. The unit won the “Mary Otter” Trophy in 1938 for the best medical team in Canada. **Private George Shoebottom** was a member of that team.

The 4th Canadian Infantry Division was mobilized in 1941 with three field ambulances: 12th, 15th and 15th. Later that year it became the 4th Canadian Armoured Division. The 15th Field Ambulance remained as before. The 12th became the 12 Canadian Light Field Ambulance (light meaning it was equipped to be fast moving to keep up with 4 CAD), and the 16th became the 16th Canadian Field Dressing Station

On mobilization, **Lieutenant-Colonel Sid Baldwin** was appointed Officer Commanding Canadian Light Field Ambulance (CLFA) and Major Merv Caverhill became the second-in-command. On 06 June 1941, Major Caverhill went to the Vancouver General Hospital looking for medical officers. **Drs. Bill Bie, Rod Whitman and Tom McMurtry**<sup>2</sup> all joined the Field Ambulance that day. They all became life long friends as did their wives. Later, **Captain Darwin Oliver** joined the unit, but unfortunately he died soon after from a rapidly growing malignancy. **Captain Dave B. Collision** joined about that time as well. Dave was an Obstetrician / Gynaecologist who would later be promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel.

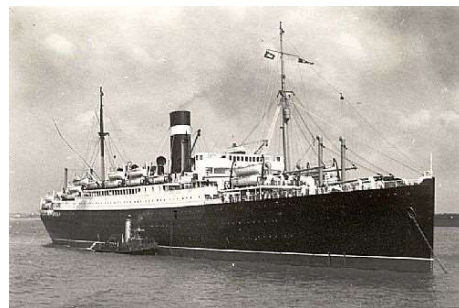
During the ensuing weeks, LCol Baldwin was supervising the medical exams of enlisting men at the Old Hotel Vancouver. He hand picked likely looking candidates for the 12th. The result was that we got a core of excellent enlisted men for our unit. The unit gradually came up to full strength and was housed in the Seaforth Barracks.

The Quartermaster was Captain Harold Davenport. The head of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps section was **Captain Lynch** (no not, Sergeant Gray!). Later RCASC officers were Quartermaster Lieutenant (later Captain) **Dick Whittington** and transport officer Lieutenant (later Captain) **Cliff Middlemiss**. The initial **Regimental Sergeant-Major was “Jock” Stewart** (no not Scott). Jock served us in action and was always a tower of strength.

In the fall of 1941, the unit moved to Camp Valcartier, Quebec and continue with basic training as before.

In late November 1941 the unit moved to Camp Debert, Nova Scotia, which had just been vacated by the 5th Canadian Armoured Division. During about nine months there, more training continued with lecturers and long route marches which relieved some of the boredom and helped improve physical fitness. There were two gas chamber exposures. One of these necessitated alcohol to control after effects. It was quite popular! The city of Truro, Nova Scotia, was 18 miles away and helped lessen boredom for those who could get there.

On 21 August 1942 (two days after Dieppe) the unit left camp proceeded to Halifax where the unit boarded the troop ship *Letitia* (a former cruise liner and then a Royal Navy Armed Merchant Cruiser; later in the war a Canadian Hospital Ship). *HMS Letitia* left the next day in convoy escorted by destroyers US Navy.



