



Class of 65 Newsletter

Edition 43-November 2011



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Editor's Corner

Another month has flown by so it's time to hear from a few friends. On the travel front, and in a rather appropriate way for the month of November's edition, **Jim Cale** shares his experience of a recent visit to Vimy. **David Cooper** signs on for the first time with an update on his life since graduation and some personal recollections of Barney Danson.

Finally, **Hugh Spence**, in his inimitable prose, reminisces on Remembrance Day in a way that will perhaps ring a bell with some of you. I certainly did with me.

On a personal note, I thought I would share one of those "kids say the cutest things" moments. My wife and our six year old granddaughter were blathering away when the topic came round to what Pops and Nana worked at when "we were young". Jan reported somewhat proudly that Pops drove a submarine. The six year old, without hesitation, and without any apparent awe replied, "Drove a submarine? How did that help people?"

MY VISIT TO VIMY

By 6602 Jim Cale

A visit to the Canadian Memorial at Vimy Ridge had been on my Bucket List for a number of years. Thus when Jane and I were making plans for our trip to Brittany and Normandy this September, I realized that it was now or never, as we probably would not be back in that region again - too many other places to visit! I discussed it with Jane and she agreed to add this visit onto our itinerary, the *quid pro quo* being three days in Paris at the end of the

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trip. Recognizing a good deal when I saw it I rapidly agreed. I have visited Juno Beach, the fantastic Second World War Museum at Caen and other sites in Normandy on previous visits, so this trip was not planned around any of the sites of either World War; rather we spent two and a half weeks visiting the towns and countryside of Brittany and Normandy and sampling all of the regional fare from Crepes to Cider to Cheese to Calvados, and much more. It was a most enjoyable visit, but I digress!

We decided to base ourselves at Arras, about 10 km from Vimy for this visit. The drive there from our previous digs was about 250 km, so with stops for coffee, map checks, recovering from errors, etc. (no, I didn't use a GPS - but next time...) we arrived in Arras early afternoon. We walked around the town and found a small café where we were able to have a drink, a late lunch and make plans for the visit to Vimy the next morning.



Monday, September 25th dawned beautiful and sunny. After a nice breakfast at the B&B we once more challenged the Arras traffic and after a short drive arrived at the memorial site. We first went to the Interpretive Centre but found that it was closed for a staff meeting until much later that morning. As the sun was in a particularly good location for taking pictures we drove to the memorial and started taking photos. Suddenly my camera went

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dead. The spare batteries that I ALWAYS carry were at the B&B in my suitcase. So we drove into the town of Vimy where I was able to purchase batteries. We then had a coffee and noting that there were picnic tables at the site and really nowhere else to have lunch, went to a bakery and bought sandwiches. Then back to the site. We booked a guided tour of the tunnel, known as the Grange Subway, and trenches that had been restored. We were in a group of mostly Canadian visitors and were conducted on the tour by a very pleasant and very knowledgeable university student from New Brunswick who explained the tunnel system and its uses. Like Juno, the Vimy sight is manned (personned?) by paid Canadian University students who spend four months there. They are well trained and each one with whom I spoke told me how much they have learned about our history by being there.

In one small room in the tunnel we were shown a small maple leaf that had been carved into the wall by a Canadian soldier. Even in 1917 there were obviously stirrings of a distinctive Canadian nationalism. This carving had to be covered by plexiglass to protect it - so many Canadians having touched it over the years much like the foot of the statue of St. Peter in the Vatican. We then went through a section of restored trenches, one Canadian, the other German. I was shocked to see how close together they were in some locations. Still very visible are the craters from shells and underground mines.



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We then found a nicely shaded picnic table where we enjoyed our sandwiches, and then returned to the Memorial Site for more pictures and a close examination of this awesome memorial. I had seen photos and the model in the War Museum, but nothing prepared me for the sight standing before me. It is truly remarkable. The two most poignant parts of the memorial are the more than 11,000 names of those who have no known grave inscribed in the monument and the figure of "Mother Canada" grieving her dead. We walked all around the monument, trying to take it all in. Finally we paid a short but respectful visit to the Canadian Cemetery and returned to Arras.

During the visit and afterwards I tried to reconcile my thoughts and expectations with what I had seen. Although pockmarked with craters, the scene is now very pastoral. The whole area including the craters is covered in grass. Much of the battlefield is heavily treed - the result of a reforestation program by the French government after the war.

Neighbouring farms have had the cratered surface leveled and farmers go about the business of farming. There are even sheep on the grounds of the site keeping the grass cut back, especially in areas that might contain old munitions. Really, except for the monument and the restored bits of trenches, the only other indications of the conflict are the little signs around fenced off areas reminding you that unexploded munitions are still present. It seemed so incongruous to be in this pastoral setting on a warm, sunny, peaceful day, basking in shirtsleeves, when the battle was fought by thousands on a few cold, rainy April days in mud and craters amid the horrendous noise of hundreds of guns. But the site does have an impact. The monument does affect you in ways that I find difficult to describe. It made me remember that this was the first time that the Canadian Corps had fought as a cohesive group. It made me think again of the incredible bravery and stamina displayed by those who fought this battle in such terrible conditions, and the tremendous victory that the Canadian Corps achieved. It is especially poignant to visit the cemetery and see the ages on the tombstones, and especially those inscribed "KNOWN UNTO GOD". This visit, as with my earlier visit to Juno Beach will stay in my memory for many years to come.

