

Chapter 19: 1969

Before carrying on, it is time to report some events that took place at the close of the previous year.

Lorne leaves the corps

To the disappointment of all, Lorne Ferrazzutti left the Optimists. He was one of two people, still with the Corps, who had been with it from the beginning; from before, if you count the Danforth Crusaders. The other one was Barry Bell. During all these years, Lorne had worked for the Loblaws Supermarket chain. Last year, he had been promoted, not for the first time, within this organization. The difference this time was that his hours in his new job would conflict with those required by the Corps.

Since the early days, the Corps had greatly increased its rehearsal hours to maintain, or even improve, its standing. The Corps, though, had never been a livelihood, and something had to give. Any sensible person would have made the correct choice, which was to drop the Corps in favour of the job. Lorne was, above all, sensible. It did not mean that he would be entirely out of Corps, or a related activity, but just not with the Optimists.

Fortunately for the Corps, there was someone willing to take over. Ron Kaiser, a pupil of Lorne, was now experienced at writing and instructing for a drum line. For the purpose of this tale, however, Lorne cannot be dismissed quite so briefly.



1969: Lorne watching Del perform

Lorne began instructing with the Danforth Crusaders and had been the drum instructor of the Optimists since the original merger. He had also played with and instructed both the Jesters and Commanders. During the long winning streak enjoyed by the Optimists, his drum lines had often been a deciding factor. The rest of the Corps always pulled its weight, but if things were even, the drum scores would tip the balance. This had happened at the last Nationals. Along the way, there had been assistance from talented, ambitious individuals, plus many extra hours put in, voluntarily, by his drum lines. Everything, though, was under the guidance and control of Lorne. More than this, he was a friend to many. If you wanted to learn to read music, most could not, he would take the time to teach you. Never loud or outgoing, his name was well known all over, partly by the success of his drum lines. I could go on a lot longer, but I believe the appropriate picture has been drawn. His shoes would be filled, but not easily. As with other instructors in the past, his loss was a major blow.

Barry Bell had taken a leave of absence last year, but would return this year. He had been reportedly ready to leave in 1961-62 but Corps members had a special meeting, in a restaurant, to see what could be done to prevent this. It was a measure of the esteem in which he was held.

This was to be a year when many problems would arise, some of a novel nature. To handle these, there was an experienced executive at hand.

- Director Don Daber (his seventh year)
- Assistant Director.. . . . Al Tierney
- Assistant Director.. . . . Clare Reid
- Business Manager Cliff Billington
- Secretary Treasurer Dick Brown
- Director Cadet Corps. . . . Greg Tierney

These men were all experienced with Drum Corps.

The Business Manager announced that twenty contests had been lined up for this year, so the schedule looked good. Every second Wednesday, a bingo was being run by the executive for fund raising. Things looked okay, despite the loss of certain people. It was not until February that the first sign of problems appeared.

Poor Turnouts

An open letter to the horn line appeared in G.C.C., requesting people come out to practice. Although things usually did slow down in the winter months, this had never before been necessary. Due to poor attendance, there was a corresponding lack of progress in many sections. A final reminder was that the Corps was expected to win the Nationals for the twelfth time.

This and all the new rules laid down since 1964 may have been part of the reason for this attitude. People can only take so much.

The propaganda machine was working full blast now, with most of its output directed at the all-important number 12. It was additional pressure to maintain an incredible record and was to be the focal point of the Optimists existence this year.

One step taken to promote the improvement of the Corps was the setting up of a “Junior Advisory Board”. More bureaucracy. Its first session was held in March 1969. All in attendance were members of the executive, or Corps members who were acting as board members. Don Daber, of course, was chairman. The stated purpose was to make a better Corps and, of course, title #12.

Part of these objectives was to establish a closer working relationship between the Corps itself and the executive.



1969: Toronto Optimists

The duties of the board, in addition to holding regular meetings, were to oversee just about everything. This included initiations, sale of rookies, assisting of rookies, spirit on trips, camp, home, trip holdovers, bus, Corps dinner, social events, setting an example and publishing the “inside” paper. Phew! Never before had such a concerted effort been made to ensure a specific outcome. Never before had it been thought necessary. There were, as well, other things, and all this pointed to a degree of sophistication never before attempted with this Corps. Comparing this with the 1958 Corps reveals almost two different units. The original Corps just went out and did what it was designed for. Everything else was handled by one small executive. Most of the things just mentioned did not exist. If the Optimists had not grown in the complex fashion outlined, it is possible that they would not now be chasing title number twelve. It was now a different era that required different techniques to survive and prosper.

