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January 2018



# The Groundsheet

The Publication of  
**The Royal Westminster Regiment Association**

*'Dedicated to the ideals and comradeship  
we knew in wars and peace in our  
services both home and abroad.'*

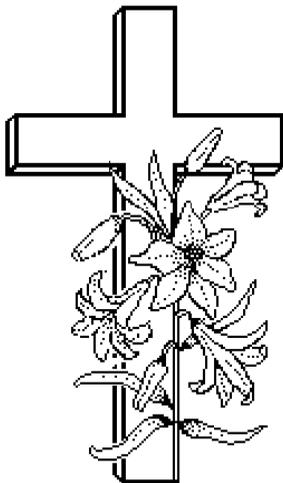
**'Pro Rege et Patria'**

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# *In Memoriam*



**Lest We Forget**

Donald Struan ROBERTSON	Ottawa, ON	August 2017	The Westminster Regiment (Motor) WWII
David James MONTROSE	Vancouver, BC	September 2017	The Royal Westminster Regiment

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## **Health and Welfare**

BGEN Hamm has settled into his new quarters, and gets out from time to time to join us for regimental events, such as the recent Soldier's Dinner and Levee. Cpl. Radcliffe was recently the victim of a vehicle incident and is recovering. Your interim editor has been blessed with the arrival of a second daughter and a substantial fruit basket from the Officer's Mess and Association. Major Chan was united in matrimonial bliss with Capt. Lancaster of 2893 RCACC.

Please advise the President of deaths, births, and other significant updates regarding the health and welfare of our members.

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## **Your Executive**

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## **Editor**

First of all, this space is looking for a permanent resident. After all, editorial space is generally filled with opinion and pithy advice, and as a very junior officer, I am not permitted an opinion and I lack the experience to provide advice. Persons interested in filling the vacancy and expressing their opinions are urged to submit their applications post-haste to the President of the Association for consideration.

Secondly, I apologize for the delay in publishing this edition. To make up for the tardiness, the New Year's Groundsheet is as full of stories and information as a turkey is with stuffing. It is also 100% calorie, gluten, and transfat free\* (this claim not scientifically verified), unlike the seasonal goodies circulating.

Given the timing, it has become the year end or holiday edition and there certainly is a great deal to report. Unfortunately, time has again taken its toll on our comrades. Don Robertson served with The Westminster Regiment in Italy, France, and Belgium and passed at the age of 95 in Ottawa after a distinguished career in the federal public service. Dave Montrose served with The Royal Westminster Regiment until 1993, transferring to 15<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Regiment, but his service was fittingly held in the Armory. With the many anniversaries this year, remembrance is top of mind, and I was gratified to see the interest and knowledge from the young people I met during the Remembrance Week speaking engagements.

Finally, however you celebrated the holidays at the end of 2017, whether as Christmas, Hanukkah, the Winter Solstice, Festivus, or not at all, I wish the best to you and yours for the New Year.

2Lt. Mulder

## Italy Trip – May 2019

The Association will be conducting a tour to Italy, to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Melfa River. The trip will be open to bona-fide members of the Association, serving members of the Regiment and Band, in good standing and members of the affiliated Cadet Corps (accompanied by approved chaperones)

Here is an update on the progress.

An Italy Trip Committee has been set up which is chaired by The Honourable Chuck Strahl, Honorary Lieutenant Colonel, with representation from the Battalion, Museum and Band.

Objectives of the trip are to provide opportunities for;

- Education - including review of battles fought by the Westies
- Commemorations - for those members of The Westminster Regiment who are buried in Italy
- Fellowship – by including members of the serving Battalion, Band and Cadet Corps on the trip

The itinerary is in the process of being finalised and the proposed schedule is to leave Vancouver on 20 May 2019 to travel to Rome and then return to Canada from Venice on 01 June 2019.

23 members along with family members have signed up and made a \$250 deposit toward the trip.

We are going to use the services of the travel agent of the previous trip by the Association to Italy. The travel agency is Special Travel International (STI).

We have also asked that Ken MacLeod, a historian, who has interviewed a number of the members of The Westminster Regiment to come and assist us with visits to the various battlefields where the Regiment fought.

The main activity of the Italy Trip Committee is now to raise funds for the trip.

Further information and updates will be posted on our website <http://royal-westies-assn.ca> and please check the STI website [www.sticanada.com](http://www.sticanada.com)

**If anyone else is still planning to come on the trip please contact the Secretary, Bill White, at [secretary@royal-westies-assn.ca](mailto:secretary@royal-westies-assn.ca) , as soon as possible.**

## President's Report

Good day to all.

