



THE Argylls

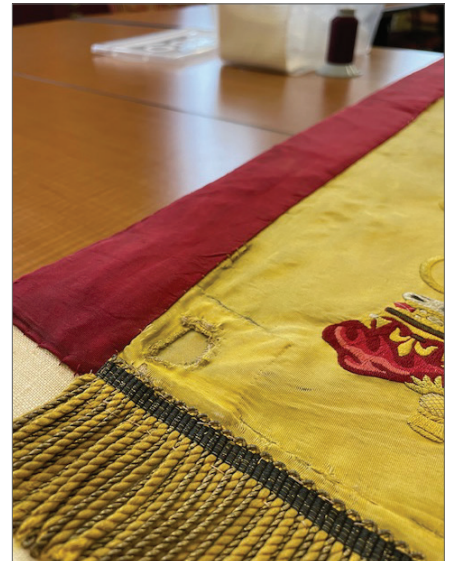
THE ARGYLL AND SUTHERLAND HIGHLANDERS
OF CANADA (PRINCESS LOUISE'S)



Major Dave Currie (left of centre, South Alberta Regiment holding a revolver) accepting the surrender of German troops at Saint-Lambert-sur-Dives, France, 19 August 1944. CSM George Mitchell, C Company Argylls (with his back to the camera speaks with a German officer. In his private diary, he wrote: *"First night dark. Ammo trucks are on fire, explosions terrific, shelling still heavy — town lit up in flames — we take prisoners — wounded badly — got them back. We have more casualties."* Of the three days of battle there, it was "such utter desolation ... Dead Germans cover the streets ... ghastly sights, and fire has been terrific.... Germans fought to a finish and are giving up in groups of 500 at a time ... all look terrible ... Germans killed in thousands."

CASE FOR SUPPORT

REGIMENTAL MUSEUM & ARCHIVES



Kilts and bagpipes are merely the distinctive symbols of a tradition rooted in Canadian military history for over 200 years



What is the Regiment?

Kilts and bagpipes are merely the distinctive symbols of a tradition rooted in Canadian military history for over 200 years – the Highland regiment. Since Confederation, the Highland Regiment has been most closely identified with the militia. In 1856, a Highland Rifle Company – forerunner of the present regiment – was formed in Hamilton. As a result of broad community support and effective political organization, the Regiment was formed on 13 Sept. 1903 and gazetted three days later as the 91st Regiment Canadian Highlanders.



In 1909, the 91st moved into its new quarters, the large addition to the armouries at 200 James Street North. During the First World War, the federal government ignored the existing militia units and mobilized numbered battalions. Thus, the Regiment acted as a recruiting depot, providing 145 officers and 5,207 men of other ranks for service in the numbered battalions of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), especially the 16th and 19th, and the 173rd Highlanders. It perpetuates the 19th and the 173rd. The latter was broken up for reinforcements, the former, commanded successively by Hamiltonians from the 91st. All told, the 19th and the various machine-gun companies and the 3rd Machine Gun Battalion lost 1,374 soldiers; over three times that number were wounded. The Regiment was less than two decades old, and already a significant part of its history had been written in the blood of young Canadians.

The government settled the debate over the militia's future in 1920. The pre-war militia units remained, perpetuating the numbered battalions of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. The 91st would remain one of Hamilton's regiments. The name evolved and, in 1927, it became The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada (Princess Louise's)

The Western world found itself at war again in 1939, and Canada was part of it. So too were the Argylls, the unit mobilized in 1940 and went into action in July 1944. Losses were inescapable, and casualties were as constant as the need for reinforcements. Through France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany, the Argylls succeeded despite wholesale turnovers. For Capt Sam Chapman, it was a history "*bought by blood.*" Of the approximately 3,300 men who served, there were 288 killed, 808 wounded, 72 taken prisoner, and over 200 injured or left because of illness, for a total of 1,638 (or 41%) of those who served.

