

The GROUND SHEET

The Publication of The Royal Westminster Regiment Association

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

'Pro Rege et Patria'

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In Memoriam



Gerry Pickell	Chilliwack, BC	03 April 2020	The Royal Westminster Regiment
Rob Brandeth-Gibbs	North Vancouver, BC	11 May 2020	The Royal Westminster Regiment
James Choi	Wainwright, AB	31 October 2020	The Royal Westminster Regiment
Howe Lee	Burnaby, BC	11 March 2021	The Royal Westminster Regiment
Rick Smith	Victoria, BC	07 May 2021	Regular Force posted to The Royal Westminster Regiment

Corporal James Choi **01 July 1991 – 31 October 2020**



Corporal James Choi joined The Royal Westminster Regiment in 2016. He finished his Basic Military Qualification (BMQ) in the summer of 2016 and his Development Phase One (DP1) Infantry in the summer of 2017. Throughout his early years in The Regiment, James was always one to lead and take charge whenever the opportunity arose. He readily made friends and family in The Regiment. He was loved by everyone. Through his hard work, positive attitude and dedication, James earned the respect of both his peers and his superiors.

Gerry Pickell MMM CD.

19 November 1937 – 03 April 2020

Gerry served as RSM and DCO of The Regiment. His wife Linda is Secretary of RWRA and his son, Edward, is a member of LDSH. Gerry grew up in North Burnaby and proudly served with The Regiment. Gerry and his family moved to Salt Spring Island in 1988 to enjoy island life. Gerry and Linda later moved to Agassiz in 2008. Left behind to miss him are his wife of 50 years Linda, his daughter Kristine and sons Andrew (Noriko) and Edward (Sara) and six grandchildren.



Howe Lee, MSM, CD, MED.

02 November 1932 – 11 March 2021.

Honorary Colonel Howe Y. Lee, a lifetime member of the Association, passed away on March 11 while a patient at the Burnaby General Hospital. He is survived by his wife Hilda and son Richard. Always a keen soldier in the Canadian Army Reserve, he joined the Rocky Mountain Rangers as a teenager before moving to Burnaby. There, he transferred to The Regiment training as an officer and rising to the rank of Major. Subsequently, he transferred to 39 Service Battalion where he qualified as LCol and was appointed Commanding Officer. After completing 35 years

in the reserve army Howe retired. He was then appointed Honorary LCol of the Service Battalion. After doing an excellent job as the Honorary, he was appointed their Honorary LCol. Howe was one of the founders of the Chinese Canadian Military Museum Society and became its first national president. For his achievement in creating the Chinese Canadian Military Museum, Howe was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal (MSM).

Please advise the Secretary of deaths, births, and other significant updates regarding our members.

Professoressa Rosali Fantoni (1940 – 2021)



During the Association tour of Italy in 2019 we met Professoressa Rosali Fantoni in Villanova di Bagnacavallo on the 29th of May. As she had done for countless other visits to the Canadian War Cemetery in Villanova, she arranged the commemoration ceremony held at the Cemetery. We participated in an act of remembrance along with Mayor, Eleonora Proni, members of the community and local school children. The photograph above was taken when she was speaking to us that day in front of the small temple at the Cemetery entrance.

Later at the lunch, which Signora Fantoni had arranged for the tour party, she told us a personal story about her father and uncle being hung, from the bridge over the river Lamone, by the Germans on 16 November 1944; as an act of reprisal against the partisans. She recounted that the Canadian soldiers arrived on the 11th December and they were very thankful. She fondly

remembered that as a 4-year-old (along with her sister, then 2 years old), being treated kindly by a Canadian soldier who was billeted at their house.

Unfortunately, Signora Fantoni died on the 29th March 2021 as a result of being infected by COVID -19. She leaves behind her husband Primo Benetti, and daughter Stefania and son Alessandro. Rosalia, as we came to know her, was a former elementary school teacher, the didactic director in Lugo and Fusignano, from 1984 to 1994; the former President of the Villanova District Council for 16 years; and the President of the Lugo University for Adults (2009 to 2021). Along with her work for the community, she took a great interest in preserving the memory of the Canadian soldiers who had liberated her town.

In addition, she was the author of three books;

- *Fiordalisi e papaveri* (Cornflowers and poppies) in 2006; about her childhood memories;
- *Casa lontana da Casa* (Home away from Home) in 2009 about the relationship of the Canadian soldiers and the people of Villanova; and
- *Ragazzi di Libertà* (*Boys of Freedom*) in 2020 about the soldiers buried at Villanova.

