AOC Chapter History: Maple Leaf Chapter

By Mike Gale and Robert Inkol

The origins of the Maple Leaf Chapter (MLC) can be traced to the Colonel By Chapter of the AOC. The latter was founded in 1980-1981 by a cadre of like-minded individuals working for the Canadian Department of National Defence and recently retired military, one of whom was BGen Peter Charlton, the chapter's first president. This was an active time for EW in Canada. The Defence Research Establishment Ottawa had launched an ambitious EW R&D program and efforts were under way to establish industrial capabilities. Upon its establishment, the chapter launched an aggressive recruiting drive. In particular, the "EW Fundamentals Course" sponsored by the chapter attracted many new members from the emerging EW industry in the National Capital Region (NCR).

In the mid 1980s, the chapter grew significantly, gaining AOC National recognition as the fastest growing chapter in the North East Region two years in a row. In recognition that the membership extended across Canada, the Colonel By Chapter Board of Director's decided to change the name. In 1986, after holding a membership vote to confirm the board's decision for a name change, the Canadian Chapter became the Maple Leaf Chapter, covering all of Canada.

In the mid-to-late 1980s, regular chapter meetings were held in the RCAF Gloucester Mess. Meetings often included presentations by notable EW experts and members of AOC National, including R. Admiral Julian Lake; Lynwood Cosby (NRL); Dr. John Legere, US Army (NE Region Director).

President Mike Gale, left, and LCol Manfred Bertelmann, right, present the Maple Leaf Chapter's first Honorary Chapter Membership to General Larry Ashley in 1986.

The growth of the chapter and the EW expertise of its members paved the way for the first joint MLC/DND classified symposium. The close working relationship with DND resulted in the MLC awarding its first honorary DND member with Maj Gen Larry Ashley accepting the distinction.

The success of this classified EW symposium resulted in support from Dr. John Legere for holding the North East Region Symposium in Ottawa in 1991. Canadian presentations were well represented in both the classified and unclassified sessions. Shortly afterwards, Canada participated in the first Gulf War. MLC members played an active role in readying the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) for its deployment.

However, with the end of the Cold War, defence priorities rapidly shifted. On one hand, defence had less priority for funding. On the other, there was a need to prioritize resources to support Canadian deployments in the Balkans and, subsequently, Afghanistan. This adversely affected the

fortunes the Canadian EW industry. Branch plants underwent shrinkage and consolidation and domestically owned companies were obliged to pursue opportunities in the Asia Pacific region where continuing military threats could not be ignored. In turn, this resulted in a difficult period for the MLC. Unsuccessful in their struggles to maintain the chapter membership and activities, chapter leadership could not prevent a period of decline.

In May 2015, MLC President Tuhin Das, left, hosted Capitol Club President Geoff Leighton at the Maple Leaf Chapter BBQ in Ottawa, Canada. After signing documents twinning their chapters, they exchanged plaques commemorating the occasion.

2015 saw efforts to revitalize the MLC, spearheaded by the defence industry clustered in the NCR. A renewed program of Lunch and Learn presentations promoted growth in membership. The success of these efforts was reflected in AOC awards in 2015 and 2017. Further growth took place under the leadership of BGen (Ret.) John Turnbull, during which time the chapter held the first of a series of Joint MLC/DND symposia. In

another notable development, the chapter launched a quarterly newsletter containing news of chapter events, in addition to technical and historical articles.

More recently, the chapter has benefited from the conspicuous role played by EW in the Russia-Ukraine War and other military actions and the recognition that Canada requires a larger and more capable military establishment if it is to preserve its independence.

The MLC has produced three recipients of the AOC Joseph W. Kearney Pioneer Award recognizing individuals for notable pioneering activities and service to the discipline of electromagnetic warfare and one recipient of the Technology Hall of Fame Award.