

# A Different Kind of Alumni Association for the Royal Military Colleges of Canada

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**What is the Royal Military Colleges Alumni Association (RMCAA)? How did it come about? What does it do? Where does it stand on the pressing issues affecting the Canadian Military Colleges? This article aims to answer all of these questions, all in the context of its overarching mission of *advancement*.**

The Royal Military College (RMC), the Royal Military College St-Jean (RMCSJ), and Royal Roads Military College (RRMC) prior to its closure; these are not typical universities. Their primary vocation is the development of leadership for the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), and for Canada. The education that they deliver, whether through specialized graduate programs, continuing studies and distance learning, or through the rigorous demands of the undergraduate Regular Officer Training Program (ROTP), has the potential to transform lives. Without the critical thinking capabilities developed through these programs, a leadership capability gap would exist in the CAF. Not surprisingly, the alumni association that serves these universities has some notable differences from typical alumni organizations at civilian universities. It has evolved as the Canadian Military Colleges have changed throughout their history, but it remains focused on three interdependent goals: advancing the military colleges, fostering camaraderie among the alumni, and promoting the heritage of their contributions to Canada.

With a history stretching back to the formation of the RMC Club in 1884, today's Royal Military Colleges of Canada Alumni Association (RMCAA) is a central part of the university community of the Canadian Military Colleges. From

its incorporation in 1966 until last year, the RMC Foundation operated distinctly from the Club as a registered charity. On October 7<sup>th</sup> 2021, some 400 members voted in favour of: combining the finances and activities of the RMC Club and the RMC Foundation Inc; changing the name to the RMC Alumni Association Inc; and modernizing its bylaw so that (among other things) all those who have attended a Canadian Military College, whether as an undergraduate, graduate or continuing studies student, are eligible to be members. The new bylaw creates two categories of members: "non-voting", which includes every person eligible for membership, and "voting", which includes all those who have paid either for a life membership or who are currently paying for an annual membership<sup>1</sup>. These changes, which make the RMCAA more like the alumni organization of any other Canadian university, were made possible by a favourable interpretation by the Canada Revenue Agency on the scope of activities that a registered charity can perform. When it became obvious that the RMC Foundation as a charity could do everything the RMC Club was doing, then all that remained was for a group of committed volunteers and staff to work out the details of the merger, and for the members to agree. The new organization currently has six full-time

professional staff, a volunteer board of 19 directors, more than 7,000 paid-up voting members, and an estimated total eligible membership of approximately 30,000.<sup>2</sup> The RMCAA also recognizes and maintains a relationship with the regional clubs or branches of the RMC (or ex-cadet) Club<sup>3</sup>, and it continues the Old Brigade, made up of those classes who have passed the milestone of 50-years from their entry into one of the colleges.

Being a federally incorporated not-for-profit corporation and a registered charity, the RMC Alumni Association is independent of the Canadian Military Colleges (CMCs), the Department of National Defence (DND) and the Government of Canada. There are some important differences in the RMCAA's relationship with the CMCs that make it distinct from the alumni organizations of Canadian civilian universities. For example, public universities, like [Royal Roads University](#), have vice-presidents responsible for advancement and alumni relations who are part of the administration and supported by university employees. There are no equivalent positions at the CMCs. Accordingly, when the RMCAA performs fundraising and alumni relations functions for the CMCs, it does so essentially as an act of good will, in keeping with its mission. The RMCAA, based on an agreement between the RMC Foundation and DND, also acts as a trustee. It manages the research grants that the CMCs receive from the federal research granting councils<sup>4</sup> through a trust agreement, which supports the CMC's administration of their research program. The advantage for the RMCAA in this arrangement is that these funds have contributed to growth in total assets under management. In [2016](#), the RMC Foundation had about \$14 million in assets and distributed more than \$670 thousand to RMCC and RMCSJ. In [2021](#), the RMCAA had \$37 million in assets, including \$8 million in research funds, and distributed some \$380 thousand to the CMCs, with the decline in demand for financial support being driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. In keeping with the strategic direction and priorities of the senior leadership at RMCC and CMRSJ in recent years, an increasing amount of these charitable gifts goes into funding activities that enhance the leadership, academic, athletic development, and bilingualism of students, rather than into funding monuments and heritage. As the pandemic restrictions have lifted, annual gifts to the Colleges have increased with more than \$860 thousand flowing in 2022, year to date.<sup>5</sup>

