



DONALD L. HINGS

and his

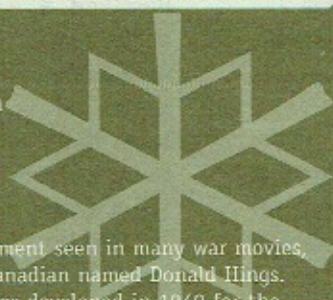
W A L K I E - T A L K I E

British Columbia
Colombie - Britannique
David Billings, Roger Chaisson, Bruce Waugh

The Walkie-Talkie

Although the walkie-talkie is a familiar instrument seen in many war movies, few people realise it was the brainchild of a Canadian named Donald Hings. The C58 walkie-talkie radio set, which Mr. Hings developed in 1940 for the National Research Council of Canada, became the standard radio communication equipment used by the Canadian armed forces during World War II. More than 18,000 of these walkie-talkie radio sets were produced for military use.

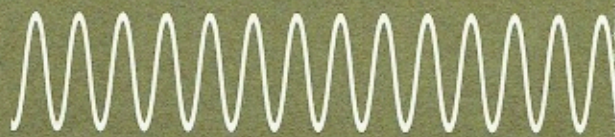
The sculpture created by Team British Columbia depicts a WWII soldier in a trench amidst sandbags, communicating with the revolutionary C58 walkie-talkie. The team chose to pay tribute to Mr. Hings for his contribution to the war effort and to the evolution of two-way communications.



DONALD L. HINGS, C.M., M.B.E., P. Eng.

and his

WALKIE - TALKIE



The walkie-Talkie

Over the years, the now familiar cell-phone has evolved from the first-ever portable radio transceiver, invented in 1937 for Cominco, by Don Hings of Rossland (now Vancouver). At the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Don patented it under the name of "Packset" and turned it over free of charge to the Federal Government for the duration of the war. In the same spirit, Cominco loaned Don's services to the Federal Government for the duration, and he moved to Ottawa. During the war about 18,000 units of Don's C58 walkie-talkies were manufactured in Ontario and sent overseas to the Canadian and British forces. The term "walkie-talkie" was coined by a journalist and it stuck. One journalist was moved to write: "that it would be safe to say their effect (Don's walkie-talkies) on the war was profound, saving untold numbers of lives and providing soldiers with a reliable means of battlefield communication they wouldn't have had otherwise".

After the war, Don moved his family to Vancouver where he set up a combined home and laboratory (Electronic Laboratories of Canada Ltd.) on top of Capitol Hill in Burnaby. By the time he retired for health reasons he had acquired 50 patents in his name, among which was a unique electronic piano.

Development

It all started in the 1930's when Don and his family settled in Rossland after being hired by Cominco (then called CM&S Co.) to set up a radio communications system to serve a group of Cominco geologists engaged in an aerial prospecting program in the remote areas of the Northwest Territories and northern BC. The small fleet of DeHaviland Gypsy-Moth aircraft was flown by geologists trained in both daylight and night flying. (It did not take the geologists long to realise if they lost their way flying over the barren north, they could find the way back by recognizing the geological formations below). Don first set up a standard wireless-telegraphy system where everyone had to use a telegraph key and learn the code. There was no other way. The portable back-pack transceiver had not yet been invented. The home-station was in the attic of Don's house up in Rossland, a better place to get the signal out. Later the company provided space for this in the plant in Trail. The first home-station operator was Ed Batt of Rossland, a wizard with the key.



For this type of work the telegraph key was cumbersome. There had to be an easier way for talk between prospectors on the ground and geologists in the plane and to the home base. The upshot was the company asked Don if he could design a portable back-pack transceiver that would be light enough to carry for the prospectors on the ground. He quietly went to work and in 1937 he came up with a back-pack transceiver, which he called "Packset". In 1939, just before WWII broke out, Don received a patent from the US Patent Office and turned it over to the Canadian Federal Government for the duration of the war.

Awards

Because of his ability, Don was loaned to the National Research Council in Ottawa for the duration of the war. During that time, 18,000 units of the C-58 series of his "packset" were assembled in Ontario and shipped overseas to the Canadian and British forces. They helped to keep an orderly retreat at the evacuation from Dunkirk. Following that, a more rugged model was developed for use in army tanks. At the end of the war Don was presented with the M.B.E. medal (Member of the British Empire) in 1946 by the British Government. Later in Aug. 2001 he received the Order of Canada medal from the Governor General for his service to Canada.



Friends congratulate Don Hings after Governor-General Adrienne Clarkson awarded him the Order of Canada medal at a special ceremony held at UBC Museum of Anthropology on Aug. 16, 2001

Accomplishments

After his release from Ottawa, Don decided to strike out on his own. He moved to Vancouver and established the Electronic Laboratories of Canada Ltd. on top of Capitol Hill in Burnaby. Attached to the lab was a comfortable home with a view of the inlet below. This was a success. Years later Don entered retirement with more than 50 patents, including a unique version of an electronic piano. An admiring Vancouver news writer had this to say: "Like many accomplished men and women of his generation, Don gives the overriding impression of a man with overwhelming intelligence wrapped in a buffer of modesty".

Don Hings was a self-educated man with a compelling desire for research. His wide field of activity included aerial geophysics. In the 1960's his air crew proved up the existence of a large body of molybdenum ore on the side of Red Mountain for Red Mountain Mines. Some years previous to this, northern communications were often blacked out for hours by intense displays of the Northern Lights.

