

## 39 COMBAT ENGINEER REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION



**NEWSLETTER - Issue # 6 (#2/2020)**

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### **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

Since my last report we have been working with the Acting OC of 6 Engineer Squadron, Captain Andrew Gower on assisting the Regiment in planning for the annual D-Day Dinner, scheduled for 06 June 2020. However as you can appreciate given the current COVID-19 situation we are not sure whether the Dinner will occur or have to be rescheduled.

In February, I attended the Annual Burns Supper and there is more detail in the article below.

Members should have received a request from our Secretary, Grant Acheson to pay their 2020 membership dues and we appreciate your support.

As mentioned before, we are trying to increase our members and it would be appreciated if you could reach out to any former members of 6 Field and 44 Field or indeed other Sappers and encourage them to join the Association.

To all, please exercise physical distancing and stay safe and healthy.

Bill White  
President

### **OP UNIFER DEPLOYMENT**

By Major Vicki Ferg

On October 5<sup>th</sup> 2019, 39 CER's Major Vicki Ferg and Major Stephen Piers were attached posted to 1 Combat Engineer Regiment and deployed on Rotation 8 of Operation UNIFER, the Canadian training mission in Ukraine.

Operation UNIFER is the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) mission to support the Security Forces of Ukraine. The operation's focus is to assist with security force training. This will help them improve and build their capability and capacity. The CAF coordinates its efforts with the U.S. and other countries that support in the same way. Military training is one part of Canada's overall support to Ukraine.

The CAF launched Operation UNIFER in response to requests from the Government of Ukraine. The intent is to help Ukraine remain sovereign, secure, and stable.

The training mission harmonizes its efforts with other nations through a Multinational Joint Commission. This commission includes Canada, Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States, Denmark and Sweden. Canada became a member in January 2015. It co-chairs the Sub-Committee on Military Policing with Ukraine.

Major Ferg is currently working as the Chief of Staff to the Multinational Coordination Cell (MCC). “I call myself “Major Meetings”, but the reality is the MCC links those allied nations that are in Ukraine providing security force capacity building. For me a good day is when I can connect allies that will be working on the same type of training or in the same location.” The MCC is where the Security Forces of Ukraine can bring their tactical level training needs and the allies can meet and decide who could best fill that need. In addition to coordinating training the MCC looks at the effectiveness of the capacity building efforts, “as the allied training missions have matured we can start to look up from the tactical level training and assist with developing the operational and strategic capacity of the Security Forces from a Soviet style forces into one that would be NATO interoperable.”

Maj Piers is currently the Officer Commanding of the Armed Forces Ukraine (AFU) Officer and Non Commissioned Officer (NCO) Development Group. He oversees a team of 25 Officers and NCOs with a task to assist and mentor Ukrainian Instructors in the delivery of individual training to future and emerging Officers and NCOs of the AFU. The Canadian Team’s primary focus is to assist the Ukrainian instructors and students in learning NATO compatible tactics and doctrine. Topics include planning, navigation, and profession at arms. Broken down into 5 dispersed training teams, Maj Piers has teams in training bases throughout Ukraine including the National Army Academy in L’VIV. During Rotation 8 the main emphasis was placed on collaborative courseware development linking NATO compatible points of instruction with a Canadian framework and Ukrainian content. The Canadian Teams also assisted the AFU cadres conduct individual instructor standardization training, scheduling, and implementing a robust end course review program to take lessons learned from the students and integrate them into the next serial. Inherent with these types of missions, relationship building centered on collaboration and respect are key to their success.

With so many allied nations involved the environment can become very complex but in the end it comes down to soldiers helping soldiers at all levels. Sharing ideas and best practices in developing and sustaining a professional military ready to defend the ideals of freedom and sovereignty.



Maj Ferg and Maj Piers in Sofiyivska Square, downtown Kyiv.