and  
*HMS*

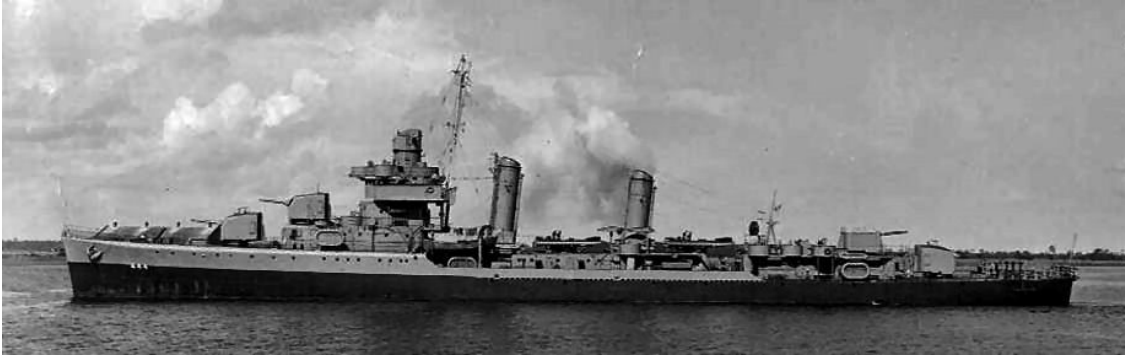
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<sup>1</sup> This description of the unit in WWII was written by Dr. Thomas S.G. McMurtry and is came from the 12 Field Ambulance Museum courtesy of LCol Adrian French, CD

<sup>2</sup> I learned of Dr. T.S.G. (“Tom”) McMurtry’s connection to the unit when I wrote this book. An interesting connection I have with him is that his son started medical school at the University of Alberta in Edmonton with my wife and I in 1965. He was named Tom as well. He didn’t graduate with us transferring to UBC for second year medicine. The younger Tom graduated from UBC in 1969 and went on to become a cardiologist in the Okanagan. He unfortunately died at a very young age.

## SINKING of the UNITED STATES NAVY DESTROYER *USS INGRAHAM* <sup>3</sup>



During the evening of 22 August 1942, *HMS Letitia* failed to react to an order to perform an emergency zig-zag. The USN Destroyer *USS Buck* was sent to correct *Letitia's* actions. This set in motion a chain of events that led to a collision between *USS Ingraham* and Oil Tanker *SS Chemung*, setting off depth charges on the *Ingraham*. As a result of this, the *Ingraham* sank with the loss of 218 hands (11 survived). There was a further collision between *SS Awatea* and *USS Buck*.<sup>4</sup> Some ex-miners of the Lake Superior Motor Battalion volunteered to go down and shore up the bulk heads of the *SS Awatea* and the ship limped home successfully.

The Convoy sailed southeast to latitudes where it was quite hot and the ocean had numerous jelly-fish. It was a smooth and unremarkable trip and eventually going Northeast we were elated to be met by Sunderland Flying Boats somewhere off the coast of Ireland. They escorted us up the Irish Channel and the Firth of Clyde to Clydebank where we debarked and were transported by rail to Bordon, Hampshire. We ultimately were stationed at “Malthouse Farm” near Bordon.

### 12 Canadian Light Field Ambulance in Britain 1942

Thus began life in England for the unit - further training, and trying to keep busy awaiting the war on the continent. Some four months later the unit moved to Hove, near Brighton. It was a popular move with the members because the social amenities were excellent. About this time **LCol Baldwin** left to command 2nd Canadian Casualty Clearing Station and **LCol E.E. “Tuffie” Tieman** became the Officer Commanding. They were both fine leaders. Tieman had been in the army as a Medical Officer prior to the war. He was stricter than Baldwin but always fair.

One day while stationed at Hove College, the unit about to start an operation when German planes came in low under the radar and surprised everybody. All the operating staff had to rush forward, grab the patient off the operating table and into a place of safety. Nobody was wounded in the incident but the incident sure startled the patient.

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<sup>3</sup> The American destroyer *USS Ingraham* sank after a violent collision with the Navy oil tanker *SS Chemung* in pea-soup fog off the coast of Nova Scotia. The *Ingraham* was part of task Force 37 escorting Convoy AT-20 to the United Kingdom. An internal explosion caused the ship to blaze from stem to stern. It was all over in a flash, the burning wreck vanishing beneath the waves taking the lives of 218 of her crew. There were only 11 survivors, one officer and ten men, all rescued by the *Chemung's* boat crews.

