

The Torch

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Charles Comfort, *The Hitler Line*, 1944, by Dr. Laura Brandon



One of the most recognized images of Canadian involvement in the Second World War that currently hanging in the Friends' lounge is Charles Comfort's *The Hitler Line* (1944)¹. He considered it his best work². An approximately one metre-square canvas, it depicts a group of Canadian soldiers in Italy, 1944, moving forward in a fiery-hued landscape of hills, smashed trees, destroyed artillery, and billowing black smoke. The scene is carefully composed. The picture's foreground third is marked by a destroyed so-called *panzerturm* (here minus its gun and basically a large black hole in a piece of rusted metal), and a horizontal splintered tree trunk, whose innards fan out like dark palm fronds against the painting's garish red-orange middle third³. Here six men progress diagonally in a line across the composition. Behind them, an almost black mountain peak dominates the picture's background. Two vertical elements also divide the painting in three. On the left, the base of the shattered tree links with smoke from a conflagration of some kind in the middle ground. To the right, a vertical *panzerturm* dissects the canvas. Further grey and white plumes of smoke emphasize the work's perpendicular construction. The figurative elements are curiously delineated. The six soldiers' almost expressionless – indeed faceless – steel-helmeted heads perch on long necks linked to gun-toting muscular bodies. They look like robots, not like men and are curiously unbelievable as human beings in an otherwise believable war-torn landscape.

Quite clearly, this painting was composed this way to have an impact on viewers. The breaking of the Hitler Line in May 1944 was a significant Canadian achievement that was worthy of recognition⁴. It is important to note, however, that *The Hitler Line* is not a carefully observed scene completed on the field of conflict. Rather it is a studio work. The violent circumstances of battle that comprise the image rule out any basis in a contemporary field sketch as well. But Comfort was there on the 23/24 May 1944. He listened to eyewitness reports during the battle, he heard the noise of conflict, and he visited the battlefield afterwards. He recorded what he learned, what he saw, and what he heard in his war diaries⁵.

Familiar with the battlefield (he had reconnoitered it the day before from a distance) he wrote from nearby on 23 May 1944: "Drama upon drama has been affected this afternoon. Faced with the insurmountable obstacles of 96 tks. [tanks] we continued to press across the AQUILLO – PONTECORVO Rd. Apparently we had not enough infantry to protect this mass of armour."⁶ During the early hours of the next day he noted that "Heavy ack ack [anti-aircraft] fire roused me at 0310 hrs. I looked out to see the night brilliant with German flares. ... The flak was intense. The sky seemed full of aircraft, the stars paled behind the amazing red fire play of thousands of tracer shells."⁷ Later that day he recorded that "The destruction of trees in full foliage leaves a more sinister impression than those wracked in winter. No tree, shrub, or bush along this road has escaped. They are striped [*sic*], shorn, and shattered." Add to this a later comment from his published war diary regarding an upright gun, and most of the necessary content for *The Hitler Line* had all been carefully observed. "One gun created a fantastic sight, sticking perpendicularly up into the air, like a gigantic pylon memorializing the disasters of war. A direct hit had detonated its magazine, the resulting blast tearing the whole turret from its casement and tossing it in the air. There it was, a vast, inert steel probe, blindly

(continued on page 3).

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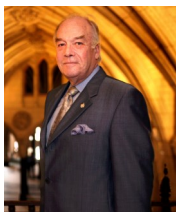
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President's Message Douglas Rowland



I was in St. John's in mid-March and was able to visit the historic Crow's Nest Officers Club again. It had been established by Captain Rollo Mainguy as a sea-going officers club during some of the darker days of World War Two. It is located on the top floor of an old waterfront warehouse. To reach the door to the club it was necessary to climb a flight of 59 stairs. They are still there, but perhaps in deference to the increasing age of many of the club's current members and supporters, there is now an alternate route with a landing part-way up.

The club has become a museum of sorts overflowing with historic military assets and memorabilia including a functioning periscope from a German U-Boat. It has been recognized as a registered Heritage Structure by the Heritage Foundation of the province. Its membership is composed of naval officers serving and retired, and their families, as well as representatives of the other two services and people from across Canada who enjoy and wish to preserve the memories of the wartime club. Don't miss it if you travel that way. To learn more go to www.crowsnestnl.ca.

