



## **RNMI First Fifty: *Unitas et Fidelitas***

The **Royal Niagara Military Institute (RNMI)** is an independent, not for profit organization located in St. Catharines, Ontario. It is one of approximately eight Military & United Services Institutes in Canada patterned on the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies located at Whitehall in London. The objective of the RNMI is to be a public forum for the discussion of matters important to the military including military history and current affairs. The institute is an advocate for Niagara based military groups including reservists and cadets.

The RNMI was founded in 1968 and received its Royal designation from the Queen in 1999. Our home is the Officers Mess at the newly renovated St. Catharines Armoury. Members are former or actively serving officers of the Canadian Armed Forces, RCMP, OPP, CSIS, veterans of U.S. & NATO allies, and interested civilians who support the objectives of the Institute. Similar to Canada's other independent military service institutes the RNMI publishes newsletters and articles, has an active monthly speakers program, maintains a website, prepares press releases and liaises with local Canadian Forces, principally The Lincoln & Welland Regiment and the 56th Field Artillery Regiment.

One of the missions of all Canada's military institutes is to be the informed voice of our armed forces; a military force that is expected to serve in silence. In Canada, for the last 50 years, the armed forces' support and its funding ebbed and flowed with the political tides. *Unitas et Fidelitas*, RNMI's latin motto, is thus explained: While the institute remains united and steadfast with the DND and Canada's Defence Policy, it has an obligation to the serving soldiers that is, at times, at odds with government and official policy. Fidelity means both faithful and factual. The RNMI has contributed to that tradition of speaking out by its contribution to the Conference of Defence Associations. The CDA's reports and messages are passed on to the Minister of Defense. That

communication historically could be contentious. An independent regional military voice like the RNMI is critical.

RNMI's unique advantage as an institute is Niagara's remarkable 340 year European influenced military history. LaSalle, Butler's Rangers, The Coloured Corps, Queenston Heights, Brock, Laura Secord, the British Indian Department, Brant, Beaver Dams, Ducharme through Confederation to present day; Niagara was the early battle crucible for our nation. Less well known, Niagara is the place of an early multicultural Loyalist, French and First Nation 1813 alliance victory independent of the British military. Beaver Dams - a first. The RNMI has perpetuated and enhanced the understanding of all that rich history through its formal dinner presentations. In so doing the institute became the preeminent sponsor and promoter of Niagara's military history in Canada.

The most important assets of our institute are the people. Canada's military institutes were first created in peacetime to preserve the returned officers priceless life saving experience garnered in Canada's foreign battles. As the Royal Navy says: "*If you want peace, prepare for war*". Such honoured warriors and intellects are our Past Presidents and Life Members.

One outstanding example is Air Commodore Leonard Birchall, CM, OBE, DFC, O.ON, OC, CD born in St. Catharines and a student at St. Catharines Collegiate received the WWII Distinguished Flying Cross as the *Saviour of Ceylon*. Churchill called this incident "the most dangerous moment" of the Second World War. Piloting an RCAF 413 Squadron reconnaissance flight Birchall discovered the approaching Japanese fleet executing a sneak attack. Birchall's message relay sacrificed his aircraft and crew but saved the British fleet at anchor in Ceylon. He obtained his OBE for his distinguished service as a leading senior officer and a Japanese prisoner of war for the next three and a half years. Air Commodore Birchall served as Commandant of the Royal Military College and was the first Canadian to receive the five-bar Canadian Forces decoration representing his 60-plus years of military service. The Commodore is an honorary citizen of St. Catharines and he is the RNMI's first Life Member. All our 18 Life members are listed at the end of this article.

Some of our four dozen Past Presidents includes Brigadier General Len Salmon CD (circa '77&'98) one of two, two time past presidents, a Life Member, resident of St. Catharines, CO of the 56th Field Artillery and Commander Central Militia. Lieutenant Colonel Cliff Baker CD (circa '95) served in Northern Europe during World War II and was CO of the Lincoln & Welland Regiment. Lieutenant Colonel Blaise McDonnell CD, current President, two timer (circa '83 & '18) a Life Member, CO of the Lincoln &

Welland Regiment and educator. Dr. Jim Wagner (circa '09), Professor of Education at Brock University, Founder and Director of Brock's Learning Lab. Lieutenant Colonel Bernie Nehring CD, current 1st V.P., CO of the Lincoln & Welland Regiment, chemist, educator, helped achieve the "Royal" designation permission from the Queen, and helped name Hwy. 405 the "General Brock Parkway". All our Past Presidents are listed at the end of this article.