The Competition

Uptown, the perennial rivals of the Optimists, De La Salle, were far from idle. They were planning to use an eighteen to twenty piece percussion section, and were getting anywhere from thirty-six to forty-five horns at rehearsal. Last year, they had come so close to winning the National title they could taste it and they would not rest until they had it.

Nothing was known yet of La Salle Cadets, who were never to be discounted. Being as far away as they were, information was harder to come by.

Finances & Fund Raising

Prior to the February 9th issue of G.C.C. “inside” urging better horn line attendance at rehearsals, an edition had stressed fund raising. This year it was to be selling chemical fertilizer, a scheme to help grease the financial wheels. The Cadets had used this method the previous year, raising \$2,000 in two weeks.

Money raised in this fashion was used for items not covered in the Optimist Club budget. Among these were a truck subsidy for gas and upkeep. The Corps now had an equipment truck. They occasionally had use of one in the past but it was owned by a member. Now a truck belonged to the Corps, as did all the expenses involved. Midwest trips always took extra funds. Because the Corps had not fared very well in the Midwest, competition-wise, and prize money was not enough. The crowds, however, loved them.



1969: Optimists Cadets in Batavia

The Nationals now entailed more than a Saturday morning to Saturday evening excursion and a hotel stay was required.

There was also money needed to buy things to sell. In other words, money to make money. These and other things were the reason that extra money was needed and raised. In the future, finance was to bring a great upheaval in the Corps operation.

Corps jackets this year cost a member thirteen dollars, with an eleven-year crest on it for an additional dollar fifty. Anybody who buys such things these days can only gasp at these prices. Such is progress.

Another sign of the times was that the Corps now preferred to hold closed rehearsals. This had never before been a regular habit of this Corps, but with the tightness of things now, it might have been a good idea.

An aid to this trend was the fact that the Optimists were now the only Corps in Toronto to have the use of an armoury. This was a definite advantage. This fact also made full turnouts a necessity for the dates on which they were available.

Saturday, March 15, was set aside as “Fertilizer Blitz Day” and was listed as a compulsory event for all. This was one way to ensure some sales and was similar to the method used to sell peanuts in 1961. That, though, was never compulsory, just voluntary and an indication of how things had changed.

A tradition begun a few years earlier was to be continued on April 13th at the Shrine. This was the now familiar “selling of rookies” ceremony. New guys, or rookies, would be bought by an old guy for one dollar. It was the duty of the old guy to teach the rookie the ropes, while the rookie would become the obedient servant of the old hand. This practice was as much fun as anything else, never reaching the heights or depths sometimes practised in certain military academies or private schools.



1969: Toronto Optimists and Optimist Cadets at an Indoor Show

A practical side was that a new guy would have a mentor in the Corps who would assist him to adjust to its ways. He would, therefore, become a better “Optimist” quicker than if left alone. After a year, of course, he was no longer a rookie and became an old guy.

Another addition to Corps lore was the adoption of a Corps motto. It had taken a long time for this idea to take hold, the closest thing yet being the club motto, “Friend of the Boy”. Now, more fitting, the motto would be “Crede Quod Habes, Et Habes.” Properly motto-like stated in Latin, its English translation was “Believe you have it, and you have it”. It was an apt motto as, during recent years, if the Corps had not believed that they had it, then they would not have.

Winning the Circuit Guard Championship

March 22nd, Ottawa saw the Optimists Guard win, for the second year in a row, the Canadian Championship Guard Contest. They narrowly edged out De La Salle in the process.

For fun and spirit, the Corps held a rally night and party. This was a good thing considering all the work projects now in hand. This year's Ontario Individuals saw the Optimists fare quite well, amid the largest number of entrants yet recorded. Five first places capped a decent collection of placings in various categories. Highest scores were achieved in rifle and horn categories, reflecting quality in both the guard and horn line.



1969: Toronto Optimists Circuit Guard with trophy

Other Bits of News

Bernie Beer, the ageless, timeless, ex-Optimist Assistant Corps Director was now Chairman of the Board of the C.D.C.A. for 1969-70. He would guide it into the coming decade.

Recordings of the corps is a subject thus far neglected. For many years the Optimists had been recorded on top quality records. This year they were on them again, in very good company.

