



**Vancouver Artillery
Association News**



RUSI News
Vancouver

Van Arty Association and RUSI Van Members News Jan 2, 2018

Newsletters normally are emailed on Monday evenings. If you don't get a newsletter on time, check the websites below to see if there is a notice about the current newsletter or to see if the current edition is posted there. If the newsletter is posted, please contact me at bob.mugford@gmail.com to let me know you didn't get a copy.

Newsletter on line. This newsletter, and previous editions, are available on the Vancouver Artillery Association website at: www.vancouvergunners.ca and the RUSI Vancouver website at: <http://www.rusivancouver.ca/newsletter.html> . Both groups are also on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=vancouver%20artillery%20association> and <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=rusi%20vancouver>

Upcoming events – Mark your calendars See attached posters for details.

Jan 10 First Lunch of 2018

Dues

A reminder that dues are payable as of January 1, for members of the Vancouver Artillery Association, RUSI Vancouver and Associate members of the 15 Fd Officers Mess.

See details at the end of this newsletter.

World War 2 – 1942/43

John Thompson Strategic analyst - quotes from his book "Spirit Over Steel"

Jan 3rd: Kleist and Manstein continue to try to hold the area around Rostov to enable trapped German troops in the Caucasus to leave. Meanwhile the air corridor to Stalingrad is already becoming littered with downed transports – the airlift of supplies is falling well short of expectations and Soviet flak and fighter planes are lurking all along the route.

Jan 4th: A revolutionary new weapon has its debut as US Navy warships thumping Bunda on New Britain now carry proximity fuze anti-aircraft ammunition for their guns. To preserve the secret of the new fuze, they cannot be fired over enemy occupied land until late in 1944. The tiny radar set in the nose of each shell make AA fire far more efficient. Nalchik in the Caucasus is liberated, as is Chernyshkovskiy on the Chir River. The German attempt to relieve the hold-outs cut off in the Citadel at Velikiye Luki fails.

Essential Reading: *The proximity fuze was a revolutionary weapon and a triumph of combined Allied research and development. Ralph Baldwin was one of the scientists working on the project and his account of their work is recounted in The Deadly Fuze. The book is truly essential for anyone seeking to understand how Allied R&D worked, especially with responsibilities and projects divided between the UK and the US and other Allied countries.*

Jan 5th: On Guadalcanal, the Americans remain unaware that the Japanese are thinning their defences and gear up for a new series of attacks. General Clark opens 5th Army Headquarters for business in Tunisia, while the British start some local attacks near Mateur. The Soviets start liberating towns in the wake of the German withdrawal from the Caucasus. For four months, Brigadier General Kenneth N Walker has repeatedly flown on combat missions with the 5th Bomber Command in the Solomon Islands. Today he leads an attack on the harbor in Rabaul despite very heavy flak and fighter opposition; the attack is a success, but General Walker's aircraft is shot down. He is posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Jan 6th: Hitler is still furious with the performance of the Kriegsmarine in the attempt to intercept Convoy JW-51B (Dec 30, 1942), so Admiral Raeder resigns as commander in chief of the German navy.

Jan 7th: US forces prepare for the end-game on Guadalcanal, meanwhile the Japanese start reinforcing Lae on New Guinea.

Jan 8th: Rokossovsky, commanding the Don Front, issues a surrender demand to Palaus, who refuses although his men are running acutely short of bread and bullets.

Jan 9th: The 17th Australian Brigade is airlifted to Wau, in preparation for the next stage of the offensive.

The War Diary of C31 L/Sgt Charles D Phelan, A Battery, RCHA 1939 - 1945

Edited by BGen (ret'd) Robert P (Bob) Beaudry CD

Chapter 41. A Rest (?)in Riccione, Porter Force

27 Oct 1944 We are officially told we were going out of action. I was on the recce that left at 1330 hrs. In Cattolica Major Brown, the 2 i/c, refused the billets at the Naval Barracks.

28 Oct The recce party moved to a large hotel on the shore. Maj Brown sent word back to the Regt not to move as he had not accepted billets as yet. The rain stopped in the afternoon.

29 Oct. Major MacPherson and Capt McQuestron and their crews showed up, coming directly from the R22R. We travelled back to an area where the Regiment was dispersed.

