

# Training for the Trenches

by *Sergeant Dwayne H. Snow, CD*

SEVENTEEN INFANTRY BATTALIONS were raised in British Columbia to serve overseas in the Great War, of which seven are perpetuated by the British Columbia Regiment (Duke of Connaught's Own), the province's senior regiment. More than 15,000 volunteers passed through the ranks of these seven units. Many of the initial volunteers were drawn from the serving members of the Duke of Connaught's Own Rifles and other local regiments, while most of the later recruits were civilians with no military experience. In each battalion a small number of veteran officers and non-commissioned officers provided a cadre around which the new recruits were formed. Three of the regiment's battalions became part of the order of battle of the Canadian Corps while the remainder were broken up as reinforcements. Those forming part of the Canadian Corps included the 7th, 29th and 102nd Battalions.

The 7th Battalion was raised at Camp Valcartier, Quebec, in September 1914 with an initial strength of 1223 officers and men. Lieutenant-Colonel Hart-McHarg was its first commanding officer. More than 6,000 men served in the 7th Battalion, which suffered 1529 killed and 3669 wounded during their 45 months on the Western Front. The 7th Battalion returned to Vancouver on 25 April 1919 with only 12 of its original members. Soldiers of the Battalion earned more than 270 awards for gallantry, including three Victoria Crosses, the highest award for valour in the Empire. Captain Edward Bellew and Private Michael J. O'Rourke and Private Walter Rayfield earned the three VCs.

The 29th (Vancouver) Battalion, known as "Tobin's Tigers," was raised in Vancouver in March 1915 and had an initial strength of 1227 officers and men. Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Tobin, a veteran of the RCMP and the South African War, was its first commanding officer. Arriving at the front in the fall of 1915, it served with distinction in the trenches of the Kemmel Sector in late 1915 until the final 100

6th Field Company Construction Engineers, Camp 2, bivouacked at Grandview Park (Commercial Drive and Charles Streets) on 2 April 1918 in preparation for deployment overseas to France and Belgium.





Victoria Cross recipients Private Michael James O'Rourke of the 7<sup>th</sup> (1<sup>st</sup> British Columbia) Battalion and Company Sergeant Major Robert Hill Hanna of the 29<sup>th</sup> (Vancouver) Battalion stand united in front of Buckingham Palace after the Victoria Cross awards ceremony conducted by King George V. Both soldiers won their VCs at the Battle of Hill 70 in August 1917. Note that CSM Hanna is wearing the white hat band of an officer cadet as he had been selected for officer training shortly after the battle.

days campaign that ended the war. Of the 4524 soldiers who served in its ranks during the war 606 were killed and 1715 were wounded. The soldiers of the 29<sup>th</sup> earned more than 355 decorations for gallantry and Sergeant-Major Robert Hanna was awarded a VC.

The 102<sup>nd</sup> (North British Columbia) Battalion, raised at Comox in December 1915, had an initial strength of 1005 officers and men. Lieutenant-Colonel John Weightman Warden was its first commanding officer and the Battalion became known as "Warden's Warriors." Warden had

served in the Duke of Connaught's Own Rifles (DCOR) and enlisted in the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The 102<sup>nd</sup> Battalion arrived in France on 12 August 1916 and received its "baptism of fire" at the Somme. Of the 3863 officers and men who served in the battalion 676 were killed and 1715 wounded. The soldiers of the battalion earned 287 decorations for gallantry. Lieutenant Graham Lyall was awarded a VC.

With the defeat of the German Empire, two of the regiment's battalions, the 7<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, formed part of the occupation force on the Rhine River and returned to base

## The Victoria Cross

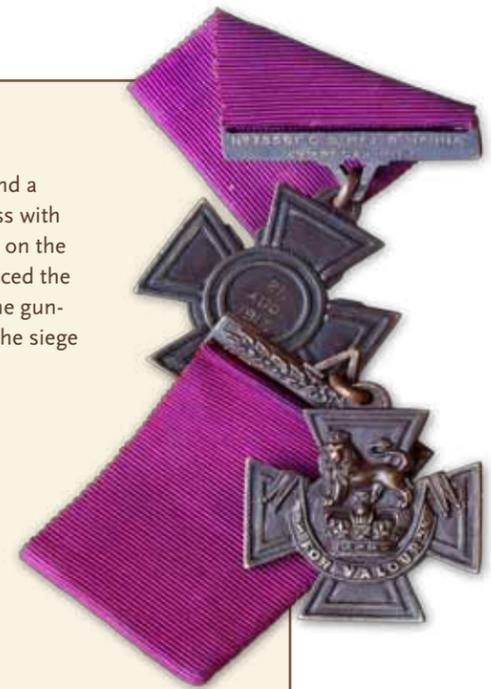
There were only 70 Victoria Crosses awarded to Canadians during the First World War, and a further sixteen in the Second World War. The decoration is a simple bronze Maltese Cross with the words "For Valour" inscribed on it with the recipient's rank, name and serial number on the reverse of the bar. It is worn on the right of other service medals. Queen Victoria introduced the medal in 1856 to reward acts of bravery during the Crimean War. According to folklore, the gun-metal from which the medals came were struck from Russian cannons captured during the siege of Sevastopol. Victoria Crosses can now sell for up to a million dollars.

