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Chair

Mr. Royal Galipeau

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● (0845)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC)): Good morning. This is meeting number 37 for the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. Today we have some distinguished guests.

I'd like to welcome Brigadier-General Kevin Cotten and Sergeant Jamie MacIntyre. They're going to talk to us about, and I have it in French—

[*Translation*]

The Nijmegen marches.

[*English*]

Members of the committee have been looking forward to this for a long time, and we thank you for being here.

Brigadier-General, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

BGen Kevin Cotten (Brigadier-General, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I would like to start off by thanking you for the opportunity to address you this morning.

[*English*]

Nijmegen holds a very special place in my heart, as it does in Sergeant MacIntyre's heart and for anyone who has actually completed the marches. We really want to thank you for the opportunity to come and share our experiences with you.

Here you can see a couple of people. You'll certainly recognize the one on the left. I want to say a special thank you to MP Lizon for inviting us to come to address the committee. The man on the right is actually a member of the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick, Brian Macdonald, who is responsible for military affairs for the Province of New Brunswick.

Yes?

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Do they have wristbands on in case they get lost as well as the...?

BGen Kevin Cotten: That's right. GPS, so you can find them.

Here's the outline. Basically, I'm going to cover the five Ws in a specific order. We'll get to that through each of these bullets. I welcome questions throughout, or if you don't mind, you can hold them until the end. Hopefully, I'll answer your questions during the presentation, but I'm happy to take questions anytime.

We'll start out with the where.

As you can see on the map, Nijmegen is a small city, really, with a population of 165,000, located in the southeastern part of the Netherlands. It is the oldest city in the Netherlands, dating back to AD 5, so there's a lot of history there.

Nijmegen wasn't the original host of the marches. It has moved around a bit throughout the Netherlands, but since the Second World War, the 1946 timeframe, Nijmegen became the main city hosting the marches, hence the name.

You will also see on the lower left corner the city of Lille, France, which is basically our airport of debarkation when we deploy to Europe for the Nijmegen marches. It puts us in very close proximity to Vimy Ridge, one of the highlights of our trip to Europe. It's only about 30 minutes away.

Now I'll move to the what.

Nijmegen marches originated in 1909 with the Dutch army. It was basically to provide physical fitness and endurance for the infantry. It evolved into the largest marching event in the world and is known as the Walk of the World. It includes 45,000 people marching from over 50 countries. That number includes about 5,000 military members from over 30 countries.

It consists of four consecutive days of marching. Each day, on average, is about 40 kilometres. You'll see that there are two different categories, both military and civilian. In the military, we are locked into a specific military route. We must carry weight, just 10 kilograms, and we have to start and finish with that weight, plus any other weight you might be carrying in terms of extra rations, water, and so on. Civilians have a choice of routes: 30, 40, or even 50 kilometres a day. You'll see people who are 60, 70, or 80 years old marching 30, 40, or 50 kilometres. I've seen a few of them actually wearing wooden clogs while marching those distances. I guess if you're comfortable with your footwear, it works for you.

Canada has been participating since 1952. Originally, our participation was based on our presence in Europe, out of Germany. Since we repatriated back to Canada after the Cold War, we've been deploying from Canada since then. My first year as the commander of the contingent was 2012, which happened to be the 60th anniversary of the Canadian Forces' participation.

The marches really are important to both Canada and the Netherlands. We have a very close relationship with the Netherlands. It basically hearkens back to the liberation of Nijmegen in 1944, and to the overall Netherlands in 1945.

The Chair: We're so close that they gave us Peter Stoffer.

Voices: Oh, oh!

BGen Kevin Cotten: There's that link, the liberation. There's also a link due to a very special birth that occurred here in Ottawa in 1943, and I'll touch on that a little bit later.

There are over one million spectators who line the route during the marches there. It's an incredible event. It's a national holiday for that region. It's a party week for the people of the Netherlands. It's not so much of a party for the people who are having to march, though.

This photo illustrates the magnitude of the event, if you will. This is the final day, during the final victory march through downtown Nijmegen. If you can, imagine a five kilometre long route lined with people five and six deep, on the rooftops, on the balconies, all cheering as you march past. Both of us can attest to the fact that when the Canadian flag goes by, the cheers get louder. They have not forgotten what we've done for them.

You'll see the sign there, Via Gladiola. That is really in honour of the flowers that the spectators present to the marchers as we pass. You end up with an armful of gladioli by the time you hit the finish line.

I'll give little bit more on the when and a little bit more on the what.

The main event begins on the third Tuesday of July each year. For the Canadian contingent, it's preceded by a formal departure ceremony that we do at the Canadian War Museum. It's hosted by them and it has been for about the last 12 or 13 years.

We have a fair number of VIPs who attend. Normally, we'll have a reviewing officer in the form of the Chief of the Defence Staff. Two years ago, we had His Excellency the Governor General. We'll have the ambassador from the Netherlands, and senior representatives from the Royal Canadian Legion. A number of veterans also attend.

It's an opportunity to formally say good luck and send off the troops. We are also presented with a number of wreaths that we are expected to lay on their behalf, both in Vimy and in Groesbeek cemetery near Nijmegen.

● (0850)

On the Friday prior to the marches, we all get on an Airbus and deploy to Lille, France, arriving there either very late on Friday night or very early on Saturday morning, depending on the flight departure time. That gives us the day to visit the wonderful Canadian cemetery and the Vimy Memorial there. It is really something to see. If you haven't been there, I strongly encourage you, if you get a chance, to get over there to see it.

We have some time to actually visit the memorial. We do a battlefield tour there, go into the trenches and into the tunnels that they've maintained, and then hold a remembrance ceremony in the shadow of the Vimy Memorial, which again is a very powerful thing, particularly for a number of young Canadians who have never been there and who really do get to feel that link back in history to their forefathers.

Sunday and Monday are basically for acclimatization and preparation. We end up shaking ourselves out a little and getting our kit ready. We're very careful about weighing the sand that we're going to be carrying to make sure we're not carrying any extra weight. We also have an opportunity to visit the town of Nijmegen a bit, just to get familiar with the surroundings.

