

Fort York News

Fort York Branch 165 Royal Canadian Legion



November 2023



Farewell address by Maj George Chabrol to AGM, September 27

Let me preface my remarks with a heart-felt “thanks and welcome” to you all for coming out this evening. I hope that you’ll enjoy this beautiful occasion, set in the regal elegance of the Toronto Hunt.

I am delighted to see you all and would especially like to thank the new members who have made the effort to join us, as you could have been elsewhere, I’m sure. To us, supporting our veterans is a “noble cause.” One we hold dearly. I hope your membership signals your desire to contribute towards this worthy cause. The Executive genuinely appreciates your support. And you can expect us to resume hosting this most popular event annually, post Covid.

Reflecting on that fateful day in 2019 when I accepted the position of President, we were very excited to innovate and carry on our practice of innumerable social events and fund-raising activities in support of our veterans. No one knew then that something sinister was lurking around the corner; the term Covid 19 was just creeping into our vocabulary.

“Pandemic” was simply an academic term. We could not have imagined the entire 21st century world would be thrown into the cataclysmic chaos it subsequently experienced. By March 2020 we were abruptly stopped in our tracks. And then ‘reality’ was brought home. Effectively - like the rest of the world - FYB 165 was mandated to cease all operations. The day -to-day administrative functions were dealt with remotely. But, as you know, public socializing and gatherings were prohibited. This brought an end to the many social events and interactions that is our ‘achilles heel.’ Fundamental to our very existence, our esprit de corps was disrupted, camaraderie was put in abeyance; everything came to a screeching halt.

Valiantly however, through it all, the Branch held together and persevered. We did what we could to keep our members informed of the ebb and flow through our quarterly Newsletter publications produced and editorialized by our creative Past President Terry Sleightholm, as time went by. And, as we became knowledgeable of the ubiquitous vagaries of the pandemic, we adjusted, formulated new ways, and soldiered on. The situation continued to vacillate between “open-and-close, open-and-close.”

To gauge the “feeling” of the membership, we held discussions and curated an informal survey, there to extract some semblance of guidance from the membership. From this we learned that, essentially, folks were not yet quite ready to meet and mingle. The safety and well-being of our members being essential, we reacted accordingly. We waited. This garnered praise and criticism. Who knew?

As the ‘plague’ of our times eventually subsided, as with everything new, lessons were learned. Moving forward, the Executive grappled with ways to reinvigorate the Branch amidst sometimes convoluted directives from the health authorities. Later, we held a few low-key events to “test the waters”, as it were. Some of you present today, attended those events. The signs were encouraging.. Considering that a sizable number of our members were quite elderly folk – the most vulnerable age group – in consultation, I made the decision to not start social events as soon as the “sun came up” so to speak, as some would have had me do. This was done not in deference to our very elderly, but out of respect for them. And for the record, let me state it was a decision I do not regret, and for which I am proud. As fate would have it, in the fullness of time, we are on the other side of the pandemic, growing once again, and thankfully, most of them are still with us today.

Through the efforts of many, and promulgated by our very capable Membership Secretary, Ann Unger, our nominal roll increased by (about) 47 new members since I took office in 2019. We are heartened by this support. All things considered; this is progress. But conversely, as we all know, the inevitability of the cycle-of life will not be denied. Regrettably, our hearts are saddened by the lost of 38 fellow officers, veterans, and friends over the past four years. We will remember them.

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After four years of the ‘scourge of our time,’ thankfully, life is slowly returning to normal, and all is well. Now, as is often said, all good things must come to an end, so too has my time in the Chair. As I peruse the lengthy roll of honourable officers who preceded me over the many decades; those who have carved the path for this Branch over good times and bad times, I remain honoured and proud to have had the opportunity to follow in their footsteps, to serve our veterans in this capacity.

