

**Oration for Drum Major William Tilley on the Occasion  
of the Awarding of an Honorary Doctor of Canon Law (*honoris causa*)  
Queen's College, May 12, 2016**

**By The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geoff Peddle**

Mr. Chancellor, it is with great honour that I present the recipient of the eleventh honorary degree to be awarded in the one hundred and seventy-five year history of Queen's College ...

Tonight we rejoice in two venerable anniversaries: 175 years for Queen's College, and 125 years for the Church Lads' Brigade in 2017. We particularly honour Drum Major William Tilley, the oldest member of the CLB in our province at 101 years of age. Although this oration is about a man we also pay tribute to the institution he served.

The CLB of Newfoundland is the oldest and largest Anglican youth organization in Canada. Since 1892 more than 20,000 boys and girls have been members. There are about 12,000 former members still living. At the end of 2015 the Church Lads' Brigade in Newfoundland had 18 companies organized into two battalions, bringing their total active strength to about 600 members ranging in age from 5 years to ... well ... 101 years.

*At least* 80 separate companies and detachments were formed since 1892. Its unique flag and badge distinguish the CLB. It also has its own prayer and hymn. Undoubtedly the most recognizable group within the CLB is the Regimental Band (formerly the Avalon Battalion Band) that exercises a leading role within the Brigade and also embraces a civic and public responsibility extending far beyond the regular life of the CLB. It is estimated that the Band has given well over 3000 free public engagements in its history including two Grey Cup Parades and countless performances at the Royal St. John's Regatta.

Which brings us back to Drum Major William Tilley and the incredible story of his life.

***Five hundred twenty five thousand six hundred minutes  
How do you measure the life of a woman or a man?***

With acknowledgement to *Seasons of Love* and the Broadway musical, *Rent*, there is no simple measure for the life of the man before us. And even if there were it could not be accomplished in the mere six minutes allotted to this oration.

The records of the Brigade indicate that William Tilley, Regimental Number 2572, joined on March 26, 1926, giving him 90 years of active service this year. For 63 of those years he served as Drum Major – leading the Band on parade – until retiring at the age of 88. He remains Archivist for the Brigade, beginning the Archives in 1978 and then beginning again after its destruction in the Armoury fire of 1992. In 2006 the Archives Room at the CLB Armoury was renamed the “Major William G. Tilley Museum” in tribute to his work.

Born in St. John's on November 30, 1914, William Tilley married Margaret Reid in 1943 and they had three children: Gary, Wayne and Glen. His life's work was with the Newfoundland Railway, later Canadian National Railway, from where he retired in 1977.

I asked Major Tilley about his earliest memories of the CLB and he recalled that at 8 or 9 years of age, before he was old enough to join, he and his friends on Spencer Street where he lived would wait every Thursday night on the steps outside the Armoury for the Bugle Band as he called it to leave to practice their marching. The young lads would follow, pretending to be members. He has fond memories of summer camp at Topsail, especially swimming in the ocean, and of rifle drill.

In 1939 Major Tilley became Drum Major, holding that role until 2002, following in the footsteps of his uncle who was Drum Major in the 1920s. Long before then he remembers his father taking him by the hand to see the Band. He was most impressed with his uncle, Harry Willar, who wore a high fur busby hat and swung a mace. He became Drum Major in 1939 when King George VI visited St. John's. The Battalion Band suddenly needed a new Drum Major and the Bandmaster appointed William Tilley with just a week's notice. In order to get used to carrying and twirling the mace he practiced in his backyard with a broom handle. According to him, in 63 years "I only dropped [the mace] once going down Long's Hill ... I was twirling it and missed and dropped it and stopped and picked it up and kept going."

It is moving for us all to know that this man standing before us tonight led the Battalion Band over and over again throughout World War Two as it marched soldiers, sailors and airmen to the waterfront and to the railway station to head overseas. He and the Band also met a great many of those who came back.

When asked how the CLB shaped his life, Major Tilley told me the following: "I think it made a man of me ..."  
He went on to say, "I learned ... how to be respected."

***Five hundred twenty five thousand six hundred minutes  
How do you measure the life of a woman or a man?***

***How about love?  
Measure in love.***

In 1992 Major Tilley wrote to the Governor and Commandant of the CLB, Colonel Adrian Heffernan, with the following words:

*Anything that I have done to assist the Brigade movement during my years of service has been a labour of love, and perhaps in many respects, to try and compensate, somewhat, for the valuable training I obtained in discipline, obedience, brotherhood and self-respect. I have said on many occasions that I am a better man because of my association with this great Christian organization. ... Dedication and discipline are important words to those who serve under its colours ...*

***So how do you measure the life of this good man? You measure his life in love and you measure it in service.***

Therefore Mr. Chancellor, I present to you Drum Major William Tilley for the degree of Doctor of Canon Law (*Honoris Causa*). I certify that he has been duly selected for the said degree, and request that you admit him thereto.

***Carry on CLB!  
Keep the Flag Flying!  
Fight the Good Fight!***