Tuesday kicks off the march. That's day one of the march. It happens to be the longest day. It's about a 44-kilometre day, so if you make it through the first day, the rest is a lot easier.

Each evening, for the VIP group and the contingent command team, there is a cocktail reception hosted by a number of different nations. You can imagine after you've marched eight hours putting on the uniform and your shoes and going to stand around for a couple of hours more, having a drink and a few snacks. It makes for a very long day, but it is certainly a great opportunity for networking with our other military contingents.

Wednesday is day two. You will see on the slide that I mention the Canada-U.K. reception. We work very closely with the British forces during Nijmegen. We share the burden of manning a number of rest points throughout the march. Each day there are two or three rest points along the way, and we share that responsibility with them. They bring their cooks and medics, and we bring ours as well, so we have a bit of synergy there in working with them. We also co-host a national bilateral reception that evening.

For me, Thursday is the highlight. It's probably the toughest day, but it's one of the most rewarding, because at the 30-kilometre mark of that 40-kilometre day we stop at Groesbeek cemetery and honour our war dead with a ceremony. There are over 2,338 Canadians buried there. That is probably the highlight of the march. Again, it's where you really connect. You're actually walking over the ground they walked over during the day, and being able to pay homage to them is a wonderful experience. The tough part is stopping after 30 kilometres, having a ceremony for about an hour and a half, and then getting going again for the last 10 kilometres, even though it's kind of downhill towards the end of the march that day. But still....

Finally, on Friday, the last day, it doesn't matter who you are; if you've made it to Friday morning, you're going to finish the march. You're walking on adrenalin at that point. The crowds are bigger. There is a party atmosphere going on, and you end up crossing that finish line in fine form. The highlight of that day is the medal ceremony, which occurs in the town of Nijmegen. As the contingent commander, I get to present the medals to those who have completed the march. Again, if you want to see some smiling happy faces, that's the day. I'll be showing you the medal up close a little later, but this slide shows what it looks like.

Saturday and Sunday are basically for a little bit of downtime and for medical recovery for those who have not fared so well, and it's definitely an opportunity for our troops to get out and see a little bit of the Netherlands. Some will hop on the train to Amsterdam. Others will go to Arnhem to visit the Airborne Museum there and to see the bridge. Others will just stay in the local area and relax, but it is an opportunity to put your feet up and enjoy a little bit of time in Europe.

On Monday we are back on the plane heading back to Canada. It's a very full 10-day program. We jam-pack it full of activity. It's very worthwhile.

While we're there, we are accommodated in a Dutch military camp on the edge of the town of Nijmegen, which sprouts into a temporary home for those 4,000 to 5,000 military members who are there for the marches. There are rudimentary, austere conditions. As you can see on the slide, it is a modular construction. We have sleeping, dining, and ablution facilities, and some office space as well, and our entire contingent of 200-plus will sleep in that one accommodation.

On the next slide, I'll show you what the rooms look like. It's not the Hilton. It has a number of bunk beds for 6 to 12 or 14 people per room. You will notice, as the slide shows, that the walls on the side do not go all the way up to the ceiling. There is an open top, which means that you hear everything up and down that whole building. You can imagine, with 250 people, the snoring and other sounds that you might have to hear. Thankfully, by the time you finish marching each day, you're so exhausted that you'll sleep through pretty much anything.

● (0855)

I don't know, Laurie, if you can remember Keith Jones' snoring.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Oh, yes. Earplugs were not a luxury; they were a necessity.

BGen Kevin Cotten: That's right.

They are fairly austere conditions, but they certainly meet the need for what we need while we're there. It really does bring the teams closer together, because they're in close quarters and really getting to know each other.

Now I'll move on to the who.

The size of the Canadian contingent will vary from year to year. The year that I commanded, 2012, was a big year because of our 60th anniversary. The total size was 270 people.

[*Translation*]

The command team is small, made up of four people. There are also 14 to 16 teams with 11 people each.

[*English*]

The marching teams, as you see there, are formed from across the country. We have army, navy, and air force representation, both regular force and reserves, and we try to cover geographically every region of Canada each year. You can imagine there's quite a bit of competition to bid to get a team into this. We'll have about 30 teams apply for these 14 to 16 spots.

There are a few extra marchers. We do have a number of VIPs who accompany us. We have a few sweepers who come along the back trail to make sure they're picking up anybody who is having any difficulty. In particular, we notice they end up helping Americans, who don't seem to train as well as we do for this, and the British occasionally as well.

There's quite a large contingent of support staff. We basically have to bring a whole bunch of things to make ourselves almost self-sufficient, so you'll see quite a few medical staff, some public affairs people, and photographers to capture what we do. We have a padre there to bless our feet before we step off each morning. He blesses the soles of our feet—excuse the humour. There are a number of cooks, canteen folks, supply people, drivers, and general duty personnel.

Finally, we had the pleasure of the central band being with us in 2012. To have live music particularly during that victory parade in that last five kilometres leading our contingent through the streets of Nijmegen is just an incredible thing.

This is just a quick slide on VIP participation. I'm just covering through 2011 and 2013. You can see the then defence Minister MacKay on the right with our contingent sergeant-major Chief Warrant Officer Jones. So he did come over for a visit and he did march one day with the contingent.

In terms of the send-off parade, as I said, the Chief of the Defence Staff and the Dutch ambassador—again some very senior folks—come to wish the troops well before we head out.

There's a small list there of VIP marchers, members of Parliament, and there are at least two in the room here with us today: Laurie Hawn and Mr. Lizon. Blaine Calkins has been with us. I marched with Randy Hoback one year, and as I said, an MLA from New Brunswick as well, Brian Macdonald.

Defence and VIP guests as well march with us. David Jacobson, the former U.S. ambassador to Canada, did the full march with us. We've had directors general and directors from Veterans Affairs helping to cement our relationship with that department and to help them understand better who the clients are that they're serving and some of the challenges that we go through from a physical perspective.

We bring a few honorary colonels over as well. We had Honorary Colonel Ryback and Honorary Colonel Rolingher. These folks are great connections with local communities. They support our reserve units very strongly, and we're happy to have them come along.