Kusten Canal, Germany. The Argylls fought in this area from 20 to 22 April 1945, suffering 79 casualties. In the fighting from 14 April to 6 May, they had 219. In those weeks, there was, as one veteran put it, "*little rest and a great deal of bitter, unpleasant fighting.*"

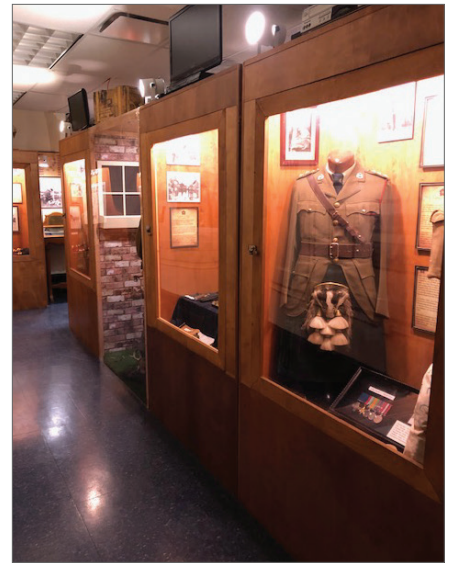
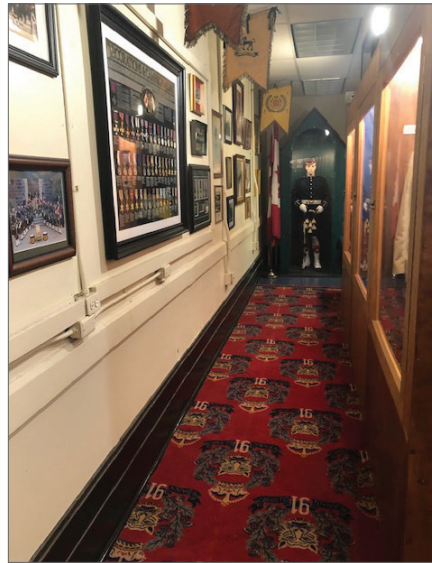
[Note: the quotation in red is from an interview with an Argyll Second War veteran, which was taped and transcribed in the 1980s, and digitized recently. The tapes are in the Archives and will be mounted on the Argyll website.]

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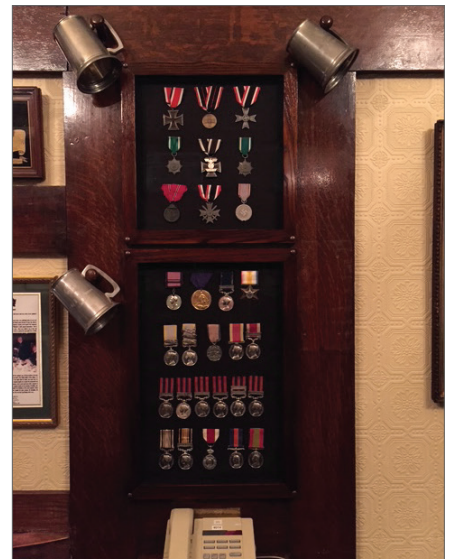
Argyll Sgt (then Cpl) Kris Downie, Afghanistan, 2006-07.

In the 1970s and 1980s, a few Argylls went to Cyprus and Germany. In 1998, 66 Argylls served during the Ontario ice storm. From the 1990s, the operational role increased dramatically, with 26 deployed to the former Yugoslavia and over 60 to Afghanistan. Significantly, the unit received a battle honour for Afghanistan. Since 2014, 34 have served in Ukraine, Latvia, and the Middle East, while large numbers have been deployed for natural disasters, the pandemic, and the settlement of Syrian refugees.



The case for the Argyll Museum and Archives

In three years (2028), the Regiment will celebrate its 125th anniversary. Since 1903, there have been few comparable surviving Hamilton organizations and institutions. Claude Bissell, a long-time president of the University of Toronto and distinguished scholar, and an Argyll veteran of the Second War, wrote "of the regiment as a pattern of memories and as an association of human beings." "Infantry regiments," he thought, "invite this kind of consideration; for an infantry regiment consists of little except human beings...."



The unit moved to Caen, France, on 28 July 1944. As one veteran said, **"This is where I realized that we were in the war."** For another, **"I always remember the rubble and the destruction ... what war was really like ... it was unbelievable."** **"The destruction and the stench,"** an Argyll recalled, **"I can still smell it after 40 years."** CSM George Mitchell wrote: **"Caen smashed – leaves one with hopeless feeling – utter destruction."**

[Note: the quotations are from interviews with Argyll veterans and one veteran's diary. Pictures may be worth a thousand words, but the words of the veterans who witnessed the carnage provide a context and a cogency not otherwise possible.]



