

The Manitoba Dragoons in Bramley



Compiled by Bramley History Society as a tribute to all those
who fought in World War II

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With special thanks

To Gord Sim, Secretary, and the staff of the
26 Field Regiment XII Manitoba Dragoons Museum, Brandon,
Manitoba, Canada, the people of Bramley, and everyone
else who has made a contribution, and to
Eric Hill of the BHS for the photographs of Bramley today, and
for producing this booklet.

Evelyn Hodgson
Bramley History Society, Bramley, Surrey
November 2006

Bramley in 1942

Bramley is a village in the county of Surrey three miles south of Guildford. In the 1940's the population would have been between two and two and a half thousand. At that time it was a mostly farming community with some light industry, with the main A281 road from Guildford to Horsham and then to the South coast going through it.



The 'Jolly Farmer' and further along 'The Wheatsheaf'

When the Manitoba Dragoons arrived in the Bramley area, Britain had been at war for over two years.

The men of fighting age were all at war, the unfit, the young and the old men joined voluntary organisations to make their contribution to the war effort. People were often working long hours or doing "war work" at night as well as their daytime job.

Gas masks were distributed, air raid shelters dug, blackout at night was implemented. The men volunteered for the police and fire services and joined the Home Guard and trained to defend our shores. At night Air Raid Precaution volunteers patrolled the streets and neighbours organised fire watching. The Red Cross and the Women's Voluntary

Service were very active, and there were numerous fund raising events in the village. Youth groups were very active collecting waste paper, conkers⁽¹⁾, and rosehips⁽²⁾ for the war effort.

Women as well as men were required to register for war work. Many worked in factories locally and as land girls on the farms. Food was very short and like clothing and petrol was rationed, and as much land as possible was dug up to grow food. Rationing became more and more severe and was worse after the war and finally finished in 1952.

Evacuees arrived from London and elsewhere, and were billeted all over the village; there was only room for all the children in the village to have half a day at the village school. The next influx was the army, first British and then Canadian. People walked or bicycled, there were few cars or buses due to petrol shortages. At times the roads were filled with convoys of lorries and tanks, from the various army camps. The structure of the village was very different to what it had been in peacetime with many outsiders living amongst the Bramley villagers.

(1)'conkers' are the fruit (nuts) of the horse chestnut tree.

(2)'rosehips' were used to make a syrup.

“Dear old Bramley”

Bramley, November 1942-June 1943

Captions on aerial photographs tell us that the dragoons were stationed at Bramley in Surrey, England from November 1942 to June 1943. Four photographs stuck in a book with the words “Dear Old Bramley”

Several aerial pictures have been found taken in April 1943. A caption under one reads:-

“On Nov 1st the regt moved to requisitioned houses and mansions in Bramley. Here we are in one of the loveliest parts of England and the men found it very pleasant to live amongst such friendly rural surroundings especially after oppressive barrack atmosphere of Aldershot”

“XII Manitoba Dragoons: A Tribute” page 42

“On November 1, 1942 , the 18th Armoured Car Regiment under Lt. Colonel McMahon left Aldershot and was decentralized to the following estates and properties in Surrey:

Regimental Headquarters:	Snowdenhall (<i>sic</i>)
Headquarters Squadron:	Northanger
‘A’ Squadron:	Hallams at Blackheath
‘B’ Squadron:	Munstead Heath
‘C’ Squadron:	Unstead Park
‘D’ Squadron	Bramley Park

Since mobilization of the 18th Manitoba Armoured Car Regiment in 1941 the unit had an identity problem which persisted until the spring of 1943. Since formation, the volunteers had come mainly from the 2nd Armoured Car Regiment, the Manitoba Mounted Rifles, and the XII Manitoba Dragoons. These men still wore their original cap badges.” (*see Appendix - page 22*)

The original cap badges were:-

2 nd Armoured Car Regiment	a wheel with a wing on it
Manitoba Mounted Rifles	a Bulldog
XII Manitoba Dragoons	a Buffalo

The unit adopted the name XII Manitoba Dragoons from the senior regiment they were formed from and were then known as “18th Armoured Car Regiment (XII Manitoba Dragoons) and on April 5th



Snowdenham Hall, with Eastwater House and lake in the foreground



Bramley Park

1943 they had a parade in which the whole Regiment wore the charging buffalo of the Dragoons.

