

VOLUME 99 / ISSUE 1

Dedicated to the ideals and Comradeship  
We knew in Wars and Peace and in  
Our services both Home and Abroad.



# THE GOUNDSHEET

The Official Publication of

The Royal Westminster Regiment Association  
P.O. Box 854, New Westminster, BC V3L 4Z8

February, 1999

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

OF THE ROYAL WESTMINSTER REGIMENT ASSOCIATION

AND ELECTION OF OFFICERS  
THURSDAY MARCH 18, 1999

Place: Combined Officer's & Sergeant' Mess in the New Westminster Armoury

Time: 8:00 pm

Parking in the City Hall Parking Lot

IF YOU ARE EVEN REMOTELY INTERESTED IN YOUR ASSOCIATION YOU  
WILL BE THERE. IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO ATTEND MAKE YOUR VOTE  
COUNT BY FORWARDING YOUR PROXY.

WE NEED YOUR ADVISE AND SUPPORT AS NEVER BEFORE

## Executive

President	<b>Fred West</b>	#16 - 3397 Hastings Street, Port Coquitlam, BC V3B 4M8	942-6275
Past President	<b>Jerry Gangur</b>	2015 Hyannis Drive, North Vancouver, BC V7H 2E5	929-5785
Hon Treasurer	<b>Vernon Ardagh</b>	3689 Nico Wynd Drive, Surrey, BC V4P 1J1	535-9093
Secretary	<b>Herb Hamm</b>	163 - 1140 Castle Cres., Port Coquitlam BC V3C 5R3	941-3565
Asst. Editor	<b>Ron Hurley</b>	2229 Bonnyvale Avenue, Vancouver BC V5P 2G4	321-8464
Editor	<b>Jerry Gangur</b>	2015 Hyannis Drive, North Vancouver BC V7H 2E5	929-5785

## Editor's Corner Jerry N. Gangur

**C**annot begin to write editorial without extending thanks to those generous members who responded to our plea for funds to ensure that publication of all issues of the Groundsheet would proceed in the coming year. Individual letters of thanks have been forwarded to all donors, but it must be stressed that without your financial assistance, publication of three issues of the Groundsheet looked very bleak indeed. *Thank you, thank you and thank you!*

Since my last report, we have been blessed with good news. Chairman of the Casino Committee, **Gary Brooks**, announced that from provincial Casino funds we have received \$9,000.00. Six thousand must be directed to our four affiliated Cadet Corps. The remaining \$3,000.00 must be spent on sick and visiting activities. As mentioned in my last editorial, the executive has plans to raise funds and there is more to come. We expect to tell you more in the Fall.

Over the years the WWII vets, who kept the association going, have been slowly turning over the reins of the organization to postwar members. The change has arrived and we now find ourselves in the position of asking veterans to volunteer to serve on the executive. WW II vets who would be willing to attend executive

meeting once a month we appeal to you. **Fred** will be retiring as president and he says it would be nice to have a war comrade keep him company as he continues to serve in his capacity as past-president. If you are willing to help in any capacity please call the editor at phone listed in front of GS.

Overheard a wartime story related at a Melfa Brunch some years ago. Have been after story teller ever since to put down his particular experience in writing. He has honored me with my wish and his catastrophic incident is reproduce in this issue

Finally **Fred West** will retire from office following the AGM. Raise your glass and join me in a toast to him. *To Good Men!*



## President's Report - Fred West

**W**ell it wasn't a real bad year, a little quiet, but a few things did happen.

We celebrated the anniversary of the Melfa with a dinner for the fifty first time, the turn out was not great, but we had a good time anyway.

The Sunday Brunch was excellent and we had good attendance. **Peter McNabb** did a splendid job in the kitchen. I hope he will be available for the next time. All the old timers enjoyed the brunch, including me.

I attended the change of Command ceremony and **Major Mark Fisher** is now the Commanding Officer of the Regiment. He tells me he wants to find a Bren Carrier hull to be mounted in front of the Armoury as a memorial to the WW2 veterans, and a reminder of what the Regiment did in WW2. It sounds good to me, how about you?

