

## THE MEMORIAL STAIRCASE

The Memorial Staircase was established in the 1921-2 academic year by the then-Commandant, 151 Major-General (later Lieutenant-General) Sir A.C. Macdonell, KCB, CMG, DSO, LLD. The purpose was detailed in the Commandant's Annual Report.<sup>1</sup> Under the heading "Improvement to College" it is as follows:

"The staircase in the Administration Building has been converted to a "Memorial Staircase", the photographs of each of the one hundred and seventy Ex-Cadets who have died on service having been placed on the walls. Other steps have been taken to beautify the staircase and to impress upon the Gentlemen Cadets the heroic sacrifice of those whose names are inscribed on the College Roll of Honour."

The memorial aspect has been maintained and expanded to include photographs of Cadets and Ex-Cadets who died in training or on active service. For as long as can be remembered, however, it has been the custom to restrict access to the Memorial Staircase to 4<sup>th</sup> Year Cadets, a practice which seems to be at odds with the original purpose. This may have been done, in part, to limit traffic and noise in the areas around the offices of the Commandant, Principal, Director of Cadets and Registrar.

The three stained glass windows between the first and second floors are memorials dedicated to the memory of three cadets who drowned.

The centre window commemorates Gentleman Cadet 566 Douglas Burr Plumb who drowned in Labrador on 22 June 1903. It features a then-unauthorized coat-of-arms that had been designed by Col E.O. Hewett and which, with minor changes, was authorized in 1920 by a special Royal Warrant of His Majesty, King George V<sup>2</sup>. It was donated by his stepfather, Wallace Nesbitt (1858 – 1930).<sup>3</sup> It is not known who designed or manufactured the window and there is no record of when it was installed.

Gentleman Cadets 954 James Wylie Logie and 971 Arthur Latrobe Smith drowned on 2 May 1913 in a canoeing accident in Kingston.<sup>4</sup> Their memorial windows were created by Robert McCausland Limited of Toronto.<sup>5</sup> There is no record of when they were installed although the Smith window has the date of 1914.

The Logie window, on the left, was donated by his father, Colonel (later Major-General) William Alexander Logie, and his mother, Mary Hamilton Wylie Logie.

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<sup>1</sup> Annual Report of the Commandant, Royal Military College of Canada 1922. p.14

<sup>2</sup> Preston, Richard Arthur. *Canada's RMC*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969. p. 396

<sup>3</sup> In 1887, Wallace Nesbitt, a Canadian lawyer and Puisne Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, married Douglas Plumb's mother, Louisa Andrée Plumb (d. 1894), the widow of his one-time partner Thomas Street Plumb, and became the stepfather of two young children.

<sup>4</sup> For details of the accident, see Appendix 1.

<sup>5</sup> See details of the windows at Appendix 2.

The Smith window was donated in 1914 by his mother, Mary Mima (Dempsey) Smith, and his brother, Harold.

The three windows on the third floor were donated in 1981 by the class of 1956 to commemorate their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of graduation and symbolize the tri-Service contributions of the College to the Navy, Army and Air Force.<sup>6</sup> The installation was done by 3379 Commander Robert Jekyll (Ret'd).

The pictures of "The Old Eighteen" were mounted on either side of the Memorial Staircase in 1976, marking the Centennial of the College.

The three Chandeliers at the bottom of the Staircase were donated in September 1972 by the members of the RMC Class of 1922-26 to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their year of entry.

The chandeliers on the first floor landing of the Memorial Staircase and on the second floor were presented in September 1973 by the members of the RMC Class of 1923-27 to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their year of entry.

The vestibule chandelier was presented by the Class entering the College in 1936 to mark the coincidence of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their year of entry and the centennial of RMC.

In the vestibule are several memorial plaques. They commemorate the following:

352 Lieutenant Charles Carroll Wood, Loyal North Lancashire Regiment. Died of wounds at Belmont, Orange Free State, South Africa, 12 November, 1899.<sup>7</sup>

146 Captain Charles Albert Hensley, Royal Dublin Fusiliers. Died of wounds near Venters' Spruit, South Africa on 20 January, 1900.

322 Lieutenant John Woodburn Osborne, Scottish Rifles. Killed in Action at Spion Kop, Natal, South Africa on 24 January, 1900.

99 Captain Thomas Wellington Chalmers, Canadian Mounted Rifles. Killed in Action near Belfast, Transvaal, South Africa on 2 November, 1900.

134 Captain John Haliburton Laurie, Royal Lancaster Regiment. Killed in action near Philoppolis, Orange Free State, South Africa on 12 April, 1901.

