

# The Groundsheet



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**The Royal Westminster Regiment Association**

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

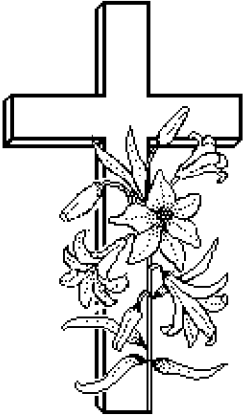
**‘Pro Rege et Patria’  
530 Queens Ave,  
New Westminster, BC  
Canada,  
V3L 1K3**

[www.royal-westies-assn.ca](http://www.royal-westies-assn.ca)

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# *In Memoriam*



## **Colonel in Chief**

On August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016 the Regiment mourned the loss of its Colonel in Chief, Major General Gerald Grosvenor, 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Westminster.

The Duke joined the British Army in 1973 as part of the TA after he graduated from RMA Sandhurst. After numerous appointments across his lengthy career he retired from the Armed Forces in 2012 as the Deputy Commander Land Forces (Reserves).

Apart from his military service the Duke was involved in many benevolent organizations and services. His latest work was the creation of a Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre to provide high quality care support for military casualties. He had purchased land in Nottinghamshire in 2011 and construction began in the spring of this year.



Visits to our Regiment from the Duke were always a welcome event. Many current serving

members can recall an occasion or two when they were able to speak with him on his visits to the lower mainland.



His Grace , the Duke of Westminster with MCPL (now MWO) Chris Hennebery, MCpl Lisa Hennebery and MCpl Chris Copeland.

He is survived by his son, Hugh Grosvenor, 7<sup>th</sup> Duke of Westminster, his wife Natalia Grosvenor, the Duchess of Westminster, and their three daughters Ladies Tamara, Edwina and Viola Grosvenor.

Our condolences and prayers go out to the Dukes family during this difficult time.

## Editor's Report

### Your Executive

#### President

Dennis Keaton  
604-649-8798

brianmckenna@hotmail.com

#### Secretary

Bill (WAS) White  
604-738-1300

waswhite@telus.net

#### Treasurer

Brian Mckenna, Past  
President

#### Editor

Paul Guilmain  
604-364-2969

westie.groundsheet@gmail.com

#### Directors

Karyn Dyer

Doug Noble

Erik Skrebsky

Mike Kvammen,

Membership

Kerry Malish

Chuck MacKinnon

Greeting Westies,

As 2016 is winding down we look back on another busy year for the Regimental Family. The association has been busy developing a plan for a trip to Italy to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of the Melfa River. The Battalion has been busy as ever with training and has shifted into the offensive operations. Additionally, a number of Westies are either deployed or preparing to deploy to Eastern Europe.

As always if you have stories to tell or information to share please contact me and we get you into the next edition of the Groundsheet.

Paul Guilmain  
Editor

## Presidents Report

Good Day Westies,

Good day to all.

As the new President I would first like to thank all those that put their trust in me to carry out the duties and responsibilities that this position holds. I look forward to the challenges and exciting opportunities ahead.

For those that don't yet know me, I was a member of the Regiment in the 80's and 90's. I was a member of the airborne platoon and also served as a peacekeeper on roto 1 of UNPROFOR in the former Yugoslavia. I retired at the rank of sergeant.

I would like to take a moment to thank Brian McKenna for his services as President for the past two years. He and his executive have kick started a number of initiatives that I am confident will continue in the coming years. Thank you Brian for your hard work and for your continued efforts in your role as Past President. Brian was also appointed as the Treasurer of the Association because we didn't think being Past President would keep him busy enough.

I would also like to take a moment to congratulate Karyn Dyer on her new role as Vice President. Karyn and I served together in the Regiment and I look forward to working with her again.

Bill (WAS) White was appointed as the Association secretary for another year. Thank you Bill for your continued efforts and support. Bill was once one of my CO's so I'm still getting used to the fact that he is my/our secretary.

