

# NEWSLETTER

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**CAPE BRETON HIGHLANDERS  
ASSOCIATION**

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**2400 HIGHWAY 327  
SYDNEY, N.S. B1L1G1**

**JANUARY 1997**

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A very strange lady took centre stage at our 27th Annual Reunion in September '96. In fact, because of her furor, some may even say that she was no lady at all. We speak, of course, of tropical storm Hortense that blasted our area for most of the reunion. The weather report warned that the full force of the storm would fall upon our area by late Saturday afternoon which caused some to head out for home after the general meeting while others remained for the dedication of the Armoury and left shortly thereafter. We sure missed them all at the banquet.

Because of Hortense the memorial ceremonies were held indoors at Branch 128, where the members did an excellent job of preparing a corner of the main auditorium for the service.

The flowers were placed in honour of Sgt. Hector D. MacLellan by his sisters Mrs. Helen MacIsaac and Mrs. Cassie MacKinnon who were escorted by their nephew, our own Paul MacEachern. Sgt. MacLellan was killed in action on May 1, 1945 at Delfzijl, Holland. The ladies are shown in this photo that was taken after the service.

We had 141 registered for the 27th annual. Seventy nine of these were association members while 62 were their escorts. A check of the stats for the three previous reunions reveals in excess of 100 members had registered at each. This represents a drop of more than 20% in member registrations for 1996. We hope this will not be a trend-setter at this time.





**Faul MacEachern & His Anns**



**Jake Ryan, Tom Yhard, Sharkey  
on Weed Parade at Monument**



**Joe MacNeil Arrives from BC  
From Over Here**



**Bob Rose Arrives from UK  
To Over There**



# **UPDATE NEWS**

**THE 28TH ANNUAL REUNION** will be held Sept. 19 and 20, and Reunion Headquarters will be at Royal Canadian Legion Whitney Pier Branch 128, Sydney. **Friday:** Registration beginning at 1300 hrs. continuing throughout the afternoon and evening. Free tea, coffee, donuts and sandwiches will be available all afternoon. Registration fee has been held at \$25.00 per person for 1997. We are looking to make a time change for the mixed buffet which was usually held at 1900 hrs. Many who are travelling, are weary from their journey and securing a place to lodge for the weekend, only come in to register in the afternoon and they do not return for the buffet or any of the evening activities. A new time of 1700 hrs. is being considered to give everyone an opportunity to enjoy the buffet. There are no definite plans as yet for an evening programme.

**Saturday:** Service at CBH Monument will be held at 1000 hrs. followed by a short parade and placing of wreath at Branch 128's monument. The luncheon will commence at noon and will be followed by the annual meeting at 1300 hrs. The Banquet Supper will be held at 1900 hrs. and followed by an evening of dancing.

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### We Have in Stock

	Each
Breed of Manly Men	\$25.00
Blazer Crests	26.00
Association Pins	2.00
CBH Cap Badges	20.00

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### Present Slate of Officers

President	C.R. (Sharkey) MacDonald
V. President	Paul MacEachern
Secretary/Treasurer	W.F. (Bill) Metcalfe

### Area Representatives

Glace Bay	Robert H. (Bob) Kipping
New Waterford	Jake Ryan
Sydney	Tom Yhard
N. Sydney	Joseph (Joe) Corkery
P.E.I.	Mack MacKenzie
N.B.	Leon Sautiere
Central Nova	Ted Slaney



# DEATHS

Bowne, Bernard (Bernie)	79	Sydney Mines, N.S.
Boychuck, Johnny		Glace Bay, N.S.
Budge, Walter	73	New Haven, N.S.
Burns, Ernest E.	76	New Waterford, N.S.
Campbell, William D. (Bill or Stump)	73	Riverview, N.B.
Hill, Gerald S.	82	Sydney, N.S.
Hyde, Daniel J. (Danny)	73	Toronto, Ont.
MacAuley, Angus G.	71	Sydney, N.S.
MacCormack, H.D. (Ki)	74	Brookfield, N.S.
MacDonald, Donald John (D.J.)	73	Baddeck, N.S.
MacGregor, Rev. Fr. John Hector	81	Antigonish, N.S.
MacInnis, John	73	Hamilton, Ont.
MacIver, Malcolm	80	Baddeck, N.S.
MacLean, Howard (Diddles)	75	Sydney, N.S.
Mombourquette, Henry J.	74	Halifax, N.S.
Power, Joseph D.	73	Balls Creek, N.S.
Rowlands, Alphonsus	81	New Waterford, N.S.
Walker, M.E.	76	unknown

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*Consider Him (Jesus Christ) lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Heb. 12:3 The contemplation of Christ is a balm for the weary mind, a comfort to the troubled heart. The Father has filled the universe with pictures of His Son. The sun, the rainbow, the morning star, are illuminations of Christ. The mines of silver, gold, and costly stones all portray His worth. The apple tree, the lily and the vine breathe out His fragrance. The lion, the lamb, and doe of the morning parade His power, His meekness, and His sensitivity. "The whole earth is full of His glory." - and He cares for you.*

My hope is built on nothing less  
 Than Jesus blood and righteousness;  
 I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
 But wholly lean on Jesus' name.  
 On Christ the solid rock I stand  
 All other ground is sinking sand.



