

## Wilfrid Laurier University



**Contacts: Julia Ann Easley**  
**WLU Information Officer**  
**(519) 884-1970 ext. 2070**  
**Captain John Grodzinski**  
**Lord Strathcona's Horse**  
**(403) 240-7327**

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### **Army captain manoeuvres through distance education course at WLU**

*Calgary* — A 44-tonne Leopard tank is an unusual study chair. But not for part-time student John Grodzinski of Calgary.

In fact, it seems just right for the captain of a tank squadron in the Canadian Armed Forces who is taking a military history course at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo.

He's one of 4,800 people a year who are discovering how adaptable part-time studies at Laurier can be — especially the Telecollege courses offered through the university's distance education program.

"It works very well into my schedule," said the 32-year-old husband and father of two.

So well, he fit a textbook into his Spartan field bag — along with one change of underwear and shaving gear — when his brigade of 5,000 went on training manoeuvres near Wainwright, Alta., this spring.

Off duty, he read in the tented camp. During the exercises when his tank sat camouflaged and awaiting further instructions, he would pull out the text — but only after laboriously washing the tank grease, diesel fuel, and explosive powder from his hands.

Then, wearing his green combat uniform and a headset to follow the battle exercise, he studied the history of the Canadian army in Northwest Europe during the Second World War. At night in tactical situations, a red lens covered the flashlight he used for reading.

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"The technology has changed but the basics are still the same," Grodzinski said.

"There are still basic principles and rules you can draw out and apply to what we are doing 50 years later."

Commander of the "A" squadron of Lord Strathcona's Horse, Grodzinski is responsible for the personnel administration, training, and operational readiness of a unit with 90 troops and 18 tanks.

A history enthusiast, Grodzinski enrolled in the course in late March after reading about it in *Canadian Military History*, a journal published by the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies. He earned a bachelor of arts in political science from McMaster University before joining the army in 1983 and wants to improve his standing for graduate studies at the Royal Military College in Kingston.

Grodzinski said the package of Telecollege materials — including the texts, seven video programs, and a study guide — is comprehensive and provides good direction for his studies.

"It's very interesting information," he said. "The readings offer good perspective on the preparation and training of the army, and role of the different commanders — both at the regimental level and for the army as a whole."

Most of his earlier reading was accomplished on manoeuvres or during the half-hour allotted to study on those days he's in the office. He watches the videos on Wednesday evenings when his wife, who is in the militia, is on parade and his toddlers are tucked in bed.

Because manoeuvres made him miss the first of two telephone conferences with the professor and other students, Grodzinski was sent a cassette tape of the session. "The support is really good," he said.

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In fact, when his responsibilities forced him to ask for the mid-term exam to be delayed, Laurier's office of continuing education reached him in the tented camp to make the arrangements. Those included having an army major act as proctor, and — in what is probably a rare instance — putting the examination under military guard until its writing.

Already the course has helped Grodzinski in his secondary duty as his regiment's officer for Calgary's Museum of the Regiments, where he is responsible for administering the budget and policies, and developing displays for that unit.

He is using the reading material and his own notes to better respond to requests for information and to improve the group tours he leads. "The course is enhancing my ability to talk about the history of the other units," said Grodzinski, who will become the assistant director for the entire museum in September.

This fall and winter, Laurier will offer 40 courses over cable television or through the home viewing of videotapes. And while Grodzinski still has to write a 10-page essay and final examination for this course, he's already looking forward to tracking through a second one.

***Note: A photograph of Grodzinski studying on a tank will follow this news release.***