

Branch Orientation



Yet another volunteer position has been created at our Branch. We now have an orientation position currently held by Laura Blyth and she is doing an excellent job. As you know our Membership Chairman has been doing an excellent job recruiting a lot of new members. It

currently seems as if every month we are initiating 20 or more new members.

It was suggested that since we are initiating so many new members on an ongoing basis, we should appoint someone to brief them on things that go on in the branch as well as some of the rules and other unique things that are anticipated that new members would not be aware of.

After every initiation, Laura with all of her charm and communication skills bring all of the new members to the club room and walks them around and explains everything that is unique to the Branch that they would not normally encounter at your local bar. She explains everything from the pot of gold, to the meat draw, to where you bring your drink glasses. She also explains the sports, the on-going committees and even how to get shuffle board rocks and pool balls only to mention a few items off of her list.

This position has received very positive feedback thanks to the efforts of yet another Comrade stepping up and volunteering to do something that makes our branch a better place.

David Langille - Sergeant at Arms



Stand down, soldier. Your job is done. You can go home.

The following was authored by Patricia Calder of Colborne, Ontario.

There is a banner someone brings to the fence of Canadian Forces Base Trenton whenever there is a repatriation of a soldier killed in Afghanistan. It reads: “Stand down, soldier. Your job is done. You can go home.”

People line up along the fence surrounding CFB Trenton waiting for the aircraft from Afghanistan to touch down, open its cargo door, and offer up its burden. Some of the onlookers are civilians, some are retired service men and women, and some are on leave from active service and dress in uniform for the occasion. Some of them even bring young children.

There’s a large contingent of bikers, the Blue Knights, wearing distinctive blue vests. One couple is visiting from Nova Scotia. Another man has just come home from Europe. The gathering spreads farther and farther along the fence.

Soon, a drone is heard overhead and the CC-150 Polaris transport plane comes into view. A hush falls over the people standing at the fence. The aircraft circles into position near the hangar where a family stands in the wind and cold to receive their loved one.

The silhouettes, especially the shoulders, speak of their exquisite pain. Their eyes are fixed on the wooden box that is now being hoisted onto strong shoulders and carried in measured steps toward the hearse.

The only colour in the whole scenario is the Canadian flag draped in its sombre duty like a blanket over the fallen comrade. It seems to speak the words from the banner: “Stand down, soldier. Your job is done. You can go home.”

After a 20-minute repatriation service, the casket is loaded into the black hearse. The family members board a limousine. Slowly the convoy exits the gates of 8 Wing-Canadian Forces Base Trenton.

The black vehicles are escorted front and back by two police cars as they drive out of Trenton and onto the celebrated Highway of Heroes. A

signal is sent to a police car waiting on the ramp of the next overpass along the way to Toronto: “Cortege en route. ETA 15 minutes.” Messages are radioed to the firefighters and ambulance workers in commuter parking lots all along the way to Toronto who have been anticipating the final good-bye. Each fire truck and ambulance rides to the top of its respective overpass where the crowd welcomes the shelter from the wind.

The police car drives down the ramp to block traffic from entering Highway 401. The crowd on the overpass is watching for that space of several minutes when there is no traffic in the westbound lanes. Then a whisper is telegraphed from one person to another: “They’re coming. They’re coming.” By this time, not one space is left unoccupied along the railing.

I stand on the side of the hill by the sign that welcomes drivers to Brighton. I want to be as near as possible to the cortege. My student will be passing by. His sister, also a former student at my school, will be sitting in the limo with her mom and dad behind the dark glass. The last time I saw these siblings they were sitting innocently in a classroom.

On my one side is a member of the Legion, a retired Sergeant-major dressed in khaki. He is the first to sight the cortege and barks instinctively, “Heads up!” to everyone on the overpass.

I am frozen in place, steeling myself against an onslaught of emotion, tears burning behind my glasses. The Sergeant-major snaps a salute and, even though he is a complete stranger, I feel supported by his experience and professionalism. Behind me, the people who have come to the overpass for just this moment wave their flags. The dark glass of the limo opens and a long arm in a black coat ending in a black glove answers in silent acknowledgment.

In less than a moment the cortege is gone. Only now do I notice how many young people have also been standing vigils at the overpass. They look to me like students skipping school.

Who are all these other people? Does each of them have a connection, as I do, to the fallen soldier? Some of them are relaying messages by cell phone – to other overpasses down the line. Are all the on-lookers on all the overpasses along the Highway of Heroes connected, like a web that stretches from Trenton to Toronto cradling the casket of the fallen at its centre?

What a strange experience our presence creates. A unique made-in-Canada ad hoc ritual that leaves participants feeling richer, and sadder, and more connected for having spent this one moment in the wind.

The story behind this article is:

“Stand down, Soldier” was written after a former student of mine was repatriated from Afghanistan. I read the piece at a writer’s group. One of the other writers attending that night was a Legion member and he asked me if he could have a copy to spread around at the Legion. I told him he could have it after it was published.

I sent the piece to 8 newspapers. Only one replied to me; 8 Wing Matters, the newspaper published at the Trenton Armed Forces Base, wanted it. The editor placed it in the paper; the publisher took it out.

A friend called from Belleville to tell me The Belleville Intelligenser had published the piece. I called the editor to ask why he hadn’t let me know. He apologized and promised to send me a copy. It never arrived.

A retired police staff sargeant, a friend of mine, dropped in for coffee because he had received “Stand down, Soldier” from another police officer in Toronto, via email.

Another friend I ski with, emailed me that a columnist in the Acton, ON newspaper had published “Stand down, Soldier” in his column because he had received it via email and thought it deserved a wider audience.

Next, I receive a phone message from Martin, the webmaster of 3 Legion websites, asking permission to post “Stand down, Soldier”. The message is FW’d to me in PEI while I’m on vacation.

In short, this little piece of writing now has a life of its own on www. What is it that makes people want to share these thoughts of mine?

Patricia Calder