

Keynote Address by Chief of the Defence Staff General Rick Hillier at the 23rd Annual Seminar of the Conference of Defence Associations Institute.

Gen. Rick Hillier: The first thing, I want to be less controversial than Doug Bland. I understand that's pretty easy to do after his talk yesterday but not surprising, right? I first met Doug back in 1978, 1979 I believe it was and I think he was in ca-ca then for some of the things that he was saying and/or doing. (Laughter.) And my second aim is to be much longer than the minister. I'm not going to leave the chance that there might be some questions out there. I want to close out that opportunity completely and that means I've got to be slightly longer than last year. Because last year I said I was going to do that. I inadvertently left some space at the end. There were four questions of which three were tough and I want to close off those tough three ones.

The one that was powerful and God bless Ron Joyce for responding to the occasion was the question of what can we do for the troops? I think my response was Tim Horton's Kandahar and secondarily Tim Horton's in Wainwright. (Laughter.) There's a Tim Horton's under construction in Wainwright and Tim Horton's since the 1st of July has been serving double-double to soldiers and sailors and airmen and air women in Afghanistan at a huge number per day. Thank you very much for stepping up to the plate on that one Ron Joyce and Tim Horton's. (Applause.)

Mesdames et messieurs, je suis très heureux d'être parmi vous, parmi nos amis aujourd'hui et de prendre quelques minutes - c'est pas exactement vrai, quelques minutes; beaucoup de minutes - (rires) pour parler des Forces canadiennes, de nos activités et certainement de notre avenir. C'est la troisième fois que je m'adresse à vous en tant que chef d'État-major de la Défense et à chaque occasion votre accueil a été chaleureux, tout comme ce matin.

Je suis particulièrement heureux d'être ici à l'occasion du 75ième anniversaire de la conférence des Associations de la défense pour vous féliciter, vous ainsi que l'Institut, du travail que vous accomplissez afin que le Canada dispose d'une politique et d'une capacité de défense efficace et qu'il soit en mesure de soutenir les Forces canadiennes comme il se doit.

C'est aussi aujourd'hui ou cette année le 90ième anniversaire d'un événement qui a fasciné le pays, soit celui de Vimy et les Forces canadiennes seront heureuses de contribuer significativement à la célébration de ce valeureux et grandiose phénomène (phonétique) ce printemps autant à Vimy en Europe que plusieurs endroits au Canada. Ça sera une grande commémoration sans doute.

Le thème de cette conférence de l'an dernier était l'OTAN. Et c'était tout à fait à propos compte tenu de nos activités qui ont fasciné l'an dernier - l'approche adoptée par l'OTAN pour la mission la plus intense de son histoire, sa première mission de combat terrestre et sa mission la plus étendue à l'extérieur de la zone d'opération habituelle. Cette mission est selon moi, à mon avis, essentielle à la survie même de l'OTAN, soit de l'alliance militaire qui assure la sécurité du Canada depuis les dernières décennies. (Inaudible) pour que cette alliance ne soit plus axée sur l'Europe comme la guerre froide l'exigeait et qu'elle devienne souple, facilement adaptable et favorable et aux opérations de grande envergure qui sont aussi bien différentes étant donné le nouveau contexte de la sécurité.

Les activités que nous avons menées avec plusieurs alliés importants se sont avérées essentielles pour que l'OTAN entreprenne cette mission militaire dans tout l'Afghanistan tout en ayant en main la clé de la réussite surtout lors des étapes initiales.

Vous ne serez pas surpris d'apprendre que l'an dernier a été fort occupé pour nous, principalement pour une bonne cause - une cause juste et importante qui permet d'améliorer la sécurité au Canada et partout au monde.

Now I know you're all frightened to death that I'm going to give my entire speech en français today. (Laughter.) But I'm not going to impose that on you completely. And, as I said to you last year, we in the Canadian Forces, in this busy past year that we have had, we exist for Canada first and that is our perspective - not a political model. It is just what we see as our clear and sole and overwhelming priority and sometimes our past actions perhaps belied that priority. Our busy-ness, if I could put it that way, has been in seven major areas throughout this past year and it has been a busy year.

First, we are engaged in intense operations, as referred to and discussed by our minister, including combat operations in Afghanistan and more about that in a few minutes. We have been growing the Canadian Forces and, as our allies often say, "You know Canadians are great, there's just not enough of you." I think one of the guys who said that might have been sitting right here in fact, General Peter Schoemaker, Chief of Staff of the Army of the United States of America.

Our recruiting advertisements, which I hope that most of you have seen, have truly been in this past year truth in advertising. And there's enough gray hair and bald heads in this room that you will remember the advertisements of the late '70s and the early '80s of an aircraft landing and a young officer in his dress uniform with a briefcase walking down the stairs and the commercial saying there's no life like it. I was a young officer during the time frame and I do not remember any correlation between that commercial and lying in a hole with water running down the crack of my bum after 24 to 48 hours of romping through the mud, climbing in and out of our vehicles and doing the normal business that we as young leaders had to do. We now have truth in advertising.

Our advertisements appeal to most and really have helped us enormously in attracting young men and women of action and that's who we want. We want those achievers with no reverse on them. And we're getting lots of those men and women of action show up at our recruiting centres and with the change in processes that we have had we are recruiting them quickly, we're getting them into uniform and we're getting them to our training system with an aim of getting them into the combat units as quickly as possible so that they can do all the jobs that we ask them to do.

But even with those advertisements that attract men and women of action, we still need to refocus slightly to meet the demands for those technicians that we also need in uniform. In short, we now need to attract a few geeks of action. Now that's probably not a great commercial here and I'm sure that the media here won't repeat any of what I said here. (Laughter.) I'll just rephrase that and say what we need now are rocket scientists with a personality. (Laughter.) We don't need a lot of them. We don't need a lot of them but we do need some.