<sup>4</sup> The *USS Buck* was escorting a convoy during a dense fog off [Nova Scotia](#) on 22 August 1942. The *USS Buck* was struck starboard side aft by the New Zealand troop-transport [Awatea](#) while trying to escort another vessel to her correct position in the convoy. The impact broke *Buck's* keel and sliced about two-thirds through the fantail. Seven sailors were killed in the collision. As the starboard propeller was wrecked, and the port propeller damaged, the destroyer maintained steerageway only with difficulty as the crew tried to secure the fantail with lines and wires. When the port propeller fell off a few hours later, leaving the destroyer helpless, the fantail was cut loose since wave action was battering and chafing the hull. To make matters worse, as destroyer [Ingraham \(DD-444\)](#) closed to assist she was mortally damaged by a collision with oiler [Chemung \(AO-30\)](#). After rescuing the survivors from *Ingraham*, the oiler managed to take *Buck* under tow until relieved by [Cherokee \(AT-66\)](#). *Buck* reached [Boston](#) on 26 August, where she underwent repairs until November. Upon completion of yard work she returned to Atlantic convoy escort duty that winter, guarding convoys to European waters into June 1943, when she was ordered to the [Mediterranean](#) for patrol duty out of [Tunisian](#) and [Algerian](#) ports.



During the early fall of 1943, there was a huge exercise in Suffolk and Norfolk. When it was over, the unit was re-located to East Grinstead. At this **Major Caverhill**<sup>5</sup> (right) was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel and took command of the unit with **Major J.A.C. (“Lofty”) Thomson** becoming the in-command. He was a very popular and efficient officer. East Grinstead location of the famous burn treatment centre under the direction of **Mr. McIndoe** who revolutionized the treatment of burns. The stay in East Grinstead was another period of relative inactivity and waiting. In May 1944 moved under canvas and was introduced to V1 and V2 bombs but none were dropped near East Grinstead.



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was the  
the unit

The successful invasion of Normandy was a great relief for the men and the unit was to join the battle on D + 30. The unit marshalled on D29 in the Thames estuary and the next day proceeded uneventfully to France. The *T.S.S. Louis Pasteur*, a French Ocean Liner from Compagnie de Navigation Sud-Atlantique, took them over to the war zone. During the next few days, the members became aware of all that was going on around and got their first taste of trying to sleep in slit trenches under chandelier flares with the odd bomb dropping nearby. During these few days, members of the staff (including RCASC members) designed a new set-up for the ADS (Advanced Dressing Station). This consisted of placing 2 lorries back to back some 25 to 30 feet apart and attaching steel cables to each lorry. A large tarpaulin was placed over the cables and a large Red Cross over that. Thus, there were 4 bays at the sides of the lorries, one of which was the entrance for the casualties where documentation was done by clerks. Another was the exit bay and the other 2 were for storage of various supplies. In the centre were stretcher trestles where the care of the wounded took place. The whole interior was lit by our own electricity generator.

On 10 August 1944, 12 Canadian Light Field Ambulance, as part of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, went into service at Cintheaux, a few miles south of Caen, and the ADS set up proved to be very efficient. The first lone casualty was a burn case and **Nobbie Clark** was carefully applying a picture-perfect St. John’s Ambulance type of dressing. **Jock Stewart** shouted from the admission bay, “For heavens sake Nobbie, get a move on – there’s another load here.” Casualties came in steadily for the next few days and **Captain McMurtry** was immensely proud of the job everyone was doing: the stretcher bearers, the clerical staff filling out casualty and I.D. forms, the nursing orderlies treating the wounded, ambulance orderlies and drivers. The largely unnoticed service corps staff under **Captain C.C. Middlemiss** kept all the vehicles in good working condition. The cooks kept up their end also.