I hope everyone had a great holiday season and all are doing well. The Executive is looking ahead to a great 2018.

The Italy Trip committee has updated details in this edition of the Groundsheet. A travel agent has been chosen and the itinerary is almost complete!

Our affiliated cadet corps have been notified and each corps will be watching their cadets closely over the next year to choose a worthy candidate to attend the trip. A quick congratulations to RCACC 2316 (New Westminster) for their team win at this year's Westie Cup shooting competition!

To all of our serving members, the deadline for this year's bursary isn't far off. Applications can be found on the Association website and must be in by the end of March. All applications will be reviewed and the bursary will be awarded at this year's Melfa Dinner.

The Melfa weekend this year will be similar to last year; it will start with golf on Friday, May 25<sup>th</sup>. For those that don't know, every golfer in attendance receives a prize. This will be followed by dinner on the Saturday and our AGM will still be held on the Sunday. At this year's dinner we will be doing a 50/50 draw again. The more people that attend the bigger the potential pot! We will also be holding the silent auction with all proceeds going directly into the Italy trip fund. This year we are looking to start the AGM a little earlier to help accommodate our out of town members. We look forward to seeing you there!

We are currently still looking for a co-editor to assist our serving battalion member Hans Mulder with this duty. Obtaining material for the Groundsheet no longer appears to be an issue. We do however need a co-editor to help sort through the material and put each edition together. If you are interested, please contact us as soon as possible through the email addresses on our website.

The Executive is currently looking at our accoutrements and making sure we have enough items in stock prior to the Italy trip. As many of you may know, we have been looking at our current berets. Currently there are a couple of issues with these. First, many of the ones we have in stock are too small. Second, we need to locate a new supplier. I would like to thank Doug Noble on his efforts in taking on this challenge. The green beret we wear is to signify the green of the Fourth Division that our members served in during WWI. The maroon background of the cap badge is to represent our members that were part of the Fifth Canadian Armored Division in WWII.

After some extensive research that included DHH it has been determined that the current green of our berets is the wrong colour. As a result, we are seeking out the correct colour and an appropriate supplier. Cap badge options are also being reviewed. The Executive will be presenting new options at this years' AGM for members to vote on accordingly.

Your President

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## Museum

The 64lb RML out front of the Armoury main entrance will shortly be undergoing a significant overhaul. Plans are to have the gun sandblasted and repainted, and while it is the shop a new concrete pad is being prepared. When the cannon is replaced, the gun will be orientated 180 degrees from present so the muzzle will point inwards towards the Bren Gun Carrier monument on the other side of the main entrance. An informational plaque in the same format as the one at the Bren Gun Carrier Monument will inform the passerby of the significance of the gun.

For anyone who has memorabilia and artifacts that pertain to the Regimental history, the Museum would appreciate the items being donated to us. We would rather have the items here than being tossed in the garbage can. You can contact the museum through the website or come into the Museum. We are open on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 11:00 AM and 3:00 pm.

## The Regiment in 2017: A Year in Review

NEW WESTMINSTER - 2017 has been another busy year for The Royal Westminster Regiment. Training and exercises continue to be the main focus as the Brigade's high readiness unit, but deployment and ceremonial functions combined to make 2017 an intensive year.

Unit level training reinforced the light infantry role, with the 2016-2017 training year culminating in the 39 Brigade training event, Exercise Cougar Rage, conducted at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington State.



*Soldiers of The Royal Westminster Regiment qualify during a gun camp in preparation for live fire attacks as part of Ex Cougar Rage*

The training focused on the offensive phase of warfare, and included classic doctrine as well as modern warfare in the urban operations compounds.



*Troops conduct room clearing drills at JBLM as part of Ex Cougar Rage 2017*

In addition to the usual training courses for members of the unit, Major Chan travelled to the UK and performed exceptionally well on his course at the Joint Services Command and Staff College.

There were many deployment opportunities for the Westies in 2017. Two officers, Maj. Schultz and Maj. Pong, returned from deployment to Iraq as part of Operation Inherent Resolve this spring.



*Majors Pong and Schultz pose atop their headquarters in Iraq.*

MCpl. Neff returned from Operation Reassurance in Eastern Europe early this spring as Cpls. Viola and Munro, and MCpls. Trafanenko and Haley also deployed to Eastern Europe this year, demonstrating the Primary Reserve's role as force multiplier by augmenting the Regular Force.