While in Villanova she gave us copies of her book Home away from Home. She took the title from the words of Major J.E. Oldfield, who wrote in, The Westminster's War Diary, for New Year's 1945 "the Westminster's once again in their home-away-from-home in Villanova". In 2020 she sent us a copy of the Boys of Freedom. These are now kept in the Museum.

“Should auld acquaintance be forgot and never brought to mind?”

Rest in peace Rosalia

Thank you for remembering “our boys”

Health & Welfare

It would be appreciated if all members of The Regimental family would report births, marriages and deaths within our membership and their families. I am sure with such a young Regiment there will be lots of babies born. So please drop us a line if you know anything.

Your Executive
2020-2021

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Hello fellow Association members:

It has been a few years since you have received the Groundsheet. The executive has been trying unsuccessfully to secure an Editor, no one was willing to step up. It is rather intimidating to follow in the footsteps of the like of Ron Hurley, Ted Usher, Jerry Gangur, Hans Mulder and Len Wohlgenuth to name a few. I have stepped up to give it a try. I need reports from the Committee chairs, from the Cadet Corps, Museum and Historical Society.

I would like to get a few articles from former serving members, what about the Wallace Efficiency Trophy (1970) and the Sir Casimir Gzowski Trophy (1970, 1971 & 1984) and the lead up to Trooping of the Colour. Also, for current serving members of the Battalion, articles about rifle teams, gun camps and postings overseas would be appreciated.

Please include pictures, pull out you scrap books and take a trip down memory lane.

The Groundsheet is only as good as its members make it. Let's restore the Groundsheet to its former glory.

Pro Rege et Patria

Linda Pickell
Editor

Report on AGM

Our AGM was held on the 31st of May with 28 members present via Zoom. I understand that is a record for attendance for many years. Agenda and Correspondence were reviewed and the reports were filed. Major Chan read a report from LCol McKinnon on the current regiment, Chuck had a lot of good words to say about the Association.

Then we came to the most interesting part of the AGM the elections of executive and Directors. Bill White started the process with the election of President. Doug Setter advised that he would be stepping down. Doug has done a wonderful job keeping the Association going over, this very difficult last year. However, Doug will still stay on the board as the Past President. Bill White was nominated for President so Dennis Keeton had to take over the nominations and elections. Bill stepped up to the plate and agreed to be President. Then on to the Vice – Troy Kimber was nominated as Vice President. There were no others willing to running he was elected to Vice President. Bill reminded those at the meeting the Secretary and Treasurer are appointed at the next Executive meeting. We got to the Director positions. Mike Kvammen and Kelvin Butler declined to run again and Bill thanked them for their service to the Association. The following accepted positions of Directors for the 2021-2022 Board, Colleen Melville, Dennis Keeton, Neil Cole, Kerry Malish, Ernie Bodrogi, and Erik Skrebsky.

The meeting had a few interesting tidbits of history of members when they were in the regiment and even Don Reiben was out somewhere in a pitch-dark field.

More to come on your new/old Board members in the next issue of the Groundsheet.

Report from the Outgoing CO

Who would have imagined that we experience a pandemic first and fore most and now this is second time an AGM for our RWRA is being conducted virtually? Not only one wave of sickness but up to a third wave, currently. However, various vaccines are available and slowly people are being vaccinated. Government officials are cautious but anticipate that by the summer of 2021 we may return to “normal” without face masks on. Meetings increasing from small groups less than 10 to larger groups. We still are having members of the Serving BN and their families as well as members of the RWRA being affected by the COVID 19.

Unfortunately, during my command, we had to lay to rest young Cpl James Choi. A happy go lucky guy, whose humour was contagious. Cpl Choi, died of wounds from a training incident in Wainwright AB while training with 3rd Battalion Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry (3

PPCLI or 3VP). Our new CO LCol Greg Chan may have a memorial service in the future for Cpl Choi. The training was part of the unit's contribution of our Mission Task of providing a Light Infantry Platoon. Post funeral the Westies and Patricia's soldiered on. Completing the required work up training. Some attending the Joint Regional Training Centre in Fort Polk, Louisiana to be validated with the 3 VP as part as there Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) task. This year 3rd Division will shift and is preparing to deploy members on various Operations: OP IMPACT – Iraqi; OP REASSURANCE – NATO Force in Latvia; OP UNIFIER – training various armies to fight the Daesh. We anticipate that we may have some positions to fill.

