

MILITARY SIGNALS in THUNDER BAY, Ontario

UNIT HISTORY

736 Communication Squadron

Part I

No. 3 Company, 10th Divisional Signals

1. 10th Divisional Signals, Canadian Corps of signals, Military District No. 10, was formed and developed during the years 1923-25. Divisional Headquarters and two Companies were stationed in Winnipeg and No. 3 Company was based at the Park Avenue Armoury, Port Arthur.
2. The task of recruitment in No. 3 Company was difficult at first but the first Commanding Officer of No. 3 Company, Major H. Hancock (City Engineer, Fort William) conscientiously pursued his duties and gradually built up a respectable sized Company. Apathy towards enlistment was prevalent in the aftermath of World War I. Lieutenant G. North filled the interim responsibility of Acting CO for a number of months in 1925-26 until Major A.F. MacDonald (Tax Collector, Port Arthur) assumed command. Soon, results of training and perseverance produced results.
3. By 1927, Company strength had reached a point where training for the Fort William members of the Unit, under Command of Lieutenant A.E.J. Fallen, commenced at the Murphy Building, Simpson Street, Fort William. The Murphy Building was being used as an Armoury by the 4th Field Ambulance, RCAMC, and sections of the Lake Superior Regiment. A second Officer, Lieutenant L.T. Poulter (later LCol, 67th LAA, RCA) was taken on strength of the Fort William section and training progressed to the level of NCO and summer training was offered at the Signals base at Camp Border, Ontario. Wireless telegraphy training was at a satisfactory technical level and instructional courses were laid on by the Permanent Force Staff from Winnipeg (making overnight trip by train) for several weeks until the two officers gained instructional skills themselves and they soon graduated a class of Wireless Telegraphers.
4. The building of a receiver, spark transmitter and assembly of antennae with wet battery power formed part of the course and a weekly schedule of wireless telegraph transmission was established with divisional Headquarters in Winnipeg at a professional level. Miniature range competitions were also arranged with the 4th field ambulance. This provided further esprit-de-corps and challenge to the men of the Signals company. By 1923, First aid Training was on the syllabus increasing to intensive training without interfering with the required Signals training. The St. John Ambulance Corps was very active with the unit at this time. In 1933, No. 3 company entered Military district 10 First Aid competitions against other Military Districts under Lieutenant Fallen, winning the Mary Otter Trophy for First Place. Subsequent annual competitions showed No. 3 company as continually placing in top positions until disbanding a few years later.
5. In 1936, Major MacDonald retired from No. 3 Company and Captain G.T.A. McNeill assumed command. The Port Arthur and fort William sections were brought together at the Port Arthur Armoury for all training purposes. By now, the prefix "Royal" had been added to the Canadian Corps of Signals.
6. In 1937, re-organization axes fell and it was a fair assessment that in view of the excellent record of the 10th divisional signals that disbanding of the Unit was not anticipated. To their amazement and with much sorrow, the members of No. 3 Company were given the option of transferring to the 18th Medium Battery, RCA (a new Unit), or discharge, with retiring officers going to the Supplementary List.
7. The officers on the disbanding of No. 3 company were: Captain G.T.A. MacNeill; Captain R.A. Bartley, MM (QM); Lieutenants' Fallen, Baillie and Poulter, all of whom had served since its formation.

8. At the outbreak of World War II, all ranks of No. 3 Company who had accepted transfer to the 18th Medium Battery were mobilized for active service into the 38th Field Battery, RCA, in Petawawa, for artillery training. Headquarters records will indicate that members of the former No. 3 Company became excellent leaders in the field during 1940-45.

9. Following the retirement of No. 3 Company, 10th Divisional Signals, to the Supplementary Order of Battle in 1937, the responsibility for communications within the Militia Units at the Lakehead shifted to Signal Corps establishments vacancies allocated to the individual units. The training and responsibility for communications continued in this manner for the next 37 years.

