

Canadian Military Mail Study Group

NEWSLETTER

No. 109

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Editorial Ramblings

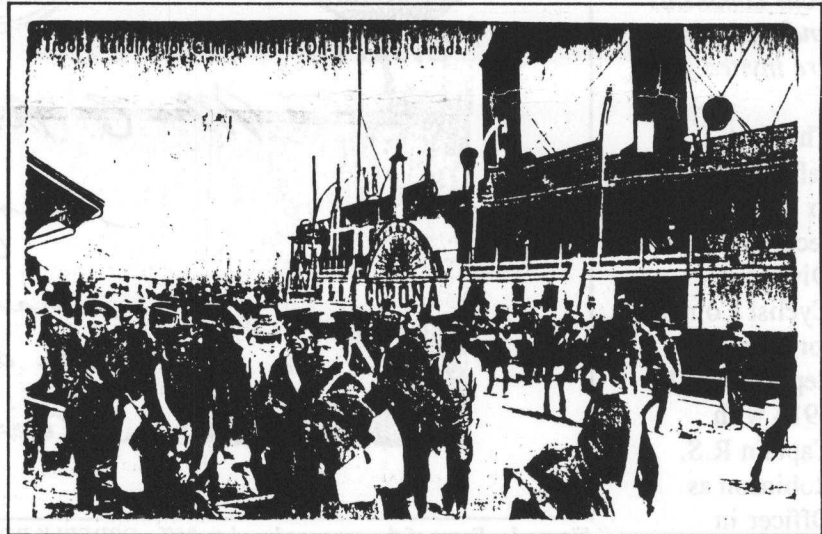
I hope that 1993 will be a good one for all of you and that you may finally locate that elusive cover or cancel you've been searching for such a long time for. This is our first issue of the year and I hope that you'll like it.

Our main feature is a story about a Fenian Raid cover (timely, since St. Patrick's Day is just around the corner). It was contributed by Hank Narbonne.

I hope that you are enjoying the time spent with your collections, despite the awful weather and the mountains of snow (at least, that is the case here in Ottawa).

If all goes well, the second issue should be out just after Easter. Happy reading!

Henk Burgers



Coming in Future Issues:

Articles on RV'92, British FPOs used by Canadians in Britain, artist signed cards and, of course, lots of other interesting news items submitted by our members.

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The Canadian Reserve Cyclist Company

By Colin Campbell

This is the first article on military cyclists in the Newsletter (at least as far as I am aware). Your comments and additions are invited. Ed.

The first reference I have to The Cyclists records the 1st Divisional Cyclist Company forming on September 22, 1914 with Captain R.S. Robinson as Officer in Charge. The Second and Third Companies

followed in 1915 and 1916 respectively and then were absorbed into the Corps Cyclist Battalion. The Fourth Divisional Company lasted less than two months and was disbanded in May 1916. The Reserve Cyclist Company was established April, 1915 and remained active until demobilization following the war. Chyngton Camp in Sussex, England was home to The Cyclists. (See illustration above).

A company of Cyclists consisting of five Officers and 78 ORs sailed on the S.S. RUTHENIA with the First Division in October 1914. They were, in effect, wheeled infantry and in one engagement at Vimy Ridge saw action alongside a cavalry unit. They later served in the Canadian Independent Force under Brig.Gen. R. Brutinel in company with machine gun motor cars, armoured cars and cavalry. Their bicycles were really meant for travelling!

The CP picture and caption tells briefly of two of the original Cyclists who have outlasted all the others. As a postal reminder see the Catholic Army Huts cover above with oval Cyclists O.R. marking.

Reference: Canada in the Great World War-various authors -1921- United Publishers of Canada Ltd.



Figure 1: Front of the cover reduced to 86%. ORDERLY ROOM oval handstamp SEP 20 1918 and CHYNGTON CAMP SEAFORD cds of 20 SP 18.

