

Canada Day at Home

For most Canadians, the beloved barbecue is key to celebrating our nation's birthday. For DFAIT's Jonathan Lodge and many of his colleagues, celebrating Canada Day is both a duty and a privilege. By Jonathan Lodge

For many years, I have served in the Canadian Forces Reserves, and during that time I've spent four summers parading with other reservist soldiers who form the red-jacketed Ceremonial Guard that performs its public duties in Ottawa on Parliament Hill, at Rideau Hall and at the National War Memorial.

On most summer days in Ottawa, the Guard is the biggest thing around, marching through the wide streets while halted traffic looks on. But on July 1, we know that Canada itself is the main event and we're just there to help add to the celebration.

And so we parade in the sunshine, resplendent in our scarlet tunics of thick wool, our bearskins' black fur shimmering in the breeze, our polished brass gleaming—and we are proud. Sweat stings our eyes and runs down our backs, our hard, shining boots grow harder against our feet, and our rifles slowly become heavier in our hands—and we are proud.

Standing there in uniform, we share a certain connection with another group of soldiers from almost a century ago, one for whom July 1 was also a major occasion—but not remotely festive. In Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada Day is also Memorial Day, which commemorates the near-total loss of the Newfoundland Regiment on July 1, 1916, in the Battle of the Somme. Of the 801 soldiers who advanced against the enemy, only 68 answered roll call the next day. In one morning, Newfoundland had lost the lion's share of a generation of its young men.

“While there's much national pride and celebration in Newfoundland on Canada Day, July 1 is also a day when many Newfoundlanders honour those who lost their lives at Beaumont-Hamel, France,” says Anthony McLevey, senior trade commissioner in St. John's and a Newfoundlander for 26 years. “The sacrifices they made ensured the freedom we cherish today.”

Since Canada Day begins in St. John's before anywhere else in Canada, many residents of the city gather each year at Signal Hill, one of Canada's national historic sites, to welcome the day with a sunrise ceremony. Traditional barbecues, block parties and grand fireworks displays follow across the province while, of course, celebrations take place in other regions of Canada.

Mélissa Dubé, currently working in the department's Policy, Emergency Planning and Training Division, has had the opportunity to celebrate Canada Day in different parts of Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick. Fredericton, in particular, holds a special place in her memories, as she was able to celebrate with close friends in Canada's only officially bilingual province.

“It offered an opportunity for francophones and anglophones to come together and celebrate,” she says. “Sitting on the grass waiting for the fireworks and hearing children scream and laugh in French and in English was very special and made me proud.”

In Toronto, the annual multicultural Canada Day celebration brings together not only francophones and anglophones but over 50,000 people from the diverse ethnic communities that make up the city. Dance, visual arts, crafts

