



Class of 65 Newsletter

Edition 62-July 2013



Disclaimer: This Newsletter is produced for members of the RMC Class of 1965 and is based solely on inputs from members of the Class of 65. It is not an official publication of the Royal Military College nor does it purport to represent the views or opinions of all members of the Class Editorial staff still lacks the linguistic skills to produce a bilingual version.

Editor's Corner

In our last edition, we reported the sad passing of classmate **Gary Umrysh**. A memorial service for Gary will be held at the Canadian Forces College, Armour Heights Officers' Mess, 215 Yonge Boulevard in Toronto on Sunday, 11 August from 1300-1700. If any of you are able to attend, would you please advise Gary's brother, Paul at paul.umrysh@me.com or at 418-550-2253. Regardless of whether you are able to attend, if you have any photos of Gary that you would like to share at the Service, please forward them to Paul.

This edition features an interesting article on Bulgaria provided by **Rick Archer**. It is particularly timely for me since Jan and I are taking a cruise around the Black Sea, including a stop in Bulgaria, later this year.

Otherwise, we have a series of notices and reports. First however, I must turn the floor over to our dutiful Secretary, **Hugh Spence**, who noted a couple of errors in Edition 61 as follows:

*The one-striper in the CMR swabbies photo is undoubtedly Commissioned Officer **Cole**. That is the name written at the time on the back of my copy of the photo you published (now also circulated by wee Georges,) and the name I clearly remember since I'd never before (or since) met a naval CmdO. **Gale** was in fact a rusty-bearded officer, maybe a two-and-a-half?, who had something to do with us at CornyWallis but I can't remember what; anyway, he's definitely not the guy in the photo.*

*Not sure where you got your gen, but the Class of 65 Teaching Excellence Award was **not** donated in memory of Tom Barton except perhaps in spirit. Without in any way denigrating our late and great classmate Tom,*

this is a self-perpetuating myth that was, I think, somehow originally generated through the College administration, and seems to keep raising its head, not only in RMC's but also Foundation references to the award. Among other classmates, Tom was certainly instrumental in getting the award launched, but though at one point after his death some of the Class lobbied for naming it after him, this did not happen since the consensus was that "the Barton prize" (as it would inevitably come to be known,) would recognize an individual rather than the Class which funded the extraordinary award.

July 12 was the date for the annual Ottawa RMC Club Golf Tournament, held this year at the Greensmere Golf Club, just outside Almonte. As usual, the Class was well represented as demonstrated by the following picture:



Can anyone identify the mystery person between **Michel Matte** and **Rick Archer**?

Another annual event - the Ottawa area Class BBQ hosted by **Jim Carruthers**

and his partner **Gail**, was held at their home on the Ottawa River on Friday, 19 July. The weather did its best to spoil the event - debilitating heat, tornado watches, and some torrential rain - but to no avail. Almost 30 classmates and partners turned up and enjoyed Jim and Gail's fine hospitality. The following are some pictures from the event which included a couple of first-time attendees: **Gary** and **Moninna Running**, visiting from the West Coast; and, **John** and **Shirley Critchley** who were in Ottawa as part of their Canada/Costa-Rica shared lifestyle.



This next item is a commercial for a project I am involved with at the Canadian War Museum. The Friends of the Canadian War Museum (FCWM) have introduced an interesting new page to its web site entitled Member Treasures. It is a virtual museum of militaria artifacts held by members and others that might be of interest to others. I would like to invite our readers to consider contributions if they think they have something of interest. The web site can be found at <http://friends-amis.org/> then scroll down to Member Treasures to find out what it is all about. I must confess that the existing web site is rather static, however, a new site is to be introduced in the next couple of months that should be more interactive and dynamic.

Time now to turn to our featured article, **Rick Archer's** piece on Bulgaria.

Bulgaria

By 6585 Richard Archer



Did I ever tell you the story of the time I visited Bulgaria? Well, it was in the Fall of 1994, and I was a Commander and had just taken up my new job on the NATO international military staff (IMS) in the armaments division. One of my tasks was to represent the IMS at the NATO Naval Armaments Group (NNAG) and among its many information exchange, working and project groups. In the IMS we reported eventually to the Chair of the NATO Military Committee, as opposed to the civilian International Staff, which reported to the Secretary General.

