

## A Toast to The Forgotten Comrades

Each year, as Remembrance Day approaches, we remember those who served and, particularly, those who fell in the Great War and the wars that have followed it in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

It is very appropriate that our focus is on these wars, as these are wars that were not fought by professional armies, but very largely by civilian volunteers – so many of them, that the lives of every Canadian have been touched. As well, they, and the South African War that preceded them, represent a major change in Canadian military thinking – away from considering our primary potential threat as coming from our neighbours to the south.

At the same time, I have always thought it a pity that we never mention, at this time, those soldiers and sailors – professionals and volunteers – who fought to establish Canada and to defend it during its earlier wars. Why do we forget them?

Is it because, historically, the popular view of the soldier was not a very positive one?

In 1587, a year before the defeat of the Spanish Armada, an English writer named Barnaby Rich wrote that, when an army was required, “...we disburthen the prisons of thieves; we rob the alehouses and taverns of tosspots; we scour both town and country of rogues and ruffians.” And this is a view that did not begin to change until fairly late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It's interesting that people did NOT feel the same way about sailors, who were the popular darlings of the press. The only concern about them was to keep them away from your daughters and, thinking of my sailor colleagues, I can well understand why people would feel that way!

But it was soldiers and sailors – volunteers as much as professionals - who first established New France and who defended it against the British and their American colonists. It was soldiers and sailors who captured Quebec and Louisbourg and Acadia and thus made us British subjects. It was soldiers and sailors – again both volunteers and professionals -who defended Canada and the maritime colonies against attacks from the south – during the American Revolution, the War of 1812-14 and the raids by the Hunters' Lodges and Fenian Brotherhood that persisted as late as 1871. Have we really forgotten that the Americans sent 11 different armies against Canada in the War of 1812, and every single one of them was defeated?

Have we forgotten the veterans of the American Revolution – the United Empire Loyalists – who founded the Provinces of Ontario and New Brunswick, like my ancestor Captain Michael Grass who led five shiploads of the Associated Loyalists of New York by sea from that city to Quebec in 1783 and the next year led them up the St. Lawrence to settle at the mouth of the Cataraqui River and found the City of Kingston?

Have we forgotten the veterans of the War of 1812 and the Napoleonic Wars who settled Carleton and Lanark Counties, men like my partner Sue's ancestor, James Hood of the 92nd Foot (The Gordon Highlanders), whose Hood's Corners, northwest of the Village of Lanark still appears on some maps and whose log home, almost two hundred years old, still stands?

When we remember our VCs, have we forgotten that the first two of them were awarded to a black Nova Scotian serving in the Royal Navy and to a graduate of Upper Canada College who charged at Balaclava with the Light Brigade? And that the next four VCs were awarded for service on the battlefields of South Africa? While these wars were hardly in defence of Canada, our participation in them speaks to the beginnings of a role for Canada in international affairs.

Do we not owe an equal debt of gratitude to these men and women? Without them, there would have been no Canada for the soldier, sailors and airmen of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries to defend.

This year, as we toast Fallen Comrades, ought we not also to offer a toast to The Forgotten Comrades?

Harry Needham

(Harry Needham has the perhaps unique distinction of having been, by turns, a squadron commander, a battery commander and a rifle company commander. He is the former Director, Programmes and Operations of the Canadian War Museum and Treasurer of the Canadian Battlefields Foundation.)