*Westies on Op Reassurance Roto 6 pose with their transportation in Eastern Europe.*

Further, the value of the Reserves were clear on the home front; more than 50 members of the Regiment participated in Op Lentus 2017, supporting or serving on the fire lines in the British Columbia interior during the worst recorded summer wildfire season.



*A firefighting platoon sweeps through pine forest in the British Columbia interior searching for hotspots during Op Lentus 2017.*



The Royal Westminster Regiment also joined The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers for a training exercise at BATUS (British Army Training Unit Suffield), near Suffield, Alberta this autumn. (see the separate article below for photos and more information)

Given the many WW1 and WW2 anniversaries this year, ceremonial duties also occurred. The Regiment commemorated the Battle of Vimy Ridge with a parade on April 9, and Cpl. O'Reilly

attended the battlefields near Ypres in remembrance of Passchendaele with an 80 soldier contingent from the Canadian Army. The Regiment was also well represented throughout the Fraser Valley at various speaking engagements for Veterans Week and with contingents at Remembrance Day ceremonies in New Westminster and Chilliwack, as well as representatives at many other community ceremonies.

The unit continues to grow its second mission element, with recruiting largely handled at the unit level once again, hoping to top 80 new recruits this year as part of the STAR (Strengthen The Army Reserve) initiative.

2Lt. Mulder

## **RECENT TRAINING**

CHILLIWACK - The unit has been conducting defensive activities for most of the monthly exercises this training year. Dug in at OPSEE, the training has focused on the platoon defensive (in the context of a company defence, of course) with EX Westie Rampart I, II, and III.

Although some support was provided to dig in courtesy of 39 CER, troops occupied the position, constructed trench improvements and built obstacles in rather wet conditions. To maintain



morale and achieve the offensive aim of defensive operations, a raid was the focus of the November exercise.

*2Lt. Suri gives orders in the platoon hide prior to the occupation of the defensive position in Opsee during Ex Westie Rampart.*

There is a great deal of training running concurrently at the brigade level, with basic, PLQ, driver, and other

courses happening throughout the province. Some, like the LOSV (snowmobile course) in the interior, are a nice change of pace and also useful preparation for the upcoming cold weather exercise in Alaska.

Troops also took the opportunity to prepare at the Soldier's Dinner, by ingesting quantities of 'antifreeze' in various forms. This cheer was liberally distributed, but also including from the circulation of the infamous boot, which also made stops at the head table. Even the illustrious Association Secretary was seen to sample the libation from the boot, but his expression afterward seemed to indicate some regret – the various contents enthusiastically added during circulation may have been of questionable nutritional value.

2Lt. Mulder

## **Westies Train with Allied Regiment in Suffield**



*The Royal Westminster Regiment joined The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers in Suffield Alberta from September 12-22, 2017, for OP IRONFIST.*

CFB SUFFIELD - Members from The Royal Westminster Regiment were invited to join The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers for a training exercise, OP IRONFIST. This exercise took place at BATUS (British Army Training Unit Suffield), near Suffield, Alberta. BATUS is the British Army's largest armoured training facility and is able to accommodate live-firing and tactical effect simulation (TES) exercises up to a battle group level.

From September 12-22, 2017, members of The Royal Westminster Regiment participated in British soldier training and drills, including clearance of buildings, fighting as part of a mechanized force, and armoured fighting vehicle drills. They also were given the opportunity to fire the M-72 LAW rocket launcher, an anti-tank weapon.

The purpose of this training exercise was to develop tactics, techniques, and procedures for the incoming AJAX tanks, which are set to replace the current WARRIORS by the end of 2024, and

be ready for partial deployment by 2020. The AJAX is said to have dramatically greater firepower, manoeuvrability, and survivability in combat compared to the current WARRIOR.

The exercise involved response while under fire, formations, and the use of an Enemy Force to provide a realistic enemy to fight against (with The Royal Westminster Regiment soldiers making up part of the OPFOR). The exercise also made use of the Tactical Engagement Simulation system (TES), or more simply, lasers. The use of TES allows formations of soldiers to assess the impact of their tactics and later review the battles that to gain insight on how these battles unfolded.

The soldiers were enthusiastic about their experience in Suffield and are looking forward to future training opportunities with their Allied Regiment. The opportunity to train with NATO allies gives important insight into the similarities and differences between our forces and allows for lessons learned to be brought back and shared with their home unit. Due to the success of this exercise, The Royal Westminster Regiment was invited back to Suffield AB, to once again join the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers in spring 2018 for a live fire exercise.

