

The **BLUE** *Beret*

Fall 2025

Newsletter of the



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National Peacekeepers' Day in Ottawa

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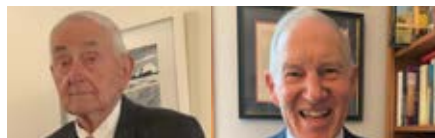
Passing the Torch

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COVER PHOTO

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A speaker at the National Peacekeepers' Day ceremony at *The Reconciliation* monument.

Photo courtesy Richard Lawrence Photography ([link](#))

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THE CANADIAN PEACEKEEPING VETERANS ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1991 by Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans and federally incorporated in 1993, the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association (CPVA) is a national, democratic, apolitical, non-profit, Veterans-only organization open to all Veterans. [More on page 16.](#)

National Peacekeepers' Day: Annual Parade in the Nation's Capital

Donald MacPherson
National President, CPVA



RICHARD LAWRENCE PHOTOGRAPHY

Every year, our comrades in the Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping arrange for a national remembrance ceremony at *The Reconciliation* monument in Ottawa on the Sunday closest to 9 August, National Peacekeepers' Day in Canada.

I am honoured to be invited to represent CPVA each year, and it is one of the highlights of my schedule. Not only is it a good time to get together with other peacekeepers, but CAVUNP put on a great event and are fantastic hosts.

The date of 9 August was chosen to commemorate the shooting down of an unarmed UN CC-115 Buffalo aircraft by Syrian air defences over Egypt in 1974. Nine Canadian

personnel were killed on what was supposed to be a routine resupply mission to the Golan Heights. This continues to represent the largest loss of Canadian lives since Canada began participating in UN peacekeeping missions in 1948.

2025 also represents the 65th anniversary of the UN Mission to the Congo, and the 60th anniversary of the India-Pakistan Military Observer Group.

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PHOTO CREDITS

Entire Story || richardlawrencephotography.ca

Many thanks to Richard Lawrence for all the photos he provides CPVA.

National Peacekeepers' Day, Continued from page 1

Reviewing the parade this year was MGen (Ret'd) Lewis Mackenzie. The parade commander was RCMP Chief Superintendent Josianne Phénix, accompanied by Corps Sergeant Major Elaine Maisonneuve.

In a departure from the traditional commemoration ceremony, instead of wreaths, the dignitaries place bouquets of flowers into the barrels of three mortar tubes. The first bouquet was placed by MGen MacKenzie as the reviewing officer, together with MP Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West - Nepean) on behalf of the federal government.



The second bouquet was placed by Gen Jenny Carignan, Chief of Defence Staff for the CAF, together with Chief Superintendent Josianne Phénix for the RCMP.

The third bouquet was placed by Mrs Corleen Muir on behalf of Veterans' families, together with Col (Ret'd) Nishika Jardine (Veterans Ombud) on behalf of Veterans. Mrs Muir is the wife of RCMP Assistant Commissioner Graham Muir who served in the former Yugoslavia, Haiti, and Afghanistan.

Additionally this year, a wreath was laid by Ms Theresa Simpson, sister of Cpl Michael Simpson, one of the soldiers killed in the downing on the Buffalo aircraft in 1974.

The Reconciliation Monument

The Reconciliation, the federal peacekeeping monument in Ottawa, was erected to mark Canada's long involvement with UN-mandated efforts to make the world a more peaceful place.

As you approach the monument from Sussex Drive, a narrow concrete path through rubble on the left symbolizes the destruction of war, with a darker line along the centre of the path marking the position of impartial peacekeeping forces between the warring factions.

On the opposite side of the monument, overlooking the National Gallery of Canada, stands a copse of trees representing renewal after the conflict. Saplings when first planted, their growth and resilience represents the hope for a strong peace.

The central structure of the monument features statues of three Canadian Forces personnel: a male Navy military observer with binoculars, a male Army sentry with a rifle, and a female Air Force signaler.

A dark diagonal stripe across the central plaza represents the famed "Green Line" in Cyprus which divided that country for generations of peacekeeping missions.

The granite wall on the left, behind the three mortar tubes, bears inscriptions detailing all of the UN-mandated missions in which Canada has participated, with beginning and end dates as applicable.



Reviewing Officer's Remarks

MGen MacKenzie completed nine UN tours in six different missions, including the Gaza Strip, Cyprus, Vietnam, Egypt, and Central America, culminating in his command of the UN Observer Mission in the former Yugoslavia in 1992-1993. His book, *Peacekeeper*, published in 1993, chronicled his experiences around the world and was the basis for a CBC-TV documentary, *A Soldier's Peace*.

In his remarks, MGen MacKenzie noted three missions in particular, having ill-defined mandates and being inadequately supported from UNHQ New York, that signaled the end of peacekeeping as it was known at the time: Rwanda, Somalia, and Yugoslavia.

In Rwanda, Canadian peacekeepers dealt with a genocide that UNHQ had been warned was coming, yet failed to protect the soldiers or the people of Rwanda.

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National Peacekeepers' Day, Continued from page 2



In Somalia, the Canadians rebuilt a demolished school and furnished it with supplies from packages shipped over from their families back home, becoming an example to other nations about how to do peacekeeping right. After the incident

documented in the film *Blackhawk Down*, the US withdrew its 28,000 troops and the mission broke down.

In the former Yugoslavia, Canadians were attacked directly by Croatian forces while protecting Serbian civilians from ethnic cleansing, and the PPCLI used deadly force to protect themselves and the Serbs.