10. Re-organization in the mid 1950's saw the disbanding of the Artillery Unit in Fort William whereupon the historical ties between the old No. 3 Company, Signals, and the present 736 Communication Squadron became thin indeed. Bdr Colpitts of the 67th LAA Regiment which succeeded the original 18th medium Battery, and who had covered off a signals vacancy in that Unit, transferred to the 17th Medical Company becoming its quartermaster Sergeant. He teamed up with 17th Medical Company Quartermaster, Lt W.B. Melville and Officer Cadets S. Wallace and D. Cochrane. All four men went to Port Arthur establishments when Fort William lost its Armoury. Lt Melville worked his way through the Manning Depot and the Lake superior Scottish Regiment before becoming Commanding Officer of the Lakehead Service Battalion and the Lake Superior Scottish Regiment respectively, finally becoming the Honourary Lieutenant Colonel of the new 736 Communication Squadron years later. Officer Cadet Wallace subsequently became LCol, CO, Lake Superior Scottish, and was eventually taken on strength of 736 Comm Sqn as a Major. Officer Cadet Cochrane also joined the 736 Comm Sqn. QMS Colpitts took his Officer's Training with the Medical Company and after broken service, joined 736 Comm Sqn and filled a number of appointments culminating with his appointment as Commanding Officer in Oct 1984. Major L.A. Colpitts would eventually become the Honourary Lieutenant Colonel of 736 Communication Squadron.

11. Three decades had elapsed before the thin threads between the old and the new became retied.

PART II

736 Communication Squadron

12. In 1972, Major G.W. Pauline, CO 73 Communications Group Headquarters Winnipeg, was tasked with investigating the possibility of locating a Communication sub unit in Thunder Bay. After months of consultation with Federal and Provincial Government departments, Thunder Bay Militia Units, Bell Telephone and other local industries, Major Pauline recommended that a sub unit (Communication troop) be located at Thunder Bay.

13. Later that same year, a meeting between Brigadier General Summers, Commanding Officer Prairie Militia Area; Lieutenant Colonel W.B. Melville, the Commanding Officer Lakehead Garrison; and Major Pauline resulted in a decision that unit lines in the Thunder Bay Armoury would be established for a communications unit. The Armoury was already bursting at the seams with a strengthened Mobile Command because of a resurgence in things military by Thunder Bay's young men and women.

14. On 22 January 1973, 3 Troop (Thunder Bay), 735 Communication Squadron, was officially on stream with Captain R. Murray (Dean of Technology, Confederation College), who had recently retired with the rank of Major in the Royal Canadian Engineers, appointed as Officer Commanding.

15. Under the capable guidance of Major W. Osborne, who succeeded Major Pauline as Commanding Officer 73 Communication Group, CFB Winnipeg, and Captain Murray, the unit grew quickly, drawing some of its members from other local units but mainly from new recruits attracted to membership in a modern unit that provided teletype and radio communication as well as driver training.

16. On April 1974, the unit was re-designated as 736 Communication Squadron and Captain Murray was promoted to the rank of Major as its first Commanding Officer since the resurrection from the supplementary Order of Battle. In February of 1975, Lieutenant Colonel W.B. Melville, MBE, CD, accepted the appointment of Honourary Colonel of the unit and by December of the same year, the unit was of such strength that it boasted a full Teletype Troop, a Radio Troop, a Tech Repair Section and a BMT section. The unit strength of 49 increased to approximately 65 all ranks, male and female. Other officers of the unit at this time were: Major S. Wallace and Captain D. Cochrane, BMT section; Captain W.J. Wheeler, Training Officer; Captain D. Croissant, Logistics Officer; Lieutenant R.J. Yoller, Radio Troop; Lieutenant R. Kovacs, Teletype Troop and Lt L. Colpitts, Supply Officer.

17. Major Murray and the Training Officer, Captain Wheeler, saw as an integral part of the local syllabus, an emphasis on training in the field with the many bush roads and lakes of the area providing excellent ground for weekend maneuvers which the young men and women of 736 Communication Squadron took to with much pleasure. This resulted in exceptionally high morale of the troops. The unit consistently paraded a high percentage of its strength whenever a weekend scheme was ordered - and ordered often it was.

