



# COURAGE AND COMMITMENT

PICTOU COUNTY IN THE WORLD WARS

JULY 26 - SEPT 28, 2014  
STELLARTON, NS

EXHIBIT SOUVENIR



# Introduction

This guide is a companion to *Courage and Commitment: Pictou County in the World Wars* (July 25 – Sept. 28, 2014). To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the start of World War I and the 75th anniversary of the beginning of World War II, our summer exhibit brings together objects from a number of museum collections as well as the memorabilia of several generous Pictonians to showcase the County's role in these events. It represents the major themes of military involvement, the Home Front, and the considerable role of local industry. Many of these items have never been seen by the public before. They offer a sampling rather than a full treatment of the topics. There are many more items in many more homes and museums that also contribute to our understanding of these world events, the impact on Pictou County, and its proud achievements and sacrifices.



# Pictou County in the Great War

When Britain entered World War I on 4 August, 1914, Canada (as part of the British Empire) also was at war. Excited by patriotism and the prospect of adventure, Canadians, including Pictonians, rushed to enlist. We contributed to all corps of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, including Calvary and Mounted Rifles, Artillery, Engineers, Army Service Corps, Army Medical Corps, the Forestry Corps, Dental Corps, the Navy and the new Royal Flying Corps. In war's harsh reality, our people endured horrendous conditions and many died valiantly. Others came home maimed in body and/or spirit.



Meanwhile at

home, Pictonians

wholeheartedly embraced the war effort in our mines and factories, on farms and in the communities that rallied to fundraise for overseas relief and our troops. When “the Great War” ended on November 11, 1918, nine million service persons and more than 20 million civilians had been killed. On the Pictou cenotaph are the names of 406 victims from Pictou County.

# Answering the Call to Arms

First to join up were the 78th Highlanders Pictou Militia. Some were sent to guard the Canso telegraph system; others trained at Valcartier, Quebec, where they were folded into the 17th Battalion, part of the First Contingent of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. The original 25th Battalion Nova Scotia Rifles drew recruits from every town and hamlet throughout Pictou County.

By the end of 1914, a 640-km continuous system of trenches extended through France and Belgium. These were the front lines, where soldiers took cover. Between them lay “no man’s land,” dangerous open space strewn with barbed wire, mines, and bodies.

The 25th were expert trench raiders – groups of soldiers who staged night attacks. Stealthily they negotiated no man’s land to attack the enemy in their trenches, using hand weapons such as knives, bayonets, grenades, and clubs. These “shock troops” fought in every major battle and marched in the London Victory Parade.



A party of french raiders. A Night Raid, by Harold Mowat. Courtesy of Canadian War Museum 19710261-0431



Postcard of the Officers of the Highland Brigade. On loan from the Army Museum Halifax Citadel

## **“The Breed of Manly Men”**

**(Motto of the Highland Brigade)**

The 85th Battalion was a Nova Scotia overseas infantry unit, the first of four that made up the Highland Brigade. The rest were the 185th, 193rd, and the 219th, plus a reinforcement battalion. Pictonians primarily enlisted in the 85th and the 193rd. Only the 85th served as a unit at the Front; the others were broken up to supply other fighting units.

British Military leaders called the 85th “the finest body of troops sent over from Canada.” In the pride-of-Canada victory at Vimy Ridge, the battalion demonstrated its courage in taking Hill 145, the German stronghold. As part of the Fourth Division, the 85th fought on in subsequent European battles. At Paschendaele their bravery and tenacity earned them the moniker “the Never Fails.”

The Highland Brigade wore the Regimental Highland Dress. The general service tunic was adapted for the kilt, although the 85th wore trousers at the Front.



# Grit and Honour

Blacks were determined to fight for Canada, but were mostly unwelcome alongside whites. No legislation prohibited their enlisting (a few Blacks joined the 106th Battalion Nova Scotia Rifles and Canadian regiments elsewhere), but racism prevailed. First headquartered in Pictou, the No. 2 Construction Battalion was mostly Nova Scotian (including 75 Pictonians) but also had members from elsewhere in Canada and the U.S.