After these failures, the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, apologized for all three missions. Several countries with a long record of contributing troops to peacekeeping missions (Norway, Denmark, Finland, France, Brazil, Argentina, UK, and Canada) stopped doing so. Where Canada used to typically deploy over 3000 peacekeepers, in current times it's closer to a dozen or so advisors worldwide.

MGen MacKenzie ended his remarks saying "Be proud of what you achieved in Canada's name helping to keep the peace for so many who had never seen it before and might never see it again".

Following the ceremony, CAVUNP hosts a reception at a nearby pub where war stories are encouraged and enthusiastically traded. **BB**



RICHARD LAWRENCE PHOTOGRAPHY



CPVA Patron:

Earlier this year, our long-serving Patron announced that he would relinquish the position in order to better focus on his health. His overall contribution to CPVA and support to Veterans was so impactful that we created a new and prestigious position of *Patron Emeritus* specifically to honour him. Larry graciously accepted the appointment. We wish him good health and look forward to continued benefit from his wisdom.

Brigadier General (BGen) Joseph E. (Larry) Gollner, OMM, CD (retired) hails from Vancouver. His distinguished career began when he joined 2nd Battalion of the Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry (2 PPCLI) as a private soldier in 1956. He became a non-commissioned officer in 1957 and was commissioned as an officer in 1959. After commissioning, BGen Gollner served in a number of regimental appointments, including an exchange tour with the British Army Rifle Brigade and two tours in Germany with NATO. He attended the Canadian Army Command and Staff College in 1968/69. He served as the Deputy Commanding Officer of 2 PPCLI before being appointed Commanding Officer (CO) of the unit in 1976. As CO 2 PPCLI, he also commanded the United Nations Sector 4 in Nicosia, Cyprus, as part of the Canadian Contingent of the United Nations Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).

Afterwards, BGen Gollner was posted to the Directorate of Land Requirements in National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ) and elected Chair of the NATO Infantry Panel. This NATO Panel is responsible for the infantry weapons and ammunition within NATO armies.

On promotion in 1981, he was appointed Deputy Chief of Staff Operations at Army HQ. During his time in Montreal, BGen Gollner was active in planning Canada's contribution to the UN mission to Namibia. In 1983, after graduating from the National Defence College, BGen Gollner was appointed Director of Infantry/Director of Land Operations at NDHQ. In this appointment, he also was Canadian Army Secretary to the Canada-United States Military Cooperation Committee and Permanent Joint Board of Defence. In 1985 he became Chief of Staff Pacific Area and Commanding Officer Regular Support Staff, Pacific. In 1987 he was appointed Director General of Reserves and Cadets. In 1989 he became Commander Northern Region. BGen Gollner was made an Officer of the Order of Military Merit (OMM) in 1980.

After retiring from the Canadian Forces, BGen Gollner settled in Victoria and went into business. He served as President of the Victoria Branch of the Alzheimer Society of British Columbia for several years. In 2003 he chaired the Veterans Affairs/Health Canada Fall Prevention Programme for Vancouver Island. The same year, he became active in Veterans' care issues which lead to his being recruited into the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association (CPVA).

BGen Gollner was an active member of the CPVA team that successfully argued for and secured many of the CPVA's positions on Veterans' issues into the New Veteran's Charter. The CPVA



team was at the forefront of Veterans' organizations in initiating and successfully pressing the federal Parliament and Veterans Affairs Canada for the creation of the Veteran's Ombudsman and the Veteran's Bill of Rights, as well as the Canadian Peacekeeping Service Medal (CPSM). Over time the Veteran's Bill of Rights and Ombudsman will help to ensure that all of Canada's veterans are treated with respect and receive their rightful entitlements and benefits.

In 2006 the Minister of National Defence appointed BGen Gollner as the PPCLI Colonel of the Regiment. Recognizing that he could not meet both his PPCLI and CPVA responsibilities concurrently, BGen Gollner asked to step back from his CPVA duties. With his appointment as Colonel of the Regiment drawing to a close in 2009, BGen Gollner's was requested by the President of CPVA to become

the Association's Patron in May 2009. In addition to being Patron of the CPVA, BGen Gollner is a member of a number of military associations, including the PPCLI Association and the Vancouver Island Branch of the Royal United Services Institute, the Canadian Airborne Brotherhood, and The Royal Canadian Legion.

BGen Gollner married Christine Mackenzie in 1962. They have three children and six grandchildren, live in Cobble Hill on Vancouver Island where he tends his vineyard and paints in water colours. He is an Honorary Member of the Victoria Sketch Club and a member of the Canadian Artists Federation. **BB**

Passing the Torch

At our 2025 AGM, through the efforts of Greg Mitchell, CPVA's Vice-President, we were pleased and honoured to present General Walt Natynczyk, OC, CMM, MSC, CD (Ret'd) as Patron.

A native of Winnipeg, General Walt Natynczyk is a leader of national distinction, an advocate for Veterans and their families, and an agent for change. He joined the Canadian Forces in 1975 after spending five years as an Air Cadet, served in countless Royal Canadian Armoured Corps (RCAC) command positions and rose to the position of Chief of the Defence Staff.

