

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division

Membership Lunch/Meeting

Saturday, September 14th, 2024 at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 191,
9775 Chemainus Road, Chemainus, BC.

1. **Call to Order** (11:30 – 54 attendees) - President
2. **Guest Speaker Presentation** (*due to a sudden change in our guest speaker's schedule, the lunch/meeting had to be started earlier*)

Ms. Tina MOREIRA (photo attached), Manager of Corporate & Community Engagement for the Nanaimo & District Hospital Foundation gave a brief presentation. Here are some highlights:

*The Foundation serves the communities from north of the Malahat Region to the northern part of the Vancouver Island.

*Its fundraising has significantly increased during the past few years (about 5.5 million dollars in 2023/2024): 2,704 individual donations; 175 corporate donations; 31 foundation donations; 29 community organization donations.

*The Foundation was able to increase, in 2023, Nanaimo Regional General Hospital's Intensive Care Unit (ICU) from 8 to 15 beds with new state-of-the-art technologies and equipment.

*The Foundation is expecting to open by Summer 2025 the High Activity Unit, an expansion, second-tier, of the ICU.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division

*The Foundation has funded the new Cancer Care Centre and near completion of the Oceanside Health Centre's x-ray suite.

*The Foundation is currently working on improving patient comfort, equipment purchases, Health Care Workers Training Support, scholarships, family practice grants.

*Compared to the South Vancouver Island, the North & Central Vancouver Island are significantly lacking in health care professionals, medical specialists, health facilities and equipment.

A first donation of \$500 was presented to Ms. MOREIRA for the Cancer Care Center – President (photo attached)

A second donation of \$500 was presented to Ms. MOREIRA for the Oceanside Health Centre's new x-ray suite - President

3. **Singing of O Canada** – Lead by Barney BERNARD

4. **Welcoming of Visiting Members/Guests**

From Victoria: Ed & Marion IDDINS, Rick & Noreen SAVILLE

5. **Approval of the Minutes of the Last Meeting** – June 8th, 2024

Motioned by Larry JOHANNES / Seconded by Dave ALDERSON

6. **Old Business** - Nil

7. New Business

Update on the Grave Project – Len JERRITT

There are 156 known graves; 12 need updates. Lists of graves were handed out to the Directors (photo attached).

Ad Hoc – Don BUCHANAN from Qualicum Beach shared his story of his time with the RCMP (photo attached).

Third call for Election Nominations for Executive Positions - President.

After the 3rd call, Rick STEELE nominated himself for the 2nd Vice-President position & Debbie REITENBACH nominated herself for the Membership Coordinator position. Hence, we are still looking for nominations for the following positions: Treasurer, Secretary, and Directors for Nanaimo, Parksville/Qualicum Beach, Comox/Courtenay.

Third call for Election Nominations for Honour Guard Commander South – President.

After the 3rd call, Bruce ROBERTS nominated himself for position.

CVI By-Laws Section 6 (3) (see attached 1.1.)

States that the President can appoint members to such necessary positions for the good governance of the Division. Accordingly, the President has asked his Executive members and Directors to provide him with names of potential members that could fill these upcoming vacant positions.

The President emphasized that the Division could function with the following minimum positions: President, Treasurer, Secretary, & Membership Coordinator. The areas without a Director would have to amalgamate themselves with one of the three nearby functioning areas. Sadly, if we can't meet the minimum positions, then our thriving Division would have to fold. Therefore, the President asked members to seriously volunteer for the positions.

8. **Executives' Reports:**

Secretary's Report: Jaak KOOSEL (absent) - Nil

Treasurer's Report: Rick STEELE (absent) - President

*June 2024 Financial Report (attached 1.2.)

*July – August 2024 Financial Report (attached 1.3.)

Membership Coordinator's Report – Ken HANDY (absent) - Nil

Quartermaster's Report – Irwin AXNESS (absent)

The President presented a 30-year bar to absent Geoff WIGGINS (Randy PHILLIPS volunteered to deliver it to him); Dave WARNER was presented with a 25-year bar (photo attached); and George KILVINGTON was presented a 10-year bar as well as a Governor bar (photo attached).

P.S.: *If you are either missing or due for a Year Bar, please advise the Quartermaster.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division

9. Directors' Reports:

Duncan – Ken BRISSARD (Absent) – Representative Brent BLANCHARD
Nil

Nanaimo – David ALDERSON reported that both Irwin AXNESS and Harp ARMSTRONG are absent due to some testing appointments. May PURNEY is recuperating from her hip surgery. December 7th will be our Christmas Lunch/Meeting at the Nanaimo Golf Club.