"Bought by blood"

Happily, peace rather than war has marked most of the contours of the Regiment's existence. What distinguishes the Argylls from most institutions and organizations in civil society is the incontrovertible fact that major chapters of its history were "bought by blood." It is too easy and woefully inadequate to commemorate service and sacrifice with mere names and numbers. There needs to be more. More is impossible without history, and history is impossible without the museums and archives that make it possible.

The Regiment reflects the face of Canada, whether combating natural disasters (as 66 Argylls did during the 1998 ice storm) or augmenting UN or NATO deployments. In the 1970s and 1980s, 5 Argylls went to Cyprus and 3 to Germany. From the 1990s, the Regiment's operational role increased dramatically, with 26 deployed to the former Yugoslavia and over 60 to Afghanistan. On 22 October 2014, Cpl Nathan Cirillo was murdered while standing vigil at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Ottawa. Argylls served on Ops UNIFIER (2015–25) in Ukraine – 9; REASSURANCE in Latvia (2014–) – 9; and IMPACT (2014–25) in the Middle East – 16. They contributed a platoon and headquarters to LENTUS (natural disasters); a platoon and headquarters to LASER (COVID-19 pandemic); and headquarters to PROVISION (settlement of Syrian refugees, 2015–16). The Argyll tradition is defined by its greatest leader, Lt-Col Dave Stewart: **"I figured my battalion was there to save lives, get a job done."**



Medal set of Pipe Major G Howieson, 173rd Battalion CEF, as originally displayed (left) and refurbished with notes regarding his personal and service life (right).



Barnes wrote, “We have had no sleep for three days.” The 19th attacked three times between 1:15 and 7:45 p.m. ... It was “pretty,” Barnes said. Then the Germans “opened up on them. It was a shame.” The 19th held its position until British troops attacked at 9:00 a.m. on the 11th and German artillery fired. “It was awful,” Barnes recalled. “Men were cut to pieces.”

19th Battalion Monument dedication, Rieux-en-Cambresis, France, 23 Sep 2017.

[Note: good archives make good history possible. The quotes in the text of this monument enliven the history for its readers as they do for the text of the Hyons plaque on the next page. It would be impossible without the archival foundation.]

“Well hey, I wonder what it was like?”

Pte John “Mac” MacKenzie, a working-class kid from the north end of Hamilton, was an Argyll Second War veteran who served from 1940 to 1946. In the 1980s, he was a member of the Regiment’s History Committee, which was tasked with establishing a Regimental Museum and Archives. Interviewed for the oral history project involving veterans, he said: “I would never go again, believe me. I would never go in combat again ... Three things are important to me: I want to live to be a hundred [he did not], and this book’s [Black Yesterdays] got to be printed [it was in 1996], and this [Regimental] Museum’s got to be opened ... I guess somebody will walk through ... some day and say, “well hey, I wonder what it was like. Maybe we’re going to find out what it was like. And I hope they’ll never find out....”

In recent years and months, Canadian history has been a subject of ongoing public and political debate and concern. The Canadian Institute for Historical Education is an example of a relatively new organization urging public engagement with Canada’s past. Concurrent with this renewed interest is a concern about the state of the federal archives and its critical relationship to the writing of Canadian history. Archives matter! The renowned historian, Charlotte Gray, published an editorial in the *Globe and Mail* on 7 June 2025 entitled “BROKEN RECORDS The study of Canada’s recent past has become ‘almost impossible.’ Will a new national archives change things for the better?” On 27 June 2025, another well-known popular Canadian historian, Mark Bourrie, published an article in *The Walrus* “Canada’s Archives Are in Trouble—and So Is Its History.” The state of the archives is crucial to the state of the history. If the history matters, so, too, do the archives.