Douglas Fisher

Douglas Fisher - was a trooper in HQ Squadron, he describes life at Bramley, and meeting one of the locals and seeing Dunsfold aerodrome to the south built in twenty weeks by the Canadian forces opening in October 1942

"I fell in love with the building and garden at Northanger (House). Early in '43 I returned to regt. HQ sq. at the edge of Godalming in Northanger House, the property we were told of the Cunard family.

When the regt sailed from Halifax I was left behind because no gas mask fitted me and I came over later from Borden in a draft in late December 1942. Literally I walked out of the armoured corps reinforcement depot at Aldershot in mid-Jan and snuck a jeep ride to the Godalming-Bramley neighbourhood in Surrey where the regt was split in six parts at six estates. There I found my way back to HQ and a welcoming Sgt Major Vanderlip and shortly went on the regimental roll as an "apprentice shoemaker."

"I had pals in B sq. next door. Mechler, encouraged by Berman, decided to get part of the golf course at Bramley going, and when I came back to the regt. he was deep into it, helped of course by the troopers eager to play. The problem in getting things cleared away was not so much equipment—golf balls and clubs came much easier than grass-mowers. Nevertheless the main problem was what the English rain did in overproducing verdure on the fairways and greens. Anyway, as I recall not a full nine holes was ever played but at least four or five fairways and greens were playable and a bright future loomed for this golf bonanza when you know what happened—we were jerked away, first to squat in the sand outside Aldershot in the shadow of the huge Iron Duke statue for some weeks before going north to Norfolk and our late summer and long fall on the famous Walpole properties."

"In one of my nights after the war at Bramley we walked up the street to a big pub which I didn't remember but found very pleasant and the talk at our end of the bar got on to the war, and I discovered that not

even the publican knew anything about the golf enterprise nor of the outdoor swimming pool the 12D guys were working up when moving came.”

“Aside from my having pals next door to Northanger at Munstead I also had two pals from home in the Lakehead in D squadron at Bramley Park.”

“The very narrow road from Northanger ran straight for a mile or so to come out in Bramley village. It was heavily cut-banked especially on the north side, and so it was for me as a walker it was just a long ditch topped by a high wall of greenery. One day coming back from visiting at D squadron I decided to climb up and see what was there. When I wormed through the growth there was a considerable farm and a rather elderly man slowly hoeing potatoes. We got to talking and I found out he’d been born on the farm almost 70 years ago and he loved the work, the locale, etc. I remarked that when he got tired of the quiet he was fortunate because it didn’t take long to get from Godalming to London’s attractions. He laughed, almost gleefully, telling me ‘I’ve never been, never wanted to go.’ Wow! I never felt that way, remembering how anxious I was as a small child to get to Winnipeg as soon as I could from our home in the Sioux Lookout bush.”

“On one of the trips back to Surrey I drove down to the old drome at Dunsfold. The base was not closely guarded; there were really a couple of janitors. It was a lovely piece of landscape and I hope it hasn’t gone into a housing development. It was from the hilltop on the way to Godalming where one could briefly see the drome that I saw my first Mustang fighter planes. They looked more like a Hurricane than a Spitfire but we’d heard nought about this aircraft until a pair of them went lancing over us and Northanger one morning. The proverbial English schoolboy know-it-all brought us up to snuff on the plane’s identity.”

“The ones we saw had RAF markings and later this fitted with what we heard at Farnborough from plane buffs there that the Yanks had decided that the Mustangs, built for the Brits’ needs, were better than anything they had and they took it up, accelerated production of these master fighters, and about 13 months after seeing them over Northanger we

were watching squadrons take off and head east a half hour or so after the B17 formations of 8th Airforce had gathered above Norfolk and the Wash, then straightened into tighter, path formation and went off, over the North Sea.”



Herb Schuppert sent this drawing from Les Jordan's 'Army Daze' book. He told us that someone told him to follow the fence to the billet entrance gate, and as he had more than his share of beer he kept going round saying it was the longest fence he ever saw!

Sergeant Caesar

Trooper Art Lyon of A Squadron

‘Sgt. Caesar was purchased for 10 bob just outside a pub at 11o’clock. The purchasers were Troopers Boatfield, Mackenzie, Spence and Nelson Smith.’

