

## Chapter 14 On the Home Front

Although the Active Service Company of the 6th left for the east in 1940 it never lost its connection to its home in Vancouver. Besides the family and friend connections, there were two organizations that maintained the links to home. One was the Sappers Auxiliary and the other the Reserve Company of the 6<sup>th</sup>.

### Sappers Auxiliary

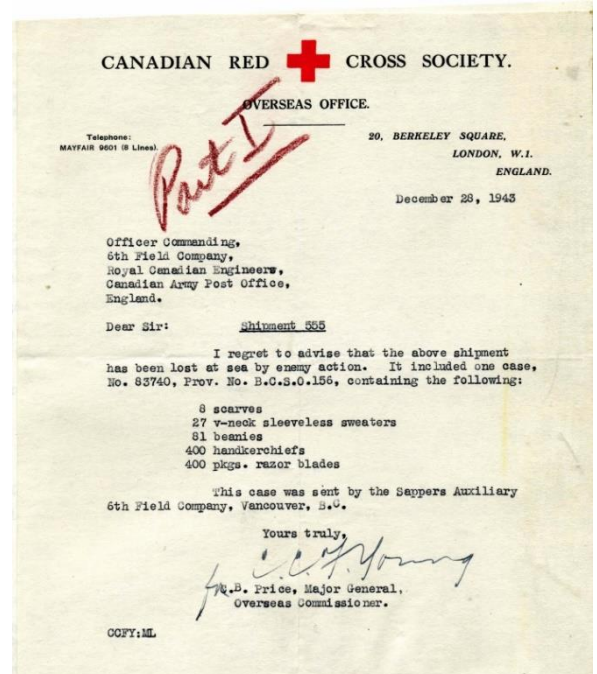
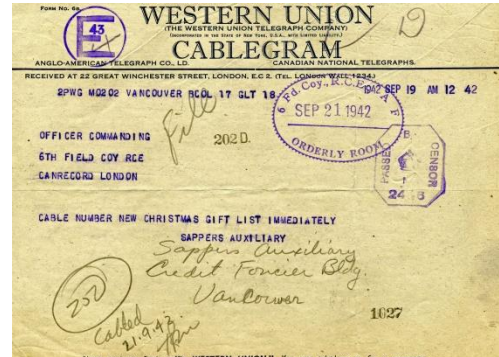
The first of these was the Sappers Auxiliary. Originally formed before the Second World War the Sappers Auxiliary became much more active with the declaration of war. Formed by families and friends of the unit its offices were in the Credit Foncier Building in Vancouver in space provided by Major Kinmond. It held social events for the families left behind including Christmas parties, summer teas and picnics. Both before the unit left for Debert and after.



Major Robert Duff Kinmond and his wife Barbara (6FESMA)

But its most important activity seems to have involved raising money to send "comforts" to the men deployed overseas. Most of these comforts consisted of practical items such as sweaters, socks, razor blades and scarves. And cigarettes. These were shipped by train across Canada and then by freighter across the Atlantic. Most but not all of these shipments made it.

Active in the organization were Major Robert Duff Kinmond M.C. and his wife Barbara, Also active were a number of the wives including Mrs Johnston, Mrs Douglas, Mrs McAlister, Mrs Crompton, Mrs Horwood and Mrs Rose Fisher Smith. Support, both moral and financial, was provided by people like Lt Col James Pemberton Fell.



Left - Miss Jean Taylor with Dip a Dime & Capt Chambers daughter



Right - Flower Stall with Mrs Johnston, Douglas and MacAlister (6FESMA)

Sappers Auxiliary Vancouver Garden Party on 22 Jul 1942

## 6<sup>th</sup> Reserve Field Company

When 6 Field Company left for Debert in the fall of 1940 the North Vancouver Drill and its building complex were initially occupied by 4 Field Park and then by an artillery searchlight unit tasked with the defence of the Vancouver Harbour.

After a time it was realized that the engineer detachments from the 4<sup>th</sup> Fortress Company (Electrical and Mechanical) under the Command of Major Kinmond working in Vancouver would have to be augmented with more engineers.

So in mid 1941 plans were put in motion to disband the 4<sup>th</sup> Fortress Company and use its personnel to form the nucleus of a reserve company of the 6<sup>th</sup>. This policy was in line with the policy adopted by most of the Canadian infantry regiments. By 1941 most of these had a 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on Active Duty (many overseas), and a 2<sup>nd</sup> reserve battalion in their old drill hall.