Our recruiting process is now working. It's not perfect, perhaps not even very good, got a lot of changes to do with it but kudos to Rear Admiral Ty Pile, the Chief of Military Personnel, Commodore Roger MacIsaac, the Commander of the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group, the support from the army, navy and the air force because the combination of that team effort has allowed us to meet the goals that we have set and get the right kind of young men and women into the Canadian Forces from our entire mosaic across the country - not enough from the ethnic communities, the smaller communities but better than we have been doing before.

We have been reequipping the Forces with an energy and a scale and a scope that has not been seen in recent years, perhaps even in decades and with a speed, as the minister again referred to, that would have been unbelievable even two years ago. And let me just say here great credit to our minister and to his work. Great credit to Gord O'Connor and in fact his work, his effect, his stubbornness in the finest sense of the word in moving and carrying and driving a bureaucracy in Ottawa through to remarkably short order being able to start

acquiring the strategic airlift, the tactical airlift, the big honkin' helicopter that we so desperately need, the joint support ships, trucks - it doesn't sound very sexy but that's what the Canadian Forces runs on - and all the other operationally urgent equipments that we needed and thank you to our minister for the job that he has done on this one and we've not yet finished. (Applause.)

And in this past year, just to make sure that we can use those people and all that new equipment to a maximum effect for Canada, we have been led to changing absolutely everything that we do and at the same time changing how we do it. While we've done those four or five things we have also been dealing with all the normal challenges of a transition in government and, most important this, most important this, over this past one to two years we have begun to fully realize the immense, the negative impact of the expenditure reductions, defence expenditure reductions from 1994 and the lasting, most negative legacy that they brought into effect which has to be put right. Restricting, reducing and constraining education, training, people, postings, equipment, fleets, maintenance, sea days, YFR, ammunition use and while at the same time we did that increasing by a factor the number of operations that we were conducting around the world has led to a Canadian Forces that is fragile as a base on which to build and in some parts of the institution is on a life support system.

Decisions taken at that time, forced by dollar deprivation, guided by the best information possible - and God knows I would not have wanted to be in the shoes of some of my predecessors because of the enormous challenges that they faced - however, those actions, dollar deprived, have now led to some deep wounds in the department and to the Canadian Forces over this past what I would call a "Decade of Darkness." We can find example after example. Let me just give you one that talks right to people.

During that time frame, because dollars disappeared, we sliced and diced our posting budgets. We took huge amounts of money out - more than 50 percent in fact of the posting budgets for men and women across the Canadian Forces. We said that's a good thing because instead of two to four years in any one spot three to five years would be better for family stability, wives or partners or spouses who work and all those good things. But immediately following that decision based on the best information at the time, driven by lack of dollars, the cost of each posting spiralled as all of those good of life initiatives were brought into being. So instead of three to five years in a posting location for the vast majority of men and women it's 10 to 15 years or more. You add on to that the operational tempo that we have and what's occurred is this.

We've got 40 percent of the Canadian Forces in the operational units who have medals that go out to their left elbow. We've got 60 percent who serve here in Canada in those important roles in the training establishment, in the domestic operations that we have to do, in the headquarters functions that we have to perform who have one medal and we can't balance that experience and carrying the load of the burden of deployed operations because we did not have the money to move men and women around the country as we needed to do. The impacts of that and the stress and the load that each individual carries are now just becoming clearly apparent to us.

Those main pillars of activity that I referred to have numerous implications across every part of our Canadian Forces. The implications from even one of them - that of combat, for example, in Afghanistan - can blow your mind. Let me just walk through some of those.

Combat in Afghanistan has led directly to significant, significant changes in how we train, how we integrate and how we accredit forces for a mission. Let me just tell you training for the Cold War scenarios was easy compared to this. If we came to a high density populated area our doctrine said picket and bypass. Guess what? We now live in those high density populated areas and we conduct operations including combat while we are there. The

training is much more difficult. Significant changes to the kind of training infrastructure that we need for the three-block war in a place like -- at the manning environment like Kandahar. And, as I say, we now live and operate in those high density populated areas and that means that we've got to replicate them back at home for the training.

The importance of how we say farewell to our troops when they leave for a mission to show them that mission is important, they are important and they are supported. The first time I went on mission, my entire family showed up, extended family, spent the entire weekend. My wife and two sons took me to the airport. A tearful farewell. Phone calls from friends. Second time I went on a mission, extended family phoned, never heard from my friends. My wife took me to the airport. My two sons were at the house, didn't come to the airport. Tearful farewell. The third time I went on mission nobody phoned. My sons phoned from somewhere else in Ottawa. My wife took me to the airport and left me with my duffle bag at the curb outside of the airport. (Laughter.) We've gotten a lot better since those times.

And as I participated last week or two weeks ago, sorry, in Gaagetown, New Brunswick at a Rally in Red and a farewell to the troops we had 5,000 people out there in the worst weather of course that Gaagetown can offer up in late January. And the folks were out there. The emotion was high. Premiers were out. Lieutenant-governors were out. The media was out. And it was one of the events which is cemented into the minds of those soldiers: you are important, we need you to do this mission and while you're doing that mission we are going to ensure that you are supported.

We learned about the fact that supporting families while those soldiers and sailors and airmen and air women are away occurs before the deployment, during the deployment and long after the deployment. In short, we've had to relook the entire methodology of how we have supported families to ensure that we can do it right. How we welcome people home was important. The fact that you've done that job, we've appreciated it, we needed you to do it has got to be cemented in the minds of those great young men and women.

One of the things that's been most important - and this came out of our air force and the folks in the fast air community - and what they said was we'll use our training flights and some of our air sovereignty flights and as our Airbuses bringing those soldiers home from Afghanistan get within a hundred or two hundred miles of their home base, whether it's Edmonton or Trenton, two F-18s show up on their wingtips.

