

Old Guard Gazette



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Merry Christmas from the Old Guard!

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas! With the holidays approaching, we would like to take this opportunity to wish you all the very best of the season. In whatever way you choose to celebrate it, we hope that you enjoy it with much joy, love, and togetherness with family and friends!

THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE OF 1914

Five months after the outbreak of WWI, Pope Benedict XV suggested a temporary hiatus of the war for the celebration of Christmas, but the warring countries, worried it might undermine the fighting spirit, refused. However, in many places along the Western Front when dawn broke on 25 December 1914, something truly remarkable happened. Some German soldiers emerged from their trenches and approached the Allied lines, calling out "Merry Christmas" in their language. The Allied forces were initially skeptical, but then saw that the Germans were unarmed so they climbed out of the trenches and shook hands with the enemy soldiers. Gifts were exchanged among them (cigarettes, food, souvenirs) and Christmas carols were sung! There were even reports of a good-natured game of soccer, but those stories may merely be legend.

"that the guns may fall silent at least upon the night the angels sang."

~ Pope Benedict XV

What remains undisputed is that the 'Christmas Truce of 1914' was a vestige of chivalry between enemies in warfare. Indeed, it wasn't observed *everywhere* along the Western Front, and as the war became more and more bitter, Commands on both sides tried to prevent such truces happening again. Despite orders, there were some isolated incidents of soldiers tacitly agreeing to brief pauses in hostilities. Yet still, it was widely felt that soldiers were no longer amenable to truce by 1916. After so many human losses were suffered during the Battle of the Somme and Verdun, most scholars believed such episodes of truce did not recur.

"I had quite a good Xmas considering I was in the front line. Xmas eve was pretty stiff. Sentry-go up to the hips in mud of course. We had a truce on Xmas Day and our German friends were quite friendly. They came over to see us and we traded bully beef for cigars."

~ Private Ronald MacKinnon

Here again though, the accuracy may be questioned, as evidenced by a letter from Vimy Ridge in 1916, sent from 23-year-old Canadian, Private Ronald MacKinnon to his sister in Toronto. In his letter, he wrote about Christmas, detailing an exchange of gifts between enemy soldiers. This proves that the tradition of a 'Christmas Truce' may have continued but is made all the more poignant as Private MacKinnon was killed four months later, during the battle of Vimy Ridge.

Whether or not it was a singular event in history, one can hardly argue that the truce on 25 December 1914 was remarkable. However brief, it served as heartening proof that beneath the brutal clash of weapons, the soldier's essential humanity endured and that even a world war could not destroy the Spirit of Christmas.

THEN AND NOW:

Mess Dinners – Tradition at its Finest

The annual Cadet Mess Dinner represents over two hundred centuries of custom, tradition and ritual steeped in ceremonial hospitality and good manners. Mess Dinners are intended to be happy, spirited occasions, allowing for camaraderie and social equity among ranks (while still respecting those in command) in a setting governed by formal rules of conduct and dress code.



Many traditions have now become integral to mess culture and there are four stages common to all mess dining: the assembly, the meal, the Loyal Toast and the conclusion.

The assembly allows a half hour of light conversation until the meal is ready to be served, signalled by the Mess Call. At this time, the host, who is usually the Commanding Officer will invite everyone to move into the dining area, sometimes led by a piper. In cadet tradition the youngest member is permitted to be the acting CO for the evening. After the last course has been served and the tables have been cleared, preparations for toast-making begins.



This is initiated by Passing the Port. For the benefit of our own cadets, a fine vintage of Welch's Grape Juice is selected. After your glass has been filled, the decanter of port is to be passed to the left. Custom dictates that it be passed specifically to the left to ensure that, in keeping with tradition, the officer's sword arm was unencumbered! Different branches of the military each have their own passing protocol. At an Air Force Mess Dinner, the decanter is not to touch the table as it is being passed - not until it is empty or has reached the last person. It should essentially "fly over the table", as opposed to the custom at a Navy Mess Dinner where the decanter is dragged to left as if it were a ship at sea.

The Loyal Toast is made to the reigning monarch. It begins with everyone standing at attention until all bars of "God Save the Queen" have been played; the Loyal Toast is made; then all attendees will stand, holding their glasses waist level high, and reply: "The Queen". This closes the formal portion of the dinner; at which point a guest speaker will make his/her presentation.

Speech making is generally discouraged at most mess dinners but may be tolerated provided they are brief. Occasionally, a guest of honour is invited to deliver an address, but the subject should be of interest to all members of the mess. An example of this at an Air Cadet Mess dinner would be a guest speaker with extensive knowledge on the cadet program or flying.

After the formal aspects of the Mess Dinner are concluded, members of the assembly may engage in after dinner entertainment such as games, skits and activities to promote good humour and camaraderie. A "Subbie's Court" for example, harkens back to a time when the subalterns (junior officers) welcomed any opportunity to enjoy a round of drinks at the expense of their more affluent superiors. Headed by the Senior Subaltern, it functions like a mock Court Martial, with designated fellow judges and other court appointments held by selected junior officers. Intended to be performed in good humour, the Subbie's Court allows subalterns to bring "charges" against senior officers, hear the evidence against them, and pronounce sentence upon determination of guilt. The sentence usually consisted of a round of drinks for everyone but at Cadet messes the sentence consists of some silly action performed for the sake of levity. This informal aspect of the Mess Dinner acts as a counterbalance to the formality earlier in the evening.



