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TOPIC/SUJET: LGen J.M.C. Couture Addresses the Conference of Defence Associations

AGENCY/AGENCE: MediaQin

DATE-TIME/DATE-HEURE: 22 11h45 Feb 02

REFERENCE: 02022208

Lieutenant-General J.M.C. Couture Addresses the Conference of Defence Associations

Moderator: Now his service in his early years was very largely -- well, was with the Royal 22nd Regiment but mainly with 2 Battalion. At the start of his career he had a number of battalion appointments as a young lieutenant and captain and I can quite imagine that he moved around a fair amount within the battalion at various appointments that enhanced and developed him as a young officer. But other appointments that he has had over the years include an appointment as a company commander, as a battalion commander, as a brigade deputy commander, as a brigade commander and as the commander of a multinational brigade in the former Yugoslavia consisting of Canadian, UK and Czech forces. Now all of his career has not been on that operational side because other highlights of his career include a stint as a DS at the Toronto Command and Staff College. He attended a Camberley Staff Course in the UK and he has had and held various, numerous staff appointments at the brigade level, at land forces headquarters and at NDHQ. Now presently he is the Assistant Deputy Minister, Human Resources - Military. But if you ask him, with all that history of command and operations, if you ask him what he does, he will answer with a very simple and very concise answer. He will say, "I work with people." So with that introduction it is my pleasure to introduce General Couture. Would you give him a very good CDA welcome?

LGen J.M.C. Couture: General Belzile, General Evraire, colleagues, confrères, ladies and gentlemen. First of all thank you very much for these kind remarks of introduction and I'm sure that your selection to be the one to introduce me had to do with my height so we didn't have to play with the microphone. And being the last speaker of the morning I feel like being the only obstacle between you and a great lunch so therefore I'll try to keep my remarks as short as possible.

I wish to thank the organization for giving me the opportunity to address the subject of combat capability from a human resources perspective. But before I begin I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you for the important role that you play in keeping the Canadian public aware of the defence issue. So many thanks to all your efforts.

Now like General Jeffery I will be using high technology, not because I'm a high tech guy, it's because it's simpler for me to follow a pattern. But also like my colleagues I will be talking about only one subject, I will talk about people. In fact General Jeffery mentioned in his opening remarks that the world was changing, defending what my colleagues from the army, navy and air force were saying. But there was one subject in common from all three of them, they all talk about people, and that's my business - people - and their business as well.

So combat capability is more than weaponry and practical knowledge. And it's clearly

articulated in a quote that I got from Wellington. In June 1815 à la veille de la bataille de Waterloo le duc de Wellington il se promenait dans les rues de Belgique, de Bruxelles avec un ami et son compagnon lui demanda quelle était la foi qu'il avait l'affrontement imminent contre Napoléon. Le duc se préparait à répondre puis il cherchait une réponse lorsqu'il a vu passer un soldat britannique au bout de la rue et en le pointant du doigt il dit, "That's the man that will make the difference. They will win the battle." So what he said then was true but is as true again today. And as the ADM HR - Mil or as chief of military personnel as I said my business is people.

Mon rôle dans le maintien de la capacité de combat des Forces canadiennes est d'être efficace dans la gestion de nos ressources humaines. Ainsi la mission du groupe des ressources humaines militaires est telle qu'articulée sur cette diapositive, en fait élaborer et mettre en oeuvre des plans, des politiques, des programmes visant à recruter, perfectionner et à maintenir en poste des gens aptes à appuyer efficacement les Forces armées dans les opérations et dans l'accomplissement des missions de défense du Canada.

C'est de cette mission que découle le travail quotidien de tous mes gens. Cette mission peut aussi être considérée comme un appui à la mission de chacun des commandants des armées par la satisfaction des besoins fondamentaux en ressources humaines des Forces canadiennes et ce qui contribue à la capacité de combat global.

