

Fall 2024

## From the desk of the President

A GCC Remembrance Day wreath was placed at the Cenotaph in Victoria Park and at the RCR War Memorial at CFB London (Wolseley Barracks). There was an increased attendance this year at Remembrance Day services in London and across Canada.

Our new VP Programming, Grant Hopcroft, has brought some impressive speakers to our meetings. There was a good number of attendees at our November meeting, and they were not disappointed in the topical, military focused presentation by Captain(N) Sean Batte on RIMPAC, the largest international maritime warfare exercise.

As the GCC no longer has a corporate sponsor for the GCC Bursary Programme, the Executive reallocated some funds to permit four (4) bursaries of \$1,000 each to be presented to the 2024 Bursary Recipients. Details of the recipients will be made available in due course.

We need volunteers who have computer/technical skills to assist our Sec. Randy Harden in setting up and running Hybrid Meetings. Hybrid meetings accommodate those members who wish to meet in person and those who prefer meeting on Zoom.

All members are encouraged to invite friends, associates and relatives to our GCC meetings. If on Zoom, please give me the name of the guests so that I can properly admit them to join the meeting.

The GCC Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday February 12th, 2025 at 12 Noon. Each member is encouraged to attend.

The GCC is one of the sponsors (along with the Vimy Legion and RLMI) of the New Year's Day Levee to be held at HMCS Prevost. Come and have a good time. The Levee is the continuation of a long military tradition.

As we approach Christmas, may our hearts be filled with hope and compassion.

Tom Dean  
President

## Remembrance Day 2024



London's cenotaph.



Randy Warden, Remembrance Day chair for the Royal Canadian Legion. Randy Harden secretary of the GCC.

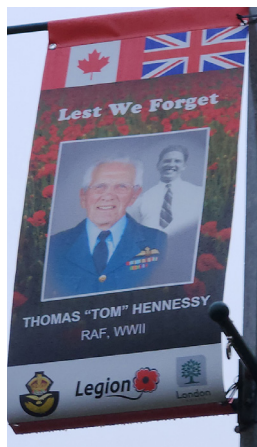
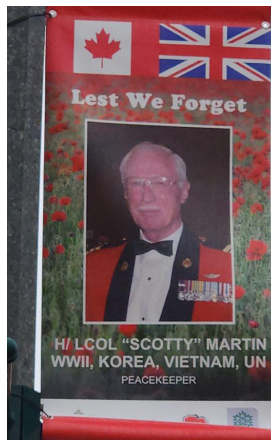




Photo of the GCC wreath at the RCR Memorial at Wolseley Barracks.

## London Veteran Memorial Banners

Six images of the 33 banners honouring war veterans that hung from light posts near Victoria Park, home to the city's cenotaph. The banners were displayed from the start of September until Remembrance Day.



### 2024 GCC Executive

President .....	Tom Dean
Past President .....	Geoff Hutton
Vice President .....	Mike Leatham
VP Communications ....	Kevin Patterson
VP Bursaries .....	Dr. Phil Dean
VP Special Projects .....	Eric Thomson
VP Programming .....	Grant Hopcroft
Secretary .....	Randy Harden
Treasurer .....	John Martin

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### Connections Editors

Kevin Patterson - VP Communications  
 Tom Dean - President and Editorial Consultant  
 GCC Screenshots - Gary Nash  
 Event photos - Randy Harden, Geoff Hutton, Eric Thomson



GCC's Mission to build a greater understanding, support and appreciation of Canada's military.  
 Our three fundamental tenets are  
**Support, Assist and Connect.**



## Honouring Our Heroes on Remembrance Day

### 10-year Anniversary of CAF Members Killed While on Duty



The Honourable Bill Blair, Minister of National Defence, and the Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor, Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, issued the following statement:

“Today, we solemnly commemorate 10 years since Corporal Nathan Cirillo was tragically killed at the National War

War Memorial. While the site was established to honour our Fallen, none of us thought that it would be a place where a Canadian Armed Forces member would make the ultimate sacrifice while on duty.

“We also pause to remember Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent, who was violently killed two days earlier in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec, under similar circumstances to the event at the National War Memorial.

“Warrant Officer Vincent and Corporal Cirillo are remembered for their dedication to duty and their embodiment of the values of the Canadian Armed Forces. The call to serve your nation is the highest calling. They both answered the call, and for that, our nation is forever grateful.

“Today, we remember both Warrant Officer Vincent and Corporal Cirillo, and mourn with their loved ones and the military community which was forever changed by their passing. Lest we forget.”



### In Flanders Fields

By John McCrae

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.





## GCC November General Meeting



Our Speaker for the GCC's November Meeting was Captain(N) S.W.P. Batte, OMM, CD, Special Advisor to Director General Strategic Naval Readiness.