A meeting of NNAG's Special Working Group 12 (SWG/12) on Maritime Environmental Protection was scheduled to be held in Varna, Bulgaria, hosted by the Bulgarian Navy. Bulgaria was a member of Partnership for Peace, which when I joined NATO was just getting underway. Eastern European nations

like Bulgaria were looking to Partnership for Peace to drag them out from under the old Soviet and later Russian blanket, with a view to eventually joining NATO (which Bulgaria achieved in 2004).

Later, when I was executive secretary of SWG/12 and many other groups, I referred to it as my "Pumps and Pipes" group. Although "government vessels" were specifically excluded from the burgeoning international laws on air and sea pollution, most nations called upon their navies to be in the vanguard and to set a high standard for pollution control. This meant a lot of work on processing equipment for the hundreds of pollutants in a ship, and substitution for chemicals like chlorofluorocarbons, and anti-growth hull coatings. The work list was very long. Within NNAG it was a group that achieved a lot, and even made successful submissions to the UN's IMO pollution prevention committee.

This three-day meeting to be hosted by the Bulgarians was a "first", but due to other commitments I wasn't scheduled to attend. The Head of the Naval Section in the International Staff (and my future boss) Captain (Ret'd) Archangelo Simi, Italian Navy, wanted to make this first meeting hosted by a Partner for Peace into a big deal, and he wanted all NATO nations to be represented. As it had turned out, the normal NDHQ Canadian representative couldn't make it, so Simi approached my IMS boss's boss, the head of the division, who was an Italian Air Force General having the delightful name of Ferrari. No contest; I was on my way to Varna.

The trip to Varna from Brussels was uneventful. The NATO HQ delegation (Simi, the SWG/12 secretary who was ex-German Navy Edi Dransfeld, Simi's secretary, a Scottish lady named Sybil Beaton, and myself) caught Balkan Bulgarian Airlines to the Bulgarian capital, Sofia. There we changed aircraft and embarked on a very decrepit short-haul Soviet-era aircraft. I looked out of the window at the fixed undercarriage and saw to my dismay that the tires, at least on that side, were bald. I had the feeling as we approached Varna that we were going back in time, but we arrived without incident.

The city of Varna is the major Bulgarian port and naval base on the

Black Sea. Given its reputation as a beachfront watering hole, it was where the Bulgarian Navy had set up its Soviet-style resort for its sailors. It was at this resort where the meeting would be held and where we were accommodated. In the rooms the plumbing was severely antiquated, including a shower head that was located in the centre of the bathroom ceiling without any curtains; one simply stood in the middle of the floor. We didn't begrudge this; it was just an aspect of Bulgarian life that we had come to experience. In any case, the Bulgarians themselves were very friendly and obviously pleased to be able to host us.

As usual with NATO away meetings, the SWG/12 part would take one day and spill over to the next morning. The second afternoon was set aside for professional interest. With other SWG/12 meetings that I was to experience later in my years at NATO HQ the second afternoon normally included visits to companies working in the field, sometimes at sewage treatment plants. On this occasion the visits included the sewage and other waste treatment facilities on the base plus a trip to the Varna maritime museum. The plant visits may sound distasteful, but all navies, both NATO and Partner for Peace, were struggling in those days with the rapidly increasing restrictions on what could or could not be disposed of in the sea. The delegates looked upon the visits as a chance to exchange ideas and take home some insights. Some of the NATO navies, at least, had large expensive projects underway, trying to duplicate the treatment capabilities of a shore-based plant, but scalable for the tight confines of a ship.

For registration on the first morning, we were met by the Bulgarian Navy captain who was the Bulgarian delegate to the group and our host. He directed us to the registration table where some young sailors were struggling with what looked like brand-new computers. I had the impression that this was the first time such computers had been put into service. I was struck by how the Bulgarian Navy had so few resources, a feeling that was to be extended to Bulgaria as a whole in the days that followed.

Even so, the Bulgarians had managed to set up for the meeting the required English-French simultaneous translation, which doesn't come cheap. We also learned that a naval exercise involving the Bulgarian Navy, a USN

frigate, some Russian ships and a few other navies had just concluded and that the ships were all visiting Varna naval base. Simi cleverly invited representatives from the ships to sit in on the meetings. Some did, including a couple of Russian officers who had brought along their own English-to-Russian interpreter to whisper in their ears. This was my first exposure to the Russian Navy, but certainly not the last as I worked in later years to gain as much formal Russian presence in group meetings as I could. In return for the invitation to the meeting, we were all invited to participate in a reception to be held on the USN frigate on the evening of the second day.