Pte MacKenzie’s wish about the Regimental Museum and Archives and its relationship to understanding what “a history bought by blood” means came true because of the museum and archives that facilitate a critical understanding of the Regiment’s history. There are several cogent testaments to this essential truth. Near the Argyll Commemorative Pavilion at Bayfront Park, the Argyll Regimental Foundation (ARF) erected two large display panels. They provide visual and textual context to the service and sacrifice honoured by the pavilion. More to the point is the content itself (see attached). Rather than a recitation of names and dates with an array of images, mainly ceremonial, it is an unvarnished story of war and battle, and their terrible cost.

Hyon 10-11 November/novembre 1918

Near Hyon, young Georges Licope welcomed the troops. "We are Canadians," they said. They were "our liberators ... all these boys had enlisted freely ... and fate would [have it] that they brought freedom to us."

It is a long way from Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, to Hyon. Canada declared war in August 1914, and the 19th Battalion was raised as part of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. The 91st Canadian Highlanders, a kilted Hamilton regiment (later The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada), provided the battalion's command structure, its pipe band, and a rifle company. Sent overseas in May 1915 and to France in September, it first saw action in 1916.

The 19th attacked Hyon on the 10th. The German occupiers were ordered "to fight to the finish." Lieutenant Joe O'Neill believed that they fought "as well as any troops we had ever seen." The 19th penetrated Hyon on the fifth attempt. O'Neill entered the Licope home on the 11th at 10:58 a.m. and told Georges's mother: "Madame, 11 heures, guerre finie."

Back in Hamilton, "great crowds moved to the [city's] heart" to celebrate, but in Hyon, O'Neill thought that "no one believed it." Lance Corporal John Gaetz was surprised: "There was not the enthusiasm one might expect." Lieutenant C. H. Mitchell struggled to take it in: "You were fighting ... and men being killed ... It was impossible to realize ... [it] was over." The 19th lost 16 killed and 36 wounded. The dead were buried here two days after victory.

An official expressed local feeling: "Never we shall forget the courageous Canadians of the 19th An indissoluble bond ... shall now unite our Country with Canada."

The war was over, but the journey home took months. The 19th reached Canada on 22 May 1919 and was demobilized three days later at a military ceremony in Toronto, Ontario. Private Ed Youngman described the 19th's last parade as "a beautiful sight." Of the 5,122 men who had served, 3,076 were casualties, including 737 killed. "I can only say that War is an awful thing and the hardships are great," Private Deward Barnes later wrote, "and there is something wrong if a man has seen as much of it as I have and wishes to see another. Private V. E. Thompson thought the war "was simply a matter of being lucky enough to come through alive and being able to endure the strain of the life." Gaetz wrote of the "friendship of the genuine sort built up" and the acute awareness that "much [will be] appreciated afterward and never forgotten."

Erected by the Argyll Regimental Foundation in memory of the soldiers of the 19th Battalion and their allies who died here. Dedicated by The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada, 11 November 2018.



Hyon 10-11 November/novembre 1918

Près de Hyon, le jeune Georges Licope accueille les troupes. « Nous sommes Canadiens, » ont-ils déclaré. Ils étaient « nos libérateurs ... tous ces gars s'étaient engagés volontairement... et le destin [a voulu] qu'ils nous apportent la liberté. »

La route est longue de Hamilton en Ontario au Canada à Hyon. Le Canada ayant déclaré la guerre en août 1914, le 19th Battalion est mis sur pied pour faire partie du Corps expéditionnaire canadien. Le 91st Canadian Highlanders, (connu plus tard sous le nom des Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada) un régiment de Hamilton dont les soldats portent le kilt, assure la structure de commande du bataillon et fournit son orchestre de cornemuse ainsi qu'une compagnie de fusiliers. Envoyé outre-mer en mai 1915, puis en France en septembre, le bataillon entre en action pour la première fois en 1916.

Le 19th Battalion attaque Hyon le 10 novembre. Les occupants allemands ont reçu l'ordre « de se battre jusqu'au bout. » Le lieutenant Joe O'Neill estime qu'ils ont lutté « aussi fort que toutes les autres troupes qu'on avait vues. » Le 19th Battalion pénètre dans Hyon à la cinquième tentative.