On a solemn note, many of you will now know that our Colonel-In-Chief, His Grace, the Duke of Westminster passed away on August 9th, 2016. A memorial service is being held in the United Kingdom and Bill White will be attending as the Association's representative. A little known fact, Bill was the Commanding Officer that requested His Grace be appointed as our Regiment's Colonel-In-Chief. The Regiment sent condolences to the Grosvenor family on behalf of the entire Regimental family.

Planning for the Melfa weekend is well under way by the Executive for 2017. Melfa weekend will take place on Friday 26 – Sunday 28 May 2017. Keep those dates open and watch future editions of the Groundsheet for further information.

The Association is currently accepting applications for this year's bursary award. This is open to ALL currently serving members in good standing. The award will be handed out at the 2017 Melfa dinner.

As most of you are now aware, we are planning a trip to Italy in May of 2019 to commemorate the Regiment's crossing of the Melfa River. A sub-committee is currently being formed to tackle this logistical challenge to ensure a worthwhile trip and good times to be had by all.

Remembrance Day is approaching fast. I would like to see as many members as possible on parade this year. Remembrance Day offers a unique opportunity to catch up with some old

friends and make some new. It allows us to pay respects to our fallen comrades as a group. I look forward to seeing you there.

Currently there are three members of the Regiment serving overseas. The Association along with the Regiment will be joining forces to send care packages to them.

In closing I would just like to say “Welcome!” to the new Executive members. To all Executive members, thank you for your efforts so far and I look forward to working with you over the coming year.

Pro Rege Et Patria

## Museum



The museum has a new weapon system on display please drop by and check it out

## **The Battalion**

This has been another busy year for the battalion. Soldiers have undergone a wide variety of training including influencing activities (IA), recce, and of course the ever popular DP3B on top of the unit exercises.

## **Westie Fusilier**

*In June 2016, 22 soldiers of the Royal Westminster Regiment deployed to the United Kingdom to cross-train with our sister regiment, the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. In all, we spent 16 days with Zulu Company IRRF.*

My lungs burned. My legs ached. I rounded the corner above the naffy, right by the regimental HQ. “One more lap to go. S\*\*\*.” It's a thought, and that's all. I doubt that I'm capable of speech at this point, and besides there is no-one to talk to. Most of the rest of the body of troops have already disappeared ahead of me, and those behind are way behind. A timed run wearing close to 35lbs has a way of separating the fit troops from the unfit. I'm disappointed to find myself in the second group. “Just keep your head up; keep your feet moving.” More thoughts. At this point I'm just trying to not embarrass myself, though that option may have already disappeared. Almost the entirety of Zulu Company is ahead of me. “S\*\*\*.”

Later at the bar, one of the guys asked me how I liked it at Tidworth, the little town where the base is located. He's rake-thin—almost all Fusiliers are—has blonde hair and ears that are too big for his face. My legs still ached from the morning's run, but I decided to play it cool and told him I liked it fine. We chat for about 20 minutes, but I can barely understand the man. It seems like I need him to repeat every second sentence. Others tell me it's because this fellow (and a great many other Fusiliers) is a Geordie—raised in the north of the UK, right around Newcastle. The Geordie dialect is unique to say the least. It's quick, often drops consonants, and almost invariably warps vowels. I'm not even 100 percent sure it's English. “Gooin ta toon, areye, eh?” The fellow explains that this is the Geordie way of asking if you're going to town. It takes a few beers before feel like I'm getting the hang of the dialect.

The Geordie's unique butchery of the English language was not the only thing that we Westies had to get used to while training with our sister regiment. As Reservists, we are very well acquainted with jam-packed training schedules. We get 39 training days per year, and it is common for our chain of command to try to shoe-horn as much training as possible into the short time that we have. Are we shaking out section attacks this weekend? Why not add some night recces? We're doing a FIBUA ex? Better do a walk-through talk-through of a platoon attack. The

atmosphere at Tidworth was altogether more relaxed, and followed a predictable cadence. We formed up for PT at 7:30, were done by 8:30 and then given until 10:30 to shower up and eat breakfast. Following this generous break, we would conduct some familiarization with the British weapons-systems, ensuring that we stopped for lunch between 12 and 1:30. After lunch it was typical to wait around the company lines for a little while, continue training for another couple hours, and then kick off around 3:30. I ended up in Tidworth's only military supply shop four times just for something to do.

