

Echoes of an Accident

In June of 1988, officers at the Canadian Forces School of Military Engineering (CFSME) in Chilliwack, BC, were on the Slesse Range conducting demolition training. They were doing something known as “cratering”. As I recall, a chamber had been blown and the officers were tamping-in a larger charge of explosives when something touched off the explosives killing six officers and injuring others in the area.

*Captain Gary Silliker
14 Airfield Engineering
Squadron, Pine Grove,
Lunenburg, NS*

There was an investigation, which resulted in changes to the monitoring and quality control process for equipment being used in the preparation of explosive charges and the storage of explosives.

What I remember is the loss of a friend and the devastation it had upon a wife and two young daughters.

It was a costly accident in terms of lives and it made the CF review its safety procedures regarding the storage and use of high explosives. Twenty years have passed since that terrible day; regardless of the intervening years, all members of the CF and DND should pause to remember and to remind themselves to remain vigilant in their workplaces. Take time to question any safety procedure that may seem dated or no longer relevant to the job at hand.



A plaque to the memory of the casualties of the June 1988 demolition accident at the CFB Chilliwack Slesse Range is displayed inside the main entrance to the Canadian Forces School of Military Engineering. The memorial plaque is inscribed: *“In memory of Captain J.W. Best, Lieutenant M.D. Aucoin, Second Lieutenant K.J. Wilkinson, Officer Cadet K.R. Gawne, Officer Cadet W.C. Sutton, Officer, Cadet W.J. Whitley; killed in a demolitions training accident at Slesse Range 20 June 1988.”* In addition, there is a willow tree at the Royal Military College in Kingston that is dedicated to OCdt K. Gawne and a small arms competition trophy in 3 Field Engineer Squadron remembers Second Lieutenant K.J. Wilkinson.”