The meeting went as expected; I even had one speaking part...but I can't remember the topic, something, I think, to do with the balance between pollution control and operational necessity.

The first evening we were entertained in a nearby hall. We were treated to a very nice meal of local provenance, and to a boisterous dance troupe that performed Bulgarian dances in national costumes. We enjoyed lots of good speeches and toasts about eternal friendship. All this in a hall with chandeliers and wall sconces, but with every second socket missing a bulb.

Some of us walked back to the resort, avoiding the occasional pack of feral dogs. My sympathies went out to the locals. This was 1994, but Varna looked like it had just come out of a debilitating war - no actual damage, just long-unrepaired wear and tear - and I guess that is exactly what had happened. Bulgaria was on the wrong side in WWII, and became collateral damage in the Cold War. But now at least they weren't just sitting back and crying in their beer. They were actively courting both NATO and the EU, and from what I heard they were taking all the right steps to move forward to throw off the remnants of Soviet rule.

We were also given the opportunity to visit the local maritime museum. The curator was a charming lady who gave us the grand tour. The big topic of display was a Bulgarian sea victory over an Ottoman cruiser in 1912. The cruiser had threatened to destroy Varna and another town if the Bulgarians insisted on interfering with Ottoman sea lanes to Romania. Four Bulgarian

torpedo boats attacked and severely damaged the cruiser and Bulgaria was never challenged again. One of the boats was preserved nearby. But I don't recall seeing any displays of WWI, WWII or Cold War events.

On the second day of the meeting a huge storm came out of the Black Sea, but in the evening we pressed on to the harbour in a bus for the reception. Despite the dangerously rocking ship we managed to get on board safely. But it was surreal. Huge waves were breaking over the breakwater, and the roaring wind was threatening to rip off the awning over the heaving quarterdeck. We were all dressed in our winter coats, struggling to stay on our feet while we engaged in small talk and sipped our salty drinks.



Bulgarian Navy Pauk Class Corvette Reshitelni

The next morning we headed for the airport but found out that the storm had prevented the aircraft from flying in from Sofia. We dealt with a concerned lady in the Bulgarian Air office in the airport, but she reported that we couldn't fly out for a couple of days. So we headed downtown to the Varna train station and got in the long line at the ticket counter. Just before we got to the head of the line, the lady from the airport airline office showed up beaming. She had managed to convince the airline to pay for an elderly

Mercedes mini-bus to take us to Sofia. It seemed a lot less comfortable than a train (if we managed to get on board), but she was so evidently pleased with herself that we couldn't say no. At least we'd be leaving right away.

What followed was a 10-hour voyage through the Bulgarian countryside. We had one stop, where one could buy a snack and where the toilets were the kind with two foot spots either side of a hole. Most intriguingly, while we were generally on a four-lane divided highway we hardly ever seemed to cross a bridge. Every so often, we would take an off-ramp onto the local roads, dodge the occasional donkey cart, scatter some chickens, cross a rickety bridge over the river in the village, and then climb back up to the highway. We never knew if the highway bridges were missing or they were just judged to be unsafe.

It was an endurance test, but we eventually arrived at a comfortable, upscale hotel in downtown Sofia. We managed to arrange some new flights via Vienna, but not until the next morning. That night we treated ourselves to a grand dinner in the hotel's dining room, which came complete with an orchestra and a dance floor. All-found, the bill came to about \$20 each.

Enroute home the next day we had a 4- or 5-hour layover in Vienna. We decided to head into the city and we shared the cost of a guided tour. Not bad.

So that was my first adventure with a NNAG group visit out of Brussels. It sure set me up for the many other visits that were to follow over the nearly ten years I spent at NATO HQ. Fortunately, Marilyn was able to accompany me on most of the subsequent trips. Most intriguing continued to be the trips to Eastern Europe, four to Poland, one to Latvia and one to Russia. The nations were all struggling to raise themselves to western European standards. We also took advantage of the trips where we were able to drive our car to the destination to also visit other countries like the old East Germany and the Czech Republic. Seeing where the representatives were coming from helped me in hosting them and making them feel welcome at NATO HQ. But I guess most of all, it made me feel so fortunate to be a Canadian.

Closing Notes

Thanks to Rick for an interesting article. Do any others of you have similar experiences you would like to share?

I hope everyone is enjoying the summer and have not been adversely affected by the extreme weather in parts of the country.

Stay in touch and keep those articles coming.