On day three we are introduced to the Warrior, the armoured vehicle which was to be our home during the upcoming ex. The Fusiliers show us around the car, giving us some cursory facts—there's the driver's hatch, here's the fire extinguishers, that's where you lot will be sitting. Their favorite topic was the door to the troop compartment. “Once you hit the close button, watch out. That door doesn't stop for nothing.” On three separate occasions I'm told the same story of a Fusilier just last exercise who loses a hand because he got it caught in the closing door. I wasn't planning to stick my hand out of the door, so their next favorite topic is far more useful. “Fight light and freeze at night, boys.” Living in an armoured vehicle means packing light; just a valise and a daypack with a small pouch for toiletries. Most Fusiliers don't even pack a sleeping mat. This is a foreign concept to most of us, who might aspire to packing light on a normal exercise, but who more often than not carry a ruck full of odds and ends and snivel kit that isn't used. It's an adjustment to say the least.

On Saturday we deploy to the Salisbury Plains for a six day exercise. We pile into the back of the Warriors and bump our way down the road to the near deafening roar of the engine. Despite the noise I fall asleep almost immediately—awakened only by stops and sudden jolts. I will spend much of the next six days using my rifle butt as a pillow as the Warrior chauffeurs me between objectives.

We start our training by shaking out section attacks. The simple act of pepper-potting is a welcome bit of familiarity. So much has been new that to hear the Brits say “up-he-sees-me-down” almost makes me feel like I'm back home. The *deja vu* is made complete by a constant struggle to keep the radios working. Back in Tidworth, I had seen the Fusiliers pull out their radios and prep them. I admired how small the radios seemed and how light. “Whats the range on your radios?” I asked them, “about five K?” I never really got a straight answer—just a smile and mumbled “Maybe two if your lucky.” Often we weren't lucky.

Our crew-commander screams. His radio just went down one minute before H-Hour. “Oh, what the f\*\*\*!?” “Do your radios always crap out like this?” I ask the lone dismount Fusilier in our section. He indicates that they do. I sit back in my seat and think about the 522. “Well, if it's a paper-weight, at least I'm not carrying the damn thing.” Still, I can't help but smile. A non-functioning radio is almost a cliché in the Reserves. You can prep the thing all you want, you can



do 50 radio-checks before you step off, but the moment you get under tree cover or more than a few hundred meters away from the CP, it's almost invariably “nothing heard; out.” To see a Regular Force unit of British infantry struggle so often and so mightily with comms is a kind of vindication.

Not that comms had a great bearing on my life in Salisbury. Rarely did I feel very communicated with. The British Army seems to have a habit of keeping troops in the dark. Often we found ourselves trundling along, quite literally in the dark and half-asleep in the back of a Warrior, fantasizing about the trouble we'd get into in London, when all of a sudden the vehicle would leap forward at speed. We would fall into each other, or perhaps hit out heads on the side of the door, and wake up for a moment. “Are we on the attack?” The Fusilier says nothing, but cocks his weapon.”I guess that's my answer” I say to myself. We're moving very fast now, and every divet and hole on the ground is a tremendous bump inside. I cock my weapon, and try to rub the sleep out of my eyes. Suddenly the Warrior stops—it seems to go from 100 miles an hour to zero on a dime. Once again, the dismounts fall into each-other, knocking the last vestiges of sleep out of me. The door opens, and daylight streams into the dark interior of the car.