General Natynczyk's operational experience consists of four years on NATO duty in Germany; six months of UN peacekeeping duties in Cyprus (1989); a one-year-long mission with the United Nations in the Former Yugoslavia as Sector South-West Chief of Operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1994) with British forces, then as the Chief of Land Operations, UNPROFOR HQ in Zagreb, Croatia (1995). He commanded The Royal Canadian Dragoons in domestic operations during the Winnipeg floods of 1997 as well as in the Ottawa region during the 1998 Ice Storm. He returned to Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1998-1999, where he served as the Canadian Contingent Commander.

As an exchange officer, he served as Deputy Commanding General, III (US) Armored Corps and Fort Hood, Texas and deployed with the Corps to Baghdad, Iraq throughout 2004, serving first as the Deputy Director of Strategy, Policy and Plans and subsequently as the Deputy Commanding General of the Multi-National Corps.

Upon his return to Canada, he assumed command of the Canadian Army's Doctrine and Training System. He was subsequently appointed Chief of Transformation where he was responsible for implementation of the force restructure. He served as the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff from 2006-2008.

General Natynczyk served as Canada's Chief of Defence Staff from 2 July 2008 to 29 October 2012. Key events over his tenure were the combat mission in Afghanistan, the 2010 Winter Olympics, humanitarian support to Haiti and the NATO mission over Libya.



General Natynczyk attended Royal Roads Military College, Victoria, BC and Collège Militaire Royal, Saint-Jean, QC (Business Administration). He is a graduate of the Canadian Forces Command and Staff College, the U.K. All-Arms Tactics Course and the US Army War College (Master in Defence Studies).

His decorations include the Order of Canada, Commander of the Order of Military Merit (Canada), the Meritorious Service Cross (Canada), the Commander Legion of Merit (US), Commander Légion d'Honneur (France), Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit (Poland) and the Medal of Merit in Gold (Netherlands).

He and his wife Leslie have three children, Margaret, William and John, who are serving in the Canadian Navy, Air Force and Army respectively.

General Natynczyk served as President of the Canadian Space Agency from August 2013 to November 2014. On November 3, 2014, he began his role as Deputy Minister of Veterans Affairs Canada, until his retirement in May 2021. **BB**

21 Sept 1941–12 June 2025

Donald MacPherson
National President, CPVA

Ray Kokkonen



Obituary: Captain (Ret'd) Ray Kokkonen, ONB, CD

Raimo Johannes (Ray) Kokkonen of Trout Brook, NB, passed away peacefully at the Saint John Regional Hospital on June 12, 2025, at the age of 83. Born in Finland on Sept 21, 1941, he was the son of Anna-Liisa and Timo Kokkonen.

Ray began his career in uniform at the 2310 Royal Canadian Army Cadet Corps in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario in 1954. He participated for four years prior to joining the Canadian Army, attending summer camps in Ipperwash and Borden, and achieved the rank of Cadet Major. He served as an Artillery officer, with tours of duty with the UN in the Middle East. He was in Libya on desert warfare training with British Forces in 1969 when Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi seized power by coup d'état to become the dictator of Libya, causing the British Forces in Libya to mobilize on an operational basis, in which Ray participated. As well, he was deployed for the national October Crisis

Ray Kokkonen receiving the Veterans Ombudsman Commendation in 2015. He was recognized for his leadership and advocacy in improving conditions for Veterans, including his work with the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association and advocating for improvements to the New Veterans Charter.

in 1970 guarding the Prime Minister, and at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal leading his 35-man troop as VIP security. He also proudly served as a paratrooper.

In 1967 Ray met the love of his life, Shirley (McNeill), in Petawawa, Ontario. They were married in 1971. Together they worked in many locations across the country; Petawawa, Ottawa, Calgary, Toronto, and retired in the Miramichi.

In addition to his military duties, he was deeply involved in the sport of Biathlon since 1967 as he took part in nine Olympic Games in an official capacity, including being the Biathlon

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Competition Chief at the 1988 Calgary Games. He served as the President and Board Chairman of Biathlon Canada for 14 years and later as the President of Biathlon NB for 20 years. Internationally, in the International Biathlon Union (IBU), he was a senior technical official and elected functionary for 35 years of which he was the Rules Committee Chair for 18 years and the Congress Speaker for six years during the same period. His last position was as the elected Auditor of the IBU for 17 years. He was also selected as an Olympic Torchbearer prior to the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver. Through all his biathlon initiatives he and Shirley travelled to Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, England, Germany, and the former East Germany at exactly the time when the two halves of Germany reunited in 1990.

Prior to his passing, he was the Honorary President of Legion Branch #10, Immediate Past National President and Membership Director, and Miramichi Chapter President of the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association (CPVA), a veterans' organization with Chapters throughout the country. He was a member of the Veterans Affairs Ministerial Advisory Group and participated in many veterans' advocacy meetings with the Minister and other senior Veterans Affairs officials. Additionally, he was the Parade Commander for 16 years for the Remembrance Day parades held in Newcastle.

My Memories of Ray

Ray Kokkonen was Acting National President of CPVA in late 2008 when I came on board as National Secretary. He and I both grew into our positions over the years until he convinced me to take on the role of President myself in 2020.

Ray would find himself in Ottawa for meetings of various types on occasion, and we would strive to find some time to get together for dinner and a chat. He helped me through various challenges we faced keeping CPVA together, and undoubtedly kept me from saying stupid things on more than one occasion.

With the rise of videoconferencing, I found myself chatting with Ray across the distances more often, keeping up with things and finding solutions as needed. As Shirley's health deteriorated and she found much of her time in care facilities in Miramichi, Ray would call me in the evening ostensibly to talk about some issue or another, which would inevitably lead to much longer talks about anything other than work, to help pass the time.