I was at the medals parade for the 1st Patricias in late August, saw the battalion forming up, went down to talk to them. Because it was cold rain, I said, hey, a bunch of great men and women here getting wet, I'll get wet with you. All they wanted to talk about was their excitement at two F-18s escorting their aircraft in and what it meant to them. All those things we've actually had to walk through.

We walked through how we recognize when honours and awards our heroes. And we've taken that process from months, sometimes years, down to days and weeks so we can do it right. We've had to make sure that we with dignity, with respect, with compassion and with professionalism repatriated our wounded, said farewell to our dead and supported our families during the most terrible days of their lives.

We learned and we even changed how we learned with immediate direct collection and analysis of lessons from every operation, firefight or attack that we were engaged in and we changed to apply those lessons within hours in theatre and within days back here in training. And over this past year, because of that mission, we bought, we modified, we improved, we constrained or we disposed of major equipments from major fleets, acquiring Nyalas, the M-777, upgrading the LAV-III's, buying ammunition, resetting the contingent's operational equipments with tanks, with armoured recovery vehicles, armoured engineer vehicles and so on.

Nous avons appris et réappris nos leçons au sujet de commandement stratégique, opérationnel et tactique et avons réalisé que c'est un volet de l'unification des Forces canadiennes, de rétablissement mis à l'épreuve pour la première fois depuis 1967 nous ont pas aidé à répondre aux demandes.

We've had some challenges with some of the things that unification of the Canadian Forces brought with us and we are working to fix them now. Specifically, within our common trades - officers, soldiers, NCOs - training to a common standard - air, land and sea - invariably became the lowest standard rather than the highest and often produced those in those MOCs that could satisfy none of the three environments where they work. We are fixing that as we speak. We validated yet again the high physical and mental demands on men and women and are revitalizing our physical fitness standards and expectations so that no matter what the job you understand this is part of our profession.

And, ladies and gentlemen, there was a lot of humour, we gave great scope to the media to make fun of a change in our recruiting process that we had removed the physical fitness test. What we have done is improved our physical fitness testing and standards dramatically and I would challenge any of you, any in the media to go down to our recruit school in St. Jean, Quebec, go for a morning workout with those courses. I did that last April. About 950 soldiers and sailors and airmen and air women wanna-bes were out there. Myself and Mr. Claude Bachand who is the member for that riding went out and worked with those. We are producing the fittest young men and women that we have in the history of the Canadian Forces. They are greyhounds by the time they come out of those courses and they are ready to do any job - air, land or sea - no matter the physical challenge.

We experienced the difficulties under stress and under fire, at night, in contact with the enemy, of integrating lethal and nonlethal assets - UAVs, close air support indirect fire, Istar, technical and human intelligence, information operations, SIMIC (phonetic), so important in all of those operations and host nation assets - and we worked at all of that to get one effect for a people who so desperately needed our help to get that effect.

And it became obvious to all of us that many of the dictums of the Revolution in Military Affairs - and you were all engaged in some of those discussions during the late '90s - the Revolution in Military Affairs that really focussed only on kinetic operations, at least 99 percent of the effort went there against large scale mechanized forces and a fallout from that was the demand rose for smaller units made big by technology. We found that needed revisiting. And what we have found is that, yes, every unit needs technical enablers but God remains on the side of large battalions.

We managed and we learned from the unsurprising frustrations of working with multiple allies, sometime nontraditional allies in a multinational environment. I think Field Marshal Slim's comment that the only worse thing -- the only thing worse than fighting a war with allies is fighting one without them remains true. Think of the complexity. Think of the complexity of languages in which you speak, not just English and French but Dutch, British -- (laughter). Simon Young knows what's coming. I've never understood a word spoken by a British soldier in all my days on tour in all my life. American, Romanian, air, land and sea languages, fast air languages, aviation, tactical air, armoured, Patricia, Royal, Vandoo, gunners, regular and reservists, loggy, intel, maintainer, SIMIC, Istar, special forces, government, CIDA, Foreign Affairs, Dari and Pushtun. All that, the middle of the night under fire in a place where you really don't recognize the culture, you're asked to come out with a clear effect and we get it all the time which speaks to the quality of people that we have.

Nous avons appris énormément sur les affaires publiques, les communications publiques et les réalités d'une approche libre et transparente qui inclut des généralistes intégrés.

And God bless journalists like Christie Blatchford and Lisa LaFlamme, Semus O'Regan, Semus Oregon or some combination of names that he goes by -- (laughter) -- and even people like Peter Mansbridge who have managed to put a face on Canada's sons and daughters serving so far away from home so well. Thank you for what you have done on putting that face on those sons and daughters of our country. (Applause.)

We started to meet the immense challenge and the demand that is there in looking after our troops and their families because of the stress suffered. And all those things I've talked about are just some, just a few of the immense numbers of implications of just one pillar of those seven pillars that we have been engaged in over this past year. One year and every one of those implications was felt right across the Canadian Forces. We're not perfect at meeting any of the challenges or implementing any of the lessons learned that I mentioned and those that I didn't mention. And we're not even very good at most of it. But we are a heck of a lot better than we were a year ago and we improve each hour and each day.

Last year, however, in all those activities we validated a lot. A command and control system that effectively separates force employment from force generation while providing the strategic and the operational context in which tactical forces can be best employed for the benefit of Canada. Having one commander supported by an appropriate staff who has responsibility for and a focus on the operational level either in international operations and a separate commander for domestic operations here in Canada, this in order to meet our overarching priority of defending and helping protect Canadians where they live and work here in Canada. We would have already failed in Kandahar if we had not had this command and control system up and operating before the intensity of operations surged.