SuperRecords: The 4th Annual Shriners International: featuring Kilties, Boston, Optimists, La Salle Cadets

North American Invitational: featuring The Troopers, Vanguard, Optimists, De La Salle

Canadian Nationals: featuring Optimists, La Salle, Chatelaines, Commanders

These were just some of those on which they appeared. The presence of other Canadian Corps on these records shows how Drum Corps had grown and improved in Canada over the years.

Vern Johansson was leading the Corps on all these sessions. He had now been leading the Corps as either first or second Drum Major, longer than anyone else ever had. He was good at the job and had become a well-known figure in local circles.

The May 11th issue of Green Capsule Comments "Inside" detailed the events for this year's "long weekend" camp. This year, it was to be at the Ukrainian Youth Camp in Oakville, Ontario. These camps, for learning and polishing the show, were loads of fun and all sorts of things went on. De La Salle and Scarborough Firefighters Drum Corps were doing the same thing. The Scarborough Corps sponsored by the local fire department were not newcomers,

having originated in 1961. Although nobody could remotely foresee it now, they would one day play a very big part in the future of the Optimists.

Also in this issue of G.C.C. was a Corps quiz about the Optimists. Some of the answers are interesting and revealing.

Gord Robinson of the Shrine Connection was now an honorary member of the Toronto Optimists.

Since the original, 1952, beginning, there have been four changes of uniform: Boy Scout Uniform, Optimist Blue, Dark Green Blouse, Black Trousers; Present Blouse, Black Trousers.



1969: Toronto Optimists mellos (Bob, Brian & Rick)

The Optimists introduced rudimental bass drum in 1964. Into Canada that is. Blessed Sacrament had been using them since 1962.

Eleven buttons had been issued one for each National Championship.

Booster material sold over the years included; buttons, crests, records, lighters, money (fake), pennants, pens, calendars, photos, decal, posters. You did not have to be a salesman in this Corps, but it helped.

The best years in the Corps history were said to be 1962 and 1968. Only one contest was lost in 1962, and 1968 saw the Corps lose five in a row, only to pull up to win the Nationals. A footnote to this is that the 1962 Corps is still talked about today, and not only by ex-Optimists.

Of the people in and instructing the Corps in those days, only three were now left. These were Barry Bell, Joe Gianna, and Ron Kaiser. All were now instructors.

Other instructors for this year were:

- ▶ Jack Roberts: Drill Director and Writer, with Don Cooper and Bob Davidson
- ▶ John MacDonald: Percussion, with Ron Kaiser

Most of these people were home grown types who had graduated from the playing ranks of the Corps itself. So far, except for the brief use of Vince Bruni on drill, it had always been this way.

The competition season was fast closing in. Everybody knew it was not going to be easy, and one of the first tests was to prove just that.

The Competition Season

June 8th saw Canadian Junior Corps square off in Batavia, N.Y., an early contest that would help set the pace for the season.

The results:

- 1st De La Salle. 75.70
- 2nd Geneva Appleknockers. . . . 71.90
- 3rd The Optimists. 70.85
- 4th Les Metropolitains. 67.20

Competition in the United States was on neutral territory, giving good indication of where one stood. As it stood, now, De La Salle had surged ahead of where they had left off last year, leaving the others choking in their dust. Messrs. McKolskey, Clark and company had done a good job. It was going to be a tough year. Both Corps were well matched in size, with field numbers in the eighties. Equality also extended to colour and performance. Visual performance, that is. The judges' pads had told a different story.

Les Metropolitains were quite a way back but would close up later, as was now becoming a trademark of Quebec Corps.

Prior to this show, at the same location, there had been a standstill contest between the Optimist Cadets and the feeder Corps of St. Josephs. The Optimist unit was seen to be more advanced and could have competed at Junior "B" level if they had a drill.

Les Metropolitains sprung a surprise when they edged De La Salle in Rochester, N.Y. Del, on a roll this year, were to be called the new power in Canada. For Mets to beat them was quite an accomplishment.

Del was using over thirty people in their colour guard this year and reversed a long-standing trend. The Optimists might follow suit. This fact was an indication of how things were changing in regards to size. The fact that the Optimists were following, rather than leading, was a sign of how other things were changing as well.



1969: Les Metropolitains

Drum line changes were now evident, getting into varied instrumentation. Tympanis and double bass, four at a time, by Del and the Optimists, respectively, were in use. It was not that many years before when only three snare, three tenor, two bass, and one cymbal were used, if you could find them. Such an arrangement would never be seen again among the more competitive Corps.