Letter Box

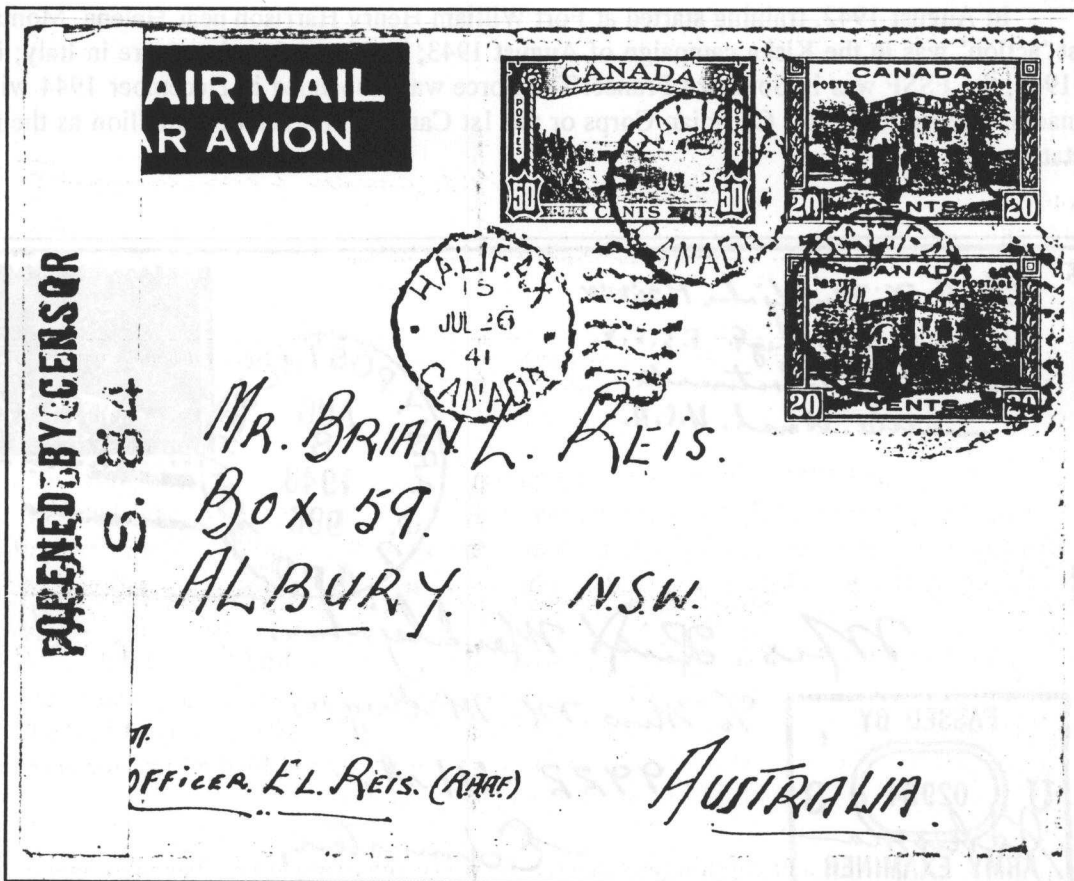
Michael Rixon, a BNAPS member and a director of documentary films, is looking for information of any kind about the Canadian Voyageur Contingent sent to Egypt as part of the Khartoum Relief Expedition. He needs research material such as diaries, prints, newspapers, drawings, photographs advertisements, military documents, awards, etc. If you have any such material or know where it may be found, please contact Michael Rixon, 749 Agnes St., Montreal, Quebec, H4C 2P9.

Airmail Covers From World War II

By Walter Plomish

In World War II the Commonwealth Air Training Plan

operated in Canada to train pilots and aircrew for the Allied War effort. Australia was a participant and this cover is from one such officer to his relatives back home. It was posted at



Halifax, N.S., on 26 July 1941 to New South Wales. It is correctly paid at 90 cents per half ounce for Pan-Am Clipper Service via San Francisco. A purple PASSED BY CENSOR S.84 ties the censor label to the envelope. Since it is not the usual Canadian type of marking, it is presumed to have been applied in Australia on arrival.

The USA-Canada First Special Service Force

By Ken Ellison

If you have ever seen the movie "The Devil's Brigade" you know who these guys were. Ken provides some background to this first joint US-Canada unit. Further news is welcomed. Ed.

Early in 1942 Allied strategists were planning Operation Plough with the objectives of destroying hydro-electric plants in Norway and Northern Italy, and the Romanian oilfields. This plan fell through, but it led to the formation of the joint USA-Canada First Special Service Force.