And so the process started. On July 15, 1941 the 4<sup>th</sup> Fortress Company was disbanded and its personnel were told that they would form the core of the reserve company of the 6<sup>th</sup>. At that time the 4<sup>th</sup>'s unit strength stood at roughly 7 officers and 65 men. However, as the 6<sup>th</sup> reserve company was not formed on the 15<sup>th</sup> the sappers in the 4<sup>th</sup> continued to function as though they hadn't been disbanded. In fact, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, only 5 days after the unit officially ceased to exist the 4<sup>th</sup> Fortress Company sent an officer and 24 men including CSM Calli and CQMS Rosser to the Annual Engineer Camp in Alberta Head on Vancouver Island. This situation continued until well after the 6<sup>th</sup> Field Company was officially re-constituted on November 21, 1941. Much of the delay was reportedly caused by the difficulty of finding a suitable officer to command the 6<sup>th</sup>. As was noted by a staff officer in M.D. 11 in a letter to the Officer Commanding the 39<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Infantry Brigade Group headquartered in Vancouver "...considerable correspondence in the matter passed between this Headquarters and N.D.H.Q."

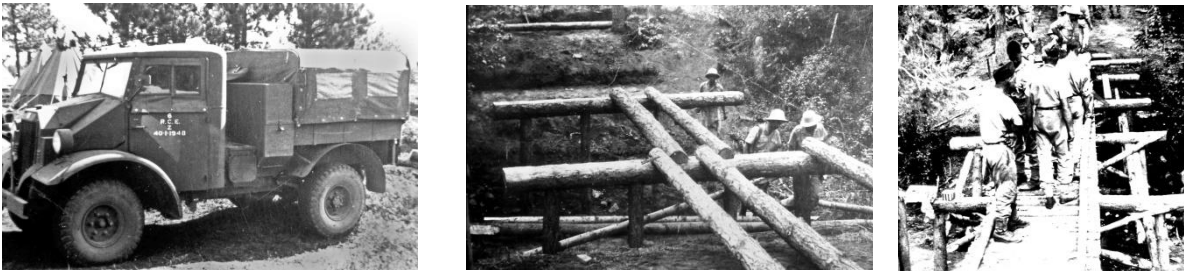
Finally a sapper officer, Major J.R. Grant, was appointed and on January 8<sup>th</sup> 1942 with orders issued to form the reserve company of the 6<sup>th</sup>, including absorbing the 4<sup>th</sup> Fortress Company personnel. By this time the strength of the 4<sup>th</sup> had dropped to 1 officer and 45 ORs, all of whom were absorbed into the 6<sup>th</sup>.

With the simultaneous Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor, Hong Kong and Malaysia and Japanese forces in the Aleutians, interest in the Reserve force was intense. By June 30<sup>th</sup> 1942 the strength of the 6<sup>th</sup> Reserve Field Company stood at 5 officers, 7 sergeants and lance sergeants, 24 corporals and lance corporals and 169 sappers. Because the North Vancouver Drill Hall was still occupied by the artillery another home had to be found. Space was found when the Japanese Hall on Alexander Street in Vancouver was confiscated by the Canadian government in early 1942. It would be their home for the rest of the war.



Timber Bridge constructed by 6 Fd Coy R.C.E. Reserves in the summer of 1942 (6FESMA)

The 6<sup>th</sup> Reserve Field Company was part of the 39<sup>th</sup> Reserve Brigade Group headquartered in the Bessborough Armouries. It consisted of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions of the local infantry regiments and a number of other reserve units. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalions being overseas. The primary role of these reserve force units was the defense of vital and vulnerable points and general security duties.



Timber Bridge constructed by 6 Fd Coy R.C.E. Reserves in 1943 (6FESMA)

As long as the Japanese presented a realistic threat to the West Coast and the war went against the Allies interest in the reserves remained high. In 1942 the annual training days was increased from 30 days to 40, with an extra 15 to 21 days for officers, NCOs and specialists. However in 1943 after a sting of Allied victories interest dropped off. And like most of the units in the 39<sup>th</sup> Reserve Brigade Group the 6<sup>th</sup>'s strength began to drop. Still compared to many it remained strong. Between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of July 1945 the company sent 70 personnel to the annual summer camp at the Engineer Training Centre in Chilliwack.



Floating Bailey Bridge constructed by 6 Fd Coy R.C.E. Reserves in 1945 (6FESMA)

Within a month of the camp the Japanese war ended. With the end of the war the Active Force members of the 6<sup>th</sup> came home. With the re-activation of the 6<sup>th</sup> in 1946 it's members included not only former members of the Active Force 6<sup>th</sup> and new members but a few of the former members of the 6 Field Company Royal Canadian Engineers (Reserve Force).