On 14 August 1944, the ADS shut down preparatory to taking part in the drive toward Falaise. That afternoon the RAF planned to use heavy bombers in close support for the first time. It was a timed run at a certain speed from the French Coast to dropping of the bombs. It was to last 2 hours. The initial run was on target but as the Germans lobbed smoke bombs onto the allies forward line, the RAF bombs kept falling shorter and shorter and eventually were dropping bombs near the unit; more particularly, on the 1st Polish Armoured Division to the left. Although the unit was closed, it quickly set up the Advanced Dressing Station and handled some 100 casualties. The unit still managed to keep the drive to Falaise on time but the Officer Commanding was criticised by the Assistant Director of Medical Services for opening the ADS. The injured Polish troops were glad they did!

As an aside, the United States Army Air Force B-29’s bombed the 2nd Canadian Corps Ammunition Dump on 8 August 1944 not far from the unit as well. At the mess that evening, the 12 CFLA officers were critical of the Americans. The **Dental Officer, Captain Jolley**, who had in the Italian Campaign, said: “Think nothing of it. In Italy we bombed; the Germans ducked. When they bombed; we ducked. When the Americans bombed, everyone ducked.”



served  
when

At Falaise, there were many casualties and, as evacuation were doubtfully secure, they had to be held until morning. There were 5 stretcher cases in each ambulance and many others, plus walking wounded in the ADS. They were Poles and Germans as well as Canadians.

routes

<sup>5</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Caverhill commanded the unit throughout the Northwest Europe campaign and again commanded the unit on his return to civilian life. He died at a very early age in 1948.

The next phase of the battle was chasing the retreating enemy. There were several short stops without having to handle casualties. Near Antwerp, the Division paused and the 12 CFLA was involved in evacuating casualties from the battle of the Scheldt Estuary. Many of these were foot injuries from “shoe mines”.



The next phase was the battle of the Leopold Canal. The unit set up in Maldegem, Belgium, a few miles from the canal. The ADS was setup in a school there. **Ken Clarke's** ‘A’ Section was evacuating casualties from Regimental Medical Officer to the unit. It was a long difficult battle. First an infantry battalion was unsuccessful; next the 10th Infantry Brigade tried and were unable to get a foot hold on the other side of the canal. Then the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division moved in and succeeded. The ADS continued to handle all the casualties. The unit was evacuating to a Field Dressing Station with a field surgical unit commanded by major “Bam” McLaughlin (later Professor and Head of Surgery at the University of Western Ontario). He made a special trip to Maldegem one day to congratulate the Officer Commanding on the high standard of work our nursing orderlies were doing, particularly their application of *Thomas Splits*.<sup>6</sup>

After Maldegem, the unit settled in for the winter near s’Hertogenbosch in Holland and were mainly inactive. No. 8 Canadian General Hospital was nearby. The only excitement was in December 1944 when Field Marshal Von Rundstedt attacked in the “Battle of the Bulge” pushing back the U.S. Forces with many casualties. There was fear that the Germans might launch a parachute attack from the general area of Utrecht landing behind the Canadian Army. The 4th Canadian Armoured Division moved at the end of December to be prepared for this and the 12 CLFA moved on 31 December 1944 to a small town in Belgium. The ADS was set up in a school but there were no casualties to treat. New Years Eve was celebrated with Belgian beer. Later the unit moved back to s’Hertogenbosch.

During this time, **Major Thomson** was posted to a Canadian Military Hospital and **Major Jack Wright** (of Canadian tennis fame) took his place. Somewhat later LCol Tieman was promoted to full Colonel on being appointed Assistant Director of Medical Services (ADMS) of the 3rd Division. **Lieutenant-Colonel Don McPherson** became the Officer Commanding 12 Canadian Light Field Ambulance (CLFA). He was a psychiatrist and was a very fine man. He seemingly didn’t know the meaning of the work ‘fear’ and nearly drove his jeep driver crazy as he reconnoitred near the forward lines.