We succeeded in getting some funds from the Gaming Commission (Casino money), not as much as we would like, but enough to help the Cadets and also some for the sick & visiting Committee. We have to submit a budget for various approved items and they give us some (or all perhaps) depending on the judgement of the powers that be. Regardless, it is helpful and we were pleased to get the cheque. **Gary Brooks**, chaired the committee for that purpose and he did a very fine job. Both the Cadets and Sick & Visiting are important

and I am very pleased that we can be of some help to both.

We have other things we would like to do, they all seem to take money, so we will keep trying and hope for the best. The **Future Fund** is also helping to keep us operational, and the Groundsheet is still being printed and mailed to all our members. I have noticed that postage is going up, only a cent, but it adds up. Our Editor was complaining that he hasn't received very many newsy submissions from the members or the Regiment to make the Groundsheet interesting and informative. Try and help our hardworking editor and keep the Groundsheet interesting to all.

We will be holding our AGM in March, and will be looking for members to fill the Executive Slate. The old timers are disappearing and we need more postwar types to take over, even some of them are showing signs of age, so we need more of the younger members to get involved: so all you younger Officers, NCOs and Junior Ranks, "**we need help**" so turn out for the AGM and get involved. Our first fifty years was quite successful and we know the next fifty will be just as successful under your guidance—that is a challenge I know you will accept.

We will look forward to hearing from members with suggestions and ideas. Ron Hurley needs to hear from the oldies. He loves to answer your letters... Happy New Year and many more years of success. .. Thanks for your support, I have been honored to be your President. ▲

## The Regiment

### Commanding Officer's Report

Major Mark Fisher, CD

It is with a great pleasure to write what I hope is a series of Regimental "SITREPS" on the current day Battalion. You are all probably that for a three year period the regiment will undergo an army wide evaluation to determine which Militia units will remain after the so called Land Force Reserve Restructure. There are a number of criteria ranging from how well we spend our budget to how the regiment has performed in the past. The latter item has been well taken care of thanks to the efforts of the veteran members of the association! In the first year we scored 14.3 out of 20 which was respectable but needed improvement. Last year we scored 18.5 which was the highest score in 39 Brigade (BC) if not the whole of Western area. The unit continues to parade an average of 96 all ranks every Thursday night and is located in New Westminster and with a Platoon (B Coy) in Aldergrove.

B Coy in Aldergrove is now at a strength of 42 all ranks and will soon move into the old supply building on the main base of Canadian Forces Station Aldergrove. We hope to have our cadet corps in Abbotsford join us there next September.

The millennium project that we are pursuing is to obtain and exercise the Freedom of the city of Maple Ridge. We are hoping to conduct this ceremony in the spring of that year with the

regiment, all four cadet corps, the band and association.

This year the unit along with the city of New Westminster hosted the Lieutenant Governors Annual Levee on New Year's day. This was the first time in the history of BC that the levee was held outside of Victoria! Some 892 "guests" visited the armoury and saw our sentries and listened to our regimental band while they waited to greet the Lieutenant Governor **Gorde Gardham** and mayor **Helen Sparkes**.

My final point is to mention the fact that the regiment will be off to exercise Total Ram, which will be held in "**Wainwright**" (some things never change). This will primarily involve A Coy and B Coy and will include a platoon of Seaforths where they should be under command of the Westies!

Pour Rege et Patria



**Historic encounter.** Commanding Officer, Major Fisher greets Lt. Gov. Garde Gardham at New Year's Levee held at the Armoury, 1 Jan 1999.



Changing of the Guard:  
Lt. Col. RA Lee, CD presents  
Regimental Colours to Major  
Mark Fisher, CD, the  
new Commanding Officer.

Positioning of Markers: RSM, MWO Connick,  
and Sgt. Hennebury at change of command  
parade.



