

# Class of 65 Newsletter

## Bulletin d'Information—Classe de 65

Number/Numéro 122



September/septembre 2019

*Disclaimer: This Newsletter is produced for members of the RMC Class of 1965 and is based primarily 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. Unfortunately, the Editorial staff lacks the linguistic skills to produce a bilingual version. Items are published in the official language in which they are received.*

### Editor's Corner/Coin du rédacteur

September already and thoughts start to turn to snow tires, snow clearing contracts, furnace maintenance and the like. For this issue we have a number travelogues to report and some life remembrances from Gord (Navy) Forbes, as well as a quick summary of the informal survey I posted in the last edition.

But first, it is our sad duty to report on the passing of Edie Helsby, the wife of classmate **6538 Colin Helsby**. The Class of 65 passes along its condolences to Colin and to the entire Helsby family for their loss.

### On the Road Again

Terry and Lynn Colfer are currently on a cross-country trek to Vancouver. Terry forwarded some photos from the road north of Lake Superior (which he reports, holds 10% of the world's fresh water).



Terry Fox Memorial



Wawa Goose





# Numéro 122

## September/septembre 2019

Page 2

### Our Visit to the Pen by Mike Braham

Janet and I recently took our two Ottawa-based grandchildren to visit the Kingston Penitentiary and the Penitentiary Museum. This was a fascinating insight into a slice of life that few RMC graduates will have had the opportunity to experience. We suggest visiting the Museum first. It is situated in the former warden's house and it is not included in the price of the tour of the penitentiary. A donation is requested for entry. It contains a wealth of interesting facts and artifacts about prison life in Canada over the years and is an excellent backdrop to the Penitentiary tour.

The tour itself is enhanced by the experiences of former guards and other prison employees who were able to provide a lot of great anecdotal information. In terms of actual living conditions, the inmates would have been better off than submariners and designees to the Diefenbunker in an emergency, although their terms of incarceration were likely to have been somewhat longer. I highly recommend this tour, but if you do decide to go, make sure you pre-book on line to ensure you get a space as tour sizes are limited.

The following are a couple of photos I took. One is of "the Dome", the central core of the cell block from which all the cells for the approximate 500 hard core prisoners radiate outward like spokes of a wheel. The other is a look down one of those spokes.





# Numéro 122

## September/septembre 2019

Page 3

### The 2020 RMC Reunion Weekend - A Survey

In the last issue, I included a brief survey to get a preliminary idea on the level of interest within the Class for the 2020 Reunion and its component parts. On reflection, it was probably premature, and perhaps somewhat confusing given that it coincided with the upcoming 2019 event.

In the event, 24 responded and with one exception, all indicated that they would attend the reunion. With respect to the individual events, the strongest favourable response was for the class-oriented events—the meet and greet and the class lunch, with less interest in the Legacy dinner and the Old Brigade dinner. Recognising that this is a relatively small sample, it might not be a true indication of the overall class response, but I suspect it is a reasonably good indication of a strong Class of 65 presence next year.

### Bunker Visit

During a recent visit to Ottawa, **6559 Gerry Mueller** and his wife June joined me for a tour of the Diefenbunker and lunch in one of the fine restaurants in Carp. During the visit, Gerry took a number of photos and a few are reproduced below.



Main Gate



Blast Tunnel



Dental Office



Departmental Office



War Cabinet Room



Situation Room



# Numéro 122

## September/septembre 2019

Page 4

### In the Beginning by 6533 Gord (Navy) Forbes

Why is this man yelling at me?! Why is this man in a red jacket telling me to stand up straight? On the other side of the car, another young man dressed in the same red suit is being ever so nice to my mother and father, telling them all about this place. But this man is yelling at me, “Take those pins out of your lapel! Take off that tie clip! Do up the buttons on your jacket!” I’m so flustered by this onslaught that I can’t do any of the things he keeps telling me to do. Why is that other man being so nice to my parents and this man is yelling at me?

