

Class of 65 Newsletter

Bulletin d'Information—Classe de 65

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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

I would like to note the heartfelt tributes from many of you following the passing of our classmate **Jim Caruthers**. I attended his funeral and passed them along to his family who was very touched by the sentiments. In light of many of Jim's contributions to the Navy, to industry, and to RMC, a group of classmates assisted me in the preparation of his nomination for a place on the RMC Wall of Honour. That nomination has now been submitted on behalf of the Class of 65.

This edition will include a report on the recent TEA Presentation and another of Gord Forbes' thought provoking blogs.

But first I must shamefacedly confess to a stupid identity mix-up. In the last edition, I published a letter purportedly from **6600 Doug Busche** who we had not heard from for some time. Unfortunately, as pointed out by several of you, the letter was not from that Doug, but rather from **6566 Doug Ross**. Sincere apologies to both Dougs. As compensation, your copies of future newsletters will be free of charge.

2021 TEA Presentation

The first of two 2021 TEA presentations was held via Zoom on 22 November. The presentation was attended by about 80 participants and, by my count 17 members of the Class of 65. The following report taken from the 20/2021 issue of e-Veritas provides a good summary of the event.

“Love what you teach” – Humility & Dedication on Display at First Installment of 2021 Class of 1965 Teaching Excellence Award Public Lecture by 25366 Anna-Michelle Shewfelt

For only the second time in the 31 year history of the Class of 1965 Teaching Excellence Award, this year there are two winners. And this past Monday saw the Public Lecture portion for the first winner, Dr. Irwin Streight of RMC's Department of English, Culture, and Communication.

“I don't count myself among the number of great teachers,” Dr. Streight admitted during his lecture. “Teaching never comes easy to me even after thirty plus years in the business. I may not love teaching but I love what I teach and that truth can cover over a multi-





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tude of pedagogical shortcomings.” That love for his subject was evident throughout his presentation which was entitled “Walking on Water: Reflections on the Truths of Teaching after 30 Years.” He wove a narrative stretching back through the decades to touch not only on the people who have made the professor he is today but also on the lessons he has learned over the years.

“After thirty years teaching is still a bit of a mystery to me but here are the reflections of a reluctant and often terrified individual. One truth is that whether teachers are aware of it or not they can unwittingly chart the course for their students’ lives. A casual offhand remark can easily fill the sails of an impressionable student. And it’s a sobering realization. My own life took the direction it did because of a similar remark,” he told those present on Zoom. “In the absence of other guides in my life, a teacher named Mrs. Anderson told me I should enroll in the creative writing program at the University of Victoria. It was a casual conversation that took place in a busy high school hallway but it set me on my course. It’s doubtful she ever learned the impact of her words but I did as she suggested and I never considered any other options.”

Another truth of teaching, as Dr. Streight explained, is that to teach is to learn twice. “In my years at Queen’s I had a strict attendance policy: ‘We are impoverished by your absence.’ And it’s true. Every student might be the one to teach you something. And the literary scholar is a sleuth and a discoverer. In my exchanges with students I’m almost certainly going to learn something as well. In addition, every day in the university classroom you will meet your intellectual superior. This has been particularly resonant for me on two occasions when students submitted papers I honestly thought were plagiarized because they were far beyond what I had expected of them as students.”

The final truth of teaching that Dr. Streight touched on had more to do with teachers than with teaching itself. “‘Ask that guy, he should know’ is a common theme amongst university professors,” he said. “A scholar is expected to have wide, specific knowledge and if not we feel like an imposter. But the truth is that university professors are sometimes forced into imposter roles. The workaday lives of profs are so unrelentingly full that there is never enough time to adequately prepare for all of our roles.”

By his own admission, Dr. Streight may not love teaching but his love for what he teaches has not only prepared him well for his role as a professor at RMC but also highlights the humility that comes with teaching excellence.

Among the eighty or so attendees who were present for the lecture by Zoom were RMC Commandant G3841 Commodore Josée Kurtz, senior members of the RMC academic staff and members of the Class of 1965, and Cadets and professors from RMC’s department of English, Culture, and Communication.

