



Guelph Historical Society

www.guelphhistoricalsociety.ca

November 2005

NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER LECTURE

In November, Professor Terry Copp, a renowned military historian, presented his lecture "Remembrance in the 21st Century" as part of the Society's commemoration of the Year of the Veteran. In his lecture he discussed the evolution of remembrance.

As this year's Remembrance Day services across the country demonstrated, Remembrance Day has taken on renewed significance in the 21st century. Everywhere record crowds participated. In the 1970s and early 1980s, however, the atmosphere in the post-Vietnam era was hostile to veterans and little was done in the way of remembrance. Copp suggested several factors that contributed to the resurgence of interest in veterans. These factors include: the veterans, who had been reluctant in the post-war era to discuss the war, began to tell their stories and become aware of their place within history; and the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents, which encouraged the veterans to talk about their war-time experiences.

By the 50th anniversary of the end of WWII, remembrance had changed. There has been an explosion of interest in military history and the social aspects of war.

Copp says that remembrance in the 21st century must be institutionalized. We must continue to communicate the experiences of veterans in universities, schools, and the mass media so that Canadian youth may ensure remembrance does not lapse again. Canada played a large role in world events (e.g., D-Day Invasion, invasion of Sicily) and it is the contributions and sacrifices of our veterans that must be memorialized.

In the Question & Answer period, Copp addressed the issue of the treatment of veterans. He said that the land grant system worked for thousands of veterans and the educational credit allowed many veterans, who may otherwise not have had the opportunity, to attend university.

Prof. Copp is an engaging speaker with wonderful anecdotes that bring to life the enormous sacrifices of Canada's young men and women in the armed forces. His comments are thought-provoking and relevant to the state of the world today.

Thank you to the veterans who attended the November lecture. Special thanks to Mr. Steve Nessner of the McCrae Branch 234 of the Canadian Legion for making poppies available for donation and Mr. Bob Mosley, President of the Guelph Navy League for his attendance.

PROFILE OF STEVE NESSNER

Steve Nessner was born in the former Yugoslavia and his family emigrated to Canada in 1927. In January 1943, Mr. Nessner enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force at the age of 19. At the time, he was working in Windsor and enlisted with a friend. Initially, he wanted to join the Navy but there were too many recruits so he switched to the Air Force.

Mr. Nessner was trained as a bombaimer but when he arrived in England the Royal Air Force needed people with linguistic abilities. Mr. Nessner who speaks three languages — English, French and German — was an excellent candidate. He served in radio counter-measures, which was involved in jamming radio and radar signals to confuse the Germans and stall the fighter planes. It was a highly technical position.

He flew in B-17 bombers, known as the "Flying Fortress". In these bombers, there was a crew of 10 and it was a team effort. The RAF was multinational, over a third were from Commonwealth countries. Mr. Nessner said he was a Canadian, flying with the RAF, in an American bomber.

Mr. Nessner, who obtained the rank of Flying Officer, is credited with 17 tours over Germany. His last flight was April 15, 1945 when his plane crashed in Belgium and he was injured.

From October 1945 to January 1946, Mr. Nessner served in the western part of Germany where he witnessed the hardship of the German civilians.

Mr. Nessner remembers the better times — the friendship and fellowship of his war years. "Everyone was like a family," says Mr. Nessner. Serving with the RAF, he got to know the English very well and he admired their determination during the Blitz.

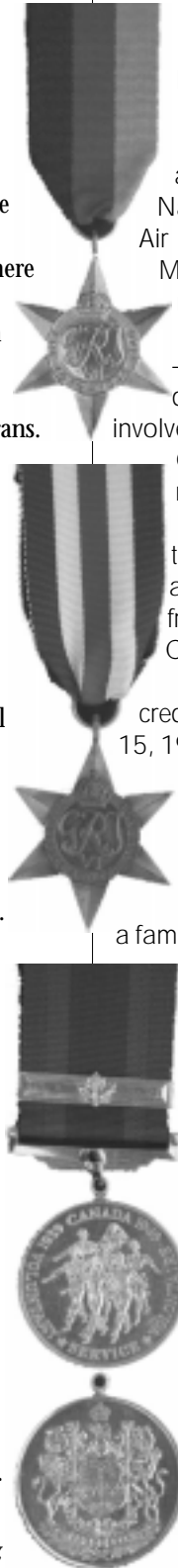
Mr. Nessner returned to Guelph and used his service grants to graduate from the Ontario Agricultural College (OAC). He says that it was a good opportunity to go to university. He worked in the farm equipment industry for 40 years.