“Dismount right! The crew commander screams. Traf gets out, followed by Millette, followed by the Fusilier, and myself. I run through the long, sopping wet grass—getting sopping wet myself—and kneel in front of a large copes of trees on the far right of our section. I start shooting before I see any enemy. I don't want to seem timid. The Brits are, as a rule, extremely aggressive, and the right action for any scenario seems to be “attack.” For a moment, I think of our crew-commander, Whitehouse, back in Tidworth. He's supposed to be training us in the use of the SA 80 assault rifle, but instead he is waxing eloquent on the bayonet. “Driving your knife into the ribs of an enemy; that is the pinnacle of a military career.”

“Oi, move up, Delta!” The Fusilier yells at me and I take a bound into the treeline. I see two enemy about 20 meters ahead. They are wearing a mix of military and civilian clothing. I shoot a mag of blanks at them, and for a moment regret that I don't have a bayonet. My military career has yet to meet its pinnacle. We bound up to the enemy position, and they dutifully “die” as we approach. “Trench clear!” I call out. The enemy force guy is smiling up at me “How are you?” I ask. “Oh, you know.” he tells me. I really do. Aside from the Warriors, everything out here seems familiar: the drills, the boredom, the rain. I could be out on Ex Cougar Whatever.

Only, I know that I'm not. On the second last day of the ex, we have a lot of down-time—more than usual. As I piss into a bush I look out onto a vista of rolling hills and verdant fields. For the first time I realize the significance of our training here in Salisbury. Less than 100 years ago, Canadian soldiers arrived on the Salisbury plain training area in order to prepare for the rigors of the First World War. It's not a perfect comparison—they were heading to the Ypres salient or the Somme and Vimy, while I was heading to London and then home. Even so, I felt a distant

kinship with those soldiers and wondered if any from the 47th Battalion had stood where I stood, or seen what I had seen. For a moment, I try to imagine myself as a soldier from that era. I erase the Warrior, and pretend my SA 80 is a Springfield 303, or better yet a Ross Rifle. The miserable weather is about the same. The Canadians arriving in the UK in 1914 trained through one of the wettest winters in recent memory. I finish my piss and walk back to the Warrior, happy that, for a moment at least, I can get out of the rain.

Later that night, at around midnight, the whole company gathers for orders. The next day is the final day of the ex; the culminating event. We are to conduct a company attack on a village. The plan is relatively simple. The Warriors are to attack at dawn from the north and create a diversion. Simultaneously, all the dismounts will attack from the south, hopefully gaining lodgement in the first buildings before the enemy force realizes where the true threat is. The character of the orders astonishes me. They take only about 10 minutes for the company commander to deliver. "All right, troops. You will have to get over a six-foot wall to assault the first building. Rehearse that for the next 15 minutes and then go to ground." As we walk away from the O-group I look at Millette. "Is that it?" I ask, "If this was a Canadian Ex we would have done battle-procedure for an objective like this for at least a full day." "It's f\*\*\*\*\*d." Millette agrees. It is f\*\*\*\*\*d. We've never done urban ops with the Brits before, but we have no time to determine SOPs now. Instead, we practice scaling walls for 15 minutes and then try to get some sleep. We will have to sort it out on the ground.

Earlier in the ex, I listened to our British platoon sergeant talk about orders. "All blokes want to know is when they have to get up, how far they are going, and when they get to go to sleep." At the time, I had laughed along and agreed. "That is all I want to know." As we bump along to the objective on our final attack, I realize that this is not even close to all I want to know. What are the grids of our objectives? What units will be assaulting Lima 1 as we assault Romeo 1? What is the fire-plan? What is the chain of command? What is the order of god-damn march? It's too late to ask these questions. It's too late to ask any questions at all. We're moving to our objective. I sleep as best I can for the hour's drive.

We stop and dismount the Warriors at 0330 hrs. Outside, the pre-dawn light is already breaking above the horizon. Why the hell did I spend so much time trying to sort out my night vision? The platoon sergeant briefly chats with the platoon and company commanders. I look at my watch and realize that H-Hour is supposed to happen in a half hour and we are about a kilometer away from our objective. "Do you need more time for H-Hour?" the company commander asks languidly. "Yeah, why don't we just do it on call when we get there." I foresaw this complication last night. We had only allotted 30 minutes to sneak onto the objective. It had seemed like too little time when orders were given, but no one had said anything. Now we're a thousand meters away from the objective, changing the plan.

