

# CANADA'S BEST KEPT MAPPING SECRET

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I expect that the majority of readers of *Geomatica* are not fully aware of both the existence and the accomplishments of this somewhat secretive organization which celebrated its Centennial in 2003.

The Mapping and Charting Establishment (MCE) and its predecessors have been located in Ottawa for their entire history and moved into the Surveys and Mapping Building on Booth Street in Ottawa when it was first opened in 1961. The next time you're visiting 615 Booth Street look for the granite Centennial Plaque just beside the main entrance doors.

Over the last one hundred years there have been many accomplishments by this military unit. For example, in World War I they pioneered the accurate location of artillery targets using photos from military aircraft. During the Second World War they developed a capability to use air photos for rapid and accurate mapping of enemy locations. A little known fact is that Canadian military mappers were responsible for 40% of the maps of Canada and 75% of the Arctic field surveys before turning the responsibility over to Natural Resources Canada in the 1960s. During the cold war they worked with our allies to map the world at 1:250 000 scale in a series called the Joint Operations Graphic (JOG), as well, they developed a classified series known as the Military City Map (MCM) for all Canadian cities with a population greater than 50 000 in case of nuclear attacks. Today military mappers are working closely with our allies to provide our Canadian Forces with the best possible maps and integrated intelligence as part of Operation Athena in Afghanistan.



Paul Metvier, Canada's oldest mapper at 104, unveils the Military Mapping Centennial Plaque in 2003.



Afghanistan: The Prime Minister with a Military Mapper (on his left) and Military Engineers.

Last October at the Ottawa Museum of Aviation there was a book launch for “*One Hundred Years of Canadian Military Mapping 1903-2003, An Illustrated History*”. The authors have chosen to use a story telling approach which along with countless photographs makes it an interesting read. The book was written in an easy to read style with a minimal amount of military jargon in order to appeal to a wider audience. It is hoped that this book will serve to enlighten a new generation of Canadians on how Canada was shaped by this small but innovative organization. The following is taken from the flyleaf of the book:

This is the story of an obscure military unit which has accomplished amazing things for our National Defence and for Canada. The text begins with the 2003 celebration of their centennial by the Canadian Forces Mapping and Charting Establishment. MCE, as it is known had other names in its history but this small but skilled and essential organization is as old as the army itself and predates the Canadian Navy and Air Force. It began because Canada had no topographical maps suitable for military operations.

You will learn about this military unit that was never a front-line weapon of war. You will soon see that what they did was just as important to success in operations. Good Maps and Charts and Geographic Information have come from our Military Mappers since 1903. Then, they slapped mosquitoes and black flies in the swamps of Petawawa while painstakingly drawing a map on a plane table. Now they sit in front of computers in the dust and danger of Afghanistan combining good maps with timely information about the enemy for use by commanders. From the Preface to the last Chapter you will be convinced that these men and women are damn good at what they do!

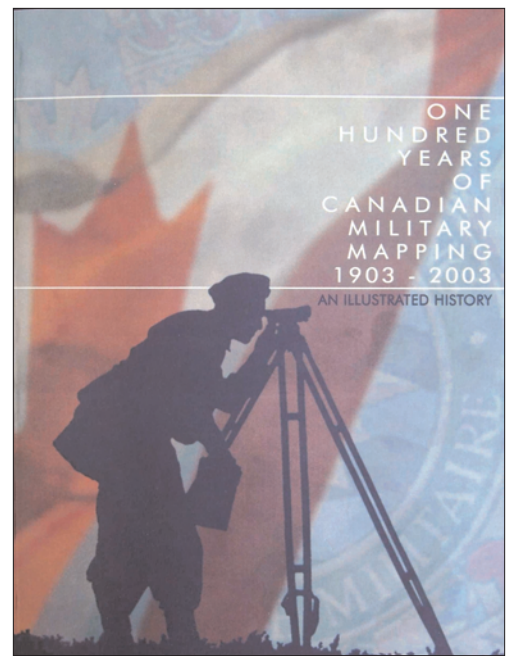
From their beginnings they challenged technology. When necessary they invented or improved it. The photos of air craft cameras, survey instruments, air photo devices, printing

presses and early computers are special to this history. As they do today, our military mappers pushed back the frontiers of science. Every instrument was soon replaced with something better.

But it is the quality of the men and women who did the work and who drew and printed the maps that is compelling. One example in 1905 is the boys who in the dead of winter, walked from Montreal to Kingston surveying a connection for the first time. Other stories are the horse parties and those in river canoes that mapped the Rockies. There were the dangerous winter surveys at Fort Churchill. Using air photography and working often 24 hours a day there is a story of the effort needed to map a strip of land for the first time, from Newfoundland to BC. It was done in record time to locate the Mid Canada radar line. The early printers who started out by engraving on stone and the meticulous draughtsmen who made world class maps and charts are in this story. They all contributed to what has become today one of the most advanced mapping agencies in the world.

John Sinclair and Bruce Hynes have woven this illustrated history with quotes, stories and photos of those involved in both directing and carrying out the work. The text mirrors the mapmaking process. You will smile and marvel at the adventures and the lifetime friendships of those involved. You will learn where these military mappers and their civilian component came from, how they trained, and the value of their military, professional and social organizations. MCE is a unique place. They have been honoured in many ways. This book is yet another tribute to their accomplishments.

The book “*One Hundred Years of Canadian Military Mapping 1903-2003, An Illustrated History*” sells for \$19.95 plus \$13 for shipping and handling. It is available from either The Military Mapping Historical Committee, 246 Tompkins Ave, Orleans ON, K1E 1H2, (613) 824-1583, email [oleolson@magma.ca](mailto:oleolson@magma.ca) or from the publisher, Baico Publishing, [www.baico.ca](http://www.baico.ca).



This book would never have been written if it wasn't for the perseverance and dedication of my old friend and mentor LCol John Sinclair (retired) who cajoled many of us into writing down our memories which he has so ably captured. You might be interested to know that eleven ex-military surveyors went on to become Presidents of the Canadian Institute of Surveying. In 1997-98, I had the chance to be the President of the Canadian Institute of Geomatics. Perhaps current and future members of the military mapping family will choose to become more engaged with the Canadian Institute of Geomatics—I certainly hope so.

It is not everyone who is lucky enough to be part of the history of such a distinguished military mapping organization. I couldn't be more proud of having had the opportunity to spend my entire working career with the Department of National Defence and especially the military mapping and intelligence communities.

The motto of the Mapping and Charting Establishment is *Ostendamus Viam* or “We Show the Way”. There isn't a more fitting slogan for this military organization as they continue to ‘show the way’ for the Canadian Forces during their second century. □