

**The Conference of Defence Associations**

64<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting

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17<sup>th</sup> Annual Seminar 21-24 February, 2001

**Panel Discussion: How the Forces View the Public**

Address by

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Thursday, February 22, 2001

Chateau Laurier, Ottawa

**How the Forces View the Public**

I have been invited to give a reservist's dimension to the topic "How the Canadian Forces View the Public". It is going to be difficult for me to restrain myself by remaining within the confines of the topic and not wander into the subject under discussion before lunch, "How the Canadian Public View the Armed Forces". As a Reservist - while I consider myself very much a member of the Armed Forces - my work, social and citizenship activities nevertheless by and large take place in that other realm - the public.

It is very satisfying for me to be given this opportunity at this seminar because I consider it enlightening and encouraging for reservists that this may be seen to be a demonstration of a subtle, albeit perhaps unintentional realization that the Reserve component of our Armed Forces may well be the more effective connector with the public at large and as well the politicians in their own back yard where, as constituents, the Reserves hold the ultimate political currency - the vote. Many a Reservist is frequently known to politicians at the municipal, provincial and federal levels in the context of a multiplicity of national and local issues other than defence. Add to this the demographics of our country and the remote location of many of our bases it is not surprising that, for many of the public, the only dimension of Armed Forces that they come into contact with is the Reserves. That, as an aside, gives the Reserve and their associated colleagues considerable leverage which has been evidenced over the past few years relative to the Reserve restructure issue. Such leverage should be exploited by the Armed Forces to broaden familiarity with and support for the military. As the situation now stands, the public have little knowledge of the Armed Forces such as is held in this room. As a consequence, it is only when catastrophe strikes and the normal tempo of everyday life is seriously interrupted and the Armed Forces rush to the rescue is the necessity of Armed Forces brought home to the average member of the public. At other times, defence is subsumed in the problems and costs of such as education, health, transportation, whether we get the Olympics and so on. We are not a high priority. After all, we - both Regulars and Reserves - are a very small group of individuals, some  $\frac{3}{10}$ % of 1% of all Canadians. How many of our legislators and politicians have an involved knowledge of defence? Very few. And why would you expect them to broaden their knowledge to encompass Defence unless we take forthright steps to capture their attention and make it worthwhile for

them to do so. There is very little voting currency for the politician in defence issues as matters now stand.

Yeoman efforts, however, are being made in this connection as evidenced by the staging by the Conference of Defence Associations of this event and doing so at a time that accommodates the MPs' schedules and thus encourages their attendance.

Attending this seminar today causes me to reflect that it is almost three decades ago that I passed the Chair of this Conference. Between then and now the recurring themes modified from time to time, have run on these lines:

- Defence is not a high priority for Canadians;
- Canada is a peaceful nation that will not accept the hard realities of international conflict;
- Canadian politicians are even less supportive; they do not understand 'defence' and will not go to bat for 'defence';
- Politicians and the public do support peacekeeping but they do not understand it either;
- The media is ignorant of Defence and goes out of its way to criticize the military whenever possible;
- There is no stomach in Canada for maintaining larger armed forces than we have.

And the list goes on. Certainly much the same could be heard in democracies worldwide. Civil-military relations and generally the place of armed forces in democratic societies is the recurring theme in events such as today. Balancing the state's need for projecting its power while controlling it; democracy's need for openness and accountable government with the necessary 'close hold' on military information; the professional obligation of seeing the world with a skeptic's eye with calls for 'peace dividends' and the drawing down of armed forces to embrace fully the opportunities of peace. Of course, not all of the public is ignorant of the military.

However, if we accept the premise that much of these themes are legitimate and justified by the CF's constant fight of resources and moral support we must, by virtue of our professional interest in the institution, examine the nature of these suppositions and the implications of addressing them.

The most obvious cure for defence is the encouragement of a larger defence community or constituency.

The initiative of CDA with their web site, an excellent defence primer and DND publications such as *The Maple Leaf* and the *Canadian Military Journal* will engender defence thinking. However, much has to be done to reach out to the public and the Reserves, I contend, can be useful in that regard.

On that note, and in conclusion, I would like to share with you a recent experience. The week before last I attended a conference initiated by DND. It comprised the senior officers responsible for the Army Reserves of Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. In some cases the officer was a Regular, in others a Reserve. In philosophical terms they were as one. A very successful event, it was quite enlightening. Our similarities were more evident than our differences. Two issues in particular were relevant to this session. The first was the Reserves' role and responsibilities as a connector between the military and the public, and the changing nature of the Reserves wherein the Reserves will be looked to to provide those skills which are either scarce or non-existent in a peace-time professional force. Typically, the medical situation was discussed as was the settling, in many cases, for talent rather than time. Into this category the high profile, very successful public relations and information specialties can be held. What matter if they are older than the current CRA, if that may be the case? I am sure that there are many in this room who sit on boards and provide their expertise and guidance to their organization. Let us obtain the same scope of talent for our Armed Forces. To do so will broaden our contacts with the public and considerably enhance the Reserves' leadership.

As a closing comment I cannot resist touching on another issue arising from that ABCA Conference, an issue that is very relevant to the theme of this panel.

We have a critical situation in the Army Reserves recruiting and qualifying officer candidates. In this regard, our success is at the low end of the scale compared to the others countries represented. The British seem to do well, a large part of their officer production being from a very similar system to that we had but discarded some 35 years ago. Unfortunately, a militia initiative through the Suttie Commission destroyed it. The British have 3,500 in their Officer Training programme (the OTC) located in 19 universities. I questioned them as to how many went on to serve in the Regular or Reserve Forces. Whilst many did so, a considerable percentage did not; however, these individuals are held on a Reserve list. The view held is that by the time of commissioning the officer has been inculcated with the military ethos. Those who do not go into the Regular or Territorial Army frequently go on to graduate studies or embark on careers that in many cases position them to be leaders in academe, commerce, industry, the bureaucracy or politics. They are counted on being the future supporters of Defence. Certainly, during the recent British Strategic Defence Review there was an extraordinary public and political input into the process.

Last December I was in the U.K. and had discussions with one of our senior military officers at the High Commission in London. He stated that talking to the public on military matters is so different in the U.K. to Canada. He opined they all have a military DNA. I think he is wrong. It may be the OTC – too bad we gave up the COTC.