

UCC / UWVA REMEMBRANCE CEREMONY November 2023, Toronto, Ontario

Every year in November during Veterans Week, Ukrainian Canadians gather at the Ukrainian Canadian Memorial Park in Toronto to remember those who served and fell in the service of their country and continue to serve, both here in Canada and in Ukraine. Organized by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, Toronto Branch (UCC) together with the Ukrainian War Veterans Association of Canada (UWVA), and funded by the Ukrainian Canadian Veterans Fund, Remembrance Day is commemorated with the attendance of Ukrainian and Canadian veterans and serving military members, government representatives, youth groups and community leaders and members.

A Memorial Panachyda was served at the Ukrainian Canadian Memorial Park by our Ukrainian Catholic and Orthodox bishops and priests and responses sung by the St. Demetrius Orthodox Church Quartet. The ceremony was emceed by UWVA President, Captain (Ret'd) Andre Sochaniwsky CD. The Ukrainian Lament "Plavy Kacha" was beautifully performed by the Regimental Band and Bugles of The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada with baritone soloist, Corporal Olivier Laquerre. As well, they played the official anthem of the Ukrainian Army.

The Ukrainian Canadian community was honoured by the presence of representatives of all levels of government. Yvan Baker, Member of Parliament from Etobicoke Centre, laid a wreath on behalf the Government of Canada. Consul General of Ukraine in Toronto, Oleksandr Shevchenko, laid a wreath on behalf of the people of Ukraine, its government, and Ukraine's Armed Forces. Wreaths were also laid by the Government of Ontario, City of Toronto, the Toronto Catholic District School Board, and the Toronto District School Board. Wreaths were also laid from UCC National, UCC Ontario Provincial Council and UCC -Toronto Branch, in addition to Ukrainian youth organizations, Plast and SUM.

Of particular note, the Canadian Armed Forces wreath was laid by a Cold War veteran, World War II veteran and a serving Canadian military officer, Colonel Daniel Stepaniuk CD. Colonel Stepaniuk had just returned from Europe where he led the coalition training program for all Ukrainian Armed Forces in Europe, outside of Ukraine.

Captain Sochaniwsky spoke about the renewed meaning of Remembrance Day, with brutal war taking place in Ukraine, and most recently in Israel. He highlighted that the world must not lose sight of what Ukrainian soldiers are fighting and dying for and what Canadian soldiers have done and continue to do today in the defence of democracy and security in the world.

Later in the ceremony, Colonel Stepaniuk provided a sober overview of the coalition training program in Europe. In 2023, he deployed to the Security Assistance Group – Ukraine (SAG-U) as the Lead Planner for the training of all Ukrainian forces in Europe. In that role, Col Stepaniuk was responsible for establishing standards, synchronizing training, implementing improvements, and building the coalition's unity of effort to provide Ukraine with the asymmetric advantage that will enable them to survive, fight, and win. He saw first-hand the eagerness of Ukrainian soldiers to learn new technology and advanced tactics and then apply to practice in combat in Ukraine.



Figure 1 - Colonel Daniel Stepaniuk CD, Canadian Armed Forces, presenting at the Remembrance Ceremony on 4 November 2023 at the Ukrainian Canadian Memorial Park in Toronto. Col Stepaniuk had just returned from Europe. Master of Ceremonies, Captain (Retd) Andre Sochaniwsky CD, stands in the rear. Photo courtesy of Sophia Sochaniwsky.

The Remembrance Day Committee is taking great effort to engage and educate our Ukrainian youth, the schools, and its many UCC organizations.



Figure 2 - Students from St. Demetrius Elementary School perform at the Remembrance Ceremony at Ukrainian Canadian Memorial Part in Toronto on 4 November 2023. Photo courtesy of Sophia Sochaniwsky.

Our UCC Toronto Remembrance Day Committee advises and encourages all UCC Branches and Ukrainian organizations to undertake similar Remembrance Day ceremonies in their area and community. It is important to create greater awareness and appreciation of our Ukrainian Canadian military contributions and sacrifices in the World Wars and Canada's armed conflicts as well as Ukraine's military sacrifices against Russia.

May we all come together with both Canadian and Ukrainian veterans and community next November 2024 Day and may veterans, military, and participants be able to attend in health and full force to commemorate and honour all those who fought and fight in Canada and Ukraine!

Andriy Sochaniwsky and Lesya Winnicki