It's important to note that the term "Canadian Forces" is inclusive of both the regular and the reserve. Now more than ever, and as it was shown with the previous speaker, there's an increasing reliance upon the use of the reserve force and we must address the need of both our personnel resource base - the regular force and the reserve force. Each has common and diverse requirements that must be addressed. Remember, though, that the command and control of each reserve element belongs to the environmental chiefs and not all central HR functions are done from the centre.

Notre vision des ressources humaines témoigne de la façon dont nous l'avons et nous avons l'intention de nous acquitter de notre mission. Une vision claire et compréhensive des ressources humaines est requise afin de rassembler tous les membres des Forces canadiennes et de servir de guide au développement de la politique, programmes et activités. Notre vision est prendre soin de nos gens, investir en eux et leur donner confiance dans l'avenir.

Le groupe des ressources humaines se voit assigné les responsabilités suivantes: recrutement, formation, instruction, politique, planification, carrières, rémunération, avantages sociaux, spiritualité, services de santé, qualité de vie, soutien du personnel, histoire, patrimoine et on inclut récemment le cimetière national.

The fact is, however, that people as a resource cannot be managed the same as other resources are managed. You cannot manage people like trucks or spare parts. Simply put, trucks break down and lose value through the years but people, because they learn, can become more valuable over time. The cost of a broken person is far more than the cost of a replacement piece of equipment. Thus, the management of military human resources is extremely complex. Our people are a dynamic, not a static, resource and, as such, demand a

dynamic system of management capable of providing the needs of the Canadian Forces members over the life of a career. In order to attract, develop and retain the best people and to inspire the best in those people to maintain our combat capability, the military human resources group has a strategy to effectively manage this important resource.

We believe that any human resources strategy for the Canadian Forces has to be developed while taking into consideration the delicate balance between missions, Canadian society and its people. We must never forget that our sole role is to support this mission - in other words, the primacy of operation. However, in my organization we do that by ensuring that personnel policies and programs are developed to support the mission without sacrificing the people. We need to go beyond the philosophy of tradeoffs in order to ensure that meet all our obligations including embedding the concept of the total force in the HR world. We have developed a comprehensive HR strategy which focusses on both near term and long term needs and goals. This strategy is supported by a long term human resources funding plan in which we have knitted together over 130 different projects and initiatives into a consolidated HR strategy.

J'aimerais maintenant vous parler de quelques instants des défis majeurs auxquels nous devons faire face et de la façon dont on s'y est attaqué et on s'y attaque. Nous avons défini six termes ou défis fondamentaux qui orientent nos activités et nous permettent d'établir nos tâches, nos projets et nos ressources pour les cinq prochaines années. À partir de chacun de ces sujets nous avons identifiés des défis spécifiques auxquels nous faisons face et de la façon dont nous allons les solutionner. Puisque le temps ne me permet pas de couvrir tous les systèmes je vais me limiter au recrutement, au maintien en poste, au perfectionnement et aux soins de la santé.

The most pressing challenges that employers in all sectors face is the recruitment of new employees. Indeed voluntary military forces around the world are also facing recruitment difficulties. In Canada our changing demographics resulting in an aging and shrinking workforce coupled with a strong economy and other factors is presenting a very, very great challenge to our recruiters.

In response to these challenges we have implemented a plan to attract, recruit, process and train an expanded intake of officers and non-commissioned members to restore the strength of the Canadian Forces to its authorized level of 60,000. The other major elements of the campaign are shown on the slide and include the substantial increase in our advertising and attraction campaigns and the addition of personnel and resources to the recruiting group. Additionally we are working diligently to streamline the administration of the recruiting processes to reduce bottlenecks and delays. Some of the processes have been developed to the reserve units and we have seen positive progress in both reserve and regular numbers and time to enrollment. Competent transfers have been streamlined to provide a more seamless transition from the primary reserve to the regular force and vice versa. Skilled members of the CF are vital to both components and we must ensure that we take advantage of that.