Captain(N) Sean Batte discussed Canada's contribution to RIMPAC 'A first hand look at the largest maritime exercise in the world.'

Intrigued by the idea of serving his country and sailing on the high seas, Capt(N) Sean Batte joined the Naval Reserve in London ON while pursuing his undergraduate studies. Sean joined HMCS Prevost in January, 1990 as a Maritime Surface Officer and the adventure began. While at the University of Western Ontario, he earned money for school and got his wish. He earned his Bridge Watch-keeping Certificate, and over the coming years sailed in numerous Gate Vessels, Minesweeper Auxiliaries and Maritime Coastal Defence Vessels. He was among the first to qualify in Mine Countermeasures as well as Coastal Operations, and subsequently taught at the Naval Officer Training Centre VENTURE, and Canadian Forces Fleet School Quebec. In 2009, he earned his Patrol Craft Training Officer In Charge designation, the fourth part time reservist to do so. The adventure continued when he sailed as OIC of all eight ships in that class.

Prior to completing his Command Part One in 2011, Capt(N) Batte served as Executive Officer (XO) in HMCS PREVOST and then at sea as XO of two MCDVs.

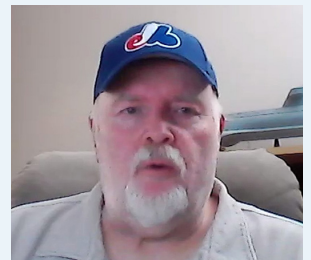
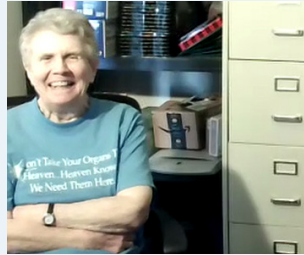
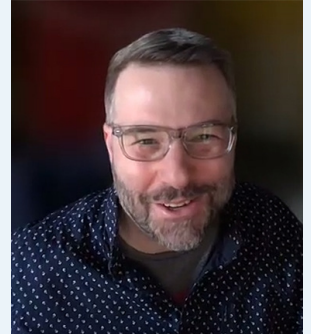
Concurrently with his Naval Service, he earned four degrees, culminating with a Master's in Medical Biophysics at Western University and a Doctor of Chiropractic in St. Louis. Dr. Batte opened his own clinic in 2001, and has cared for families in London as well as amateur, professional and Olympic athletes. In his spare time, Dr. Batte volunteered at London's Salvation Army Centre of Hope clinic, enjoys high performance driving and travelling. He is married to his wife (who served in the RCN for 25 years) and welcomed their daughter to their home in May of 2014.



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## GCC November General Meeting *Continued from Page 4*



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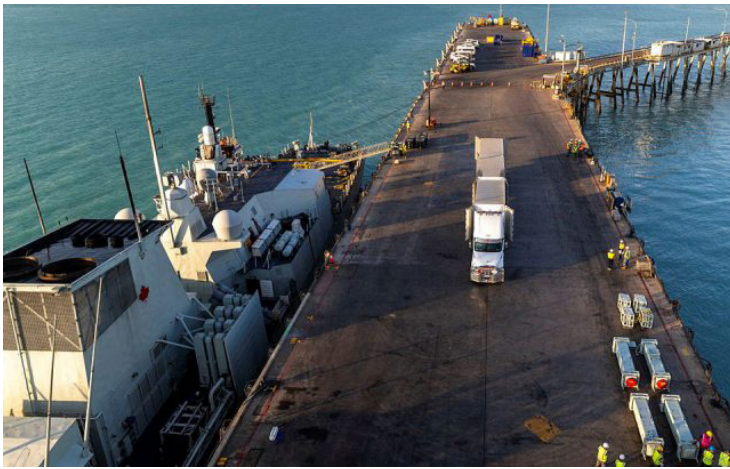


## GCC November General Meeting *Continued from Page 5*





## Broome hosts Canadian missile rearmament



Royal Canadian Navy frigate HMCS Vancouver re-arms at the Port of Broome, Western Australia. Story by Lieutenant Mick Wheeler. Photos by Petty Officer Leo Baumgartner.

In a significant first, the ADF has re-armed a Canadian warship in the Port of Broome in Western Australia.

The complete rearmament of HMCS Vancouver, a Halifax-class frigate of the Royal Canadian Navy, was the first time an ally other than the US conducted a vertical launching system (VLS) munitions rearmament activity in Australia.

It was also the first rearmament of its kind to occur in Broome.

VLS is the main launch system for missiles fired from modern warships.

Similar activities took place just days prior when American Arleigh-Burke-class destroyer USS Dewey and Australian Anzac-class frigate HMAS Warramunga rearmed their respective VLS in the Port of Darwin.