Parksville/Qualicum Beach – Ken AZZOPARDI reported that Ken HANDY continues to be in/out of the hospital. Peter GRAHAM's wife, Madelainie, broke her hip.

Port Alberni – Steve VATAMANIUCK reported that he is the only active member.

Courtenay/Comox – Mary KOSTASHUK (absent) - Nil

Campbell River – Barney BERNARD reported that Glen BARRIE is in a wheelchair and is not really cognizant. Dick and Doreen HALL have serious health problems but are reluctant to leave their lovely home. Larry and Pat STRIGHT are in Manitoba attending their 50th Labor Day Family Reunion (photo attached).

10. Correspondence and Anything for the Good of the Association

a. *Veterans with Cancer Initiative* (see attached 1.4.) - President brought to the attention an initiative from the Military Veterans to identify veterans who have developed a work-related cancer, so that they can request compensation from VAC. They are requesting via Mike DUFFY, RCMP/VA Chief Advocate, to also identify RCMP veterans who have developed a work-related cancer. It appears that some RCMP members

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division

who have worked on the 1998 Swissair Flight 111 crash near Peggy's Cove in Nova Scotia have developed some type of cancer. They provided the following link: www.veteranswithcancer.com for veterans to report their work-related cancer (see attachment 1.4.).

b. Nanaimo & District Hospital Foundation's Donation Wall – President reported that our Division's name is listed on the donation wall (see attached photo 1.5.).

c. Historic Retro Swissair Flight 111 Crash – President provided the attendees with some facts about the RCMP members and staff involvement in the Swissair Flight 111 crash near Peggy's Cove in Nova Scotia on September 2, 1998. Almost a year later (February 9, 1999) an article appeared in the Journal of Ayub Medical College (Pakistan) regarding this tragic event (see attachment 1.6.).

12. Adjournment for Lunch (12:30 due to a delay in serving the meal) –
President

13. Remembrance - President

14. Recalling Meeting to Order (13:30) – President

15.A. Birthday Wishes for the Month of July

PENNER, Philomena KRELLER, Glen RUSHTON, Wayne

LOK, Chuck MERCHANT, Donald McCOLL, Blair

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division

15.B. Birthday Wishes for the Month of August

MEACOOK, Joyce	BUCHANAN, Don	LAVERGNE, Marc
BOLLEFER, Jim	DAY, Lloyd	JOHNSTON, Douglas
SOMMERVILLE, Ian	DALLIN, James	LOTT, Jeffrey
KIRKBY, David	HAY, Gordon	SUMMERLAND, David
KOSTASHUK, Mary		

15.C. Birthday Wishes for this Month

PURNEY, Josh	GILCHRIST, Betty	HALL, Richard
KRENZ, Annie	SCHMIDT, Herbert	MUIR, Bob
WILSON, Jim	CASSON, Roger	FALLON, Mike
JOHANNES, Larry	WEIGUM, Arlee	BASS, Stan
BECHDHOLT, Bud	AXNESS, Irwin	MORRISON, Bruce
HARTWIG, Brian	SMITH, Don	GOODRIDGE, Howard
GOULD, John Leslie	BOYCHUK, Reg	ROBINSON, Robert J.
SMITH, Jason R.	HELGESON, Don	CALDER, Glenn
CAMPBELL, Dave		

*President mentioned that today Josh PURNEY is celebrating his 94th birthday !

P.S.: If your birthday does not appear on a list, then please advise.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division

15. Thanks to the Organizers, Kitchen Staff – President

16. Next Meeting

Our next Membership Lunch/Meeting (AGM) will be held on
November 9th, 2024 at the Royal Canadian Legion Brach 17, 367
Cliff Avenue, Courtenay, BC.