We also have a representative from the Legion. That person is selected by the Legion. The first year I think what happened was that their primary candidate had to withdraw about six weeks before the march, so they pulled another guy in at six weeks, and that guy had to train like crazy to get ready to go, but he did complete the marches. He was hurting a bit by the end, but he did do it.

During the marches, we have a number of visitors who come to see us as well. I'll just mention two other people who aren't on that list. Minister Alexander and Minister Leitch both completed all of the training. They were both parliamentary secretaries at the time. They managed to squeeze it into their busy schedules, but the week before we deployed, there was a cabinet shuffle and they were appointed ministers and did not get to go, after marching about 1,000 kilometres in training. They were very disappointed, but I think very pleased at the same time since they were getting cabinet appointments.

The Chair: They didn't turn down the cabinet appointments.

BGen Kevin Cotten: Apparently not. They don't know what they missed.

Finally, here's the why. Here you'll see a list of objectives. I'm going to cover them all in a little bit more detail in a minute.

First of all is fielding a first-class contingent. It allows us to showcase the Canadian Forces to an international audience. We are in fact ambassadors for Canada there among a very grateful and gracious host nation. We meet with a lot of local people and we get to meet a lot of our counterparts in the other military contingents.

Second is ensuring successful completion by all the marchers. This is a very tough physical, mental, and emotional challenge.

● (0900)

The only way to be successful is to train for it, so we teach our members that by training and working together as a team, they can overcome any obstacle. I think Sergeant MacIntyre will talk a bit more about that later from his perspective.

This enhances the relationship with the Netherlands, which is again a very special relationship. There will be more on that in a few moments.

Commemoration is a key part of our visit to the Netherlands. We have this beautiful ceremony at Vimy Ridge. We also honoured the dead in Groesbeek cemetery. In the past year, in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War, our folks were allowed to visit the Menin Gate for the last post ceremony there.

I mentioned enhancing the partnership with Veterans Affairs, and engaging with VIP marchers and visitors again to familiarize them with who our Canadian Forces are and what we do.

Finally as a complementary add-on in 2012, we decided to bring a team from our Soldier On program. It had not been done before, and in fact we're the only country that's had an entire team of recovering ill and injured guys complete the march as a team. That was a great compliment on their road to recovery. Sergeant MacIntyre will talk more about that in a minute.

I'll do a quick summary of each of those objectives along with some photos, starting with “A First Class Canadian Contingent”. At the top left you can see our Chief of the Defence Staff Tom Lawson inspecting the troops at the War Museum during our send-off parade. His comment to me afterwards was that he didn't see very much extra weight on any of those folks. Marching many hours every week certainly has benefits in terms of weight loss and maintenance of very good physical fitness.

In the lower left you can see me and MP Lizon on the dais. Each morning as all the contingents leave the camp, they give an official salute. We were on the dais receiving that salute. It's really the kickoff of the day. We had a very specific Canadian way of kicking things off. The whole camp heard us when we left. I'll talk about that at the end of the presentation.

In the lower right you can see the Soldier On team proudly holding a combat boot in a glass case. That was the award for the team that embodied the spirit of Nijmegen. For very good reasons, as you'll hear, that team certainly impressed all of us.

In the top right you can see one of the teams returning to the camp. We always pay compliments to the guards at the camp who are our hosts, so that's what the salute there is about.

What does success look like? As I said, at the end of day four, we stop on the edge of town. We drop our packs. We change at least our uniform shirts so we have a fresh uniform. We put on our berets. We hold a medal ceremony at which each of the teams is presented with its individual medals for successful completion and a team medal if it has completed it.

I want you to have a closer look at the medal. You'll find that people march for different reasons. One of the reasons is certainly the medal, which is a tangible sign of their success. The other part of the success is the—

An hon. member: What do the letters stand for?

BGen Kevin Cotten: KNBLO is the association that actually organizes the march. I can't remember what it specifically stands for.

You can see in the photo in the top right that it is really the high point: everybody's on the highest emotions; the crowds are cheering and we know we've completed our four days of marching. The victory march is essentially a bonus five kilometres you get to do on top of your day of marching, but you don't even feel it because it's just such a great thing.

I talked about our relationship with the Netherlands. In the top left you'll see me standing there with the deputy head of mission for the embassy here, Rochus Pronk. I have yet to convince him to join us on the march. He's actually sending one of his staffers this year: Wendy Sewell is coming to join us on the march. Hopefully. she'll be able to come back and tell him what a great deal it was.

There are over one million Canadians of Dutch heritage—I'm sure Mr. Stoffer's familiar with that—here in Canada. That's a huge number. You're also certainly familiar with the Tulip Festival as a sign of thanks from the Dutch for what we did for them during the Second World War. But a little known fact is that, according to 2011 figures, the Netherlands was the second largest source of foreign direct investment in Canada, at $56 billion. They were also our sixth largest merchandise export market, at $5 billion, in 2011. We have very close ties from a trade perspective and a military perspective, and certainly in terms of a common heritage.

● (0905)

In the lower left corner, you will see members of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 005 colour party. They are one of five Legion branches in continental Europe. They are very proud to come out every year to support us at the Groesbeek cemetery event. They also do a number of other commemorative events around the Netherlands.

In the bottom centre, you can see one of the grave markers at Groesbeek cemetery. Again, 2,338 Canadians...there are 2,617 people actually buried there. There are a number of others, British, a couple of Polish soldiers, and a few others from a number of other nations.

On the right, a little known fact is that the Dutch flag is the only foreign flag to ever fly over the Peace Tower. That was in 1943, on the birth of Princess Margriet. As you might recall, the royal family left the Netherlands at the beginning of the Second World War and came to Canada. Princess Juliana was pregnant at the time, and she gave birth to her daughter in Ottawa. Another little known fact is that the maternity ward at the Civic Hospital was temporarily deemed extraterritorial by the Government of Canada so that Princess Margriet would have Dutch citizenship. It was a temporary measure, to make sure that she was a Dutch citizen.