On April 14, the Museum held a family day to introduce the public to the new look of the LeBreton Gallery with its heavy equipment. Special attractions included: a look behind the scenes at the machine shop; the opportunity to view and handle World War One kit and have it explained; and, participation in the building, with Lego, of a

near life-size tank. On hand to assist were larger than normal contingents of Museum staff and our volunteer interpreters.

Members have been invited to attend a special event in the LeBreton Gallery designed especially for them by the Friends. The evening is centred on a talk about the newly restored (with the Friends help) M1917 tank. The tank, derived by the Americans in World War I from a French design, played a significant role in Canada's military history. Tony Glen, director, collections management, and our own volunteer interpreter, Major (Ret'd) Don Allen will present the history and significance of the type, its service with the Canadian forces and the manner in which the Museum's example was acquired. Before and after, those attending can familiarize themselves with the Gallery's changes.

June 6th is the date of our annual general meeting to be held, for the first time, in the Barney Danson Theatre. The format is somewhat expanded with a special tour being organized for those who wish to participate, members with 25 years service in the Friends will be honoured, the year's outstanding volunteer will be named, and Museum officials will make us privy to some of their more exciting plans. During the day, former directors of the Friends will receive plaques acknowledging their contribution at a special ceremony. As usual refreshments will be served prior to the business meeting. We hope to see you there. Watch for your invitation, the schedule of events and the meeting agenda.

Erratum: "To Doug Bradford, to whom I referred as Doug Bradbury in the last issue, my apologies."

Charles Comfort, *The Hitler Line*, 1944 (continued)

challenging the heavens.”⁸ He also sketched it.⁹

Notably absent in his documentation are descriptions of fighting soldiers. As he remarked in a 1977 interview, “I didn’t go in with the troops, non-combatants were not permitted in action areas.” Nonetheless, the men that surrounded him during his years as a war artist, and history, all told him that it was the soldiers who counted. Unable to portray the event without including their presence as leading players, he added them in using knowledge gleaned from his day-to-day wartime experiences and a good dose of imagination. In so doing, he produced a popular work of art that continues to meet commonly held expectations as to the nature of battle. Ironically perhaps, this painting

is open to criticism as a historical document even if, as art, it is powerfully evocative.

1. Charles Comfort, *The Hitler Line*, 1944, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 121.7 cm, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art (BCWA), Canadian War Museum (CWM), 19710261-2203.
2. Joan Murray interview with Charles Comfort, September 1977, copy in CWM artist file, Charles Comfort, 14.
3. The *panzerturm* was a tank turret with a gun which, mounted on a concrete base, the Germans used in wartime defence.
4. See, for example, Daniel G. Dancocks, *The D-Day Dodgers: The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart,

1991).

5. Charles Comfort’s war diaries are in Library and Archives Canada (LAC), MG 30 D 81, vol. 36, files 6-12.
6. LAC, file 9, 23 May 1944.
7. Ibid, 24 May 1944.
8. Charles Comfort, *Artist at War*, 2nd ed. (Pender Island, B.C.: Log House Books, 1995): 134.
9. Charles Comfort, *Destroyed Panzerturm, Hitler Line*, 21 June 1944, watercolour on paper, 39.2 x 56.8 cm, BCWA, CWM, 19710261-2182.
10. Murray interview, 4.

Dr. Brandon is the Historian, Art and War, at the Canadian War Museum

Notice of 26th Annual General Meeting by Helen McKiernan

Notice is hereby given of the 26th Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Canadian War Museum which will be held in the Barney Danson Theatre of the Museum on Thursday, 6 June 2013 commencing at 1800 hrs with registration and a meet and greet with light refreshments. Watch for announcements of other events on the day of the AGM and the full business meeting agenda.

Business will consist inter alia of:

- Approval of the minutes of the 25th AGM
- The President's Report
- The Financial Report
- Appointment of Auditor
- Election of Directors
- Application for Continuance
- Outline of 2013/14 Donations to CWM
- Other business

Nominations to fill vacancies on the Board of Directors should be sent to the Secretary by mail at 1 Vimy Place, Ottawa, ON K1A 0M8 or by email at sec-fcwm-amcg@magma.ca.

