

Speaking Notes for

Lieutenant General (Retd) Michael K. Jeffery

at the

Remembrance Day Service

Bell's Corner United Church

11 November 2007

Good morning. I want to thank you for the invitation to worship with you today on this Remembrance Day Morning, it is a pleasure to be here

Today is Remembrance Day – that time when Canadians gather to honour those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the defence of Canada and world peace. It is not, as some may argue, to celebrate war, but to honour those who have fought.

I personally subscribe to the “just war” theory, which combines both a moral abhorrence towards war with a readiness to accept that war may sometimes be necessary. Jesus taught us to turn the other cheek, (Matthew 5:38-48) - a sound personal moral code. But there are conditions under which society feels compelled to defend itself against forces which would destroy it. In short, sometimes we have to fight. However, today we need to separate the politics of conflict from the celebration of sacrifice.

Society is protected by a range of organizations and people committed to the safety and security of the nation. Police, fire departments and the medical profession immediately come to mind. But we must include amongst these professions the military. These men and women in uniform, these guardians of the nation, hold a special place in our society. They have taken an oath to defend the nation and to be prepared to sacrifice in fulfilling that commitment. It is these special Canadians that we honour today.

In remembering, we would do well to reflect on who they are. For years, we have attended Remembrance Day services, recalling the veterans of yore. WWI, WWII and Korea were the focus of our thoughts through much of our lives, and while Canada did lose service men and women in a variety of Peacekeeping type operations, the numbers were small, as was the national impact. That has changed, as over the past 15 years Canada has participated in a large number of security operations of increasing intensity. And today our operations in Afghanistan are as difficult and risky as any Canada has faced in any previous conflict. We have men and women who today are facing the horrors of war, every bit as real as our fathers and grandfathers. But what does that mean for us and how, if at all, does it change how we view remembrance?

Remembrance Day has long been a traditional day in our collective calendars - right up there with Christmas and Easter. We all participate, but the emphasis seems much more on the tradition – something we have always

done. There is no question that our veterans “remember” why we are here in a very personal way, but for many Canadians, the real personal connection to the ceremony has been missing. I sense that is changing.

As I attend Remembrance ceremonies today, I reflect that it was only a few years ago that, faced with dwindling crowds, we wondered whether Remembrance Day had a future. However, there has been a resurgence of interest and concern. In part, this has been due to the public recognition of the dwindling numbers of World War and Korean War veterans. But significantly it has been due to the increasing actions of today’s Canadian Forces - and they are significant.

Today we have sailors, soldiers, airmen and women deployed around the globe on missions to preserve the peace and defend our way of life. To give you some idea of what they face, let me talk briefly on the nature of the current conflict.

Today members of the CF deploy on operations in Afghanistan for a period of six months. They may operate from secure bases, but most spend the majority of their time deployed and operating in the local communities. They can and do find themselves in Tactical operations every bit as intense as any conflict in history – with all the risks that come with it.

But there the similarity ends. There is no front line. This is an environment where they are never sure who is friend and who is foe. Where, they never know if the person they are trying to help is going to detonate a bomb. Where, they aren’t sure if the old man driving the car approaching them is disoriented, or has an evil intent.

The physical and mental strain is as great as it has ever been. They face the debilitating effects of operating under constant fear and working weeks at a time in temperatures over 40 Degrees Celsius, with only rare periods of respite. And when they come home, to family and friends, they must live with the certainty that they must return.

We have been in Afghanistan for four years, resulting in many members of the CF having been there more than once. Today a soldier in the Canadian Army can expect to have only a year at home before he or she is again deployed into conflict. And the losses have been significant. 71 have been killed and many times that injured - some very seriously. And increasingly

we face serious mental casualties, as the horrors of conflict and the strain of long exposure take their toll.

But there are other differences. During the two World Wars, the nation was at war and, while there were individual differences of view on the merits of the conflict, the nation knew it had to commit. Sailors, Soldiers, Airmen and women left Canada for years at a time, rarely coming home. Indeed many of them never came home. Every family and every community was affected and everyone shared the load. When one family experienced a loss or injury, everyone in the community suffered. And when the troops finally did come home, everyone in the country celebrated that the great sacrifice was at an end and the nation rushed to return to normal.