War Diary

Amersfoort, Holland 20th October 1945

A very big repeat draft destined for our home city, Winnipeg, left this morning. Lt. A B Megaw was in charge of the 115 other ranks, and included on the draft was H77000 Sgt Caesar P J, our Regt Mascot, who has been with the regt. all through the campaigning in North-West Europe. In this draft were many original members of the Regt, in fact one might say that it was the nucleus of the Regt.

Caesar goes to his blighty

Sergeant Caesar, formerly of 17th Troop of the 12th Manitoba Dragoons - probably the only sergeant in the Canadian Army who was loved by everybody - is dead.

Sergeant Caesar joined the Dragoons of the 18th Armoured Car regiment in 1942 at Bramley, England, when he was just a pup. Of doubtful parentage, he soon proved that he had all the qualities of a thoroughbred and was adopted by the unit as its official mascot.

He obtained periodic promotions officially through regimental orders and eventually achieved the rank of sergeant. He served with the regiment throughout the war and was a favorite of all ranks despite the many problems he created in his various exploits.

AWL too

At one time, while in France, "he was demoted" because he disappeared for a few days . "Must have been those French girls" one of his buddies observed. Later he was promoted again and given back his specially made jacket with the three stripes on it.

At war's end he received an honourable discharge and was awarded all service ribbons due him which he wore on a special harness along with his sergeant's stripes.

In reserve

He was brought back to Canada when the unit returned and was posted on reserve to Mr. and Mrs. Mc Kenzie of Rainy River, Ont. For the past few years he had been resident in Brucefield, Ont., where he became popular with the local community as he had been in the army.

As a veteran he was granted exception from buying or wearing a licence tag. He was also made a life member of the Humane Society in honor of his war service.

On March 10 Sergeant Caesar died at the age of 15 years.



*From a local newspaper of the time,
supplied by Herb
Schuppert*

Wings for Victory Week May 1943

This was a fund raising week, the villages of Bramley, Blackheath, Womersley and Shamley Green which raised over eighty three thousand pounds from various events for the war effort (*roughly equivalent to £3,000,000 in 2006*)



Grand scrappers—those lads up there. Show 'em we're fighters too . . . show 'em how we fight with them—with our work and our savings to help give them all the aircraft they need. Save more and help to straddle the target figure set for this district in "Wings for Victory" Week. Deny yourselves to save—help our district win its "Victory Wings"—with more and even more savings.

PUT EVERYTHING INTO IT—

3% Savings Bonds 1942-70
22% National War Bonds 1941-3
3% Defence Bonds
Savings Certificates
Savings Stamps
Post Office Savings Bank
Trustee Savings Bank

May 15th - 22nd

**HAMBLEDON
R.D.**

TARGET £250,000

The cost of 25 assorted aircraft



'Wings for Victory Week' in May 1943 was a series of fund raising events for the war effort. The band also played at a dance in Shalford, a neighbouring village during this week.

In a film made for the Manitoba Dragoons, a parade led out of Bramley Park is seen, with Sergeant Caesar running alongside.

They are led by the Dragoons pipe band, following are the local Home Guard, the A.R.P. (Air Raid Precautions) the Police, the firemen, the Red Cross, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides.

An ARP messenger boy remembers - "During one of the 'Weeks' we cadets were in a parade. We were led by a pipe band, the Manitoba Dragoons from the Park. There were the Home Guards, Fire Brigade, cadets etc. We formed outside St. Catherine's School."

A newspaper advertisement published by Hambledon Rural District Council to help the appeal

12th Manitoba Dragoons Bugle Band

Jack Simison - July 2006



Drummer nearest camera

Jack Simison

Behind Simison

Lyle Leslie

Behind Leslie

Roy Forsyth

Tenor Drummer front Rank

Jimmy Corbet

First Bugler front rank

Ray Cortens

Tenor drummer obscured by Leslie

Tony Kudar

Others unknown

The regiment was on its way by troop train to Debert NS prior to embarking for England. Regular exercise stops were made and the regiment de-trained and marched about accompanied by the band. We were a sensation at the Winnipeg stop, our best musical piece was Semper Fidelis (Always Faithful), which none of us knew was the marchpast of the U S Marines

The band's only problem was changing from 2/4 time to 4/4 time on the march. we regularly lost marching cadence to the dismay of everyone, especially Art Woodfield, who was the band's organiser, manager, and instructor.