In the spring of 1945, the allies began a wide offensive to push the enemy back to the Rhine. One day the 12th Field Ambulance received orders from the Director of Medical Services to proceed at a specified time next morning to an 8 figure map reference to be prepared to set up an Advanced Dressing Station. Thus began our part in the battle of the “Hochwald Forest”. The advance party found this reference to be on the forward slope of a hill and the only allied personnel there were artillery spotters. The Field Ambulance stopped short of that to await further decisions. While the unit waited at the side of the road, the 22nd Canadian Armoured Regiment passed though us and **Lieutenant-General Guy Simmons** came by in his armoured scout car. 12 Canadian Light Field Ambulance had been the ferocious troops at the front of the assault! The unit managed to get the ADS set up in the area where they remained for several days with a steady flow of casualties.

After the Germans were pushed back across the Rhine, the 4th Division moved back to Breda in Holland to rest and refit. **Dr. McMurtry** left the unit at this time and has only second hand knowledge of the battle of Sogel where the unit achieved fame. Over the final months of the war, various medical officers left and came. At the time of the rush to Falaise, the unit was saddened by the death of **Captain Jake Mandel** from shrapnel as he was driving his jeep. Jake was a particularly fine person in every way whom **Dr. McMurtry** had known from their University of Saskatchewan days.

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<sup>6</sup> Major Ken Clarke and his bride Elna on their wedding day in 1940. Ken was a medical graduate of the University of Alberta and later a Professor at the university. Photo on the right is Ken with the South Alberta Regiment. His citation for the Military Cross is under honours.



## The Battle for SOGEL, Germany

12 Canadian Light Field Ambulance was in support of the 4 CAD during the battle of the Hochwald Forest in April 1945 near the German town of Sogel. On 10 April 1945, they made Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps history becoming the only field ambulance to engage the enemy in combat.

On the night of Saturday 7 April 1945, The Lincoln & Welland Regiment departed Delden to catch up to the rest of the Division already advancing into Germany. The trek was very hard under heavy road traffic and a road surface which was breaking up. On April 8th the Regiment had caught up to the Regiment near Meppen, Germany. The next day the Lincoln and Welland Regiment was given its orders to participate in attacks on Sogel and Werlte, Germany in order to clear the road northeast to Oldenburg, 80 km away. It was the Lincoln and Welland Regiment's primary job to mop any pockets of resistance which were encountered on the way. By noon on the 9th, the Regiment moved into Sogel. There were light casualties as they cleared the south half of the town. On the evening of the 9th the orders, were made to attack Werlte at first light on the 10th. Early on Wednesday, the 10th of April, the Lincoln and Welland Regiment moved east in company with tanks of the Governor General's Foot Guards.

At approximately 0800 hours on 10 April 1945, the 12 Canadian Light Field Ambulance's Advanced Dressing Station was disturbed by the burst of machine-gun fire in the streets. It became obvious at once that the village was being counter-attacked with 30 or more German paratroops infiltrating their position. Immediately both officers and men of the unit took up arms and proceeded to defend the ADS. The Commanding Officer quickly organized two platoons, and placed them at the approaches to the dressing stations. They held off the enemy with weapons borrowed from the wounded - at the time medics didn't carry weapons. Some of the enemy came within 10 yards of the ADS and were killed. Under fire, some of the personnel made their way to other parts of the town to obtain Bren guns and hand grenades from the small handful of infantry that were left behind in the town. They then returned to the ADS to distribute the badly needed weapons. With all this activity going on, bullets whistling through the windows of the building, the unit carried on with their medical work, administering treatment to casualties, and clearing them through the ADS. Two of the stretcher bearers working under direct enemy fire, were wounded. The gallant defence of the unit continued from about two hours before the enemy was driven off following which a troop of Canadian tanks arrived and blasted the houses from which the enemy were sniping. Five unit members were wounded in the encounter, one of them seriously. Of the enemy, a number were killed and other wounded.