In Broome, a combined team of Canadian and Australian Defence personnel, along with Port of Broome employees, carefully loaded the missiles into the VLS on board Vancouver.

The delivery and loading of the missile cannisters was the final piece of months of planning and coordination across both the ADF, Canadian Armed Forces, the Port of Broome and numerous civilian contractors.

Royal Australian Navy weapons electrical engineering officer Commander Matthew Wernas said the rearmament in Broome was the result of significant preparation.

“There are months of planning that goes into making sure that this type of activity goes smoothly,” Commander Wernas said.

“Each country does its own rearming activities within their own country, but making sure when we work together that there is a common way of doing a rearmament like the one in Broome is important.”

Deputy Director Navy Logistics Futures Commander Dan Turner said there were significant benefits for the Royal Australian Navy and Royal Canadian Navy.



Royal Canadian Navy frigate HMCS Vancouver re-arms at the Port of Broome, Western Australia. Photos: Petty Officer Leo Baumgartner.

“The ability to re-arm in both Darwin and Broome for the Royal Australian Navy, the Royal Canadian Navy and the United States Navy shows that as a coalition we can together operate in multiple locations in the north of Australia,” Commander Turner said.

“Specifically, a rearmament such as Broome provides another option for rearming rather than having to go back to home bases or further down to southern Australia, and enhances our ability to operate in the Indo-Pacific.”

Commanding Officer Vancouver Commander Tyson Bergmann said a strong bond existed between Canada and Australia.

“Canada and Australia have a long history of working well together and developing our interoperability,” Commander Bergmann said.

“We relied on that interoperability to execute complex rearmament thousands of miles from home in a place where the Royal Canadian Navy had never rearmed vertical launch systems.

“This successful forward rearmament has only strengthened the bond that we have been working on for decades, not just for Canada and Australia, but also for our allies by confirming a proof-of-concept so far from home and in the Indo-Pacific.”

Vancouver departed its home port of Esquimalt, British Columbia, Canada, in June and participated in Exercise Kakadu, which is a Royal Australian Navy-led exercise that provides for partners such as Canada, an opportunity to undertake multinational maritime training activities.



## GCC October General Meeting



Our Speaker for the GCC's October, Meeting was Stan Skrzyszewski, Historian for the Polish Combatants Assoc. Branch #2

Stan is a leading expert on Polish contributions to Allied victory in WWII. His presentation concentrated on Polish-Canadian ties. At least 400 survivors of General Anders (Polish 2nd Corps) Army soldiers and civilians landed in London, Ontario after the war. This is their story along with some very personal references from his father's unique story.

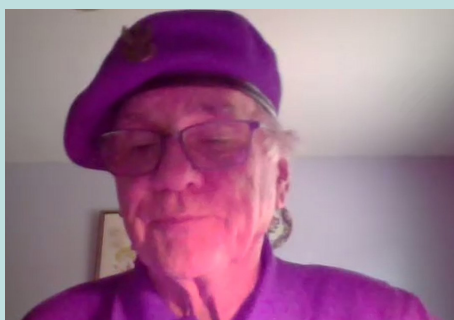
Stan (Stanisław) Skrzyszewski was born to a Polish soldier and a Scottish mother who had both directly experienced WWII and who often discussed history, although they usually had opposing interpretations. Thus began Stan's life-long interest in history and WWII.

Stan's life began at university where he graduated with a BA in philosophy and literature and with a Master of Library Science. He went on to work in public libraries and then management consultant specializing in Internet strategies.

Taking an early retirement Stan returned to university and completed an MA in philosophy. As a philosopher, he organized a long-running series of philosopher cafes – open discussions on varying topics.