In addition to Security Force Capacity building members of TFU (Task Force Ukraine) also participate in outreach activities; pictured here Maj Piers speaks with members from the Ukrainian Leadership Academy. This academy's mission is "to influence the underlying social processes in the Ukrainian society by forming a generation of young people who take responsibility for our nation and have the necessary skills for this."



Maj Ferg working in the Multinational Coordination Cell during a meeting with Ukrainian Land Forces, as they present their orders to convert a Brigade Tactical Group to be NATO interoperable within a two year period and request assistance from their allies.

### 39 CER CHAPLAIN



The Rev. Major Gavin Robertson joined the Canadian Forces in 1998, serving as Chaplain to the 44 Field Engineer Squadron in Trail. Padre Robertson remained in that position for 10 years, whereupon he became Chaplain to the newly formed 39 Combat Engineer Regiment. In total, Padre Robertson served as Chaplain to the Engineers for 21 years — a matter of great personal pride and satisfaction. In 2019 Padre Robertson was promoted and appointed Chaplain to the 39 Canadian Brigade Group. In this role, Padre Robertson serves as Padre to 39 Brigade HQ, supports the Brigade Commander on matters of ethics and morale, provides direction and support to the other Chaplains in the Brigade, and oversees the Chaplain recruiting effort. Padre Robertson is also presently serving as (acting) Deputy 3 Division Chaplain. While Padre Robertson's current duties tend to be more administrative in nature, he will always remember the great times he had providing a Spiritual presence to the Engineers, on range shoots, bridge builds and as they invented many and various ways to blow things up. Until the Regiment secures a replacement, Padre Robertson is still supporting the regiment however possible.

## **POLAR BEAR SWIM**

(As reported in the Trail Times)

Polar Bear Swim, a refreshing opening to the new year. The annual plunge provides an invigorating start to the new year.



A total of 122 daring souls took the plunge at Gyro Park on Wednesday to ring in 2020

One-hundred and twenty-two people ushered in an invigorating New Year at Gyro Park Wednesday at noon, all participating in Trail's 44-Engineer Squadron's 32nd annual Polar Bear Swim.

About 350 spectators also showed up to catch a glimpse of the yearly plunge into a frigid Columbia River, and enjoy refreshments by the fire.

With the water at about 4 C, and the ambient temperature at 1 C, a search-and-rescue boat poised just off shore, first aid attendants nearby, and a roaring bonfire, Master Warrant Officer Shane Batch counted down from 10, before the mass of swimmers rushed into the water. Many exited even faster, but a few lingered, soaking up the moment and reflecting on 2019, while looking forward, optimistic and hopeful, to 2020 and the next decade.



Brad Buskey and Darrin Kissock ring in a refreshing new year at the 44-Engineer Squadron's Polar Bear Swim at Gyro Park on Wednesday.

## **EX FROZEN SAPPER**

Local Army Reserve Conducts Winter Training Exercise

By Major Nils French

(as reported in the Rossland News and Trail Times)

Trail B.C.--Soldiers of the local 44th Engineer Squadron conducted a four-day training exercise in the Trail area from 20-24 February involving more than 50 participants.

Over the course of the exercise, Squadron members from across the Kootenays practiced a number of key skills for winter operations. They were joined by other Canadian Army Reservists from the lower mainland who are part of their parent unit, 39 Combat Engineer Regiment.

Training included the use of winter gear including arctic tents, snowmobiles, specialized toboggans for hauling equipment, and military issue cold weather clothing. The exercise was the last step in granting the soldiers the Canadian Army Basic Winter Warfare qualification and included training in cold weather survival, camouflage and concealment, snow shelter construction, and navigation in winter conditions. The soldiers, who live and work in the Kootenays and serve part-time in the Canadian Armed Forces, also conducted a live-fire weapons range and demolitions training with satchel charges of plastic explosives. Several of the exercise participants joined the Army Reserve as recently as this past spring and completed basic training over the summer as part of the Army's Full Time Summer Employment program. These newer members found the exercise extremely valuable.