We snake towards the village in single file. I am at the very front of the order of march, not because that was the plan, but because that is how it worked out on the ground. As we approach the objective, we crouch low beneath the high grass in a pantomime of stealth; if the enemy are looking this way, they will see us regardless of our pretense. I see the wall we are to scale. It is way too bright outside; we were supposed to assault this building in darkness. “Let the battle begin!” “Who the f\*\*\* said that?” I wonder. Suddenly, someone in the village starts shooting blanks.

The jig is up. The enemy knows we're here and we haven't even crossed the wall yet. Now instead of gaining lodgement before the enemy is even aware of us, we have to fight our way up to the buildings. We sprint up to the compound wall, and I get on all fours. Millette hops up onto my back and peers over, searching for targets. The sounds of shooting are now echoing all around the town. “We have to get the f\*\*\* out of this kill zone!” yells our platoon sergeant. The drive and aggression for which we have come to know the Brits kicks in. Millette is grabbed and funneled into a door in the wall in order to begin the assault of the first building. I get up and cover where I can—there are enemy popping in and out of two second floor windows that I can see, and one keeps trying to poke his head and rifle around the corner of the wall.

The whole attack is chaos. As normally happens in urban ops, sections get split up and shuttled through the buildings with little more situational awareness than what is directly in front. I spend most of the attack in the courtyard of the second building fighting my own personal duel with a sniper in a second story window. If we had real bullets we would have killed each other dozens of times—instead we have blanks and we make a lot of noise. It doesn't take too long before I'm running low on ammo. For the first time in the exercise, I wish I had more than four magazines.

“Got any mags?” I ask every passing troop. “I'm down to one partial.” Everyone is in the same boat, even Captain Manmohan. “I thought officers weren't supposed to shoot much.” I grumble to myself. My section commander strides by and gives me a mag, but it is unnecessary. The attack has stabilized, and we have taken most of the buildings. The enemy seems to have been subdued, and I don't see my nemesis in his second story window anymore. The building has been cleared.

“STOP!” The command is echoed around the whole village. The attack is over. The ex is over. Each platoon gathers together and starts to empty their mags and pull out their serialized kit. It's only seven in the morning, and we have a long day of cleaning ahead of us—cleaning the training area, cleaning the Warriors, cleaning our weapons. The platoon sergeants walk off a little way and chat as they blow off the left over grenade sims.

For the moment, I relax and take stock. It has rained almost the entire week, and I've been some level of soaked for each day of it. It's a feeling I know well. If it wasn't for the Warriors I could

almost believe that I was wrapping up an October ex in Opsee rather than a June ex in the UK. I'm amazed at how many things have been familiar: the weather, the struggles with comms, the constant bitching about issued kit. I never thought that the UK could feel so close to home. There have been differences too, of course. Perhaps the most obvious has been the orders—or apparent lack thereof. All the Canadians will talk later about how we never knew what was going on. How often we sat in the semi-darkness of the Warrior and wondered if, when the door opened, we would be on the assault or in a hide. We marvel especially at how short the orders for our final assault were. Such a complex operation seemed to warrant at least some rehearsals, or a discussion of groupings and tasks, or at least a map model. The fact that our orders were essentially, “here is the enemy; now go kill them” was absurd.

After we've given our range declaration, we get into the Warriors and begin the drive back to base. My thoughts drift across the English Channel to a place called Vimy. There in 1917 the Canadian Corps was tasked with assaulting a well fortified German position commanding a prominent ridge. In order to accomplish their mission—one that both the British and the French had previously tried and failed—the Canadian commanders meticulously planned every phase of the operation. Maps were distributed to NCOs, rather than just officers, and detailed models of the positions and terrain were built and studied. Every section was assigned a specific task, and each man was expected to know their unit's objective, and to be able to carry out their mission even when their leaders were killed. Famously, the attack was a startling success, and it is because of this success that detailed battle-procedure became such a focus of Canadian military doctrine.