Partnerships with colleges have been developed to recognize and accredit civilian levels of competence and education and we have introduced recruiting incentives to alleviate critical

shortages in specific regular forces occupations. We are also reaching out to the ethnic communities in a variety of ways including ethnic media days, translating recruiting materials into ethnic languages to anchor support from elders and parents and expanding also our defence visible minority advisory group. We recognize that the Canadian Forces of the future will need the support of these communities and the diverse skills they can bring to bear if we want to maintain operationally effective.

Thus far we are seeing success to our effort. On the recruiting front the 7,000 target for the regular force is at 85% success as I speak and at the reserve we expect to go to 4,200, i.e., 1,200 over the target of 3,000. But that doesn't -- it's not the end of it because the campaign is a sustained one for at least the next three years and we do have challenges in specific occupations, mainly highly technical trades for which we are not as successful as we would like to. And that's the reason why we have introduced some incentive measures for officers, mainly engineers. We have just started to do that so I'll know in about two or three months' time how successful this portion of our strategy is working.

Now to complement on the recruitment challenges is the retention of skilled talents. It doesn't take rocket science to come to the conclusion that increased retention rates reduce the need to recruit. As the Canadian Forces is attractive to many potential recruits and also to prospective outside employers due to the training and development that we provide, other employers may attempt to actively lure Canadian Forces members away, like the pilot occupation, for example, but that's not the only one. We are losing people in technical trades. It could be from plumbing to medical prevention technician to aviation technician to communication and so on. So the challenge, as I said, is not just to recruit and train but especially to retain those skilled members that we need to meet our operational demand. So to do this, we need to address the retention challenges before us which include issues surrounding the cycle of operations, the cycle of deployment, operational stresses like PTSD and the support to the members and families. In the reserve force the challenges of retention are further compounded by the competing demands of civilian and military careers and the requirement to strike a balance that would enhance retention and continued contribution to the forces.

Integral to any retention strategy is the understanding of why people leave. To obtain the answer, survey data collected of departing CF members were analysed and we determined the major reasons why people leave. In the regular force 45% of those who are leaving left because of pressures on families and family life. Career discontent was for another 26%. Also what was surprising, to me anyway, that substantially more people left to find a different challenging job, more of those people than they left for money. So at least we fixed that one for the time being. While some of these factors are the same for the reserve, additional reasons include lack of meaningful training or employment, conflict with civilian commitments and the need for a part-time job with more hours and predictable employment.

In considering these figures you should know that all the respondents had more than one reason for leaving the Canadian Forces. This suggests that no one policy or program in a single area is likely to reduce attrition rates significantly thus lower attrition rates require a wide array of measures. The goal is to make a career with the forces as effective as other

career options and as easy to explore. What is required is an effective balance of compensation and benefits, career opportunities, innovative training delivery and a work environment that allows members to realize positive quality of life for themselves and their families. We are revising terms of service, offering a wider range of entry choices and we have increased the retirement age. We are redesigning the system of military occupation structure to provide the flexibility and range of career possibilities needed to appeal to the interests of a broad segment of the Canadian population. We have launched a professional development strategy for both officers and NCM. We are committed to a competitive compensation and benefits such as the new cost of living allowances and we have undertaken pension reforms to support both full and part-time personnel which allow for easy transfer between the regular and the reserve components.

The retention strategy also calls for modernization of employment policies to ensure fairness and equity with regular and reserve, both components. To maintain the morale and the well-being of our members and to appeal more strongly to a broader applicant pool, efforts must continue to focus on quality of life and also to address the deployment cycle or the operational tempo as it was alluded by General Jeffery.

Thus far we have seen some progress. In both the regular and the reserve force the rate of recruiting has exceeded the rate -- for the first time in nine years we have exceeded the rate of attrition. And so it means to me that only by investing in our people can we expect them to stay and invest in us.