Ubique Honor et Equis

Memories from Bramley

Here are some memories from Bramley villagers, they remember the Canadians, but in most cases not which regiments!

Children living near the army camps

"I remember the Manitoba Dragoons coming and setting up camp in Bramley Park, they were an armoured regiment and had a bulldog for their crest."

"We did not have much to do with the soldiers who we could see camped in tents in Bramley Park. I do remember the Canadians driving down Snowdenham Lane in their lorries. We used to run outside and chant "Have you got any gum chum?" and they used to give us chewing gum."

The Schoolchildren used to pass Bramley Park gates where there was always a soldier on duty.

"I remember the Canadian troops stationed at Bramley Park. There was always a soldier outside the gates. They used to collect Caporal cigarette packets and give them to the children as they passed on their way to school. On each packet was a picture of allied or enemy planes. They also made toys out of wood for the children in the infants' class."

"Sweet Caporal fag packets with their plane spotter silhouettes were eagerly cadged from the Canadians, or traded for souvenirs such as spent Sten gun bullets mined from the sandpit firing range behind the Bramley Fruit Farm at Thorncombe Lane."

"There were a lot of Canadians posted in the village. There was a sentry box at Home Park gates. It was here that I first saw a coloured man. He told the children ghost stories and would scare them with large eyes rolling. The children were always treated well by the military and during wartime and no harm came to them."

People invited Canadian soldiers for Sunday tea.

"We kept pigs on the smallholding as well as chickens, which provided income. My father used to collect waste from the army camps (I think most of the Canadian troops were from the Engineering Regiments). They gave my father extra food including tins of peaches. The soldiers used to throw away the fruit and drink the fruit juice."

“My Mother used to have six Canadian soldiers visit us regularly each week-end, including Christmas. We children used to be taken back to their camp and watch films.”

People were asked to give the Canadian soldiers Sunday tea.

“My granny used to have a soldier, at least one, for tea, or just for a cup of tea or cocoa. You could not buy a thing. People went hungry and there was barely enough food to go round, so we did not have them coming to us. The soldiers used to walk round the villages in twos and threes and would give us children sticks of chewing gum from Canada. I wanted the war to go on for a long time so that I should be old enough to marry a Canadian soldier.”

“My mother used to have two or three soldiers to tea on Sundays. One young man wrote to his sister in Canada who sent us food parcels He was later killed.”

January 2nd 1943 A Christmas party

This party was organised for 300 children in the private boarding school for girls in the village. The speech Hall was used for many social events as the village hall had been taken over as the NAAFI for the soldiers.

The local paper records that ‘After carol singing the children sat down to a tea at tables laden with good things and overlooked by a large Christmas tree, beautifully decorated and illuminated with fairy lights. Witheyman’s band accompanied by several talented Canadian musicians provided music. One of the most popular features of the party was an electrically lit camp fire, around which the children sat while Trooper Bill Ritchie, a real Canadian cowboy, sang hill-billy songs with guitar accompaniment.’

The train bombing

On December 16th around two o'clock a two carriage passenger train was bombed by a lone German Dornier plane as it pulled into Bramley Station. The driver, the fireman and six passengers died in the attack.



XII Manitoba Dragoons
War Diary 1942

In the Field 16 Dec.

14.15 hrs. Lone German raiding plane dropped bombs on Bramley Station vicinity today (449645) Bomb damage done to a train approaching the station from Guildford and houses nearby. Eight people died in the wreckage about 25 more were injured. Valiant work was done by those rendering first aid by the men of D Squadron, RHQ, and C Squadron.

In the Field 17 Dec.

As a result of the low level bombing in Bramley yesterday: our troops are ordered to carry filled magazines on their Brens in the recce cars when out training.

In the Field 18 Dec.

Squad of 12 men under Lieut.E.D.Morgan worked all day cleaning up the debris in one of the houses bombed on 16 December. They reported great temptation to become “looters” on finding three “Purdy” shotguns in the ruins.

Herb Schuppert

Trooper in Manitoba Dragoons

“As I was in “D” Squadron I was in Bramley Park, if not doing Staghound training I relieved the duty and dispatch riders while they went on leave for something to do other than general fatigue jobs which were not my favourite. I was in Bramley the day the Stukka Dive Bomber hit the train and station and seen all the commotion. There were a couple of us and we went to give whatever aid we could.”



