



WEBNEWS

This Week's News From www.rclbr50.ca



Ontario : Branch 50 - FRED GIES, Kitchener. 🍁

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Mixed Pool Tournament Results



On Saturday, January 26th, Branch 50 held their first mixed pool tournament of 2008. We had a great turnout and the winners were:'

First: Peter Whitehall and Louise McArdle;

Second: Terry Churchill and Ginny Polai;

Third: Jim Chamberlain and Darby McArdle.

Thank you to everyone who participated and/or came out to cheer the players on.

The next pool tournament is scheduled for Saturday, February 23, 2008.

Registration fee is \$5.00.

Monday, January 28, 2008
Jerry Prince, Sports Officer
Section: Sports

Track & Field Report to the General Meeting January 27, 2008



Track & Field

The Royal Canadian Legion, Ontario Command Winter Indoor Track & Field Championships, will be held on Saturday, February 9, 2008, at York University, Metro Toronto, Track & Field Centre.

Branch 50, along with Branches 530 and 412, will be hosting the Provincial Track & Field Meet, in Kitchener, on July 18th & 19th, 2008.

Next meeting of the Local Arrangements Committee (LAC), responsible for organizing the Provincial meet, will be held on March 1, 2008, hosted by the Elmira Branch.

Monday, January 28, 2008
Gloria McKibbin, Track & Field Chairman
Section: Sports

Public Relations Report to the General Meeting January 27, 2008



Branch 50's web-site continues to be popular and now features a member opinion section. Our current survey is asking member's opinions about The Dugout Newsletter. This survey will be open until January 31st, 2008.

In 2008, Public Relations & Membership Committees will be working together to recruit new members and encourage non-renewals to become active members again. Get your friends, neighbours

and family to attend a branch function. You never know, they may just want to join!

Recent PR activities were:

- December 12, 2007 cheque presentation to the Army Cadets
- January 9, 2008 CKCO-TV interviewed several of Branch 50's veterans
- January, 2008 executive meeting approved a \$2,000 donation to the Salvation Army but unfortunately, we were not able to arrange a media presentation of the cheque.

Ontario Command has chosen The Easter Society as its Charity of Choice, and encourages all members to support this worthy cause. The Annual Easter Seal Telethon will be held on Sunday, April 6th, 2008, and the provincial presentation will be done between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. Any branch members wishing to make a donation can do so to the office, and we will advise command of the amount of donations received.

I received a letter from The Office of Karen Redman, M.P. for Kitchener Centre, inviting all veterans to a luncheon on Friday, February 22, 2008, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. The purpose of this luncheon is to remember and thank local veterans who have served our nation. I have made some phone calls to our branch veterans but haven't as yet reached everyone. Several vets who attended last years' event, automatically received an invitation this year. The invitation will be posted on the bulletin board following this meeting.

Monday, January 28, 2008
Gloria McKibbin, PRO
Section: Executive

Recognising efforts of Women's Land Army



Female war veterans can apply to have their efforts recognised as applications open today for a new badge of recognition. The badge will acknowledge those surviving members of the Women's Land Army and Women's Timber Corps who worked on the Home Front to provide food and timber for the nation during World War I and II.

Environment Secretary, Hilary Benn said: "It is absolutely right that we at last recognise the selfless efforts these women made to support the nation through the dark days of World War I and II. This badge is a fitting way to pay tribute to their determination, courage and spirit in the face of adversity. I hope that as many eligible women as possible will apply for one."

Badges will be awarded to surviving members as of 6 December 2007. Badges will not be able to be awarded to spouses or families of deceased members except where death has occurred after 6 December 2007. How to apply

Application forms are now available for anyone who believes that they may be eligible for a badge. Applicants will need to supply date of birth, approximate dates of service in the Women's Land Army or Women's Timber Corps and the location at which they were stationed.

The application form is available on the Defra website.

Requests for application forms can be made by post or telephone to:

Mr Dermot McInerney
Defra
5E Millbank
c/o 17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR
Defra helpline 08459 33 55 77

Click here to go to the DEFRA website

Tuesday, January 29, 2008
Canadian War Brides
Section: Veterans

Forces can do much better in treating post traumatic stress:



OTTAWA - The chief of personnel and the surgeon-general of the Canadian Forces say the military can do significantly better when it comes to helping soldiers who return from Afghanistan with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Maj.-Gen. Walter Semianiw told a House of Commons committee Thursday that great strides have been in military health care since Canadian troops first deployed to Afghanistan in 2002.

