

# A Message to the CME on the Passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

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The passing of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II on 8 September 2022 caused a shock wave around the world and especially touched all Canadian Military Engineers (CME). We have lost our Colonel-in-Chief who served us for more than 60 years. Her Majesty leaves a remarkable legacy of selfless service and devotion to duty, having embodied our highest ideals of integrity, resolve, and grace.

## Her Legacy

In addition to being the longest-serving Commander-in-Chief of Canada's military, the Queen held honorary positions with eighteen individual units. She was the Colonel-in-Chief of the CME, the Legal Branch, fourteen regiments, the Captain-General of the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery, and the Air Commodore-in-Chief of the Air Reserve. Royalty traditionally holds the Colonel-in-Chief appointment and this individual acts as a patron. His Majesty King George VI became the first Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Engineers and the Royal Canadian Engineers (RCE) on 18 February 1938. Queen Elizabeth II became Colonel-in-Chief of the RCE when she succeeded to the throne on 6 February 1952. She held that appointment until the re-organization of the RCE on 1 February 1968. On 11 June 1977, Queen Elizabeth II accepted the



new appointment of Colonel-in-Chief of the Canadian Military Engineers in conjunction with her Silver Jubilee. Her acceptance was a particular honour for the CME as it was the only such appointment that she accepted during her Silver Jubilee year.

Her Majesty had a great understanding of and affection for Canada and its people. Since becoming our Colonel-in-Chief, she visited Canada eleven times, seeing all regions of Canada. She delighted in meeting with people from all walks of life and recognized their contributions to society. Our Colonel Commandants and Branch Chief Warrant Officers have had the honour of an audience with Queen Elizabeth II and engaging with her in discussions over our missions and accomplishments.

The CME Museum holds the official oil portrait of Queen Elizabeth II that was commissioned by the Corps of Royal Canadian Engineers when she ascended the throne in 1953. Since 1977, the portrait has been used as the Official Portrait of Her Majesty as the Colonel-in-Chief of the CME

and is kept in the Museum's collection for exhibition at the Canadian Forces School of Military Engineering. Upon her Majesty's death, the portrait was draped for mourning.

While the title of Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian military automatically passed to King Charles III following the death of The Queen, the wide range of honorary appointments previously held by Her Majesty, do not. Therefore, the CME is currently without a Colonel-in-Chief.

## Operation LONDON BRIDGE

*The Bridge is down* was code for D-day, the death of Her Majesty the Queen, and the launch of Operation LONDON BRIDGE. The operation was ten days of ceremonial activities leading to her State Funeral on D+11. Buckingham Palace invited Canada to send a small delegation, including members of the Canadian Armed Forces, to participate in formal remembrance activities in London. The Canadian Military Engineers were represented by MGen (Ret'd) D. Benjamin (CME Colonel Commandant), CWO D. Jones (CME CWO), Capt D. Cruz (Construction Engineering Officer, RP Ops Det Borden), Sgt E. Barkus (Geomatics Technician, MCE Ottawa), and Cpl A. Zabunyan (Combat Engineer, 2 CER Petawawa), all of whom were extremely proud, honoured, and privileged to be part of such a historical event.



With very little time to prepare, the delegation left from Ottawa on a CAF flight on Monday, 12 September 22, D+4, arriving at the RAF Brize Norton Airport, UK, the next day. Greeted and taken under operational control by the Canadian Defense Liaison Staff of London, the troops headed for the Army Concentration Area (Brunswick Lines) in Pirbright while the senior representatives and Colonel Commandants headed to a hotel in downtown London, near the UK Ministry of Defence. Both groups joined Commonwealth partners from Australia and New Zealand to be briefed before starting drill practice on D+5. Full parade rehearsal began in the middle of the night between D+6 and D+7.

Apart from ongoing practices for the next three days, the Canadian contingent had the honour of meeting Prince William and Princess Catherine, the Prince and Princess of Wales, as they visited Pirbright and of travelling to Canada House to meet the Governor General, the Prime Minister, the Canadian High Commissioner in London, and other Canadian VVIPs who were also attending the State Funeral. The Contingent received a guided tour of Brookwood Military Cemetery, followed by a religious service in honour of fallen comrades. More than 2000

Canadian military personnel, who died in the UK during the First and Second World Wars, are buried at Brookwood Military Cemetery, of which 158 are Royal Canadian Engineers.

## Her Funeral

The State Funeral for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was held on Monday, 19 September 2022, D+11. The event was televised by the BBC and rebroadcast worldwide and viewed by over a billion people. A religious service at Westminster Abbey, for which the senior representatives and Colonel Commandants had the privilege of sitting in the West Wing, was followed by a 3.5-kilometer procession to Wellington Arch.

Tens of thousands of people gathered along the route from Westminster Abbey to Wellington Arch to watch the procession led by the London Metropolitan Mounted Police and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police on horseback. The Commonwealth Marching Contingent from New Zealand, Australia, and Canada, completed Procession #1. The Canadian senior representatives and Colonel Commandants marched with their Commonwealth partners as part of Procession #5, finally halting no more than 12 meters from Her Majesty's coffin in a very poignant moment. At the Arch, Her Majesty's coffin was transferred from the State Gun Carriage to the State Hearse to proceed to Windsor Palace for a more private ceremony.



This historical event was a tremendous honour and privilege for the Canadian Contingent. Our Engineers proudly represented the CME by taking part, paying tribute, and thanking Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for being an outstanding Colonel-in-Chief for more than 60 years.

Chimo!