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6610 DAVID COOPER



After early graduation from RRM (Fraser Flight) in the spring of 1962, I went to UBC where I joined the UNTD. After graduating from UBC and having enjoyed my time as a naval reserve cadet/officer where I obtained my watch-keeping certificate I transferred back into the RCN in 1967.

Some members of RMC Class of 65 may recall that I became their career manager as MARS A and/or PCO2, (1979-1982) where I viewed their careers with undivided interest! Mine peaked as CO TERRA NOVA, the goal of any naval (MARS) officer.

Having had two following appointments of the west coast - Commandant CFFSE and BAMDO CFB Esquimalt - my "wet" coast time was up and I was returned to CFCSC Toronto as D/Director Maritime Studies, then NDHQ (no comment) and finally for the last four years of my career at Northwood, UK as a NATO Staff Officer to CINCEASTLANT.

Maureen and I then returned to Victoria in 1997, where I drove the Victoria Harbour Ferries around for 5 years spinning yarns about Victoria and its waterfront to Victorians and visitors alike. I now give away my time volunteering with the church and as president of a housing society. My daughter, a teacher in the Kootenays has two sons, and my son, Director of Communications for the Municipality of Wood Buffalo, lives in Fort McMurray! All the best to you all!

REMEMBERING BARNEY DANSON

By 6610 David Cooper

The recent passing of the Hon Barney J. Danson, Minister of National Defence 1976-79 kindled my memory of his visit, in February 1977 to HMCS FRASER where I was XO for Peter Cairns. Along with the other ships of the East Coast Fleet, we deployed on EXERCISE MAPLESPRING 77 - the annual

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Cold War strategic naval soiree in the Caribbean. Having ensured that the "home front" in Halifax was fully equipped with snow shovels, snow tires, de-icing salt for the steps etc, etc, on the second week of January we sailed off into a snowstorm and heavy seas heading 180 for Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico. On arrival we painted ship for a week or so, then carried out the Fleet Exercise Program (FLEX Program) entailing ASW, gunnery practices, shore bombardment of Culebra, seamanship evolutions, etc, all of which were interspersed with visits to various Caribbean Islands in support of the Department of External Affairs (and ourselves of course). We were also required to entertain "snowbirds" from Ottawa and Halifax, coming to witness the combat readiness of their fleet which would require the ships to put on a suitable display of their competence and agility in a range of events and evolutions. This year, one such visitor was the Minister!

FRASER was blessed without a HELAIRDET, which gave us more cabin space, a wardroom devoid of lounging and unemployed officers and no disrupting "pipes" advertising air operations! However, since the Minister suffered from WWII wounds, it was necessary for him to embark by helicopter at sea. Therefore, we underwent a helicopter safety check to clear us for "free deck" landings i.e. without the use of the "bear trap" haul-down system. In addition to the hangar door which is closed during flight deck operations, there are three small doors facing the flight deck - one on each side for the fire-fighting compartments and on the port side a second door which leads into the hangar. During flight ops, the two fire fighting compartments (about 25 square feet deck area) not only housed fire-fighting equipment hanging from the bulkheads, but also 3 largish fire-fighters kitted out in their fire-retardant suits (as if ready for a moon walk) with foam nozzles at the ready. To say the least, it is a cramped, hot and undesirable location in which to spend any time!

At the appointed hour, HURON's helo landed on board with the Minister who was escorted from the helo by an air officer who was either unfamiliar with the layout of an ISL DDH flight deck or obtuse! Ducking beneath the rotating blades, he escorted the Minister to the only door on the starboard side, opened it, pushed him inside, closed the door firmly with the securing clips and returned to the helo which then continued to sit on the flight deck

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for what seemed to be ages whilst the pilot and the air-controller likely discussed their next mission!

Meanwhile, FRASER remained on a flying course at some 20-25kts steaming in the wrong direction away from the formation! During this time the fire-fighters suddenly found themselves hosting an unexpected, but very congenial if somewhat confused VIP in their midst while I was left frustrated, cooling my heels and making unprintable comments with the bo'sun's mate in the hangar ready and anxious to welcome the Minister on board!

When the helo finally left, the Minister was escorted to the correct door by one of his new friends and acquaintances, thanked him for his hospitality in the locker, stepped inside, brushed off his now dusty jacket, shook hands with the bo'sun's mate who was somewhat taken off guard by this gesture of friendship whilst I saluted and said "Welcome to FRASER, Sir - the captain is expecting you on the bridge!" FRASER then set course to expeditiously rejoin HURON to conduct a jackstay in order to transfer the Minister's son who was enjoying a trip with Dad to the Caribbean. I do not recall how the Dansons departed, but it was just another day at sea!

