



Van Arty Assoc and RUSI Van Members News Dec 30, 2014

I am taking a short break over the holiday period. I will send out an abbreviated newsletter each week keeping the two war journals updated, printing urgent articles only. Next regular newsletter will be published on Jan 7th.

Wednesday Lunches

Mess is closed for the holidays. The first lunch of 2015 will be Jan 14th.

New Year's Levée

15 Fd Messes will open for visitors at 1100hrs. A light lunch will be served starting around noon.

From the Journal of Capt Fred G Coxen RFA - 1915

Dec 31st: The morning was rather quiet. At 2:30 pm we were subjected to a fierce bombardment and a heavy attack. The enemy capturing the KEEP by the railway embankment, from the Kings Royal Rifles, who [then] recaptured it again late in the afternoon. About 10pm the Germans again attacked and gained the KEEP and REDOUBT. We were firing heavily all night, it was very cold. After two attacks we succeeded in again retaking the lost ground about 3am, but could not hold it, the KRR's being 'bombed' out soon after gaining possession. Throughout the night until about 8 am we kept up hot fire – the New Year came in, in real war like style.

Jan 1, 1915: I was hard out, and handed over the instruments to Collins. [I] went in a stable and slept throughout the day - a little shelling took place, but I slept through it all.

World War 2 – Jan 1940

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

Jan 1st 1940: Western Europe is quiet because the British and French are not yet willing to fully commit themselves for battle.

Jan 2nd: The Finns savage the 44th Division as the Soviet troops blunder forward to attempt to relieve the 163rd Division at Suomussalmi; the Russian habit of staying road bound costs them dearly as the few Finnish ski battalions are enjoying uncontested mobility in the woods and are striking at will.

Jan 4th: Goering is given overall control of the entire German war industry; but Hitler being Hitler and the Reich being the Reich, there will be lots and lots of exemptions and back-door deals anyway. The poor organization of the German war industry will remain Hitler's greatest handicap.

Jan 5th: The Finns ease up in their attacks on the trapped Soviet 18th (on the Karelian Front) and 168th Divisions – which have finally formed a solid series of defences while the handful of Finnish battalions are nearing exhaustion. A Cabinet shuffle in the UK: Leslie Hore-Belisha is replaced at the War Office by Oliver Stanley, the new head of the Board of Trade is Sir Andrew Duncan and the Information Minister is Lord Reith.

New Year's Day Levée

The annual New Year's Day Levée, hosted by the Governor General, the Lieutenant Governor, military establishments, municipalities and other institutions, has an unusual and interesting origin. The word Levée is derived from the French verb lever - to rise (specifically from one's bed) - and has its origins in the Levée du Soleil or Rising of the Sun instituted by King Louis XIV (1643 - 1715) (*There was an evening ceremony as well, when he went to bed*) whose custom it was to receive his male subjects in the Royal bedchamber just after arising, a practice which subsequently spread throughout Europe. The Levée crossed the English Channel in the 18th Century, and in Great Britain and Ireland became a formal Court assembly (reception) given by the Sovereign or his/her representative in the forenoon or early afternoon, at which only men were received.

In the New World colonies, the Levée was held by the Governor acting on behalf of the Monarch. Because settlers were widely scattered, and separated from the seat of Government, the annual Levée was a very important event, and attendance by village leaders and public dignitaries was compulsory. It was in Canada that the Levée became associated with New Year's Day. The holding of a Levée by the Governor General and Lieutenant Governors on New Year's Day is not a continuation of the precedent set by the Sovereign they represent, but rather perpetuates an ancient custom of this country, dating from the days of the fur trade. The people of the trade traditionally paid their respects to their representative of government - the Master of the Fort – on New Year's Day. The first recorded Levée in Canada was held on January 1st, 1646 in the Chateau St. Louis by Charles Huault de Montmagny, Governor of New France (later Québec) from 1636 to 1648. In addition to shaking hands and wishing a Happy New Year to citizens presenting themselves at the Chateau, the Governor informed guests of significant events in the Mother Country, as well as the state of affairs within the colony. (This tradition is carried on today within The Commonwealth in the form of The Queen's New Year's Message.