Today, we again face the reality of troops in combat - current day veterans, communities and families who have suffered and sadly will suffer again the losses of injury or death. But, much as with Korea, we are not a nation at war. I don't feel the sense of unity that comes from that overarching national commitment – we all go about our lives as normal and unless we see a report on the National News, few think about the commitment of our troops. And while many agree with the government's international policy and commitment of the Canadian Forces, many do not. Unlike the past, where everyone had a relative or knew someone affected, there is a general disconnectedness from the actions and the sacrifices being made.

In such an environment, our remembrance cannot be the passive tradition of the past, but needs to be the active remembrance that draws the past into the present. Today's Canadian Forces, both regular and reserve, is a force of veterans, out there protecting us all. These veterans also need to be remembered. This is not to minimize or relegate to history the tremendous contribution and sacrifice of older veterans. But it means Remembrance can't just be about the past.

Today, on parades throughout Ottawa and across Canada, we have veterans of World War II, Korea and a multitude of peacekeeping and other missions. We are proud of what they represent, their sacrifice and their accomplishments.

But less visible, you have members of your community who are making that same sacrifice today. I don't know who they all are; probably most of you do not either. Some of them are the sailors, soldiers and airmen and women of

the regular military who originate here. They and their families may now live elsewhere, as their duty calls them, but they are local families nonetheless. Or they may be serving members of the Canadian Forces who are stationed in Ottawa – living in the local community. In either case, if misfortune hits, this community is affected.

But increasingly Canada is relying on reservists to carry a portion of the load and this impacts on the local community more directly. Indeed today there are soldiers from the various reserve units in Ottawa who are deployed on operations, including in Afghanistan. To give you some idea of the magnitude, 33 Brigade which is headquartered here in Ottawa currently has over 150 reservists, citizen soldiers, either serving on international operations or preparing to go.

So whether the commitment is of a serving member of the regular Canadian Forces from this region or assigned here, or a member of a local reserve unit, the community is affected. We all pray that every one of them will return home safe and sound – but the risk is there.

But the impact of this risk goes further. The strain of operational deployments is always carried disproportionately by the families - the spouses, parents, siblings and children of those far away. Every minute of absence is felt intensively by those families. And every report, opinion or imagined action imparted by our 24 hour a day news media is pored over by family members. When the news announcer says that a NATO or Canadian soldier has been killed or wounded, their hearts stop – waiting for that phone call - or a visit from the Chaplain. For these families and their friends they remember every single day. And this load is being carried by the families and friends of these military personnel here in our community.

Now some would argue that our troops should not be deployed overseas and should not be fighting. That this is someone else's war and that Canadians should have no part of it. I respect those views and the right, indeed the obligation of Canadians to debate such issues. But you won't likely hear too many in uniform sharing that view. These are volunteers – who believe Canada has an important role to play in the world. They, like me, also believe there are principles worth fighting for and if necessary dying for.

But whether or not you agree with their mission, all Canadians have the responsibility to support the troops asked to complete it. Remembrance is

not just to recall the past, but it is also to “keep someone in mind”. In this context, I would ask that you consider making every day your special remembrance day. Something I like to call “Active” Remembrance.

And bear in mind it is a special breed of Canadian that we are remembering. In this age when so much of society is “me” oriented and we seem to lack the cohesion of community, we have young men and women who have willingly put on the uniform and have placed their lives on the line for an ideal and ultimately to protect us and our way of life.

They or their families; wives, husbands, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, sons or daughters may live next door to you, may drive your local bus, or may be the cashier at the local supermarket. You may not know who they all are, but I am certain every one of you knows at least one of them.

Get to know who these special Canadians are – these Canadians in uniform and their families. Support them in their burden. Show your interest and concern. They don’t require much – often only a voice of concern and an understanding ear. If just one person shows concern, you will make the burden they carry so much easier

John McCrae in his epic poem “In Flanders Fields” said.... “To you from failing hands we throw the torch”. Well - the torch has been thrown. We face a new era of security challenges requiring Canadians again to commit and to sacrifice and we have a new generation of veterans who need our support.

Here is the torch – “be yours to hold it high”

Please - Every Day – “Let Us Remember Them”.