Mr. Nessner is actively involved in the community. He has held many positions in the Legion. He works tirelessly for veterans and frequently speaks to school groups about his experiences.

Special thanks to Mr. Nessner for the interview and Mr. Jim Stoneburgh, Legion Information Officer, for providing additional material.

Resources

Peden, Murray. *A Thousand Shall Fall*. Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co., 1988. Available at the Guelph Public Library.



WAR MEDALS (top to bottom) • The 1939-1945 Star • The France and Germany Star • Canadian Volunteer Service Medal

ESSAY CONTEST

*Topic of your choice pertaining to
Guelph's History — Any Era*

Essays relating to historical events, residents, architecture, etc. can be based on archival documents, personal experiences, interviews, etc.

CASH PRIZES

1st Prize: \$500 2nd Prize: \$350 3rd Prize: \$200

An extra \$50 is awarded to a first-time entrant prize winner.

Essays (approximately 3000 words) will be judged on their originality, literary style and research. Must include references to source materials and photos. Essays become the property of the Guelph Historical Society and may be published in its annual publication *Historic Guelph: The Royal City*. The Verne McIlwraith Award Contest is sponsored by the Guelph Historical Society and is open to all residents of Guelph and area.

DEADLINE: JANUARY 31, 2006

Mail one hard copy (double-spaced) and one disk to:
Guelph Historical Society "Essay Contest"
Unit B9, 100 Crimea St. Guelph, ON N1H 2Y6

Please note that members of the Guelph Historical Society Board are ineligible to receive cash prizes.



GUELPH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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UPCOMING LECTURE

"McCrae House and Keeping the Faith for Which They Died"

Bev Deitrich, Curator of Guelph Museums

December 6, 2005 at 7:30 p.m.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church,
161 Norfolk St., Guelph

Bev Deitrich, Curator of Guelph Museums, has responsibility for the collection at the Guelph Civic Museum as well as McCrae House, the birthplace of military doctor and poet Col. John McCrae of "In Flanders Fields" fame. Her presentation is titled "McCrae House and Keeping the Faith for Which They Died". Ms Deitrich will discuss the historical significance of McCrae who died tragically during World War I as well as development of the McCrae House Museum that has achieved status as a National Historic Site. In 1995, Ms Deitrich was a special guest in Belgium for the 80th anniversary of the writing of McCrae's poem and she has detailed knowledge of McCrae's international reputation.

NEWS

On November 23rd the Guelph Historical Society presented a special gift to the Guelph General Hospital by providing some history for their walls. Six historic photographs were reproduced on archival quality paper, and framed with a description of each image. The photographs include an early Red Cross truck in front of Victory School (ca. 1920), a turn-of-the-century scene showing Mrs. Sleeman with construction workers outside the Silver Creek Brewery, and general city views from 1860 to 1930.

Staff at the GGH Foundation are excited about the donation and have decided that it will be added to the 5th floor where the photos will serve to educate patients, staff, and visitors, to improve the general appearance of the hospital, and to offer some distraction for patients who are ill.



Image: ph 3278 Wellington County Archives

With this gift, we give to the citizens of Guelph who pass through the halls of the

GGH, an opportunity to reflect on our history and the changing nature of our city.

Left: Mrs. Sleeman with construction workers outside Silver Creek Brewery.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Re: Admiral Sir Charles Edmund Kingsmill (Guelph Historical Society Newsletter, Sept. 2005).

There is related material on Admiral Kingsmill at the Wellington County Museum and Archives available at: www.wcm.on.ca.

Using the archives search engine, enter Kingsmill. His daughter Diana Kingsmill participated in the 1936 Olympics as Diana Gordon-Lennox.

With thanks to Ian Easterbrook, Volunteer, Wellington County Museum and Archives