



THE BLACK WATCH OF CANADA FOUNDATION

A NOTE FROM CADET DRUMMER STEVEN KOWCH



The Black Watch Cadet Pipeband at Banff National Cadet Camp, summer 1965. Steve Kowch is highlighted.

WOW! 60 years ago I joined the Black Watch cadets' pipe and drums band at 15-years-old and ended up in Banff at the cadet's camp.

A Rosemount kid in east end Montreal spending Saturday mornings at the armoury on Bleury Street. My mother enrolled me in the cadets. She was Scottish and thought a stint in the BW would make me a "man" at 15-years-old. So she marched me down to the armoury and told the commanding officer she wanted to enlist me in the cadets. Thank God Major Gibson told my mother he would talk to me in private and take a seat while he gave me a tour.

What the hell was I doing there! I was singing in the school choir and in the drama club acting in plays. I was bullied in school and now I was facing weekends with a bunch of guys marching around in uniform, saluting guys shouting orders.

Major Gibson caught on very quickly during the tour that my mother wanted me to be a cadet more than I wanted to be a soldier. So he introduced me to the guys in the band room playing bagpipes and the drums. They introduced me to the bagpipes but after blowing into the instrument I almost passed out from lack of oxygen. It was a lot more difficult than playing music on my recorder (a wooden flute). So they suggested maybe I would be a better drummer than playing the bagpipes. And there was an opening for a new drummer. Sure there was a lot of marching and playing the drum at the same time, but it looked like a lot of fun so I enlisted in the Black Watch cadet Pipes and Drums!

Truth be told, I was probably the worst drummer in the history of the Black Watch cadet corps.

There was discipline. You stood at attention. You saluted. You marched and you took orders. I was not used to that life and I think it was the reason I didn't quite fit in with all the guys. I was not macho. I was a storyteller, a writer and it served me well as a newspaper reporter, a radio reporter, a news director, a news network manager and program director of two of Canada's largest radio stations in Canada - CJAD in Montreal and CFRB in Toronto.

My two years in the BW cadet pipes and drums taught me discipline, working in unison with a team, taking orders in the process and learning how to be a leader and cover some of the biggest breaking news stories in Canada and win a wall full of awards my news team covered.

Yes, some of the guys in Banff picked on me. But that's life. It was part of growing up as a teenager and becoming an adult which is why my mother enlisted me in the Black Watch cadets in the first place.

Now here is my favourite story from Banff: First night at camp the sergeant ordered me to stand guard outside our cabin while everyone else went to bed. An hour into guard duty the camp commanding officer shows up outside our cabin and wants to go inside. My orders were to stand guard and not let anyone in. The CO was not impressed and ordered me to stand aside. I didn't want to get into trouble with my sergeant so I shouted into the cabin: "it's OK guys. It's ONLY an officer who wants to come in for inspection". I hear my sergeant laughing. Then I hear the CO shouting at the sergeant. When he leaves the cabin, I salute him. He stops, stares at me. Salutes me back and says: "guard duty over. Go to bed!"

Happy 60th anniversary.