



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 109

Monday, October 21, 2024

Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg



Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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• (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 109 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motions adopted by the committee on Thursday, March 9 and Tuesday, December 5, 2023, the committee is resuming its study of the recognition of Persian Gulf veterans and the definition of wartime service.

Today's meeting is taking place in hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. All comments must be addressed through the chair.

[*English*]

I would like to inform members of the committee that we have confirmation of two ministers for this study. They are the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the Minister of Defence.

[*Translation*]

In the framework of this study, the Minister of Veterans Affairs will appear before this committee on Monday, October 28 and the Minister of National Defence will appear on Thursday, October 31.

I would remind committee members that they will be given a limited amount of speaking time during the question and answer period. I invite members to time themselves because they tend, at times, to exceed their time. Unfortunately, should they do so, I will have to interrupt. That said, I will always remind members when they have one minute remaining, but once the clock runs out, I'll have to stop them and give someone else the floor.

[*English*]

I would like to welcome our colleague MP Charlie Angus, who is replacing Ms. Blaney.

[*Translation*]

I'd like to put the following proposal to the committee. For the second hour of our meeting, we have only one witness.

[*English*]

For the first hour, we have two witnesses. I think it should be okay to have an hour and 15 minutes with those two witnesses, and 45

minutes with the other one, because he's alone. Is that okay, or would you like to have one hour with the first witnesses and one hour with the second witness?

I heard someone ask if we can have the three together for two hours.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): It's whatever the witnesses prefer.

The Chair: Yes. It's up to you guys. It's also up to the witnesses.

What do you think?

Okay. Let's go with an hour and 15 minutes with two witnesses, and 45 minutes with the other witness.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Desilets, do you have a question?

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Yes, I have a very simple question for the clerk about the visit from the two ministers and how much time they'll have: Will they be with us for two hours? Also, what's scheduled for the following meeting in early November?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Marie-Hélène Sauv ): All I can tell you right now is that we'll have the Minister of Veterans Affairs here during the first hour of the meeting on Monday, October 28. It's up to the committee to determine whether it wants to hear from other witnesses in relation to that study in the second hour or do something else. Then, the Minister of National Defence will be here during the first hour of the meeting on Thursday, October 31.

Mr. Luc Desilets: That means that each minister will appear for one hour. In principle, following the meeting on Thursday, October 31, the time allotted for this study will expire. Even if we go ahead with the two ministers, the study will expire.

Mr. Chair, what will we do during the second hour of those two meetings?

The Chair: First, I'd like to take 15 minutes in camera to discuss the letter we received, so as to deal with a matter concerning the redacted materials. Then, it will be up to committee members to decide how to proceed. We have a list of studies we could undertake.

Consequently, during the second hour of the meeting on Monday, October 28, we will discuss committee business in camera.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you.

[English]

Now I would like to welcome our witnesses.

As an individual, we have, by video conference, retired vice-admiral Duncan Miller, commander of the Canadian naval forces and allied combat logistics commander.

I have to tell members of the committee that we have some technical problems with the system of Mr. Miller. We're going to try, and we're going to ask the interpreters if they are okay with that. If not, we have all of his notes, in both languages, so we will share everything with you.

In the room with us, we have retired rear-admiral Ken Summers, commander of the Canadian Forces in the Middle East.

We're going to start with Mr. Summers, and after that we're going to go to Mr. Miller.

Mr. Summers, you have five minutes for your opening statement. The floor is yours.

● (1540)

Rear-Admiral (Retired) Ken Summers (Commander, Canadian Forces Middle East, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I am Ken Summers, retired admiral. During the Gulf War, I was the commander of all of the Canadian Forces in the Middle East: the operational command, the aircraft, the ships, the hospitals, all that.

I'm very pleased that, in fact, you've made additional time for this testimony, because I now can be here as opposed to not making it. I'd like to give my very personal perspective, I guess, on what happened in the Gulf War. The bottom line, ladies and gentlemen, is that the Gulf War was a war. It was not a peacekeeping operation, as some people have suggested. I should have brought a piece of the Scud missile that fell at Bahrain near my headquarters to emphasize the point, or perhaps the bullet that went in the sand very close to where I was when I was up in Kuwait City following the liberation.

