

Remarks by Brigadier-General David Fraser on receipt of the Vimy Award
CDAI Vimy Dinner, 17 November 2006

General Manson, Minister O'Connor, General Hillier, Distinguished guests, family and friends.

I am humbled and most grateful that you have considered me worthy of this tremendous honour. I was completely taken aback when I received the call that I had been selected as this year's recipient. I was visiting the Dutch in Uruzgan in Tarin Kot when I was informed. Standing in what seemed to be boot deep moon dust, I listened with some disbelief learning about this award. The magnitude of the honour only grew in the following days as I looked down the list of previous recipients. It is a privilege to join this august list of great Canadians.

I look back on the last year, this incredibly fast paced last year and give pause to think that there were days that never seemed to end. I stand in front of you today and I am just beginning to reflect on heroic acts average Canadians are doing in Afghanistan and continue to accomplish.

Canada took the lead in the first multi-national brigade inside of the US led coalition Operation Enduring Freedom. Canada provided the brigade headquarters and task force as part of the 10th Mountain Division or otherwise known as Combined Joint Task Force 76 in Afghanistan. It was this country that led throughout the summer and fall in southern Afghanistan where the Taliban regime tried and failed to topple the Karzai Government. It was this country that put together a multi-national coalition and then took it through the transition to the NATO led ISAF coalition. In our long tradition of leading and doing the right thing, Canada once again established itself as a world leader.

It was Task Force Orion led by LCol Ian Hope that took to the field in Kandahar distinguishing themselves. They met the call for action in Helmand assisting the inflow of the British forces and Canadians now know about Sangin. This is where Major Bill Fletcher and his company distinguished themselves winning the hearts and mind of the people and combating the Taliban. Sangin was the site of Canada's first brigade attack since Korea with Task Force Orion leading the way. Operation Hewad was designed to re-establish the Government of Afghanistan's legitimate right in the Sangin region and it succeeded. During this struggle, a town 160km south of Sangin fell to the Taliban. Ian Hope answered the call and 12 hours after receiving orders he rolled his battle group into Garmser re-establishing the government's rule and achieving recognition from the President of Afghanistan. No other battle group in the brigade could have done what Ian Hope did because of excellent leadership and training and outstanding equipment. The Canadian task force was and is the best equipped unit in the brigade. In the end Task Force Orion traveled across three

provinces in Regional Command South and assisted not only the British but the Netherlands establishment of their operations in Uruzgan. Canadians should beat their chest and be proud with how fellow citizens answered the call.

August and September brought more challenges for Canada in Kandahar. The Taliban chose to engage the Government of Afghanistan and the international community. Selecting a piece of ground where their predecessors fought and defeated the Soviets, the Taliban wanted to do the same thing. Pangwayi represented the challenge to Afghanistan, NATO and Canada. On this piece of ground Canada led and fought the set piece battle of the 2006 season. Where all others had failed, Canada led and won over the Taliban supporting the Afghan government and security forces. Whereas the enemy wanted a battle of attrition, we chose to fight smartly and defeated the enemy saving a city, proving the capability of the Afghan security forces, proving the capability of a government and demonstrating the will of NATO. Where all others had failed, Canadians led and won like they did in 1917 at Vimy. Canadians, as they did 89 years ago did what all others could not. They persevered, demonstrated superior capability and determination achieving acclaim from a grateful Afghan nation, NATO allies and Canadians back home. Task Force Orion started the fight and the 1RCR battle group finished it this past fall. Canadian commanders like their forefathers in all conflicts learned from the bitter lessons of their predecessors how to conduct effective operations against a capable enemy. Preparation was extensive, effects well developed and the operation was supported with good supplies, intelligence and air power.

The victory at Vimy Ridge is celebrated as a national coming of age. For the first time Canadians attacked together and triumphed together. Pangwayi is a reaffirmation of Canada leading the way and winning. In 1914 Canada entered the war as a colony, a mere extension of Britain overseas; in 1918 she was forging visibly ahead to nationhood. 2006, Canada entered Afghanistan in a new role and today she emerges as a respected leader in NATO and the world stage. The gallant soldiers who stood fast at Ypres, stormed Regina Trench, climbed the heights of Vimy Ridge, captured Passchendaele, and entered Mons on November 11, 1918 purchased nationhood for Canada. Soldiers with similar names to their Vimy Ridge great-grandfathers, fought in Sangin, retook Garmser and re-established Pangwayi under the control of the Afghan government. History again repeats itself with the gallant efforts of our men and women serving their nation abroad building a nation called Afghanistan. Let us not forget their efforts and remember their feats.

I am once again honoured to receive this award on behalf of all the men and women serving in Afghanistan as a tribute to the Canadian spirit and reaffirmation of a nation that is doing what is right – continuing to provide hope and opportunity to average Afghans.