No. 2 Battalion arrived in France in May 1917 attached to the Forestry Corps. They produced timber for trenches and supported the front lines building roads and bridges, diffusing land mines, and caring for the wounded. They toiled courageously in harsh and treacherous conditions, often under enemy fire. Some were killed; many were wounded. Chaplain of No. 2, Hon. Captain W. A. White, was the only Black officer in the British forces during World War I.



A monument on Pictou's Market Wharf honours the No. 2 Construction Battalion, Canada's only African-Canadian battalion.

# Angels of Mercy

Called “Angels of Mercy” by soldiers whose lives they saved, whose wounds they treated, whose spirits they soothed, Canada’s World War I Nursing Sisters bravely served in hospital venues in Europe and at sea. They saw horrific injuries and deaths, and at front-line Casualty Clearing Stations persevered in unsanitary and dangerous conditions. Forty-nine died in the war.

Several Pictou County nurses volunteered. Of them, Major Margaret Macdonald of Bailey’s Brook ranked highest as Matron-in-Chief. She directed the activities of 3,000 nurses in casualty-clearing stations, base hospitals, and hospital ships and trains. Harriet Graham of New Glasgow was decorated by the Red Cross for her field service and as Matron at London’s IODE Hospital. Some others who nursed in WW 1 were Myrtle Grattan, Catherine Clarke, Marguerite Grey, Annie Margaret Fraser, Evangeline MacDonald, Kathryn Ross, Wilhelmina Thompson, Ethel MacKenzie, Elizabeth MacLean, and Matron Margaret Fraser, killed in the torpedoing of Canada’s Hospital Ship, Llandoverly Castle.



WW 1 nurse Matron Margaret “Pearl” Fraser was killed on the hospital ship, Llandoverly Castle, and June 27, 1918. Scan courtesy of Nova Scotia Archives 201404210



# Arms and the Infantry

During World War I, Canada's first three infantry divisions were armed with the bayoneted Ross rifle. Invented by Scottish baronet Sir Charles Ross and manufactured in Quebec, the Ross was chosen as Canada's military rifle over objections from the British War Office. A London journalist called it the "finest all-round small arms weapon that has ever evolved". Pictonians were especially pleased because the rifle sights were invented here and manufactured in New Glasgow.

The Ross proved dangerous. Due to urgent demand, new rifles were not adequately field tested. In soldiers' hands, many jammed, blew back, or misfired, and did not do well in muddy trenches. In 1916 the Ross was replaced by the Lee-Enfield, but was retained for sniping. Stephen Toney of the Pictou Landing First Nations, a member of the 85th, was an accomplished sniper who was formally given his rifle at war's end.



# Keeping Up Spirits

Music and entertainment was an important part of the war effort, refreshing and boosting the morale of the battle-weary. The Stellarton band became the Regimental Silver Band of Pictou's 78th Militia, and then evolved into the 85th Battalion Band, led by bandmaster Dan Mooney. The band played around Nova Scotia, recruiting for the Highland Brigade. Overseas, the Director of the British Army Musical Services praised them as the best Canadian band. Forbidden to accompany the 85th to war, they smuggled their instruments on board ship to France. The Brass relented, and the band became famous, entertaining troops around the Front with parades, concerts, and plays.



Another morale booster was Sergeant Ingram “Gitz” Rice of New Glasgow. The gunnery officer played piano and sang, and composed musicals for the troops’ concert parties. He reportedly wrote the popular song, *Mademoiselle from Armentières*. Also from New Glasgow, Ross Hamilton was with *The Dumbells*, who entertained with irreverent skits spoofing military life.