Now I'm talking broadly for the overall Canadian Forces recruiting and attrition. But that doesn't mean that all my colleagues' problems are solved because we do have people in. There's the time of training and by the time that these people will be in the unit of the army, navy and air force, some other people will have left or will leave the service so the going back to the train, effective train of over 54,000 we predict will take up to three to four years maybe before we can get there. So therefore we're not declaring victory because we've had success this year. This is a sustained effort for the next three years as I said.

Attrition in the reserve is much higher than in the regular force for different reasons and also from a policy perspective we are trying to address that. Over the past two years, the Reserve Force Employment Project has reviewed all reserve employment policies with the goal of enhancing reserve attraction, employment, quality of life and ultimately the retention. This is the most comprehensive review of the reserve human resource policies that has been conducted to date and some of the major initiatives are being implemented now while others require a longer period of development prior to implementation.

Some other related initiatives also include civilian job reinstatement legislation in the event of a compulsory callout in an emergency which is part of Bill C-42, education reimbursement of up to \$8,000 to a reservist for an initial degree, Class C pay for all reserve personnel on operation with a domestic or deploy outside Canada. In fact General Jeffery did answer the question quite well on the Class B, Class C pay based on a policy perspective but the framework that we have put forward for operative commander to determine is that anybody who is on operation is a reservist that is paid Class C and we have developed a series of

criteria that will assist people to determine whether or not it is an operation for pay purposes. The physical or the geographical location of the operation becomes totally irrelevant for that point and it's the commanders of the army, navy and air force who decide, who determine if this is ops or not.

We're working also to improve access to benefits and personal support programs for reservists that are on Class A service. And as I already mentioned, the reserve pension plan is under development for implementation in the '04, '05 time frame as part of the overall Canadian Forces pension modernization project.

One of the greatest challenges facing the CF today also is professional development for the 21st century because as we have seen before, the equipment, the maintenance system of our equipment are becoming more and more technically advanced which will require highly skilled workers and leaders who are trained to operate and lead this increasingly technical force in a more and more complex environment. We must advance a system of professional development which supports the needs while keeping in step with civil interest and training delivery methods. In all cases the Canadian Forces must progress to a lifelong learning culture. But we must also -- we also need to balance the costs of training and the development with our members' needs and operations.

The effectiveness of the Canadian Forces depends largely upon the individual and collective knowledge and skills of our members. To invest in them, the Canadian Forces devotes considerable resources, especially in training and in professional development. Some of the initiatives that we are progressing include: the recent launch of Officership 2020, our strategy for officer and a similar program for non-commissioned members; the creation of the Canadian Defence Academy to act as the centre of excellence for education of both officers and non-commissioned members and in which we'll play a pivotal role in establishing and maintaining linkages to other military and civilian learning institutions; improving the quality and access to education by revising and updating the curriculum at the Royal Military College in Kingston and the Canadian Forces College in Toronto and through the creation of a defence learning network which capitalizes upon advances in information technology to function as a distant learning platform. By investing in our people with training and development we not only develop and maintain our people, but we hope that in return they will invest in us by staying. We see this as crucial in our retention strategy and to be able to meet the technological and resources challenge of the future.

In a profession that may require its members to go in harm's way, the risk of injury or illness is great. To maintain the morale of the Canadian Forces it's essential that adequate medical and health services be available at home and abroad. Reviews of the Canadian Forces health system have identified a need to reform and improve confidence in health services. The health and well-being of the Canadian Forces members is a prime concern of the leadership of the forces and one of my most important areas of responsibility. But we're facing many, many challenges.

We've made improvement of our health system -- the improvement of our health system has been made one of our major priorities and the latest project called Rx 2000 represents our

most ambitious effort to date, encompassing numerous initiatives. Instituting positive effective change within a health care system is a major undertaking but significant progress is being made. A few of the more significant areas where we are achieving success include: the Primary Care Renewal Project which is a series of initiatives to improve patient care; a series of force health protection initiatives to prevent injuries and illness and promote health; introduction a case management program to assist members with health care needs including those who transition to civilian life, particularly those who become clients from Veterans Affairs Canada. And with respect to Veterans Affairs we have established a liaison position to improve communication, understanding between the two groups and there's an increased cooperation level at major bases across Canada. The strengthening of the mental services, particularly for the treatment of PTSD which includes an ongoing project to create what we call Occupational Stress Injuries Social Support Network.