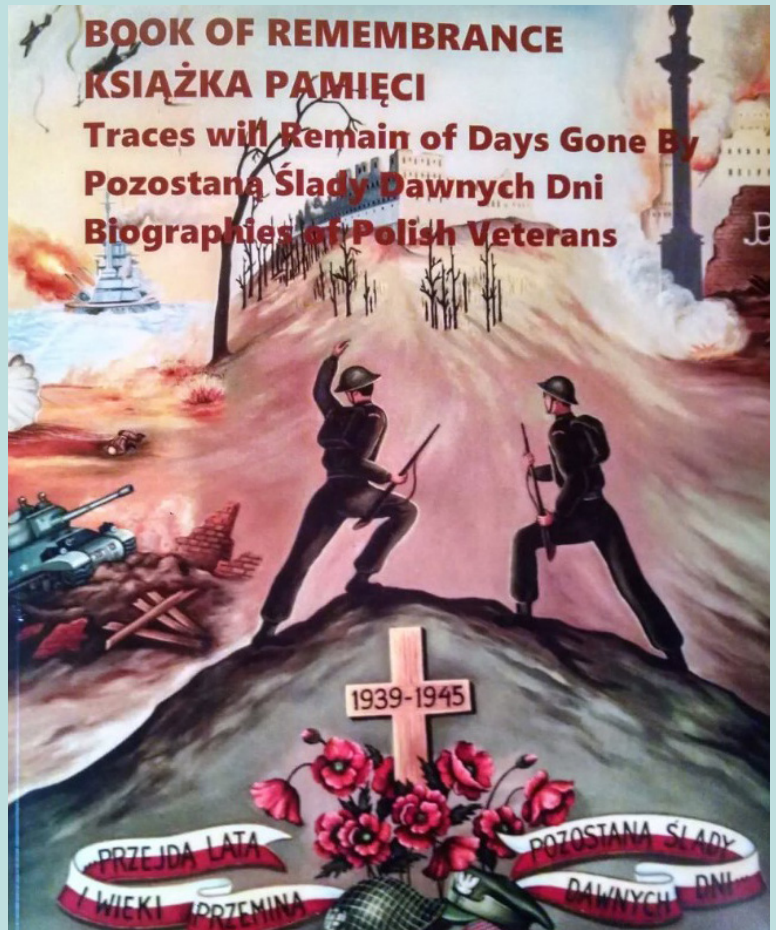
Stan also serves as curator and chief researcher for the Orliński Museum in Mississauga, Ontario. As a historian, Stan focuses on a Polish-Canadian perspective bringing a unique lens to how this history is presented. He also specializes in presenting the stories of Polish veterans who decided to make Canada their home after WWII.

Stan is married to Jantina and has two children. Mary Anne is an artist and horticulturalist. Michael is an outdoorsman and renovator living in British Columbia.





## GCC October General Meeting *Continued from Page 8*



*W Falconara we Włoszech (1946 r.).*



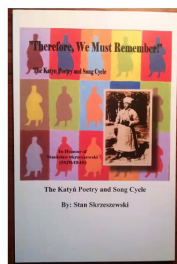
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## GCC October General Meeting *Continued from Page 9*



From labour camp in Siberia to general Anders Polish Army



**Garrison Community Council**

London & Region  
*"Civilians supporting Canada's Military"*

has the pleasure to award this certificate of appreciation to

**Mr. Stanislaw Skrzyszewski**  
Historian, Polish Combatants Association. Branch #2

for his presentation, 'The Odyssey of Freedom – Polish Veterans in London'

Garrison Community Council  
London & Region

Tom Dean, President  
9 October 2024





## Canadian Army Awards Contract to Thales for Canada's Night Vision Systems Modernization project



The Thales Sophie Ultima long-range handheld thermal imagers have been selected by the Canadian Armed Forces, the first contract awarded under Canada's Night Vision Systems Modernization (NVSM) project.

- Manufactured and maintained in Canada, the Sophie Ultima will enhance operational capabilities for the Canadian Army with advanced technology and resilient navigation.
- This contract award further affirms Thales' commitment to Canada with significant local industrialization, skills development and training in Quebec.

Thales Canada is pleased to announce that the Government of Canada has awarded a contract to Thales Canada for the acquisition of its Sophie Ultima Handheld Thermal Imager (HHTI) as part of the Night Vision Systems Modernization (NVSM) project. This award marks an important advancement in Canada's defence capabilities, ensuring

that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) are equipped with cutting-edge technology designed to excel in complex and challenging operational environments.

The Sophie Ultima, a lightweight, handheld thermal imager, is engineered to deliver extraordinary performance in the field. With a high performance infrared channel, it offers NATO tank recognition range performance of up to 6 kilometres. The continuous optical zoom and wide 20° field of view enable operators to maintain visual contact with targets during detection, recognition, and identification phases, ensuring rapid and precise engagement.

Thales will manufacture and maintain the Sophie Ultima at its existing Canadian Electro-Optics Center of Excellence, further strengthening Canada's defence industrial base. This initiative will create new jobs and spur economic growth, expanding Thales's current supply chain within Canada. In addition, the Thales Optronics facility in Montreal will provide comprehensive in-service support, ensuring that the Canadian Armed Forces benefit from a dedicated repair facility with rapid turnaround, reducing equipment downtime.

*"Thales is committed to delivering advanced, reliable, and locally supported solutions like the Sophie Ultima," said Benoit Plantier, Vice President, Optronics, Missile Electronics and Unmanned Air Systems, Thales*



## Every Member should be a GCCPP

(Garrison Community Council Project Person)

### Who Can Participate in the GCC? All Of Us!

The Garrison Community Council is open to any individual, or organization representative wishing to participate in any activity to raise awareness of and support for the local military community - past and present.