The Squadron Commander, Major Nils French of Rossland, noted that winter warfare is a core skill for the Canadian Army and the ability to operate in winter conditions is of particular importance in the Kootenays.



Throughout the exercise the squadron used their fleet of Specialist Equipment Vehicles. The SEVs are 5-ton off-road trucks configured to carry nine soldiers as well as a wide array of equipment. Several members of the squadron had completed air brake and class 3 driver training earlier in the year and were able to put their new skills to work during the exercise.

## Robbie Burns Supper 2020

The annual Burns Supper was held at the Lt Col J.P. Fell Armoury, North Vancouver on Saturday 01 February 2020.

This is the main fund raising event for the JP Fell Pipe Band. The supper was well attended by members of the 39 CER Association, 6 Field Engineer Squadron Museum Association, 6 Engineer Squadron and 2573 (6 Engineer Squadron) RCACC.

There was great food including a wee bit o' haggis, along with some great Scottish pipe music including pibroch. The Pipe Band, at the end of their set, marched off playing Wings.



Drum Major Doug Drysdale gives the toast to the Haggis



The JP Fell Pipe Band



Hon Col Bill Diamond and Audrey



BGen Jerry Silva (ret'd) and Carla Krens



Group with Maj Geoff Dyer (ret'd), Ptes Giesbrecht & Hudec



Group with Capt Knoll, 2Lt Sidhu and Cpl Wotherspoon



Sergeants Monty Black (ret'd) and Savage



Bill White, President and SSM Craig MacLeod

### **MUSEUM UPDATE – MARCH 1, 2020**

Feb was another busy month in the museum. A full wall diorama of WW I training at the armoury was installed. A start was made on a special shadow-box exhibit for Lt Col J.P Fell. A special visit by recruits undergoing training in the armoury. The website was transitioned into a Regiment Museum website.

**WW I Diorama:** To recognize the unit's role in training more than 4000 engineers during WW I we devoted an entire wall to a diorama showing WW I Training at the armoury.

**Lt Col Fell Exhibit:** Lt Col J.P. Fell was instrumental in forming 6 Field Company, Canadian Engineers and was the first Commanding Officer. The armoury is named after him. At the suggestion of one of our visitors, we have assembled much of the existing memorabilia to one location and making it a focal point.

**Recruit Course Visit:** On February 29 a group undertaking recruit training at the armoury visited the museum and the Royal Engineer Cabin for almost an hour. Many indicated a continued interest and we will arrange another, longer visit.

**Website Changes:** The Regiment has made application to the Directorate of History and Heritage to authorize and certify 39 CER Museum as an official military museum. In preparation for the change of status, we have upgraded our website to a regimental site that offers information on the museums, displays and news of the entire Regiment. Please note that the website is under construction and there is much more to come.

Visit at: <http://www.39cer-museum.net/index.html>

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **D-DAY DINNER**

This year's dinner is scheduled to be held on Saturday 6 June 2020 in the J.P. Fell Armoury, North Vancouver. The dinner will be a mixed dining in but will follow the mess dinner format and protocols. However, given the current response to the COVID 19 outbreak, the dinner may be postponed. We will let you know if there is a postponed of the dinner.

### **MEMBERSHIP**

For those wishing to become members of 39 CER Association, a membership form is sent along with this letter or can be acquired from: [membership@39cer.ca](mailto:membership@39cer.ca)

#### 39 CER Association Contacts

President: Bill White Col (Ret'd)

[president@39cer.ca](mailto:president@39cer.ca)

Vice-President – Roli Krueger HLCol 39 CER

[roland\\_krueger@telus.net](mailto:roland_krueger@telus.net)

Treasurer – Bill Diamond HCol 39 CER

[treasurer@39cer.ca](mailto:treasurer@39cer.ca)

Secretary – Grant Acheson Maj (Ret'd)

[secretary@39cer.ca](mailto:secretary@39cer.ca)

For more Engineer news please visit the Canadian Military Engineer Association website at: <https://cmea-agmc.ca>