

[Page 34 - "Fortress Sydney" Manning the Guns on the C.B. Coast](#)

ISSUE : [Issue 14](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1976/8/1

Yet the land defences were primarily built to repel an attack by surface vessels and the prospect of such an attack diminished as the years passed. This had an effect on the morale of the soldiers in the coastal forts. In August 1939 the 6th (Sydney) and the 36th (Sydney Mines) Batteries of the 16th Coast Brigade, Royal Canadian Artillery, contained 130 men. By recruiting and the absorption of the 9th Searchlight Battery, the two units grew to seven times that number in two years. At first, the recruits were local men and volunteers, but they were gradually replaced by conscripts from other parts of Canada. For those of the prewar militia who were kept in the coastal defences, this transformation and the dull routine of duty were discouraging. It was now clear that, for the Canadian Army, the battle would be on the other side of the Atlantic. Their mood of bitter resignation is well expressed in a poem attributed to Gnr. Ings of the 6th Battery at Fort Petrie, "The Coast Gunner's Lament." The Coast Gunner's Lament a poem by a gunner of the 6th (Sydney) Heavy Battery Why didn't I wait to be drafted? Why didn't I wait for the band. Why didn't I wait for the banquet. Oh, why did I hold up my hand? For nobody gave me a banquet. And nobody said a kind word. The howl of the wind in the tent ropes. Was the only sound that I heard. Off to the depot I'd hustle. To be trained for a third of a year. Then back to the coast like a leper, I was only a volunteer. We had given the others our billets. While we froze to death in the tents. We had cleaned up a dozen parade grounds. For the guys that were only sent. I waded the mud of Cape Breton, I froze in the Cape Breton cold, I tramped the beat by the sea shore. Watching millions of waves unfold. Then came the National Army, then it was all made clear. The glory goes to the drafted. The work to the volunteers. I dreamed of the time I thought coming. When over the top I would go. With my nerves all jumping and tingling. And my muddy old Enfield held low. I dreamed of far off dangers, Of the bloody fields of hate, I dreamed of the bullet that hit me, I had met a soldier's fate. Then up to St. Peter I would double. And he'd say there's no room for you here. We're reserved for the National Army, Hell's made for the Volunteers. Maybe some day in the future, As I hold a lad on my knee. And he asks what I did in that conflict. That was fought so far off from me. Then I'll blush, as I must look away. To wipe off a shame-faced tear. And tell him I missed being Drafted, I was only a VOLUNTEER. DEDICATED TO ALL THE COAST ARTILLERY GUNNERS IN CANADA Top Row Left: L/C A.A. McIsaac. K. McKinnon? J.L. McLean, M. Saule. D.G. McNeil. D.J. McGillivray. F. Jessome. Sgt. J. N. McDonald. Second Row Left: Lionel Lee. Philip McIntyre. Arthur Fernyhough. H. Blinkhorn, Joe Doucette, Anthony Andrecyk. Third Row Right; Cooks and cooks, J. F. Leroy, J.F. McAdam, John Quinn. Philip McIntyre. J.T. Doble. W. Tones. J. Handley. On Guard Bugler at Right is F. Tate, Walter O'Neil Pickup. ti CAPE BRETON SOLDIERS TRAINING