The impact of Alumni charitable funding can be found not only across the four-pillars of the ROTP, but also on the continuing studies programs, research activities and the

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graduate programs. There are too many examples of activities supported financially by the RMC Alumni Association to list here, but a brief selection follows. Alumni funding for RMCSJ experiential learning and cultural trips enhance the quality of the International Studies degree program. Sports and athletics programs at both Colleges receive charitable funding for items not covered by either public or non-public funds, as do the bands and other elements of military heritage. RMCC's varsity hockey and rugby programs have enhanced their competitiveness with sustained Alumni funding over the years and have strengthened their connection with the donor community to generate this success. The military skills teams, combat shooting, mountaineering, most other clubs, recreational and cultural activities, these all benefit from Alumni funding. A series of historical learning tours to the sites of key Canadian battlefields in Europe, and more recently in Niagara, have been supported with the donations of a single donor, complimenting the history curriculum. The RMCAA and the *fondation des ancien(ne)s du CMRSJ* are collaborating to fund the renovation of the RMCSJ cadet mess through the St. Maurice project, which will greatly enhance the social connection and morale of students at that College, thanks in large measure to the generosity of individual donors and the collective donations of specific classes.

Fostering philanthropy, or donorship, is a key activity for the RMCAA. Graduating (or entry) classes are a key part of fundraising, with the annual “Battle of the Classes” generating hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations. Some classes collaborate to achieve shared objectives, like 1981 and 1984 partnership to commemorate the presence of women at the Canadian Military Colleges with a female cadet statue, unveiled in May 2022. Other classes, like 1969, have accumulated funds in an endowment. Originally intended to fund bursaries for

Reserve Entry (RETP) cadets who had to repeat an academic year, after the RETP program ceased, these funds were redirected to support heritage projects at RRMC, RMCC and RMCSJ, including the St. Maurice project, the new RMC museum building project and a memorial at Royal Roads. Other classes, like 1965, have chosen to sponsor a *Professorship in Leadership*, which promotes the academic and research agendas of RMC as well as leadership development. There are numerous endowments which fund prizes to recognize excellence, including in teaching and research. The Association also offers progressive ways of supporting the experiences of students at the military colleges, including through a Diversity Fund and the Truth, Duty, Valour Fund which both give the Colleges greater flexibility in funding activities than a restricted donation for a single purpose. Donations from outside the alumni community, including from corporations, are also part of RMCAA fundraising efforts.

Over the decades, alumni philanthropy has created a legacy of positive impact on the lives of current Naval and Officer Cadets and other students. Beyond their contribution of iconic monuments honouring the fallen at each campus, including the memorial arch in Kingston and the plinth at St-Jean, throughout the history of the RMC Club and the RMC Foundation, charitable giving to the Colleges has been a tremendous source of pride in the alumni community. The RMC Alumni Association proudly continues that legacy today.

Another key activity for the Alumni Association is advocacy and promotion of its mission, which includes:

- ▶ bringing together our alumni and other members for their mutual benefit, support, mentorship and camaraderie;
- ▶ advancing education by establishing and maintaining scholarships, bursaries and prizes; supporting and promoting training and leadership programs by providing funding for programs and initiatives for the benefit of the CMCs to grow and develop Canada's future leaders;
- ▶ establishing, preserving, protecting, and commemorating monuments and significant heritage sites at the CMCs; and
- ▶ enhancing, preserving and promoting the experience, history, traditions and culture of the Canadian Military Colleges.

The overarching objective across the various elements of this mission is *advancement*. This means that when the Alumni Association advocates, it is advocating for change, improvement, and enhancement of the programs and the contributions of the Canadian Military Colleges to the Canadian Armed Forces.

With this orientation towards advancement in mind, the RMCAA Board of Directors was deeply concerned when it read the *Arbour Report*<sup>6</sup> as noted in its [statement](#) issued on June 30<sup>th</sup> 2022<sup>7</sup>. The RMCAA wants the Canadian Armed Forces' and DND's efforts to prevent and eradicate sexual harassment and sexual assault to be successful. It hopes that implementation of the report's recommendations will contribute to that goal. Institutional reforms aimed at achieving cultural and systemic change to reduce or end sexual harassment and assault in the CAF and DND must succeed. The Association wants to contribute to these objectives, to change and improvement, in part by better connecting the alumni community with the Canadian Military Colleges.