His comments come as the military ombudsman examines how stress casualties have been treated once they return from the battlefields of Kandahar.

"We've done a hell'uva lot to ... get this thing better," was Semianiw's terse response to questions from the Liberals about the quality of care afforded soldiers.

"We've got a hell'uva way to go, but we're on the way to getting it right."

The general, who served as a task force commander in Kabul early in the war, rhymed off accomplishments to date, including the establishment of stress injury clinics across the country and the creation of new policies.

Almost six years ago, the military ombudsman issued a report that said the Defence Department needed to improve its treatment of stress-related casualties. This was before major deployment began in Afghanistan.

In a follow-up investigation, the ombudsman has found half the original recommendations from the first report were not implemented.

A call to establish databases on the

number of soldiers with stress-related injuries and on soldiers who kill themselves is among the suggestions that's been allowed to languish. It was also recommended that support programs be improved for the families of those diagnosed with PTSD.

Semianiw countered that the absence of a database has not prevented the military from taking action.

Brig.-Gen. Hilary Jaeger, the military's surgeon-general, said families and part-time reservists are not eligible for care under the current policy - only the full-time serving member.

Last fall, Auditor General Sheila Fraser warned that the military's mental health care system was overloaded and that it could not meet all of the demands for service.

Jaeger insisted she has enough resources "to provide a very solid baseline of service."

But Semianiw conceded that finding qualified counsellors and psychiatrists, recruiting them into uniform and convincing them to serve at military bases, such as CFB Petawawa, Ont., is a challenge.

In Quebec, a coroner's investigation has been launched into the suicide of a soldier, Pte. Frederic Couture, 21, who lost his foot in a landmine explosion in Afghanistan. Jaeger pointed out to the committee that the rate of suicide among soldiers is below the national average in the civilian community.

Regardless, the case underlined the urgency of mental-health issues for the military and Semianiw said no expense will be spared to take care of those who need help.

But in a very blunt message, he placed the responsibility squarely on Jaeger's shoulders.

"The leadership of the Canadian Forces and the department did tell Gen. Jaeger, in the month of October, aside from the auditor general's report, we have to do better," he said.

"At the end of the day, she's been directed to spend whatever money she needs to get it right for our soldiers, sailors, airmen and airwomen. She was very happy to hear that. Money should not be an

issue that prevents our soldier, sailors, airmen and airwomen to get the support that they need."

Thursday, January 31, 2008
Murray Brewster, THE CANADIAN PRESS
Section: Afghanistan

British government compensates veterans of Cold War chemical weapons tests



LONDON - Britain's defence ministry has agreed to pay a total of \$6 million in compensation to 360 military veterans who took part in secret chemical weapons tests during the Cold War.

Defence Minister Derek Twigg apologized to the veterans, many of whom claim to have suffered serious long-term health problems as the result of the tests. But in a written statement to legislators Twigg said the government did not admit liability.

In the 1950s and 1960s, hundreds of servicemen and women were exposed to substances including nerve agents, poisons and LSD and one of them died.

A government-commissioned study concluded in 2006 that some of the experiments at Porton Down seriously deviated from ethical standards.

A group of veterans has fought for years for compensation and Twigg said the \$6 million sum was "in full and final settlement" of the veterans' claims.

The ministry said the veterans and their lawyers would decide how the money was divided up.

The veterans' lawyer, Alan Care, welcomed the payment.

"I think this is a good deal for the veterans," he said. "I'm very pleased for them."

Thursday, January 31, 2008

Jill Lawless, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
Section: Veterans

Command of military efforts in southern Afghanistan handed to Canadians



KANDAHAR, Afghanistan - A change in tact and tactics for international coalition efforts in southern Afghanistan is coming with the changing of the guard, according to the Canadian now in control of international military efforts in the region.

Maj.-Gen. Marc Lessard on Saturday took over leadership of Regional Command South, the designation given by the International Security Assistance Force to Afghanistan's six southernmost provinces.