This unit consisted of a combat force of three small 'regiments' and a service battalion of which Canadians comprised one quarter of the strength. The Canadian part, for security reasons, was initially called the 2nd Canadian Parachute Battalion until May of 1943 when the unit's name was changed to the 1st Canadian Special Service Battalion; in fact, they were already an integral part of the FSSF.

In August 1942, training started at Fort William Henry Harrison near Helena, Montana. Their first 'action' was in the Kiska campaign of August 1943; by November they were in Italy; in August of 1944, the FSSF was in Southern France. The Force was disbanded in December 1944 with the Canadians going to the 1st Canadian Corps or the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion as their training dictated.

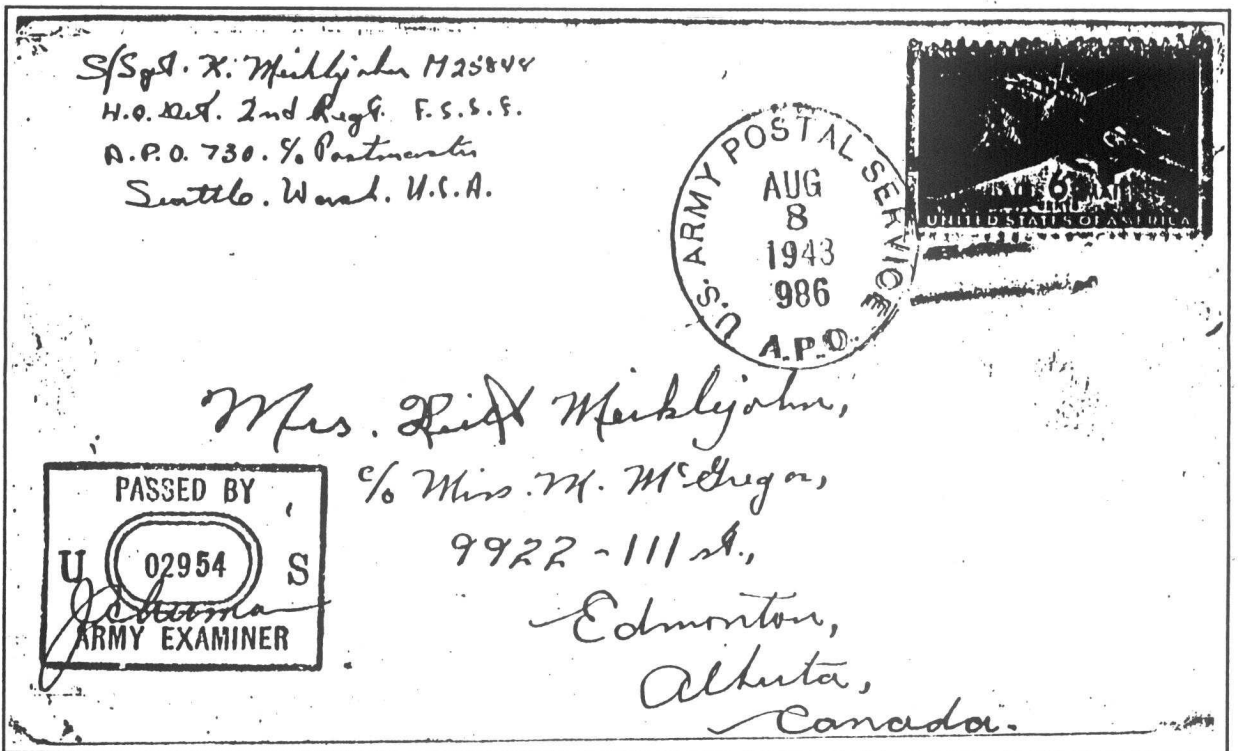


Figure 1. Cover from APO 986, Amchitka.

Postal services for the FSSF were provided by the US Army Postal Service and covers have been noted from APO 986 (Amchitka), APO 700 (Oran, North Africa), APO's 541 & 306 (Caserta, Italy), APO 539 (Naples), APO 543 (Capua), APO 392 (Naples), and APO's 548 & 21 (Marseille). Covers from Canadians in the FSSF can typically be identified by the soldier's Canadian serial number in the return address. (see illustration).