We benefited again from having one commander with a very small staff that had come with their disparate responsibilities from across a staff matrix hold authority and responsibility for national level support. I had a group of graybeards, as I call them, look at our command structure over this past several months and they came back particular effusive in their compliments to Major-General Daniel Benjamin and his merry band of men and women for the work that they do in orchestrating national level support to operations domestic, continental or international. "About time," was the comment of the graybeards on the changes in the command structure.

We validated the requirement for, the incredible value of, and the need for more special forces. And we are confident that what we are producing is equal to the best in the world. And God bless all those great trouperes with the 19½-inch necks who do such incredible work for us.

And we confirmed, no surprises here, that exactly in accordance with our vision, close, planned and prepared integration of air, land and sea forces give us the best bang for the buck. No silos when we deploy to operations. One profile, one visibility for Canada and one effect for Canada. Last minute, ad hoc preparations are not the way to do business and define amateurs rather than professionals. When you show up on a mission, you've got to look after yourself. First of all, you've got to do it to survive. Then you have to do it to deter attacks upon yourself and, last, most importantly, you've got to do it to win. And otherwise, if you're relying upon others to provide certain capabilities, you may find yourself playing second fiddle for the use of those capabilities and the difference may mean the lives of our soldiers, of our sons and daughters.

Our equipment has won undying affection from those who so skilfully use it and I cannot tell you how many soldiers have told me that the LAV-III, that world class vehicle, has saved their lives. We're actually working to improve that LAV-III and make it an even better vehicle. But those soldiers swear by it and we confirm yet again that desperate need for a big, honkin' helicopter. I believe that's Sandy Leslie's term actually but I steal it from him because it does describe what we need.

You perhaps have seen General Leslie over there. I just point him out because he's in his civilian attire, not in his uniform, and I just want to say that he's been wounded in his right knee and for anybody else here who offers a meeting to me without coffee that's the kind of treatment you can expect from the CDS, okay? (Laughter.)

I say that because marvellous work from the army, the navy and the air force to do all of the above and set force employers up for success and validated yet again that our development of men and women, that combination of training, education, operational experience, international opportunities, command staff, selection process continue to produce people that stand tall when people to stand tall are most needed.

Leaders like Major-General Angus Watt who just left as the Deputy Commander of ISAF and spent a significant amount of time of his tour actually commanding ISAF. Dave Fraser who needs no introduction or presentation and I know spoke here yesterday. Lieutenants-Colonel Ian Hope, Homer Lavoy, and John Conrad - heroes all who took a millstone around their neck and turned it into an awesome effect for Canada, a demand asked of them that we have not put on a single individual I don't believe since the Korean War.

People like Commander Darren Hawco, the skipper of the HMCS Ottawa, where I had the opportunity with a few Newfoundlanders - it seemed what most of them were, Rick Mercer and a few other, Mary Walsh and Damhnait Doyle - to spend Christmas Eve onboard that ship with that crew. When I got back to our camp, the commander of the U.S.S. Eisenhower battle group, Rear Admiral Joel Fornhauer to meet me in a 15-minute window we had in my schedule. He took the hour drive up just for that short period, that 15 minutes, an hour drive back to tell me that Darren Hawco was the best skipper that he had in the battle group, that the crew of the HMCS Ottawa was the best crew and the most experienced and capable crew that he had in his battle group and that the combination made for an unbeatable credential for Canada. And that's what he wanted to say to me.

As a result of that, Darren Hawco as a three-ringer ended up commanding a task group of multinational -- a multinational task group several days after that during the period of the last weeks of the deployment of HMCS Ottawa in the Persian Gulf. Incredible performance by another Canadian who stood tall for Canada when we need it.

People like RSM Bobby Girard. Majors Bill Fletcher, Matt Sprague, Captain and Major Mike Wright, Captain Nicola Goddard, Sergeant-Major Barnes, Warrant Officer Robbins, Warrant Officers Nolan and Melles, Sergeant Pat Towers and Sergeant Mike Denine. Guys like Sergeant Steve Bedard and Master Corporal Villeneuve, Master Corporal Fitzgerald and all the other officers and NCOs who led and lead from the front - air, land and sea - and who often pay a terrible price for it.

Let me just tell you a little story. Charles Company, 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment, Labour Day weekend. On that terrible weekend, Matt Sprague, Company Commander Sergeant-Major Barnes, Company Sergeant-Major. They lost a company commander in action, lost a company sergeant-major, lost one out of three platoon commanders, lost all three platoon warrant officers, one wounded, two killed, lost five section commanders out of nine and lost all of the section's second in command master corporals - a total of 40-plus wounded and five killed in a 48-hour period. They stepped up. A young sergeant promoted to sergeant last July became the company sergeant-major. Young master corporals became a platoon commander and platoon second in commands. And young soldiers became section commanders and they carried on the operation and the fight against the Taliban that gave NATO such an incredible boost right at the start of that mission. Now if that's not a Canadian epic that will come out in the telling, I don't know what it is. And I think it just tells us yet again what incredible people we have in places like Charles Company, the 1st Battalion, the Royal Canadian Regiment. (Applause.)

Now, ladies and gentlemen, we confirmed yet again this past year through those people I mentioned and many others that the very best weapon in the Canadian Forces remains the motivated, the well-equipped and the well-led men and women who wear our nation's flag so proudly on their shoulder. And where they're saying just the right thing when a microphone gets stuck in their face and I don't know how many folks here have seen, for example, before Christmas the CBC shows from Edmonton and Trenton and Petawawa or the CTV show out of Petawawa just recently or any of the others but when you see those kids talking they are incredible. Whether it's there or whether it's patiently explaining to a class of kids what they do or whether it's demonstrating incredible moral courage or displaying bravery so commonly that it becomes the norm, these young soldiers, sailors, airmen and air women prove yet again that even describing them as national treasures is perhaps understating their worth to Canada and to all Canadians.