As modified and approved by the Board of Directors of the Friends of the Canadian War Museum at the Board meeting April 10, 2013.

The RCN in World War II — Excellent Video

Check out the excellent You Tube video on footage of the Royal Canadian Navy in action during World War II at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOHQHF34ORQ>.

Volunteer Profiles—Marcel Lavigne



Born in Sherbrooke, Quebec, in 1942 Marcel completed his primary and secondary studies in the Province of Quebec.

Marcel began his working career with the Royal Bank of Canada in various locations in Ontario and Northern Quebec from 1961 through 1965. Concurrent with his employment with the bank,

Marcel served with various militia units.

In September 1965, Marcel moved from the bank to join the Canadian Army as an Officer Cadet under the Officer Candidate Program. Upon graduation Marcel served in various line and staff positions in Canada, Europe and the Middle East.

From September 1976 through May 1978, Marcel studied at the Royal Military College under the University Training Plan Officer program. He graduated in May 1978 with a BA in Political Science.

Marcel retired in April 1986, having completed 28 years of combined service with the militia and the Canadian Army/Canadian Forces and joined the Public Service of Canada with the Department of National Defence. He retired from the public service as a procurement officer (PG4) in March 2003.

Marcel joined the Friends in August 2005 as a volunteer interpreter. You can see him twice a week conversing with visitors in Gallery II.

Marcel is married to Thérèse; they have two grown children.

The FCWM Website by Mike Braham

The FCWM Web Site has been badly neglected in recent years but I am pleased to tell you that action is being taken to rectify the situation.

In the long term there will be a completely new, more modern site. Work on that project is underway. In the meantime, however, your Communications Committee is pursuing improvements to the existing site. Our priorities are to update and correct existing material and to translate it so that we can have a bilingual site. Slow but steady progress is being made on both of these priorities.

There are, in addition several exciting new initiatives.

The first is the introduction of a Face Book site that is now up and running. We invite you to visit the site and to give us your comments.

In the very near future we will be adding a page to the Web Site entitled "Member Treasures" a virtual museum of photographic archives possessed by our members and by others that they are willing to share.

We will also be adding a page entitled "Our Volunteers" that will include the biographies of many of our volunteers. This will allow you to get to know our volunteers and to appreciate their varied and interesting backgrounds and the wide range of volunteer activities that they perform.

I encourage you to log on at http://friends-amis.org/fcwmindex_e.html to see the progress being made and to offer any suggestions for further improvement.

Announcing New Friends

The announcement of new Friends will now be made quarter-

ly on the FCWM Web Site at <http://friends-amis.org/>

[apply_e.html](http://friends-amis.org/fcwmindex_e.html)

Forgotten No More

Canada's participation in the Korean War has rightly been termed 'The Forgotten War'. Coming shortly after the all-engrossing Second World War, probably less than 1% of the population had a direct connection with any of the 27,000 Canadians who served in a land whose name few Canadians had even heard of. The media gave it scant attention, the public even less. 2 PPCLI's notable defence at Kapyong did make the headlines, but fatalities, of which there were 512, were consigned to small interior columns, if reported at all. Yet, maintenance of a five to six thousand man brigade group of all arms; the continuing presence of three destroyers; and the contribution of an air transport squadron plus a score of fighter pilots made Canada the third largest United Nations contributor (South Korea was not then a member of the UN).



PPCLI Advances

Other notable defensive actions included 2 R22eR's stubborn defence of the very exposed shoulder of Hill 355 (Kowang-san, 'Little Gibraltar') which enabled

that hill to be recaptured; 1 RCR's later defence of that same hill, and 3 RCR's stand on Hill 187. Many other relatively small but intense offensive actions took place, such as the 2 RCR assault on Chai-li, and the dicey offensive operations across the Imjin River. For all three battalions, these usually involved strenuous uphill scrambles against determined enemy resistance.



HMCS Cayuga

The RCN's destroyers were active and had a great record of smashing North Korean trains along the coasts. Captain Brock in HMCS Cayuga performed a superb feat of navigation when he led a squadron of Australian, American and Canadian destroyers up a long, narrow, mined waterway at night to enable the evacuation of the North Korean port of Chinnampo.