The Board of Directors, representing graduating classes from the 1960s to the early 2000s, includes a range of professional experiences, with a mix of women and men and an independent director (a parent of a graduate). The experience of the directors is an important source of insight which creates opportunities to build empathy and peer support at the board level and across the Association. The Board recognizes that there are 42 cohorts of women from the ROTP/RETP programs in the Alumni Association's membership, and that women are currently about a quarter of the Canadian Military College undergraduate student population. The Board knows that within the student population, and among the alumni community, there are survivors and victims of sexual harassment and assault. Certainly, there are allies for survivors among the remainder of the students and alumni. However, because gender-based violence is a societal problem, there are also offenders, persons accused of wrong-doing, enablers, bystanders, and others who continue to question how the situations described in the Arbour Report came to pass. All of that to say, the Board understood that one of the first priorities in its response to the Arbour Report was to recognize and offer support to survivors.

The Alumni Association has work to do in this regard. "Bringing together alumni for their mutual benefit and support" seems like a straightforward part of the RMCAA mission. But for those who have experienced trauma, returning to campus for a reunion weekend might not be a celebration. Listening compassionately to the survivors in the alumni community is one of the first steps that can be taken as an organization. Fostering peer support networks is another, through classes, branches, and at the national level. In the fall of 2022, the Alumni Association began engaging with its

members on the question of how best to support survivors. Hopefully, this engagement will be the start of an ongoing dialogue that can inform future decisions. That said, the RMCAA must be mindful of its capacity and areas of expertise. Accordingly, it is exploring partnerships with organizations that have expertise and capacity in this field. To that end, the Association is engaging with Survivor Perspectives Consulting Group to raise awareness and build capacity at the national level and in branches in these important areas.

More broadly, the Arbour Report has prompted the Alumni Association to reflect on how best to advocate for reforms at the CMCs to make them safer for everyone and more effective in their vocation of producing exemplary leaders for the CAF and Canada. The Colleges already receive charitable funding from the RMCAA to support inclusive leadership development activities, including *Resilience Plus*<sup>8</sup>, and the *Athena Network*<sup>9</sup>, among other programs. Continuing charitable donations to the RMCAA ensures programs like these are supported, enabling Canadian Military College students to contribute to culture change. Certainly, there have been important examples of CMC graduates influencing CAF culture throughout Canada's military history. It is only logical then, that creating a positive and respectful leadership culture at RMCC and RMCSJ should have a positive effect on CAF leadership culture. There are opportunities for the Alumni Association to advocate for change that advances these goals. The Association can also set an example by continuing to maintain the highest expectations for the standards of conduct of its members. The rare expulsion of an RMCAA member following an admission of guilt to a charge of criminal misconduct in 2022 was an unfortunate but necessary decision.

That being said, the membership of the Alumni Association is a rich source of expertise, experience, and ideas on how to improve leadership development at the CMCs. Many have shared reflections with the RMCAA about their positive and negative experiences at military college. For example, while some have noted there was little direct supervision from military staff in their time, others have pointed to the opportunity of creating leadership-coaching and mentoring relationships for students as a resource for reflection and for generating improvement in self awareness and empathy. Others have recalled the critical role that leaders play in shaping organizational culture through the actual standards of behaviour that they tolerate as either a positive or negative example and signal to their organization. As the review driven by M<sup>me</sup> Arbour's recommendation number 29 proceeds, the RMCAA stands ready

to bring together experts, from industry, academe and other areas of its membership that would be relevant to the review team.

The Alumni Association is also exploring the question of how best it can support and enable needed changes to conduct and culture of the CAF. Indeed, many of the CAF's efforts in this regard are being led by CMC alumni currently in senior leadership positions, who are truly in the front lines of generating positive culture change. At the same time, other alumni – including survivors – are some of the most insightful critics of CAF leadership when it falls short of expectations, drawing on their lived experience and the depth of their own expertise. Alumni are also playing key roles in producing the new doctrine aimed at generating a more inclusive framing of the CAF Ethos, *Trusted to Serve*<sup>10</sup>, with its emphasis on respecting the dignity of all persons as a key element of leadership. The RMC Alumni Association and its vast network of members are not just a vital stakeholder in this process, they are a unique and vibrant resource for the CAF and the Canadian Military Colleges to draw on for expertise, to raise awareness, and to generate momentum for change. The Association has a continuing role to play in enabling culture change by raising awareness among its membership, including by working with individual classes and regional branches.