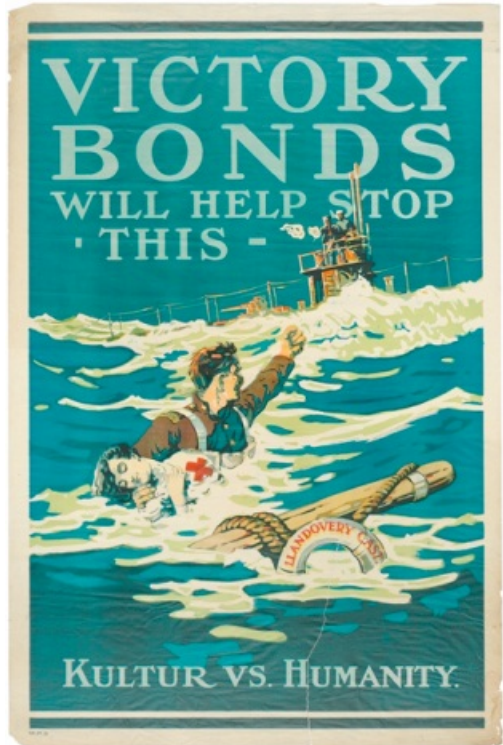
## On The Homefront

Nova Scotia Steel and Coal's Colonel Thomas Cantley, a First Member of Canada's Shell Committee, engaged his company's enterprises in war production: the mines worked 24 hours a day to fuel the war effort (miners were exempt from military service), Eastern Car rolled out 2,000 rail cars, the steel works produced 180,000 tons of steel and forged 14 million shells. With merchant ships sinking from U-boat attacks, NS Steel launched three steel steamers to carry vital supplies overseas. The first, SS War Wasp, was torpedoed on three occasions before sinking.

The county's smaller steel fabrication shops built both shrapnel and howitzer high-explosive shells. Among woodworkers, J.J. Grant alone made 168,282 shell boxes. Because enlistment created a shortage of men, women took on many factory jobs, a novel and ground-breaking experience for them. After the war they returned home, and men resumed their old jobs in industry. Our farmers also were warriors on the home front, producing food for our troops and for hungry Britain.

# Valour

The exploits of our intrepid fighting units and the patriotic grit of our soldiers made our county proud. Individual heroic acts abounded, whether it was going over the top against gunfire to take out an enemy machine gun nest (like VC James Robertson), or dashing into the firefight to rescue wounded comrades. Not to be forgotten, prisoners of war suffered harsh treatment and diseases in squalid prison camps. Our grateful British Empire honored the bravery and sacrifices with citations and medals, many posthumously.



At home, families anxiously awaited letters and postcards from their beloved kin. Newspapers consistently carried injury and war-death notices. Mourning families were thanked for their patriotic sacrifices with formal letters, memorial plaques and the Silver Cross. Imagine their grief when the bundle of personal effects arrived home, while their loved one now lay in a foreign cemetery they would never be able to visit.

# Tending the Home Fires

The war permeated community life. Belgian Relief led to urgent appeals to farmers for potatoes and to the public for money and clothing. Public subscriptions raised money to buy a field kitchen for the 25th and two machine guns. The Red Cross organized women's groups to sew and knit for our troops. At home, families compiled care packages for their own. Youth groups collected money, children pitched in on farms, and a province-wide "Call to Arms" asked schoolchildren to talk family into enlisting.



In New Glasgow, Berlin Street became Liberty Avenue, and Cavell Street honored the English nurse shot by a German firing squad.

Workers flocked to thriving industries, overflowing housing and farmers produced food for overseas. To pay war costs, the government sold Victory Bonds, using posters with emotional appeals to patriotism. Less popular were new "temporary" income taxes.



# Pictou County in World War II

On September 10, 1939, Canada joined Britain at war against Germany. Pictonians enlisted in all branches of the military, flew in the battles of Britain and the Atlantic, sailed with the plucky merchant marine, soldiered in western Europe. Canada was not active in the Pacific theatre but a few Pictonians with the Royal Rifles defending Hong Kong were killed by the Japanese or starved in brutal prisons.

At home, Pictonians rallied with fund-raising and comfort packages, doing without so precious food and arms got to our troops. The economy again boomed with war-related industries. This time hostilities touched our shores, with U-boats surfacing and sinking ships including the passenger ferry, the SS Caribou in which 137 died. As part of home-preparedness, air raid wardens taught Boy Scouts the sounds of different aircraft to recognize a night air attack.