18. Without any doubt, the spontaneous growth of the Squadron resulted in pressure on the unit lines, spilling over to space required by the militia in its own Armoury. Great diplomacy was required on the part of Major Osborne in Winnipeg and Major Murray in Thunder Bay to calm the fears of the militia that it was losing space urgently required for their own purposes. Maritime Command's land based HMCS Griffon in Thunder Bay came partially to the rescue by granting space at the HMCS Griffon for the unit's transport and supply stores. The tennis courts of HMCS Griffon were also utilized by the unit's 17 odd vehicles and trailers as a Vehicle Compound. till, many concessions had to be made with regard to schedules and space in order to accommodate the 'Communicators' and not only was space fully requisitioned from the militia but other space as "shared" and training and administrative nights were juggled in an attempt to satisfy both agencies. Even so, the BMT section under Major Wallace and Captain Cochrane, paraded one night a week apart from the unit. In spite of all this, both Mobile and Communication Commands got along quite well and the competition only spurred the Garrison and Communication Squadron to greater professionalism.

19. Obviously the question for space was a priority item, as on 29 March 1976, the 60-odd officers of all Thunder Bay units paraded at a "Dining In Night" to hear the remarks of Brigadier General Wylie, Commander Communication Command as well as the comments of Major General Comack, Commander Militia Area, Prairie Region. For the record, it appears to be a matter of "coincidence" that two Generals arrived at Thunder Bay to inspect their respective units on the same day. However, it should be noted that it had been 17 years since even one General had inspected the Thunder Bay units.

20. Spring of 1976 saw the Squadron involved for the first time in emergency rescue operations. Nineteen trained personnel turned out to support Search and Rescue operations with the L.S.S.R. During the summer of 1976, the unit members were involved in numerous trades training courses and supported the Militia Concentration in Dundurn Saskatchewan, providing communications in support of an Infantry Battalion. The Unit also supported the 74 Communication Group Concentration in Fort Lewis, Washington and sent 31 members to the 73 Communication Group Concentration in Shilo Manitoba. Several of its members that summer were deployed throughout the country training with other elements of the Command at the Olympic Games in Montreal, and tours of duty overseas.

21. Under the direction of Major W. Osborne in Winnipeg and Major Murray in Thunder Bay, 736 Communication Squadron was now ready to settle into a role of continual upgrading of its members trade skills in orders to vie for the Command's coveted Malloch Trophy which the Unit was determined to win in competition against all other Communication Reserve units. Nineteen seventy-six was not to be its year, however, with unit esprit-de-corps at an all time high, the unit set 1977 as its new goal for achieving the Malloch Trophy.

22 January 1977 saw the addition of two female officers to the Squadron, Ocdt Bradley, BL, a former Cpl in the Sqn, and Ocdt Mihalik, KJ, a University graduate student. For the next five months, the Squadron was involved in numerous radio, teletype and driver training exercise. On March 21, 1977, command of the Squadron was handed over from Major Murray to the newly promoted Major Wheeler. Major Murray was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and assigned the position of Senior Liaison Officer (Reserves) for the 73 Communication Group. During 1977, three Sqn members were sent on call-out to Lahr, Germany.

23. Nineteen seventy-eight saw the replacement of the old ¾ T. trucks with the new 5/4 T radio vans. New radios were also supplied for these vehicles. These new trucks were to be extensively used in the following years on many exercises such as the Western Dash, Fresh Starts, MILCON, and local unit exercises. 1978 also saw a change of command from Major W.J. Wheeler to A/Major D. Croissant. Colonel Simpson from CFCCHQ reviewed the change of command parade. 736 Communication Squadron was not to see another change of command for five years. MCpl G. Romick, on call-out in Lahr Germany, had an opportunity to talk with Princess Ann and her brother, Prince Charles. MCpl Romick was part of an Honour Guard being inspected by Her Royal Highness Princess Ann, Colonel in Chief, Canadian Signal Corps. 1978 also saw four members of the Unit presented the Queens Jubilee Medal, Lieutenant Colonel Melville, Major Wheeler, Captain Yoller and Sergeant Ritchie.