With the Force Health Protection Measures (FHPM) still in place and the restrictions and limitations seemed to go up and down like a rollercoaster it certainly effected the Serving Bn's training plan as well as the conduct of CITY or local individual training such as Basic Military Qualification Course (BMQ), the Infantry Development Phase 1 Module 1 Course (Basic Infantry Course for Soldiers). Ranges and exercises and training were planned and based on the Dr Bonnie Henry factor either commenced, had certain FHPM imposed or canceled/postponed. I'm sure this made the Operations Cell even have more gray hair. A rebound from the FHPM, was that Lt Owen McIntyre previously Sgt McIntyre was grounded here. All flight training put on hold. Eyebrows were raised when we proposed that a pilot be the Course Officer. However, once they saw his Military Resume, he was in.

On top of this was the unit continuing to provide soldiers on Class C to support OPERATION LASER and OPERATION VECTOR. This included support to Public Health Agency, Canadian Border Services Agency, US Homeland and US Border Patrol as they made preparations for reopening the border. Still waiting for the border to open. Last week our Westies completed their contracts.

Last summer OPERATION LENTUS was in standby mode. As we had Headquarters' personnel in place in case a Provincial Request for Assistance came to support them during flooding and fire. This year forest fires are a concern. Remember you will be conducting them in a COVID environment.

The Armouries is still closed except for essential CAF members. Right now, the national policy is that there is no access into the building. The reason for that is that they are potentially areas to remain as clean zones in case we have to deploy to support the Pandemic.

The Regiment strength is approx. 240 personnel. We did end up training the Companies on different nights so to accommodate FHPM restrictions. Administration was conducted with essential staff in both Armouries or from home. Some training for soldiers was also done virtually.

This year we have no one on international deployments but we do have Westies sitting in isolation as they await their training to begin across Canada. Most having to be there 2 weeks to ten days prior to training to start. Sgt Neff our RQMS actually attended his Platoon Warrant Officers Course 3B (you old guys would recall 6B) in Gagetown, NB and there were 150 candidates on the course. Typically, there is 40.

So being the Westies, we have two unique moments in regards to our Honorary Colonel's. Our former Honorary Colonel – Hon Col Karen Baker MacGrotty will receive her Canadian Forces Decoration for her 14 years of Service to The Regiment. This is remarkable because she had no prior military service. The second is we have two Hon LCol's. I hear that Hon LCol Chuck's Strahl's appointment is coming. The second Hon LCol is George Salamis. Hon LCol Salamis biography was posted on Facebook last summer.

Finally, it has been my unique pleasure being the CO of the Westies. I came here as a Warrant Officer. I'm the only CO to have been RSM in the Regiments 150 plus history. I got lucky twice!

On the 5th of June 2021, I will hand over command to Major Greg Chan. This will end the 34 years of service to the Serving Bn. However, I suspect I'll still be involved. In November, I'm scheduled for CRA (44 years of service) I know this next two years I will be joined by others in the Serving Bn. It's been my pleasure to mentor, assist and advise where needed members of the RWRA. I've soldiered with most of you at one time or another or know you at various social engagements.

I know one thing for sure the LCol Simpson motto doesn't only apply to the Serving Bn but to all of you Westies in our Regimental Family. Westies give 110%.

Pro Rege et Patria
stay safe and maintaining your social distancing.

Lieutenant Colonel C.W. (Chuck) MacKinnon, CD

Welcome LCol Greg Chan, CO



LCol Greg Chan enrolled in the CAF in 2000 and graduated from the Royal Military College in 2004 with a BA in History. He was posted to 2 PPCLI in Shilo, MB where he served in a variety of roles including Platoon Commander, Assistant Adjutant, and as a Battle Group Senior Duty Officer. He completed two operational deployments totaling 18 months to Kandahar, Afghanistan. The first in 2006 with the Multinational Brigade, Regional Command South (TF 1-06) and the second in 2008 with the 2 PPCLI Infantry Battle Group (TF 1-08). During his time with 2 PPCLI he was recognized as the top Lieutenant in 2006 and was awarded a Command Commendation from the Canadian Expeditionary Forces Commander in 2008.

LCol Chan left the regular forces in 2009 to pursue a teaching career and spent a year abroad teaching English as part of the Japan Exchange Teaching Program. On his return to Canada, he completed a Bachelor of Education from the University of British Columbia in 2011. He is currently employed as a middle school teacher with the Coquitlam School District.

