

The Royal Canadian Legion Colonel R.H. Britton Br. 92

55 King Street East, Gananoque, On K7G 1E8
Tel: (613) 382-3023 Fax: (613) 382-5208
E Mail: rclbr92@bellnet.ca



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Gananoque August 1914

Submitted by Eric de Kroon

Adapted from articles appearing in the *Gananoque Reporter* August 15 and 22, 1914.

The arrest of four young men whose suspicious bearing boded some evil purpose threw the small town of Gananoque into a state of fearful excitement. It was August 1914.

Mr. George Turkington, superintendent of the roads and the town's informal gatekeeper, was the first to observe them as they trekked into Gananoque from the east along the main thoroughfare. Though they hardly appeared suspicious characters, being politely-dressed, it was the heavy and cumbersome baggage they carried that drew Mr. Turkington's watchful gaze. He allowed them to pass, choosing instead to follow them.

It was undoubtedly Mr. Turkington's persistence, and some might say his proclivity to act as a one-man neighbourhood watch, that led the eventual capture of the four strangers. As he stalked them through town, he shared his suspicions with Fire Chief Sweet, who eagerly joined the stealthy pursuit. Together they caught up to their prey at the train office up town, where they had entered, as was later revealed, with the intention to buy tickets to Brockville. Coincidentally, Police Constable Neil happened by and was quickly apprised of the situation by Mr. Turkington and his accomplice. The four men were promptly arrested as suspicious characters, certainly a crime in a time without moral ambiguity or strong civil rights.

Held at the jail, the four men were interrogated and searched. Taciturn at first, even intimating an inability to

converse at all in English, the men soon recovered from their bashfulness and chatted about almost any subject, except their identities or the purpose of their visit. Yet, to the charming reporter of the local newspaper, the four internees smilingly consented to reveal their names and places of birth. In the first cell was Mr. Oscar Haussler of Buhlertal and Mr. Carlss Wagner from Nuremberg. Locked in the second cage was Mr. Wm. Lehmert of Dresden and Mr. O. Schobel of Hamburg. The prisoners were all born in Germany; an exciting and yet provoking revelation.

Asked for an explanation of their presence in Gananoque, and more widely the Dominion of Canada, the Germans replied they were on a fishing trip. They had left Clayton, New York in a punt, an ill-suited craft for use on the river, but had drifted to Dark Island where they had come ashore. Mr. Lee, the Customs and Immigration officer, soon recovered the boat where the men said they left it; the only means of propulsion were boards nailed to long sticks, certainly a peculiar way to navigate the St. Lawrence. How a fishing trip, in an ill-equipped punt they purchased in Clayton and abandoned in exchange for train tickets to Brockville seems less a truthful story than the makings of conspiracy. Especially given a passenger steamer regularly moved between Gananoque and Clayton and would have made for a much more comfortable, and certainly conspicuous and legal, passage to Canada.

Again, the Germans hardly appeared as men of ill-intent. They were young, all under 25 years old, showing signs of good address and breeding. They had all lived in the United States for the past six years. They spoke excellent German, though their English was not as good. Mr. Haussler, the assumed leader of the gang, gave good evidence in his mannerisms of being a student, and not the carpenter he claimed to be. Though their story was dubious, nothing about their appearance was suspicious. It was however their baggage, what had initially drew the attentive eye of Mr. Turkington, that affirmed the wisdom in detaining the four men. It was Among camping gear and cigar boxes of miscellaneous lotions, poultices, and bandages there was 1 rifle, 2 shotguns, 3 revolvers, 1 12-inch long dirk, 40 rounds of ammunition, 1 bandolier, a map of the area, and Kodak field glasses. Not at all peaceable equipment required for a relaxing fishing trip. In fact fishing tackle, a necessary warlike to the extreme.

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.....Continued pg 2

SPECIAL EVENT

"THE MONARCHS"



GALA NEW YEARS EVE PARTY

9PM - 1AM TICKETS \$30

LATE NIGHT BUFFET, PARTY FAVOURS

get your tickets early - limited seating

Gananoque August 1914.....Continued from pg 1

3 revolvers, 1 12-inch long dirk, 40 rounds of ammunition, 1 bandolier, a map of the area, and Kodak field glasses. Not at all peaceable equipment required for a relaxing fishing trip. In fact fishing tackle, a necessary component of any fishing expedition, was completely absent from their gear. The weapons and ammunition and first aid material convicted the men of some evil purpose. Most especially given the recent declaration of war, announced hardly a week earlier, between the British Empire, of which Canada was a proud dominion, and the German Empire. The four internees claimed no prior knowledge of the war before entering Gananoque, but inconsistencies in their story and their arsenal of weapons was damning evidence of some plot to be executed in Canada, a nation at war with Germany.

Major Russel Britton, who commanded Gananoque's 8th Battery of Field Artillery, was notified of the arrest of the four Germans, and promptly made contact with the military authorities in Kingston. He was advised to have the men held in Gananoque as prisoners of war. As a precaution against sabotage Britton assigned a squad of militiamen to sentry duty overnight at the pumping station, standpipe, and the bridges in town.

Word of the arrest of four, heavily-armed Germans quickly spread throughout Gananoque and excited residents soon gathered outside the jail. Thronging the yard of the jailhouse a curious crowd watched in awe as the Germans were brought out, under the careful supervision of Police Chief Ryan, for some exercise. Enjoying the attention, one of the prisoners began a series of physical manoeuvres that darkly hinted towards rigid instruction, military almost, at some earlier point in his life. After a particularly amazing feat of strength he winked at the crowd and goaded them by saying, "That's what you have to do in the navy." Mayor Gibson proclaimed any suspicious strangers had to be reported to the police immediately.

After being held in the Gananoque jail for a week, the federal government in Ottawa ordered a hearing before Magistrate Carroll. After giving their evidence, which involved testimonies that held they were visiting Canada to hunt and had no connection with the German military, the four Germans were transported by train to Kingston under a guard from the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery. The four Germans, prisoners of war on suspicion of being spies, were interned in Fort Henry

Interestingly, it was later learned that four Germans, answering the description of those arrested in Gananoque, had previously tried to enter Canada at Marysville on Wolfe Island where authorities turned them back to the United States.

Others might disagree, but perhaps the people of Gananoque might have a valid claim to be the first Canadians to capture prisoners of war in the First World War.



NEW YEARS LEVEE -JAN. 1ST 2019

All Legion Members are invited

10am -Meet and Greet with MP, MPP & Mayor

11am- Ceremony and Naming of Honouree of the Year

Noon - 3pm - Light Buffet

2018/2019 ZONE SPORTS

8-BALL	BROCKVILLE	DECEMBER 12, 2018
SENIOR DARTS	GANANOQUE	JANUARY 12, 2018
EUCHRE	KITLEY TOLEDO	FEBRUARY 16, 2019
SHUFFLEBOARD	PORTLAND	FEBRUARY 23, 2019

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

December 2 – Sunday Brunch 9am – 12:30 pm

December 11 - Br 92 Legion Meeting 7pm

December 18 - LA Legion Meeting 7 pm

December 21 -Special Christmas Meat Draw
starting at 5:00

December 31 – New Years Eve Gala 9pm – 1 am

January 1 - 2019 New Years Levee, starting 10 am

January 6 - Sunday Brunch 9am – 12:30 pm

January 27 - Robbie Burns Afternoon. Scottish

Food & Entertainment, \$20, tickets at the bar