24. The highlight of 1979 was the presentation to 736 Communication Squadron, the coveted Mooney Trophy, awarded for outstanding military proficiency within 73 Communication Group. The Unit was extremely busy during 1979 participating in numerous Exercises including: EX ALGO IV, EX WESTERN BOLT III, EX FRESH START, EX THAW OUT, EX SPRINGO IV (attended by Lieutenant Colonel McLeod, Group Commander 73 Communication Group), EX MILCON '79, EX JULIAN KNOLL, EX SOUTHERN EXPLORER, and EX HARVEST MOON II. The Student Youth Employment Program (SYEP) helped the Squadron's size increase as 17 members elected to remain with the Unit.

25. Nineteen Eighty was an equally busy year with the Unit participating in the following Exercises: EX ALGO V, EX JULIAN KNOLL's I, II, III, IV, and V, EX KRUSHED ICE (winter warfare), EX FRESH START, EX KISMET, EX MILCON '80, and EX LIMELIGHT. The Unit's members were very busy during the summer months conducting the annual Student Youth Employment Program training.

26. 736 Communication Squadron distinguished itself in 1981 when Thunder Bay held the Canada Summer Games. Seventeen drivers from the Squadron were tasked to transport athletes and equipment between the Games sites. The Unit also provided maritime communications for the sail boat races. The Unit strength was at an all time high of 67 personnel. MCpl LM Howarth was commissioned from the Ranks to 2LT. Pte Zimmermann was employed as an RTOP at Pond Inlet, Baffin Island NWT 08-30 June and 4 members attended EX FALL EX '81 in Lahr, Germany. Nine members participated in RV '81 in CFB Gagetown, NB. Sgt SF Bagnall was tasked as a Radio Op in support to RCC Trenton in a major Search and Rescue effort in Northwestern Ontario. As well the Unit conducted the following Ex's: EX WESTERN BOLT, EX KRUSHED ICE, EX's JULIAN KNOLL I and II, EX KISMNET, and EX OPEN GAT I in support to the 18 Service Battalion.

27. In 1982, WO (W) S.E.M. Bagnall was awarded the "Commanders Commendation, Seventh List". Cpl Groves started the year out on CI B callout in Baden Sollengen Germany (continued from FALLEX 81) then proceeded on a CI C callout with the United Nations at UNDOF (Golan Heights). Two Squadron personnel proceed with 1 CSR Kingston on EX MERCURY TREK at Fort Drum, New York, and two personnel went to Lahr Germany to participate in EX FALL EX '82. The Unit participated in Exercises: EX JULIAN KNOLL, EX INDIAN WATCH (driver trg to CFS Sioux Lookout), EX ICE BREAKER I, and EX JAW BREAKER.

28. Modern computerized communication terminals were installed in 1983 and the Squadron came "on line" to the ADDN later that year. Similarly, a solid state HF transceiver was installed in 1984 allowing the Squadron to communicate by radio to its sister Communication Reserve units in 73 Communication Group. Additional communications, support equipment and vehicles are arriving at the Squadron throughout 1985 offering new challenges to the Unit.

29. In 1983 Major Croissant was replaced by Captain R.J. Kovacs. At this same time, WO C.P. Higgins was appointed as the Squadron's Sergeant Major. The Unit participated in numerous Exercises, highlighted by the annual MILCON '83.

30. Construction on the new addition to the Armouries began in 1984. In October 1984, Captain L.A. Colpitts was appointed the new Commanding Officer of the Squadron replacing Captain Kovacs. His promotion to Major was presented to him in 1985, by the Commander of CFCC, Brigadier General Simpson on the occasion of the 73 Communication Groups Mess Dinner. The Unit participated in the annual MILCON '84 as well as 9 additional Squadron Exercises.