But let me say for the record that, during my presidency, I’ve had the privilege of working with a dedicated group of officers who have worked hard, often frustratingly hard, to provide the service to our veterans, for which we signed up. Gratitude to all the Executive Members is quite in order, but I would be remiss if I did not sing praises to a few notable tenures for their yeoman service. As they step down after four years of dedicated service, I would like to express my appreciation for the gracious assistance and leadership of 1st Vice President Donna Murakami, to the Membership Chair Ann Unger for her tedious and precise promulgation of the membership file, and the number-centric acuity of our affable Treasurer, Malcolm Hamilton. They made my job easier.

Thankfully, with the formidable scourge of the pandemic largely behind us, I can assure you that under the experienced leadership of our new President, Col Geordie Elms and his rejuvenated Executive Committee, FYB 165 is on the way to a full recovery. Re-establishing, renewing, rebuilding, and revitalizing our Branch to the great high it once held, is the primary task at hand for the new administration. And I am confident that, with Geordie at the helm, this will be done. But, let there be no doubt about it, paramount to this achievement, given the uniqueness of our Branch, and crucial to the very existence of this Branch, is your participation in our events. Without this, FYB 165 will “wither on the vine” and the hard work of our founding fathers and the leadership that followed over the decades will have all been for naught. I therefore, respectfully implore you, please, do not circumvent the hard work of those who came before us with ambivalence and complacency. Your presence is the only antidote that will keep the Branch healthy and relevant.

As I move on, once again I sincerely thank you for your support during my four years as President and ask that you now dedicate your support to Col Elms and his incoming team as they take on the herculean task before them.

While I have other irons in the fire, moving forward, I will remain on the Executive Committee as the Immediate Past President and will fulfill the duties as directed by the new President.

Finally, as the lyrics in that old barrack room ballad proclaims, “old soldiers never die. They simply fade away.” Like that old soldier, I will now fade away.

Thank you and good night.

Maj George Chabrol (Ret’d) CD., OCT

President, Fort York Branch 165



Cold War Drama

THE SOVIET SUB AND ONE OF THE GREAT SPY DRAMAS OF ALL TIME

By Capt. Larry Rose

One of the most astounding episodes of the Cold War, and one of the most astounding spy capers ever, was the American attempt to recover a sunken Russian submarine from the bottom of the Pacific Ocean.

The US Central Intelligence Agency planned and carried out the operation in 1974 to recover the nuclear-armed sub K-129 which had gone down in 1968 after an unexplained onboard explosion. The Soviets conducted a massive search for the sub or its wreck-



age but could not find anything. However, the Americans, using a string of passive sonar devices known as SOSUS (Sound Surveillance System), knew exactly where it was--near the International Date Line almost 1,600 miles northwest of Hawaii. The CIA wondered if, somehow, some way, they could recover the sub. Grabbing it from three miles below the surface and bringing it up would be unimaginably difficult but, if it succeeded, it would also make for a spectacular intelligence windfall. A 50,000 ton ship which, as a cover, would supposedly be attempting to conduct manganese mining from the seabed.

The whole operation was near unbelievable-- right out of Tom Clancy or James Bond. But in case the elements were not bizarre enough, reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes was invited to lend his name to the project to give it credibility. Hughes agreed to



have the ship named the "Hughes Glomar Explorer" to help the fiction that it was conducting a commercial seabed mining venture.

After construction and trials the Hughes Glomar Explorer was able to get to the scene of the sub despite being tailed and harassed by Soviet intelligence vessels. Apparently they wanted to get a close up look at this unlikely ship but failed to grasp what it was really doing.

Despite the sub being three miles below the surface, the Hughes Glomar Explorer, with its crew of CIA spooks and high tech engineers, was able to use huge claws to grab hold of it. Despite the explosion in the boat's sail, it was mostly in one piece. Then they began lifting it. Imagine having to lift something as heavy as a submarine from that depth.

Alas, while the lifting device managed to get the sub about half way to the surface, the claws partially gave way and about two-thirds of the vessel fell back to the sea bottom.

Ultimately, all the Americans recovered was the forward section of K-129 and some code books and other debris. However, they did at least get Soviet nuclear-tipped torpedoes and they were able to learn a lot about Soviet submarine construction. We don't know if the code books amounted to anything.