With regard to commemoration, as the number of our wartime vets sadly continues to decline, the importance of commemoration is on the increase. We take advantage of every opportunity while we're there to commemorate the fallen. In the top left is a young civilian. That's Shawn MacDougall from Veterans Affairs, who is the director of privacy and access to information. He had no idea what he was getting into when he volunteered, but that man had tears coming down his face when he marched in on the fourth day. There he is laying a wreath on behalf of Veterans Affairs at Groesbeek. On the lower left, you can see the colour party.

The top right is Chief Warrant Officer Keith Jones. He was my contingent sergeant-major. He's the senior non-commissioned member who accompanies the contingent and the guy who makes everything happen. I think he has completed 14 Nijmegen marches now, and he'll be going on to 15 this year. He loves walking. I think it's a bit of an addiction for him. I've told him to get counselling, but it doesn't seem to be working. He just retired last year. He's now in New Brunswick, and he's still marching down there. He's going to be coaching a team from True Patriot Love this year, so he's going back as a civilian. This time he'll be staying in a hotel with a spa, not in our austere conditions, so I'm not sure how he's going to adapt to that. He'll still be snoring, though, I'm sure.

Again, the partnership with Veterans Affairs is very important. As we all know, there have been some challenges with the care for our ill and injured. Making sure that there is transition from service in the Canadian Armed Forces to Veterans Affairs is a very important thing. The more that they understand what we do and who we are, the better they can serve us. We do share, in terms of commemoration with them, and again, in offering the senior leadership the opportunity to march with us. Similarly, participation in the march and visits by influential Canadians help to familiarize them with who we are and what we do.

On the top left, again that's Captain Macdonald from New Brunswick. He is a retired captain from The Royal Canadian Regiment. On the lower left is a retired sergeant and Legion representative, Chris Blondin. On the lower right, again you see young Shawn MacDougall.

On the upper right is Honorary Colonel Sol Rolingher, from 1 MP Regiment in Edmonton. Sol has a heart of gold. He's one of the most committed, toughest guys I've ever met. He was 69 years old, I believe, when he attempted the marches with us. Sadly, on day three, I had to order him off the march for medical reasons to avoid long-term injury to his feet. If I hadn't done that, he would have marched on to day four, no doubt about it. Sadly, he had to withdraw that day. It shattered him at the time, but, again, to have completed three days at his age in the conditions that year—the temperatures were very warm, as I recall, and it was quite a tough march.

The Chair: Does that mean he didn't get the medal?

BGen Kevin Cotten: Unfortunately, he did not get the medal.

The guy in the centre needs no introduction. I think you all know him. He's one of our biggest marching fans and supporters.

Again, thank you, Monsieur Lizon, for inviting us here.

I would like to turn the floor over to my colleague, Sergeant MacIntyre, to speak for a couple of minutes on his experience. He can talk about this great group of people.

● (0910)

Sgt Jamie MacIntyre (Sergeant, Department of National Defence): Thank you, sir.

I got to march with the Soldier On team in 2012. That's a picture of our team. I was joined by other ill and injured Canadian members, men and women across Canada with visible and non-visible injuries.

Everybody had their own obstacles to overcome in order just to volunteer to come out to this event. Some people were reluctant even to leave their house.

I'm an amputee so I have a very similar condition to Dale up there, completely different, but very similar, so doing the training and stuff for me was like, man, am I really going to be able to withstand marching this distance? But I always had good teammates, and if I looked at Dale, he was still going, so I was still going to go too.

Everybody had various different obstacles they had to confront and overcome just to get to Nijmegen to start the marches. Our team was a really great team. The whole team started and completed together, so all the members of our team did complete it and did get the medal.

In the end it's just so empowering to all of us ill and injured soldiers. You get there. You see everybody else, all the other teams. Our team was a really strong team as well. We completed. We didn't lose anybody so it's very empowering and it helps you accept your new normal. You're just another soldier and you're marching.

Being given the opportunity to go to Nijmegen, and face your fears and your personal obstacles was just an amazing opportunity. I met some people for the first time and we did some of our training marches here. When I talked to them at the end of the fourth day, I saw the way that people interacted with others—their attitudes and their emotions—was so vastly different and had improved so much.

We had people who were very introverted and did not want to speak to anybody, but I can tell you when you're marching for eight hours with somebody, you can eventually pull something out of them because you have to talk about something to keep your mind off marching.

It was a really great bonding experience. It was one of the highlights of my military career. It was an excellent opportunity for all ill and injured soldiers.

There's a nice picture of me.

Thank you.

● (0915)

BGen Kevin Cotten: It was a great opportunity to bond with the people as well. The Soldier On experiment that year was successful.

The model we're moving to now though is to get Soldier On program members embedded in the teams from the various bases and wings from their local area, so they're able to train and march with their own teammates for the whole training period, as opposed to coming together a couple of times throughout the training period. We'll see how that works out this year.

There's one more person I'd like you to hear from before I wrap up. The then U.S. ambassador David Jacobson who marched with us in 2012 made an unsolicited video. He wanted to express his feelings right after the marches.

Could I ask you to play that, please.

[*Video Presentation*]

Money can't buy that kind of public endorsement. You can see the benefit of the veterans independence program, VIP, that we tried to introduce, with I think some great success.

That pretty much wraps up the presentation.

You saw the boots and the helmet which mark the entrance and exit to the camp. It is much larger. Every day we marched through and came back and you are really happy to see that at the end of the day. The road is about a kilometre long, and you can see the boots and the helmet welcoming you back to the camp after another long day on the road.

Again, thank you very much for the opportunity. Sergeant MacIntyre and I will be very pleased to take any questions you might have.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Brigadier-General and Sergeant.

It was not only a learning experience for me, but also very moving.

I'll open the floor for questions.

Perhaps I'll give the floor to my vice-chair, Peter Stoffer. I'm sure you feel the emotions I felt.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Yes, it was great.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all very much for coming.

General, have you ever had the opportunity or ability to possibly entertain bringing those soldiers with service dogs to the Nijmegen march? I'm thinking of the dog now, because you have to be cautious, and a lot of people would be concerned about the health of the dog as well. Now that a lot of the servicemen and servicewomen have post-traumatic stress disorder and have service dogs, have you thought there's some opportunity for a possible march with them at any time?