## FROM THE PARK



On Saturday Sept. 14, after our annual meeting, we went to Victoria Park and were met by young Militia soldiers in their finest regalia who escorted us into the new armoury, and seated us in a place of honour for the dedication ceremony. During the ceremony the Armoury was officially named **CORIANO BUILDING**. Our President, Sharkey MacDonald returned thanks to the Chair as he gave a short but moving speech on the night attack on Coriano Ridge so long ago. Anybody who took part in the battle could not conceive that the ridge would ever again be a peaceful farming area. I am sure that the ones who have revisited the area have noted that it does not look the same.

The photo was taken by Cari Arnold and it shows L. Col. R. G. (Rick) Parsons CD, CO of the 2nd NSH(CB) and our President C.R. (Sharkey) MacDonald cutting the cake commemorating the battalion's 125 years of faithful service.

## **John H. MacGregor 81, Antigonish**

**Rev. Fr. Johnny Hector MacGregor**

Many of you have written expressing your sorrows over the passing of our beloved old friend and comrade-in-arms Rev. Fr. Johnie Hector MacGregor, and for your sake we have included a copy of his obituary as it appeared in the Cape Breton Post July past.

To all of us who knew him he was a very special person and as a front line soldier he served his country with courage and dedication to duty. As Sgt. MacGregor, he led his platoon (the Signals) with determination to give the very best in communications to the ones who would lead in the battle. He was brave and he was humble, he could face the worst that the enemy threw at us and he could weep over the dead.

When we heard that Johnie was entering the priesthood it did not come as a surprise to those of us who knew him well. On the occasion of his ordination, in 1950, as members of the CBH Militia, we formed up a little guard of honour, and marched to the Holy Cross Church where we partook of his first mass. Somebody was heard to say, "He led us in battle, now he is leading us to Glory."

Our heartfelt sympathy is extended to all of the family.



Rev. John Hector MacGregor, 81, died in Antigonish, Monday, July 15, 1986.

Born in Donkin, he was the son of the late John H. and Sarah Ann (Phalen) MacGregor. He graduated from Glace Bay High School and from St. Francis Xavier University.

He joined the Canadian Armed Forces in 1940 and served overseas with the Cape Breton Highlanders. After discharge he entered Holy Heart Seminary in Halifax and was ordained a priest in 1950. In 1950-51 he served at St. Joseph's Parish, North Sydney. In 1951 he returned to the Canadian Armed Forces serving as chaplain, during the Korean conflict. In 1953 he was cited for bravery by being awarded a Member of the British Empire medal by the then Governor General Right Honorable Vincent Massey. He continued as chaplain in the army until his discharge in 1969. In 1970 he was appointed pastor to St. Mary's Church serving Big Pond and Sacred Heart Church in Johnstown. Upon his retirement in 1984 he took up residence at St. Francis Xavier in Antigonish.

Surviving are two sisters, Mable Hogan, Glace Bay and Mary MacDonald, Toronto; and numerous nieces and nephews.

He was predeceased by one sister, Jean and four brothers, Peter, Ira, Angus Lionel (Chippy) and Vaughn.



## I MARRIED A DANDY

Most of us will remember John Alex Rankin from Mabou, Cape Breton. He was a tall fellow with broad shoulders and he was strong as well as good natured. He had a high pitched voice that would have been excellent for speaking Gaelic, but in English it belied his masculinity.

As a front line soldier John Alex was fearless, he had enough courage for three men. His greatest vice was that he loved the booze and he would nickname all of us after his favourite brands, I was "Redcap" and Ernie Ryan was "Rhine Wine Ryan" - the list was endless.

His main weapon was the PIAT (Projectile Infantry Anti Tank). The PIAT replaced the Boys Anti Tank Rifle in 1942. Can anyone, after being at the front, imagine himself taking pot shots at a tank with the Boys or trying to sneak upon a German Tiger with that candy coated apple, "the sticky bomb"? Heaven forbid!

One of the big problems with the PIAT was to cock the mechanism but once cocked it would reset itself each time a bomb was launched. We used to joke about it by suggesting that half the unit would become casualties before going into action by just trying to cock the blasted thing. However, John Alex could cock it with little or no effort and quicker than you could say JOHN ALEX.

He used to sing a little ditty that he called "The Mabou Love Song". The Lyrics were simply,

I married a dandy, a ninety year old,  
She was more like a nineteen than a ninety year old.

He would say to me, "you can join in the chorus Redcap," but there was not any chorus to the ditty.