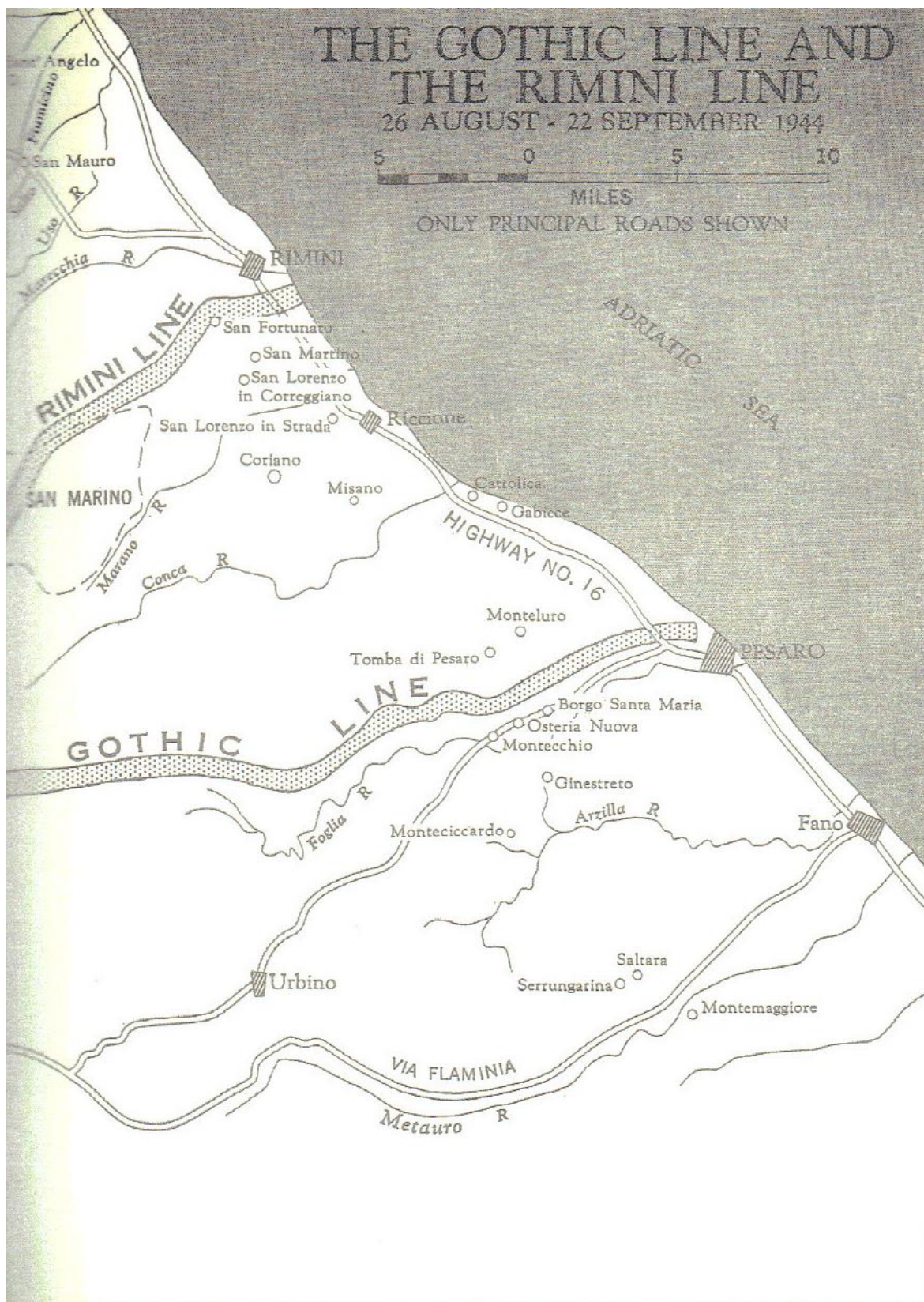


*'B' Troop Command Post staff near Lamone River, 24 December 1944. L-R: Bdr JF Erskine, TSM RV (Bob) Armishaw, Tracey Huggins, Lt RG Hepburn, Lt DO Doe, Gnr FA Sheldon and Bdr Charles D Phelan.
RCHA - Right of the Line - page 155B*

30 Oct The Regt is pretty well bogged down in deep mud. Drizzling rain all day. The CO, Col Brown, came around and said we would be here for a couple days and then we would go to Riccione, where we had gone for leave at the end of Sept.

31 Oct – 3 Nov Did a little maintenance. Not much activity. More rain. A report that Gen A McNaughton had taken over as MND pleased us all. We hope we will soon go to France to form part of 1 Cdn Army, McNaughton's dream. There has been a lot of arguments lately about the "zombies", the draftees now being called up in Canada. Some quite witty sayings have come up, like the Zombies motto: "Ladies before gentlemen; CWACs overseas first"

4 Nov Kitchen moved off at 1030 hrs, followed by the guns, with half an hour interval between troops. We arrived in Riccione at 1430 hrs, where a hot dinner was waiting. Our Bty is in a school in the middle of town. A bit crowded, but dry.