## A MAJESTIC MONUMENT: Ottawa's Iconic National War Memorial



By Gord Jenkins  
(First featured in March 2017 *Esprit de Corps*)

It is located in the heart of Ottawa and rises from the horizon as one looks north along Elgin Street, framed by the iconic Parliament Buildings and the Château Laurier Hotel. It is ingrained in the psyche of our nation. Of course, I am referring to the National War Memorial, our national cenotaph, which is recognized by all through the yearly Remembrance Day ceremonies that commemorate the sacrifices that have been made in defence of Canada. These ceremonies are conducted by the Royal Canadian Legion and see thousands of Canadians attend in concert with veterans, currently serving members of our Canadian Armed Forces, foreign military and political dignitaries, and other service-related organizations.

This structure was created in «the memory of those who participated in the Great War and lost their lives in the service of humanity» ... the First World War, the «War to end all Wars.» Yet sadly, history has a bad habit of repeating itself and, over time, the memorial has seen the names of the other conflicts in which Canadians have participated etched into the granite: South African War, Second World War, Korea, Afghanistan.

Some things that you may not know about the cenotaph.

Until last year, if you were standing near the cenotaph, you were actually standing on an artificial «island of earth» under which a storage «cave» lays.

This is due to two reasons. The first being that Ottawa, formerly known as Lower Bytown and Upper Bytown, is actually divided by the Rideau Canal which flows north-south, cutting through the downtown core as it enters into the Ottawa River. Secondly, as the old Grand Trunk Railway lines ran along the Rideau Canal to the main train station (now the Government Conference Centre), the cenotaph site was a confluence of bridges and the roof over the railway tracks. Not a pretty sight for the engineers, but I'll get to that in a moment.

The design for the cenotaph was awarded to Vernon March, a United Kingdom artist, in January 1926. March won the international competition to design a monument «expressive of the feelings of the Canadian people as a whole, to the memory of those who participated in the Great War and lost their lives in the service of humanity.» March was helped by his six brothers and sister, who completed the work after Vernon's untimely death in 1930. The bronze figures were all completed in 1931 but had to wait until 1938 until the appropriate site in Canada was found and developed. For six months, Londoners were welcomed to view the bronzes in Hyde Park, prior to the figures going into a storage shed for seven years.

The 22 bronze figures going through the arch, called «The Response,» are surmounted by two figures on top of the arch representing «Peace» and «Freedom.» The arch and the base of the monument were constructed from seven types of marble; the monument itself consists of 503 tons of granite and 32 tons of bronze secured on built-up steel piles. All this weight eventually caused the whole marble and bronze and surrounding platform and steps, also of marble, to begin to sink and a major restoration was announced in March 2016. Numerous cement trucks were then seen at this site as Public Works quietly poured tons of cement into the train track cavern (used for storage) underneath the cenotaph.

Now that the cenotaph is adequately shored up, it will remain a beacon to the memory of those who gave so much in the defence of Canada and our way of life. Don't forget to wear a poppy and come to the cenotaph on Remembrance Day. All Canadians can be proud of those who went before them and who continue to serve in the Armed Forces.



**espritdecorps**  
CANADIAN MILITARY MAGAZINE



## GCC September General Meeting



Our Speaker for the GCC's September 11, Meeting LCol (retired) Chris Thompson

Chris presented a Historic Review of Yemen, the Rise of the Houthi's, the initial war between Saudi Arabia/UAE and the Houthi's, and the approaches to the Suez Canal. Yemen and the Houthis Impact on Region and World.

Chris Thompson is a retired Armoured Officer who started his career in the ranks and retired as a LCol who had commanded the 1st Hussars. Chris has a BA from Western University.

Chris also had a career in the Defence Industry working with General Motors Defence and General Dynamics Land Systems (GDLS) along with other companies. In his final years before retiring from GDLS he was a Business Development Lead located in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), serving the Arabian Peninsula (Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman as well as KSA).



### Yemen, the Houthis, and You

- Thought Primer
- Regional Overview
- Yemen History
- Humanitarian Crisis
- Recent History
- Summary



### Thought and Attitude Primer

- Family
- Tribe
- Sect (Sunni, Shia or other)
- Region
- Country

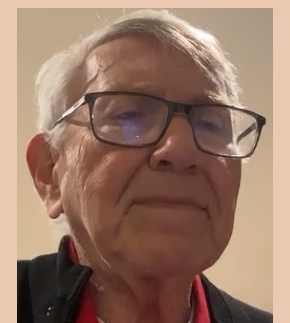
- Yemen is a 100's year old complex, multi-faceted, conflict.
- Gulf Arab and Muslim priorities, greatest to least:
- Borders are generally straight lines established by Colonial powers.
- Regions Foreign Policy/values are not automatically Western aligned.