When we finally caught up with the unit after our ordeal in the Valley of death, they sent us up the lines to a place that we referred to as the Indian front because it was there that we relieved the Gurkhas. (None of them that I saw were wearing turbans - all were wearing helmets). These fellows had cut blankets into strips and wound them as putties all the way up their legs. It was not long before we were doing the same with our ten ninety-eights, it sure helped to protect us from the cold. What a sight it must have been to see us coming down on a reverse slope with our long putties when we were finally relieved.

There was John Alex in front of me with his rifle slung over his back, his PIAT on his shoulder, a case of PIAT bombs in his hand and all of the standard equipment, personal and otherwise, that we all carried. And as he went before me he began to sing, "I married a dandy a ninety year old ..." and when he came to the words, "She was more like a nineteen" he would leap very high in the air and click his heels together. Once when he leapt I could see beneath his feet some pipers on a distant rise preparing to pipe us to our rest area.

I never saw John Alex again after I came home in 1945. Jake Ryan informed me that he passed on some years ago in Montreal.

# Highlanders remember battle

Today is the 52nd anniversary of one of the toughest battles faced by Canadian soldiers in the Second World War.

The battle of Coriano Ridge in Italy was fought and won at great cost by the Cape Breton Highlanders (CBH) in mid-September, 1944.

German troops atop the ridge were blocking the entire eastern Allied advance that had begun with the invasion of Sicily.

General Sir Oliver Leese, commander of the British Eighth Army, handed the job to the Canadians after British troops had tried from three different directions to dislodge the Germans.

The story of the valor and the horror that followed is told in graphic detail in *The Road of Manly Men*, the history of the CBH by Alex Morrison and Ted Slaney.

It begins with deceptive calm: "Forty-five minutes into 13 September, a day with fine weather and a cool breeze blowing, C and D Companies began their move from the assembly area to the Start Line, a distance of approximately 800 yards."

Then: "The CBH, the

Nighthawks as some had named the unit, crossed the Start Line at 0100 hours and the trouble started almost at once."

Lieutenant-Colonel Somerville, the CBH's commander, noted in his report that the German paratroopers made "a firm stand and every inch of ground was contested."

Forty hours after the start of the assault the ridge was secured and four companies of Highlanders marched off with their ranks considerably thinned.

The grim statistics tell the story: 24 killed in action or died of wounds, 67 wounded in action, more than any other unit in the Canadian brigade.

Given that the "bayonet strength" of the unit participating in the actual attack was considerably fewer than 400, the CBH had suffered a loss of 25 per cent.

"The unit pipes and drums were waiting for them when they reached Battalion HQ and played them from the field to the tune of 'Highland Laddie,'" noted Slaney and Morrison in their account based on the official War Diary.

The diary noted that "every-



Looking BACK

JOHN CAMPBELL

one's spirits rose when the good old pipes were heard once more."

Sgt. Karl MacKenzie, a machine gunner with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, told of watching the CBH file down from the bloodied ridge and recalled that he was overcome with emotion at the sound of the pipes that he broke down and cried.

One of the pipers, whose brother Dan Gillis was in the battle, recalled how hard it was to be piping as the troops filed by having his brother would be among them.

"The tears ran down my face as I saw him waving to us as he marched past."

The victory at Coriano came at the end of 17 days of fierce fighting that had begun for the Cape Breton infantry battalion Aug. 25. Total casualties during those terrible 17 days were 57 killed and 241 wounded.

The battle was marked by numerous acts of gallantry resulting in the awarding of a variety of medals and battle honors.

The CBH fought on to the end of the war, playing a major role in the liberation of Holland, where the unit spent some time in occupation before shipping out for Canada.

By the time it was all over the unit counted 201 dead and more than 700 wounded, men from many parts of Canada whose names are engraved on a granite monument adjoining the court house grounds in Sydney.

General Leese, the British Army commander, summed up his view of the CBH's performance at Coriano Ridge in a top secret dispatch to Somerville a week later.

"My congratulations to you and all ranks of your battalion on your hard fighting at Montecchio and Coriano. The regiment may be proud of its part

in a great and hard-fought victory. With my thanks and best wishes to you all. Well done Canada."

As a footnote to the story it's interesting to note that the memory of the men and the events of that long ago September will be honored today with the opening of the first of three new buildings slated for Victoria Park in Sydney, where the CBH first rallied shortly after the outbreak of war in 1939.

The Coriano building will be occupied in November, but officially opened today at 2:00 p.m. in the presence of many of the old soldiers for whom Sept. 14 is a date never to be forgotten.

They're in town for the 27th annual reunion of the CBH Association at Whitney Pier Branch 128, Royal Canadian Legion.

This morning at 10 a.m. they'll gather at the CBH monument for a memorial service, then form up at 11 a.m. on Victoria Road at Henry Street to march to the Branch 128 cenotaph.

(John Campbell is a staff writer with the Cape Breton Post.)