The Commanding Officer, **LCol Alexander Donald ('Don') MacPherson**, received the **Distinguished Service Order**<sup>7</sup> for his leadership in this action; **Corporal Forrest Francis Thompson** was awarded the **Military Medal**. He was a dispatch rider attached to 12 Field Ambulance and his citation reads that Private Thompson,<sup>8</sup> "Armed only with a Sten gun, moved from house to house, personally accounting for several Germans". Another story from 12 Canadian Light Field Ambulance is about unit personnel during the Northwest Europe campaign acquiring enemy pistols as souvenirs. One member of the unit was showing off his Luger to a buddy during a rest period when there was a bang and the owner had accidentally shot his chum in the leg. Luckily, the wound was not serious. The wounded man was patched up and shipped off to Britain for further treatment. The victim actually wrote to the CO asking him not to punish the shooter because as a result of his medical evacuation to Britain the victim had unexpectedly been able to be present at the birth of his first child!

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<sup>7</sup> **Citation for the DSO:** "In the early morning hours of 10 April 1945, then the Advanced Dressing Station (ADS) of 12 Cdn Light Field Ambulance was located in SOGEL, Germany, MR3471, in the centre of 4 Cdn Armoured Brigade fortress position, an enemy counter-attack reached the centre of the town. In violation of the rules of war, the enemy fired indiscriminately at all Medical Corps personnel and patients in and about the ADS which was plainly marked by Red Crosses. LCol MacPherson, realizing the seriousness of the situation, quickly organized his RCASC personnel into two sections and covered all approaches to the ADS. Then a squadron of tanks came to his assistance. LCol MacPherson personally directed their efforts and the enemy was repulsed in this section with 11 killed and 14 prisoners taken. During the entire action, the RCAMC personnel of the Advance Dressing Station continued to render efficient medical attention to all casualties in the vicinity. LCol MacPherson's actions during the attack were beyond mere praise and his swift and efficient organization of his unit, and utter disregard for his personal safety, under constant enemy small arms fire, not only saved the casualties in the ADS at the time, but helped to protect HQ 4 Canadian Armoured Brigade which was immediately in the rear."

<sup>8</sup>

The photo shows Private Thompson with a German prisoner (from 12 Field Ambulance Museum)

The map shows where Sogel is in Germany.

Another story told by **Nobbie Clark** was he and **George Shoebotian** going on a mission and obviously reading their map incorrectly. They were confronted by an armed German sentry who was aiming his weapon at them in a very professional manner. However, the German sentry did not shoot at them. Instead he simply said, “Turn around, go back the way you came .... Or I must shoot you”. George was immediately convinced by the wisdom of this enemy advice and lost no time in following the sentry’s instructions to the letter and taking their departure back to whence they came.

At the cessation of hostilities in WWII, the unit was stationed on an estate near Varel in Germany. From there they were repatriated to England and then to Canada.



**Citation for the Military Medal to Corporal Forrest Francis Thompson:** “At first light on 10 April 1945, the Germans put a strong counter-attack on the village of SOLGEL, Germany MR8751. The ADS of 12 Cdn Light Field Ambulance was situated in a building called the Hotel Jensen. It was shortly apparent that the enemy had infiltrated from the NORTH, SOUTH and EAST. The enemy paratroopers occupied buildings all around the ADS and proceeded to snipe the medical personnel as they worked on casualties. Defence parties were organized. Private Thompson, a dispatch Rider, immediately volunteered to assist in the clearing of the houses. Armed only with a Sten Gun, he moved from house to house, personally accounting for several Germans. On no less than three occasions, he went back for more ammunition for his party, crossing and recrossing the bullet swept street with complete disregard for his personal safety. When the clearing parties reached a house in which the enemy seemed to be firmly established with automatic weapons, Private Thompson placed himself in an exposed position and by accurate fire support enabled the remainder of the party to dispose of the enemy. When four tanks arrived to assist the medical personnel, Private Thompson returned to his unit to assist in the evacuation of casualties. The initiative and daring of this soldier, above and beyond his normal call of duty, is a splendid example of bravery and deserving of high praise and commendation.