5 -8 Nov Maintenance and scabbing got underway. Checked controlled stores like watches, rifles, and tech equipment, and inspected the tentage. Found a Sally Ann canteen, which offered writing and reading rooms and an Italian orchestra providing music.

9 -11 Nov Started on a short refresher course preparatory to an attempt to qualify as Surveyor Class B. I think it's a bigger bite than I can chew.

12 Nov Went to Mass in a small church nearby. Also went for a walk, and had a haircut and shampoo. Went to a show in the evening. Situation: Most of 1 Cdn Corps is now at rest in and around Riccione. Rumors are that we will go back into action around 19 Nov. The bull is getting pretty thick, and everyone is getting quite fed up with our alleged "rest". Each morning we have to lay out all our kit on our beds in accordance with a mimeographed diagram, with our blankets, towels, great coat, big and small packs, skeleton web, mess tins, fork, knife, and spoon, mug, water bottle, rifle or tommy gun, spare boots, tin helmet, etc. What a war!

13 Nov A Regt'l parade was addressed but, wonder of wonders, not inspected by the GOC, Gen "Chris" Vokes. He said home leave was about to start. Unfortunately, only 200 – all ORs – are in the first draft, which could be home for Christmas. There will be 30 days at home, personnel will return to their own units, and long service will be the only deciding factor. It's better than nothing, but 200 from the whole Corps seems pretty few. My chances are slim. We were issued with winter equipment. I got a heavy canvas coat lined with oilskin and sheepskin. It comes down to my ankles and looks like a tent, but will be great for recces.

14 Nov Tried survey test. It was very tough, and I doubt if I made it. The Bty started collecting data for home leave. A minimum of five years is required. Time in Theatre of War counts double, time in UK is single, time in detention is deducted.

15 – 17 Nov Results of test as expected – I failed. Saw some shows, did some reading, and went to concerts at the canteen, including an excellent British Army show "Cats Whiskers". Lt HJ Bedell, the RSO, and his driver, L/Bdr RF Taylor, were killed by a new type of mine while on a preliminary survey at the front for the Regt'l gun areas supporting "Porter Force". *

** (Editorial Note). Ironically, L/Bdr Taylor was one of the RCHA long-service men slated for leave in Canada. The Regt also received news that Brig JN Lane, then CRA of 4th Armoured Div and the immediate past CO of 1 RCHA before Lt Col HE Brown, was killed on 9 Nov in Holland when his jeep ran over a mine.*

Maj GD Mitchell, MC. RCHA – Right of the Line, p 144

18 Nov We have become part of Porter Force, a small force composed of a couple of British battalions, a couple of Field Regts, and a Medium Regt. Porter Force will operate across a wide front on a fairly marshy stretch, and is to maintain pressure on the enemy without attempting any large gains. I left on recce in Y and had a long trip to the position occupied by 3 Fd Regt, whom we are to relieve. We took over their target records and survey data. We are about six

miles from the sea, near San Pietro. In front of us, and as an ally, is the fabulous private army of a rich Russian (Vladimir Peniakoff)** who has been nicknamed Major Popoff (actually Major Popski). His “army” is composed of many nationalities, and is equipped with ducks and jeeps and heavy MGs. They specialize in raids behind enemy lines. There are also many Partisans in the area. Apparently, they did a good job around here, and are still fighting in the line.

19 Nov Our guns arrived at 0830 hrs and took over the gun pits after 3 Fd Regt pulled out. We are limited to 10 rpg per day. We did no firing all day. There are a few Jerry shells in the distance. Allied bombers are pounding the area ahead of us. We recorded a list of targets, fired on some active Nebelwerfers, then had a quiet night. We received data on a new Jerry mine. It is constructed of plastic with glass pressure plates and is shaped like a curling stone with a glass handle. It is a dark grey color. It is very sensitive and an 8-oz pressure is enough to explode the charge. They are very difficult to detect. We received a message from the Honourable AGL McNaughton, MND, congratulating all ranks of Cdn Force Overseas on their performance and progress in Italy and in NW Europe. He said that when peace shall be established, his duty will be “to ensure that you who have borne the heavy burden in the heat of battle shall have fair play.”