We're facing similar health care challenges that groups everywhere are facing but we are actively pursuing initiatives to develop a quality affordable health care system whether on base or deployed in operation. And this is to look after our people. Recent initiatives also for the reserve health care include the formation of the Health Services Reserve which amalgamates all health services personnel into one reserve element and enhancing veterans benefits also to access also for the reservists who are coming back from operations.

Although I believe there is little doubt that the men and women in the Canadian Forces represent the backbone of the military, it's obvious that combat capability is not just about people. While people are our most important resource, we must -- we recognize the need to strike a balance amongst our capital equipment acquisitions and our ongoing operations and our people. That being said, the government and the people of Canada expect the Canadian Forces to remain combat capable. With respect to our personnel it's incumbent upon the leadership to ensure it has robust, efficient and effective human resources policies to support our part of combat capability. It's clear that we are faced with numerous challenges in our efforts to lead our people but we know what we have to and we're doing it.

Please don't mistake this statement for arrogance. All it is about is getting on with the mission. We know that we have made mistakes in the past and we will probably make other mistakes in the future. That's human nature. But what I'm saying to you is we are aware of the issues we're facing and we have developed the plans to deal with these challenges and thus far we are seeing good results with these plans. We are not perfect but we are determined and dedicated to putting our people first. I guess that is why it's no surprise today to anyone, anyway in this room and probably -- and in the forces, that human resources is the top priority of both the minister and the chief of defence staff and that's my job. And I think that our strength is in our vision which is look after our people, invest in them and give them confidence in the future.

So I guess the obstacle between you and lunch is getting shorter and shorter so I'm ready to answer any questions that you may have. Et dans n'importe quelle langue aussi.

Question: Charles Kepall. A short question. You mentioned guidance has been provided to determine whether people are on operational status. You also mentioned, you know Canadian

people support those in uniform. Have the Canadian people extended veteran's status and veterans' benefits to all the members of the Canadian Forces who have been deployed on operations in harm's way?

LGen J.M.C. Couture: Having the veteran's status does not guarantee immediately veterans' benefits because veterans' benefits are not rights based but are needed based and anybody in the Canadian Forces, both regular or reserve, who's coming back from operation with injuries and some medical limitation that has a permanent disability have access to Veterans Affairs Canada programs. And at the same time we're working on with -- in close cooperation with Veterans Affairs to improve this program and also to facilitate the transition from the military life to the civilian life if those limitations are such that we have to separate from the men or the women coming back from operations or being injured while training in Canada. Does that answer your question? Maybe. You see I'll ask you to speak a little louder because the last time I spent on a rifle range -- I'm not a gunner but I'm as deaf as a gunner.

Question: I thought it took an act of parliament to declare that those that deployed to the Gulf War would be declared veterans and then there are certain aspects that follow them the rest of their lives and in some cases their survivors beyond the grave, beyond the grave. I'm just asking, when we deploy people to Kosovo, when we deploy people to other places where they're being shot at, when they're in explicit harm's way does it still take an act of parliament to put them on that kind of operational status or are all the people who have been deployed to those kind of actions now veterans and therefore ultimately eligible for what Canada calls veterans' benefits.

LGen J.M.C. Couture: Well, I'll answer the same way as I started. Being called a veteran does not automatically give a guarantee to any benefit because as I said - and it's quite clear in the act - veterans' benefits are not rights based but needed based and if there is a need then anybody in uniform today that has a need because of military services have access to that. Now if somebody wants to change the act it's up to me to do that but right now anybody serving in uniform that has a requirement, has a need for benefits that is now provided by Veterans Affairs has access to it, to those benefits.

