

Creston Museum hosting “Trench Dinner” to commemorate Great War battle

On April 24, 1915, Canadian troops made their first major appearance on a European battlefield. It was the Battle of St. Julien, and it was a pivotal moment in the Great War.

“We have identified fifty-one young men from the Creston Valley who had enlisted by the time the Battle of St. Julien occurred,” says Creston Museum manager Tammy Hardwick. “Some were still in training, but over thirty of them were in France, and on that battlefield.”

Thanks to many hundreds of hours of research by volunteer John Dinn, the Museum has been able to trace the movements of almost all of those young men – the date they enlisted, the units they served in, and where exactly they were on April 24, 1915.

“We’ve had to make educated guesses for a few of these guys,” says Hardwick, “but for the most part we know whether they fought in the Battle of St. Julien, and, if so, where they were on the battlefield and whether they survived it or were wounded, killed, or taken prisoner.”

The Museum has also traced – although in less detail – the military careers of the soldiers after the battle. Collectively, they fought in every major battle of the Great War, served in every capacity from privates to flying officers, earned many military decorations, and account for nearly half of the local fatalities of the war.

Now, the Creston Museum invites the public to share the individual stories of these fifty-one brave young men, at a special Trench Dinner on April 24, 2015 – the hundredth anniversary of the Battle of St. Julien.

Each dinner ticket bears the name of one of those fifty-one soldiers. Guests will follow “their” soldier through a special exhibit that details his enlistment and training process and pinpoints his presence and actions on the battlefield. Where exactly was he on that day, a century ago? Did he survive the battle? Did he survive the war?

Then, guests will enjoy a meal similar to the one “their” soldier would have had in 1915.

“We do have to take into account modern health regulations,” says Hardwick with a laugh. “So we won’t be serving rats, and we’ll even avoid the beans-on-toast thing. But we will be re-creating, as closely as possible, a typical meal for each soldier, depending on where he was and what happened to him. Obviously, the lads training in England would have had quite a different meal than a soldier who had been taken prisoner.”

Although the Battle of St. Julien marked the first time Canadian troops were subjected to the horrors of chemical warfare, “we won’t actually recreate a gas attack,” says Hardwick. “And no one will go without a meal, even though a lot of the local soldiers were without food or water for a couple of days during the battle.”

Even so, the Museum guarantees that guests will leave with a greater understanding of what it was like for these young men, so far from home, fighting a war that was far longer, and far bloodier, than anything they had expected.

The special exhibit and dinner will be held at the Canadian Legion Hall on 11th Avenue North, on Friday, April 24, 2015. The exhibit opens at 5:30; dinner will be served at 6:00. Tickets, \$15 per person, are available at Creston Museum and Black Bear Books. Space is limited; advance tickets are highly recommended.

The Creston Museum's Annual General Meeting will follow.

For more information, or to purchase tickets, call 250-428-9262 or email crestonmuseum@telus.net