

A Time to Reflect and Remember

By BGen Kevin Horgan, Member of Phase II 8801

20 June 2018 will mark the 30th anniversary of the Slesse Range Demolition Accident, a tragic and significant milestone in the history of the CME. This event which occurred during Engineer Officer Phase II training at CFSME, claimed the lives of six students: Capt Joe Best; Lt Dennis Aucoin; 2Lt Kevin Wilkinson; OCdt Kelly Gawne; OCdt Wade Sutton and OCdt Bill Whitley. Several other students were injured and families and colleagues have been impacted ever since.

A coroner's inquest and a BOI followed and it was determined that a number of factors had led to the accident. More importantly this tragic event led to a total review and revamping of the training and use of demolitions within the CME. When we consider the operations that have been conducted in the past 30 years starting with Bosnia and through Afghanistan and the role that effective and safe operations of demolitions and explosive devices have played in those operations, it is clear that as tragic as this event was, it has resulted in the saving of other lives and injuries. We will never know who or how many have been saved but we know there is a number based on the re-focus that occurred within the CME community following this accident.

Clearly we need to remember the life's lost and impacted by this event but we should also reflect on our day to day activities at work and at home and consider the safety of ourselves, colleagues and families. At work, ensure we are following established procedures and guard against work arounds that may make a task easier may also increase the risk. Those of you in leadership positions must hold firm on safety procedures. In a military there will come a time when risks may have to be taken, that is part of our culture but those risks must be managed and only taken when operational necessity calls for it. This cannot become the norm nor should these risks be part of our training environment. Good ideas need to be safe ideas.

As a member of this course and of 1 Section of which Joe, Dennis, Kevin, Kelly, Wade and Bill were part of, I think about and I am reminded of this accident on a regular basis. There is a clear case of "by the grace of God" that I and other students and instructors on the range that day sit here today. This event has impacted the lives of many, especially the families. I believe it has been a guiding lesson for me throughout my career. As stated in the title, it is right for us to remember our lost colleagues and reflect on the impact this event has had on individuals and the CME community at large. The next time you are at CFSME, take the time to stop at the hallway cairn to these members and remember their sacrifice and reflect on how you can ensure we take the right precautions to limit risks in all our tasks.

Chimo!