There was, around this time, a reunion of Optimist Alumnae. Dennis DeCarli, one of the original members of the Corps, was in charge of this. If the ship appeared to be sinking, at least the rats were not leaving. Most Optimist Alumnae were pretty loyal and were often seen at shows and contests.

It is worth noting that at any Optimist reunion, big or small, the reigning topic of conversation is always the Corps. No matter that some of them are now presidents, vice-presidents, have their own businesses, or have not much at all. After five to ten minutes the Corps, once again, is the main interest for the next couple of hours, or until the beer runs out.

This was to be a pivotal year in Canadian Drum Corps, even historic. Sadly, the telling will suffer due to information being somewhat sparse. That is unfortunate. This situation will occur again, regarding future years. Then, as now, we shall do the best with what we have. Here goes!

The Shrine Show

Before a crowd of 17,000 excited fans, this year's Shriners International took place. All but one of the Canadian entries did well, placing closer to their American counterparts than usual. The Optimists were among them and, although third in the top three Canadian entries, they had improved a great deal from Batavia.



1969: Toronto Optimists (Shriners show)

The four top placings, held by the Americans, ranged in score from Kilties with 80.95, in first, Boston 79.05, second, Blessed Sacrament 78.80, third, and St. Josephs 75.56. Fifth was De La Salle, with 74.30, leading the rest. Next, came La Salle Cadets, with 73.66, followed by the Optimists at 73.65, barely in seventh. These three Canadian units were all within less than one point of each other. Les Metropolitains were so far back as to be out of contention, yet not so long ago they were nudging De La Salle. A strange business this is.

De La Salle's horn line was said to be a match for any of the Americans at this show. Also noted was the great improvement of the Optimists. This observation was borne out by the scores of this competition.

Don Daber was still the director. He had taken over when the Corps was the undisputed number one in Canada. The last couple of years had been shaky, and this one looked as if it might be even shakier. A lesser person might have quit. Not him! If things became less rosy, he would still be there. Don was an unsung hero. Green Capsule Comments was still stressing the "on to #12" theme. Well, it was coming, that was unavoidable, but the outcome, right now, was beyond prediction. Recent scores showed the three main contenders to be candidates for top honours. Significantly, though, no other Canadian Corps had yet beaten De La Salle in Canada. Les Metropolitains had done it in Rochester, but they were now out of contention.

Still definitely in the race were De La Salle, La Salle Cadets, and the Optimists. Now a familiar scene, it was anybody's year. The face of Canadian Junior Drum Corps had changed forever.

Though the Optimists, who could rightly claim the sixties as their decade, might not like it, the change was for the better. No one could now be considered a sure-fire winner in all-Canadian contests. This situation made for very exciting and entertaining shows.

These statements do not belittle what the Optimists had accomplished in the past. That was a phenomenal achievement, not likely to be repeated. Thus far, it has not been. The big winners from this change were, without doubt, the fans. They got more for their money, with nail-biting results and better shows.



1969: Toronto Optimists (Batavia)

Shows in the U.S.

Two major contests in the United States showed how close things were.

- ▶ De La Salle, at the World Open, 10.70 out of first place.
- ▶ The Optimists, at the U.S. Open, 9.84 out of first place. A difference of only 0.86

These shows were held on August 15th and 16th, not that far from “Number 12”.

At the World Open, two California Corps began their ascent. This leak would become a flood.

Due to lack of information about this year, it is impossible to do justice to all the events that took place. All that can be said with any accuracy is that towards the end of the season things got even closer. Also, as the Canadian Nationals approached, no Canadian Corps had defeated De La Salle in Canada. Del had even won the CNE Contest for the first time since 1961. All other years it had been an Optimist preserve.

Thankfully, we do have an account of the all-important Canadian Nationals. This promised to be the most hair-raising one yet, mainly because the reigning champions had not yet been able to defeat their greatest rivals. Yet, there was a good chance it could be done. It would call for a supreme effort.

The 1969 Nationals

For the Optimists, the whole year had been geared towards this contest. The #12 campaign was constantly promoted through the pages of Green Capsule Comments “Inside” editions. Along with this, almost every day of the two weeks, up to and including this contest, was laid out in detail. Rehearsals times, meeting times, arrival times, leaving times, eating times. Nothing was missed. It would have done any army proud. As mentioned before, with sparse information being available, no information regarding the preliminaries is currently available. Diminishing this omission is the fact that prelims are often indecisive, results often being overturned. It is

the all-important finals that count.