This brief review tells only a bit of the story. One is referred to the official Canadian military histories, *SIX YEARS OF WAR* and *THE CANADIANS IN ITALY*, for more detail.

The following is a summary of the activities of the First Special Service Force:

FIRST SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE

1942-00-00	PLAN FOR OPERATION PLOUGHSHARE	1944-05-09	RELIEVED TO CENTRE OF BRIDGEHEAD
1942-06-26	PRIME MINISTER APPROVES PLAN FOR FORCE	1944-05-10	FIRST REINFORCEMENTS - 15 CDN OFFRS + 240 ORS
1942-07-14	MIN. NATIONAL DEFENCE OK'S SENDING 47 OFFICERS + 650 ORs TO USA	1944-05-23	BREAKOUT - ADVANCE TO ROME
1942-08-00	CANADIANS JOIN FSSF AT FORT WM HENRY HARRISON, HELENA	1944-06-03	REACHED ROME
1942-11-00	OPERATION PLOUGHSHARE CANCELLED- TRAINING CONTINUED	1944-06-05	AFTER ROME - 6 WEEKS TRAINING ON GULF OF SALERNO
1943-05-00	2ND CDN PARA BN BECOMES 1st CDN S.S. BATTALION	1944-08-11	STAGING AT CORSICA FOR OP 'DRAGOON'
1943-07-11	FROM S.F. TO AMCHITKA FOR FINAL TRAINING	1944-08-14	ON HMCS PRINCE HENRY TO LEVANT THEN TO PORT CROS
1943-08-00	ARRIVE AT AMCHITKA	1944-08-15	CAPTURED PORT CROSS / LEVANT ISLANDS
1943-08-15	AT KISKA	1944-08-21	MOVE TO CANNES
1943-09-00	AT FORT ETHAN ALLEN, VT	1944-09-00	ADVANCE TO ITALIAN FRONTIER
1943-09-01	FSSF BACK IN USA	1944-09-09	STOPPED AT ITALIAN BORDER FOR 9 WEEKS
1943-10-00	SAILED FOR NORTH AFRICA	1944-11-28	HELD FLANK TILL NOW, THEN WITHDRAWN
1943-11-00	WITH 5TH ARMY IN ITALY	1944-12-05	DISBANDED - INF TO 1 CDN CORPS / PARA TO 1 CDN PARA
1943-12-05	FSSF AT MONTE LA DEFENSA / MONTE LA REMETANEA	1944-12-09	LANDED BACK IN NAPLES-AVELINNO
1943-12-09	RELIEVED FROM THE LINE	1945-01-10	1ST CDN BN CEASED TO EXIST
1943-12-25	EAST OF CASSINO	1945-01-11	FORCE LOSSES: 450 KILLED, INCLUDING 155 CANADIANS.
1944-02-01	FSSF AT ANZIO		

Anyone having covers from the Canadians in the First Special Service Force is requested to send a photocopy to the writer to help round out the postal story of this force.

The Observer

Received another issue from down under, the Australian Forces Mail Research Group. The September-October issue contains an interesting article on mail to internees in Canada during WWII and one about interpreting POW items from Camps in Germany during WWII.

A Fenian Raid Story

By Hank Narbonne

Collecting Canadian stamps and postal history has been one of my joys for a number of years. However, most of my pleasure comes from researching postal significance that item may possess.

This is the case with the cover shown here. This cover was sent while the 1st ORC (Oakville Rifle Company) was on active duty during the Irish American 'Fenian' crisis and invasion of Canada at Fort Erie on June 1, 1866.