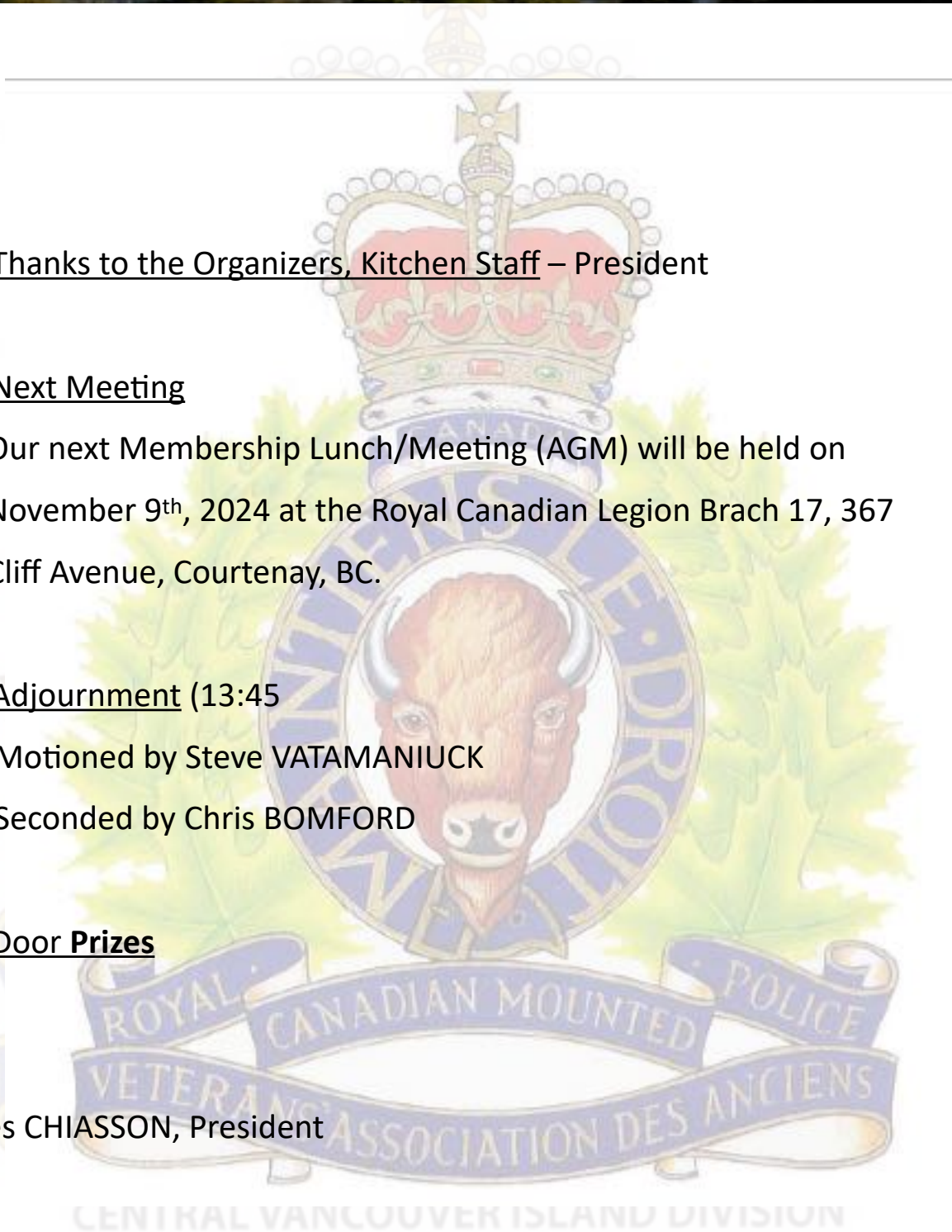
17. Adjournment (13:45)

Motioned by Steve VATAMANIUCK

Seconded by Chris BOMFORD

18. Door Prizes

Gilles CHIASSON, President



Meeting Photographs



CHEMAINUS LEGION BRANCH 191
Community Service and Support of Veterans and their Families

VETERANS' ASSOCIATION DES ANCIENS

CENTRAL VANCOUVER ISLAND DIVISION

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division



*Tina Moreira,
Nanaimo & District Hospital Foundation*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division



*President Gilles Chiasson presenting
Donations to Tina Moreira of Nanaimo & District Hospital Foundation*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division



*Len Jerritt
Grave Coordinator*



*Don Buchanan
RCMP Story Sharing*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division



*Brent Blanchard
Duncan Director
Representative*



*Barney Bernard
Campbell River Director*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division



*Dave Alderson
Nanaimo Director*



*Steve Vatamaniuk
Port Alberni Director*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division



George Kilvington accepting 10-year & Governor Bars from President Chiasson

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division



*Dave Warner accepting 25-year from President
Chiasson*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division