We had driven to this place in my father’s car all the way from Hamilton so that my parents could see where I would be going to college. I had been driving when we drove through the gate and were directed to park on a big, paved parking lot. There were quite a few cars already there. When I parked the car, I got out one side and my parents got out the other. I was proudly wearing my best Ivy League jacket, three buttons and grey stripes sporting my high school pin. That’s when these two young men in blue trousers, red tunics and pill box hats approached us. In the few seconds that I had to look around, the place looked quite impressive. There was, in addition to the place we were parked, a large sports field with stone buildings on three sides and the grass covered ramparts of a fort at the other end. I got to know this place very well over the next four years when it was my home.

This was my introduction to the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston, Ontario and the day was September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1961. This was the start of the rest of my life. The same thing was happening to about 75 other young men in that place and time. It was also happening 4000 Kilometers away in another institution called Royal Roads Military College in Victoria, British Columbia. In the third such institution, College Militaire Royale in St. Jean, Quebec, the young men who would become our classmates already had a year under their belts since this school had a five year program. Many of these people now formed the Class of 1965.

I was an only child so the prospect of suddenly having a bunch of brothers was pretty daunting. Not only that, but I knew nobody else there. There were no other cadets there from Hamilton. All my friends had gone to McMaster University or elsewhere. My two best friends from high school were both on their way to becoming doctors. So what was I doing entering the military. There was certainly no military heritage in my family. No navy Captain who had been a hero at Jutland or army Colonel who had stormed the beaches of Normandy. There was only a cousin then in the air force who had joined when he and his parents could no longer afford university. In high school, I had been in the army cadets, but had had enough of that. I had no interest in flying so that ruled out the air force. So, by a process of elimination, I had joined the Royal Canadian Navy. My odyssey was about to begin.





# Numéro 122

## September/septembre 2019

Page 5

### In the Beginning (Concluded)

That first day was a blur of activities. Drawing our uniforms; shapeless blue wool tunic and pants, hat, boots, white shirts and black tie. The fancy stuff would come later, once they knew we were going to stick around for a while. Finding our cabins (rooms) and changing into uniform, never to see civilian clothes again for many months. Somewhere along the way, we were allowed to see our parents one last time. I was so shell-shocked by this time that I don't think I had anything coherent to say to them other than goodbye. I think I may have eaten supper after finding the mess hall. And finally I collapsed into bed.

The next surprise happened on day two – haircuts. I had had a brush cut throughout high school and had thought that this would put me in good stead when I joined the military. After all, everyone knew that soldiers had short hair. So when I sat down in the barber's chair, I was shocked to hear him tell me that I would have to grow my hair longer on top and develop a part on the left side. It took months and lots of Brylcreem to finally get the hair to obey.

The next two weeks were a constant diet of drill, inspections and circles. Circles were the form of punishment during that period. Each circle was a run of  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile around the track. The maximum number of circles you were allowed to run in one day was eight which was a total of two miles. Unfortunately, there was no limit to how many circles you could collect in a day, so most of us were always in arrears. Some of the new recruits, for such were what we were called, bailed out very early. Some lasted only into the second week. I was almost one of those who gave up that week. I was, like most of us, confused and harried. There never seemed to be any time to sit and think. If you weren't drilling, being inspected or running circles, you were ironing your clothes or polishing your boots, or trying to catch up from what seemed to be constant sleep deprivation. It really got to me in the second week when I realized how homesick I was. So one evening, I lined up for the only pay phone in the dormitory and called home . . . collect of course. I intended to tell my parents that I was quitting and would be home soon. I got my mother and I poured out my feelings and frustrations and told her what I was planning. My father wasn't home so my mother told me not to do anything and to call the next evening. I trudged through the next day full of dread and hope. I hurried through supper and got to the pay phone again and called . . . collect again. It was then that my father did the best thing in the world for me. He told me that if I left RMC, I would never be allowed to enter his house again. At the time, it was like an unexpected slap in the face. But I realized in that sobering moment that maybe I was going to have to tough this out.