And whether they were the part of the 10,000 on duty every day here in Canada, whether they're defending Canadians where they live and work, as I said, at home here in Canada or whether they were in our training system or whether they were in the air, land and sea deployments, their actions make them the incredible credentials for Canada that bring pride to us all. Their actions - and it's interesting to do that this year, the 90th anniversary of Vimy, I believe - make them worthy recipients of the torch passed on from the ghost of Dieppe, Battle of Britain, Battle of the Atlantic, D-Day, places like Hill 187 in Korea and on Easter Monday this year will allow them to stand proudly amongst the ghosts of those valiants who took Vimy 90 years ago. These men and women are why I took the job and why I keep the job of Chief of Defence Staff.

I'd like to introduce four of them to you here this morning. I've asked them to come in because I think they're pretty incredible people and I just want to walk through who they are. And I ask them to stand and remain standing until four are up.

Master Seaman Robert Williams. Master Seaman Williams, will you stand up, please? Master Seaman Williams is a clearance diver, Halifax fleet diving unit, Atlantic, done numerous missions, numerous jobs, spent his entire life, really since he became a man, right? Joined as a boy as most of us did. And joined the navy, fleet diving unit Atlantic. He wears the Gulf Kuwait medal and the Southwest Asia service medal. Of course he'll wear the Afghanistan medal - I'll talk to that. And of course the Canadian Forces decoration.

Master Seaman Williams was deployed in Afghanistan this past year as EOD team. And that's the place I got to meet him and he is one of the individuals that had the highest risk job to go out and help defuse some of those explosives when we found them in place, help ensure that something wasn't booby trapped when events had occurred and helped us learn the incredible lessons that we needed to make sure that we could protect our soldiers and sailors well and make sure that they could do the job on the ground that we had asked them to do. Master Seaman Robert Williams. Would you just show your appreciation to that man? (Applause.)

Corporal chef Daniel Joseph Gilles Villeneuve. Master Corporal Villeneuve is a search and rescue technician. And let me just tell you this is an individual who routinely with the other search and rescue technician partners that he has puts his life on the line here in Canada to help secure Canadians and help extract them from some of the positions where people get and sometimes you have to ask why but when they're in those positions and it's too late to ask that, this is the individual that goes out and does it.

Let me just read to you just a small little piece here. On March the 30th, 2005, he, along with Sergeant Steve Bedard, his partner, rescued five seal hunters stranded in their disabled fishing vessel in the ocean near les Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Quebec. After several failed attempts to reach the crewmen on the vessel's deck due to severe weather, the two men decided to conduct individual boat hoists from the water. Dangerously high seas, massive

ice chunks thrown about by 20-foot swells and wind in excess of 50 knots per hour. They were lowered down to the boat, time and time again, into the water time and time again with darkness descending upon them from that helicopter to eventually, despite putting their life at risk, to rescue all five of the boatmen. For that action Master Corporal Villeneuve was decorated with the Medal of Bravery. There is a Canadian hero, ladies and gentlemen. (Applause.)

Major Bill Fletcher. Bill, would you stand up, please? Never thought I'd be saying this many good things about a Patricia when I was growing up in the armour corps but there you are. Life takes you down many roads all of which are great in my case here. Major Bill Fletcher was a company commander, is now a DCO of his battalion. Deployed to Afghanistan last year with ROTO 1 under Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Hope as his battle group commander.

Let me just read you a little citation written about Bill Fletcher. As officer commanding Charles Company, Task Force Afghanistan, January to August '06, Major Fletcher repeatedly demonstrated extraordinary bravery by exposing himself to intense fire while leading his forces on foot to assault heavily defended enemy positions. On two occasions the soldiers at his side were struck by enemy fire. He immediately rendered first aid and then continued to head the subsequent assaults. On these occasions and in ensuing combat actions his selfless courage, tactical acumen and effective command were pivotal to the success of his company in defeating a determined opponent.

Bill Fletcher has been awarded the Star of Military Valour, second only to the Victoria Cross in our litany of recognition. Ladies and gentlemen, Major Bill Fletcher, a Canadian hero. (Applause.)

After having done all that, our reward to him in the CF was to take him out of his company and what we all love to do and make him the Deputy Commanding Officer of his battalion, a job at which he will excel.

I'd just like to introduce a fourth, certainly not last, a fourth individual to you, hero in a different way. Master Corporal Renee Grose, Master Corporal Grose, a Newfoundlander by the way - I had to sort of work that one in there without being too overwhelmingly obvious about it. (Laughter.) Master Corporal Renee Grose works here in Ottawa. She's an intelligence operator. She has produced a Book of Remembrance for our soldiers, for our families, for the Canadian Forces, had everybody so far that she can get in touch with from the prime minister to the minister downwards sign that book. The book is out here, I believe, isn't that right, Renee? So if you haven't signed it yet, you get your name into that book for our soldiers and their families. She also produces, if you will, signature notepads and her aim was that every soldier, sailor, airman or air woman that deployed would have one of those signature notepads. This is an incredible lady, in uniform, makes us even prouder perhaps, doing something that is beyond her job in uniform just to make a better Canadian Forces and a better Canada. Master Corporal Renee Grose, an incredible Canadian daughter. (Applause.)

Thank you.

Au cours de cette dernière année nous avons réappris qu'il existe d'autres personnes encore plus importantes que nous les militaires. Il s'agit de nos familles. Ma femme a posé sur notre réfrigérateur un aimant qu'elle a reçu lorsque nous étions à Fort Hood.