Robert Hill Hanna joined C Company of the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion, known as Tobin's Tigers, as a private. He received his VC in 1917 after all his company officers were killed. He reorganized the remaining men to attack and capture a German trench and defend the position against counterattack in August 1917 on Hill 70 near Lens, France.

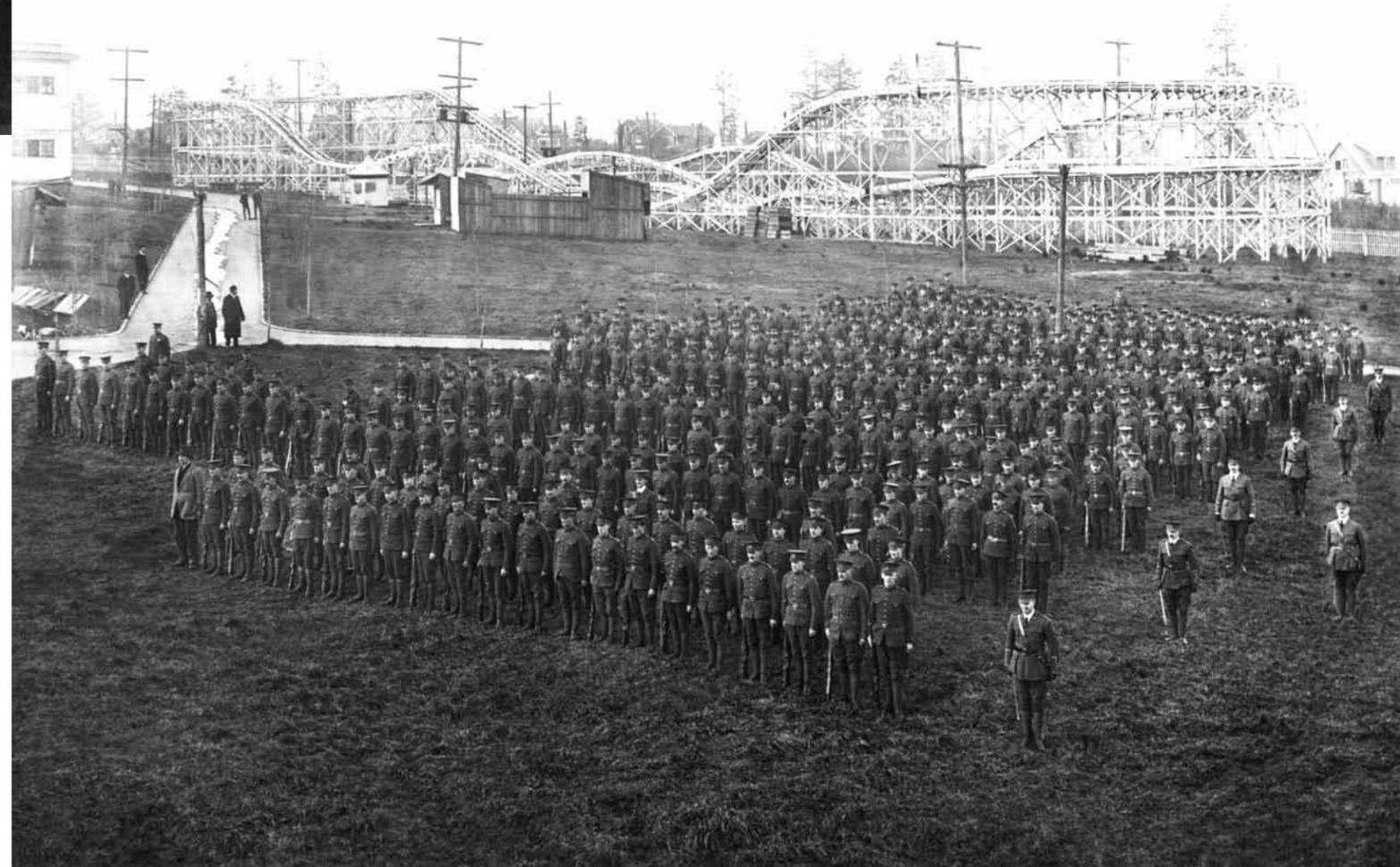
## Hastings Park

*From the Bessborough Armoury Museum's notes:*

The 1920s were a time of improvisation and achievement for the brigade. The first summer camp was held in Hastings Park (present day PNE fairgrounds) in 1921. The government was unwilling to fund a permanent establishment of horses to pull the guns, so the artillerymen rescued some old horses on their way to the slaughterhouse. Fed, encouraged and groomed by the soldiers, the horses pulled the guns to Hastings Park, where, in between rides on the roller-coaster, the artillerymen trained in a manner described as "cheerful and willing, rather than well-informed".



The 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Forces stand at attention in 1914 at the parade square at Hastings Park with the roller-coaster ride in the background.



16754 P.O. Bryant



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

7<sup>th</sup> Canadian

1918.

The Queen joins me in welcoming you on your release from the miseries & hardships, which you have endured with so much patience & courage.

During these many months of trial, the early rescue of our gallant Officers & Men from the cruelties of their captivity has been uppermost in our thoughts.

We are thankful that this longed for day has arrived, & that back in the old Country you will be able once more to enjoy the happiness of a home & to see good days among those who anxiously look for your return.

George R. I.

Left