Eventual inclusion of '1950-53' on the National War Memorial and issue of a Canadian service medal for Korea did not garner wide attention but, with the government declaring 2013 the Year of the Korean War Veteran, more Canadians will now at least know there was one, even if they know

little about it. Without United Nations intervention, the entire peninsula would today be North Korea.

Korean War veterans who act as Volunteer Interpreters in the Korea Gallery include Buzz Bennett, Reg Redknap and Ramsey Withers, all of whom contributed to this article. They are occasionally asked if it was all worthwhile and the best answer that they can give is to quote the Canadian Army's eminent Director of History, Colonel C.P. Stacey, who wrote "The Canadians who fell in Korea gave their lives in one of the best causes for which men have ever sacrificed themselves. If, as the old Roman said, it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country, it is certainly no less fitting to die for the future of mankind".



Korean Vets Doug Meredith and Reg Redknap meet visitors in Lebreton Gallery

Rifles to Royals - 150 Years of The Westies by Howard Mansfield



A Canadian Militia unit with an unbroken lineage back to 1863; which sent volunteers to every one of Canada's Wars; with a Victoria Cross winner in both World Wars; and with Field Marshal Montgomery as a former Colonel-in-Chief, marks its 150th anniversary this year.

On 20 November 1863, James Douglas, Governor of the Colony of British Columbia, granted authority for the establishment of the New Westminster Volunteer Rifle Company, with its first seventy-three volunteers, some of whom being former Royal Engineers who had stayed behind when their unit was returned to England. They were soon deployed in dealing with lawless prospectors and miners and difficulties with the local Indians, as they were then known.

In 1871 when B.C. joined the Dominion of Canada, the unit was renamed No. 1 Company of Rifles in Military District 11, and subsequent amalgamations and re-designations led in 1899 to the unit being designated A and B Companies, 6th Regiment of Rifles, Duke of Connaught's Own (DCOR). The companies were later detached from the DCOR and in December 1913 received the title the 104th Regiment, Westminster Fusiliers of Canada which, during World War I, trained men for the 47th and 131st battalions, Canadian Expedition-

ary Force. The 131st was broken up to supply other battalions in France but "The Fighting 47th" established a fine reputation at Amiens, Ypres, Vimy Ridge, Hill 70, Valenciennes, Canal du Nord, Passchendale and other major battles. In August 1917 while holding vital ground around Hill 70, Corporal Filip Konoval earned the Victoria Cross for most conspicuous bravery and leadership when in charge of a section in attack against enemy machine-gun placements.

In 1943, after two years in England, the 1st Battalion, The Westminster Regiment (Motor) landed in Italy and took part in the battles of the Gothic Line, Naviglio, Ijsselmeer, the Delfzijl Pocket and many other engagements in the course of which members of The Regiment were awarded 1 VC, 3 DSOs, 6 MCs, 18 MMs, 1 OBE and 1 MBE. On 24 May 1944, Major Jack Mahony, commanding A Company, crossed the Melfa River under heavy artillery fire to secure a bridgehead as part of the operations by 1st Canadian Corps to break through the Hitler Line. Against vastly superior forces, the bridgehead was held for five hours under continuous fire until reinforcements arrived. Major Mahony suffered three wounds and was awarded the Victoria Cross for his great valour in forcing and defending the bridgehead.

The British sister regiment of Westminsters was the Royal

Warwickshire Regiment, of which Field Marshal Montgomery was the Colonel-in-Chief, having joined that regiment as a subaltern in 1908. This meant that the Field Marshal was also Colonel-in-Chief of the Westminsters. In 1960 he attended the Regiment's annual Melfa Dinner and has donated one of his own much-beribboned battledress tunics to the Regimental Museum. As it happens, the Field Marshal's elder brother, Donald Stanley Montgomery, had been an officer of the 47th throughout the Great War.

The Regiment has provided personnel for many United Nations missions including Cyprus (UNFICYP), Egypt (UNEF II) 1973-79, Golan Heights (UNDOF) 1974-present[65] and the former Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR) 1992-1993, and to the Canadian contingent of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

In 1966 the Westminster Regiment was granted the title "Royal" by Her Majesty the Queen in recognition of its service in two world wars.

Howard Mansfield served in the Westminster Regiment in the early 1960's.