1025 Lieutenant Travers Williams-Taylor, 13<sup>th</sup> Hussars. Died at Shendi, Soudan on 10 May, 1926.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See details of the windows at Appendix 2.

<sup>7</sup> His brother, 67 Zachary Taylor Wood, was the Acting Commissioner of the North West Mounted Police and his nephew, 825 Stuart Taylor Wood, was the Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

<sup>8</sup> Montreal Gazette, 6 June 1927. The plaque was unveiled by General Sir Arthur Currie and the Bishop of Ontario. RMC Review, June 1932, p. 183. In December 1931 his parents donated to RMC the oil sketch "The Ghosts of Vimy" by William Frederick Longstaff.

135 Captain Harry Sloggett, Royal Engineers. Died at Chatham, England on 22 October, 1899.

39 Captain Huntly Brodie Mackay, Royal Engineers. Died of fever at Mombasa, Kenya on 16 April, 1891 while serving as the Acting Administrator of the British East Africa Company.<sup>9</sup>

62 Captain William Henry Robinson, Royal Engineers. Killed in action on 14 March, 1892, while with conspicuous bravery, blowing in the gate of the stockaded village of Tambi near Sierra Leone.<sup>10</sup>

52 Captain William Grant Stairs, the Welsh Regiment. Died of fever on 9 June, 1890 at Chende on the Zambesi River while in command of the Katanga Expedition sent out by the King of the Belgians.

917 Lieutenant Francis Fyshe, 7<sup>th</sup> Battery, 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Canadian Field Artillery. Killed in action near Messines, Belgium on 27 November, 1915.

1716 Gentleman Cadet Thomas William Smart (Tommy). Died on 12 October, 1926 as a result of an accident on the football field.

Lieut-Col Joseph Bramlen Ridout, 90<sup>th</sup> LI Cameronians (Scottish Rifles). First Captain of Cadets and Adjutant 1876 – 1881.

Robert Carr Harris CE. First Professor of Civil Engineering and Architecture Royal Military College of Canada 1879- 1897 and first Professor of Engineering Queen's University Kingston.

Amongst the pictures, the following are of note:

- A member of the Old Brigade, 4 - Lt Col WM Davis (d. 1918) raised the 54<sup>th</sup> (Kootenay) Bn CEF and then the 2nd Cdn Pioneer Regt (from Central Canada) which he took to the UK. Injured before he could take the unit to France, he died in Ottawa from those injuries at the age of 58.
- 25 - Maj Gen W.T. Bridges, was the first Divisional Commander to die in theatre of injuries received in action in the Dardenelles Campaign as Commander of the ANZAC forces. Withdrawn from RMC at the request of his parents (and on the payment of \$100), he moved with them to Australia, joined the Australian Artillery, and was the founder of Duntroon.
- 774 - Lt C.G.G Mackenzie, KIA with the Royal Scots Fusiliers was killed on 29 Oct 1914 (probably at First Ypres after the Retreat from Mons) and the first Canadian to die in action in the Great War. His classmate, 775 - Maj J.L.

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<sup>9</sup> Captain MacKay was the first Ex-Cadet to die on active service. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) as a member of the Emir Pasha Relief Expedition 1887 – 1890.

<sup>10</sup> Captain Robinson was the first Ex-Cadet to be killed in action.

McLennan, MC, RASC, the last Canadian to be killed in action as a member of the British Military Mission in Southern Russia.

41 - Lt Alexis Helmer, RCA, the 'close friend' of Maj John McCrae whose death prompted McCrae to write "*In Flanders Fields*" on 3 May, 1915; and

- No. 23519 Cpl K.C. O'Quinn KIA in Afghanistan

The Memorial Staircase has survived three fires. The first, on 12 May 1931 seriously damaged the whole building. The second, in the early 1970s, damaged the right-hand window that was then restored by the McCausland Company. The third, in 1992, caused by a lightning strike, damaged part of the Mackenzie Building but left the Memorial Staircase unscathed.

5300 Robert H. Thomas

## APPENDIX 1

### DROWNING OF GENTLEMEN CADETS LOGIE AND SMITH

Circumstances of their drowning were described in detail in several newspapers<sup>11</sup>. While the accounts vary, it appears that the two cadets left RMC in a canoe in the late afternoon on Friday, 2 May 1913 and paddled to Garden Island. They were last seen shortly after 1700 hrs, heading back to RMC. On discovering their absence, an extensive search was launched and the canoe was found at Howe Island and a paddle and items of their kit were found further up-river on Saturday.