We get back to base at around 10am. My thoughts of Vimy fade away and are replaced by thoughts of London, our next destination. We sit down to sort out the remaining ammunition and to clean our weapons. Now that the ex is over, the sun comes out for the first time in a week. Several people take off their soggy boots and dry their feet in the warm morning air. “Just like back home. It rains all ex, and brilliant sun and rainbows come out just as we leave.” Sometimes it seems that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

## **Ex Cougar Conqueror**



The Brigade Training Event or BTE took place this summer in Wainwright, Alberta. This was the culminating training event for 39 Brigade for the 2016 training year. Westies again showed up in fine style. The photograph above is WO Joe “Astro” Cullen, leading his platoon in the attack after his platoon commander had been “killed”.

## **Ex Westie Old Skool & Ex Westie Challenge**

The battalion started of the fall training cycle with a number of very challenging exercises aimed at section and platoon level operations. The intent was to start off at the lowest command level, the section and gradually increasing the complexity and difficulty of training objectives up until platoon size elements. Both exercises where very successful in that the soldiers were able to practice their bread and butter, the infantry craft. Most objectives where aimed at closing with and destroying the enemy which is the meat and potatoes of what our regiment is all about. Soldiers were able to get practice at all levels in comms, leadership, tactics, fire and movement and patrolling. Overall the training met its intent, and all personnel probably fell asleep within an hour of getting home from the ex.

## **Honours and Awards**

There are a number honours and awards so far this year. Well done to all those listed below:

MCpl Haley Relentless Warrior – CO's Commendation

MCpl Haley Work with SAT – CO's Commendation

Cpl Law – Relentless Warrior – CO's Commendation

Cpl Aujla – Relentless Warrior – CO's Commendation

Cpl Chau – Work with SAT – CO's Commendation

Capt Chan – AOC TC – CO's Commendation

Sgt Guilmain – Unit Work – CO's Commendation

Sgt Cullen TC DP 3B – CO's Commendation

WO Cullen TC ILP –

As a special mention to Association past president

Brian Mckenna VAC



Mr. Brian McKenna is a Veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces. He has participated in many programs offered to Veterans and has developed a keen understanding of some of the issues Veterans experience in accessing these programs. Due to his expertise, Mr. McKenna was asked to take part in an advisory group for Veterans Affairs Canada to help guide and improve Canada's policy on Veterans. Mr. McKenna also served as a volunteer paraprofessional with the Veterans Transition Network. In this work, he has been an advocate of the program, has assisted Veterans with the necessary paper work to help them enroll, and has provided mentorship for new paraprofessionals. Mr. McKenna also helped establish a social support group for Veterans in need called the Veterans Assistance Group. This group has regular meetings and is able to immediately respond in case of a crisis. While representing the Veterans Assistance Group, Mr. McKenna has met with local hospital mental health authorities and health care workers to provide advice on streamlining the process for Veterans. Mr. McKenna, who has a service dog of his own, also volunteers his time to assist Veterans with new dogs, educate Veterans on the service dog program, and guide dog trainers on the needs of Veterans. As the British Columbia representative of the Veterans Well-being Network,

Mr. McKenna presents Veterans' concerns to stakeholders. Mr. McKenna also helped run a crisis phone line for Veterans for the past few years and remains active with the Royal Westminster Regiment Association

## Melfa Trip

The Royal Westminster Regiment Association is planning a trip to Italy to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Battle of the Melfa River in 2019.

The objectives of the trip are as follows:

- 1) Education – including review of battles fought by the Westies
- 2) Commemorations – for those members of the Westminster Regiment who are buried in Italy
- 3) Fellowship – by including members of the serving Bn, Band and Cadet Corps on the trip.

A committee has been formed under Hon. Lt. Col. Chuck Strahl as OPI. Further details regarding financial deposits and the payment plan will be finalized at the next association meeting in January and should be release for the next edition of the Groundsheet.