

## **All Sappers Cenotaph is Reborn**

*by Retired Sapper - Jim Harris*

Our All Sappers Memorial Park in Chilliwack was conceived and its construction supervised by Lt-Col Coulson Norman Mitchell, VC, MC Commander Camp Chilliwack. It was dedicated on 14 July 1946 by Canada's Governor General after a year of design and intense labour by Sappers....for Sappers 'Everywhere'.



**A Parade at All Sappers Cenotaph at Camp Chilliwack in 1946**

After the closure of CFB Chilliwack in 1998, Canada Lands Company was charged with the responsibility of disposing of the DND property. But DND still retained ownership of All Sappers Memorial Park and the Cenotaph and it continued as the focus of local memorial activities. Sappers soon raised concerns, however, about DND's ability to maintain the Cenotaph in a condition that would ensure that it properly honoured the sacrifices of all Canadian and British Commonwealth Sappers. The challenge became even greater in 2004 as local real estate developed significantly and proposals were considered to expand the local road intersection and possibly encroach into All Sappers' Memorial Park. CFB Chilliwack Historical Society, a strong and constant defender and advocate for our Military Engineering heritage, organized a committee that went into action advising Canada Lands Company that the option of taking land away from the cenotaph was unacceptable! Their response amazed us all – they would beautify the grounds, would not disturb the cenotaph, would respect the soil where ashes are spread, and would actually increase the land area overall.

Initially spurred on by LCol Paul Corcoran (Ret'd) representing the CFB Chilliwack Historical Society until his untimely death in Nov 2007, numerous Retired Sapper watchdogs kept a close eye on proceedings. LCol Al Dempsey (CME Ret'd) from Canada Lands provided strong leadership and ensured the support of the local community with informative meetings and securing advice from Retired Sappers. After the retirement of Al Dempsey, Mr. Randy Fasan and Mr. Larry Morgan of Canada Lands Company, worked tirelessly to revitalize and refurbish the All Sappers Memorial site, returning her to former glory, to properly respect the proud Sappers around the world who have given their lives in the Service of their Country. Mr. Greg

Smallenberg, renowned for his work at the Vimy Monument among his other high profile works, was selected as the designer. He quickly won the hearts and minds of the senior sappers with artist renditions and a presentation that could not be dismissed.

Ground was broken in June 2009. Work included a major re-design and comprehensive re-landscaping of the surrounding Park in order to vastly improve the visibility and focus on the Cenotaph itself. They stripped away the concealing hedge, elevated the centre island, beautified the landscape, inserted soft lighting and signage, redirected sidewalks into the site and added numerous seats to invite visitors to sit and reflect.



#### **Architect's Concept of the Restoration and Landscaping**

A promise had been given to our former Colonel Commandant, The Late Colonel Roger St. John, that the Cenotaph would be ready for rededication by 7 November 2009. Witnesses to this restoration can appreciate the dedication and reverence with which the labourers and their supervisors held for this cenotaph as they worked to the deadline. Congratulations to GEMCO, the construction company given this sacred trust, who came through with flying colours and consistent high quality workmanship, ensuring the glory and integrity of the site well into the future.

Relatives of Lt-Col Mitchell were present to witness the re-dedication of the Cenotaph. Mrs. Frances Bailie (Mitchell's daughter) and her son Philip Beck and Mitchell's great grandson, Liam Gleeson in his cadet uniform, did Colonel Mitchell proudly! Mrs Bailie's poignant speech held the spectators spellbound and the silence was maintained as the family laid a wreath in memory of their renowned relative.

Another era has opened, our Memorial site has a new life. All Sappers Memorial Park shall live and be respected in perpetuity as our National Monument to 'Sappers Everywhere' who have paid the supreme sacrifice.



**Re-Dedication Day: 7 November 2009**



**CHIMO! UBIQUE!**