### Find the Hilton Hotel



- Suez Canal
- Bab Al Mandab Straits
- Gate of Tears
- Djibouti
- Iran
- Oman
- Straits of Hormuz
- National Borders



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## GCC September General Meeting Continued from Page 13

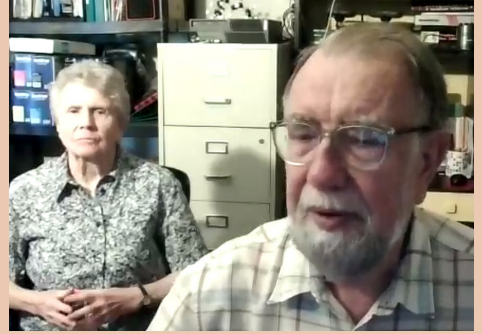
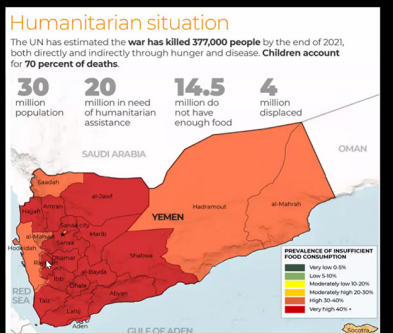
**Majority of population is in the mountainous Western Region**

**99% of Population is Muslim**  
65% are Sunni and 35% Shia

**Median age is 22 years**

**Urban population is 40% of total**  
Sana'a population 3.3 Million  
Aden population 1.1 Million

**Literacy Rate**  
- Male 85%, Female 55%

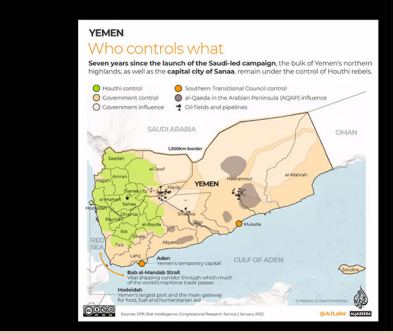


**Houthi controlled - Green**

**Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) - Grey**

**Government controlled/influence - Sand**

**Oil Fields - Black**

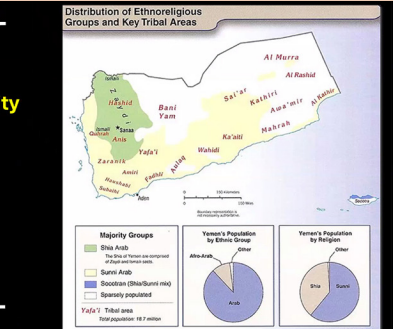


**Sunni Muslims**

- 85% plus of all Muslims
- Arab Peninsula is majority Sunni

**Shia Muslims**

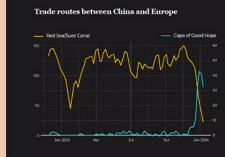
- no more than 15% of all Muslims
- Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and Azerbaijan are majority Shia





## GCC September General Meeting *Continued from Page 14*

In recent months, major shipping carriers, which usually sail via the **Red Sea and Suez Canal**, have responded to attacks in the region by transiting their fleet around the **Cape of Good Hope**, off the Cape Peninsula in South Africa.



### Summary

#### Humanitarian Crisis:

- Death, disabilities, under-utilization of all members of Yemeni society
- Risk of systemic disease outbreaks and export to other countries
- Under performance of the Yemeni economy – security vs social spending
- Suffering drives multi-generational and tribal distrust effecting national unity

#### Strategic/Regional Impact:

- Increasing friction between countries and their economies
- Disruption of trade routes
  - Significant cost increases
  - Significant schedule delays
- Global defence and security impacts

## Honouring Our Heroes on Remembrance Day



### Trooper (Ret'd) Gordon "Gord" Fennell

Gordon "Gord" Fennell was born on 19 April 1922 in Preston, Ontario. He enlisted with the Highland Light Infantry of Canada on 18 June 1940 in Galt, Ontario. His service lasted until 30 October 1945 when he retired with the rank of Trooper—a Trooper with a very lucky pair of shoes.

Family was always important to Gordon Fennell. When the Highland Light Infantry moved to England in 1941, he requested a transfer to the 14th Army Tank Regiment (the Calgary Tanks) so he could be closer to his brother, George Fennell. The Calgary Tanks first saw action during the Allied assault on the German-occupied port of Dieppe, France.

*"I escaped being made a prisoner of war by accepting to be towed back to England in a leaking boat."*

Known as the "Dieppe Raid", it would prove to be the single bloodiest day for Canada's military in the entire Second World War. Of the almost 5,000 Canadians who took part in this ill-fated raid on occupied France, more than half became casualties. For Fennell, it was some quick thinking that potentially saved his life. "I escaped being made a prisoner of war by accepting to be towed back to England in a leaking boat."