20 Nov Nothing today except a small shoot on some enemy mortars. The Red Patch news reported that Lt Gen Charles Foulkes is replacing Lt Gen ELM Burns as Commander 1 Cdn Corps, and Maj Gen HW Foster is replacing Maj Gen Chris Vokes as GOC 1 Cdn Div. Gen Vokes sent a message to all members of the division, thanking them for their loyalty, good will, teamwork, and determination. He said commanding 1 Cdn Div was “the greatest and most lasting honor of my military career.”

21 -22 Nov Lt Matheson came to the troop as GPO. Seems like a nice guy. No firing both days.

23 Nov Fired a Mike Tgt in the afternoon and a HF at night. Gnr Les Sergeant of Perth, a '39er, was the lucky lad today when he was sent home on leave with only two hours notice. It was a treat to see his face when he got the news. He's the only one from the Bty. It will be many months before I am that lucky, I suppose.

24 – 25 Nov Nothing on the 24th. Fired a small Fire Plan the next evening on enemy OP areas.

26 Nov Went to Mass in a little church in San Pietro. Drizzle of rain all night.

27 Nov Still raining. Moved # 3 and 4 guns nearer the road with the aid of oxen as the ground is getting very soggy. Lt Doe returned as GPO, and Lt Matheson became the Tp Leader. Received information that 1 Cdn Div is coming into action. The Regt will move forward and will be under direct observation. The Air Force will flatten any targets assigned. The aim is to eliminate the bulge in our line preparatory to establishing our winter line.

******(News Ed note) Lieutenant-Colonel Vladimir "Popski" Peniakoff DSO, MC, FRGS 30 March 1897 – 15 May 1951) born in Belgium to affluent Jewish Russian emigre parents and was the founder and commanding officer of No 1 Demolition Squadron, PPA, known as "Popski's Private Army". Popski's Private Army, was a unit of British Special Forces, similar to the LRDG and was set up in Cairo in October 1942 by Major Vladimir Peniakoff, MC, and spent a year conducting raids in North Africa.



Major Peniakoff

In September 1943 an advance patrol of PPA sailed to Taranto on board the USS Boise and headed inland, where they discovered a hitherto unknown weakness of the German 1st Parachute Division opposing 1st Airborne. As a result of this success Popski was allowed to increase the size of PPA to 80 all ranks; throughout the Italian Campaign about 100 men were actually deployed at any one time.

Three fighting patrols, each of 18 men in six jeeps, and one Tactical HQ patrol of four jeeps were formed and given great autonomy. Each jeep was armed with .50in and .30in machine guns, giving the patrols immense firepower for their size. The men trained hard for amphibious, mountain and parachute operations, demolition and counter-demolition, reconnaissance and intelligence gathering. They were deployed in many roles, often clandestine, and for several months even operated as regular front line troops (this is when Sgt Phelan saw them), holding a sector of the Allied front line, badly depleted after the withdrawal of forces for the D-Day landings in Normandy, nipping around in their jeeps to fool the Germans into believing that they were opposed by much larger units.

The PPI's cap badge was an Astrolabe

Several operations used DUKWs or small landing craft called RCLs (manned by 7 Royal Engineers who inevitably became known as "Popski's Private Navy") to sail up the Adriatic and get behind the German front line, escorted by the Royal Navy's Coastal Forces. At the end of the war Popski's Private Army sailed some of their jeeps on RCLs to Venice, where they drove around St. Mark's Square, the only wheeled vehicles ever to have been there. The unit was disbanded four months later on 14 September 1945, after hunting for Himmler, disarming Italian partisans and discouraging Josip Broz Tito's partisans from encroaching on Austrian and Italian territory. Several members wrote published accounts of the unit's activities.



For a brief synopsis of PPA activities, go to:

<http://www.militaryhistoryonline.com/wwii/articles/popskisprivatearmy.aspx>

From the ‘Punitary’

A New Year’s Resolutions – Something that goes in one year and out the other

This is an abbreviated ‘holiday edition’. Regular articles, the Vancouver Gunners Update, Murphy’s other laws and Who is it, will return on Jan 9th.

Dues 2018

Dues for the Vancouver Artillery Association are \$25, payable to the Vancouver Artillery Association. Send to:

Treasurer, Vancouver Artillery Association
2025 West 11th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V6J 2C7

Dues for RUSI Vancouver are \$50 (\$25 for students), payable to RUSI Vancouver. Send to:

Treasurer, RUSI Vancouver
2025 West 11th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V6J 2C7

Dues for Associate Mebers are \$60, payable to 15 RCA Officers Mess. Send to:

Treasurer, 15 Fd Regt Officers Mess
2025 West 11th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V6J 2C7