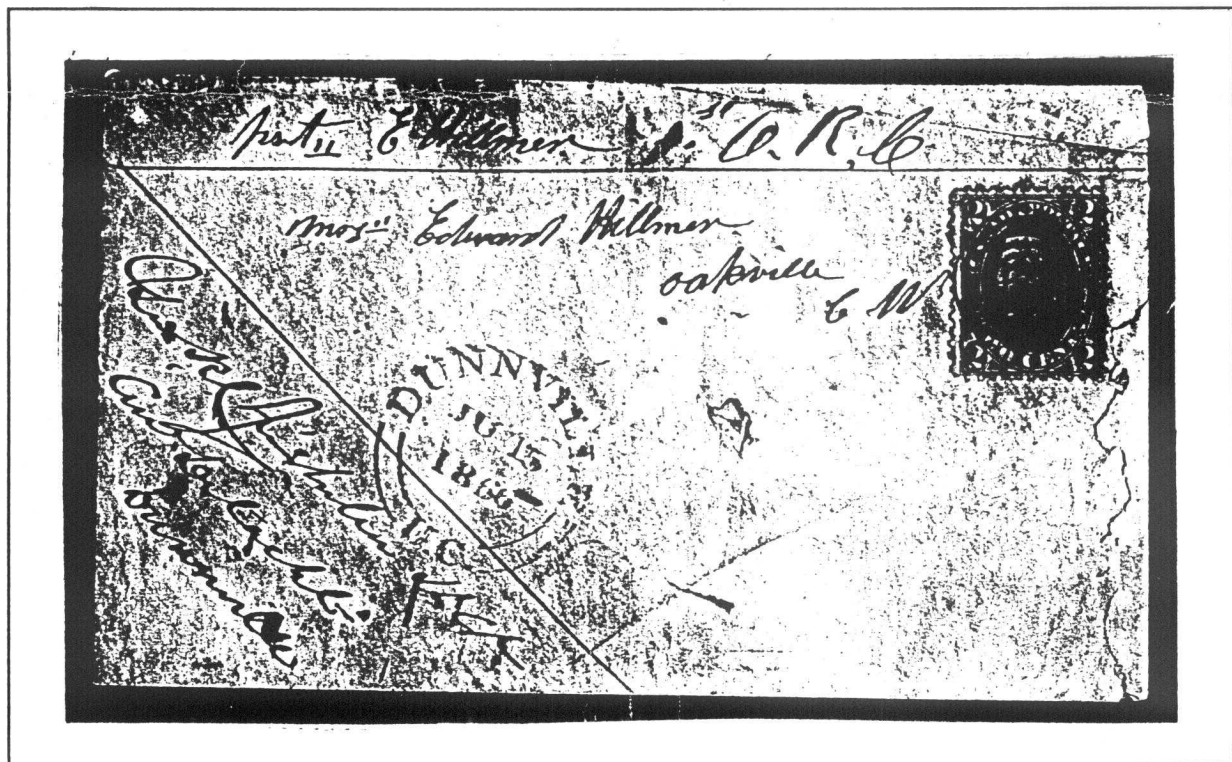


Figure 1: Dunville to Oakville Fenian Raid Cover.

The regular postal rate for single weight domestic letters in 1866 was five cents. But, according to the Canadian Postal Guide of 1863, "*Non-commissioned Officers, Embodied Pensioners, Seamen, Soldiers, and Army Schoolmasters of all but first class, while they are employed in Her Majesty's Service, can send or receive letters at the rate of two cents each.*"

There were certain regulations to follow in order to obtain the special two cent rate. Firstly, the name of the soldier and his company must be specified on the cover, and secondly, in the case of letters being sent by the soldier, the company's commanding officer must sign his name and rank. Hillmer properly signed the letter and receive the authorization of his commanding officer, (Lt. Col.) Geo. K. Chisholm, U.E.L., commander of the detachment at Dunnville (see lower left of the cover).

Prior to the Fenian Raids and during the threat of American invasion during the Civil War years, the Canadian people and Parliamentarians took interest in national defence. But, only at those few crucial instances where imminent danger threatened the country did the Volunteer Militia act.

From this viewpoint, one of the most important crises was the long series of the raids from 1865 onward, that forced the provinces to unite and defend against a common enemy.

The evolution of the volunteer militia force in Canada began in 1855. In 1854, Britain entered into war with Russia and needed to draw upon her colonial forces to form a Crimean Expeditionary Force. In March of 1855, there were only 1887 British troops in Canada, down from the 5000 troops present before the war. Now, if Canada was to be defended, she would have to look to her own countrymen.

Late in 1855, a Commission was appointed to investigate this matter. It advocated, and the Legislature subsequently approved, the formation of a new force of volunteers which would be uniformed, armed and given prescribed training. This new force of over 4,000 men would be capable of responding and dealing with any sudden emergency.