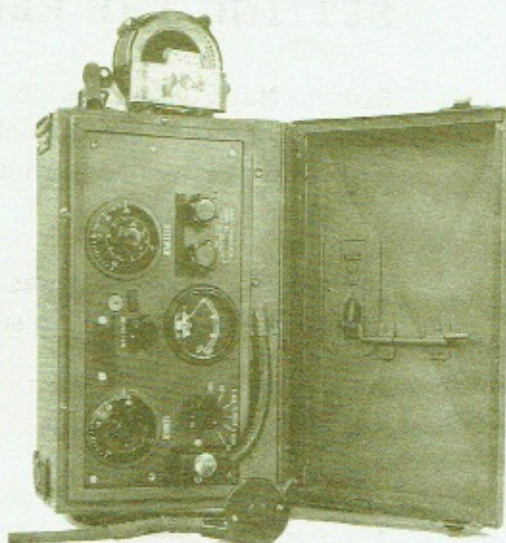
Don eventually came up with a solution for the problem for Cominco. The Federal people agreed that Don was right and adopted his solution.

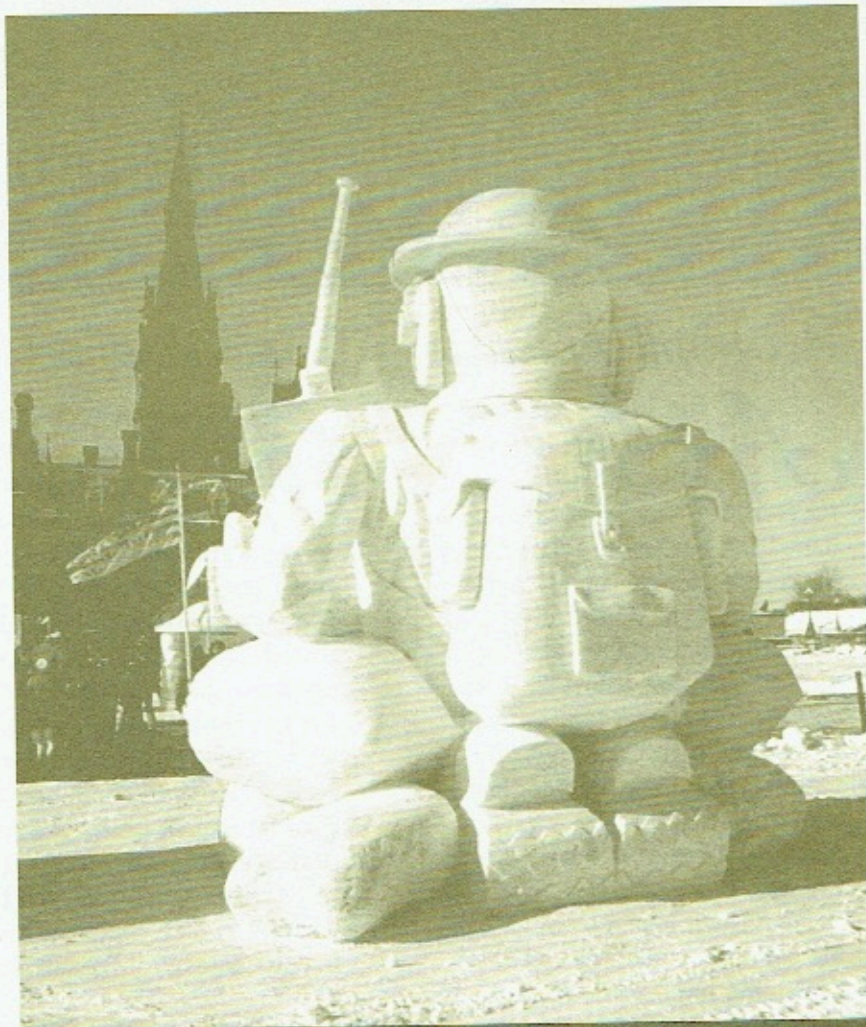


Snow-sculptors

In the year 2000 Donald Lewes Hings, with his model C-58 "walkie-talkie", was the subject for a three-man team of professional snow-sculptors (named "Sandemons") when they were chosen to represent British Columbia for the Canada Snow Sculpture Contest in Ottawa. For the contest they were asked to do a snow sculpture of a local legendary figure who has had a substantial impact on their home province or Canada in the last 100 years. After much research they decided to do a sculpture honouring the legendary Donald Hings.

When asked what the sculpture would be, they replied: "It will be 12 feet wide and 12 feet long and 16 feet high. It will be a Red Cross soldier from World War II talking into a C-58 walkie-talkie, the one invented by Hings. It turned out this sculpture won "The People's Choice Award".





Canada snow sculpture contest
in Ottawa, Ont. 2000

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

Early in May 2000, a popular CBC Radio program congratulated a visiting USA guest who had apparently just received a delayed recognition from the US government for having invented the first-ever walkie-talkie during WWII. We contacted the CBC to correct the obvious error but did not receive a reply.

Since Don's 1937 patent was issued at least five years ahead of the US army's claim, we have produced this pamphlet to set the record straight.

Produced by the Rosland Historical Museum & Archives

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