Dr. Phil Bates, RMC’s Vice Principal for Academics, and 6496 Charles Émond of the Class of 1965, gave a brief overview of the Class of 1965 Teaching Excellence Award. As Charles Émond explained, “A recently departed classmate of ours, 6604 Jim Carruthers, dearly wanted to be here tonight to recognize how important it is for Cadets to have a professor like Dr. Streight. It was during a moment of introspection some twenty years after graduation that Jim came to the realization his success in life would not have happened without the support and careful nurturing of his professors.” As Charles Émond went on, Jim’s timing was fortuitous: “This happened at a time when the Class of 1965 was considering a legacy gift to the College. We coalesced around the raising the profile of teaching at the military colleges. The Class wanted students not only to nominate but to be directly involved in the selection process. Students are encouraged to participate fully and not



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be intimidated by the presence of previous award winners. This is an incredible privilege for the Class of 1965 and we hope to be able to continue to impact the quality of teaching at RMC for years to come.”

As Dr. Bates elaborated, this year’s Teaching Excellence Award is unique in having two winners. “In February of each year we send out a call for nominations. Professors are never self-nominated but rather are nominated by faculty and students. Every year we get ten to twelve nominations. If those professors choose to let their nomination stand then we have them submit their teaching philosophy and their CV and we get our committee of experts, including Charles Émond, three former Teaching Excellence Award winners, and several Officer Cadets. We meet over Zoom to assess the nominations and come up with a short list of four to six before going back to the nominating committees to try to whittle the short list down to one. We can usually settle on just one but this year, for only the second time in the history of the Teaching Excellence Award, we have a tie. Tonight’s is the first Public Lecture and in February 2022 we’ll have the second presentation by Ms. Annie Riel who coincidentally is the first non-professor to win the Award. She’s a Second Language Teacher in the Language Centre at RMC.”

Congratulations to both of this year’s winners!

Afghan Evacuation by 6533 JG Forbes

There have been a number of articles in the press depicting an expectation that if we had started earlier with an evacuation effort, we could have got all of the people who expected to be evacuated by Canada out of Afghanistan successfully. There are even others who say we should have evacuated all of these people when the Canadian Forces left the Afghan mission. But the situation must be looked at more objectively.

Canada had aircraft in Kabul starting on 3 August. Up until then, even the US had only been flying their own troops out of the country. No one at that time suspected that the Taliban would move that quickly to take over the country. Even the day before the Taliban approached Kabul, intelligence sources were reporting that the end would not come for 2 to 4 weeks. It fell the next day, after the Canadian Forces had started flying people out.

I challenge any of the critics of the airlift effort to plan and execute a mission of this importance at short notice (hours? days?). Civilian aircraft could not be used. Once things got chaotic, no airline would take the risk (not to mention their insurers). It could only be the military who could plan and execute such a risky operation, which they did. First find the planes, the C-17s of which we have four, of which three were probably operational at the time (the other in routine maintenance). Make arrangements for the other missions those aircraft were scheduled for. Then a staging country had to be found (in this case Qatar) and arrangements made for the necessary support on the ground. Only then could the mission begin. Conditions on the ground were acknowledged by all to be chaotic. Finding slots for aircraft to land and take-off must be very difficult. It is not as if an aircraft can just show up and be accepted with no notice. The bombing outside the airport shows that things could and were getting more precarious. The other terrorist organizations also in Kabul such as IS-K, who are being blamed for that bombing, would have loved nothing more than to embarrass and terrify the west by bringing down one of the evacuation aircraft, preferably one full of refugees. What would be the hue and cry if that aircraft



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was Canadian. Once again, the government would have been condemned, probably from the same people who are critical of the current situation.

The curtailment of Canadian evacuation flights on that Thursday was obviously made for sound reasons, as was the same decision made by almost all other countries taking part by that time. You have to trust the military personnel who are involved in this operation and are constantly monitoring the situation in Afghanistan.

As for the argument that we should have carried out the evacuation when Canadian troops left, it belies reality. The Afghan helpers had worked with Canadians to save THEIR country. At the time, there was still a belief that the Taliban were and could be defeated. Afghanistan was their home. Under those circumstances, most of the helpers would probably have refused to be evacuated. Those who would wish to leave the country had ample opportunity to make such overtures over the intervening years.

You have to put events such as these in the proper historical perspective. From what I understand, no government has a crystal ball into the future. Even the Americans were caught a bit off guard.

Closing Notes

Janet and I would like to wish all of you and your loved ones a happy and safe holiday season, with the hope that the new year might starting putting the pandemic into our rear view mirrors. As you relax a bit, take a moment to fire off an article for future issues of this newsletter—nothing is too trivial!