31. Nineteen Eighty-five saw the Unit move into its new accommodations as the addition to the Armouries was completed. Unit strength had decreased to 50 personnel even though the SYEP program produced 8 members for the Squadron. The Unit acquired a Sanyo MBC-550 computer greatly enhancing training possibilities. In November, the Squadron acquired two CUCV's.

32. The highlight of 1986 was winning the 'Mooney Trophy' for the second time in its twelve year history. Unit strength, after an aggressive recruiting drive climbed to 61 personnel. The Unit acquired 3 of 4 of its ILTIS jeeps. Once again the Unit participated in MILCON as well as numerous Squadron exercises.

33. The years 1987 and 1988 were much the same as the Unit continued to support the annual MILCON Exercises and RV '87, and conducted numerous training exercises at the Unit level.

34. Nineteen Eighty-nine was a year of change as the Unit moved into the forefront of communications technology with the acquisition of INMARSAT (International Maritime Satellite) and the ADDN Thunder Bay Communication Centre. 736 Communication Squadron is the only Reserve unit in Canada to possess the INMARSAT equipment. Major L.A. Colpitts retired in September with Major D.L. Clearwater taking over command of the Squadron. The Unit participated in both RV '89 and MILCON '89. The Unit conducted the Primary Reserve Summer Training Program (PRSTP) formerly SYEP. December of 1989 saw the introduction of "**Radio Santa**". The brainchild of MWO D. Mihalik, the Squadron Sergeant Major, this program saw Unit members taking Radio Vans to various elementary schools and allowing young children an opportunity to "talk with Santa" over the various Radio equipment. This event was a real boon to our public relations.

35. The years 1990 and 1991 saw much of the same. The Squadron continued to support the annual Exercises RV '90 and '91 and the MILCON's. Unit training on INMARSAT progressed until the equipment was seconded to United Nations duties.

36. Nineteen Ninety-two was a year of change for the Squadron. The INMARSAT was returned from its tasking in the Persian Gulf and immediately re-tasked to UN duty in Cambodia. Captain Bagnall assumed command of the Squadron from Major Clearwater and MWO D. Mihalik was appointed Squadron Sergeant Major for the second time. Honourary Lieutenant Colonel F.W. Bayne retired and Honourary Lieutenant Colonel Colpitts was appointed to his new role. The Unit once again participated in the annual MILCON exercise. The Squadron also witnessed the commissioning of Second Lieutenant Warren Tracz, Lieutenant Peter King was promoted and Second Lieutenant Valerie West was transferred in to the Unit from 22 (London) Service Battalion.

37. Nineteen Ninety-three was the year the Squadron received a CRTTZ radio van w/5kw generator and the Cheyene 4X4 support vehicle. Captain S.F. Bagnall received a well deserved promotion to Major culminating a career which began as a Private with the same Unit. MCpl Allaway proceeded on United Nations duty in Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR). Sgt B. Woods was the recipient of the Canada 125 medal while Captain J.Groves, MWO D.Mihalik, WO D. Ditchfield, Sgt D. Vaananen, Sgt Tremblay and MCpl Miller all received the Special Service Medal. Lieutenant Watkins was transferred in from 1 CMBG Calgary as the Deputy Commanding Officer. Second Lieutenant Charles Kerber received his commission.

The Unit participated in its first foreign exercise, EX SOUTHERN PUSH II, with the remaining Garrison units at Camp Ripley, Minnesota. They conducted weapons training and qualifications, rappelling training and attended the obstacle course. During the entire deployment they also maintained radio support to 18 Svc Bn in the form of Command and Admin Nets. The Unit strength was at a peak level of 61 personnel

38. Nineteen Ninety-four saw the Unit win the coveted Mooney Trophy for its third time. Captain J.K. Groves was commissioned from the ranks from Master Warrant Officer., 2Lt Kerber was promoted to Lieutenant and 2Lt Wilcox received his commissioning scroll.

