

Remarks by Ms. Christie Blatchford on receipt of the Ross Munro Media Award
CDAI Vimy Dinner, 17 November 2006

Good evening, ladies and gentleman.

I'll begin by thanking the Conference of Defence Associations and the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute for this honor, the board of the Royal Canadian Military Institute and Reserves 2000 for nominating me and the selection committee for choosing me.

I'd also like to say how proud I am to be in the company of my fellow nominees, Matthew Fisher, from Canwest News and the National Post, and Mitch Potter of the Toronto Star. It was Mitch's story on the axing of Trevor Greene which inspired me to go to Afghanistan, and on my second trip there this summer, I got to spend a couple of weeks alongside Matthew. When he left, the press corps was a lot duller and a lot less fun: They're both great reporters, good company and lovely people.

There are many awards for journalists in this country and I've even won one of them once, but nothing makes me prouder than the Ross Munro Award. Mr. Munro was not only a great war correspondent but a man who left his mark such that his former secretary, Betty Marcus, who phoned to congratulate me when I won, remembers her years with him as the most interesting of her working life.

The criteria for the Munro Award is that the winner make a significant contribution to the general public understanding of issues that relate to Canada's defence and security.

Frankly, on one level this means the bar isn't that bloody high, because too few journalists in this country write well or regularly about these issues and the general public understanding of the Canadian Forces is in my view pretty dim. We are a country where the civilian population is so separated and disengaged from its military that almost anything that I or anyone else writes helps breach that gap.

But the real reason the award means as much as it does to me is because I have come to care so damn much about our soldiers. If I wrote well about them, it's because they were, and are, generous with their time, patient with my dopiness, protective of my ass, articulate and intelligent and unafraid to talk to me.

The soldiers won this thing for me, and that's why I treasure it so.

So this is for all of them, and in particular Major Bill Fletcher, the Officer Commanding of Charlie Company 1PPCLI, who took me into the thick of battle and still gives the best and most wonderfully profane briefings I ever heard; Sgt. Patrick Tower, who was recently awarded the Star of Military Valor for his fearless soldiering in the Panjwei district of Afghanistan but who more importantly played such great

country music during our 26-hour LAV ride and was so entertaining I forgot to be afraid; Corporal Keith Mooney, the big Newfoundlander I followed through battle in August because I knew he'd keep me safe and whose accent is so outrageously pleasing that I knew if I died I'd at least die happy, hearing that voice; and Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Hope, the fiercest, bravest, most hands-on and smartest Commanding Officer I know I'm ever going to meet.

This is for all of them, with thanks and affection.

Incidentally, Cpl. Mooney became rather infamous when he was injured in one of the Battles of Pashmul, this one in July, when he was probably hit by Taliban ordinance that exploded when the area was bombed. He bewildered his fellows at first by crying, "Are they alright boys? Are they alright?", and it was only when he insisted Major Fletcher personally check his privates, and insure they were intact, that all became clear.

I could have told Cpl. Mooney – it takes more than that to dispense with the balls of a Canadian soldier.