

DIRECTORY

1957



48th BATTALION

C.E.F. ASSOCIATION

3rd Canadian Pioneers

1914 — 1918

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THE 48th BATTALION was the fourth infantry Battalion to go overseas from British Columbia.

This Battalion was mobilized at the "Willows" in Victoria on February 15th, 1915. It was formed from the 50th Gordon Highlanders (3 coy.), 88th Victoria Fusiliers (4 coy.), some of the 68th Earl Grey's Own Rifles from Prince Rupert (1 coy.) and 102nd Rocky Mountain Rangers from the Kootenay and Okanagan (2 coy.). There were also some members from Nanaimo and New Westminster Units to complete the strength.

In command of the Battalion was Lt./Col. W. J. H. Holmes, a graduate of Royal Military College, Kingston, who had been Commanding Officer of the Rocky Mountain Rangers. Second in Command, Major W. St. J. Beale, a retired British Army Officer, who was living in B.C. Third in Command was Major J. F. Templeton, also a graduate of Royal Military College. Captain Agnew, of Prince Rupert, Earl Grey's Own Rifles, was Adjutant, he was killed on the Somme in 1916. Capt. J. W. Briggs was Medical Officer. Capt. W. J. Holt Murison was Paymaster, and Capt. J. L. Retallack, an old R.N.W.M.P. man and later a mining engineer in the Kootenays, was Quartermaster. A number of the other officers were also graduates of Royal Military College or had previous service with British Regiments.

The late Maj. Gen. J. W. Stewart of the firm of Foley, Welch & Stewart, presented horses and wagons for the Transport section, other citizens contributed Field Kitchens, and several machine guns were presented to the Battalion by private citizens of Union Bay and Armstrong.

The Battalion left Victoria June 25th, 1915, and arrived at Shorncliffe early in July, going to "Upper Caesars" or Caesars Camp North. At this time the strength of the Unit was 1,156.

To the disappointment of all ranks, drafts of trained men were taken from the Battalion to reinforce other units and the Battalion was listed as a Reserve Unit. The first draft was a small one to the 10th Battalion, and in September about 200 men went to reinforce the 6th Brigade which was preparing to leave for France, later other drafts of about 100 went, about this time reinforcements were received from the 62nd and 54th B.C. Battalions and also from the 68th of Saskatchewan.

During the fall of 1915 efforts were made to have the Battalion serve as a Pioneer Unit as a large percentage of the Officers were either Civil or Mining Engineers or Land Surveyors, and the great majority of the men were "outdoor" men, following such trades as mining, lumbering, farming, prospecting, etc. These efforts were finally successful and the Battalion left for France in February, 1916, to take on the job of 3rd Division Pioneers.

The Battalion served as 3rd Canadian Pioneers and after the Battles of Mount Sorrel and the Somme, received reinforcements from the 75th Toronto Battalion and the 88th Victoria Battalion. It served with the 3rd Division until after the Vimy "do" when it was broken up and used as reinforcements to two B.C. infantry battalions, the 7th and the 29th. The reason given for the breakup was that sufficient reinforcements from B.C. were not available to continue to support the number of B.C. Units then in the four Divisions. (Those who were with the Unit when broken up will remember the cross set up in memory of the Battalion at its headquarters near Neuville St. Vaast).

The records show that B.C. had already contributed a much higher percentage of its population to the Armed Forces than the other Provinces of Canada.

Two companies of the Unit went to the 7th Battalion and two companies to the 29th. About 80 men went to the 123rd, a Toronto Battalion which had been raised by the 10th Royal Grenadiers and came to France in May, 1917, to take on the job of 3rd Division Pioneers.

Some members of the old Battalion who were young soldiers then more recently served with distinction in War 2, some rising to command of Units.

After War 1 efforts were made from time to time to get members together for a smoker or a dinner, the late Sid. Beech, in Vancouver and others in Victoria devoted considerable time and effort and finally in 1936 an Association of members was formed in Vancouver with Major C. W. Erlebach as President and Ed. Humphreys as Secretary; in 1948 a Branch was formed in Victoria with Jack Dirom as President and Ed. Humphreys as Secretary and a reunion dinner was held June 26th, commemorating the day of departure of the Battalion June 25th, 1915, at this dinner there were 123 in attendance, each year since then a dinner has been held at Victoria on the Saturday closest to June 25th.

In the summer of 1953 Fraser Stamford of the Victoria Branch, suggested that a bronze plaque as a memorial to our Fallen Comrades be placed in the Parliament Buildings where other Victoria and B.C. units already had memorials, permission to place our plaque was given by the Government office and our members were asked to subscribe towards the cost. A very nice bronze plaque was made and placed in position just prior to the November 11th, Remembrance Day ceremony and Victoria members gathered before it for their first time.

On Saturday, June 26th, 1954, the unveiling was performed before about 100 members, amongst them a number from Vancouver, relatives and friends, the Association asked Fraser Stamford, who had done so much towards the successful completion of the project, to do the unveiling. Jack Dirom, President of the Victoria Branch, presided and made a suitable address. In 1955 and 1956 in the afternoon prior to the reunion dinner a ceremony was held before the Plaque and it is the intention of our Victoria Branch that this will be continued each year.

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