Anyway, the Iraqi invasion occurred on August 2, 1990. Immediately, the UN Security Council—Canada was a member of the Security Council in those days—passed a number of resolutions, and Canada was very active in those discussions. In fact, our ambassador, Yves Fortier, co-sponsored a number of the resolutions, and I do recall—because I was watching this extremely carefully from Halifax—that he made a statement that has always stuck with me. He said that sometimes you have to make the peace in order to keep the peace, and that's something that turned out to be very true as things developed later on in January 1991.

Well, last week, for the first time, I had an opportunity—that was mentioned to one of your members—to actually go into Hansard and see what was happening on January 15 and January 16. I was at the other end, and I phoned back to Ottawa, and they said, “Well, they're still debating whether we should even be here.” I said, “Well, they'd better hurry up because in about two hours' time, something is going to happen that's going to put this all behind us.”

In any event, it did occur, and those discussions were very interesting. Video and Hansard on January 15 showed that the Prime Minister, among others, made the point that they had passed resolutions but that the deadline was approaching at midnight and that if Iraq did not withdraw from Kuwait, then it was incumbent upon the members of the United Nations to actually enforce the resolution. That set the stage.

In fact, on that point, I noted that on the 16th, when it occurred, there was some discussion still going on. One of the members of Parliament actually came into the House and said they had seen video that the war had already started, and that got the ball going. Very shortly thereafter, actually, the Prime Minister came back in and said that we were now with our allies taking action against Saddam Hussein in Iraq to enforce the resolution.

I noted that, quite correctly, the leader of the opposition, Jean Chrétien, very quickly arose and said.... Well, he had been talking about enforcing the embargo, letting the embargo and those things continue on. Very quickly, he got up and said that they were behind what was going on over there, and they supported the Canadian Forces and our troops over there. It was really quite something.

Shortly thereafter, the government formed a war cabinet, which consisted of the Prime Minister as the head, plus a number of the senior ministers and the chief of the defence staff, John de Chastelain. I would recommend that you get him to come talk to you. John de Chastelain was there at those particular meetings. What happened with the war cabinet is that we provided the information to the war cabinet of what was going on in the Gulf, and in return, they would give us direction in terms of where we could operate and what type of action we could be taking as things went on. It was a two-way street. We were providing the information to them, and when it required their approval for operations, they came back and gave that to us, including areas of operation and also the type of weapons that could be used.

To the 4,000 Canadians who were deployed over there during that particular time—our ships, the aircraft squadrons, the hospital, security and support—the hostilities over there were, in fact, a daily reality. Our ships, which Admiral Miller will no doubt discuss in greater detail when he comes on, were instrumental in the interdiction operations that took place in the gulf prior to actual hostilities. Canada, with only about 5% of the interdiction ships, ended up doing in excess of 25% of all the boardings in the gulf, and quite honestly, we were in the central, middle gulf.

● (1545)

Do I have one minute left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes. Please continue, Mr. Summers. We will ask you questions after that.

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: Great.

I have to mention the aircraft, the CF-18s, which people believed were just flying over the ships in the gulf and protecting them. In actual fact, they did an awful lot more. They started doing that, but then they were moved up to the head of the gulf and were right off Kuwait City and the operations there. In fact, the station they had was code-named “Brown”. The Americans named it that after Canadian World War I ace Roy Brown. That's how we got that.

They did those operations right off Kuwait at the CAP station, the close air patrol. When the requirement came to actually conduct fighter operations and bombing missions over Iraq and Kuwait, we were asked to provide close air support, the so-called sweep and escort missions, where they went ahead of the attacking force and with the attacking force going over Kuwait and Iraq. That was a tremendous thing. Toward the end, they got into doing air-to-ground, or air-to-sand, perhaps. In any event, it was a mission.

I would point out very proudly that of all the aircraft over there, it was only the Canadians who did all three missions with the same aircraft and the same pilots. That was a testimony to the professionalism of our air force.

All the time, of course, there was—

The Chair: I am sorry, Commander. I know that you have gone through a lot of things as a commander, but you will—

Mr. Blake Richards: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: We have only two witnesses in 50 minutes. I would be comfortable with our giving him a few more minutes. He obviously has a very unique perspective as a commander of our forces there. I think it would be nice to give him a few more minutes.

The Chair: Me too. I said at the beginning that it was going to be five minutes, and I gave him six.

We will be having two or three rounds of questions, Mr. Summers, but I think the committee would like you to continue with your testimony. Please go ahead.

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: I have another five minutes. Got it. Okay.

Voices: Oh, oh!

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: The aircraft were doing great things. We had a 707 air refueller, and that aircraft proved to be absolutely invaluable, as it was providing fuel not only to our own CF-18s, but also to the other allied aircraft as they went in and over Kuwait and Iraq, and back out again.