After Shirley's death in the fall of 2022, Ray kept on putting in the work with CPVA, plugging away at the membership portfolio to clean up the files. In fact, Ray attended the online AGM on 31 May from the hospital in Saint John where he was about to undergo cardiac surgery.

For his work for veterans and in sport, Ray received numerous awards, including:

- The International Biathlon Union Medal of Honour in Gold;
- Inductee into the Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame, Canadian Forces Sports Hall of Fame, and the Sport Officials Canada Hall of Fame;
- The Order of New Brunswick;
- Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendation and Veterans Ombudsman's Commendation;
- The Queen's Silver, Diamond and Platinum Jubilee Medals, Canada 125 Medal, Canada 150 Community Leadership Award, and the King Charles III Coronation Medal;
- Canada Certificate of Merit and Alberta Achievement Award;
- Miramichi Sports Wall of Fame;
- Rotary Club Paul Harris Fellow Award; and
- Many other organizational awards

Ray is survived by his brother, Pekka (Peter), and sister, Pirjo Spina, both of Ontario, brother-in law Raymond McNeill and many loving animals. He was predeceased by his beloved wife Shirley; and parents Anna-Liisa and Timo Kokkonen.

A Celebration of Life was held in Ray's honour at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch #10 in Miramichi on Wednesday, June 25 with a Legion Service at 6:00 pm.



Ray Kokkonen receiving the Order of New Brunswick from Lieutenant Governor Jocelyne Roy-Vienneau in 2017

I was able to be in Miramichi on 25 June for his celebration of life, and spent a wonderful evening hosted by members of the Miramichi Chapter who had no shortage of stories to tell about their longtime member.

I'm thankful for my time with Ray, and can only aspire to live up to his legend. Good night, Ray, your watch is over. **BB**



Ray Kokkonen (L, rear) along with Tim Sparling (L, front) and David Hyman (R, rear), getting together with Donald MacPherson (R, front) for lunch in December 2019.

Messages of Condolence for Ray Kokkonen

So sad to hear of Ray's passing. He was a constant support. Condolences to his family. May Ray Rest in Peace.

Michael O'Rielly (Ret'd C/Supt RCMP), Original patron CPVA

CPVA has lost a stalwart leader and ardent supporter. Ray leaves huge shoes to fill—my heartfelt condolences.

Harold Leduc

This is sad news. I have known Ray for many years. He was the secretary and then VP when I was President for CPVA. Ray was

instrumental in keeping the organization going and without his efforts I feel CPVA would have had a different future. I was just thinking about him last week and that I owed him a call. He will be missed.

Tom Hoppe, Past President, CPVA

My farewell with great respect. He will live in my home for many years to come through his signature on my CPVA certificate and in my memory with great respect.

John M. Hammell, LTC, US Army

Ray Kokkonen, Continued from page 8

At the going down of the sun and in the morning we will remember them.

Paul Hale

Greg, what a fantastic history. I regret not having met this significantly qualified brother officer who just happens to be the same age as I (1941). I only hope he may have kept a record of his outstanding service to Canada that he can share through his family. With respect and sincere condolences to his family and close friends.

Colonel (Ret'd) Michael J. Houghton, MSM, CD

Dear Greg, I am so sorry to hear about Ray. He was so helpful to me and my uncle when we attended PK 75 and in so many other instances.

Jasteena Dhillon, B.A./J.D./LL.M
Barrister and Solicitor (Ontario, Canada)
Professor of Law Studies and International Development

BGen Mitchell, thank you for sharing this news about Ray. I knew in a short period of time that he was a wonderful and kind man. My condolences to Ray's family and friends. May he RIP.

Lee-Anne Quinn

Mon Général, Ray fût un grand parmi les grands, un exemple pour nous tous par sa persévérance dans tout ce qu'il a entrepris toute sa vie. Vous avez perdu un grand ami et un frère. Je vous envoie mes plus sincères sympathies. RIP Ray. Une chanson en son honneur.

Jean-Guy Boulianne, Vétéran

Greg, A very sad day, indeed. Heartfelt condolences to his loved ones — he will be greatly missed. In the service of peace/ Au service de la paix.

Wayne MacCulloch, CD, rmc, plsc, psc, B.Eng., M.Sc., P.Eng.

Alistair Edgar

Dear Greg, Very sad and sorry news, although I met Ray only briefly myself I thought he was a very genuine and generous person. Losing him is everyone's loss. Best regards,

Alistair Edgar
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science
Associate Dean, School of International Policy & Governance
Balsillie School of International Affairs
Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON

Greg, thanks for sharing. I am deeply saddened by Ray's passing. He was an exceptional leader and noble Canadian. At VAC I relied on his wisdom and balanced judgment. He will be missed. Respectfully, Walt

General Walter Natynczyk, OC, CMM, MSC, CD (Ret'd)
Patron, Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association
Former Chief of the Defence Staff
Former Deputy Minister, Veterans Affairs Canada
Former Head of Canadian Space Agency

Thanks for this Greg. As you know, I really enjoyed working with Ray. I am so sorry for your loss.

Paul Thomson
Director General / Directeur général
Centralized Operations Division | Direction générale des opérations centralisées
Service Delivery Branch | Secteur de la prestation des services
Veterans Affairs Canada / Anciens Combattants Canada

Greg and to the CPVA family, please accept my sincere condolences on the passing of Ray Kokkonen, ONB, CD.