For a number of years, the volunteer force enjoyed tremendous popularity. This military enthusiasm brought in thousands of recruits and the authorities were actually shocked by the demands of those who wished to organize themselves into volunteer units. It was in 1861 that the 1st ORC was organized by Lieutenant Colonel George King Chisholm in response to fears caused by the American Civil War.



Figure 2: Lt. Col. George K. Chisholm

In 1861, George Chisholm was the Mayor of Oakville and prominent in many non-political affairs as well. He therefore had the great and possibly unique distinction of being a Militia Commander and a Mayor at the same time! His father, William, a staunch United Empire Loyalist, was the founder of Oakville in 1827 when he purchased a portion of Crown Reserve around the Sixteen Mile Creek for \$4,116.

Edward Hillmer was, on the other hand, not as prominent. He came to Canada in 1848 at the age of eleven and subsequently moved to Oakville where he started a butcher business in the 1850's. He settled permanently in Oakville, married and had a son, Alfred, in 1863. Edward was a strong Conservative with an intense dislike of Americans. Both of these men would display their patriotism and American dislike in the near future during the Fenian Raid a few years later.

Fortunately, threats of war with the Americans during the Civil War years did not materialize. It was with great sense of relief that Canadians watched the demobilization of what was the strongest army in the world at that time. But troubles of another kind were brewing.

In the United States, the radical Fenian Brotherhood grew out of the discontent of the Irish situation in the British Empire. The Fenians, bolstered with many thousands of recently discharged soldier sympathizers, sought to embarrass, if not cripple Britain, through invading Canada and the Maritimes.

In September of 1865, the Fenians held a convention in Cincinnati and "ON TO CANADA" became their slogan. Under the leadership of General T.W. Sweeny, Canada was to become an Irish Republic. But anticipating trouble companies were called out on November 9 to police the more exposed sections of the frontier. Nothing happened however.

Early next March, Sweeny set up battle plans and a whole strategic program for the invasion of Canada to occur on St. Patrick's Day. But the Canadian government found out about the Fenians' plot soon after and called out 10,000 volunteer militia on March 7. St. Patrick's Day passed without incident as the Fenians reconsidered their plans for invading Canada.

The remainder of March through May passed quietly and the people of Canada almost forgot about the Fenians. But towards the end of May, Fenian forces started secretly gathering at strategic points along the Canadian-American border. This time there was to be no false alarm, the Fenians were definitely attacking.

In Buffalo, near midnight on May 31, 1866, Fenian forces were observed secretly loading ammunition into boats on the Niagara River. Soon after, everything was in readiness for an attack on Canada; on the other side of the river. Was Canada prepared for this secret attack by as many as a thousand or more wild, heavily armed, Fenian invaders?

Because of so many false alarms, the Canadian government was not prepared for the latest threat, even though they had received secret surveillance reports of the Fenian activities in Buffalo. The government waited until the raid was a certainty and, at the last minute, on May 31, ordered 14,000 volunteers to the Fort Erie area.

In the early hours of June 1, 1,200 Fenians were secretly ferried across the Niagara River and, a short time later, landed on the Canadian side one mile north of Fort Erie. The Fenians encountered no resistance as the volunteers were still at least thirty miles from their camp. Feeling very confident indeed, a Colonel Starr of the invading force promptly raised a green silk Irish flag amid loud cheers, claiming Canada as an Irish Republic.

The Fenians then marched to a protected area called Frenchman's Creek where they encamped to wait the arrival of reinforcements which they hoped would pour across the river

from Buffalo. Details were sent to obtain knowledge of the whereabouts of the Canadian forces. Learning that the forces were getting close, the Fenian commander O'Neill, preparing his troops for battle, pushed forward and posted his men at the Limestone Ridge, a section of elevated ground five miles west of Fort Erie. This ridge was a good position with a clear view of the surrounding country.

The next day, the first volunteer militia force arrived. Eight-hundred and fifty men under the command of Lt. Col. Booker approached the Limestone Ridge. But Booker, thinking the Fenians were still at Frenchman's Creek, did not discover the enemy until it was too late to withdraw. The resulting skirmish lasted only a few hours as O'Neill and his men barely turned back the surprised, but very brave, volunteers.