A young woman travelling on the train

“I was comfortably knitting, pleased that I had nearly finished the garment, when as we slowed down on our approach to Bramley Station, I suddenly heard machine gunfire hitting the train. On looking up I had a fleeting glimpse of the plane out of the window flying in the direction of Guildford. It was very low, just above the trees. Then there was a big explosion and the train rocked on the rails, but fortunately did not go over. The door on the far side was blown out and the glass from the windows flew across the compartment. I realised at once what had happened, but then everything went completely quiet and still. I suppose, because I was young my reactions were quick. I got my hands over my face before the glass blew in and had no bad damage done to my face, only nicks, although my hands were cut. Many people were not so lucky and had bad facial injuries, several losing eyes. As the door of the compartment had blown out of the train I was able to jump down out of the train onto the grass verge, other passengers were emerging too.”

“There was a man lying on the ground, quite still, and I imagine he had been blown out of the train. I couldn’t stop to look at him as I was being called from the train by the man who had originally spotted me. They handed me a very young baby asking me to take it to safety somewhere, as the mother was badly injured. I took the baby which seemed unhurt except for a small cut on the end of its nose. I suppose its mother was hurt protecting it from the flying glass and was unable to protect her in any way. I thought the best thing to do was to take the baby to the station where there was sure to be someone to help.”

“A little way down the line I saw people leaning over a fence looking along the railway line to see what happened. One of them promised to look after the baby so I handed it over to them to care for. On returning to the train I found some Canadian soldiers doing great work in getting the injured out of the train and administering First Aid. One passenger I noticed was a soldier who had been propped up against the fence, pouring blood from a wound in his neck and shaking like a leaf. He also looked as if he had bad injuries to his eyes. A Canadian soldier said he could take him to hospital in his jeep if he could get him to the road.”

A mother and her ten week baby were also on the train.

Her son reports:

“My Mother was struck in the side of the face by a bullet which shattered her jaw bone and exited from the opposite temple taking out an eye. She also had deep penetration wounds from the glass from the shattered windows. I also had glass wounds and my mother remembered passing him down from the wrecked carriage to a Canadian soldier who helped her on foot along to the station. She was later transferred to East Grinstead for operations by Alexander Macindoe, the celebrated plastic surgeon.”

Both the injured woman with the baby and the young woman received a Christmas card every year with “from a Canadian soldier” inside. This was discovered when the baby (now in his mid sixties) and the young girl were reunited by Bramley History Society in October 2006.

A schoolchild

“We ran home as fast as we could to find out what was going on. When we got home and saw our broken window we thought it was a great adventure. Our mother told us what had happened and told us not to go around the corner and get in the way of the people trying to clear the train away and open up the line.”

“So when she forgot about us we went. There were barriers across the roads and some of the people that lived at the end of the road were standing waiting to get back home. The Canadian troops were searching the gardens and railway banks for any unexploded bombs.”

“I saw the door of the plane open and three bombs fell out about where Bramley Station was. I tried to get to the site that had been bombed but was unable to do so because there were so many Canadian troops coming down Snowdenham Lane and going down Station Road.”

“My Mother’s cousin found her bleeding heavily, and her husband in a state of shock. She rushed to the main road and flagged down a Canadian Army lorry, and got the driver to take her to hospital.”

Thank You

Surrey Advertiser, Saturday May 1st 1943

The “Surrey Advertiser” has been asked by some of the lads of the “Canadian Army” to thank the people of Bramley and district for their hospitality, great welcome, and general kindness.

Their experience they say has been a happy one. The writers wish their Surrey Friends good health, good luck and a safe return of their lads after the Victory

The Dragoons left Bramley the next month June 1943.

Bramley after the war

At the end of the war the soldiers had left the village and the evacuees went home. Most of the men in the British forces did not return home until 1946. Our war memorial shows seventeen names, of men who were killed.

Cars began to be seen on the roads again and farming increasingly became mechanised. Life slowly got back to normal, but for many people in Bramley life would never be the same.

The photographs opposite, taken in 2006, show how little Bramley High Street has changed since the war, even though the population now is approaching 3,500.



Snowdenham House as it is now



*Views of Bramley
High Street*



Appendix

Contacts

XII Manitoba Dragoons Museum website

www.12mbdragoons.com

Bramley History Society eMail address

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Cap Badges



Manitoba Mounted Rifles

2nd Armoured Car Regiment





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