NOT THE GONG SHOW

by 6439 Hugh J.M. Spence, former naval person

Over the years since RMC grad and leaving the navy I have often been puzzled as to the appropriate thing for me to do on Remembrance Day. Being a service veteran but not a war veteran, it seemed presumptuous to personally take part in war memorial ceremonies and the like. In any case I had no gongs to flash.

So my standard routine was to watch the CBC-TV's coverage of the normally moving ceremony at Ottawa's downtown cenotaph, now graced with the remains of the Unknown Soldier interred at its base. I suppose as a capital city resident I could have



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gone there in person to watch, wave and clap, but I got into the habit of avoiding the gawdawful weather that usually prevails on that date, as well as the downtown parking hassle. Besides, having no medals I couldn't get a free ride there and back on a city bus.

In the mid-90s I became a guide at the old Canadian War Museum (CWM), spending once a week in the streetcar/bus barn that had become the parking lot for most large thingamies in the Museum's collection, like tanks, field guns, a German "smart bomb", and a bloody great airbase fire truck. Guides were necessary in that ugly but interesting facility because there were no signs or labels to tell what the artifacts were, and it helped visitors to have someone identify the bits and bobs plus add some colour with short tall tales about the equipment.

When the new Museum opened in 2005, I switched from guide to "volunteer interpreter" (VI) with a once-weekly shift in the Cold War gallery, and accordingly started spending most of Remembrance Day there. Now it's monumentally boring to be a CWM VI on a day when few or none visit the facility, but on account of free entrance on Remembrance Day there are normally a lot of people checking out the place, and that's rewarding. VIs always get free parking at the CWM, so having no medals is not an obstacle to transportation.

An alternative arose when my men's chorus got a yearly mid-day gig for Remembrance Day at the downtown RCAF officers' mess. After harmonizing through a package of wartime songs for the zoomies present, the bar would open and we would proceed to seriously inebriate. This invariably presented a challenge since absent any medals I couldn't get a free ride home on the bus.

Last year, a call was put out for any service veteran capable of marching a couple of clicks to join the Remembrance Day parade at the downtown Ottawa war memorial. They needed bodies to fill the ranks sadly depleted by more and more absent elderly war veterans, most younger ones from recent conflicts still "on the job" and not yet ready to present themselves as ripening symbols of military history. So I did that, and found it a very

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emotional and rewarding experience. I have to say I felt a bit of a fraud hearing people on the parade route clapping and saying "thank you" over and over, but they obviously didn't care a whit about my absolute dearth of medals.

This year, on the eleventh day of the eleventh month of the century's eleventh year, at the eleventh hour, I did something different: I became a pongo for a bit, joining the PPCLI in a two-hour Remembrance Day ceremony at Ottawa's Lansdowne Park. Vehicle parking was no problem so my lack of medals didn't interfere with the to-ing and fro-ing.

Lansdowne Park on the Rideau Canal is the location where the Patricias were formed in 1914, under the patronage (read financing, to the princely sum of \$100,000,) of Andrew Hamilton Gault, who eventually rose to the rank of brigadier. The regiment was named after a daughter of the then Governor General, (Queen Victoria's third son,) and a stone cairn honouring its founding was placed next to the park's football stadium during the regiment's diamond jubilee in 1974.

The PPCLI event was particularly moving as it included something you won't witness in many places other than a war theatre: a roll call of regimental personnel who had died in combat operations in the past year, all of whom were known to a majority of those present.

My reason for being on hand was that the ceremony involved musical input from another men's chorus I belong to, *Aged in Harmony*, a.k.a. *The Olde Fartes*. The audience appreciated our several offerings, but unfortunately our singing was curtailed due to the bitter weather, (we went outside next to the cairn for the closing ceremonies.) So we didn't sing certain Patricias' favourite songs we'd learned, like the regimental quick march, ("Has anyone seen the colonel...?"), and "The RCR refuse to fight (unless their brass is shining bright!)".

Since I was in my chorus costume of scarlet shirt, black pants and tie, nobody but me cared that I wasn't sporting any gongs.

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Closing Notes

Thanks again to this month's contributors. It is always a pleasure to reacquaint with someone we have not heard from before.

Previous issues have contained information on the documentary series, "The Veterans: Discovering Our Military Past Through the Eyes Of Those Who Were There", co-produced by our own **Andy Nellestyn**. On November 4, I was pleased to be invited to the premiere of the series at the Canadian War Museum. Other members of the class in attendance were **Bill Leach**, **Gord Diamond** and **Charlie Emond**. I think everyone in attendance was as impressed as I with this enormous and important undertaking. Anyone interested in seeing the 52 episodes can do so on line at <http://vimeo.com/channels/theveterans>.