There were literally hundreds of people who were in on the secret project because it required dozens of engineers and many different contractors to design and build the ship and make it work. Shortly after the vessel returned to the US, the Los Angeles Times in a journalistic thunderbolt revealed the secret of the recovery plan and it was then given international publicity by journalist Jack Anderson. He dubbed the effort a failure and a waste of tens of millions of taxpayer dollars.

Since 1974 the operation has been the subject of news stories, documentaries, and books. One good account of the saga is Josh Dean's *The Taking of K-129*. However, one thing about a spy caper like this is that one is never sure, absolutely sure, about what *really* happened. That is because, in reality, the one and only source of information about what went on is the CIA and people who worked for it.

Conspiracy theories are a dime a dozen but a 2005 book by Kenneth Sewell titled *Red Star Rogue* claimed that actually almost all of K-129 was recovered despite an "elaborate cover-up" by the CIA. It is a near certainty that the Americans did not recover the

main part of the hull or any of the nuclear missiles. Sewell's book is speculative and probably wrong. But one has to concede that it was in the CIA's interest to hide as much as possible what intelligence it actually did get. Such is the reality of spookdom.

Hughes Glomar Explorer



Builder: Sun Shipbuilding & Drydock Co.

Chester, Pennsylvania

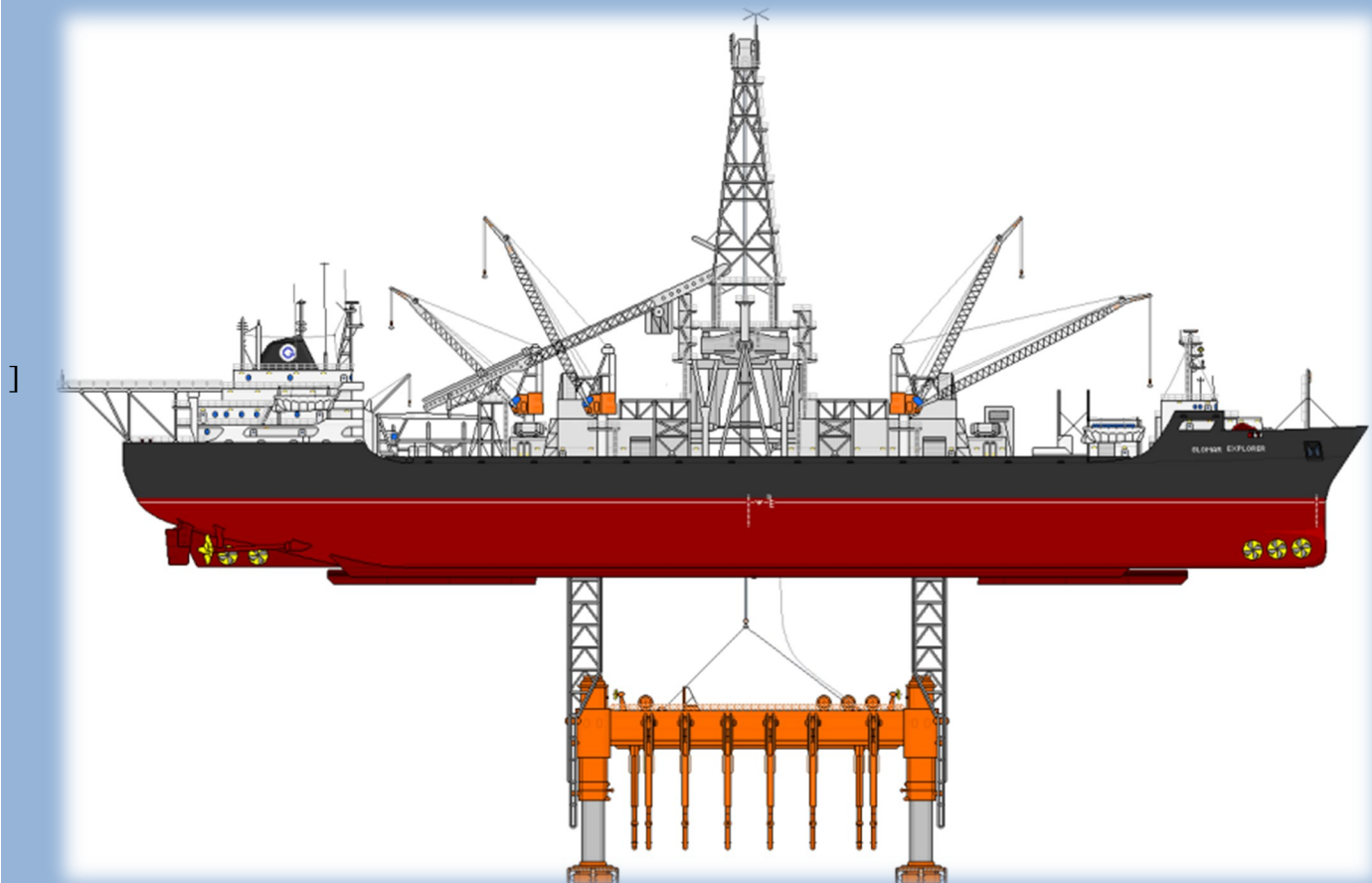
Type: Drillship

Cost: \$350 million (1.52 billion 2021 dollars)

Launched: 1972

Operator: CIA

Scrapped: 2015





CHANGE OF COMMAND

2023





AGM 2023 Toronto Hunt



Our Newest Members 2023



Ethel Wilcott-Feldt

Tpr Harry Hamper Keleshian

Wen Hao Li

HCol Kevin R.E. McCormick

Richard Oko

Sean Paul Pretty

Bradley Wood

Welcome to

Fort York Branch 165

Past Presidents of Fort York 165

Air Vice-Marshal J.L. Plant

1910–2000