WHERE ARE THEY NOW:

Santo Klaus



Although Santo had always dreamed of becoming a fighter pilot, his father had always hoped that his son would eventually join the family business. In fact, on occasion, the boy would accompany his dad on business trips, making deliveries to various clients. It was on one such evening in Mount Hope, that he spotted a roadside sign for the 779 Black Knight Squadron.

During his time with 779, Santo rose steadily through the ranks. Some of his best cadet memories were from glider training, earning his power pilot license, and Cadet Christmas Mess dinners.

Somewhere between the rank of Flight Sergeant and Warrant Officer II, Santo's dad began applying more pressure on him, to start becoming more involved in the family business. Despite his father's own enthusiasm for aviation (he in fact had some limited flight training of his own), tensions would escalate when the topic of the family business came up. His dad would get all the red in the face during some of these discussions; Santo was an only child after all – who else would carry on the years of work, dedication and passion that he poured into his life's work? Just when it seemed they had truly reached an impasse, the perfect compromise presented itself:

Somewhere between the rank of FCpl and WOII, Santo's dad began applying more pressure on him, to start becoming more involved in the family business.

After Grade 12, Santo passed the rigorous testing and was sworn in as a pilot with Canadian Forces. At the same time, he enrolled at the Royal Military College in Kingston for a degree in Computer Science. For the next four years, he spent the academic terms learning and developing computer and programming skills that would complement everything his father had built. He increased social outreach by enabling clients to connect over various media platforms and apps, and he designed an award-winning website. Over the summers, he underwent his Basic Military Officer Qualifications and flight training, for the forces. It was intensive, but worth it, enabling him to fulfill his own dreams and ambitions of flying, and to honour his father's wishes on his own terms.

In the years following RMC, Santo was deployed several times, and logged thousands of flight hours with the Canadian Air Force. Whenever possible, he did what he could for the family business: he designed software systems that would improve networking, supply chain management, and more efficient deliveries to clients.

When his dad passed away years later, Santo retired from service and dedicated himself full-time to continuing his father's legacy. Of all his accomplishments, he is most proud of developing an elaborate tracking system to monitor the efficiency of client deliveries (which ended up becoming officially adopted by NORAD), and continually growing the philanthropic spirit that was always paramount to his father's work.

In retrospect, it's clear that the air cadet program perfectly reinforced everything that shaped his character and his future. The squadron nurtured his passion for flight. It taught him the skills that would help him to lead a team through training exercises and workshops. It gave him the confidence to achieve what many people may think 'impossible' or 'unbelievable'. And it echoed his father's philosophy on giving back to the community.

While many of our alumni have gone on to achieve great success, very few have developed quite the global recognition of Cadet Santo Klaus. Our squadron is so proud to have been a part of his journey!



CONGRATULATIONS ...

To Our Award-Winning Squadron!

Philip C. Gainham Award, OPC Ad Astra Award, and a Certificate of Honour



Announcements



This autumn has been quite the season for awards!

When the Ontario Provincial Committee held it's Annual General Meeting in November, they presented our Squadron Sponsoring Committee with the 2019 Ad Astra Award; thank you to John Mayhew for accepting it on our behalf!

John Mayhew is the Treasurer of the SSC, an alumni cadet dad, and an all-around permanent fixture at the building. For more than 20 years, he has demonstrated outstanding dedication to the squadron, which is why the Air Cadet League of Canada has just awarded him with a Certificate of Honour.

The SSC and its members, however, are just a small part of a much bigger picture – our squadron as a whole is the beating heart of it all! That's why it was such a pleasure to receive the Philip C. Gainham award on December 10th. While the cadets were parading at the CWH that night, members of the Gainham family, including nephew Philip Gainham, came out to present the award personally, in recognition for 779's involvement in our community.



THANK YOU ...

to our Anonymous Benefactor!

(Gliders, and laptops and tech, oh my!)



Our squadron has recently been the recipient of a generous contribution from an anonymous benefactor. Our donor has supported us at the local level by very kindly providing some much-needed new technology to our squadron in the way of Thinkpads and PC's. Furthermore, being such an advocate of the cadet program as a whole, our benefactor has generously purchased two 2-33 Schweizer Gliders for the Air Cadet League of Canada, to complement the aviation program that all of our cadets enjoy. We extend a hearty squadron salute, in gratitude for these generous gifts.

Many of our alumni talk fondly about how their years at the squadron helped to shape their lives. If the cadet program has made an impact on your life, perhaps you might like to consider how to give back. Drop an email to us at 779treasurer@gmail.com, to discuss financial contributions, legacy giving, gift-in-kind donations, or the tremendously valuable gift of your time by volunteering with the squadron.