Following the Dieppe Raid, the Calgary Tanks turned their attention to the Italian Campaign. In 1943, the Calgary Tanks participated in the successful Allied invasion of Sicily. Afterwards, they engaged German forces again as the Allies pushed from the south to the north of continental Italy. That is where Fennell's brother, George, lost his life. He is now buried at the Bari War Cemetery.

While in Italy, Fennell had what he considers the most memorable moment of his military service – and perhaps his life. Fennell asked Joyce Cobb, an English woman, to marry him. He requested that his mother send him new shoes from Canada for the wedding, as shoes were rationed in England during the Second World War.

*"...You saved my life by agreeing to marry me, even though you were far away in England."*

By the time the shoes arrived, he was in Sicily with the invading force. He decided to put the shoes beside his head while traveling in a tank, as he thought they would be safe there. Soon after, the tank was attacked. "It was early October 1943, and our tank was blown up. Shrapnel entered the tank, and went through the soles of my new shoes, which in those days, were much thicker than today. The shrapnel continued through my earphones and into my head."

Thanks to the thick soles of the shoes, he only sustained minor injuries. The next day, the Calgary Tanks continued onward. "I wrote my fiancée to say, 'you saved my life by agreeing to marry me, even though you were far away in England.'" Fennell later donated his 'lucky shoes' to the Canadian War Museum: "Presumably they don't get too many good luck stories."



## Honouring Our Heroes on Remembrance Day

### Trooper (Ret'd) Gordon "Gord" Fennell *Continued from page 15*



Shoes with  
Embedded  
Shrapnel

CWM 20170753-001  
Canadian War Museum

In early spring of 1945, Fennell's regiment joined the Allied advance in the Netherlands and Germany until the war in Europe came to an end. For his service, Fennell was awarded the 1939-1945 Star, Italy Star, France and Germany Star, Defence Medal, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with the Dieppe Bar, and the War Medal 1939-1945.

In honour of the 75th anniversary of the Italian Campaign, Gordon Fennell is one of our Faces of Freedom. He recently travelled to Italy with the Government of Canada delegation to participate in ceremonies commemorating this special anniversary.

## Honouring Our Heroes on Remembrance Day



### Miriam "Mimi" Freedman

Miriam "Mimi" Freedman (she would later take the married name Hart) was born in Montréal, part of a prominent Jewish family that could trace its roots in Canada back almost two centuries. Her own immediate family would immigrate to Europe after the First World War, first arriving in Belgium before eventually settling in the United Kingdom. Eager to do her part upon the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, the young woman joined the London Ambulance Service in England in the opening weeks of the conflict. She spent three years as an ambulance driver, including during the worst days of the Blitz when German bombers pounded Britain with almost nightly bombing raids, before joining the Canadian Women's Army Corps in 1943 as a driver attached to the Canadian Military Headquarters.

Staff Sergeant Freedman would find herself close to the front lines as she landed in Normandy two months after D-Day—one of the first Canadian servicewomen to arrive on the continent—and followed the advancing Canadian troops through Northwest Europe over the course of the rest of the war. Although she was a driver, Freedman was sometimes called on to use her impressive language skills (she was fluent in English, French, Dutch, German and Flemish) to talk to the local people of the countries being liberated, as well as to help interrogate captured German prisoners.

Freedman earned a Mention in Dispatches for her impressive military service and is believed to be the only Jewish Canadian enlisted woman to be decorated for bravery during the Second World War.

Miriam returned to Canada in April of 1946. She passed away in April 1994

*Eager to do her part upon the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, Miriam Freedman joined the London Ambulance Service in England in the opening weeks of the conflict. She would later join the Canadian Women's Army Corps as a driver.*



## Honouring Our Heroes on Remembrance Day

### Captain(N) (Retd) William Hargen “Tug” Wilson



Serving on HMCS Ottawa, Bill Wilson helped keep the seas clear on D-Day and the months that followed.

As the sun rose on the morning of 6 June 1944—D-Day—seaman gunner Bill Wilson was standing on the deck of HMCS Ottawa. While normally below deck in hammocks, Bill and anyone who could were watching the scene below them unfold from the deck.

*“It was cold and I went through half a pack of cigarettes in a hurry,” recalled Wilson as he and the crew eagerly waited.*

“I knew things were happening but I couldn’t see anything,” remembered Wilson as the day started. “We were on the west flank of Utah Beach. We could hear rumbles, when battleships fire they make a lot of noise.” At the break of dawn, the clamour became more intense as the invasion ramped up. The sun revealed a scene like no other. A sky chock-full of planes and barrage balloons – below them, landing craft upon landing craft headed directly towards the smoking beach.