## Honorary Lieutenant Colonel

Leslie Deane, CD

### The Value of Tradition For Today's Soldier

One of the Regiment's most highly respected soldiers with many years of experience both in peace and war said, "*Man's ability to stand up to the trauma of war or natural disasters depends on five qualities: leadership, morale, courage, training and faith.*" However, there is a sixth factor which sustains the individual when all else fails - tradition." In these words, LCol. H.F. Hoskin, DSO, CD, summed up very succinctly the value of **TRADITION** in the conduct of each of the individual soldiers who collectively make up the Regiment. While an individual many serve in the battalion for only a short period, perhaps 4 or 5 years, what makes that person a Westie and so different from members of any other unit is that during his service he is governed, guided and moulded by the traditions of this regiment. It was the inspiration of the actions of the Fighting Forty-seventh in World War I which was passed on to the soldiers of the Westminster Regiment (Motor) in World War II which encouraged and strengthened that generation of Westies to achieve their most enviable record of ever failing to take any objective assigned to them during all their time in front line action against the enemy. It was the same dedication to the Westminster tradition of always give 110% effort to everything that helped the wartime 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion to win every sports competition in the Division. That same tradition of giving an extra 10% beyond the maximum is what has made the postwar members of this militia unit win the Sire Casimir Gzowski

Infantry Trophy five times. No other unit has been able to beat this record. (The Sir Casimir Gzowski Infantry Trophy was awarded to the unit judged to be the best trained and qualified of the 52 militia infantry battalions in Canada.) This tradition of giving your very best - and then some - is why Westies who go on courses today will finish top of the course. Because that's what Westies have always been - the best! That's our tradition. ▲

### A Fond Farewell

#### Art Miller

Newspaper clipping forwarded to us and reprinted with permission of Executive

Herbert Arthur (Art) Miller of Kamloops, BC passed away on November 6, 1998 at the age of 80 years....Art was predeceased by wife Phyllis. He will be remembered by daughter Laurie Masse of New Westminster and sons Doug and Rob Miller both of Kamloops; grandchildren William and Andrew Miller; sisters Fern Thomas and Lesley Hudson both of White Rock. ...Art was born and raised in New Westminster. He proudly served in World War II, and was a member of The Royal Westminster Regiment. Art earned the Military Cross for bravery in Italy. He was wounded and after a lengthy recuperation returned to civilian life with bride Phyllis. ...Art enjoyed retirement, fishing local lakes and at his place in Palm Desert.

## Memories

### A Trip Up the Mountain - Valvori Italy 13 April 1944 Tragedy Visits the Regiment

I have been reading the Westminster's Diary. I have read it several times before and I will probably read it some more yet, each time it refreshes memories and reminds me of various comrades and incidents. The War Diary is interesting, but there is a lot of stories out there that never get in to war diaries and I suppose the one I have in mind is one of them. I have heard many versions of various actions and occasions and they vary somewhat depending on where you were at any particular time. There was unusually enough going on in your particular location to hold your attention, so you would not be aware of what was going on a short distance away.

The incident or experience I am reminded of this time is the trip into and the time spent in the little village Valvori. I believe it might have been a nice place in more peaceful times, but I was quite pleased when my visit was over. I was a Corporal in A Coy #1 Platoon. On this trip we left our vehicles and drivers behind and were transported in trucks by the Service Corps. The first leg of the journey took us to a staging camp outside of a small town., we arrived there late in the day and were fed our supper and shown a place to bed down. It wasn't a very exciting or entertaining place, so several of us decided to take a look at the little village as it was quite close by. We spent an hour or so looking around and eventually decided to return to camp. About this time we noticed one of our number was missing. It was Freddy Hansen. We figured he would find his way so we carried on back to camp, prepared our beds (our two issue blankets) and spent a peaceful night catching up with our sleep. When morning arrived we had breakfast and packed up our equipment and loaded onto our vehicles for the second leg of the move. There was still one of our number missing.