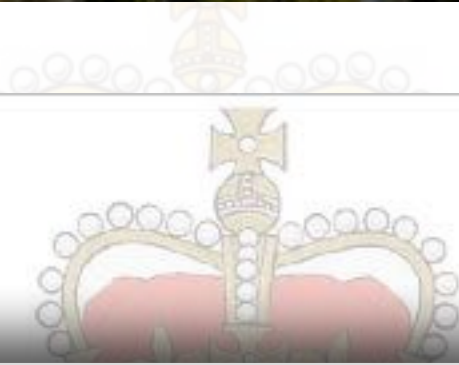


Table 1

ASSOCIATION DES
CENTRAL VANCOUVER ISLAND DIVISION

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division



CENTRAL VANCOUVER ISLAND DIVISION *Table 2*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division



Table 3



Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division



Table 4

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division



Table 5

CENTRAL VANCOUVER ISLAND DIVISION

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division



CENTRAL VANCOUVER ISLAND DIVISION *Table 6*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division



Table 7



Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division

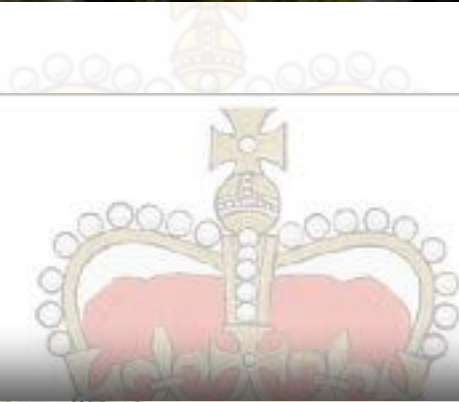


Table 8
CENTRAL VANCOUVER ISLAND DIVISION

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division



Larry Stright's Manitoba 50th Labour Day Family Re-union



HUMOUR

Contributor Terry Hluska



Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division



Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division



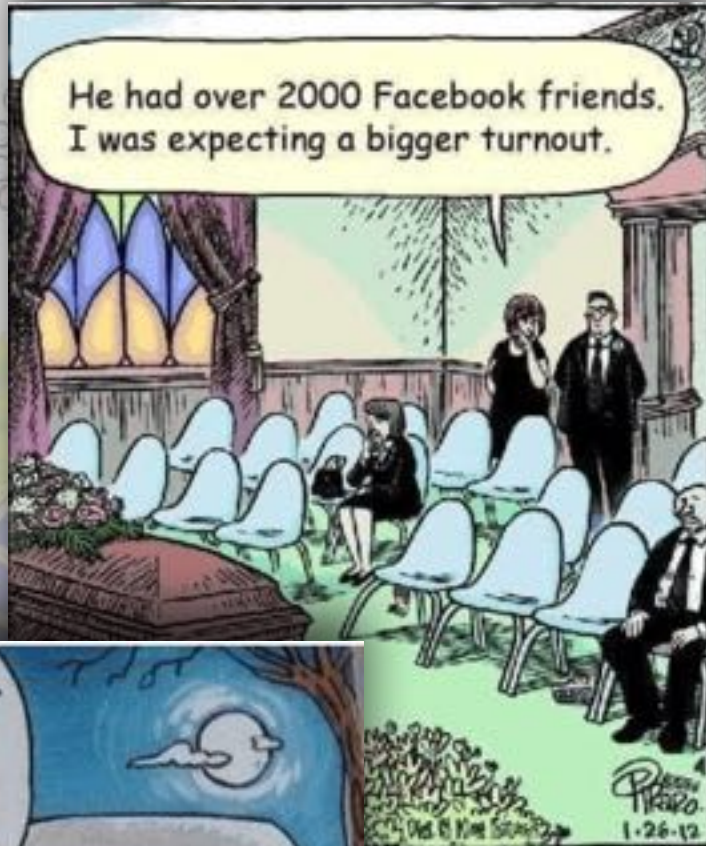
Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division
November 2023



Sometimes I like to use my empty liquor bottles as water bottles just to keep the neighbors guessin..

CENTRAL VANCOUVER ISLAND DIVISION

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division
November 2023



POLICE
DES ANCIENS
DIVISION



THERE WE WERE,
RENOVATING OUR HOME,
WHEN WE KNOCKED OUT
A WALL AND MADE AN
INCREDIBLE DISCOVERY;
WE FOUND A SECRET ROOM,
COMPLETELY FURNISHED.

THAT WAS WHEN WE
REMEMBERED THAT WE
LIVE IN A DUPLEX!