A memorial service was held at St. George's Cathedral on 14 June 1913<sup>12</sup>. Their bodies had not been recovered at that time and it appears that they may never have been recovered.

A monument commemorating Gentleman Cadet Logie and his brother<sup>13</sup> is in the Hamilton City Cemetery but the Cemetery Administrator has stated that there is no record of a burial taking place. Similarly, Gentleman Cadet Smith's name is inscribed on a monument to his father, Cecil B. Smith, and his mother in the Stoney Creek Cemetery, now administered by the Hamilton City Cemetery.<sup>14</sup> Burial records from that time for the Stoney Creek Cemetery do not exist.

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<sup>11</sup> Kingston Whig Standard, Saturday, 3 May 1913 and Monday, 5 May 1913 as well as in the Globe and Mail, Monday, 5 May 1913, p. 2 and in The Hamilton Spectator, Saturday 3 May 1913, p. 1 and Tuesday, 5 May and Wednesday 6 May, 1913.

<sup>12</sup> Kingston Whig Standard, Saturday 14 June 1913.

<sup>13</sup> Major Alexander Chisholm Logie, was killed in action 20 October 1944 and buried in the Canadian War Cemetery at Bergen-OP-Zoom.

<sup>14</sup> Photographs of the monuments with their names can be viewed at [www.geneofun.on.ca](http://www.geneofun.on.ca).

## APPENDIX 2

### DETAILS OF STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

The Logie window depicts St Michael, the Archangel, shown fully armed and holding a staff and a shield. In Hebrew, Christian and Islamic tradition, he is viewed as the field commander of the Army of God and his offices include rescuing the souls of the faithful from the power of the enemy, especially at the hour of death and to call away from earth and bring men's souls to judgment. The verse "Go Thy Way Thy Son Liveth" (John 4:50) refers to Jesus healing the son of a nobleman at Capernaum.<sup>15</sup>

The Smith window depicts three angels and Sir Galahad, who is shown on foot leading a horse. Sir Galahad, a knight of King Arthur's Round Table was one of the three achievers of the Holy Grail in Arthurian legend, is shown fully armed and holding a staff and a shield. At the top of this same window it also states a line from the famous poem 'Sir Galahad' by Alfred Lord Tennyson, Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom: "My strength is as the strength of ten because my heart is pure." The verse "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8) refers to Jesus giving his sermon on the central principles of the Christian faith at the Mount of Beatitudes.

The Navy window is bordered by the cadet uniform buttons set in navy-blue cloth reinforced by the gold "wavy-navy" reminiscent of the seas in constant motion. The imagery is further intensified by setting the College buildings in fields of blue and green. The central motif is taken from the Naval Hymn. The osprey near the top of the window suggests naval aircraft in search of their submarine prey and finally the wings of the osprey extend into the wings of the angel representing the immortality of the Ex-Cadets of the Maritime Forces.

The visual image for the Army window is based on the poems "Into Battle" by Julian Grenville and "Taps at Twilight" by Arthur Stringer. The straight gold border is drawn from the "line of battle" while the red cloth is reminiscent of the "scarlets". The stylized buildings are set in fields of green and brown symbolic of the operational environment of the land elements. The central motif is taken from the last verse of "Into Battle". It represents Day clasping the soldier symbolized by the sword, grenade, ladder and crown with an abstraction of strong hands in the form of open mailed fists that also suggest armoured might. Above is a representation of military firepower, both traditional and contemporary. In the upper arch, the two bugles related to the first verse of "Taps at Twilight". And, finally, at the top, the immortalized spirit of the soldier is folded in the soft wings of night.

In the Air Force window the colours suggest the air element with the "buttons" now enclosed in the traditional colours of the RCAF. The views of the College buildings are seen from the cockpit of an airplane in stylized form. The window theme is taken from the poem "High Flight" by John Gillespie Magee Jr. The first line of the poem "...oh I have slipped the surly bonds of earth.." is represented by the broken chain freeing the spirit from its earthly bonds. The central motif captures the feeling expressed in Magee's poem of "dancing the skies" and flinging an

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<sup>15</sup> e-veritas 22 August 2010 "3 Stained Glass Windows Memorial Stairwell – Mackenzie Building".

“eager craft through footless halls of air”. The globe represents the world-wide deployment of the air element while the stars and space symbolize the limitless frontiers of flight. Above the central motif, as in the other windows, the combat aspect is caught in the probing searchlights. And, finally, set against the wings of immortality, is the outstretched pilot’s hand, which in Magee’s poem “touched the face of God”.