Ray's legacy of service and leadership within the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association is truly inspiring. His dedication at every level—national, regional, and local—demonstrated a deep commitment to veterans and to the values we all hold dear. His contributions to the Legion, and the North Shore Regimental Association, further reflect a life lived in service to others.

Beyond his many accomplishments, Ray will be remembered as a kind and generous individual, whose humour and friendship left a lasting impression on all who had the privilege of knowing him. His absence will be deeply felt across the veteran community and beyond.

Please know that my thoughts are with you, the CPVA, and all those who knew and loved Ray during this difficult time. I will honour his memory and the remarkable legacy he leaves behind.

With deepest sympathy,

Amy Meunier
Assistant Deputy Minister, Commemoration and Public Affairs
Veterans Affairs Canada



Active Representation

Donald MacPherson
National President, CPVA



Donald MacPherson (left) joins Minister Jill McKnight (centre) and Deputy Minister Paul Ledwell (right) at *The Reconciliation* monument in Ottawa to mark the International Day of UN Peacekeepers.

This is a busy time of year for CPVA, and as your National President I'm attending a lot of events to ensure our organization is known and being heard.

In the month leading up to Remembrance Day, I typically attend up to a dozen events, large and small. This comes on top of the usual collection of commemoration events that occur each year, usually in Ottawa.

This year, on 29 Mar 2025, I joined VAC Minister Jill McKnight and Deputy Minister Paul Ledwell at *The Reconciliation* monument in Ottawa to mark the International Day of UN Peacekeepers in a small ceremony.

As the Minister had only been appointed to her role on 13 May, and being the only Veterans group representative there, this was a great chance to meet her one-on-one to introduce our association.

The Ottawa Chapter of the Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping put on a full commemorative ceremony at the same monument each August, and I've described that event earlier in this publication.

Veterans Consultation Assembly

One of the most informative meetings I attend each year is the Veterans Consultation Assembly, hosted by the Royal Canadian Legion at their HQ in Kanata. This year, the VCA was held on 18 October, and I was one of about 15 Veterans organizations at the table.

Typically, the Legion arranges for three speakers to present in the mornings, followed by a round table discussion in the afternoon where the various organizations get to speak on their major initiatives to inform the others and gather support as needed.

The Veterans Ombud, Colonel Nishika Jardine (Ret'd), gave the first presentation of the morning with facts and figures detailing how her office works and about their productivity over the past year. She spoke about their general ability to influence VAC, particularly in areas where her office sees some systemic issue that can easily be fixed.

In particular, she would like to draw the attention of Veterans to the series of [Resource Guides](#) her office has posted online. With titles such as "How to Access the Services You Need from VAC" and "What to Do When You Disagree With a VAC Decision", these are text-based and graphical guides that provide excellent information and steps to take.

While the Ombud is not able to directly action change at VAC, she has taken great pains to ensure the integrity and independence of her office, which helps her to influence the change needed. To be transparent about that change, they publish their [Spotlight](#) publication each year, scoring all of their previous recommendations and how/whether they have been implemented.

She asked the attendees to get the word out about her office and the ways they can help. In particular, their report on [Additional Dependant Care Reimbursement Under the VAC Rehabilitation Program](#) makes for good reading.

She also mentioned that her office is generating a plan to help VAC deal with better communicating with its clients. Citing one example, the term "withdrawn" in VAC-speak means

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IMAGE CREDITS

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Photo: courtesy Veterans Affairs Canada

Representation, Continued from page 10

“paused,” typically while seeking further details from the client. Of course, when the client goes to their online portal and finds their case has been withdrawn, a pause is not the first thought that comes to mind, resulting in a complaint submission.

In short, the Ombud wants to push the idea: “If you’re pissed off at VAC, call us!”

The second speaker of the morning was Carolyn Hughes, the Director of [Veterans Services](#) at the Legion. She first stressed that the RCL provides Veterans Services completely free of charge and that a Legion membership is NOT required. This is in contrast to several supposed support groups found online across the country that offer various services but will take a cut of whatever they win for the clients.

Legion branches across the country typically have at least one Service Officer, usually a volunteer, who can help the Veteran get in contact with the national office where staff are highly trained and skilled in Veterans issues and the corresponding legislation.

She also brought up recent VAC policy changes that haven’t been particularly advertised by VAC, including that most fractional disability entitlements are now being upgraded to at least 4/5ths. Improvements have been made for hearing loss and tinnitus, cervical disc disease, mental health benefits, military sexual trauma, and female sexual dysfunction. Her message is that Veterans should be aware of such changes and must apply for reconsideration as VAC will not take it upon themselves to review their cases.

Carolyn described two situations in particular where Veterans need to take some care. The Veterans Independence Program must be activated before their death in order for the benefits to continue on for the surviving spouse. Also, read your decision letters from VAC carefully. Echoing the Ombud’s

comments about unclear communication, these letters often lead with a denial or discontinuation of benefits or clawback of funds already paid, burying any clarifying information on subsequent pages of the letter.

The third presentation was from Paul Hook, Managing Director of the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research ([CIMVHR](#)). They have been around for 15 years and facilitate research for military, Veteran, and family-related issues.

Paul noted some of the difficulties with Veterans accessing health care, including the search for a primary care provider after years or decades of military-provided health care. Veterans typically access the provincial health system much more in the first two years after transition than do members of the general population.