This letter, which appears to be in the handwriting of King George V, is actually a printed form letter sent to many of the prisoners of war released shortly after 11 November 1918 in accordance with the terms of the Armistice. This letter was sent to 16754 Private H.H. Bryant of 3 Company, 7<sup>th</sup> (1<sup>st</sup> British Columbia) Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. He was taken prisoner on 24 April 1915 during the Second Battle of Ypres near Saint Julien, Belgium. Germany gave notice of his capture on 15 May 1915, and he was kept at a prisoner of war camp near Munster, Germany until his release.

Right

This official portrait of King George V hangs proudly on display at the Bessborough Armoury.



camps in early 1919. The battalions returned home in the ensuing months and were demobilized and dismissed with appropriate ceremony and fanfare.

The greatest problem that faced the army after the war was reorganizing and perpetuating 260 reinforcing and 59 fighting battalions of the Canadian Expedition Forces within the "Old Militia" regiments that remained behind in Canada. In British Columbia, National Defence Headquarters decided to create the 1<sup>st</sup> British Columbia Regiment with six battalions. The DCOR and the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion joined to form the First Battalion (7<sup>th</sup> Battalion CEF) 1<sup>st</sup> BC Regiment (DCO). The 29<sup>th</sup> (Vancouver) Battalion formed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> British Columbia Regiment, and the 47<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the Westminster Regiment formed the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> British Columbia Regiment.

The Beatty Street Drill Hall was a busy place, with the Vancouver Regiment parading Monday and Wednesdays, the Seaforth Highlanders on Tuesday and Thursdays, and the 1<sup>st</sup> BC Regiment parading on the other days.