*Editor's Note: This may become the opening chapter of a book Gord is working on.*



# Numéro 122

## September/septembre 2019

Page 6

### The Ontario Regiment RCAC Tank Museum in Oshawa, ON By 6559 Gerry Mueller

For the last several years, every time I have driven east of Toronto, on Hwy 401 or 407, at Stevenson Road on the East side of Oshawa, I have noted an Ontario Tourism sign, advertising the “Ontario Regiment RCAC Tank Museum. Each time I have muttered that I should really check that out, but then, always, I was on my way to somewhere, or home, and didn’t have the time. This Summer has been one of restricted travel, forced on us by my rather serious fall in early Spring, leaving me with intolerance for sitting too long in any one position as my spinal compression fracture continues to heal. Thus last week I decided that I would test my ability to drive for more than an hour or so, by driving to Oshawa, and after checking the Museum’s website, settled on Saturday, August 10 as the day. Every 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday during the Summer and into Fall the Tank Museum holds what they call “Tank Saturdays”, each with a specific theme. The Museum is open every day, but for mostly static displays of vehicles, while on these Saturdays it goes into full “operational” mode, with a selection of vehicles being driven in their “tank arena”, an area perhaps 200 m by 150 m, with one side lined by concrete barriers behind which spectators can stand.

On the website are listed various options for admission and features (Note: basic admission is free for Veterans with ID). Available as options are various rides in transport vehicles and LAVs, but the top-of-the-line option is joining a tank crew for the day, doing maintenance, slogging supplies, dogsbody jobs, and finally riding in a fighting vehicle during the display part of the day – and I assume helping to clean up after. All this for the bargain price of \$500. I (very) briefly thought about it, but quickly told myself that nostalgia only went so far and wasn’t worth \$500. (Factoid: I was a Tanker [Grey & Simcoe Foresters] for about 3 ½ years prior to RMC, including two full-time Summer “call-outs”, and qualified to drive anything with wheels under 5 tons, and Sherman tanks at 36 tons – and also qualified as a loader-radio operator and tank commander.)

This Tank Saturday, with theme “Desert Warfare” was well organised with volunteers (most looked like retired or present members of the Ontario Regiment, suitably kitted out in tanker overalls and boots, the look somewhat spoiled by bright orange and yellow reflective safety vests). These directed traffic to the parking lots, and provided helpful directions to where the action was, also pointing out that food and drink could be had at the on-site RCAF 420 Wing building, as well as from a couple of food trucks. The fare is basic, hot dogs and other finger food, but the draft beer available at 420 Wing is quite good (and needed after the live show to get the dust and diesel fumes out of one’s throat).

The static part of the museum is a very crowded hangar, with 30+ vintage fighting vehicles of every kind parked every which way. The smell of diesel is overwhelming, with slight overtones of gasoline, as there are also a couple of Shermans parked. All are mud and dust covered, as these are all vehicles that can be and are operated during the various Tank Saturday shows. But the crowding makes it difficult to stand back and actually see many of these, so I am not sure that visiting on an ordinary day would be worthwhile. There is also very little information on the vehicles on display, although the plentiful volunteer guides, whose main function seems to be to stop visitors from climbing on tanks, are only too willing to talk about them, in great detail, even greater if you confess to knowing something of the subject. There is also a smaller area dedicated as



### Tank Museum (Continued)

an Ontario Regiment museum, which is badly in need of curating and provisioning with more than the limited information placards provided, but does contain some interesting items – notably uniforms going back to Victorian and later days, as well as a WWII officer’s wardrobe trunk (not much bigger than a carry-on) containing all uniforms and other kit needed for the well-dressed tank troop commander. Also in that museum are a number of non-fighting vehicles, a radio command truck, and a staff car, as well as a Bren-gun carrier. Roped off in a working area is a badly deteriorated German Flak 18 88 mm anti-aircraft gun modified as an anti-tank weapon that is being restored. On asking how one would ever find parts to do that, one of the helpful volunteer guide assured me that among skill sets available to the museum staff were not only scroungers of the most ingenious kind, who could find parts to almost anything, but also skilled machinists and tool makers who could make anything that couldn’t be scrounged. That’s how the museum could keep fighting vehicles, some almost 80 years old, that had gone through at least one war, operational.