During the battle, O'Neill found out that an additional 10,000 to 15,000 Canadian volunteers would be arriving soon and seeing that his own reinforcements from Buffalo did not come, ordered his troops back to Fort Erie.

On June 3, O'Neill hastily planned for his final retreat back to Buffalo. Quickly, the invaders crowded into a few boats and left Canadian soil. But halfway across the Niagara River, they were picked up by American authorities on the man-of-war "The Michigan". And so ended the 1866 Fenian Invasion of Canada West.

The activities of the 1st ORC during the Fenian crisis can be traced. By order on June 1, 1866, the ORC along with other militia companies was called to the front by the Militia and Defence Headquarters at Ottawa. It was not until June 3 that Chisholm and his 53 other ranks, including Hillmer, arrived at Fort Erie. By that time, the Fenians had escaped Canada and were being picked up by the American authorities.

Since there were still many Fenians in Buffalo, the ORC remained in the Niagara Frontier area to guard against any further attacks.

It was, therefore, while the company was in Dunnville, on June 15, that Hillmer wrote to his wife back in Oakville. The contents of the letter are unknown, but the letter was probably to reassure his worried wife and young son of his safety.

Also on June 15, the Fenians finally dispersed and returned to their homes after signing a U.S. parole form which stated in part that they "agree and promise to abandon their expedition against Canada". Now the danger was seemingly at an end.

The majority of militia units were released from duty on June 23. The order praised all the men for the "patriotism and energy displayed by them in their instantaneous response to the call to arms. Relieved of active duty, Chisholm, Hillmer, and the rest of the 1st ORC returned to Oakville to a hero's welcome.

This major Fenian raid, along with other attacks in New Brunswick and in the Eastern Townships of Canada East, vividly displayed that all the provinces needed to be united. The events of the Fenian raids sent a thrill through the Canadian people which fired their hearts and settled the matter of Confederation. The necessity of united action in defence and cooperation in other matters for the benefit of the whole was heartily admitted and the provinces joined into confederation one year later.

The Dominion at its foundation was, to a great measure, the beneficiary of the Fenians; those assiduous but inept practitioners of the art of revolution.

I would like to express my thanks to Miss Merri Hamilton of the Oakville Historical Society/Museum for the verification of George K. Chisholm's signature.

This picture appeared in the Kelowna Courier of June 8, 1992. It reminded me of the OR marking I had stashed away.



CP Photo

Figure 2: First World War veterans Dick Ellis, 96, left and Bill Richardson, 98, share a toast from a bottle of 1937 champagne.

And then there were two

Billy Richardson, 98, isn't much on drinking, but he was willing to make a rare exception this weekend.

The champagne in his glass was a 1937 Pol Roger, a vintage that is as rare as they come.