Question: One of the veterans' benefits that's not need based, unless you define need differently, is the right to apply for a government job and to have to have a reason given why you shouldn't get it as opposed to members of the armed forces and the RCMP being precluded absolutely from applying for some jobs, for example.

LGen J.M.C. Couture: Yeah, okay, those of you who have studied history, while older than I am, will remember that after the Second World War there was something called the Veterans' Charter who have had a lot of benefits or some program that was instituted to assist to the demobilization and returning people to the civilian life. Today's veterans' needs have changed because we've got, like after the Second World War, a very younger population of veterans like soldiers, sailors and air personnel leaving the forces because of injuries and so on and the needs are different. And we are working with the Veterans Affairs to determine if there's a requirement to reintroduce such a program. We are at the early stage of our studies and so I don't know when we're going to be able to do something about that but it's

something that we are examining. In fact we need to find out what are the needs and how we can satisfy those needs and so on. Are we going to introduce what was after the Second World War? Probably not because the needs have changed since then but we're examining it. Right now there's nothing but we are examining it. Yes?

Moderator: Last question.

Question: Leo (inaudible) Corps Association, sir. When I retired it took me about nine months to get my retirement gratuity. Has that improved a little better these days than it did four years ago? Yeah. The same as you got, General, but I'll bet you yours didn't take nine months, like a baby.

LGen J.M.C. Couture: But at least you got it, okay?

Question: That shouldn't be the answer. Just because I got it but I waited nine months, eh? And you know I wasn't treated like a regular force guy that would have got it in a month, okay? They would have got it before they walked out the door, I know. Now secondly, you mentioned the 6% ---

LGen J.M.C. Couture: Attrition rate, yes.

Question: What's the reserve force rate?

LGen J.M.C. Couture: The reserve force rate - which one, army, navy and air force? I've got the figures for all three but globally it's about 25%.

Question: 25?

LGen J.M.C. Couture: Yes.

Question: But the regular's only six.

LGen J.M.C. Couture: Say again?

Question: The regular's only 6%, though.

LGen J.M.C. Couture: This year, yes. But it's something that changes. In fact we -- if you look at the attrition historically and then you're trying to project based on the age profile of the forces and then you're trying -- it's not the -- it's not a very accurate science, okay? But with the age profile of the forces, the type of service that we have today, today 6% is not something that will remain there we are predicting because if you look in about two, three, four years' time there's quite a large number of people that reach the gates according to the current level of service and if they exercise that option like it was mentioned by General Jeffery then the attrition will go back to the historical rate of about 8%. Right now it's down to 6%. It's an effect -- it's a combined effect of the program that we have, the quality of life that has been improved and a few other things also. Maybe the economy right now has an

impact, who knows? But I'm not complaining because we've got the people, we keep the people in and we get more people at the recruiting centres. Now the reserve attrition is different for different reasons. Like the militia, for example, the latest figure for '99 was 24.25%. The air force was 17.6%. And the naval was the same thing and the communication group it was about 18%. So but it varies from year to year okay?

Question: I think when, you know, the baby boomers start retiring out of industry a lot of people hitting the 20-year gap are going to be getting out of the forces and I think you're going to have a higher rate, you know, as your gates open.

LGen J.M.C. Couture: You are absolutely right and it's one thing that we're monitoring very, very closely and that's why we have embarked upon that recruiting campaign last year and we see it going on for the next three -- at least the next three years and then even more than that may at a reduced rate. The retention strategy is the same thing because when you look at the demography of the force, we look at the demography of the Canadian population the baby boomers start retiring next year and for the next six to 10 years there will be a huge demand for manpower or for people power if you will not only in the military forces but in every aspect of the Canadian economy and we will have to compete very, very furiously to get the people to join the forces. And that's why we need compensation benefits, quality of life, condition of service, terms of service and you name it that will be as attractive to those people as any other career and so on. No, we're not waiting 2004 to arrive so we can start -- we will be watching baby boomers getting out and in fact we're getting ready for that. We're preparing for that, yes.

