

CULTURAL MOMENT

TWELFTH FIELD REGIMENT – 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF D DAY

JUNE 6, 2014

Photo 1 depicts two soldiers in Guelph in 1940 standing beside a recruiting poster for the group that will become the 12th Field

Photo 2 depicts soldiers of the 12th Field reading that the war is over

In September 1939, following a declaration of War, Canada quickly recruited an elite group of men for the First Division and regarded those efforts as satisfactory for the situation at hand. Much to the horror of MacKenzie King, the Prime Minister of the day, the Germans, after 9 months of inactivity, began invading Holland, Belgium, and France and occupied those countries by June 1940. The Canadian Government realized that England might fall and began recruiting in May 1940.

In Guelph, at the end of May, Major O. McConkey received orders to commence recruiting for a joint Battery called the 16/43, an artillery unit. Requiring 300 men for the unit, recruiting efforts occurred throughout Wellington County. Normally each artillery battery had six guns, work horses called 25-pounders. This joint Battery had 12 guns.

The first step a recruit faced was a medical examination. Some men failed the examination because of lack of proper food and nutrition during the Depression; others had dental problems. If accepted, each man received a uniform and took up residence near the Armoury in Guelph. A short period of training began immediately but the recruits lacked equipment and were forced to use poor substitutes. They were transferred to Camp Petawawa in eastern Ontario for a month ending in October 1940. Here they joined with the 11th and 69th Batteries of Hamilton and Brantford to form the 12th Field Regiment. The Regiment relocated to an unprepared and ill-equipped Camp Sussex in New Brunswick, where the men completed much of the construction work themselves due to a shortage of tradesmen in the area. In February the Regiment was reorganized to conform to the new War Establishment, and the 69th Battery departed. The Regiment now consisted of the 11th, 16th, and 43rd Batteries and the RHQ (Regimental Head Quarters), each Battery having two troops of four guns each. The Regiment trained at Sussex for 10 months, leaving for England in July 1941. They sailed with over 2000 men on the “Duchess of York”, a prized trophy for a lurking German submarine.

During their first year in England, the men trained to defend England from a German invasion. In the second year they prepared to invade Europe and were issued a new weapon, Priests, which were self-propelled guns. They practiced, typically firing these guns from Landing Craft. As part of the 3rd Canadian Division, they attacked on D Day morning, June 6, 1944. If information contained in the book “Into Action with the Twelfth Field” is accurate, they were the first Field Regiment to fire their guns on French soil at Courseulles-sur-Mer.