

I can't believe three months in the desert translated into this.

Mr. Minister? *Now* can I get that interview?

In all seriousness, everyone must have goals in life. To me, there can be no higher calling than to report back to Canadians the activities of their countrymen on the field of battle. Ross Munro, of course, did it better than anyone – *anywhere*. It is a measure of the respect with which he is still held, years after his death, that I have been receiving phone calls and letters and e-mails from across the country congratulating me on this great honour ever since it was announced more than a month ago. Ross Munro's name has given this award immediate currency and credibility. I am deeply honoured and deeply touched to receive it from Mrs. Munro and Mrs. Purdy. I thank you ladies for being here, and I thank the Conference of Defence Associations and the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute for this great award. Congratulations to Col. Fraser.

There are a few people I want to acknowledge and thank.

First, the commander of Canadian Forces in Afghanistan, Lt.-Col. Pat Stogran, who is here tonight. He has my undying respect not only as a brave warrior, but as a fearless decision-maker. He opened his camp to me and other journalists and I am convinced that Canadians would not know or understand nearly as much about their Canadian Forces today if it had not been for him. Certainly, I would not be standing here tonight. And I hope the chief of defence staff and the minister will see that freedom of access is the most effective way to elicit coverage of the Canadian Forces.

I thank *all* the members of the 3 PPCLI Battle Group, especially Captain Ryan Latinovich and the members of Recce Platoon who let me come along on the Whale's Back for five days last March. They were courageous professionals and great *Canadians*.

I want to acknowledge the four brave soldiers who died – Sgt. Marc Leger, Cpl. Ainsworth Dyer, Pte. Richard Green and Pte. Nathan Smith – and the eight who were wounded, especially Sgt. Lorne Ford. And I want to thank their company commander, Major Sean Hackett, who spoke to me as soon as it was humanly possible to do so after that terrible tragedy of April 18th and encouraged his mourning troops to talk to me.

I want to thank CP for having the faith in me to send me to Afghanistan and I want to tell my senior bosses who are here tonight that I am ready to do it again in Iraq or wherever the winds may take us. I also want to acknowledge the efforts of two exceptional CP employees – Nahlah Ayed and John Ward. Nahlah was in Afghanistan for three months before Canadian troops arrived. Then she relieved me for three more months in May. Nahlah bore the brunt of the hot Afghan summer – 50-degree days, day after day. *Newswise*, I happened to be there for the best three months. I am lucky enough to work right next to John Ward, who some of you undoubtedly already know. Not only is he the best defence writer in the country, I happen to think he's one of the two best writers in CP.

I also want to thank Garth Pritchard for his companionship and guidance. We worked together in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Some of you may have seen his documentaries on *History Television*

last Monday night. There is no one, save for a Canadian soldier, with whom I would sooner venture into hostile lands.

Finally, I want to say something about my beautiful wife, Lise. We were married last New Year's Eve. Six weeks later, I went away to war for three months. I was speaking to some military wives the other night about the fact they live on a base and thereby have a built-in support network of like-minded people who are facing similar fears and circumstances. In this way, the wives of war correspondents are on their own. Lise was a pillar of strength and support throughout my time away. She distributed a sort of family newsletter. She was on the phone constantly. She was outstanding. And, as you can see here tonight, she *is* outstanding. Thank you, Sweetheart. Je t'aime de tout mon coeur.

Thank you all.