241 Pictonians died in active service.





## **“No Retreating Footsteps”**

**Motto of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders**

“The Canadians are fighting like wildcats”, CBC London reported on D-Day. Those wildcats included the North Nova Scotia Highlanders (of the 9th Brigade, 3rd Canadian Infantry), “descendants” of the World War I Nova Scotia Highlander units. Their first active service was on D-Day, June 6, 1944. After Juno Beach was taken, the North Novas (one-quarter of them Pictonians) led the advance into Normandy. In the German counteroffensive, 84 North Novas perished and 128 were taken prisoner. Twelve were among the 20 Canadians executed in the Abbaye d’Ardenne. Of 156 Canadian POWs believed murdered under Nazi Commander Kurt Meyer, 35 were North Novas. After Normandy, the reinforced and non-retreating North Novas went on to fight in NW Europe and onward to defeat Germany.

Visit the computer in this exhibit for more stories about the North Novas.



# Remembering the 1st Canadian Paratroopers

Paratroopers in the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, assigned to the 6th British Airborne Division, wore with pride the maroon beret and pegasus badge unique to the Paratroopers. Their first action was June 6, 1944, before the D-Day ground invasion. Dropped into Normandy behind enemy lines, they seized roads, destroyed bridges, German communications and headquarters, and protected fellow paratroopers, thus facilitating the Allies' advance. In January 1945 they joined Allied troops in winning the Battle of the Bulge. As participants in the joint US-Britain Operation Varsity, the war's largest airborne operation, the Canadians crossed the Rhine and advanced through Germany. The 6th British Airborne captured the city of Wismar on May 2, five days before Germany surrendered. At least four Pictonians served with the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion. In 2014, France awarded its Légion d'Honneur to former paratrooper Roy Rushton of Westville for his bravery in World War II and the Korean war.



Memorabilia from the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion.  
On loan from a private collection.

# Of Sea and Air

In addition to land forces, Pictonians distinguished themselves at sea and in the air. Some rank among the highest-achieving Canadians.

Rear Admiral

Leonard Murray of Pictou Landing was the only Canadian to command an Allied theatre of war. Under his command in the Battle of the Atlantic, our navy safely



escorted convoys of more than 25,000 merchant ships, bringing 165 million tons of vital cargo to Britain.

Over occupied Europe, bomber crews battled enemies in the sky and bolstered ground troops. Incomplete records indicate that 1000-1500 Pictonians saw action in the air. Some gave their lives; at least two were captured and tortured by the Gestapo. Everett Baudoux excelled in numerous bombing missions, winning among other medals, the Distinguished Flying Cross. Ace George Hill's formal count is 13+ wins while fighting off attackers over France, North Africa, Malta, and Italy, until he was captured and imprisoned by the Gestapo.

# Messages in Memorabilia

Keepsakes and souvenirs are poignant reminders of wartime and what Pictonians thought was important to preserve and pass on to family members so their stories would not be forgotten. Scrapbooks and photographs, ephemera of rank and duties, censored mail, all connect us to that time. Letters home described camp life, friends made, and social activities, like John Sinclair's



description of an English Christmas. To distract himself from the “hell” he saw as a sailor, George Baird kept a scrapbook of his life on the sea to share with the folks back home. Gladys MacDonald was a teen-ager when she first put on her WACS uniform. Her autographed photo testifies to women doing their part for Canada.

Hyman Goodman's military certificate shows us that the

Pictou Highlanders Reserve was active. Goodman taught military techniques to Maritimes' militias and led Victory Loan campaigns.

# Tributes and Memorials

During the war Pictonians lived in dread of the knock at the door, of greeting someone on the porch bearing a telegram with bad news of the wounded, the missing in action, or of supreme sacrifice. Family heirlooms capture that time and remember the uncle or cousin or grandfather forever changed or never known by later generations. Only a sampling is possible here. Visitors are encouraged to recall their family keepsakes of the wars and especially the relatives who did not get to grow old here in Pictou County.

Community members also play an important role in memorializing citizens of the past. Whether it is to raise funds to revitalize a town war monument or the more personal gesture of collecting and creating displays of medals that pay tribute to ordinary people who did extraordinary things, these are important gestures to help us to never forget.



Sergeant Instructor Rose Jette Goodman killed in the crash of a training plane, 1943. On loan from a private collection

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