Clearly, when the Arbour Report was tabled, recommendations 28 and 29 aimed at the Canadian Military Colleges, caught the attention of alumni. In the first weeks following the report, there was an immediate, emotional, and passionate reaction. Many alumni posted social media profile photos of themselves in scarlet uniforms. Some alumni published opinion pieces in defence of the Colleges, while others advocated for change. There was (and there remains) a palpable fear of seeing another round of college closures, like in 1994/95, with strident cries of “don't throw the baby out with the bathwater!” At least those who have derived personal and professional benefits from their education and leadership development experience at the CMCs can take some assurance from knowing that the main recommendation (29) calls for an expert, external review. Regrettably, this immediate, reactive wave of support also had negative impacts, with many in the survivor community feeling that their perspectives and experiences were being denied yet again.

As the RMC Alumni Association engages with its members, and as it advocates for advancement of the Colleges, it should position itself to play a constructive role. Knowing that there have been many reviews of the Canadian Military Colleges in the past, it will be vital for the CAF, DND and the Government to ensure that this review is properly mandated, resourced and

enabled with relevant expertise. The composition of the review team, in terms of expertise, lived experience, gender, linguistic and other societal characteristics, military and leadership perspectives, will have to be carefully considered for the review to be credible and effective. Similarly, the mandate of the review should be looked at with Canada's national security strategic context in mind, beginning with Mme Arbour's recommendations, but not necessarily confined to those terms. The first principles that led to the founding of the Royal Military College in 1876 should be kept in mind today. To be an independent country, Canada must be capable of educating and training the highest calibre of leaders for its armed forces. Those military leaders should be educated and trained on subjects and concepts that will equip them to defend and serve the interests of Canada in a complex, dynamic and too often hostile international security environment. These leaders should continue to play a role in building Canada into a country that is capable of being a role model for the world. The leaders produced by the Canadian Military Colleges should be exemplary to ensure that they and the CAF remain a source of pride for Canada.

Since the merger in 2021, the RMC Alumni Association is in a critical position to continue to be a key stakeholder as the CAF and DND consider the future of the Canadian Military Colleges. By engaging an unparalleled network of alumni across Canada and around the world, and by building on the legacy of giving of the RMC Club and RMC Foundation, the Royal Military Colleges of Canada Alumni Association remains a vital platform for charitable support for the ongoing enhancement and

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reform of academics, physical education and athletics, social development, and military leadership development programs at RMCC and RMCS. The merits of continuing to integrate these four developmental “pillars” have been reviewed before and should continue to be the subject of rigorous review. *Advancement* means finding ways to evolve and improve the quality of leaders produced by the Canadian Military Colleges. As an advocate, the Alumni Association will be tireless in supporting the generation of exemplary leadership for the Canadian Armed Forces and for Canada. That means tireless support of safety, of respect for the dignity of all persons, and of leaders capable of succeeding in the complex conflicts of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.



## Notes

- 1 Existing life memberships were grandfathered, including for those who attended the Colleges before they had degree granting status.
- 2 More information on the structure of the RMCAA, including the board committees and staff roles can be found on its website, <https://www.rmcalumni.ca/en/about-us/>
- 3 The regional clubs or branches are legally independent affiliates, as noted in the Bylaw, Article 9, available here: <https://www.rmcalumni.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/By-Laws-English.pdf>
- 4 Including the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, among others.
- 5 Based on unaudited financial results, as of the time of writing.
- 6 <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/report-of-the-independent-external-comprehensive-review.html>
- 7 <https://www.rmcalumni.ca/en/statement-by-the-rmc-alumni-association-inc-on-the-report-of-the-independent-external-comprehensive-review-arbour-report/>
- 8 <https://www.rmc-cmr.ca/en/college-commandants-office/resilience-plus>
- 9 <https://www.instagram.com/reseau.athena.network/?hl=en>
- 10 <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/canadian-armed-forces-ethos-trusted-to-serve.html>