“It was quite a sight, the largest invasion in history,” remarked Wilson.

William Hargen Wilson was born on 5 November 1924 in Winnipeg. In September 1939, he joined the Sea Cadets and in December 1942, he joined the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve. Only 18 when he first saw service, his years in Sea Cadets gave him the advantage of being more knowledgeable than most recruits.

Wilson spent his first year training and guarding HMCS bases. By 1944 he was escorting convoys. D-Day marked a big change for him and his crew. It was time to go on the offensive. “I think all of us felt the same, how well were we going to perform individually and collectively,” recalls Wilson. “And of course, in the Navy, you’ve got to work as a team. You all end up serving together. We depend on each other. You fight as one. You depend on the guy standing next to you, the guy who is above and the one below you. You know that everyone is going to do their job. That’s what you’re trained to do.

From day one from an ordinary seaman up to the commanding officer.

*“It is essential that you work as a team or you all end up swimming together.”*

The months following D-Day were eventful for Wilson and crew. In fact, they spent the whole month following D-Day at sea. He doesn’t remember a day going by that didn’t see them drop at least some depth charges. HMCS Ottawa and Escort Group 11 sunk three U-boats and rescued German survivors of another U-boat sunk by Coastal Command aircraft. They also took fire from a German coastal battery. “That was scary,” remarked Williams about his ship nearly being hit.

Even the return trip home to Canada was disquieting, when a storm battered their ship and a crew member of an accompanying destroyer was lost overboard in rough waters. Once back in Canada, Wilson happily recalls getting a care package from his parents containing cake and homemade raisin tarts. The hearty food was warmly received, as Wilson had grown tired of rations, in particular Spam and ketchup. “Lots of Spam,” recalls Wilson. “We had boiled Spam, fried Spam, chopped Spam... and lots of tomato ketchup. I have not eaten a can of Spam since 1945.”

*Continued on page 18*





## Honouring Our Heroes on Remembrance Day

### Captain(N) (Retd) William Hargen “Tug” Wilson *Continued from page 17*

Known during the war as Tug and later as Captain Bill, Wilson was discharged from active service in the fall of 1945; however, he joined the naval reserve that same year and rose through the ranks over the ensuing years. He retired from active service in 1979, having reached the rank of Captain in the Royal Canadian Navy. He now lives in High River, Alberta and at 100, his house still remains free of tomato ketchup.

*“The thought occurred to me that maybe he was looking at an old man from Canada who arrived at this exact spot some 75 years ago to help free his country.”*

Some 75 years after D-Day, Wilson was invited to a commemorative ceremony in Normandy. It was a cold June day when Wilson and 36 fellow D-Day Veterans were ushered to the event. When it began to rain, a group of young school children came to help, raising umbrellas over the heads of the visiting Veterans. “It was cold, I really couldn’t hear what was being said over the speakers at the podium, but at least I was dry,” recalled Wilson.

Wilson and the young boy who sheltered him from the rain developed a connection that transcended the language barrier they faced. “The thought occurred to me that maybe he was looking at an old man from Canada who arrived at this exact spot some 75 years ago to help free his country,” recounted Wilson. “I immediately had a lump in my throat. It was, all-in-all, quite an unexpected emotional experience.”

After returning to Canada, Wilson wanted to try and reach out to the boy to thank him. With some investigation, using a photo from the event and a little luck, the boy was identified as 10-year-old Florent Geffrey from Normandy. Wilson sent Geffrey a package that included a photo of the ship Wilson served on, HMCS Ottawa. Geffrey’s show of kindness and respect had touched Wilson. “I lost two close friends who participated in the landing in June 1944,” remembered Wilson. “Nineteen year old Joe Shack, in my high school graduating class who was a Rifleman in the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, and Jacky Wheeler who lived four houses away from me and was a Trooper in the Fort Garry Horse (tanks) aged 20, lost their lives within weeks of landing in France. When I visited their graves 25 years ago, I wondered if it was really worth it. Now, having met young Master Florent Geffrey, I feel that maybe their sacrifices were after all, not in vain.”

In June 2024, Wilson will be travelling back to France with the Government of Canada delegation to commemorate the 80th anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy. Geffrey is determined to meet his Canadian friend again. Now 15, he is the same age as Wilson was when he first joined the Sea Cadets.

With courage, integrity and loyalty, Captain(N) (Retd) William Hargen “Tug” Wilson has left his mark. He is one of our Canadian Veterans.

*Source for articles on Trooper Gordon Fennell, Miriam Freedman and Captain William Hargen Wilson is Veterans Affairs Canada Salute Magazine*



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