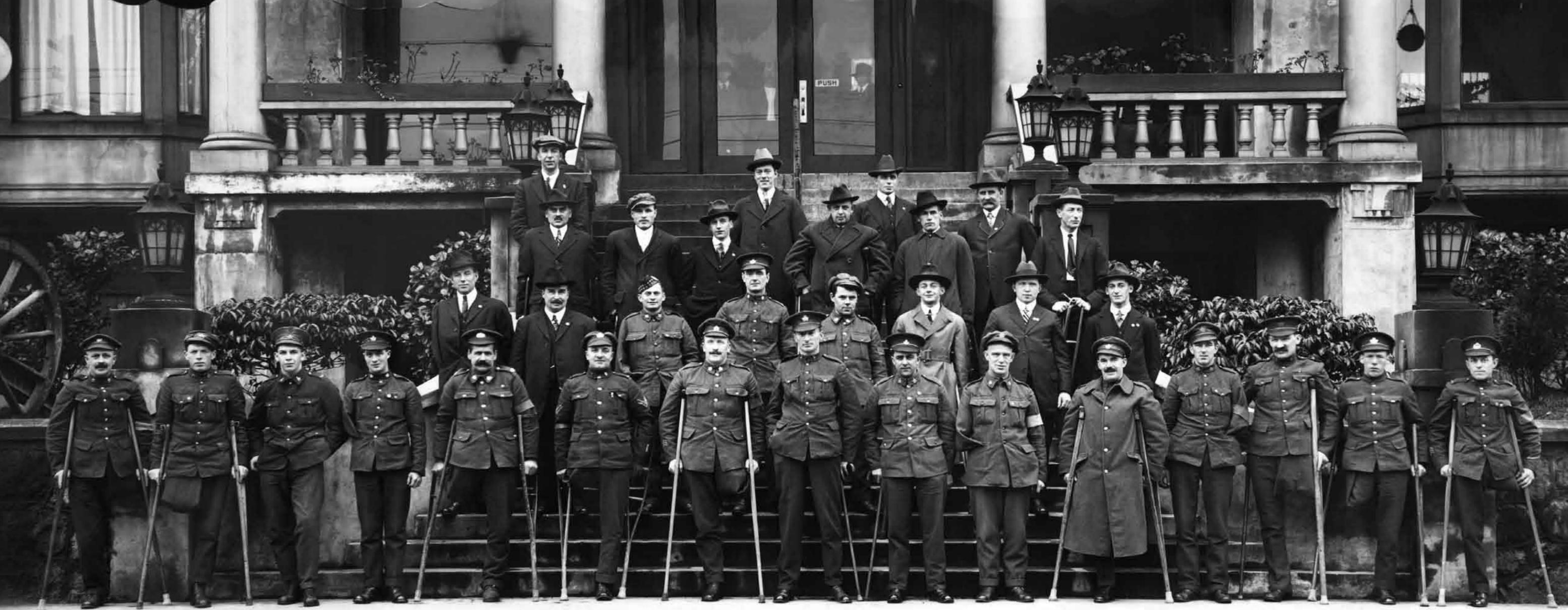
In 1927 Lieutenant-Colonel William Wasborough Foster, CMG, DSO, VD, became the new commanding officer of the regiment.

In the 1920s Vancouver's militia regiments had undergone a series of amalgamations, brought on by cuts

in the defence budget. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was renamed the British Columbia Regiment (Duke of Connaught's

Own Rifles) and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was redesignated the Vancouver Regiment; the latter was amalgamated with the Irish Fusiliers in 1936. In 2002 the Irish Fusiliers were amalgamated with The British Columbia Regiment (Duke of Connaught's Own).

Throughout the inter-war period the militia in Canada was badly equipped and underfunded—still wearing uniforms and using equipment left over from the First World War."



## Vancouver's Amputation Club

The club was formed in the early fall of 1918 and included in its membership only men who had lost an arm, a leg, or who had suffered amputation as a result of wounds in the Great War. The headquarters of the organization was at the Returned Soldiers' Club at 1142 West Pender Street, midway between Thurlow and Bute Streets.

But while the wounds of the amputees were visible, many veterans coming back from the war suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder for the rest of their lives from flashbacks and nightmares resulting from

their times in the trenches. They went overseas young and healthy and came back broken and with changed personalities.

The 100-room Elysium Hotel, built by realtors Marriot & Fellows and opened in 1911, competed for business with the CRP's second and third Hotels Vancouver. After the Second World War, the hotel was turned into 46 family suites under the federal government's Home Conversion Plan. It was demolished in the 1970s.

Some members of Vancouver's Amputation Club photographed in front of the Elysium Hotel , 3 November 1918.

Front row: A Stewart, F. Cowan, C. Wilson, M. McGougan, M. Wildman, A. Burnett, W. Armstrong, T. H. Potts, J. R. W. Jones, R. C. Sinclair, S. Ross, J. W. T. Currie, G. S. McArthur, F. McDonald, and F. C. Newcombe.

Second row: J. Logan, J. Alderson, R. C. Verrier, P. J. McCormack, C. McQueen, G. H. Morritt, T. L. Heads, W. Halstead.

Third row: H. Corner, E. R. Morton, C. Etchell, W. B. McConnell, President; D. McKenzie, R. W. Bashford.

Fourth row: H. W. Daw, J. R. Mulford, J. A. Paton and George Humphreys.



Brigadier General Duff Stewart takes salute from Lieutenant-Colonel W. W. Foster, CMG, DSO, VD, during Trooping of the Colours of the Regiment at the Cambie Street Parade Grounds, 1927. The photo was taken to the west from the roof of the Beatty Street Drill Hall and shows the steeple of the Holy Rosary Cathedral in the top right hand corner of the photograph.