#### **Major John Robert Grant M.C. (1878-1957)**



John Grant was born in Elora Ontario on 18 December 1878 and obtained his engineering degree from Queen's University. In 1904 he started work as a draughtsman with Hamilton Bridge in Ontario. In 1907 he joined the American Bridge Company and moved to New York where he worked on bridges throughout the United States. He first visited Vancouver in 1906 and in 1910 was asked by the City of Vancouver to prepare plans and specifications for a bridge across False Creek. He then changed employers and from 1910 to the start of the First World War worked on local projects including the river dykes for Delta and Dewdney.

When the war came he went to England and in 1915 joined the Royal Engineers. He was awarded the Military Cross for bravery on 28 December 1917. He was captured by the Germans during their 1918 Spring Offensive. He later escaped from a German Prisoner of War Camp by tunnelling out of the camp but was re-captured and sent to another camp on an island in the Baltic Sea.

After the war he returned to Vancouver. He was the senior engineer during the construction of the Burrard Street bridge between 1930 and 1932 and was responsible for the large lamps at the ends of the span. These are a tribute to WWI prisoners of war, who huddled around similar open fires in their prison camps. The current lamps are 1965 replacements, as the originals had to be removed in 1963 because of corrosion.

When the Second World War arrived he joined the RCE reserves and from early 1942 to late 1945 was the Officer Commanding the 6 Field Company RCE (Reserve). During most of this time he remained active in civil engineering.

His plans for the Granville Street Bridge were accepted in 1949 and he retired in 1954 after its completion. He passed away on 13 July 1957 after a lengthy illness.

## **Defence of British Columbia from 1942 to 1945**

At the time of the simultaneous Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbour, Hong Kong, Manila and Malaysia in December 1941 the defences in British Columbia were relatively light. There were some coastal gun positions, a few air force squadrons and the naval base in Esquimalt. The only army units were the reserve units of 11 Military District.

In early 1942 this had all changed. Two of the three Home Defence Divisions had been moved to British Columbia. In March the 6th Canadian Division arrived and was headquartered in Esquimalt with brigades in Nanaimo and Port Alberni. In late 1942 they were joined by the 8th Canadian Division with brigades in Terrace and Prince Rupert. Although both Divisions were under strength they represented a substantial increase in the number of troops on the coast.

At the same time the strength of the 39th Reserve Brigade Group dramatically increased. It was tasked with the defence of Vancouver.

Simultaneously the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers were formed which at their peak had 138 small companies in the province. This organization was similar to England's Home Guard of 1940 and provided local guides for both the Active Service Force and Reserve troops in their areas.

Additional air force squadrons were deployed to the west coast with modern fighter, bomber and maritime patrol aircraft. These were soon active off the coast looking for Japanese submarines.

By mid 1943 the war was going against the Axis and bit by bit the forces in BC were reduced. The first to go was the 8th Division, which was disbanded in October 1943. The 6th Canadian Division was then steadily reduced in size and disbanded in January 1945. The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers were disbanded in September 1945. The 39th Reserve Brigade Group would soldier on into 1946 and many of its personnel would become later part of Canada's post war reserve army.

***39th (Reserve) Brigade Group***  
***Formed: 1 Apr 1942***

***Headquarters: Vancouver, BC***  
***Disbanded: 31 Mar 1946***

### ***Canadian Infantry Corps***

*2nd (Reserve) Battalion, The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada*

*2nd (Reserve) Battalion, The Irish Fusiliers of Canada (Vancouver Regiment)*

*2nd (Reserve) Battalion, The Canadian Scottish Regiment (MG)*

### ***Canadian Armoured Corps***

*30th (Reserve) Reconnaissance Regiment (Essex Regiment (Tank))*

*9th (Reserve) Armoured Regiment (British Columbia Dragoons)*

### ***Royal Canadian Artillery***

*39th (Reserve) Field Regiment, RCA*

### ***Royal Canadian Engineers***

*6th (Reserve) Field Company, RCE*

### ***Royal Canadian Army Service Corps***

*Brigade Group Company, 6th (Reserve) Divisional Signals, RCASC*

### ***Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps***

*No.13 (Reserve) Field Ambulance, RCAMC*

### ***Royal Canadian Corps of Signals***

*E and J sections, No.9 (Reserve) Fortress Signal Company, RCCS*

### ***Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps / Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers***

*No.2 Group, No.11 (Reserve) Divisional Workshop, (RCOC) RCEME*

*No.33 (Reserve) Light Aid Detachment (Type A), (RCOC) RCEME*

*No.34 (Reserve) Light Aid Detachment (Type B), (RCOC) RCEME*

*No.35 (Reserve) Light Aid Detachment (Type B), (RCOC) RCEME*

*No.36 (Reserve) Light Aid Detachment (Type B), (RCOC) RCEME*