



Armed Forces Pensioners'/Annuitants' Association of Canada

From chance meeting to national association: a brief history of the AFP/AAC

A chance meeting at a coffee shop in 1970 between five military personnel who discussed the negative reception they were receiving when seeking employment in civilian life, resulted in the formation of the Canadian Forces Long-Service Pensioners' Association (CFLSPA). Though the name has since changed to the Armed Forces Pensioners'/Annuitants' Association of Canada (AFP/AAC), the goal remains unchanged: to promote and protect the rights and interests of Canadian Armed Forces retirees and their survivors.

For nearly 40 years the AFP/AAC has been lobbying the government on many issues, including pressing for an equal pension for equal rank and service provision in the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act; seeking an increase of the Survivor Benefit to the maximum permitted by current regulations (66 per cent) of the contributor's pension or superannuation; and seeking justice in regard to Employment Insurance premiums and benefits for all retirees from the Canadian Armed Forces, to name a few.

Ex-Air Force Corporal Danny Nadon was elected first president of the national not-for-profit association. Annual dues were \$3.

For the first few years of its existence, the association had little success lobbying the federal government on issues such as job accreditation and increasing survivors' benefits.

Over the course of several years, the association grew to over 1,000 members. Committee members changed several times and at the association's 1975 meeting Ernie Huntley was elected National Vice President.

Accommodation for adequate office space was becoming an issue, and after exhausting all obvious possibilities, the association went to the Department of National Defence Headquarters (DNDHQ) and was permitted free use of a large room in 'A' Block at Wolseley Barracks in London, Ontario.

Monthly meetings were held in the church hall in the barracks and AGMs were held in various places.

During that time the association received an anonymous letter from a DNDHQ staff member warning that a letter was being distributed to Members of Parliament cautioning them to be suspicious of the association and its objectives as the group might be a threat to the federal government.

A week later, unbeknownst to the association, the RCMP and Military Police had examined the associations' files at the barracks (there were no committee members there at the time).

Throughout this time, Ernie Huntley and his wife typed letters and mailed them to over 500 news outlets countrywide, seeking publicity and trying to recruit more members. The effort was successful; membership applications came in fast and furious and, at one time, the association had more than 23,000 members.

Danny Nadon resigned in 1977 and Ernie Huntley was elected national president. The association set about forming area and local branches across the country, in ridings such as Alberta, Atlantic and British Columbia regions.

As time passed, the association held many meetings at various branches. National executive members did not receive remuneration but area directors and branch chairmen were reimbursed their travel costs. Members of the executive in London extended the hospitality of their homes.

After submitting a number of briefs to the Minister of Defence, Ernie Huntley and his wife were finally invited to meet with him (the Honourable Barney Danson, Minister of Defence at the time). This was the only time in the history of the group that any of the executive was given the opportunity to meet with a Minister of National Defence. Among the subjects discussed were job accreditation; the formation of a military institution to be called the Military College of Applied Sciences (part of a written brief regarding job accreditation), increasing widow's benefits, and a suggestion that help should be given to anyone about to retire in order to prepare them for civilian life. Danson was very interested with the submission and vowed to act on it if re-elected (elections were then two weeks away).

Danson sent the Huntleys to meet with Major Terry Christopher (Lt.Cmdr. Navy) to come to an agreement on a satisfactory plan to submit for approval. After four meetings agreement reached for what would become the Second Career Assistance Network (SCAN), which remains in existence today.

Unfortunately, the Liberal party was not re-elected and the Huntleys had no further meetings with Danson. The effort of the Huntleys and others on this resolution was ignored by the incoming Conservatives and all parties since that time.

In October 1977 the association was successful in having many of the military trades made acceptable to the civilian workforce.

It was around this time that the association was told to change its name from the Canadian Forces Long-Service Pensioners' Association, as the Department of National Defence did not want the public thinking they were government supported them.

The association ignored the request until they were eventually evicted from their DNDHQ premises. Executive member Jock Shields offered a room at his driving school for the association and they moved in.

