

One Hundred Years of Military Communications in Canada
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Col Michael Gallant, Communications-Electronics Branch Advisor

Reported by Dave Edmunds

MGen John Leech opened the presentations by stating that AFCEA Canada is pleased to salute the 100th anniversary of military communications in Canada. It's a story that parallels the development of the nation itself, as we encountered our international responsibilities and explored and developed the vast territories to the West and North of this spot. It's a story of vision and technical excellence infused by courage and innovation. The 20th Century began with Canada being involved in a UK-inspired war in South Africa. However poorly justified and prosecuted the Boer war is now recognized, the Canadian contribution was innovative and adaptive, and one of our soldiers recognized the advantage that professional communications would provide. Canada went to war again and again in the 20th Century, and also built a country, invented peacekeeping and neglected the military again and again. And through it all some Very Important People established and maintained the world standard in military communications. He then introduced the three speakers.

Col Peter Sutton discussed the ways in which military communicators have contributed to the growth and development of Canada over the past century. His presentation was a masterpiece of conciseness, including the founding members of the Communications and Electronics (C&E) Branch; the founding officer of the first Canadian signalling corps; the significance of Mercury (Jimmy); media used in World War I; the growth of Signals between the wars; the Northwest Territories and Yukon Radio System which enabled the development of the North by providing vital communications for mining companies, aircraft, trading posts and prospectors, as well as providing the weather reports enabling the Dominion Observatory to produce national forecasts; operation (first by army Signals; then by the RCAF Signal Service) of radio beacons for mail planes and transatlantic communications for airmail, mail to ships at sea, and to aircraft of the RCAF. World War 2 saw many thousands of military communicators serving not only in Canada and Europe but also in North Africa, Hong Kong, Australia and Burma. A notable contribution to the improvement of communications equipment was made by the Canadian Signals Research and Development Establishment in Ottawa. After 1945, Military communicators provided essential support in the Korean War and in many other UN peacekeeping operations, as well as to NATO forces stationed in Europe. At home they operated the cross-Canada National Defence Communications System including developing and installing advanced communications systems operating from underground bunkers in support of Defence of Canada operations during the Cold War. Members of the RCAF Telecommunications Branch manned the Pinetree radar line, and sailors provided a large part of the Supplementary Radio Service. The military training schools throughout the period were essential contributors to all the capabilities required.

I provided a short exposé of various early equipments, with most of which I have had personal experience. I discussed the salient features and techniques of their operation. My presentation slides are posted on the Chapter website; my speaking notes are included with the slides.

Col Michael Gallant commenced with a photo album of recent parades and visits, followed by views of equipment and sites around the world where the equipment is being manned by Canadian military operators. He then gave a quick view of the principles being considered in the future development of the Communications and Electronics Branch. He stressed that in any approach to organizing an enterprise such as Information Management, there must be a balance between four factors: Strategy, Culture, Technology and People. This places an obligation on the senior leaders of the C&E Branch to have the leadership and moral responsibility to dedicate themselves to the advancement and well-being of the Branch.

[Some of the presentation slides can be found at www.afcea.ca . Others will be added if they can be made suitable for posting to the Web]