John Lawrence Plant, C.B.E., A.F.Q, C.D., B.A.Sc., LL.D. (Hon), was our President in 1964. Born in Swansea, Wales, 1910. He immigrated with his family to British Columbia in 1919. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree (with Honours) in Mechanical Engineering from the University of British Columbia in 1931. Plant began flying as a Provisional Pilot Officer with the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) in 1929, received his wings and was granted a permanent commission in 1931.

Plant enrolled in a flying instructors course at Camp Borden, Ontario, in 1936, and was posted to No. 20 Auxiliary Bomber Squadron at Regina. He organized and operated a squadron pilot training program with both ground and air instruction to convert the flying qualifications of young officers to squadron standards.

In 1941 John flew a Catalina flying boat on a trans-Atlantic ferry trip from Bermuda to Greenock, Scotland in 20 hours, a speed record that stood for quite some time. In May, 1941, he was posted as Wing Commander to the RCAF Station at Patricia Bay, British Columbia. He placed the station on full alert after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. On March 3, 1942, Plant was posted to the command of No. 413 Squadron which proceeded to Ceylon. He flew many patrols from Ceylon, one of which was a cover operation for the British landings on the island of Madagascar.

In 1943 he was posted to England as C.O. of RCAF Station Dishforth, Yorkshire, home for No. 425 and



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426 Squadrons. He was later posted to RCAF station Leeming, Yorkshire, which housed 408, 427 and 429 Bomber Squadrons, remaining at this post until November, 1943. He flew as crew on flights to such places as Wilhelmshaven, Mannheim and Kassel.

In 1945, as Air Commodore, Plant was appointed Air Officer Commanding, No. 9 (Transport) Group. He immediately became qualified on all types of the Group's aircraft, including the Consolidated B-24 Liberator and Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress.

He made flights to all units in the Group, both in Canada and overseas. In November 1945, he flew as Captain of a B-17 from Canada to Warsaw, Poland, carrying penicillin donated by the Canadian Red Cross to the people of that shattered country. The flight was very risky at the time because of the developing 'Cold War', and for his efforts he was awarded the Air Force Cross (A.F.C.).