ASSOCIATION
CENTRAL VANCOUVER ISLAND DIVISION

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division

CVI DIVISION EXECUTIVE 2024

President	Gilles Chiasson	gilles.psych@gmail.com /778-441-3797
Past President	Irwin Axness	iaxness@shaw.ca /250-585-1862
1 st Vice President	Ken Azzopardi	kenazz@shaw.ca /306-596-5779
2 nd Vice President	Dave Free	home-free@live.ca /250-923-1965
3 rd Vice President	Vacant	
Secretary	Jaak Koosel	koosel@gmail.com /250-245-2487
Treasurer	Rick Steele	rick26911@shaw.ca /250-585-0846

DIRECTORS

Campbell River	Barney Bernard	berneyb@shaw.ca /250-923-7502
Comox/Courtenay	Mary Kostashuk	Marykpi007@gmail.com /250-871-2592
Duncan	Ken Brissard	ken42311@gmail.com /250-710-3393
Nanaimo	Dave Alderson	dpalderson46@gmail.com /250-729-3615
Parksville/Qualicum	Ken Azzopardi	kenazz@shaw.ca /306-596-5779
Port Alberni	Steve Vatamaniuk	svjat@shaw.ca /250-723-0232

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division

GOVERNORS

Tony Antoniuk	Don Buchanan	Tracy Hardy	Gary Forbes
Martin Thompson	Larry Johannes	George Sveinbjornson	Josh Purney
Stan Wilcox	Larry Stright	Steve Vatamaniuck	Keith Trail
George Kilvington	Robert Wheadon		

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association
 Central Vancouver Island Division

COMMITTEES/APPOINTMENTS

Benefits	Gilles Chiasson / Sheryl Armstrong
Chaplain	Charlie Massey
Database Administrator	Keith Trail
Membership	Ken Handy
Newsletter/Webmaster	Glenn McKenna
Quartermaster	Irwin Axness
Grave Location & Maintenance	Len Jerrit
Fan Out	Terry Hluska
Honour Guard Coordinators	Gilles Chiasson
North Team Honour Guard Commander	Larry Stright
South Team Honour Guard Commander	Bruce Roberts
CVI National Advocacy Co-Ordinator	Gilles Chiasson

Coffee Clubs on Vancouver Island and Powell River

Campbell River: Tim Hortons at 10.00 hours on Wednesdays & Fridays.

Courtenay/Comox: Best Western Westerly Hotel, 1590 Cliffe Avenue every Wednesday @ 09.30 hours.

Duncan: York Street Diner, 5859 York Road - Mondays @10.00 hours.

Nanaimo: Woodgrove Mall Food Court Wednesdays @ 10.00 hours.

Parksville/Qualicum: Thursdays at 09.00 hours upstairs at Quality Foods, 371 Alberni Hwy., Parksville.

Port Alberni: No organized gathering.

Powell River : No organized gathering.

Victoria: Hillside Shopping Mall at the west side of the Food Court 1st and 3rd Monday @ 10.00 hours.

Westshore: Quality Foods Restaurant on the Langford Parkway Wednesdays @ 08.30 hours.

rev. Feb. 2024

Last Post



*Click on images or text to link to Online Recent Last Post



Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans Association/
Association des vétérans de la Gendarmerie royale du Canada

Central Vancouver Island Division, c/o 4115 Gulfview Drive, Nanaimo, BC, V9T 6G3

Financial Report

June 1 to 30, 2024

Balance Forward from **\$10,479.68**

Income

Membership	\$ 15.00
Donations	
Purchase of Red Blazer	\$ 100.00
June Luncheon Income	\$1,871.00
Total Income	1986.00

\$12,465.68

Expenses

June Luncheon Payment	\$1,735.18
BMO	\$ 201.20
QM Expenses	\$ 543.09
Comfort	\$ 67.19
Annual General Meeting	\$1,493.39
Donation-Tofino Hospital Foundation	
	\$ 250.00
Total Expenses	\$4,290.05

General Account Balance **\$ 8,175.64**

Short Term Investment 0989-9796-853 **\$17,034.68**

Short Term Investment 0989-9796-975 **\$10,000.00**

Total **\$35,210.31**



Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans Association/
Association des vétérans de la Gendarmerie royale du Canada

Central Vancouver Island Division, c/o 4115 Gulfview Drive, Nanaimo, BC, V9T 6G3

Financial Report
July 1 to August 31, 2024

Balance Forward from		\$8,175.64
Income		
Membership	\$ 310.00	
Donations		
Total Income	\$310.00	\$8,475.63
Expenses		
BMO	\$ 6.00	
Comfort	\$ 67.19	
Remittance to National	\$220.00	
Total Expenses	\$293.19	
General Account Balance		\$ 8,192.44
Short Term Investment 0989-9796-853		\$17,034.68
Short Term Investment 0989-9796-975		\$10,000.00
Total		\$35,227.12

