



ROYAL UNITED SERVICES
INSTITUTE OF NOVA SCOTIA

Security Affairs Committee

Remembering Nova Scotia's Fallen Soldiers

Remarks to the
Nova Scotia Legislature Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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by

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I would like to begin by noting that I am not a native-born Nova Scotian. I was originally a Newfoundlander, joined the Canadian Armed Forces in 1972 and served 37 years until my retirement in Halifax in 2009. My final four years were as a reserve force, or part time, officer.

My family and I moved to Halifax in 1991, where I was assigned as the Defence department's Regional Director of Communications for Atlantic Canada. Following a year-long assignment to Croatia and Bosnia Herzegovina in 1995 to 1996, I returned to Halifax. My superiors in Ottawa wanted to assign me to National Defence Headquarters, but I employed my most persuasive capabilities to have them leave me in place.

Accordingly, I was assigned to the Headquarters of Land Force Atlantic Area, the Army formation of Atlantic Canada, as the Senior Area Public Affairs Officer, a position I held until 2000, when I was assigned to the southern European headquarters of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Naples, Italy, until 2004. Predictably, when I returned my superiors wanted me to work in Ottawa for my final several years, but I was offered a position with Communications Nova Scotia and was, ultimately, the Communications Advisor with the Department of Natural Resources, until 2007, when I was asked to undertake the position of Military Affairs Advisor with the provincial Department of Intergovernmental Affairs.

This position was significant. Nova Scotia was the first province in Canada to create such a position and staff it with a public servant. I used to joke with the ministers for whom I worked that this constituted the smallest ministry in the British Commonwealth — the minister and me. Other provinces, most notably Manitoba, tried to claim they were first, but I quickly disabused my Prairie colleague of that misperception.

I retired from that position in 2009 with the feeling that we did some wonderful work. With the enthusiastic assistance of my colleagues, we did a number of small things for Nova Scotians who deployed to Afghanistan to make them understand that they were remembered and appreciated; we also worked with the Defence Department and military offices in Nova Scotia to identify the actions and decisions that would support them.

We should be mindful that the Canadian Armed Forces is responsible for more than \$ 1 billion of the provinces revenue annually, but also, while military personnel are assigned to Nova Scotia for specific postings, they quickly become integrated into the fabric of the province and the communities in which they live — Halifax, Eastern Passage and Greenwood, in particular.

But there are also about 3,000 reservists, or part time

military members, in Nova Scotia. On average, every ten reservists equal one person year of employment, but more than that, there are a great many other advantages that these part timers bring to the province.

When Central Canada was paralyzed by the massive ice storm in 1998, the Army asked reservists to assist with recovery from the impact of the storm. The local Army commander received double the number of volunteers that he expected.

When SWISSAIR 111 occurred on September 2, 1998, reservists undertook whatever work was necessary. Some worked with me at our international press centre, some participated in recovery of floating material in St. Margaret's Bay, and others assisted with shoreline searches.

When Nova Scotia received 2,400 ethnic Albanian Kosovars in 1999, the Army called out reservists to assist with the accommodation and temporary resettlement of this unfortunate people, and again, military reservists assisted.

When we underwent the blizzard of 2003, there was that same response.

Similarly, as Canada went into the conflict in Afghanistan, the reserve component was a major element of the Canadian expeditionary force. Some estimates put the reserves consistently at fourteen per cent of the total, and at times, it may have been more. Successive commanders repeated that Canada would not have been able to meet their operational objectives without the assistance and support of our reserves.

The role of the Military Affairs Advisor was a busy one and one that attracted a lot of attention from the Canadian Armed Forces. Commanders and senior representatives used Nova Scotia as an example for the other nine provinces to emulate. This introduced a period when senior military representatives in this province felt a close camaraderie with the province's leadership and even briefed cabinet about the roles and operations of the Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Army and the Royal Canadian Air Force in the province.

Nova Scotia became the first Canadian province to pass job protection legislation for reservists who deploy on operations with the Canadian Armed Forces; and every student has the right to return to their program of study and without financial penalty.

But our real work occurred when a Nova Scotian was killed in that theatre of operations. Until I retired from the position, the minister and I would visit the families privately to present them with the Province's flag that was flown in that serviceperson's honour at half-mast on the grounds of Province House. It was laid out in a hand-made hardwood presentation box and given to the families in their homes.

Minster Murray Scott had made arrangements with the Springhill Institute to have the boxes made.

I would like to note that after I retired from the provincial public service, I maintained my association with efforts to recognize our Nova Scotian fallen soldiers. I became the Nova Scotia representative to the Highway of Heroes. Whenever a fallen Nova Scotian travelled that highway I provided a provincial flag that was flown from the Victoria Park overpass as the procession drove by. The Highway's coordinator returned each of the flags to me and I would ask a notable Nova Scotian in that area to present it to the family.

On a per capita basis, more members of the Canadian Forces come from Nova Scotia than from any other province. An estimated 12 per cent of the military is made up of Bluenosers.

The number of Nova Scotians who made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of our nation in Afghanistan is also disproportionate. With only 2.5 per cent of the Canadian population, Nova Scotian service members represent ten per cent of the fatalities of Canadian military operations there.

Canada has recognized each of its fallen servicewomen and men with ramp services as they departed Kandahar and returned to CFB Trenton.

Ontario has recognized each one, as he or she made that last trip down the Highway of Heroes.

Manitoba has named lakes after those from that province who have died in uniform. Nova Scotia's fallen service personnel should also be recognized by this province in a manner that is respectful, appropriate and permanent.

Nova Scotia has 21 provincial parks. How fitting a memorial it would be to name these parks, or the campgrounds or picnic areas within those parks, after those who have given their lives in that far-off country, fighting a war, as their nation demanded of them.

As a province, we should honour the memories of these Nova Scotians who made the supreme sacrifice on behalf of the nation that sent them and the province they came from.

Nova Scotians, like so many other Canadians, have answered the call when asked. When they join the regular force, members of the Canadian Armed Forces understand and accept that they are subject to "Unlimited Liability," that they must serve when directed, and where they are directed to deploy regardless of the risks and dangers that may be present.

This is not the same for reservists. They can simply choose not to step forward to voluntarily place themselves in harm's way. But they do, as they have so often in the past. And when they do, they join the profession of arms alongside their colleagues.

We now live in a different age than those simpler times when people generally answered the call from Queen, Flag and Country. So many no longer recognize the need for public and military service. The traditional values of loyalty, courage and duty are never manifested in easy times, but demonstrated only by those who choose to step into the pathway of challenge, adversity and danger.

These people, who would be ordinary under normal circumstances, provide a lens through which we can measure the gap between where we stand and where they have placed the bar, and have that bar rest on the twin underpinnings of courage and sacrifice.

It is my wish, as I hope it is yours, that we recognize the sacrifice of the thirteen Nova Scotians and the two who have adopted this province as home, who have fallen in the line of duty. By remembering them, we may give our younger Nova Scotians a beacon to allow them to also recognize, not only the benefits, but also the responsibilities, of living in Nova Scotia.