In 1946, John was appointed Air Officer Commanding, Western Air Command and in 1947, he was posted to Air Force Headquarters as Air Member for Personnel. His overall contribution to the NATO alliance was recognized by his appointment in 1953 as Chief of Staff and his promotion to Air Marshal.

In 1954, he returned to Ottawa as Air Member for Technical Services with the rank of AVM. He retired in 1956. John had a varied and successful business career. He was appointed executive vice president of Collins Radio Company of Canada Limited, and president and general manager of Avro Aircraft Limited Canada. He resigned from Avro, and returned to Collins Radio until his retirement in 1970. John had a life long interest in mathematics that resulted in his teaching of Calculus at Royal Roads. He also enjoyed woodworking, fishing and working with computers.

He was inducted into the Canadian Aviation Hall of Fame in 1985. By the application of his unique leadership qualities in both war and peace, he changed aviation to the substantial benefit of Canada.

T. Sleightholm

The British Empire Service League

The Great War created the problem of returning Veterans in magnified numbers. More than 600,000 Canadians served in World War 1, over 60,000 were killed in action; between 117,000 and 137,000 received medical discharges.

Canada and the Canadian Government had never before faced the problem of the mass return of men from war. There was no experience of war pensions and their administration. There was no united voice, no united effort, and no united representation.

Veterans interests were represented by Regimental Associations in scattered, splinter groups. Their effectiveness was limited due to the vastness of Canada and the isolation of each group – each conceiving that their problems were peculiar to themselves and could best be handled and resolved by themselves. New Veterans groups sprang up almost every time a new problem arose.

The Great War Veterans Association (“GWVA”) was the largest and the most influential of the many Veterans groups. Formed in 1917, it comprised of more than 700 branches by 1925. In 1921 they started pressuring for the unification of all the various Veterans groups as being the best way to represent the many Veterans and their dependants. In 1924,

“The Veterans”, the national magazine of the GWVA stated, “until the last Veteran goes to his final resting place – there will be problems arising from War service. But the major work of the GWVA in the future will be nation building”. Prophetic words, indeed.

The British Empire Service League (“BESL”) was formed in November 1921. Its main inspiration was Field Marshall Earl Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Armies (including the Canadian Corps). He became the first Grand President of the BESL. – In 1923, he became interested in assisting: the unification of the multiple Veterans organizations in Canada. The GWVA acted as the Canadian voice of the BESL.

In June 1925, the GWVA held its Dominion Convention in Ottawa, coinciding with the visit of Earl Haig. Haig addressed the convention, appealing to all Veterans groups in Canada to follow the example of the BESL, and amalgamate for more effectiveness

A Unity Conference was held in Winnipeg on November 25, 1925. From this conference emerged “The Canadian Legion of the BESL”, commonly referred to as “The Canadian Legion”. The word “Royal” was not added to the name until 1960, signifying recognition of the Queen. (101 Legion Website)



T. Sleightholm

Branch Events

Tuesday 5 December.....Annual Christmas Dinner, Granite Club
Details to Follow

Legion History

Issued in 1926, the Regina Branch is known as Branch No. 1. It resides at 1820 Cornwall Street and is the first branch of the Royal Canadian Legion to receive a charter.

In 1926, the G.W.V.A. (Great War Veterans Association) and other groups joined to form the Canadian Legion British Empire Service League. The designation of Branch No. 1 was issued to the Regina location on this date.

In 1960, Royal Assent was granted, allowing the organization to become the Royal Canadian Legion.



Regina No.1

In Flanders' fields



By Lt. Col. John Mc Crae
(of Guelph, Canada)
Died January 26th, 1918, while on
active service in France.

In Flanders' fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place, and in the sky
The larks still bravely singing fly,
Scarce heard amidst the guns below.
We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders' fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe,
To you from falling hands we throw
The Torch—be yours to hold it high;
If ye break faith with us who die,
We shall not sleep though poppies grow
In Flanders' fields.