My wife has a little magnet on our fridge. It's got a tea bag hanging down from it and a note that says "Military wives are like tea bags. You only know how strong they are when they're in hot water." And that's true. My wife has experienced that many times. She continually reminds me. Our families are fundamental to success in our missions - air, land or sea. And

clearly it's high time that we acknowledged and acted upon that truism. And we have been doing just that.

They are abandoned with minimal notice. They're sometimes held hostage to a media focus on the violence in our missions as opposed to all of the mission. And the families in Edmonton and Petawawa and Gagetown will tell you that very clearly. They feel alone no matter how many other are around them. And they experience sweaty palms and a stuttering heart when late at night there's a knock on the door or that phone rings. And they carry the weight of the world on their shoulders and they inspire and carry us. And if 2006 was dubbed the year of the soldier in Canada, then 2007 should be the year of the military family to recognize their essential service to our country.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have been with and seen our families during the worst hours of their lives. I and we, all of us together in that chain of command with our minister, with the prime minister try to support them and sustain them and inspire them and keep them going but knowing no matter what we do we're not going to make things better. And each time, though, I was the one who left inspired - inspired by their dignity, their courage, their resilience and their ability to comfort us even as we were trying to comfort them. Moms and dads, husbands and wives, sons and daughters who had lost their loved ones but yet could still inspire us.

Ms. Judith Budd, who lost her son in Afghanistan, said nothing, nothing was worth losing your boy. But when that boy became a man and that man wanted to become and did become a soldier and that soldier wanted to go on the mission in Afghanistan because he believed in what it meant to others and accepted the risk which he knew, then she, his mom, could not do anything but support that boy who became that man who became a proud soldier.

There are 85,000 other military families across this country just as special as that. They are incredible.

Nous avons, par ailleurs, confirmé que les Canadiens appuient les Forces canadiennes. We also saw this past year that Canadians love and want to support their men and women in uniform, their men and women in the Canadian Forces. And you know if we can market Canada's sons and daughters back to Canada's moms and dads, we need to be replaced in our jobs. And if we're going to be successful in doing that, for many decades we've been trying to get to it and now we've really started to get where we need to be.

Our connecting to Canadians strategy has a simple goal. It's not to get more recruits. It's not to get more money. It's not to get government decisions to give us the equipment that we need. It's to get all of those things and each of them are just being a tactical pillar of it. Our efforts to be visible to Canadians in major events across Canada have worked whether it's the Calgary Stampede, Canada Day in Ottawa, Canadian National Exhibition, the Montreal Grand Prix, the Nova Scotia Tattoo, the Pacific National Exhibition or the Grey Cup Parade and events and week in Winnipeg, the visibility, the support has been incredible. Stories abound.

I went out to the Grey Cup. Opportunity there to talk to a large number of folks about the Canadian Forces and what they do. And you know the Grey Cup is carried in this big steel case, right? Guarded all the time by these big two strong guys. I know, I met them. I had my picture taken with them. They never lose sight of the Grey Cup. 430 Squadron transported the Grey Cup in one of the Gryphon helicopters from Winnipeg Airport down to the stadium. The two guys that were with it, the Grey Cup was locked in its steel grey box, taken out in the room after. I had my picture taken with it. Never left their sight, never came out of the box. Yet sometime during that period of time, as the picture showed when the Grey Cup was presented, when they hoisted it up and the base of the Grey Cup was visible on the bottom of the Grey Cup is a 430 Squadron sticker. (Laughter.)

Now how the heck that got there, I don't know. But I did have a chat to the two big guys that guard that cup. They don't know how it got there. But this is indicative of the support for Canadian men and women in uniform. They knew it was there pretty early on and they made a decision themselves to leave it there to show their support for what men and women in uniform do. This is quite incredible.

Les Canadiens cherchent maintenant désespérément des manières de manifester leur appui. Plus de Canadiens que jamais expriment de l'intérêt à l'égard des Forces canadiennes. Selon un sondage, environ 15 pour-cent des Canadiens âgés entre 18 et 35 ans - soit notre cible, certainement - prévoient se joindre à nos troupes. Je connais pas les chiffres exacts mais cela représente beaucoup de monde.

Between 18 and 35 years old, 15 percent in a poll indicated that they would be joining us soon. That's a large number of folks - our target audience. We're delighted with those numbers. What did cause me some concern was that almost 20 percent of people over the age of 55 wanted to join us. (Laughter.) And I'm not sure what's happened here. Probably including half the audience here today. (Laughter.)

That need to personally support men and women in uniform is enormous whether it's the Rallies in Red across the country starting with the one here on Parliament Hill on 22 September, whether it's the thousands and thousands of Christmas cards and scrolls. I took in 20,000 Christmas cards to Kandahar and the Gulf when I went there at Christmastime. I took in the flags of each Canadian Football League team. I took in sweaters from the Leafs and the Senators so in the ball hockey rink in front of Tim Horton's we could have real hockey with the Senators and the Leafs continuing their rivalry 10,000 kilometres away from home. And Minister MacKay took in a miniature Stanley Cup crafted by a craftsman down in Nova Scotia so when I go back in March I know that perhaps my only chance this year to see the Leafs hoisting the Stanley Cup will be if I get a young soldier -- (laughter) -- in a Leafs jersey to hoist it in Kandahar.

The entertainers and celebrities want to visit our units. Rick Mercer, paratrooper wannabe, colonel of the regiment Rick Mercer, unarmed Rick Mercer. I said, "Rick, you're never getting a gun. Stay away from the guns." Mary Walsh, Damhnait Doyle - some of you may know her, a Newfoundland singer who lives in Toronto - to be Christmas Eve on the back deck -- on the flight deck of HMCS Ottawa with 200-plus sailors and airmen and air women and soldiers and have Damhnait, instead of saying a few words to the assembled say, "General, would it be inappropriate if I led this company in singing O Canada?" I said, "My God, I don't think it would be anything but superbly appropriate." And she did. You want to have an emotional moment, eight o'clock in the morning Christmas Eve in the Gulf with a crew that's as incredible as that and sing O Canada led by Damhnait Doyle, that would be right up there with it.

