

## Reflections on over 40 years with local cadets



**By Brock Weir**

Last month, Phil Lusk returned home after 10 days shepherding over 40 of our local cadets, and seven other adults, around Europe to walk a mile in their forbears' shoes.

After seeing the sights in places like Paris and Amsterdam, things took a poignant turn when members of the Queen's York Rangers Army Cadets set foot on the battlefields of the First World War ahead of this weekend's 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

'It was the pinnacle of my career here,' said Lusk, who handed over the role of Commanding Officer of the local cadets to his wife, Sue, at a ceremony on Friday night.

It's a career that has lasted over 40 years since the Oak Ridges native stumbled into the Queen's York Rangers cadet program by chance, tagging along to a meeting with a school friend who was already an active member.

He stayed on, rising through the ranks and making the choice in 1989 to become an officer.

'A big part was the skills we were learning,' says Lusk of what first grabbed his attention within the cadet program. 'I was really interested in navigation skills with a map and compass. This was, of course, before GPSs were around! The shooting and the knots and all those kinds of things were really interesting. The army side? Not so much. The drills and the saluting wasn't as important to me at that time. The skills were unique. I remember being in Grade 10 geography and we got to the part about navigation and maps and I was so far ahead of everyone else.'

Eventually, Lusk says he started to really enjoy the role of teaching younger cadets, a path he pursued. He served as a civilian instructor for seven years before joining the CIC to become an officer in 1989, four years after Sue. It was a tough decision to make, he says, on whether he wanted to be subject to all the rules and regulations that came with the role, but the decision was made. When he first took command of the Queen's York Rangers Army Cadets, it was a corps well known for its marksmanship. Over time, the cadets focused on growing its members, boosting the ranks from 75 cadets at the outset to a regular complement ranging between 120 and 140 members.

'We have always been a shooting corps and since the 1960s we have been known as one of the best, if not the best shooting cadet corps,' he explains. 'Our plan was to step that up into other areas such as the drill team and the band in the early 200s, as well as our expedition program. We wanted to be a more well-rounded cadet corps, and I think we have done that.'

'We use a term called 'soft skills' and the expedition program is great with soft skills. It is easy to have hard skills like how to peddle a bike or paddle a canoe, but when you throw cadets into an expedition, which usually means hardship, poor weather, and personal boundaries, the soft skills kick in' and that's not just being a great member, but a good leader when it applies: having perseverance and being able to manage complement.'

After 42 years being actively involved with the Queen's York Rangers Army Cadet Corps, stepping away was a tough but necessary move for Lusk as he takes on a new role with the Canadian Armed Forces. Based at CFB Borden, he took on a new role effective April 1 as a Zone Training Officer, which means he now looks after 12 or 13 Army, Air and Sea Cadet corps and squadrons.

Staying involved with one particular corps in this role, he said, could lead to a conflict of interest in the long run.  
?It is going to be a tough change to not be as directly involved with this cadet corps after being here for almost 42 years,? he says.  
?For the recent Vimy Trip we all worked together to raise our fundraising targets and the kids didn't pay a single thing other than their spending money. They had a great time and learned so much about Canada and their contribution in World Wars One and Two and that was a great way for me to finish my career with this corps.?