Freddy H hadn't found his way back to camp, we didn't know quite what to do, he was a popular guy and we were worried that he might be in trouble if he missed the trip. We loaded his gear and hoped he would get there in time. We were just starting to move off when who should come running to catch up but our pal Freddy. He actually had to run to get on the truck, a couple of us reached out and helped him into the truck. We were very relieved that he made it. Little did we know what was ahead.

We arrived at the next stop and de-bussed, the rest of the way was on foot. We were to carry everything we would need, weapons, ammo and kit, that was no big deal, we thought, until we got underway, maybe I should say overway. We climbed a mountain trail for the next several hours. It was really a steep climb and it was after dark, the trail was under enemy observation during daylight. I am sure we did some of it on hands and knees. We sweat and swore and thought up a lots of good names for whoever thought of this idea. Jerry Brisbin, our bren gunner was sweating and swearing and struggling up the trail, he said they are going to have to carry him out of here. I didn't like that remark, it gave me a bad feeling. We eventually arrived at our destination, I don't remember how long it took, but it was a long, tough climb and we were glad it was over. We were shown directly to our positions by a guide, it was on the outer slope of a hill in a cemetery. It would have been a good place for a Halloween party, there was even fireworks. The enemy welcomed us with mortar fire, the shells would hit the trees behind me and Jerry's position and we would have air bursts, some fireworks. My section had three two man positions around the lower perimeter of the cemetery. We weren't too well oriented when we took over the positions, we figured it out later. We had to retire behind the hill just before first light as we would be under enemy observation, they had the high ground, like Monti Casino, you may have heard of it. The first night went quite well and just as daylight was breaking we were shown our way in behind the hill. There was a house built into the hillside and another

long building behind it that had been used for the chickens and cattle, it was built into the hillside too and was two levels, both being at ground level. We had the top level for our quarters, the house in front was the cooks quarters and where they did their cooking. We could look out the back window of our abode and see the village. The enemy would try to shell us behind the hill, but it seemed they weren't able to get enough trajectory to drop them in on us as they would land in the village behind us. The village was evacuated some time earlier, so the only occupants were the rodents. We would watch the shells land and feel quite secure where we were located we rolled into our snug little beds and slept for a few hours, then got up and had a meal and prepared our equipment for a night in the cemetery. We were not able to dig in. It was too rocky so we had breast works made of rocks, not a whole lot of protection, but it passed for the same. We cleaned our weapons etc., and I cleaned and primed a crate of grenades, the grenades that were in our positions were the yank variety and we were not too fussy about using them, we were told that they had a habit of exploding prematurely and injured the guy doing the throwing, so that is why we acquired a box of our own. The mule train brought them up the mountain trail for us. All of our supplies, including water was delivered by mule train at night as the trail was under enemy observation in daylight. I had prepared my grenades as mentioned and we were just waiting for enough darkness so that we could go out to our positions. I placed the grenades on a small table by the door and told the men to pick up a couple on their way out. I went back to my kit to find my gloves and was grumbling about not being able to find them, when a helluva explosion took place. I thought the building was hit by some kind of bomb and was crashing down on us. I remembered the window I mentioned earlier I couldn't see anything so I felt my way along the wall to find the window. When I got there I felt someone else's hand looking for the same window. It was Alfie Jackson (Walter Jackson's brother). He was looking down at the ground about ten feet below. I said are going to jump or not, so

with a little push he took off and I was right behind him and almost landed on him. We ran around the end of the building expecting to have to remove the rubble to free some of the others, only to find the dust was clearing and the building was not caving at all. We had not been able to see through all the dirt and dust that the explosion had created. A mortar shell had landed in the doorway close to the table where I had placed the box of grenades. The explosion blew along the wall where the other four guys were sitting. The box of grenades exploded and blew shrapnel all over the place. Those four guys didn't really know what hit them. I carried L.P. Uselman outside and laid him on the grass, he was dead. I went back and carried Jerry Brisbin out and he was also dead. Some of the other members of the platoon arrived and carried the other two out. Bill Eliason had his face blown off, but he was still breathing, so they had to form a stretcher party and carry him out. He died along the way. Well, Jerry didn't have to walk out, I guess he called the shot that time. Freddy didn't get left behind and that might have been better, who knows. My section was down to two men now.