**RCMP Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division**

Elections 2025/2026 – Third & Final Call

Dear Membership,

The two-year term mandate for your current Executive Team and District Directors will terminate on December 31, 2024; hence, new candidates will be required for the following positions:

Executive

> Second Vice-President – Nominee's Name: Rick STEELE (self-nominated)

> Secretary – Nominee's Name: _____

> Treasurer – Nominee's Name: _____

> Membership Coordinator – Nominee's Name: _____

District Directors

> Nanaimo – Nominee's Name: _____

> Parksville/Qualicum Beach – Nominee's Name: _____

> Courtenay/Comox – Nominee's Name: _____

You can nominate a person and/or yourself before the Division AGM in November 2024. The duties of each position is attached for your information. Outgoing members will take the time to train new candidates in their respective position. Please send your nominations to the President.

Please Note: Our Division By-Laws indicate that the President can assign a member to a position if no nominee is submitted, in order to preserve the existence and well-functioning of the Association. So please, take it seriously.

Gilles Chiasson, President (August 19th, 2024)

**RCMP Veterans' Association
Central Vancouver Island Division**

**Position Nominations
Honour Guard Commander South
Third & Final Call**

Dear Membership,

Gary FORBES has retired from his position as Honour Guard Commander South; hence, we are recruiting for a replacement.

Attached, you will find a description of the position's duties.

If you are interested, then please contact Gary at email:
foggyforbes@gmail.com or Tel.: 250-729-0093.

Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Gilles Chiasson, President (August 19th, 2024)

Att. 2 pages

Honour Guard Commander - Duties

The Honour Guard was originally established to recognize and honour the passing of members of the Central Vancouver Island RCMP Veterans Association. At their passing, contact with the family is initiated by either Gilles Chaisson or Sheryl Armstrong to offer condolences and determine what assistance may be required by the remaining spouse/family. As part of this function, the services of the Honour Guard are made known to determine if there is a need or interest. If there is, this information is passed on to the appropriate Guard Commander (North or South) for follow-up.

The Guard Commander then initiates contact with the family to further explain the role of the guard and more specifically what we are able to offer in terms of options on their behalf. With the family's agreement, a plan can then be formulated and fine tuned up to the date of the service. It should be explained that there is no charge for the services of the guard.

For the occasion, the Guard is attired in either a red or blue blazer with white gloves and for those that have them, a wedge cap. The piper or trumpeter may be attired in their own unique but proper attire.

Usually, the Guard is called upon to lead the family into the chapel or hall and escort them out at the end of the service. Near the end of the service, the delegated Master of Ceremonies, be it the church minister, priest, or family member calls on the Guard to pay last respects to the deceased Veteran. The Guard Commander then calls the Guard to attention and assembles them at the front of the family and guests. The piper or trumpeter then plays the Last Post while the Guard salutes. This is followed by a moment's silence which is then followed by the playing of Reveille while the Guard once again salutes. The Guard is then dismissed and marched off to escort the family from the hall or chapel. The time taken for the Honour Guard to perform its duty is minimal and thus not overly onerous. Nevertheless, a positive and lasting impression is left with the family and guests.

The Honour Guard South has a small collection of items that can be used as desired to compliment proceedings. Included is a small folding table, a Shabrak and red serge table cloth. I have added my own high brown boots and stetson to the collection for good measure. I do not require their return. Depending on what the family may wish to add, such as pictures, cremated remains, etc., a larger table might be required and possibly available on site.

It should be noted that requests for the Honour Guard have dropped off radically in the wake of the onset of Covid. Prior to Covid, we had somewhat regular requests for participation of the Honour Guard; however, since then, we have only had one in the past four plus years.

Current Honour Guard - South

AXNESS, Irwin - 250-739-1862 - iaxness@shaw.ca
BLANCHARD, Brent - 250-710-2984 - ybblanchard@shaw.ca (piper)
BOOTH, Rod - 250-715-8828 - rod.booth@shaw.ca (piper)
CRAWFORD, Derek - 250-929-6575 - sargenbari@shaw.ca (piper)
FORBES, Gary - 250-729-0093 - foggyforbes@gmail.com
KOOSEL, Jaak - 250-245-2487 - koosel@gmail.com
PHILLIPS, Randy - 250-247-0042 - gadabout@telus.net (trumpeter)
ROBERTS, Bruce - 250-756-9829 - brucerostronroberts@gmail.com (trumpeter)
WALTON, Richard - 250-248-2788 - dickwalton1949@gmail.com
WHITE, Stephan - 250-334-8525 - piperwhite3559@gmail.com (piper)

Honour Guard Commander - North

STRIGHT, Larry - 250-923-1640 - larrystright@gmail.com

Under certain circumstances both North and South Honour Guards can work in co-operation . For this reason, Larry should be kept in the loop via email .