BGen Kevin Cotten: I have not. I would think one of the big challenges with that, sir, would be the congestion on the roads. They're very conscious of the number of people on the road at any one time. They do not allow bicycles. They do not allow even—there was one exception made for a wheelchair. A Dutch soldier was wheeled the whole way by his teammates. There are cobblestones. It's very crowded, very congested, and very noisy.

I think it would be a real challenge for a service dog to participate in that, if they were allowed. I'm not sure the organizers would allow that.

● (0920)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you.

I want to personally thank you and Sergeant MacIntyre very much for your stamina and courage. That's not an easy thing to do even for regular able-bodied people, but for an amputee to do that is really quite remarkable, and you should be personally congratulated for your efforts. It shows, as the ambassador said, that if you can do it, there's no reason anybody else....

I congratulate all of you for that, and good luck in the future as well.

BGen Kevin Cotten: Thank you.

Sgt Jamie MacIntyre: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Hawn.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks for the—

The Chair: But since he participated, what, three times—

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Having done it three times, I can tell you those are three of the best things I've ever done in my life. It's just spectacular.

If anybody gets a chance—

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): What are the other two?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: The other two Nijmegens.

If anybody gets the chance to do it, even to go there for one day and do it, just the feeling of the people around you.... On the victory march, there are a million people there and they're all cheering. As the general said, when the Canadian flag goes by, when Canadians go by, the noise goes up several notches, the shouts of, “Thank you, Canada; thank you for our freedom”, that sort of thing. It's very cool.

I have a couple of questions. At the risk of being a tiny bit practical, you talked about the feet. Of course, it's all about the feet. We have a significant medical contingent that goes along with us. One of the things we learn, if you can talk about that a little bit, is something practical, like the care and feeding of the feet.

What do we learn there, and what do we exchange with our international partners?

BGen Kevin Cotten: One of the keys to being successful at Nijmegen is the training. Part of that training is making sure we have the right socks and footwear, the right system on our feet to serve us well. Not every person likes to wear the same things on their feet. People are different. But whatever you end up using to train with is what you need to stick with.

We've had people who have done 1,000 kilometres in training, and that includes back-to-back 40-kilometre marches as the final confirmation before they go. Everything is good to go. They get over there, and they hear about some other way another contingent might be doing things. There are certain techniques we may use to tape our feet—again, to provide that protection, that extra layer to protect us against blisters. Then when we change something, deciding there might be a better idea, the next thing you know, our feet are hamburger. You learn to trust your training, trust your leadership. When they say don't change a thing, make sure you do that.

We have learned new taping techniques for our feet from the Dutch. All of our medics are trained to do it now. We actually have a video of it, so it's something we'll maintain corporate knowledge of as we go forward.

I did not have my feet taped in training, but we never did four days in a row at 40 kilometres a day in training. The advice is to tape them the proper way, and off you go. The tape basically stayed on for those four days. I would shower in it. We would soak our feet. You saw in the ambassador's video a pair of feet soaking in a pool of water. I don't know whose feet those were. They both had painted toenails, I noticed, so they weren't his and they weren't mine.

However, I would leave that tape on. I'd put plastic bags over my feet, while I was soaking them at least. I had the temperature of the cooler water to help the swelling go down. But I went with the tape. We learned a lot about foot care.

In today's modern army, we tend to drive everywhere we go. We have LAVs and tanks. We have vehicles. But the light infantry still march. I think every soldier should still be able to march, and long distances would be a good thing. I think it's very important from that perspective.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Sol Rolingher is a close personal friend. His mistake was that he changed what he did in the march from what he did in his training.

BGen Kevin Cotten: Yes, it was unfortunate.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: He's been kicking himself ever since.

A voice: He tried it.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Yes, he did.

I think you probably know this story, General. There's one grave off to the side in Groesbeek. There's one grave over by the fence.

BGen Kevin Cotten: The caretaker's?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Yes. Can you tell that story?

BGen Kevin Cotten: I know only a little bit about it. Mr. Jones could tell this story much better than I can.

There was a Canadian who was hired to look after the Groesbeek cemetery, and he did so for 40 years or something.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: It was a long time.

BGen Kevin Cotten: Yes.

Obviously, a cemetery like that is reserved for the war dead, but he had made an arrangement, I'm not sure through who, to authorize his burial there.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I can't remember the story about who actually made the presentation or the request, but it was a request through the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. They made a special dispensation because he had been so involved.

The fondest wish of the guy who is currently tending that cemetery is to be hit by a falling tree on the site so that he can be buried there too. Now I don't know; I assume he's still there—

BGen Kevin Cotten: I imagine he is.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: —chopping down trees.

Thanks so much.

BGen Kevin Cotten: Thank you.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Brigadier-General and Sergeant, thank you so much. Frankly, I'd never heard of Nijmegen until it was discussed at this committee.

I've had the opportunity to march. I've never been part of the forces. I didn't grow up in that culture. But as an MP, I've had the opportunity to march with our Legion members. I've had the opportunity to march with Minister Fantino towards the Menin Gate when we were there together last year. There is an incredible therapeutic effect to marching; it's a solidarity, a feeling of oneness—not so much accomplishment, although having marched for those many days, I'm sure there's a feeling of accomplishment in that sense.

I think about our veterans. I think about our veterans who are suffering from PTSD and other invisible injuries, and about their feeling of being not part of anything anymore.

In the States, they've labelled it sanctuary syndrome; you're in this unit together all the time, for months or years, and all of a sudden you're cut free, and you're on your own. There is a consequence to that. I don't know if any studies have been done. I'm going to ask you that. But I imagine there's a therapeutic effect for veterans who are able to march again, to be part of a contingent, feeling part of that group, that solidarity.

Based on that premise—and I would ask you to address, number one, the possibility of it being a helpful therapeutic effect—can you tell me how many veterans, Sergeant, are invited over? How many come through Wounded Warriors? I thank them for that.

Could we be doing more to help our veterans and support those that are suffering? Might it help them in their recovery to participate as veterans?

What is the cost to participate in this if you're a veteran? I assume it's not free. I assume there's some fee that has to be paid. Can you discuss that in general for us so that, as a committee, we can perhaps look at some ways of helping our veterans, those who are suffering, to get there, and to participate in something so very therapeutic?