The RNMI participates at the annual military commemorations: Remembrance Days for St. Catharines, Welland, Thorold, Ft. Erie, Niagara Falls, Port Colborne, Pelham and annual dinners including Bergen op Zoom, St. Julien, and Queenston Heights. Plus, it has been a busy couple of years with all the battle centenaries from World War I. The RNMI's sacred duty is public remembrance. In Air Commodore Birchall's memoirs he tells of the Allied War Graves cemetery in Kohima, Burma, where over 1,500 Allied servicemen are buried. That duty is summed up at the entrance with the epigraph: *"When you go home tell them of us and say, For your tomorrow we gave up our today."*

Canada's new Defense Policy was released last summer. ***"Strong, Secure, Engaged is a long-term, fully funded plan built around people."*** In many ways this is the policy that the RNMI, as well as Canada's other military institutes and the military itself have lobbied on behalf of, for decades.

Under the new Defence Plan the long term budget will double, the standing army and the reserves will increase and heavy and light arms equipment procurement will improve. Built around people means the family pressures on the soldiers will be a core concern to their command staff regarding any deployments, transfers or transitions. This is a sea change of policy improvement.

Built around people also means a core part of this **Strong, Secure, Engaged** policy is recruiting and integrating more women and people of colour, that reflect the multicultural nature of Canadians, into the forces. People have evolved, conflict has transformed, there is constant innovation in technology and the Canadian Forces must adapt to all these changes. Military and service institutes will adapt as well. Possibly, with peace in mind, Niagara can lead once more on the multicultural front.

The RNMI turns 50 years old this year. Canada continues to fight far off battles. Our bravest continue to give their lives for our tomorrows. The RNMI will continue to speak on behalf of our military. It will commemorate our rich history. It will remember our dead and honour our soldiers. For as long as we can imagine, *Unitas et Fidelitas* will guide us.



## **LIFE MEMBERS**

**A/Comm. L. Birchall, OC, O.ON, OBE, DFC, CD**

**L Gen R. Lane, DSO, DFC, CD**

**L Col William Alton, CD**

**F/L George B. Dunbar, CD**

**B Gen L. Salmon, CD**

**Maj. J. Shaw, CD.**

**Maj G. L. Howse, SBStJ, CD,**

**L Col C..R. Baker MC, CD**

**B Gen K. Troughton, SBStJ, CD**

**L Col B.A. McDonnell. CD**

**L Col A. E. Page, CD**

**F/L Harold F. Avery CD**

**LCol M. Clifford Parks CD**

**Maj. C. Jamieson, CD**

**L Col H. A. Snelgrove OStJ, EM, CD**

**Maj. V Furney, CD**

**Sgt. L.H. McRitchie, CD**

**LCol Ian A. Purdie, OSt.J, CD**

## **PAST PRESIDENTS**

**1968 LCol M. C. Parks, DDS, CD**

**1969 LCol M. C. Parks, DDS, CD**

**1970 Capt F. Keir, CD**

**1971 LCol E. Partington CstJ, ED**

**1972 F/L H. F. Avery**

**1973 LCol H. A. Snelgrove, OStJ, EM, CD**

**1974 F/L G. B. Dunbar, CD**

**1975 Col R. W. Yorke, CD**

**1976 Lt (N) G. W. Rivers**

**1977 Capt L. Salmon, EM, ED**

**1978 LCol W. Alton, CD**

**1979 S/L A. T. French, CD**

**1980 Maj G. L. Howse, SBStJ, CD**

**1981 Capt R. K. Roy, CD**

**1982 LCol I. A. Purdie, OStJ, CD**

**1983 LCol B. A. McDonnell**

**1984 F/L L.G. Taylor, CD**

**1985 F/O D. Price**

**1986 F/O G. Rochfort, Esq.**

**1987 Lt. CF Chitty**

**1988 Chief D. F. Roberts, LSM**

**1989 Capt A. L. Holmes, OStJ, CD**

**1990 F/L T. M. Potter**

**1991 Mr. C. Duquemin, Esq.**

**1992 LCol B. L. Nehring, CD**

**1993 LCol S. G. Heaman, OStJ, CD**

**1994 LCol C. A. Brunger, CD**

**1995 LCol C. R. Baker, MC, CD**

**1996 Maj R.C. Junke, CD**

**1997 Maj J. G. Shaw, CD**

**1998 B Gen L. Salmon, CD**

**1999 Maj A. B. Paxton, CD**

**2000 Maj V. M. Furney, CD**

**2001 Maj H. R. Bailey, CD**

**2002 Maj R. Brook, MD,CD**

**2003 Maj C. S. Jamieson, CD**

**2004 Lt (N) D.C. Wright**

**2005 B Gen K. Troughton, SBStJ, CD**

**2006 Capt E. MacDonald, CD**

**2007 Maj S. Tanner, CD**

**2008 Capt A. Houston, CD**

**2009 Dr. J. Wagner**

**2010 Maj B. Kempston, CD**

**2011 LCol K. Moody, CD**

**2012 Capt D. Jeffrey, CD**

**2013 Capt R.L Green SBStJ, CD**

**2014 Capt R.L Green SBStJ, CD**

**2015/17 LCol E. Rayment, CD**

**2017/19 LCol B. A. McDonnell, CD**