All kinds of things are occurring. An individual sent me a cheque for \$10,000, a personal cheque to me. I said, I'll hand this to make sure -- (laughter) -- said whatever you need to do with that, General, for the troops or for the people in Afghanistan, you do. We've got a school being rebuilt as a result of that. Union of National Defence Employees, President John MacLennan presented me a cheque for \$20,000 from his membership. I thought first he had seen the car that I'm driving and was going to replace that but -- actually, we're going to use that to great stead also to look after the troops and to look after that mission in Afghanistan.

Thousands of gift certificates for Tim Horton's coming from right across the country to enable our soldiers to enjoy free the Tim Horton's services that are in Kandahar. And I've got to tell you there's nothing more Canadian than sipping a double-double in Kandahar Airfield while you're watching a hockey game with those Senators and Leafs shirts on. Nothing more Canadian than that.

The CFL showcased CF men and women during the Grey Cup in Winnipeg. It was absolutely incredible. And on and on and on. Toronto Maple Leafs, the Vancouver Canucks and the Allouettes are all holding, have held or will hold appreciation games. We did one a little while ago with the Senators. I did one last year. I'm standing at centre ice, 20,000 people looking at you, 2,000 soldiers.

Two stories, let me just tell you. Two stories. The first one was I'm standing there with a young soldier from Petawawa and his five-year-old son, centre ice, to drop the puck. Halperton comes up, came up, gave me the puck. I said we're going to let this little guy here drop the puck. Gave it to the kid and said okay, drop it. Bear in mind, 20,000 people waiting for the game to start. That kid shakes his head. He thought if he dropped the puck he wouldn't get it back. (Laughter.) So a little stress and pain, we actually had to convince him in about 20 seconds he could drop the puck.

And then as I was standing there in the alleyway, and this is only as good soldiers go, as I'm standing there in the alleyway, right behind the Senators' bench, there's row upon row upon row of young soldiers clearly out of Petawawa in uniform and they see me standing down there looking down at them -- and they're looking down at me and there must have been 20 or 30 of them and three or four or six or eight stand up, "Sir, it's the greatest seat." I said, "Oh my God, the name is not even started yet." (Laughter.) They had a superb evening. We never had a single event other than positive events and the thing went on superb.

Let me just say that lot of what's occurred in those areas on the sporting arena has been set, has been triggered, has been initiated by a class organization - the Ottawa Senators. Let me just give them their kudos. I'm a long-suffering Leafs fan. That's probably redundant to say that, right? But I pay incredible compliments to the Senators for putting actions to words here. Three times in a row they've had Canadian Forces appreciation nights. They've done it better each time. They're setting the standard higher for next year and perhaps even more important than that they're causing the rest of the NHL and the rest of the professional sports franchises across our country to do exactly the same.

I had a chat on Sunday night in Toronto with Leafs ownership and management and they want with the Raptors and the Marleys, for example, this coming year to have a Canadian Forces appreciation weekend in Toronto with a Raptors game, a Marleys game and a Leafs game and have lots of men and women in uniform and their families all there. An incredible thing which has snowballed across our country.

My grandson is two and a quarter years old. Speaks French. He walks in the door and he knows I'm a Leafs fan. He walks in the door, "Poppy, les Sénateurs sont bons. Les Leafs ils ne sont pas bons." (Laughter.) Sometimes the stress at home is greater than the stress at work. (Laughter.)

We have other things that occur across our country. A group of ladies in Marmorough, Ontario, just this side of Peterborough have quilted quilts for the mothers and the widows of every soldier that we have lost this year. And those quilts reflect their lives. A picture, quilted, where they went to church, where their hometown is, a map of certain things, what is important to that young man, Nicola Goddard, that young lady, to them on those quilts and they have presented those.

The Lacrosse Association of Ontario sent sticks and sweaters and caps and balls to the troops. We're establishing a relationship, a partnership really with the Canadian Paralympic Association and their initiative is what they call Soldier On program and they want to build a better support for our wounded when they come back to Canada and their families.

This recognition, the simple words of thanks to individuals across the country and those kinds of visible deeds carry those in danger. They carry those who feel along back in Canada. They carry those who are wounded and who face daunting challenges in rebuilding their bodies and their lives and they help carry those who have lost loved ones. Canadians cannot fly, sail or walk the dirty, dusty and dangerous trails that we ask them to do unless Canadians sail and fly and walk with them.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I've already gone on too long. I know that but I did warn you at the front that I was going to take a while. I've already gone on too long, risk not just boring you but killing you but I've not forgotten or ignored the immense challenges that we have. We have, for example, appreciated the recent investments in the Canadian Forces and we're trying to use them as effectively and as efficiently as we possibly can to get the biggest bang for those dollars. But funding remains a challenge. Our readiness, as indicated by the manning of our units, their equipping, their training and preparation readiness is at an alarmingly low level. We have infrastructure that is still unrelated to our operational mission and much of that infrastructure is in an unsettling state of repair. We ignore none of those things and in fact we spent almost all of our waking hours trying to solve those problems and more with your help.

What is of most concern to me right now though as the Chief of Defence Staff is our level of intensity, combining all the activities and the implications from those seven pillars - that is fighting, growing, equipping, changing the what, changing the how and mitigating the negative legacy - changing those seven pillars -- or combining those seven pillars of activity each with its endless implications requiring action plus the impact of other areas I have not mentioned means that we are at sprint speed and have been for a while. The Canadian Forces is working at about 125 percent capacity and our ability to implement more is extremely limited.

