



On Guard for DFAIT

They have a long and proud history and are fixtures at DFAIT Headquarters—those familiar faces who check our passes at the door, patrol the halls through the night and keep us secure in times of crisis and controversy.

The Corps of Commissionaires, a private, non-profit security firm, dates back to 1859, having been founded in England by a retired army officer to employ veterans of the Crimean War. The Corps began in Canada in 1925, providing meaningful work for men who had fought in the trenches of the First World War. Today the Corps employs 19,000 men and women of all ages in all provinces and territories, and is the country's largest provider of security services. A large number of commissionaires are ex-military personnel as well as former RCMP and police officers, although civilians who are "security-focused" and who undergo comprehensive training can join, says Section Supervisor Andy Lockwood, who is in charge of the 84 commissionaires at DFAIT.

"We're an institution here," says Lockwood, an ex-RCMP officer and former bodyguard to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau who joined the Corps and was assigned to DFAIT in 1991. Some commissionaires have been with DFAIT so long that ministers know them by name and give them chocolates and Christmas cake.

Commissionaire Jerry Laroque, who served with the Armed Forces in Germany and first came to work at DFAIT 28 years ago, says that when former External Affairs Minister Flora MacDonald encounters him on visits to 125 Sussex Drive, "she says, 'Jerry you're still here!' and we hug."

Commissionaire Bill Quinney, who works at the Canada Reception Centre, turns 85 in July. Yet he continues to work a full week, at the ready whenever there are VIP arrivals and departures or other uses of the hangar scheduled by DFAIT as well as DND. A native of England, he served in the Royal Navy in the Second World War, came to Canada in 1954 and joined the Corps 20 years ago when he retired from his job repairing electronics.

Quinney has met four prime ministers—even being invited on several occasions to 24 Sussex Drive—and has been on hand for the visits of four U.S. presidents as well as the Queen. He says the on-call position with its long hours "wouldn't be everybody's cup of tea...but I wouldn't trade it for the world."



photo: Mike Pinder/DFAIT

Section Supervisor Andy Lockwood, shown in the DFAIT security control room.



photo: Laroque/RCMP

Commissionaire Bill Quinney with Prime Minister Stephen Harper.



photo: M. Laroque/DFAIT

Commissionaire Randa Hokayem

Randa Hokayem, who became one of the first women commissionaires in 1989, joined the DFAIT staff in 2001 and works as a classification assistant in human resources. She is still with the Corps, escorting work crews that come into the building on evenings and weekends. "It's a great job if you like to meet people," says Hokayem, a former lieutenant in the Armed Forces. "There's always a lot of action."

Overseas duty

Some of our DFAIT commissionaires even work overseas, where they fill in at Canadian missions for military police, for example, or oversee sensitive construction work. Captain Lockwood says commissionaires have recently served in Khartoum, Athens, Warsaw, Abu Dhabi, Lima, Tel Aviv and Hong Kong.