2Lt. Berg-Iverson



*The AJAX, set to replace the current WARRIORS by the end of 2024.*



## Honours and Awards

NEW WESTMINSTER - On December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017, the CO Lt. Col. Vernon announced the pending appointment of MWO Hennebery to the Order of Military Merit at the rank of Member. BZ MWO Hennebery!

Several presentations were made at the CO's and regimental birthday parade on November 22<sup>nd</sup>. MWO Jones was to receive his bar to his CD marking 22 years of service, but due to some error at some level, received a 2<sup>nd</sup> CD medal instead! Sgt. Skrebsky, MCpl. Comack, MCpl. and Cpl. Czajowski were also presented with their Canada Decoration for 12 years' service. Cpl. Sieber also received his CD at the January CO's parade.

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## Respected Westie Chaplain transfers to COATS

NEW WESTMINSTER - Capt. Walter Opmeer, more affectionately known as Padre Opmeer, former regimental chaplain to The Royal Westminster Regiment, was re-enrolled in the Canadian Armed Forces on November 27, 2017, now as a COATS GSO (Cadet Organizations and Administration Training Structure General Service Officer). He had reached the compulsory retirement age for the Primary Reserve and was eager to continue his service with the Forces. As



the retirement age for COATS component is 65, this provides him with another five years to serve, and as a COATS GSO he can retain his rank and Royal Canadian Chaplain Service branch identity while working to support the Canadian Cadet Organizations.

*Capt. Opmeer speaks at the unveiling and consecration of the Bren Gun Carrier Monument as part of The Royal Westminster Regiment Sesquicentennial celebrations.*

Padre Opmeer joined The Royal Westminster Regiment in 2013 as the regimental chaplain, and one of his first official duties was to assist in the service for the untimely death of Major Louis Beglaw. Since that time he became an integral and valued member of the Regiment and regimental family, participating in training and joining the soldiers on exercise, earning the sometime moniker “The Combat Chaplain”, no doubt in part due to the presence established by his distinguished mustache.

*Capt. Opmeer offers a prayer at The Royal Westminster Regiment parade commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.*

During his years with the Regiment he was a constant smiling face, support, and confident to the soldiers and no doubt will continue to make a positive impact on the Sea, Army, and Air Cadets of the Regional Cadet Support Unit (Pacific) – and hopefully our own regimental cadet corps – he is as keen to get out into the field.



His service as treasurer of the officer's mess will also be missed – after all, who could be more trustworthy than the chaplain? He was dined out by the officer's mess on November 24, 2017, but will always remain a member of the regimental family and is also a life member of the association, and is welcome back home anytime.

2Lt. Mulder



*The “Combat Chaplain”, Capt. Opmeer, participates in the 2017 39 Canadian Brigade Group Training Event, Exercise Cougar Rage 2017 at Joint Base Lewis McChord.*

## Our Cadets

**1789 Agassiz-Hope** – The week of remembrance was a busy time for Hope’s Cadets. Poppy distribution on behalf of the Hope and Agassiz Legions saw the cadets take up strategic positions in Hope and Agassiz raising funds for veterans in need and ensuring that the symbol of remembrance could be displayed by all who wear the red poppy. On a brisk Sunday afternoon the cadets placed Canadian flags in Hope’s cemeteries. Discovering a fallen Westie, the cadets quickly staged an impromptu ceremony, placing their poppies on the headstone and saluting – Pte. Thomas Martin, The Westminster Regiment - Lest We Forget.

While providing a vigil for Agassiz’s cenotaph, Hope’s services are the main focus for the cadets. Cadets in full dress uniform with pith helmets and white belts march on the cenotaph forming the vigil. Other cadets assist the legion with their flag party, while the junior cadets provide wreath escorts, assisting those laying wreathes. Representing the Regiment at the east end of the county, 1789 RCACC is proud to serve, Pro Rege et Patria!

### Are Your Dues Up To Date?

The Royal Westminster Regiment Association depends on your dues and donations. Yearly dues are \$15 and a Life Membership is only \$100. This gives you voting rights, this fine publication, and a snazzy beret.

How about a donation? You can identify where you want the donation to go: The Future Fund, Cadets, Health & Welfare, or whatever you feel is worthwhile. Whatever you support, it is appreciated. Send in your dues today. Thanks.

### MIA/AWOL