The handover ceremony was attended by both Afghan and international military dignitaries, including both brothers of Afghan President Hamid Karzai and the commanding officer of the entire NATO mission in Afghanistan, Gen. Dan McNeil of the United States.

In Ottawa, Defence Minister Peter MacKay issued a statement congratulating Lessard on his new command, which he said "clearly demonstrates Canada's leadership role within NATO and the international community in bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan."

Eleven countries have a presence in the Regional Command South area of operations, with a total of about 12,000 soldiers on the ground. The biggest contingents come from the Canadians fighting in Kandahar, the British in Helmand, the Dutch in Uruzgan and the Americans.

Lessard takes command of the region at a time where national governments, think-tanks and aid agencies are all questioning the current state of the mission in Afghanistan and many are suggesting it simply isn't working.

"We blocked in 2007," Lessard said of the last year's activities.

"In 2008 we're going on the offensive."

Southern Afghanistan has seen a steady rise in violence over the last year.

Both Kandahar and Helmand provinces have seen significant fighting to halt the Taliban's encroachment at a time when the insurgency has claimed hundreds of lives through a steady campaign of roadside bombings.

"The truth is there has been a 50 per cent increase in incidents, but people are forgetting that it's only at the end of 2006 that we had our full posture in Uruzgan, Helmand, and certain parts of Kandahar," Lessard said.

"So there has been an increase in incidents but what people tend to forget (is that) in every occasion the Taliban were blocked, they didn't achieve any real success."

The major-general, who most recently was assistant chief of land staff, has already broken with one of the traditions set by his predecessor, Maj.-Gen. Jacko Page.

Page never spoke to the media, save for a brief interaction with Afghan media over the summer that was closed to foreign journalists. At the time, he apologized for civilian casualties and promised to do better.

But minutes after taking command, Lessard was out in front of the cameras.

He acknowledged that much of the international community is now questioning the mission.

Two reports from prominent American advisers suggested the war in Afghanistan was being forgotten amid the higher-profile conflict in Iraq and that NATO was fighting a losing battle for control of the country.

In Canada, a recent report by an independent panel suggested

Canada's combat effort end unless NATO provided 1,000 more troops and increased air resources in the south.

But Lessard said it's his job to do what he can "with the forces I have here."

"For me the important thing is to communicate what we're doing. It's not what's happening every day but it's to see the trend, how have things evolved in the last three, six or twelve months."

A reoccurring theme from senior officials in Afghanistan is that the situation is not getting worse, it's just different.

Even the head of the Canadian contingent in Kandahar suggested recently that the recent tempo on the battlefield remained the same as during the summer months - a startling observation given that winter is usually a quiet time for the insurgency.

But January has been a deadly month.

Four Canadian soldiers were killed, two from roadside bombs.

More than a dozen Afghans have also been killed by improvised explosive devices in Kandahar and an American aid worker and her Afghan driver were kidnapped. Their whereabouts remain unknown.

Insurgents also sent a suicide bomber into the international community's hotel of choice in Kabul, the Sereena, killing seven people.

In Helmand, a massive suicide bombing there killed the deputy governor of the province, along with five others.

At the change of command ceremony, the chief of staff for the Afghan army acknowledged the mounting death toll for both Afghans and international troops.

"Of course the people of Afghanistan will never forget the sacrifice and the efforts and the hard work of our friends in the international community," said Gen. Bismullah Khan.

"We are doing our best to stop (the losses) and have the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Security Forces take the lead in the

operations that can reduce the sacrifice and loss of our international friends."

Lessard said working closely with the Afghans remains essential but he also promised change was ahead for the way ISAF does business.

"All I will tell you is that where we have operations right now, it will be different six months from now," he said.

But for the moment, Lessard said, his priorities remain clear.

"Firstly, to increase security within the region in order to ensure the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan exercises its legitimate authority," he said in his official remarks upon assuming command of the region.

"The second priority is to co-ordinate to the greatest extent, the aspects of governance and development within the overall security framework."

Saturday, February 02, 2008
Stephanie Levitz, THE CANADIAN PRESS
Section: Afghanistan
