

Thank you very much.

The CDA and CDFAI have taken on the task of informing the public about Canadian defence policy and the Canadian Forces. In recent years, they have pushed hard to get the word out that all is not well in the Canadian military. They have contributed significantly to the debate over the military's budgetary and operational deficiencies, providing experts and studies in the hope that both the people and the politicians will listen.

Informing and animating a public, that, understandably, has other, more immediate concerns such as health care, is not easy. For these organizations to recognize my work as having contributed to that task, is indeed a great honour.

In the media we constantly utter the mantra "the public's right to know". But I believe that there's a second part to that. It's not just the public's right to know that is important, it's the public's responsibility to decide. The public must decide what kind of foreign and defence policy it wants, what kind of military it needs, and what kind of money it is willing to spend.

The media has an important role in all this. It's the media which must do its best to view events, policies, decisions, and consequences, with an objective lens, providing the public with enough information to make an informed choice.

The media, however, has not always been keen to cover military stories. When I started writing in 1983, I submitted an editorial piece to one of our major newspapers. It was rejected. The rejection wasn't a big deal – you have to expect that when you're freelancing – it was the reason they rejected my article that stunned me. I was told,

"We have bought excerpts from Peter Newman's book, True North Not Strong, Not Free, and that more than exhausts the defence subject for a little while."

Thank goodness things have changed. While Canadian defence was not a hot topic during the Cold War, since the early 1990s news organizations have paid increasing attention to Canada's military and the political decisions which affect its role and capabilities.

Of course, the coverage is not consistent. Everyday challenges faced by the military tend to be overlooked until a scandal or tragedy highlights them. While that can certainly be attributed to the media's love of bad or controversial news, the military must also bear responsibility for the coverage it gets.

Increasing politicization of the dept, senior officers who trust their people with a gun but not a microphone, and a rather opaque transparency policy have resulted in a huge credibility problem.

For that to change, takes leadership. It all starts at the top.

Over the years I've been fortunate to interview some terrific military people and I would like now to thank them for all the time they've given me, to explain things, to answer my questions, and to fill in the blanks. I especially would like to thank the public affairs officers who have gone above and beyond in arranging for me to get the information and the interviews I needed.

I would also like to thank the academics at the various strategic centres set up at universities across the country. They have helped me understand complex subjects, not just by taking the time to talk to me – sometimes at great length! – but by including me in their conferences and workshops. In particular I would like to thank Jim Fergusson at the Univ of Manitoba, Martin Shadwick at York University, and Dan Middlemiss at Dalhousie University.

Finally, I would like to thank Jane's for taking a chance on me 19 years ago, for trusting my judgement, and for always making me feel like family.

And most of all, I want to thank my wonderful husband, Jim Bagnall, who is also a journalist, and who continues to inspire me with his honesty, accuracy, and integrity.

Thank you.