LCol Chan transferred to the reserves in 2011, initially working with the Army Cadet Program followed by The Royal Westminster Regiment in 2015. With the Westies, he has served as 2ic A Coy, Ops O, OC A, and was the team leader for the 2019 Nijmegen march. During domestic operations he was OC of the 39 CBG Domestic Response Company (DRC) during Op LENTUS 17-04 for the BC wildfires and for Op LENTUS 18-03 for the BC floods. For Op LENTUS 18-05 he was the 39 CBG Liaison Officer to the Land Task Force (LTF) for the BC wildfires. Recently, he was the S3 for LTF FRASER and 39 CBG TBG (Territorial Battalion Group) during Op LASER in 2020, and the OC for DRC FRASER for Op LASER in 2021.

LCol Chan graduated as the top candidate of the Primary Reserves Army Operations Course in 2016. He then completed the United Kingdom's Advanced Command and Staff Course

(Reserves) in 2017, and the Canadian Forces Joint Command and Staff Program in 2019. Recently, he completed a Master of Defense Studies at the Royal Military College in 2021.

He currently holds an appointment as an Honorary Aide-de-Camp to the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia. In his free time, he can be found hiking local trails or volunteering with St. John Ambulance. He lives with his wife Stephanie, a Registered Nurse, and their very active Catahoula Leopard Dog named Pepper.

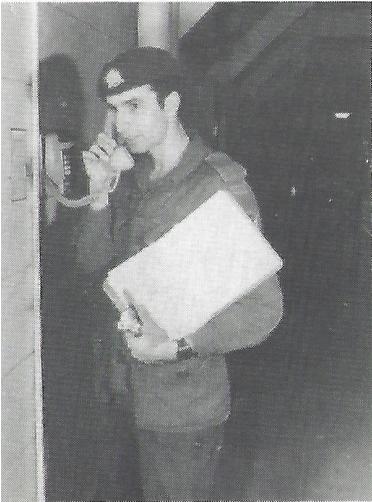
Then & Now



Lance-Corporal James Alton Thrasher holds the PIAT anti-tank weapon he used to disable the German self-propelled 88mm gun on which he is standing, near Pontecorvo, Italy, 26 May 1944. – Sgt Thrasher unfortunately was later killed on 11 December 1944 at Villanova, Italy.



MARCH PAST OF THE REGIMENT, AREA COMMANDER'S INSPECTION, 1984.



ABOVE LEFT The first pattern of the new shoulder title introduced in 1986 with the new dress uniform. The new uniform included epaulettes on the shoulder and metal titles as unit identifiers. This title was made locally and was a kit shop purchase. It was replaced with the current version (above right) in 1990. This dress uniform is still in use today.

LEFT Pte Erik Skrebsky wearing the 1986 dress uniform (pictured in 2006)

Award & Honours

Congratulations to former HonCol Karen Baker MacGrotty who has been awarded the Canadian Forces Decoration (CD) for 12 years of service to the CAF in her roles as Honorary Colonel and LCol. Though COVID-19 put the ceremony on hold, we congratulate Hon Col MacGrotty on this outstanding accomplishment!

Congratulations to Capt Suri, MWO Cullen and Sgt Boston who were recently promoted!

Missing Groundsheets

We are in the process of converting all editions to searchable electronic versions. This initiative builds on the work started by Ted Usher and then Len Woghlemuth. Also thanks to Jerry Gangur for providing a significant number of older editions. It would be appreciated for those who have old editions of the Groundsheets if you could let the President (president@royal-westies-assn.ca) know which specific editions you may have prior to 1996 (volume 45) and any from 1996 and from 1998 to 2002. Within that range we are not missing all the editions but we have a number of gaps.

Are Your Dues Up To Date?

The Royal Westminster Regiment Association depends on your dues and donations. Yearly dues are \$20 and a Life Membership is \$200. Send in your dues today. Thanks.

What became of Kelly?

(Help us reconnect with former members)

Dave Delisle

Ron Glenn

Gary Grigg

Kathy Fynn

James Hansen

Glen Holling

James R Hudson

Pat Hyska

Bob Jacobs

John Sanborn

Shane Stearn



Mask Up!

Get a mask from the kit shop for \$12.50 each, with proceeds going to the Association. Link to kit shop is <http://westiekit.bigcartel.com/>

“Once a Westie always a Westie”

Good day to all of the Association members.

I am writing to you to ask you to become involved and volunteer to help the Association. I know some of you will say I have done my part but you can always do a little more. Maybe a little less or a little more. Last fall we had to beg members to take on executive positions and board members.

The Association takes its direction from the executive and directors. If we aren't doing what you want let us know and raise your hand when election time comes around.

The last year has been a very enjoyable experience for me. The board is a great group of people to work with, WE DON'T BITE. The past year has been difficult for all of us but with Zoom, email and texts we are moving forward.

So please consider volunteering, we can always use a few more hands.

Linda Pickell

Secretary