39. In 1995, the Squadron receives six new Light Service Vehicle Wheeled (LSVW's). These vehicles replaced the aging 5/4 T, Radio Vans which were returned to 17 Wing Winnipeg. The one CRTTZ vehicle that the Squadron owned was also returned to 17 Wing Winnipeg. In May, the new Interim Re-File System (IRS) was delivered to the Squadron. Testing of the system became a major training item for the Administration Clerks as much testing and verification of the system was required. In November, the TFWAN (Total Force Wide Area Network) was disconnected and DEMS (Department Electronic Mail System) installed. As well, the unit acquired four new 486DX computers. IBTS (Individual Battle Training Standards) training was conducted with the a confirmation exercise, EX SOUTHERN WARRIOR conducted at Camp Ripley, Minnesota. This exercise consisted of live fire of the C7, M-72 light anti tank weapon, M67 grenade launcher and gas chamber (NBCW) training. "Radio Santa" continues to be a very popular public relations event.

40. Nineteen ninety-six was another year of change as Captain Peter Scott (Regular Force) assumed the seat of command from outgoing Commanding Officer Major Stuart Bagnall. During the Change of Command parade, April 13, 1996, WO Jean Camirand was appointed Squadron Sergeant Major. Captain John Groves assumed the responsibility of Deputy Commanding Officer. In May, the Squadron joined with 735 Communication Squadron Winnipeg to form a team for EX JIMMY WEST which competed against all other 73/74 Communication Group Units in a communication skills competition in CFB Chilliwack. Although the Squadron did not win, the competition was fierce, with the combined 735/736 team being highly competitive.

41. In 1997, the Unit underwent major personnel changes when the majority of the experienced Master Corporals either departed for civilian employment or decided to make the military a career and transferred to the Regular Force. At EX MERCURY POTLATCH, the Squadron Sergeant Major, WO J. Camirand was promoted to Master Warrant Officer during the Alberta Signalers Annual Mess Dinner. The Squadron spent considerable time training in an attempt to overcome the loss of so many Master Corporals.

42. Nineteen ninety-eight was again a year of major change and a very intense year for the Squadron. With cutbacks imminent and a possibility of Units being closed, the Squadron had to demonstrate its ability to meet all of its taskings, prove its communication skills were at a very good level and that it was capable of training and retaining its personnel. EX THUNDERING BISON in Camp Ripley Mn, was the proving ground. Together with 734, 735 and 737 Communication Squadrons, 736 became an intricate part of 73 Composite Signal Squadron in support to Land Force Commands 38 Brigade. Squadron personnel proved they were the equal of any member of the various units and completely up to the challenge. Master Warrant Officer J.L. Camirand was selected to be the Squadron's Sergeant Major and Second Lieutenant R. Omeljaniuk received invaluable experience as Junior Signals Officers at a Brigade HQ. Later in the year, the Squadron was honoured with a Commander's Commendation for its top notch Web Page. In November, 736 Communication Squadron and 735 Communication Regiment combined to become units of the new 73 Communication Regiment. Both units joined in a Change of Command Parade at the Minto Armouries to recognize Lieutenant Colonel J. Hoekstra as its new Commanding Officer and its former Commanding Officers become Officers Commanding. Chief Warrant Officer T. Fuller became the new Regiment's first Regimental Sergeant Major.

43. The 2012 and 2013 training year saw many changes in personnel and communication capabilities. In December 2012 the Canadian army witnessed the official stand up of 38 Signal Regiment, 3 Squadron Thunder Bay formerly known as 736 Communication Squadron also witnessed the promotion of Cpl Swaggert, Cpl Voss, Sgt Bureau, MS Allen, WO Maggrah and 2Lt Docimo. The squadron worked diligently to transform its capabilities to provide communication support for the changing needs of the army. Through joint exercises with other units in the Thunder Bay Garrison 3 Squadron established a TOC Command Post in its unit lines which provided HF, VHF and line communications. The success of 3 Squadron's hard work was made evident when it provided flawless communications through ADM, CMD and TAC nets as well as providing two dismounted signalers during EX Soggy Highlander an amphibious assault EX led by the LSSR. By the end of the training year in May 2013 the personnel and equipment of 3 Squadron were well prepared for the upcoming tasks and challenges of the new training year.