Question: And one other thing is you know I sometimes think from what I hear is that the process is more important than the people at the recruiting centres on the number of visits they go in there for, you know. We're 35 miles from the recruiting centre and I keep my ear to the ground and I don't think it's much different from those located right in the city, that the process is more important than the product.

LGen J.M.C. Couture: And I was very concerned about that length of time it took to recruit not only a reservist but a regular force personnel and we have been working very hard in reducing that -- those processes, administrative processes to reduce the bottleneck and then to reduce the time it takes to recruit and to minimize the number of visits at a recruiting centre, like, for example, visiting for filling a bunch of forms and then going back for physical fitness and on and on and on. Now we have streamlined that and in then in many places we can do that in one visit and they take perhaps no more than two visits, not counting the first one because the vast majority of the people showing at the recruiting centre they go there just to get information to make up their mind so they pick up a bunch of pamphlets, ask a few questions and so on and then they go home and they think about their choices, look maybe on the internet and then come back with a serious desire to make an application and then once we get that on the road there is -- we have accelerated but we're not there where I want it to be because I'm saying for a reservist if we cannot enroll it within seven days we'll lose him or her and for a regular force young person if we don't make an offer within 21 to 30 days we're going to lose that person as well. So therefore and that's why we're striving towards those objectives. Now mind you the vast majority of candidates are coming clean, no prior --

well, no difficulty with the reliability check, no medical condition whatsoever and on and on. We can process those people very, very, very quickly but those who have -- need more medical information, they have to go back to their family doctors and so on or those who have had some difficulty with the law at a certain point in time it takes more time to get a clean sheet for an application. But it varies. But we're working on making it faster and more effective, yes.

Moderator: Ladies and gentlemen, it's my pleasure to thank General Couture for a very comprehensive presentation but what struck me the most, obviously, is the closing statement at the end of his slides that he plans as a personal philosophy to put people first and anyone that's ever had the honour of commanding Canada's men and women in operations I think would agree with that and it's the right philosophy. Regardless of what capabilities you have in equipment and what have you or the sophistication thereof, people are still what make it work. Merci beaucoup, Christian, pour une présentation extrêmement intéressante et je crois que ça devrait être un événement annuel.

If I may, I'm not going to keep you very long here because I know that we're on our own for lunch but I wanted to add my collective thanks on behalf of all of you to that whole row of senior gentlemen in uniform there. When I talked to the CDS and wrote to him and I said, you know, that going back a few years and remembering that having the commanders here is such an important thing for us to have to be able to not necessarily have a go at you but at least find out from the horse's mouth so to speak how things are in your various environments and of course we wanted personnel added to that this year. So thank you very much to all of you.

And at the same time I suppose what I'm making here is an offer on behalf of the Conference of Defence Associations, if you ever feel the need, how can we help and if you require help and we can help, how should that be? Short of keeping our mouth shut. I'm saying this advisedly because it's pretty obvious you're either in better shape than we thought you were or else like good commanders you have to be completely optimistic and because we sometimes from the outside perhaps perceive problems and perhaps we exaggerate them. So if we do, please let us know and I think this has been a tremendous morning and I'm very grateful to all of you. So please join me, ladies and gentlemen, in thanking.

I now have a couple of very short administrative notes to pass on that somebody gave me a piece of paper here. The list of names of those of you who have signed up for the mess dinner this evening is posted on the notice board I'm told in the right rear of the ballroom. We would like you all that are attending to indicate any corrections that you feel are needed to your name or deletions or for that matter additions. And please do that before 14:00 when we reconvene. That's the only way we can organize the seating plan which we hope to do as much as possible by our associations. I remind all of you also that the CDS' reception which precedes the mess dinner in the army officers' mess on Somerset Street will commence at 19:15 tonight. If you would all be back here at 14:00 we might start putting you all to work. Thank you.