

## **An Audience with Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II Colonel-in-Chief of the Canadian Military Engineer Branch**

On May 15, 2007 Chief Warrant Officer Pierre Ste-Marie, CME Branch Chief Warrant Officer, and I had the privilege of representing the Canadian Military Engineer Family in an audience with our Colonel-in-Chief, Queen Elizabeth II. It was a thrilling experience to meet Her Majesty (HM) amidst the splendor of Buckingham Place.

On arrival at the Palace in the chauffeured car kindly provided by CDLS (L), HM's military aides met us at the main entrance inside the courtyard and guided the visitors upstairs to the waiting room where we were introduced to the Lady in Waiting and the Queen's Military Equerry. They both were superbly helpful in making us feel at ease and describing the protocol we would follow in meeting HM, and in departing HM's company at the end of the audience. (If you have seen the movie "The Queen" you will know the procedure to which I refer.)

Incidentally, the Equerry was a member of a "Guards" unit who had recently served in Afghanistan and had been wounded in combat operations two weeks before his tour was complete. He told us he had worked with Canadian troops during his deployment and spoke very highly of them and their performance.

Through the graciousness of Her Majesty and recognition of the important role that spouses play in the military families, our wives, who had accompanied us on the trip to London at personal expense, were invited to join their husbands in the meeting with the Queen. I might add that they too took part in the discussions with the Colonel-in-Chief.

My predecessor-Brigadier Jerry Silva (Retired)- who visited HM during the CME Centennial year, informed me before I left for London that I would find the Queen a "most gracious and warm lady, who makes one feel very comfortable". And that is just the way we found her. Her steady, warmhearted smile and keen interest in what we had to say helped make it easy and a pleasure to speak with her. HM's well-informed, perceptive and candid remarks made our conversation all the more interesting and enjoyable.

Our audience lasted about 20-25 minutes. Our conversation touched upon a wide variety of subjects-from CME news highlights, Afghanistan, Battle of Vimy 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations, peacekeeping, HM's recent visit to the USA, family members including the Royal Family, CFSME's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, and the Queen's and HRH Prince Phillip's 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on November 20, 2007.

HM staff had been sent a brief we had prepared before we arrived in London summarizing some of the CF and CME highlights that we thought would be interesting to the Colonel-in-Chief. We assumed HM had read this background information.

In mentioning the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Canadian Forces School of Military Engineering, which will be celebrated on 24-25 May, HM asked that I convey her personal congratulations to the Branch and the School on achieving that proud milestone.

CWO Ste-Marie pointed out that where in past decades the CF had been heavily involved in international peacekeeping and peace support operations, the main priority was now our mission to Afghanistan and combat operations. HM, in reflecting on the years of Canadian peacekeeping, commented-...“Canadians were the first and the best peacekeepers”.

In HM’s address at the Vimy celebrations, the Queen referred to the Canadian mission in Afghanistan as being “in the cause of freedom”. In our brief discussion of the subject on May 15 it also became clear that HM considered CF operations in Afghanistan as a necessary course in helping the Government of Afghanistan achieve its security and development objectives, the attainment of which are necessary to bring a better life and future for its citizens..

Before leaving we thanked HM for the opportunity to visit and the warm reception we were accorded. I emphasized that these visits, which we hope will occur about every three years if there is not the opportunity to meet during a visit to Canada, are seen by us as an important manifestation of our connection with HM as our Colonel-in-Chief. Finally, I expressed appreciation on behalf of the CME Branch for her continuing service in that role.

John Woods  
Major-General (Retired)  
Colonel Commandant  
Canadian Military Engineers