

Military Archives: In the entrance ramp is the Polish Alcove which features an oil painting of a Polish PZL fighter diving on a Messerschmitt. In 1939 Germany and Russia overran Poland, but the outnumbered Polish Air Force performed well against the Luftwaffe and gained valuable experience. Many airmen found their way to Britain where they formed the RAF Polish Squadrons, numbers 300 to 303, whose badge-plaques are above the painting.

Behind the TV is a late 1950s picture of Queen Elizabeth. To one side is the badge grant of the Vancouver Military District, signed Elizabeth R.; on the other of that of 409 Squadron RCAF, signed by her father, King George VI.

Above the bar is a propeller from an Avro Anson twin engine trainer. Directly below the propeller hub is the badge of the submarine HMS Thrasher. It was presented to us by "Tommy" Gould, who won a Victoria Cross while serving in her in the Mediterranean.

On the wall to the right of the bar is the Past-President's board. Our second President, Alf Watts (1946) later became the first WWII veteran to serve as Dominion President of the Canadian Legion. Bessie O'Brien (1981-83), was one of the first women to be a Legion Branch President in Vancouver.

Above the piano bar is a propeller from an American designed Fairchild Cornell trainer. The leading edge is strengthened with metal so it will rotate clockwise (as seen by the pilot.) The English, driving as they do on the other side of the road, prefer to have the pilot see a counter-clockwise rotation, as with the Anson above the bar.

The north-east corner of the lounge, the Gun Park, boasts a large plaque of the Royal Regiment of Artillery. A painting of the King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery, is unfinished. A long-time member, a gunner, died before completing it.

A print depicts a mule reluctant to be loaded on a 436 Squadron RCAF Dakota (Commonwealth name for the DC-3.) It was given in recognition of the soldiers of the 14th Army – which defeated the Japanese in Burma – and their RAF and RCAF transport squadrons.

On the centre pillar of this wall is a Ghurka plaque, showing crossed kurki. During WWII the equivalent of 55 battalions of Ghurkas fought in North Africa, Italy, Greece, the Middle East, and Burma; volunteers from a population of about eight million. Canada put more than a million people into uniform, from a population of 11 to 12 million, but only a fraction of them saw action.

## **The Spitfire Room**

The north wall is dominated by iconic images. A large Spitfire print is mounted above tributes to the five British Columbians awarded the Victoria Cross during WWII. Three other pictures are symbolic of all who served on sea, land or in the air.

The sailor is Able Seaman Marshall Smith who served in Halifax throughout the war. Around his picture are naval badges, including those of the four Royal Navy ships lost in the Falklands in 1982: HMS Sheffield, HMS Coventry, HMS Ardent and HMS Antelope.

The soldier, Sergeant P.J. Ford of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, is unusual amongst Canadian troops in that he is wearing the Africa Star; he was for a time attached to the 5th Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment in Tunisia.

The airman is Squadron Leader Hal Gooding, DFC, a Typhoon pilot commanding 440 Squadron RCAF. Between the sailor and the soldier, at the intersection of the black timbers, is the badge given by the crew of H. M. Royal Yacht Britannia, which accompanied the Queen and Prince Philip to Vancouver for a Royal Visit in 1983.

To the right is the Wooden Wonder, a de Havilland Mosquito. With airframes of 1/2" thick plywood (built in furniture factories!), this was the fastest and most flexible fighter-bomber in the war. The fighter version shot down over 600 Doodlebugs (German V-1 Buzz-bombs) in 1944.

Next to the kitchen door is a picture taken in front of The Billy in April 1995 at a reunion of the [Air Force Prisoners of War Association](#), and a photograph of the Billy Bishop stamp and first day covers from 1994.

Also on this wall is pictured the RAF Memorial Flight, a Lancaster bomber with Spitfire and Hurricane fighters. The [Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum](#) (Mount Hope, Ontario) has an RCAF flight of these vintage aircraft.

On the pillar are two picture of Squadron Leader [Len Birchall](#), the "Saviour of Ceylon" (now Sri Lanka.) On April 4, 1942, his Catalina amphibian of 413 Squadron RCAF spotted a Japanese invasion fleet heading towards that island county. They radioed warnings to Ceylon until they were shot down. The survivors spent the rest of the war in a Japanese POW camp. Churchill called this, one of the most important individual contributions to victory.

On the post above the piano is a photograph of the notoriously camera shy Bea Blackford, who played at The Billy for 35 years. She had a remarkable repertoire and the uncanny ability to pick up a tune for anyone who could "hum a few bars." Her fans (the piano mafia) gathered around her to sing-along, as the boys overseas learned to do in British pubs.

Above the piano bar are 17 plaques showing the career of Lieutenant Commander Tony Scott, RCN. This remarkable collection, left to the Branch in his will, was presented by his wife Ann in 1998. Across the room, large plaques mounted at ceiling level show the careers of Derek and Irene Irons.

To your left, below the Churchill picture, is a shadow-box display of four Royal Navy badges, the ships of [The Yangtze Incident](#). in 1949, as Communists were taking control of China, HMS amethyst, HMS Black Swan, HMS Consort and HMS London traveled from Nanking down the Yangtze river to safety at sea. They communicated with London through Singapore and Irene Irons – once an Admiralty radio operator – donated this display in 1999, the fiftieth anniversary of the event.

Around the corner is the Air Force Passage leading to the patio. Two large charts show the WWII inventories of Fighter and Bomber Command, and the badges of their squadrons. To the right above them, is a badge-plaque of [98 Squadron RAF](#), donated by the former BC Lieutenant Governor Henry Bell-Irving in memory of his brother, Wing Commander Roderick Bell-Irving, whose bomber was shot down in 1944.

Left of the Dart Room door is the [Ultimate Honor](#). In 1943 a Mersserchmitt BF 109 piloted by Franz Stigler came upon a beat up Boeing B-17 flown by Charles Brown – and decided NOT to finish off the wounded American. They had lost power – were flying low – but he escorted them over the coastal anti-aircraft guns and part way across the English Channel. Many years later Brown, living in Seattle, traced Stigler to Surrey, BC. They met and became friends. Franz often attended Remembrance Day at the Billy and stood here to tell his story. Both died, 8 months apart, in 2008.

## **The Corridor**

If you go back to the front door you will find a hallway leading north. We have mounted the pictures of all the [Canadian casualties in Afghanistan](#) beside the door to the office. We would welcome the donation of pictures and/or badge-plaques to serve as memorials to those troops.

Further down, on the left are period photographs of people who attended conventions in Vancouver of that predecessor to the Legion, the British Empire Service League. Clearly these pictures date from before the adoption of the current Legion uniform.

By the patio door is a print of the [Vimy Ridge Memorial](#). The eerie moonlight shows ghosts of some of the 66,665 Canadians who died in the 1914-1918 war. It belonged to General Foster and was donated by his great grandson Cary Macdonald in 1999.

The staircase opposite leads up to more pictures, and to the Buerling Bar and the Hall (which are not part of this Quick Tour.) If you are standing at the foot of the stairs, look up at the photograph of the wall.

It shows men of [426 "Thunderbird" Squadron RCAF](#) in 1944. They are lined up around and on a Lancaster bomber. 100 of them are standing on the wings. Shows the strength of that workhorse of Bomber Command!

*A Short History and Tour, 1998, John A. Macdonald, Leanne Frid. Updates: Ron Crawley, Derek Irons, Arthur Hughes.  
Revised 2015: Derek Allen, Archivist. Online publication 2016: Jennelyn Boyadjian.*