Fact Sheets on Cpl. Konowal and Maj. Mahony may be found on the FCWM Web Site at http://friends-amis.org/factsheet_e.html

The Military Museums of Calgary by K.C. Richards



Driving down Crowchild Trail in Calgary you can't miss the fighter jet pointed towards the sky, or the armoured vehicles on the front lawn of The Military Museums. The cenotaph, tanks, and statues tend to evoke thoughts of Remembrance Day and rightly so. But there is a lot to see and do at TMM all spring and summer, and there's plenty of free day parking.

"We have so many events happening this summer, and the staff have been busy planning fun and educational activities for the whole family," says Martin Delaney, Executive Director of The Military Museums Foundation.

The summer youth program re-launches once again on Canada Day. Summer Siege 2 features War of 1812 themed indoor and outdoor activities and games that educate and entertain.

TMM holds their 5th annual open house on the first weekend of June. This event is always a big hit with families with free admission, ample free parking, historical re-enactments, and a lot of fun activities and displays.

When the current exhibit *Walls Between People* wraps up in April, The Founders Gallery will become home to an exhibit called *Defending a Nation: Canada and the Korean War*. Opening 25 June, this exhibit is part of the overall effort to achieve increased recognition for veterans of the Korean War.

"This exhibit will help educate Canadians about why we were in Korea and the sacrifices that were made there for the freedom

of a distant nation," says Curator Rory Cory. It will feature audio and video interviews with Korean War veterans giving firsthand accounts of their experiences in Korea. 2013 is the year of the Korean War veteran according to Veterans' Affairs Canada.

Last fall the Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) gallery completed a makeover with new displays depicting scenes from the Second World War, the Cold War, and Afghanistan. Starting in April, the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry is preparing for the upcoming 100th anniversary of the regiment's founding with a renovation to their gallery. The renovations are expected to take a few months so be sure to see it before April, or after to see the changes.

K.C. Richards is the Communications and Marketing Director with the Military Museums Foundation.

Renewal of LeBreton Gallery by Mike Braham

On 14 April the Canadian War Museum held a Family Day in the LeBreton Gallery to showcase the excellent refinements with the layout and signage of the artefacts in the Gallery

The event featured activities for children on how to build a tank with blocks; how a submarine works; and, how to send a message by flashlight.

Volunteer Interpreters were on hand to enhance the experience for the many visitors and the Friends set up a recruiting table to entice new members.

Judging from the turn-out and the enthusiastic response to the event, it was a great success.



Donations: The FCWM thank all of the following who generously donated to the Friends between 1 Jan. - 31 Mar. 2013

The Jackman Foundation, MGen. John L. Adams, Ms. Ann D.M. Adams, BGen. Ray Audet, Mr. Derek H. Aylen, Mr. Christopher Barltrop, Col. (Ret'd) Ian D. Barnes, Cdr. Pat D.C. Barnhouse, Col. Francis W. Bayne, BGen. (Ret'd) Robert P. Beaudry, Col. Gil R.J. Bellavance, Col. Berard Bennett, Mr. Martin Boomsma, Mr. John W. Braithwaite, Ms. Theresa Bridel, Capt. Thomas H. Brooks, Cmdre. William J. Broughton, Lt. (N) Pamela N. Brunt, Mr. Hendrik Burgers, Mr. Eugene Burles, Capt. Alan F. Cameron, Mr. Sean Campbell, Gen. William K. Carr, Mr. Ross W. Christensen, Mr. Fred A. Christie, Col. John H.C. Clarry, Mr. John E. Cleghorn, Mr. Garry A. Comber, Maj. (Ret'd) Peter E. Cooke, Ms. Donna Coutu, Mr. Rene Danis, Mr. & Mrs. Fred de Jong, Mr. Thomas de Wolfe, Mr. Patrick M. Dennis, Mr. Ted Dobbie, Dr. Robert Drummond, Mr. Selwyn Dumaresq, Mr. R. Hunter Dunn, Mr. John P. Evans, LCol. Robert G. Farrell, Mr. Alan Fowler, Mr. Colin A. Franklin, Mr. John Friedlander, LCdr. M.F. Furlong, Mr. Joseph Gambin, Maj. E.H. Pierre Garneau, MGen. (Ret'd) & Mrs Robert

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In - Memoriam and Special Donations (1 Jan. – 31 Mar. 2013)

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