● (0925)

BGen Kevin Cotten: I'll start and then I'll pass it over to you.

Absolutely, there is value in walking.

One of our teammates was a doctor. One day he said to me, “If you could be given a prescription for something that would give you longer life, better feeling, lower cholesterol, and on and on, would you take it?” I said, “Yes, absolutely. Where's the pill?” He said, “Well, it's walking.” Whether it's one hour a day, or whatever, it's great for you physically, emotionally, mentally, and all around. So I would think that for anyone to march in any circumstances is a good thing.

I know we give an opportunity to veterans at ceremonial occasions where they do form a group. You've seen them at Remembrance Day parades, and so on, where they get to march, again depending on the age. Some people think of veterans as the World War II veterans or the Korean War veterans; not anymore.

The Chair: Mr. Stoffer, what you have to say is important, but not as important as what he has to say.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I'm listening to what he says.

The Chair: But I need to listen. After that, I'd like to hear what you're sharing.

Go ahead, General.

BGen Kevin Cotten: Definitely, there are positive effects. I would love to see veteran participation.

At it stands now, the majority of the contingent is made up of military members who are still serving, including the Soldier On guys. The only non-military members are those that we invite, such as VIPs of some type.

Could we have veterans who are no longer serving? I think we could.

Again, it comes down to the physical condition of the veteran. It's a challenge, obviously, to do something like this. But if we could have a veteran team, it would be amazing. I'm not aware of any studies that have formally said that to help healing and therapeutically, it is a good thing. Intuitively, I share your view that it would be, but I can't really say it more conclusively than that.

Perhaps Sergeant, you could talk about the therapeutic aspect, and the participation of Soldier On and how we recruit for that. I can talk about the cost alone.

Sgt Jamie MacIntyre: Soldier On basically sends out an e-mail to everybody they can possibly get to through the military chain of command and anybody who has been on the Soldier On website who basically put their e-mail address in to say they would like to receive updates on anything Soldier On has coming up. We try to get the information out to as large number of people as possible.

To speak to the therapeutic aspect of it, being with the guys and spending so much time with them there is very free and to have open conversation with other people about things I'm going through. We all have different injuries, different styles of injuries. You can connect and talk about your injuries, your time in the hospital. There are big discussions on types of medication you're on and how it affects you. These are the types of conversations I generally wouldn't have with other people or other soldiers who haven't experienced similar things as I have.

In that aspect you're in an environment that you feel is less judgmental. You could be in an environment that is less judgmental but when you're in with a bunch of other ill and injured soldiers, most of them going through very similar situations as yourself, you end up feeling as though it's a very safe environment. You can speak openly and freely with them, usually connecting for the most part even with people with vastly different injuries. You're connecting and you have very similar stories. In that aspect, it is invaluable, really.

● (0930)

BGen Kevin Cotten: It's hard to parse out individual costs, but the costs overall on average are about $3,000 per person for this 10-day event. That includes the registration itself for the event. It's only about 80 euros per person, depending on the exchange rate, whatever that might work out to. There are minor accommodation costs. Again, the Dutch are very good hosts. They don't charge us very much for rations and quarters while we're in the camp. Then there are the travel costs. Again, we have an Airbus going anyway, so we take as many people as we can take on that plane. The costs aren't that prohibitive, I don't think, for an individual to join us. Certainly our guests are welcome. I think they just pay a small stipend for the registration, if even that; I'm not sure. Otherwise they just join our contingent and we cover the costs.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: When I'm not an MP, say, I'd like to march in this as a civilian and pay a fee and join you and go through the preparation? Could I do that and how would I do that if I live in Guelph?

BGen Kevin Cotten: It's tricky. Civilians are allowed to march, obviously. There are about 40,000 who do march there. It's a bit of a lottery now because the demand is so high. They will take over 50,000 registrations. Then they'll have a lottery to parse that down to the numbers they can take based on the ability of the route to handle that many people. They've had larger numbers in certain years, so they've had to restrict and cap the number who can actually participate because there is a risk to health and safety.

For a civilian to join independently, it's no problem. It is a problem in terms of getting in because of the lottery aspect.

In terms of joining with us, the drawback would likely be access to the military camp. Again, we tend to have individuals who we sanction to join us, i.e., the VIPs, but to have any number of civilians showing up, they would not likely be welcome in the camp. You would lose that synergy with the contingent.

We have had people sign up on their own and march independently. We've met them outside the gate and marched with them for a day. That's happened on occasion. But I don't know that this would work.

What I would say, though, is that locally, on the years where our team might be coming from somewhere in your riding, to get out and march with them for five kilometres or ten kilometres—maybe don't go too far beyond that without more training—that would certainly be doable. It's the same for veterans. I think locally they could get out with a team that's in training and march, again for a shorter distance depending on their physical fitness and their abilities. That might be one way to tackle that.

The Chair: I'm just reminded that you had to order a 69-year-old off the march. What's the age of the oldest person who has actually completed it? Is it Laurie Hawn?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): He didn't mean that, Laurie.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Yes, he did.

BGen Kevin Cotten: Certainly, I am aware of Dutch people male and female who have completed over 60 or 65 marches. They started when they were teenagers. They are in their late seventies, I suspect even into their eighties.

Laurie, you might know more.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: The oldest was...I can't remember her name, but she did it 62 times. I think the last time she did it she was 93 and they ordered her not to do it. She was still going and they said, “No, you can't do it, because with all that experience, we don't want you dying en route”, because people have died on the march.

One year I wasn't there, but it was extraordinarily hot on the first day and two people died from the heat. The biggest thing is hydration. People don't hydrate. Soldiers hydrate because they make each other hydrate, but civilians don't always do that. Two people died on the first day so they cancelled it. But the Canadian team went out on the second day and marched anyway because they weren't sissies. They got a fair bit of shit from the authorities for doing that because the authorities had officially cancelled it and everybody was supposed to stay safe and stay home.

BGen Kevin Cotten: I think it was in the 2006 timeframe.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Somewhere around there.