Gary Forbes Honour Guard Commander - South (Retired)

**EXECUTIVE DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES
CENTRAL VANCOUVER ISLAND DIVISION**

**ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE
VETERANS' ASSOCIATION**

1. In this article:

'ASSOCIATION' means the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association.

'DIVISION' means the Central Vancouver Island Division.

'YEAR' means calendar year.

2. Division Executive

a. Shall be limited to one (1) additional member. The Executive shall be elected every two (2) years with no member of the Executive serving no longer than two (2) consecutive terms in any one position, unless deemed necessary or appropriate by the Nominating Committee and duly voted upon by the Division membership present. The Executive can authorize up to \$1,000.00 per year, and anything in excess of \$1,000.00 must be presented for approval at a Division Lunch/Meeting.

b. Duties and Responsibilities shall include:

i. Past President

- * Resource to the President.
- * Presides over the installation of the Division Executive Officers.
- * Presents Special Awards.

ii. President

- * Prepares agendas for luncheon/meetings, have these distributed to the Executive and/or the membership.

- * Determines the frequency and occasions of Executive Luncheon/Meetings.
- * Presides both Division Luncheon/Meetings and Executive Luncheon/Meetings.
- * Appoints Area Directors as considered appropriate and necessary.
- * Receives and presents new members with an Association pin at Division Luncheon/Meetings.
- * Establishes and staffs needed committees.
- * Is authorized to spend up to \$500.00 per calendar year for emergencies.

iii. First Vice-President

- * Acts as President in the absence of the President.
- * Assists the President in various responsibilities.
- * Supervises Division extra curricular activities; i.e., Remembrance Day, tournaments, visits, etc.
- * Chairs on some committees.

iv. Second Vice-President

- * Acts as President in the absence of both the President and the First Vice-President.
- * Maintains and files annually, with the Secretary, a complete Division inventory of assets.
- * Chairs on some committees.

v. Secretary

- * Takes the minutes at both the Division Luncheon/Meetings and the Executive Luncheon/Meetings.
- * Submits draft copies of these minutes to the President for review.
- * Maintains and files annually, with the Second Vice-President, a complete Division inventory of assets.
- * Notifies the National Association of the Division Election's results and the appointment changes.

- * May participate on some committees.

vi. Treasurer

- * Manages the Division finances, including budgeting, financial planning, and monitoring the budget constraints.
- * Presents monthly financial reports to the membership.
- * Establishes proper internal controls to safeguard the money and assets.
- * Manages the Division's bank accounts, including paying bills/expenses, submitting cheques for donations, receiving donation cheques.
- * May be involved in annual financial audits.

vii. Membership Coordinator

- * Recommends and presents new applicants to the membership for approval.
- * Sends, on behalf of the President, a welcoming letter to new members.
- * Submits the new members' information to the Distribution Coordinator to fan out the information.
- * Forwards the New Members' information to the National Databank.
- * Introduces new members at Division Luncheon/Meetings

3. Area Directors

- * Resource to the President.
- * Attend both Executive and Division Luncheon/Meetings, and report on area activities.
- * Arrange and schedule Division Luncheon/Meetings in their area.
- * Ensure needs of members and spouses in sickness, injury, or death are met through advising the Secretary and being

authorized to spend up to \$75.00 for comfort gifts, floral tributes, or charitable donations

- * Arrange participation at the Remembrance Day ceremony every year and being authorized to spend up to \$75.00 for a wreath.
- * Maintain contact with area RCMP Detachment Commanders relative to assistance and members who have left the Force, in order to contact them.
- * Arranges with the area RCMP Detachment Commanders annual grave inspection and maintenance.

Revised on January 27, 2024



After Swissair 111, the helpers needed help

Nancy Robb

Stress counsellors were quick to respond when Swissair 111 smashed into the choppy waters off Peggy's Cove, NS, last Sept. 2. Within 24 hours, organizations such as the RCMP had stationed counsellors on the coastline near the crash site and at the morgue to help those involved in recovery and identification operations.