The Finals, Ottawa, Ontario, 1969

Although La Salle Cadets were definitely in the picture as championship contenders, all eyes were inevitably focussed on the Optimists and De La Salle. There was something here that was above the commonplace. These two fine Corps had been going at each other for close to eleven years now. If there had sometimes been bad blood between the two, and there had, the reverse was also true. If one of them had not been at this affair, it would have seemed somewhat unreal.



1969: Toronto Optimists Drum Line

Both Corps were extremely nervous, though for different reasons. For the Optimists, it was the same reason that had existed for the last eleven years. Their National title was at stake. De La Salle knew that this was the best chance they had ever had to win this coveted title which had always eluded them, sometimes by only a hair's breadth. They had beaten the Optimists ten times this year yet, without this one, it would mean little. De La Salle wanted this title more than anything else.

All the proceedings of the evening would be conducted in an atmosphere of electric tension. La Salle Cadets put on an excellent performance, in front of a hometown crowd. It ranked with anybody and made it evident that the outcome would not become known until the retreat.



1969: Toronto Optimists On The Line (Nationals)

When the Optimists entered the field, they were met with dead silence until they stepped off the line to "Hang 'em High". It was apparent to all that everyone was giving of their utmost and little, if any, booing was heard this year. This Corps was putting its heart and soul into its performance, one that outdid all previous ones this year. This observation was unanimous.

Then, of course, De La Salle took the field. No doubt due to nervous tension, it was noted that they did not put on as good a show as they had on previous occasions. It was, however, a match for anyone else. The outcome, as yet, was undetermined. Until the retreat, that is.

The Retreat

Above all, this was a judges' contest. Uninvolved with records, nerves, emotions, tensions, and fears, they do their job as required. In the process, they determine who was the best on a given night. On this night there was no obvious, clear-cut winner. It would all be left to the fine points on the score sheets.

The announcer began his slow, tantalizing climb up the score sheets. When he got to third, there was a visible heightening of tension throughout the entire stadium.

In third place, it was announced, with a score of 78.45, a pause, then, the La Salle Cadets. They had performed well, but their time had not yet come.

Then another, greater, increase in suspense, as Drum Corps history hung in the balance.

In second place, a pause, with a score of 80.80, and in first place with a score of 80.85. It was agonizing.

In second place, with a score of 80.80, from Toronto (both corps were from Toronto)



1969: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Ottawa)

Then *The Optimists!*

For a while, that was as far as the announcer got, as immediate bedlam took place. De La Salle displayed what was probably the greatest display of controlled frenzy ever seen on a Drum Corps field. Twelve years of frustration and disappointment exploded, as everything went up in the air, yet without breaking ranks.

They had finally done it. They had defeated the Optimists at the Canadian National Championship. It had not come easily. The crowd reaction was generally favourable, though definitely not unanimous. This had been a hard fought affair, as the margin of victory, or defeat, showed. It was only 0.50 but it meant everything!

De La Salle were to be congratulated. If they had not earned it, they would not have won. They had finally overcome the jinx of the "2nd place" feeling, clearing the psychological barriers to the road ahead. Now they could, and would, rise to even greater heights.

What about the Optimists? Were they now just another Drum Corps? Hardly!



1969: De La Salle (Batavia)



1969: Toronto Optimists drums at practice

The greatest Nationals winning streak ever seen in Drum Corps had finally come to an end. As they stood silently on the field, contemplating their fate, no doubt some members felt a heavy responsibility. They would be known as the ones who lost, broke the record, smeared the streak. In retrospect, none of them should have felt this way. In truth no other drum corps in competitive history has achieved what the Optimists had achieved.

All the changes in style, instruments, planning, and myriad other things had been absorbed, mastered, and successfully presented for almost twelve years. After leading the way in many of these things, they now had absolutely nothing to be ashamed of. In the future, it would still be a feather in the cap of any Canadian Corps to beat the Optimists.

It would also lead to some unpleasantness, as others would take an opportunity, now and then, to deliberately slight or snub this Corps. This being one of the less admirable traits of human nature and Drum Corps are, after all, made up of human beings.

The Aftermath

For the first time in twelve years, the Optimists marched from the Nationals field second from last to cheers as well as boos. Not everyone, it turned out, agreed with the decision. What was seen were people removing Optimists buttons from their jackets and throwing them on the ground. Everyone loves a winner, and the Optimists no longer filled the bill. It's times like this when you find out who your real friends are.



1969: Toronto Optimists Colour Presentation (Nationals)

Barry Bell who, earlier this year, had reverted to bugle instructor from music director, looked wistfully at his busload of proteges. For him, too, it was an occasion. His time had come, as one day he must have surely known it would. At least he had the consolation of knowing the Corps that had beaten his was partly taught by ex-members of his Corps.