BGen Kevin Cotten: We had one really hot day. There's a section of the march about five kilometres long where you're on a dyke, with no shade and no wind. You're just out in the sun with, again, thousands of people, single file. You're moving at about five and a half kilometres an hour. That's about as fast as you can move, based on the crowds. That was a sapping day, I have to tell you.

Again, that was actually one of the days that I think contributed to poor Colonel Rolingher's demise, because that day was the second day, and it was tough. It took a lot out of our folks, because they were on the road for almost 10 hours that day. That's too long to be on the road. You need to be in and out in eight hours or eight and a half hours maximum.

● (0935)

The Chair: I didn't want my question to cause such a distraction. Mr. Lemieux has the floor now.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you for an excellent presentation.

For the committee members, the general and I served together on one brigade back in the early 1990s. Funnily enough, we've crossed paths in the last six months a number of times, so it's been good to see each other again.

BGen Kevin Cotten: Speak for yourself, Mr. Lemieux.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I speak only for myself.

I want to ask two questions, but before I ask my questions, let me reinforce this idea. Personally, I think it would be an excellent idea to have a team of veterans. Veterans range in age from quite young to quite elderly, and it might be a challenge to put together a well-balanced team, but I think there's a lot of value in that. I think it would be strongly supported by serving soldiers, because every serving soldier will eventually become a veteran. I think to forge those ties and to include veterans as part of this contingent would be a great move on behalf of the organizers of the Nijmegen march.

On the two questions that I want to ask, you mentioned that a number of interested teams apply, but only some are selected. Maybe you could brief us on the selection process. How does one decide, then, that these 14 teams are going and those 16 are not? The second thing I want to ask about is the training. You've hinted about the 1,000 kilometres of preparation, but maybe you could just walk us through some of the preparation and how that's broken down, perhaps in terms of time and miles. What kind of a commitment is one undertaking when one says they would like to go on a Nijmegen march?

BGen Kevin Cotten: Taking the second question first, training is a huge demand in terms of time. Again, it's the secret to success. You can go over there without having done enough training and it will be hell, or you can go over there, be successful, and enjoy the whole experience.

Depending on where you are in Canada, training will start as early as January in preparation for the march, which is in July. I know that on the west coast, in Victoria, that team is usually out marching in January. There's a lot of individual training that takes place in terms of general personal fitness, but eventually they come together as teams. There's a progressive period of marching, starting off with about five kilometres, either with or without weight. Again, you have to be carrying that 10 kilos, and that's probably closer to 15 kilos when you factor in everything else you're carrying with you. You gradually increase that over time, and at some point you'll get to back-to-back 20 kilometres. It's a sort of a check in the box that we're progressing well, that we can do that, and that's great. Eventually, then, we do back-to-back 30 kilometres, and then finally back-to-back 40 kilometres.

As I said, that's going to be eight or nine hours on the road each of those days, so there's the time commitment, depending which job you're in. Now, how MPs, if any of you can find that time.... Again, you really have to be dedicated, with great time management, I think. Even for a general to find the time, depending on the job you're in, it's very difficult. Our teams out in the bases and wings have a little more latitude, I think, although they all have regular jobs too. I think they get cut a little bit more slack to be able to find the time to get the training in, but again, it takes.... You'll probably do between 750 and 1,000 kilometres in total, and that's only to do 160 kilometres over there. But that 1,000 is a very good investment of your time.

What was your first question again?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: It's about the selection process among different teams.

BGen Kevin Cotten: Yes, the selection process is a tough thing. I've had to do it twice now. You get over 30 applications for about 15 positions. What we do is look at the level of participation historically from across the Canadian Forces. The aim is that each base, each wing, and each formation or each unit will have equal representation over time.

If you haven't been there in the last two or three years, your time may be coming up. If you have a unit anniversary of some sort, of some significance, maybe the 100th or 150th anniversary of the unit itself, we'll try to give preference to that. Again, we'll make sure that we have a balance across the army, the navy, and the air force.

We'll make sure that there is reserve representation as well. That one brings with it other challenges, because the reserve team has to pay for salaries. That adds to the cost, but again, we make sure the funding is available if they're going to sign up. Often, a small unit can't generate 11 people for a team, because in a small reserve that's very difficult to do. What you'll sometimes see is that a base, or a wing, or a local reserve brigade will form a team, and that will be a composite team from a number of different units. That seems to work out fairly well.

Overall, it's about making sure that we have proper representation across Canada and that on a cyclical basis each base and wing and the different units have the opportunity to go. Again, if they have an anniversary, that is really a big tick in the box for that unit.

● (0940)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Okay, thank you.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I'll just add a bit to the training thing because it's pretty open.

It's hard on wives. I would go home on the weekend—maybe it was just especially in the west—and she'd wake up on Saturday morning, Sunday morning and put her arm over and of course I would be gone for eight or nine hours.

The first year, because I didn't want to be lower than the average guy, I didn't want to be that guy who couldn't finish, so I did 1,850 kilometres in training, and the march was a piece of cake. The second year I did about 1,200 and it was still easy. The third year, because it was 2011 and the election got in the way in May, I did only about 600, and it was okay, but I really noticed the difference between the two.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Oh, really.

BGen Kevin Cotten: In the first year you'll find you're so nervous, especially as a commander, so I thought, "You have to lead these guys and gals, and you'd better make sure you're going to cross that line", so I did every kilometre. The second year I thought, "Now that I know what I'm doing, maybe I can back off a little bit", so I think I did about 750 the second year. I know what you mean in terms of getting that comfort level and knowing what you're actually participating in. It's very important.

The Chair: Obviously, this march each year continues to strengthen the links between our country and the Netherlands. This committee's special link to the Netherlands is named Peter Stoffer, and I always look forward to his contributions when he talks about the love of the Dutch people for us.

That's why I interrupted him a minute ago. I had one ear to you and one ear to him because I wanted to know what he was sharing with Chicoine.

Now, Peter, will you share with us what you were sharing with only one of your...?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I'd be happy to.

The distance between the place where I was born and the location of the Nijmegen march is almost 160 kilometres. It's over 180, to be honest. If you went from Nijmegen to Heerlen, in Limburg, you would have it.