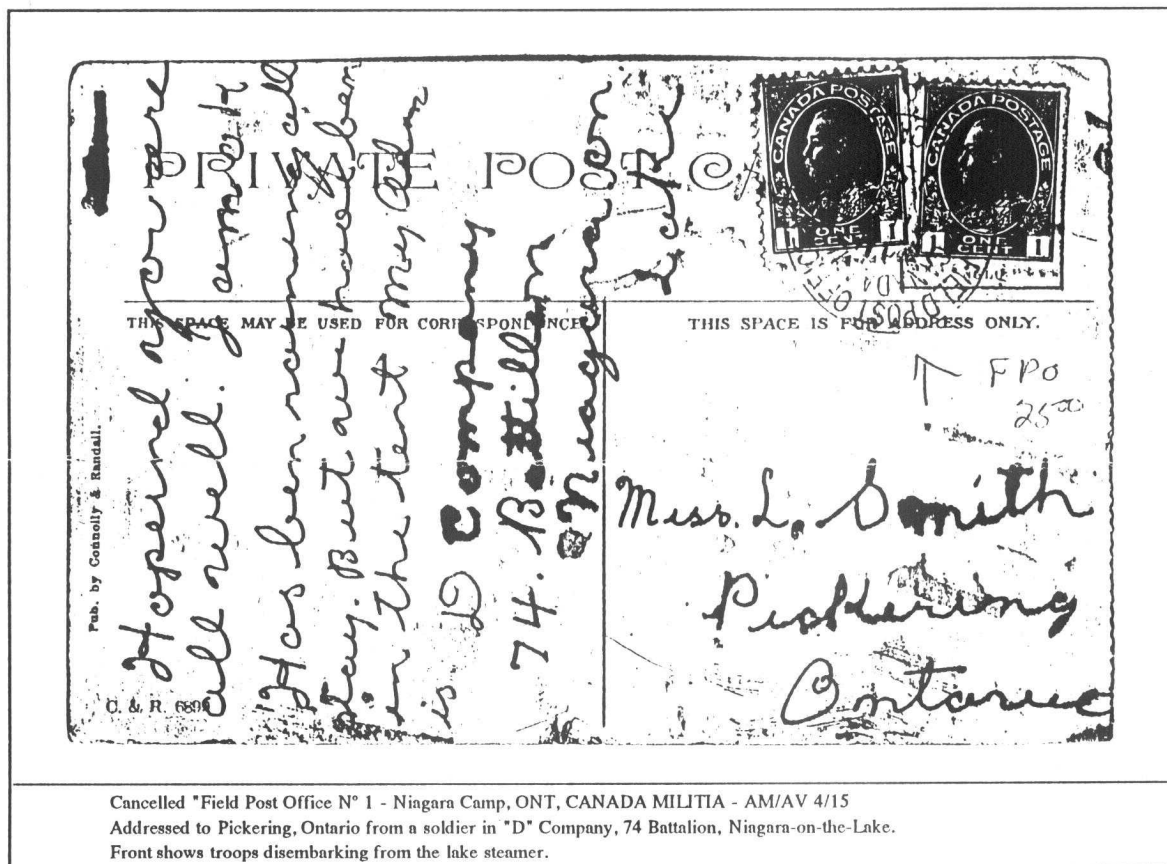
The bottle was purchased 55 years ago to be used for a toast by the last two living members of the Canadian Corps of Cyclists, a battalion that served in the First World War.

There were 400 battalion members then.

Saturday, there was just Richardson and Dick Ellis, 96, to pop the cork.

"It's a sad feeling," Ellis said. "All my pals are dead. Except Billy and me."

Cover-Cover



Small Ads

The Newsletter will accept small ads from members. One insertion of up to four lines for a Loonie! (For our overseas friends, that's a Canadian dollar) Send your ad with real money or mint (Canadian preferred) stamps.

FOR SALE: CMMMSG MILITARY MAIL ANTHOLOGY. Hard Cover - \$44.89 in Canada; US\$40.00 for USA and overseas; Soft Cover - \$32.05 in Canada; US\$30.00 for USA and overseas; Post Paid. Order from:
Robt. A. Lee, #203-1139 Sutherland Avenue, Kelowna, BC V1Y 5Y2.

WANTED: Falklands Island invasion material (yes, Falkland Islands!). Please send photocopies/prices desired. Have material for trade (modern Canada/UK/USA).
Dean Mario, Box 342, Saskatoon, SK S7K 3L3.

FOR SALE: READY FOR THE FRAY, History of the Canadian Scottish Regiment.
J. Colin Campbell, 1450 Ross Road, Kelowna, BC V1Z 1L6.

WANTED: Security MPOs and CSEF material. Photocopies + price to:
Henk Burgers, c/o HBA Ltd., 2660 Southvale Crescent, Suite 301, Ottawa, ON K1B 4W5.

Wanted: FIRST SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE Canadian covers. (See article in N/L 109); even photocopies will do!
Ken V. Ellison, R.R. #1, Oyama, B.C., V0H 1W0.

NEWFOUNDLAND WANTED: Covers to and from Newfoundland servicemen, all periods. Civil and Military censorship covers concerning Nfld. also desired. Send photocopies, even if you do not want to trade the material.
Doug Hannan, 23 - 1950 Burtch Street, Kelowna, BC V1Y 4B2.

FOR SALE: North West Field Force Transport Office Qu'Appelle Station 18__, blank supply order form. \$50.00.
Albert Tanner, # 201, 1025 Gilford Street, Vancouver, BC V6G 2P2.

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