The live show on this day featured fighting vehicles from WWII to Afghanistan, in areas loosely definable as “desert”. WWII was represented by a German Panzer III and a Hanomag half-track (there were so many versions of these, and not all made by Hanomag, that the name became generic) in desert colours. Two bright-white Canadian badged vehicles, a Jeep and Ferret scout car, represented the Canadian peace-keeping mission after the Suez crisis. Several vehicles were from the 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf war, notably a British SAS Land Rover equipped for covert operations behind enemy lines, and a US Marine Corps M60 Main Battle Tank. And last was Afghanistan, with two Canadian vehicles, the short-lived Iltis (and it was easy to see why these were irregularly “retro-fitted” with sandbags and scavenged welded on steel plates) and a Canadian version Leopard 1 main battle tank. Each of the vehicles on display would drive around the “arena” and then stop in front of the spectators, while a commentator would relate relevant facts and factoids, followed by another drive-around.

The finale of the show was the so-called “Battle Royale” a simulated (very much so, as anyone with even slight knowledge of armoured warfare would notice) battle between two main battle tanks; on this day between the US Marine Corps M60 and a Belgian Leopard 1. Given that all this happens in a roughly 200 by 150 metre enclosure this is nothing like any tank battle ever, but it does engage the senses – lots of dust, diesel exhaust fumes, noise of strained engines, and blanks being fired. (Paying attention, it is obvious that the firing of blanks is carefully controlled, the guns never pointing directly at the other tank [whose commander is in an open hatch!], nor in the direction of the spectators, to make sure no bits of wadding can hit anyone.) Any old Tanker would argue that under these unlikely circumstances the best strategy is to depress the gun to about 2 degrees below horizontal, and fire an HE round in the general direction of the other tank; at worst that will take out the commander, and at best either take out a track or damage the bearing between turret and hull; either would cripple the other tank. But, it’s good theatre, and the audience, especially the kids, soaked it up!

Speaking of theatre, this Battle Royale is sponsored by “World of Tanks”, an on-line game, in which participants fight tanks that they acquire by fighting the tanks of other participants, starting with one “free” puny vehicle. I’ve briefly checked it out, and it is, like most on-line games, not very realistic, but if you are that way inclined, a lot of fun. There is a spin-off gift shop on site, that sells tank model kits, and other model weapon kits, if you are into that sort of thing.

---



# Numéro 122

## September/September 2019

Page 8

### Tank Museum (Concluded)



They also have t-shirts – I got the t-shirt. (Not sure it was THE best job ever, but it was a lot of fun, and good comrades, those many years ago.

Would I recommend a visit? Yes if you are passing through Oshawa it would be worth it, but check out the museum website, <http://www.ontrmuseum.ca/tankmuseum/>, and time your visit to coincide with a Tank Saturday. For serious photographers, there are really good photo opportunities, but protect your gear from dust; if your body and lenses are dust-proof that's optimal, otherwise, a rain cover for your camera would be wise. And pick your lens before the show; don't even think about changing it during.



ONE OF SEVERAL HANOMAGS



GERMAN WWII PANZER III



CANADIAN FERRET SCOUT CAR, SUEZ PEACEKEEPING



USMC M60 MAIN BATTLE TANK FROM 1ST GULF WAR

**Photographs** For all of my photos from this museum, go to <https://tinyurl.com/Ontario-Regiment-Tank-Museum>; feel free to download any you fancy.





# Numéro 122

## September/septembre 2019

Page 9

### Closing Notes

Time to sign off again with usual thanks to this month's contributors. Before I go, however, I have to redress (partially) an oversight from the article by John Bardsley in Edition 121. John noted that I had not included the photos of a couple of the motorcycles featured in his article. I must confess that I lost the photos in question and don't remember which bikes they were, however, I have taken a guess and downloaded photos of his favourite, the BMW R1100RT, and the one that ended his biking career, the Suzuki V-Strom 1000.



**BMW R1100RT**



**Suzuki V-Strom 1000**