We now need to take a step back to consolidate those incredibly powerful accomplishments, to reinforce the successes we have had and to complete what we are doing and to make it routine, first to allow us to focus completely on setting conditions for success in our mission in Afghanistan. That's an overwhelming first priority. And at the same time reduce the risks to the men and women who execute that mission and we don't want to put either of those priorities at risk.

Secondly, so we can preciously guard and maybe even improve slightly our ability to do a similar mission post-Afghanistan. Third, so we can focus on preparations, growing preparations for any support that we will provide to domestic events, particularly as we look at Vancouver Olympics 2010 just around the corner. And so we can focus on making routine many of the changes that we have made and so we can complete the development of initiatives like the expansion of the special forces and the better integration of the air, land and sea forces and the bringing into service of the major equipments that we now have coming and know we will need and turning lessons learned into doctrine and training methodology and rebuilding our medical system and so on.

In short, we need a chance now to shore up our house and provide that solid base for successful implementation of future initiatives and for the overall well-being of our soldiers, our sailors, our airmen and air women. Our Vice-Chief of Defence Staff Lieutenant-General Walter Natynczyk says it's the GICP -- what's that again, Walter? It's the Good Idea Cutoff Point. We need now to just get to a plateau and do what we're doing and confirm it and make it part of our very good routine for a successful Canadian Forces.

Ladies and gentlemen, in closing, I'll tell you for a last minute we just want focus on that part. I'll focus instead on where we've been and where we are. Focus on the incredible people that we have, the most positive state of their morale, the overwhelming support of a nation for them, the honour and the privilege of serving that nation in uniform, the inspiration that we get

from our families and the fact that today across our country, around the world Canada's men and women in uniform, our sailors, our soldiers, our airmen and our air women, their families stand tall. Their heads are high. They are proud. They are professional and they feel valued. It's been a long time coming and I thank you for your part in making that happen. It's been an incredibly central part that you have played.

We will continue to need your support. God bless. Thank you. Je vous remercie.
(Applause.)

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for that. And Rick did say I had time for one question but in order to preempt that what I'd like to do is say something else. (Laughter.) And actually that very short thing is that I just want to announce to you today that Chief Warrant Officer Daniel Gilbert, Canadian Forces Chief Warrant Officer will be leaving his post this coming summer and I have asked RSM Greg Lacroix from the army to become the Canadian Forces Chief Warrant Officer. Is RSM Lacroix here? RSM, would you stand up? RSM Lacroix will become the Canadian Forces Chief Warrant Officer this summer. (Applause.) RSM, thank you

I probably do have time for one question.

Moderator: There we are. Microphone number 2.

Question: Bonjour, mon général. Merci pour un discours qui nous a fait rire.

Gen. Rick Hillier: Merci.

Question: My name is Stéphane Gauvremont and I'm doing a PhD at the University of Calgary, studying how the Royal Canadian Air Force built a vital aircraft industry, both civilian and military, in Canada in the past century. I'm afraid when I look today at the Canadian Air Force that my dissertation will become an obituary. The Canadian Air Force is in decline. Actually, you were right in your speech. It's become a military airliner carrying Tim Horton's supplies and Rick Mercer to Kandahar. (Laughter.) So may I ask you seriously if you plan finally to rejuvenate the offensive capabilities of the Canadian Air Force and to use maybe the capabilities that it has now or if you will just let it fall into ruin like we've been watching for the last 15 years?

Gen. Rick Hillier: Do I have another hour, Rick, to speak to this question? (Laughter.) First of all, you come at several perspectives here. One is you say as if it's a bad thing that we're lifting the military supplies and Tim Horton's, equipment, and Rick Mercers into theatres around the world. That's strategic and tactical lift and we are fundamentally rebuilding all of that.

Secondly, out of all the concerns that we have in the Canadian Forces, the one that falls further down the list because we've started down it to rebuild it, rejuvenate it is the air force. Whether it's the STRAT, the tactical lift, the aviation, the rotary piece, the fixed wing search and rescue, any of those pieces, sorting out how we're going to do the surveillance piece and do it effectively, continuously for Canada and the world obviously and at the same time as we've pushed hundreds of millions, maybe up to billions into the rejuvenation of the F-18 - I'm not sure what the exact figure is but it is a substantial amount of money to rebuild those F-18s and continue to have them as the world class, high performance aircraft that they need to be for Canada for at least the next 10 years. And then a walk down the road here to figure out how we're going to maintain then that high performance capability which allows you to do the lethal things that are necessary at times to do. In fact, what I would say is your premise should be incredibly optimistic if you're focussed only on building a Canadian Air Force because we are going to rebuild it and I think all the steps are in place or in the context of

becoming in place. And I have more confidence on that part of our program at this time than any other.

Question: Thank you.

Gen. Rick Hillier: Thank you.

Question: Mon général, nous vous devons une fière chandelle. Vous nous inspirez à chaque fois que vous nous adressez la parole. Vous inspirez évidemment tous les membres des forces armées canadiennes. Et pour ceux qui malgré la couleur de leurs cheveux ou le manque de cheveux aimeraient suite à vos commentaires se joindre à vous encore une fois. Votre inspiration est reconnue. Nous l'apprécions. Nous l'admirons et nous vous en remercions.

General, you inspire us every time you address this audience and so many others across the country. We are delighted at the fact that not only do you inspire this audience and many others, you obviously also greatly inspire the members of the Canadian Forces who you very properly pointed out are performing in such an outstanding manner throughout the world.

We know that you'll be travelling to do this sort of thing again fairly soon and on behalf of the delegates to this 75th anniversary Annual General Meeting, I would like to offer you some reading material for your long travels and please accept it with our greatest thanks and appreciation. (Applause.)