CIMVHR also publishes the [Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health](#), both in paper format and available for download on their website, containing articles of interest for those in this field.

Of particular interest to families with young children, they publish a series of [children’s books](#) dealing with military deployments and dealing with parents with service-related injuries, all available for download on their website.

CIMVHR helps coordinate and fund research rather than doing their own, and noted that much upcoming research will be dealing with military-related amputations. While there are about 200 such amputees currently in Canada, there are already about 30,000 from the Ukraine war, a number sure to increase.

Round Table Discussion

After lunch and catching up with the various representatives of Veterans organizations, we get a chance to speak about our own priorities.

The Nursing Sisters Association of Canada, on their 105th anniversary, have

renamed themselves to the Military Nurses of Canada to better represent changes in gender inclusion.

The Operational Stress Injury group stressed their ability to provide mental health peer-to-peer support.

The [National Council of Veteran Associations in Canada](#) noted that their chairman, Brian Forbes, had passed away, but were still working on 12 programs.

The [Maritime Air Veterans Association](#) spoke about their commemoration of Robert Hampton Gray in Ottawa this year. They also wanted to remind Veterans that VAC does not automatically reassess their hearing loss-related benefits when new tests are done or new hearing aids provided. It’s up to the Veteran to request the reassessment.

The [RCL Defence and Security Committee](#) noted that the compensation package for the CAF was significantly overhauled recently, the biggest improvement since 2001, and that RCMP cadets have received a considerable increase to their training allowance. Work is progressing on establishing a national broadband emergency network for first responders, getting RCMP retirees classified as Veterans for commemoration purposes, and improving recognition for women Veterans. It was noted that while there is still no dedicated monument to women Veterans, there is one in Ottawa for military dogs.

[Music Healing Veterans Canada](#) helps military Veterans, along with police, correctional officers, border patrol officers, and other first responders, using music to heal silent injuries. They now have four chapters up and running.

The [Canadian Airborne Forces Association](#) brought up their 40th anniversary trip to Cyprus, noting that while VAC paid fully for a dozen current military members to join the trip, they denied subsidizing any of the Veterans themselves.

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Representation, Continued from page 11

The [RCMP Veterans Association](#) also noted the increase in training pay for cadets from \$525/week to \$1000/week, bringing this more into line with other police services, such as York Region which pays their cadets a salary of about \$61,000 annually while training. They also spoke about efforts to add a fourth figure to *The Reconciliation* monument to represent civilian policing in peacekeeping operations.

[NATO Veterans Organization of Canada](#) noted they stand at about 300 members, mostly above 60 years of age, and are having great difficulty attracting new members from younger cohorts. They also spoke about using Access to Information requests to get medical reports from the CAF and VAC.

The Merchant Navy representative mentioned they were proposing an International Merchant Navy Day to the United Nations, planning for a date in September.

The [Persian Gulf Veterans of Canada](#) spoke about their long effort to get the status of the 1990-91 conflict changed from a Special Duty Area to a War Zone, affecting the change of status to applicable personnel to War Veteran. The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs issued a report titled "[The Persian Gulf War Was a War](#)" in December 2024, which generally urged such recognition. VAC and DND, however, issued their response in October 2025 essentially denying the

proposal. It was noted that the last War Veterans in Canada would be from the Korean War, and that no new ones would be forthcoming.

The [Army, Navy & Air Force Veterans in Canada](#) noted the passing of Gerry Wharton, their Honorary President. They have been looking at the proposed Veterans Bill of Rights, which appears rather toothless to them, and are using the UK Veterans Covenant for comparison. They are also looking into a Canadian Volunteer Service Medal for all who served, making it easier to identify Veterans.

CPVA Input

In my own report I noted that our current membership stands at about 660. As always, we recognize that we can accomplish more working in collaboration with VAC and other organizations. To this end we contribute to the annual VCA, VAC's National Stakeholders Summit, VAC's Deputy Minister Coffee Group, VAC Minister's Advisory Groups, and have supported other organizations around the table, in particular CAVUNP and the Persian Gulf War Veterans.

While we remain committed to helping keep VAC focused on wait times, we are also preparing a new initiative aimed at increasing Canada's participation in future peacekeeping activities, more in line with our storied past. While Canada may not be in the position currently to

supply active troops to such a mission, we could certainly play a significant role in rapidly deploying a complete headquarters unit to set up for the mission in the countries involved while the world debates participation.

I also brought up the passing of our own former President, Ray Kokkonen, and the change in Patrons from Larry Gollner to Walt Natynczyk, both featured elsewhere in this publication.

Finally, I brought up our commitment to commemorating the 80th anniversary of peacekeeping in 2028, our PK80 project. To that end, we have already sought out and received grants to begging the planning process. Learning from our work on the 75th anniversary, we're starting early, already approaching the Royal Canadian Mint about a commemorative coin, and Canada Post about a stamp. If we get enough funding, we'll pursue creation of a PK80 logo, challenge coins, and pins.

In addition to developing educational materials and building on our anthology of stories from Canadian peacekeepers, we hope to have a series of bronze plaques ready to install in each provincial/territorial legislature early in 2028.