"How could anybody ever be prepared for this?" asks Dr. John Butt, Nova Scotia's chief medical examiner. He had the unenviable task of being responsible for victim identification. "There is no simple way to take anybody and ask him to go out in a rubber boat with a scoop and pick up a bucket of gut. I know that sounds crude, but that's what was going on."

The Swiss jetliner was en route to Geneva from New York when it fell into the waters near one of Nova Scotia's most popular tourist havens. The impact shattered the jet into more than a million pieces and killed all 229 passengers and crew members. Only 1 body was identifiable by sight.

More than 1000 people — from military personnel to fishermen — were involved in recovering human remains from the sea. Hundreds more — from doctors to RCMP officers — took on the gruesome task of putting names to the thousands of body parts transported to a temporary morgue at CFB Shearwater, on Nova Scotia's Dartmouth shore.

Gilles Chiasson, RCMP psychologist for the Atlantic region, says research suggests that 3% to 4% of people involved in recovery and identification efforts may develop post-traumatic stress disorder. Most RCMP officers are used to dealing with death, he says, but "it's not as if you're responding to a call and it's over. In this case, people went out day after day after day for 2 months."

It was clear from the beginning that some people couldn't cope with the tragedy. According to 1 source, a few junior RCMP officers helping in recovery operations became physically ill and had to be removed from their posts. As well, a few technicians at the morgue chose not to return after a day "because they couldn't [cope with] the work environment," says Dr. Jim Young, Ontario's

chief coroner who was called in to assist Butt. "We understood that and there was no shame in it."

Young, who came to Halifax for 3 weeks to help Butt, an old friend and colleague, says people working at the morgue were encouraged to talk about their feelings and take advantage of the on-site counsellors.

Steps were also taken to ensure that people had long periods away from the morgue. "The tendency when you start is to go and go and go," Young says. "The faster you normalize hours the better, because it really grinds after a few days."

Inspector Lee Fraser, head of the RCMP's forensic identification unit in the Atlantic region, says the RCMP switched all identification officers at the morgue on the 18th day. "We said OK, that's enough," he recalls. "Everybody in the forensic identification unit had a debriefing before going home."

RCMP psychologist Chiasson says some RCMP officers have begun to exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress, which include crying spells, insomnia and nightmares. "This is quite a different type of disaster because we're not dealing with whole bodies," he says. "What we do find is that when our people are able to put a face or name to those parts, that's when we're seeing some post-traumatic reaction."

As a preventive measure, the RCMP held mandatory small-group debriefing sessions throughout November for the more than 500 officers it deployed during the disaster. Debriefing sessions were also held for spouses of identification officers.

Chiasson says the sessions are designed to encourage people to talk about their reactions and to educate them about post-traumatic stress and its possible symptoms. "We're trying to get the message across that if you have feelings or reactions, these are normal — it's the event that's abnormal."

"By having a team on site defusing the situation and the formal debriefings afterwards, we hope to have a healthier group at the end."

Nancy Robb is a freelance writer living in Halifax.

FROM: MIKE DUFFY, Aug. 9, 2024

The original message at the bottom, plus the attachments came to us from Veterans With Cancer (www.veteranswithcancer.com) (Director Randy Hildan via RCMPVA CAD 4000, St. Jerome). Checking with RCMPVA Communications Director Dawn Mogg, this information will be going into the RCMPVA September 2024 Newsletter.

The Veterans With Cancer initiative appears determined to build a database, initially identifying Military Veterans With Cancer that may be attributed to service, thereby making it a condition that should be addressed by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC).

The attachments (and the Website) are an interesting read. Initially addressed towards Military Veterans, the attachments provide a history of the initiative, requests to identify Veterans With Cancer, and commentary on the lack action by the six (6) Veterans' Affairs Ministers since 2015 despite each of the six ministers promising to clear the backlog at VAC.

As noted, the initiative appears addressed to Military Veterans, but commendably, the cover Email message includes RCMP personnel who may have contracted cancer as a result of service; dealing with the Swiss Air disaster is noted.

I am aware that some RCMP Veterans who were Forensic Identification Technicians have contracted cancer directly attributable to their service. Scheduling this go into the Newsletter in September gives us time to canvass the RCMPVA Support & Advocacy for more information to be gathered.

Could you review your situation and enquiries you may have received, *and share this initiative with known RCMP Veterans facing cancer which may be or is attributable to their service.* They may wish to consider contacting www.veteranswithcancer.com

I will contact Randy Hladun at Veterans With Cancer.

More to follow as we learn more.

Mike

Mike Duffy

RCMP Veterans' Association (RCMPVA)

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