The State-of-the-Union address by the President of the United States, although not delivered on New Year's Day, has similar origins.) In turn, the settlers were expected to pledge anew their allegiance to the Crown. The Levée tradition was continued by British Colonial Governors in Canada, and subsequently by Governors General and Lieutenant Governors, and continues to the

present day. Records suggest that only after British Columbia entered Confederation in 1871 were Levées regularly held by the Lieutenant Governor of the Province, and that Colonial Governors of Vancouver and (Mainland) British Columbia did not customarily hold them on New Year's Day. The (Victoria) Colonist of January 3, 1872 reported that "... His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor (Sir Joseph JW Trutch) and family received and entertained many callers at their private residence". Subsequent Levées were held, for the most part, in Government House.

Although receptions hosted by the President of the United States of America are occasionally referred to as Levées, over the years, the Levée has become almost solely a Canadian observance. Today, the word Levée describes the receptions (usually - but not necessarily - on New Year's Day) held by the Governor General, the Lieutenant Governors of the Provinces, the Military, and others, to mark the advent of another year and to provide an opportunity for the public to pay their respects. The Levée has a long tradition in the Canadian Forces as one of the activities associated with New Year's Day. In years past, Military Commanders garrisoned throughout the vast expanse of Canada held local Levées since, as Commissioned Officers, they were expected to act on behalf of the Crown on such occasions. On the West Coast, Levées are a well-established tradition, given that Vancouver Island was the base for the Royal Navy's Pacific Fleet, beginning in the 1840s.

Today, as in bygone years, members of the various Canadian Forces units and Headquarters across Canada receive and greet visiting military and civilian guests in the convivial spirit of the first day of the New Year. As has the Levée itself, refreshments served at Levées have undergone change - in importance and variety - over the years. In colonial times, when the formalities of the Levée had been completed, guests were treated to wine and cheeses from the homeland. Wines did not travel well during the long ocean voyage to Canada; so, to make the cloudy and somewhat sour wine more palatable, it was doctored with alcohol and spices, and heated. The concoction came to be known as "Le Sang du Caribou", or Moose Blood. Under British Colonial rule, many of the customs of French Canada were retained but, in the case of "Le Sang du Caribou", whisky, which travelled better, was substituted as the basic ingredient. This was then mixed with goat's milk, and flavoured with nutmeg and cinnamon to produce an Anglicized version called "Moose Milk". Today's version of Moose Milk, in addition to whisky (or rum) and spices, uses a combination of eggnog and ice-cream and sometimes an additional alcoholic refinement or two.

Refreshments were clearly an important element in the New Year's festivities. A report of the New Year's Levée held in Brandon House in Manitoba in 1797 indicated that "... in the morning the Canadians (men of the North West Company) make the House and Yard ring with saluting (the firing of rifles). The House then filled with them when they all got a dram each". Simpson's Athabasca Journal reports that on January 1st, 1821, "the Festivities of the New Year commenced at four o'clock this morning when the people honoured me with a salute of fire arms, and in half an hour afterwards the whole Inmates of our Garrison assembled in the hall dressed out in their best clothes, and were regaled in a suitable manner with a few flagons of rum and some cakes. A full allowance of Buffalo meat was served out to them and a pint of spirits for each man". Indeed, when residents called upon the Governor to pay their respects, they expected party fare. On

Vancouver Island, there was “an almighty row” in 1856 when the Colonial Governor’s Levée was not to their liking.

In military messes, hospitality is dispensed in a variety of forms, from the previously-mentioned Moose Milk (with rum often substituted for whisky), and the special flaming punch of the Royal Canadian Hussars of Montreal – a concoction bequeathed to the regiment by the old 1st Motor Machine Gun Brigade and requiring a month to prepare - to the famed Athole Brose, the brew of oatmeal, honey and whisky of the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, Vancouver. Historically, the Levée has been largely a male preserve having its origins, as previously mentioned, in the Royal bedchamber. This custom persisted, in part, because of societal practices of earlier days, and quite possibly the fact that it was an occasion enlivened by quantities of rum or other spirits, and thus was often a raucous celebration. During the Second World War, Levées were attended by female officers of the Armed Forces, and since then the “men only” tradition has given way to Levées attended by both men and women. From the rather boisterous celebrations of early times to the somewhat more sedate, if informal, event of today, the Levée has evolved into an occasion to call upon representatives of the Sovereign, military, and municipal governments, to exchange New Year’s greetings and best wishes for the coming year, and to renew old acquaintances and meet new friends in a convivial atmosphere. It is also an opportunity to reflect on the events of the past year and to welcome in the challenges and opportunities of the New Year.

*Compiled by J. Michael Roberts
Secretary to the Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia
Christmas 1997*