Finally, the PK80 web domain is already up and pointing to our PK75 website, ready to take over the banner as we move closer to the celebration. **BB**

CPVA Special Advisor Presented Medal

Our own Special Advisor for Veterans' Health and Wellbeing, Lee-Anne Quinn, OMM, CD, was recently presented her King Charles Coronation Medal in recognition of her work with homeless and, in particular, homeless Veterans. **BB**



Miramichi Chapter News

To the right, National President Donald MacPherson is shown having dinner with the Miramichi Chapter executive after the celebration of life for former President Ray Kokkonen.

Below are a couple of photos from the Chapter's National Peacekeepers' Day parade in Miramichi. This Chapter stands out for their annual parade which they put on in fine form. **BB**



CPVA Member Presented Medal

Another CPVA member, Paul Hale, was recently presented his King Charles Coronation Meda, shown here being presented the medal by Greg Ferguson, President of the PPCLI Association. **BB**



Office of the Veterans Ombud



Press Release
ombudsman-veterans.gc.ca

June 17, 2025, OTTAWA, ON

Veterans Ombud Colonel (Ret'd) Nishika Jardine is pleased to announce that today the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, the Honourable Jill McKnight tabled the 2024-2025 Annual Report of the Office of the Veterans Ombud (OVO) in the House of Commons.

The report covers the systemic work and outreach initiatives undertaken by the OVO during the 2024-2025 fiscal year, and includes a summary of complaint trends. Most importantly, the report reiterates specific recommendations made by the Veterans Ombud, and features cases where Veterans or their families raised an issue of unfairness relating to Veterans Affairs Canada's programs and/or services.

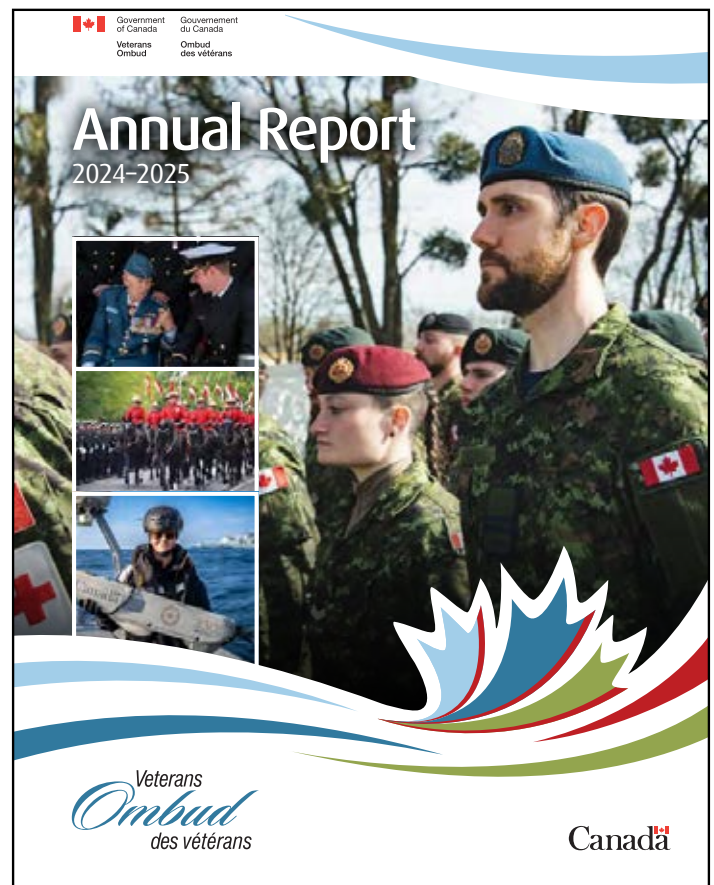
"I am pleased to present the OVO 2024-2025 Annual Report to the Veteran community. It has been a very busy year for our office, and I am proud of the work we have accomplished. From the calls we receive to the conversations I've had with Veterans and their families all across this country, a common trend emerges: the Veteran community continues to face challenges when applying to or accessing benefits and services from Veterans Affairs Canada. At the OVO, we continue to work hard in our pursuit of fairness for all Veterans and their families."

Access the full report here: <https://ombudsman-veterans.gc.ca/en/publications/annual-reports/2024-2025>.

Message from the Veterans Ombud

This past year has been a busy one. We continued our outreach across the country to meet with and hear from the Veteran community, including many stakeholders who care deeply about Canada's Veterans and their families.

We have heard several disturbing stories about Veterans not having family doctors and the impact that has had on their well-being. One Veteran shared his predicament: his operational stress injury (OSI) clinic psychiatrist recommended a medication but he no longer had a family doctor to provide the prescription and necessary oversight, and as a result, the Veteran was unable to get the medication he sorely needed.



Other Veterans have told us about family doctors or specialists refusing to fill out Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) paperwork, which means they can't apply for disability or even treatment benefits. These are heart-breaking stories. We continue to advocate for Veteran access to family doctors and for VAC to consider alternatives to complicated forms that require a doctor or specialist to complete.

Equally hard to hear are the stories of Veteran families who struggle with mental health issues arising from being part of a military or Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) family. One individual who has become the caregiver to her grievously injured Veteran spouse shared about how she needs mental health treatment for herself and her children as a result – beyond

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what the VAC Assistance Service can provide. Our January 2021 recommendation to the Minister in this regard is still outstanding and is still, if not more, pressing.

Our first online Town Hall was with a group of Survivors, primarily widows of deceased military members. I have shared their many concerns with VAC and look forward to a response that, at a minimum, will eliminate the possibility that a widow or widower receives incorrect information from VAC that impacts the benefits for which they could be eligible. We look forward to expanding our online reach to Veterans and their families.