In attempts to appease the government, the association came up with other names, none of which was acceptable to either federal government party until the name Armed Forces Pensioners'/Annuitants' Association of Canada (AFP/AAC) was accepted.

An executive meeting was called and Ed Halayko suggested reorganizing into a different kind of association, more on business lines, so there would no longer be a national president but a national chairman, with appointed directors. The idea was accepted. Ed Halayko volunteered. The first item on the AFP/AACs agenda was to increase dues to \$15 and to build a legal fund.

The association continued to submit briefs, which were blatantly ignored by whatever party held office. Then in came the Hon. Flora MacDonald, who tried to stop military retirees in receipt of the Canadian Forces Superannuation from drawing unemployment assistance through a December 23, 1984 Order in Council to become effective in January 1985.

After much discussion at association meetings, AFP/AACs response was to march on Parliament Hill in protest. On April 24, 1986 over 2,500 people attended from nearby provinces and as far east as Nova Scotia. Protests were also held in the mid and western provinces. The result was the modification of the order allowing someone to claim UI benefits if they were laid off from a civilian job obtained after retirement.

It wasn't until June 10, 1987 that Unemployment Insurance Bill C-50 was passed, partially restoring full entitlement of UI benefits to second career retirees. This was only a partial victory for the association since it was argued that if someone couldn't draw UI benefits then they shouldn't pay premiums. It is interesting to note that it was stated in the House of Commons that the service and ex-service portion of the UI account had generated a surplus of over \$200 million in that three-year period (1985-87) in which benefits had been denied.

After a number of meetings presenting the AFP/AAC's arguments to various government committees, the result of the court case regarding the theft of the accumulated pension funds was a costly blow to the association.

In December 2007, AFP-AAC and various other federal unions and associations filed appeals of the decision dated November 20, 2007 of the Ontario Superior Court of Justice dismissing the challenges to the pension legislation passed by the government in 1999 (Bill C-78). The legislation purports to allow the government to appropriate over \$30 billion in pension surplus in the Canadian Forces, RCMP and Public Service Superannuation plans.

The unions and associations had argued that the members and retirees of the Superannuation Plans have an "equitable" ownership interest in the assets in the Superannuation Accounts. They

claimed that Bill C-78 does not authorize the government to remove surplus from the accounts as this would amount to unlawful expropriation. They also alleged that the amortization of the surplus in the Superannuation Accounts during the 1990s amounted to a breach of the government's fiduciary obligations toward the members and retirees of the plans. Finally, the plaintiffs took the position that if Bill C-78 did allow for confiscation of the surplus, the provisions are contrary to the equality provisions under section 15 of the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

AFP-AAC and the unions and associations continue to work with their legal counsel to prepare the materials for the appeal. It is anticipated that the appeals will be argued before the Court of Appeal for Ontario in late 2009 or early 2010. Thus, legal fund donations are greatly appreciated in order to help offset these costs.

Over the years the AFP/AAC has achieved a number of memorable and landmark victories for retired service people and their survivors. These include:

1. Job accreditation; and
2. The inception of the Second Career Assistance Network (SCAN); and
3. The establishment of the Pensioners' Dental Service Plan.

The battle continues for the association as it attempts to squash the marriage after 60 clause and in its struggle with EI premiums and spouse' benefits.

Following the death of Ed Halayko in 2007, the association secretariat function was contracted to a professional association management company, Megram Consulting Services Ltd. in Renfrew, Ontario. A new professional newsletter and website, member pins and a new supplementary group insurance policy now form part of the member-benefit package in addition to the continuing strong lobby activity that has been the very backbone of the organization. .

The annual membership fee remains \$15. Directors and officers continue to be volunteers who receive no compensation for their efforts. AFP/AAC is affiliated with the National Council of Veteran Associations in Canada and the Common Front for Retirement Security. The Council promotes military veterans' rights and benefits and comprises of more than 50 veteran and regimental organizations. The Common Front seeks to improve the financial welfare of all retired Canadians and has been instrumental in the recent tax change which permits pension splitting.

AFP/AAC needs your support so call the Executive Director, Bonnie James at the national office right away – 613-432-9491!