O'Neill entre dans la maison des Licope le 11 novembre à 10 h 58 et annonce à la mère de Georges : « Madame, 11 heures, guerre finie. » À Hamilton, « des foules immenses se dirigent vers le centre [de la ville] » pour fêter, mais à Hyon, O'Neill pense que « personne n'y croyait. » Le caporal suppléant John Raymond Gaetz s'étonne : « L'enthousiasme auquel on pouvait s'attendre n'y était pas. » Le lieutenant C. H. Mitchell a du mal à saisir ce qui se passe : « On se battait... des hommes se faisaient tuer ... Il n'y avait pas moyen de comprendre... [que] c'était fini. »

Le 19th Battalion compte 16 morts et 36 blessés. Les morts sont enterrés en ce lieu deux jours après la victoire. Un officiel exprime le sentiment de la population locale : « Jamais nous n'oublierons les courageux Canadiens du 19th Battalion... Un lien indissoluble... unira désormais notre pays au Canada. »

La guerre est finie, mais le voyage de retour au pays dure des mois. Le 19th Battalion arrive au Canada le 22 mai 1919; il est démobilisé trois jours plus tard lors d'une cérémonie militaire à Toronto en Ontario. Le soldat Ed Youngman qualifie l'ultime défilé du 19th Battalion de « beau spectacle. » Parmi les 5 122 hommes qui ont servi, on compte 3 076 victimes, dont 737 morts. « Tout ce que je peux dire c'est que la guerre est une chose terrible et que les épreuves sont rudes; » déclare le soldat Deward Barnes de retour chez lui, « quelque chose ne va pas quand on en a vu autant que moi mais on veut que ça recommence. » Le soldat V. E. Thompson estime que la guerre « n'est qu'une question de chance de s'en sortir vivant et de pouvoir supporter les tensions de la vie guerrière. » Gaetz écrit sur « l'amitié sincère qui se construit » et la conscience aiguë que « par la suite on appréciera bien des choses et on ne les oubliera jamais. »

Plaque érigée par l'Argyll Regimental Foundation à la mémoire des soldats du 19th Battalion et de ses alliés qui périrent en ce lieu. Inaugurée par les Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada, le 11 novembre 2018.

The ARF erected four plaques in France and Belgium commemorating the 19th Battalion's efforts in the First War. All too often, such endeavours are bloodless monuments to battles of the past, conveying no sense of the experience or how this group came to be there. The Argyll monuments are different because they go beyond prosaic history (see attached). Again, the museum and archives make it possible.

Alex John Laba was born in 1945 and named after his uncle, Pte Alex Eli Laba, who died on 6 December 1944 of wounds suffered the previous day. Alex Laba was a labourer in a Grimsby basket factory before enlisting in 1940. The news of his death devastated the family. The family, however, **"never talked about him."** Alex found out when he was older, "talking to my aunts ... It was funny, they never talked [about his uncle], but the battalion picture [of the Argylls] of 1940 hung in the hallway of their house." He was **"killed in the war and that was it."** But that, in the end, was not it! Pte Laba's long biography of a short life is on ARF's website – <http://argylls.ca/history/labla>.

"People now realize if you don't have anything written down, it will just disappear."

– Alex John Laba on the biography of his uncle, Pte Alex Eli Laba, who died of wounds on 6 December 1944

A casually dressed Lt-Col Millen, DSO, (seated) enjoys a laugh with fellow officers in a trench. He commanded the 19th Battalion, from December 1916 to demobilization in May 1919. He wrote of battle that "it is a hard, hard game and I hope the day is not very distant in the future when it will all be over. So many of our best and finest going."



"In action one has the very close comradeship of men who have submerged all their petty and selfish differences. They are rather out of place amongst the death and destruction of war.... Every day ... men performed what would seem like heroic deeds in civilian life and which were natural and seemed insignificant. Men risked their lives to save a comrade, went out of their way to help others....The old saying 'Eat, Drink, and be Merry as to-morrow you may die' was never truer [than] out there."

– Cpl Harry Ruch

The Argyll Museum and Archives have, since their inception in the 1980s, fulfilled their promise to collect, to catalogue, to display, to preserve, and to disseminate with remarkable success. But the fourth object is threatened with disappearance from physical decay. This case for support addresses the compelling justification for a good museum and archives – a good history. Funding for the activities outlined in the Director's report (see attached) explains what is required to ensure that what is written down and what is recorded (in sound or image) does not disappear.