Over my four years in this role, I have also heard from Veterans who released from the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) before having completed twelve years of service, and who had nothing to show for their service. I shared this story with the Commander Military Personnel: a Veteran was attending an event where Veterans were being provided with a complimentary item of clothing, and when the Veteran reached out her hand to take one, the person behind the table slapped her hand and said, "Those are for Veterans only!" I was delighted to learn that the CAF will extend the eligibility for the Bronze Service Pin for CAF members releasing after having achieved their occupational functional point but with fewer than 12 years (exact details yet to be promulgated). The Service Pin is a small thing, but it is something tangible that Veterans can wear to show that they served.

Finally, and probably as a result of our outreach efforts, we have seen a notable increase in the number of complaints and requests for information we receive. This and other factors have caused us to re-imagine some elements of the way the Office is structured. But the way we do our work remains constant. Our Intervention Services Directorate analysts receive weeks of training before they can take a complaint and apply their analytical skills to ascertain whether there is unfairness in a case and then seek resolution with VAC. The handful of senior

analysts delving into systemic issues, defining elements of unfairness or barriers to access, and proposing recommendations know that their efforts can make a difference in the lives of many Veterans and their families. Our Communications and Corporate Services teams are critical to the smooth running of the Office. Each one of our staff members is contributing to the essential Ombuds' work for our Veteran community, and I remain impressed with and grateful for their dedication, their commitment and their compassion. **BB**

Office of the Veterans Ombud 2024-2025 Annual Report Summary

Message from the Ombud:

- Our busiest year in the last five years
- Cross-country travel to meet Veterans, their families, and stakeholders
- Veterans consistently cited difficulty accessing family doctors and/or medical specialists
- We continue to advocate for mental health services for families in their own right

3 Key Publications

- 2024 Spotlight
- Additional Dependant Care Reimbursement under the VAC Rehabilitation Program
- Resource Guide: What to Expect When You Contact Our Office

Stakeholder and Media Engagement

- 29** meetings with Veterans and related organizations
- 46** major stakeholder meetings
- 90** media articles referencing OVO

Policy Impact

- 2** new recommendations submitted to the Minister of Veterans Affairs

Cross-Canada Outreach

We travelled to 5 provinces to connect directly with Veterans, their families and stakeholders

- Manitoba
- Saskatchewan
- Ontario
- New Brunswick
- Prince Edward Island



By the Numbers

- 9** Veterans Ombud Commendations presented

- 1848** complaints and information requests received

About the CPVA

The CPVA, founded in 1991, is a national, all Veteran, all volunteer, not-for-profit, apolitical organization with Chapters from Vancouver Island to St. John's, Newfoundland. It has its Headquarters in Kingston, Ontario, and our national administration is not funded by the Government in any way. Our Mission Statement is: "To be a strong and leading advocate for all Veterans and to provide a forum of comradeship for Veterans". The CPVA is a longstanding Veterans' organization, national in scope, which welcomes all Veterans of all generations, of all conflicts, men and women, regular or reserve, military, police or civilian, serving or retired, who participated in peace support, peacekeeping, anti-terrorist, or war operations, national and international, overseas or on the home front.

In addition to its long-term work for Veterans, which has produced substantial gains, CPVA has a number of notable organizational strengths such as an effective governance, democratic representation of all members and a nationwide communications network. Below is a summary of some of the Association's achievements and capabilities:

- CPVA's proposal in the late 1990's led to the establishment of the VAC-Canadian Forces Advisory Council, the first forum established by VAC to allow CAF (modern-day) Veterans organizations to participate equally at the table with the traditional Veterans organizations.
- CPVA, in its nearly twenty-five years of existence, has provided the Canadian Veterans community with focused, knowledgeable, innovative and cooperative leadership. This leadership has reached far beyond our own membership and has expressed itself in many ways, ways that have benefited all Canadian Veterans. The Veterans Bill of Rights, the Canadian Peacekeeping Service Medal, the 1-800 VAC assistance line, the Veteran's Ombudsman, and the 9th of August National Peacekeepers' Day being just five achievements of such benefits. The CPVA has also made several appearances at the hearings of the House Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to provide input about various Veterans issues.
- CPVA has consistently worked cooperatively, albeit without always being in agreement, with the Minis-



CPVA President Donald MacPherson attending the Government of Canada Remembrance Day ceremony in the Senate Chambers, 3 Nov 2023.

ter of Veterans Affairs and senior VAC staff, providing them with innovative suggestions on a wide variety of topics. Topics such as a comprehensive method of validating VAC's statistics, rational and reasonable ideas on how to resolve the on-going issue of cash versus disability pension, and other ways to improve the NVC and VAC support to Veterans. The Association has always provided strong membership and leadership to numerous VAC committees, working and advisory groups, NVC regulatory discussions, and so on. At present, the CPVA is a member of the VAC Stakeholders Committee. CPVA, alone amongst Veterans associations, has taken the initiative to recognize the VAC staff for good support and service to Veterans with its outstanding national and regional service awards program.

CPVA's steady and active leadership to the Canadian Veterans community, while avoiding public confrontation with VAC, has earned it a reputation for being a straight-shooting Veterans organization that has a proven and recognized capacity to reach far beyond its own membership to influence events and activities affecting all Canadian Veterans. CPVA is a staunch member of the Veterans Consultation Assembly and fully supports the collective initiatives of about twenty Veterans groups. **BB**