When heads and hearts had cooled down, acting like the champions they had once been, a group of Optimists visited their conquerors to offer congratulations. Such a gesture was not uncommon and reflected well on the Corps. De La Salle had acted in a similar fashion in 1961, as had Scout House in 1958.

The subdued bus trip home was punctuated with pity comments – “I’m sorry”, “It won’t happen again”, “I let you down”, “What happened”, etc., etc., etc. The debates would go on for years.

The Explanation

With the advent of new instructors to both of the Corps under examination, certain things happened to both that contributed to this year’s result. No one was to blame. It just happened. Drums had usually been the Optimists strong point. They had from the beginning used a closed style of drumming. It was better for execution.

This year, they had switched to a more open style, flashier, but more difficult to execute accurately. On the other side, De La Salle had adopted a more closed style, which was better adapted to good execution scores.

Oddly enough, it was not this factor that caused the battle to be lost. Where it occurred was in the general effect drum caption.

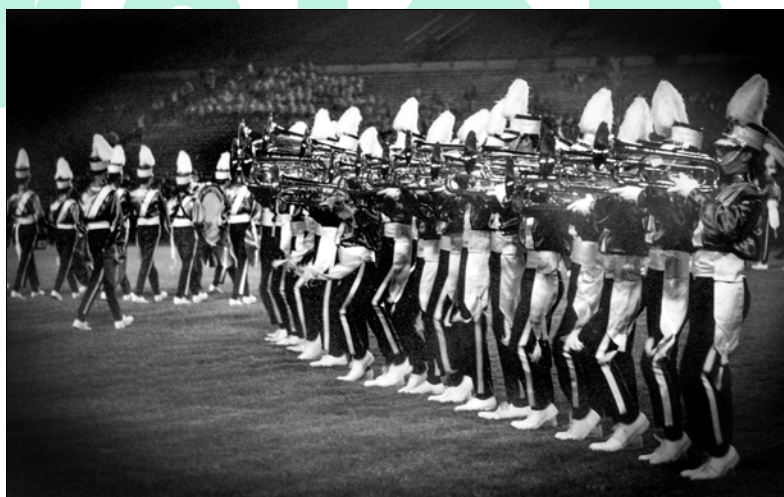
Different composition of lines of both Corps gave rise to one judge, an American, preferring one to the other. The result was a large spread in the general effect drum score. All other things being equal, this was where the contest was lost. De La Salle had won the trophy for best horn line and the Optimists that for best marching and maneuvering.

A quick glance back at the year shows that the Optimists did not defeat De La Salle once this year. So the end result could hardly be called a surprise. What occurred was a near miracle that made things very exciting.

Downright, cold, light of day analysis of the effect of this year has to show that what happened was probably for the best. For any activity to be dominated by one organization for so long is not healthy for the overall activity. That the Optimists finally lost was good for the Canadian Junior Drum Corps movement. It opened the door for others, as well as De La Salle, to contemplate chances of winning in the future. Others would rise, on their own initiative, not



1969: Toronto Optimists (Batavia)



1969: Toronto Optimists (Shrine show)

because the Optimists were gone. They were not. It had been shown that they were, after all, not invincible, and the field was now open to all comers. This still included the Optimists, who were now back in the pack where they had not been for a long time. How they were to fare in this unaccustomed position, we shall shortly explore.

Rounding out the year were two events, one with an appropriate name, whose meaning was altered by this year's events.

The Optimist Cadet Dance, billed as a "Celebrate the 12th" dance, was intended as a celebration of the twelfth title. Instead, it became a celebration of September 12th, the date on which it was held.

Secondly, the 8th Annual Corps Dinner was held to present annual awards and present plans for the future. For the first time, it was not a victory dinner. Corpsman of the Year Award was presented here, decided by a vote of the members themselves. Considering the effort that must have been put out by more than one person, in order to come so close, starting from so far back, this could have been a multiple award.

Now the year was over. It was time to lick wounds, relax for a while, and for those who were still of age, still interested, to contemplate next year. There would be no campaign for thirteen, at least comparable to that for twelve. It was possible that some in the Corps were glad of this. The pressure was off and no doubt some were relieved. They could go back to square one and begin again. The shoe was now on the other foot. The Optimist were history. They were legend, too.

Now, the Corps could move on to a different future.



1969: Toronto Optimists (Shrine Contest)