I also told him that Limburg was actually liberated by the U.S.A.'s army, the Kentucky brigade. The Canadians did everything north of it. The coal mines are in southern Holland, in Limburg, and the Americans had the vehicles to do that; whereas the Canadians did all the foot work and the trudging through the mud and everything else. The Poles and the Brits were up in the northern parts.

If you went from Nijmegen to Heerlen, you'd be doing the Nijmegen march all the way down south. You're going down and over hills, though, and it would be a lot harder.

Thanks, again.

I do have a trade secret I'd like you to share with me. What's in the CamelBak? Some guys say it's Gatorade; some say it's energy water. What do you prefer in your CamelBak, Sergeant MacIntyre?

Sgt Jamie MacIntyre: Generally, I would have water. You don't want—

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Just water.

Sgt Jamie MacIntyre: Sometimes if you're doing that much marching and doing that much sweating, you can lose a lot of the salt from your body as well. You can offset that with a little bit of Gatorade at some of the rest stops. Gatorade has a lot of salt and a lot of sugar in it. But you don't want to overload yourself too much on sugar and caffeine, as well, really.

BGen Kevin Cotten: I have a little anecdote to share with you. Is there anybody of Danish descent here? No?

The Danish contingent actually march from Denmark—there is one ferry ride, of course—to Nijmegen ahead of the march as part of their training. I'm not sure what the distance is. I think it's even farther.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: It's 650 kilometres.

BGen Kevin Cotten: Is it? So those guys are bears for punishment, I think, but they really love the walking.

The Chair: Are there 270 Canadian marchers?

BGen Kevin Cotten: No, on average, the number of marchers would be about 160 to 170, depending on the number of teams. They have the support staff as well, and the band happened to be there that year, which brought our numbers up. I would say that it's normally about 170 marchers, and 90% of them would be first-time marchers. That's one of our basic rules. We want to see at least the team captain and the second-in-command be experienced marchers who have been there before and know the training, but the rest of the team should all be novices so that as many people as possible from the Canadian Forces can participate over time.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: So there are 170 marchers from Canada. How many marchers are there altogether?

● (0945)

BGen Kevin Cotten: Well, from the military there are about 5,000. We're one of the smaller contingents, but the Dutch are there, obviously, in large numbers.

The Brits actually bring their cadets over from the youth cadet program. They'll have several hundred of them and they're accommodated in the camp with us. To me that's a bit of a recipe for disaster. You have young men and women with not enough supervision. There is access to alcohol. I think we had a cadet team before, but I don't think it has been repeated. It was not a good experience.

The French are there. Again, there are over 50 countries. We've seen China, Israel, and Australia there.

The Americans are there in large numbers, but they don't train together as teams. They come together as individuals so you can see that the lack of discipline and the approach to training isn't there. We'll walk by them and it's like the retreat from Moscow. They're on the sides of the road, feet up, and we're trying to encourage them to get up and come with us because they're not going to make it otherwise. It's rather embarrassing, and the U.S. ambassador was quite taken by that fact as he saw them along the sides of the road.

The Chair: He knew what team to march with.

BGen Kevin Cotten: He did. That's right.

The Chair: Mr. Lizon.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): General, there are two questions I have, maybe for both of you, on commemoration ceremonies. Of course, there is Vimy Ridge and Groesbeek. During the last march, and you were not there, General Pelletier was the commander, and something happened.

I don't know if it was for the first time because of the 100th anniversary of World War I. We were in Belgium, and in Nijmegen of course. We were also at a few cemeteries and we had a joint commemoration at German cemeteries with the Germans.

Can you maybe share your views on it? I will tell you that, personally, I had very mixed feelings. On the other side, one of the teams that marches, as a military team, is a German team.

Can you share some of your views on that idea?

BGen Kevin Cotten: Certainly. I've been on battlefield tours before where we've had Canadian Forces members from the staff college over in Europe doing a battlefield tour. During that tour, we actually had a Canadian tank commander and a German tank commander, who we believe may have faced off on the same battlefield. They both talked about their experiences there. So, we know....

Those guys were wartime veterans who had fought on opposite sides. To me, if they can come together in that kind of a scenario and shake hands and say, “Hey, I remember fighting against you, but guess what? Today we are allies. We are at peace with each other.” I think it's a great thing that we can celebrate with the other contingents.

I don't like the Germans for one reason. They are accommodated next to us. They drink more, and are louder than anybody I've ever seen, which cuts into our sleep time, and they're a little bit more liberal in their dress as they approach the showers as well. Some of our female members were quite taken aback when they happened to see a half-naked German walking up.

But all that to say that I'm a fan of it because, again, it does represent the realities of today. I didn't get to experience it as you have, so I can't really speak from your perspective.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: The second question is on the issue that was already raised and deals with the participation of veterans. Is the Canadian contingent capped at a certain number or can it be bigger?

BGen Kevin Cotten: I believe we are capped by the organizers of the march. They're very tolerant of us, though, because they know we've been long-standing supporters. We bring a lot to the march. Often we bring a band with us. They like to see that kind of thing.

I would think there might be some accommodation given to us because of our long-standing relationship. I'm not sure about how big we can make the numbers, but I'm sure we could grow it by a little bit.

The Chair: Thank God they can also hear the cheers.

BGen Kevin Cotten: That's right. Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: I would like to thank Sargent MacIntyre for his participation and for everybody else who was on the team. I understand how hard it is for a perfectly healthy person—for all you guys—to train and to go and participate. It's truly an achievement. Thank you very much for doing it and for your service.

Also, the general knows that I did march 100 kilometres for Soldier On with Mr. Jones. That was quite an experience. It was harder than Nijmegen, not because of the distance, but because of the rain.

The Chair: This was a very touching presentation. I want to thank you very much for taking the time to come and share this experience with us.

BGen Kevin Cotten: You're welcome, Mr. Chair.

I mentioned that we started each morning with a distinctly Canadian cheer. Perhaps you would join me in it. Basically, it starts with me saying “Nij” and you saying “Megen”. Let's give it a shot.

Nij.

Some hon. members: Megen.

BGen Kevin Cotten: You guys can all do it. You're welcome to join us.

● (0950)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Gentlemen, we are going to meet again in this place on Thursday at 8:45.

The meeting is adjourned.