We were in Valvori for another several weeks and were very pleased to leave that place. Our next action several weeks later was thought the Liri Valley and culminated at the Melfa. There were a lot of medals won at the Melfa, but only R. I. Ps at Valvori!

I almost forgot the punch line. It was getting dark and we needed to look after our positions, which now became two one man positions instead of three two man positions, so I grabbed Jerry's Bren and went and spent the night in behind our breast works (a dozen small rocks). and threatened to shoot any Hun on sight. When I came in that morning, I thought the Bren looked rather dusty, so decided to clean same. To my surprise the gun was so jammed and badly damaged I couldn't get it apart. It was a write off and I wasn't sure about myself about now, I think I was still shaking. I guess I could have used it as a club. ▲

**Fred West**



## AGM Notice of Motion

Change of Annual General Meeting.

Para 3. Article 9.

### Current Wording

The annual general meeting of the Society shall be held on the third Thursday in March, each and every year at 8:00 p.m. or at such times as may be decided by a previous general meeting.

### New Wording Proposed

Be it resolved that the date of the AGM and election of officers be held on the Sunday of the Melfa weekend and in no event not later than the 31<sup>st</sup> of May.

Your executive envisions holding the AGM immediately prior to or following the Sunday Brunch.

### **Gift to the Association: Through your Will.**

There are many ways to contribute to your association. A contributor to our Future Fund suggested that I remind members leaving a bequest in your Will is a very simple. For advise, see your solicitor about adjusting your Will.

### Sick & Visiting

There seems to be no better way to raise one's spirits than by saying it with flowers. We may not always say it with flowers, maybe instead, with a basket of fresh fruit, but your executive does want to touch base with any member that may be hospitalize or ill.

We ask members throughout the province, not to assume that we know of someone's condition. Pick up that phone and do let us know if someone is confined.

### Memories/Experiences

You owe it to future generations. Those who went through war have many experiences to relate. There are many stories that can be told. Some can be very humorous. I recall at one Melfa, about 15 years ago, a number of fellows reliving an incident, in Italy, where they were trying to catch a pig. The pig was caked in mud and proved to be most difficult to catch. Maybe someone will recognize the incident and write about it. When told at a Melfa may years ago, it made quite an impression to the listeners.

If you have an experience or two that you would like to write about, do so and forward same on. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. That we can deal with.

## Happenings



President Fred West presenting RWRA John Ford Memorial Bursary to Caitlin Birdsall, Granddaughter of WWII Veteran Ivar Birdsall. June 1998.

### Time for Bouquets

Saturday, 30 Jan 1999, Doug Glenn returned home from hospital after having a major operation to be greeted by a beautiful arrangement of flowers from The Royal Westminster Regiment Association. Doug says he was overwhelmed with the gesture....Doug was in hospital for 8 days. He had an aneurysm on his Aorta removed.....Doug says he is doing well and will return to his sick & visiting duties at George Darby Centre.

### Melfa 99 Last Melfa Dinner of the Millennium Not affected by Y2K

This is an advance warning of Melfa 99. Here is what we know to press time.

May 28 - **Golf**                      \$35.00 per golfer

May 29 - **Melfa Dinner.**    Cocktails 6:00 pm  
   Dinner: 6:45 pm  
Cost: (tentative): \$30.00 per person

Place: Church Auditorium  
6<sup>th</sup> Street & 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
New Westminster

(Four blocks North of Armoury,  
parking and wheel chair access)

May 30 - **Brunch.** Armoury 10 am to 1 pm.

Melfa Dinner Chairperson: **Len Wohlgemuth**

Trivia questions will determine the order in which your table eats. Brush up on your Westie History

Work with us!  
Don't forget to mail your

**Proxy**

**Today**