

2016 Royal Canadian Legion Dominion Convention Report

Submitted 23 June 2016

by Br 145 delegate Comrade Sam Newman

Well Comrades, it was a very interesting and informative AGM they held in St. John's two weekends ago. The theme, 'Looking Back to See Ahead', was very appropriate. As your Delegate for RCL Br 145 Vimy, although I could easily have foregone some parts of some of the Debates held, I am happy to report I attended all the sessions, from start to finish

Being that the Committee Reports and Resolutions booklet of 140 pages in length, I won't bore you by covering every little detail, but perhaps I can summarize some of the highlights. The opening Parade was massive with most of the 966 Delegates on parade, together with approximately 500 more from the proud surrounding Legions marching, and a long list of VIPs blanketing the Nat'l War Memorial Cenotaph downtown on Water St. The Weatherman co-operated for the occasion, which was quickly followed by the indoor Opening Ceremonies at the Convention Centre, which in turn, was preceded by a wonderful 45 minute continuous program by which we learned about Newfoundland and Labrador's contributions over the years in Story and Song. Very moving, to say the least! We were reminded of our heritage and our accomplishments thus far, and encouraged to view the proceedings of the AGM with great optimism as we chart our Way Ahead, and evolve into an organization that is more open to consultation and focused on our core mission. Naturally the emphasis was placed on the Battle of the Somme at Beaumont Hamel and the 100 years that has followed. The usual remarks were given (a few of them by video) from the Governor General, and on down the pecking order, but I must say that the speech given by our Minister of Veteran's Affairs and Assoc Minister of Defence, Mr. Kent Hehr, was by far, the most eloquent speech of the entire conference ... and not a note or tele-prompter in sight. I firmly believe that he is bound to make positive changes that will affect our Veteran's in a positive manner, (if given the sufficient time), especially those whose lives are in a complete mess. Time will tell.

So, what, of interest to all of you, did go on? Well, the nominations as suspected, were of prime interest to everyone. Our new Nat'l President is Dave Flannigan, right from Burin, Nfld. Tom Irvine, from Quebec Command defeated Ed Pigeau and Andre Paquette to take Dominion 1st VP, while the 3 VPs will be Bruce Jullian, Angus Stanfield and Andre Paquette. Regretfully Ed Pigeau threw in the towel, having served Ontario Command for many years or otherwise he would have been a shoo-in for one of the 3!. Mark Barnham was acclaimed Dominion Treasurer again, and Jack Frost remains in the position of Dominion Chairman. I thought he was masterful at keeping the meeting moving and in good order.

President Tom Eagles, who was elected in Edmonton 2 yrs ago, implemented a tough two year deficit plan to reduce committee sizes; held more teleconferences; adopted "0" Based budgeting and was

able to report a surplus after many years of deficits. He reported that a new membership system was hopefully moving forward which will make it easier for potential members to join the Legions and reduce Branch administration and paperwork, although quite near the end of the conference, after much debate, the Resolution to reduce the present 4 categories of membership to 3 labelled "Veteran", "Associate" and "Member" was defeated. Pres Eagles noted the contributions of Legion Ladies' Auxiliaries; the need for Legions to become hospitality centres in their communities; and he also spoke on the Poppy Campaign, with 17 million poppies distributed across Canada last year; holding the line internally with spending and staffing levels; He repeated to the delegates that Poppy Funds could be accessed for the Invictus Games, and I'm sorry to report that there was nary a remark made about the way that could come about nor any complaints. Lastly he did report that the press has been attacking the Legion in the past 3 weeks, and allegations have been made, but the Legion Lawyers will be responding to those allegations.

The Dominion Treasurer, M. Barnham's report was eloquently reported. President's expenses for the year was the lowest ever. Poppy allocation costs underfunded in 2014; \$1 Million turn-around in the last 6 months of 2014. 2015 saw a wage freeze and rolled back pension contributions by 20%. The Legion introduced pay for performance, thus 2015 showed a surplus of \$800,000. The sales Dept exceeded sales expectations by \$500,000. All the departments pulled together and delivered their planned programs and cut the deficit. As a result, they did not spend reserve monies. In 2016, Barham stated they were committed to balancing the budget, but to expect a smaller surplus. The shrinkage in income is due to the shrinking membership and expected decline in sales. He pointed out that because of the declining membership since 1986; age demographics showing more Seniors; Sources of revenue being membership (70%), investments and supplies cover the rest; we will see an impact of scholarships, youth support, and all areas of the Legion support will be threatened. We have 2 choicesfix revenue or cut programs. He emphatically stated the need to increase per capita membership cost. By doing this we will not compromise programs. Per capita tax has not been raised in 10 yrs. A Motion to increase the per capita tax to \$1.25 this year and next was approved unanimously. (He likened it to less than one cup of coffee for everyone!)

Many Committee Reports were given throughout the Convention (all of which can be found on the Legion Web Site and in the Committee Reports and Resolutions Booklet. Some of the more notable Keynote speakers were Mrs. Sheila Anderson, Nat'l Silver Cross Mother; BGen James Camsell, Deputy Cmdr, 5th Cdn Div; Steve Wallace from the Invictus Games; (oh yes, and by the way he spoke of the awareness for the games with 16 Nations competing, 600 competitors, 1500 volunteers, 12 sports, 400 medics and broadcaster, and 1200 – 1400 friends and family involved, but unfortunately nothing was heard regarding Public Dissatisfaction); Guy Parent, Vets Ombudsman; the reps from the American and Royal British Legions; Cadet League, as were the Pilgrimages of Remembrance Representatives all put on superb presentations. Amongst all of these speakers, the Founder's Award was presented

to a worthy recipient, Rick Mercer, of CBC TV fame (who in turn treated us to an entertaining kaleidoscope of his activities in support of Legion goals and those of our Military.)

As with any lengthy and assorted reports (such as this one that I am giving you), other reports and resolutions were presented, all of which were often boring and to be considered 'motherhood'. The CANVET Publications report and audit, dealing with our own Legion Magazine indicated that the Magazine has had 1 of its best years in decades. Finances are on track; the number of subscribers is stable; and we continue to deliver the stories of Canada's Military History. A long applaud was accorded the staff of the magazine. Not to drag this report on unmercifully, but other subject matter was covered for a new Poppy Manual, Defence Security, Valour Canada; RCEL supporting Vets in the Caribbean countries; Reserves; and the plight of Tuberculosis veteran's which, by the way, is on the rise, especially in Northern Canada, but also around the world.

The Convention came to a close with the Installation Ceremony and the turnover of the Legion Flag to the Manitoba delegation who will host the 47th Convention in Winnipeg, 20 – 25 August, 2018.

My thanks to you all for the opportunity to represent this Branch at this Convention. While I kept a low profile and close to the sidelines, I did have numerous opportunity to not only extol the benefits of having no housing difficulties to look after while holding 2 General Meetings annually and usually 1 Executive Meeting each month to conduct our business, but to inform them that our membership was climbing steadily, and with spouses, girlfriends, and their friends, as well. That produced many questions and much discussion among members that couldn't possibly understand how we fulfilled our mandate with our Command. You just may receive some Emails Mr President, but I assure you, that I left us on the best footing with all the doubters, and I informed them that we had been doing it that way since the Branch's inception many years ago. As an aside, Secretary Keith asked that I ascertain who the new Poppy Chair would be. You will have to contact Mr. Ed Pigeau, to ascertain who was newly chosen within the Poppy Caucus. It had not yet been decided at this Convention.

Respectfully submitted,

Comrade Sam Newman