I have to mention the field hospital, because it was sent over there. It was stationed at Al Jubail, which was on the Persian Gulf, but when war started, it went out to the west to a place called Al Qaysumah on the Saudi-Kuwait border. When it was being set up, it came under a Scud attack. It was the hospital that looked after not only injured allies but injured Iraqi people coming to the headquarters. It was really quite something. In fact, the number of Iraqis coming there because they were given up... Our security forces who went with them became very much the guards of all the POWs until they could send them elsewhere.

Someone mentioned this, but the mining that took place on the shores of Kuwait City and at the airport was absolutely incredible. It was our engineers who went there and were able to clear the shores and the airfield of booby-trapped bunkers with ammunition and all sorts of stuff. I would also proudly say that other allies were not quite as lucky, so I put it down to our professionalism and the training of our soldiers that no one ever got hurt doing those mining operations.

I will finally say—and I mentioned this—there was a Scud attack on the headquarters in Bahrain.

Suffice it to say, ladies and gentlemen, this was not peacekeeping. No one in the navy or air force and no soldiers were killed. I believe this was pretty much the case because we had worked very hard at training and they were extremely well trained and prepared prior to going over there. We had luck, to be sure, and other allies weren't so lucky. They were able to conduct operations there and we came back with everybody, basically.

Notwithstanding all of that, there was something out there called Gulf War syndrome, which, honest to God, we didn't understand at the time. It subsequently became something called PTSD. It was something we tried to figure out, but we didn't know. Subsequently, when we came back, PTSD, among other things, was something that was known. I'm sure there are people who were in the gulf who still suffer from PTSD.

I think all the airmen, sailors, airwomen and soldiers involved in the gulf would tell you this was not a peacekeeping mission. It was war, pure and simple. Those who were there knew it, and they and their families back home knew it and felt it. I remain surprised that Canadians—I didn't realize this—did not recognize the Gulf War as a war. I encourage ACVA to give long-overdue recognition to those brave Canadians who served.

I note that all three ships and all three aircraft squadrons received battle honours, which means that they were involved in the participation in a battle with a formed and armed enemy, thus meriting the classification of wartime service. To not do so, to me, sets a bad example and an unwelcome message to those who serve our country in uniform.

That is my other five minutes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm quite prepared to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you very much.

• (1550)

The Chair: That's great. Thank you, Mr. Summers.

We're now going to go to Mr. Duncan Miller on Zoom.

The floor is yours for your statement.

Vice-Admiral (Retired) Duncan Miller (Commander, Canadian Naval Forces, Allied Combat Logistics Commander, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Hopefully, you can hear me.

Good afternoon, distinguished members of ACVA.

I'm here to support the attempts of the president and vice-president of the Persian Gulf Veterans of Canada to have the Government of Canada acknowledge that the Gulf War from 1990 to 1991 was indeed a war, and that they and all veteran participants in that war are war veterans.

I was shocked that at a previous session of your committee an assistant deputy minister of Veterans Affairs declared that the Canadian government does not define the Gulf War of 1990-91 as a war. The committee member who asked the question replied that the committee could therefore pack up and dispose of the issue. I believe he needed to ask “Why?” in order to understand the government's position.

In response, I'd be happy to elaborate on why it should be termed a war and to provide answers to your policy questions, which arose in previous sessions. I can provide the naval operations information as the commander of the naval forces and the allied combat logistics force formed during the war. I'm delighted that Admiral Summers is there in person, as he was the joint force commander. Between us, we should be able to answer all your policy questions.

In 1990, the Canadian government authorized the navy to send three warships to the gulf area to participate in the war. Initially, we were authorized to conduct interdiction operations in the Gulf of Oman. Post-January 1991, we were authorized to operate in the central gulf area. During this time, the United States commander asked if we would escort the United States' ship *Princeton* out of a known sea minefield, which had damaged the ship off Kuwait. We were not authorized at that time to cross north of the latitude where the ship was positioned, and I called Admiral Summers to explain the situation and say that the ship *Athabaskan* was well prepared to proceed. As I understand it, he received a reply from the Prime Minister within hours to authorize the deployment, which was ultimately successful.

In addition, during the war, we were authorized to proceed off Kuwait under burning oil well smoke to protect the United States' hospital ship *Mercy* against missile attack. We experienced being within kilometres of an anti-ship missile attack on the British destroyer HMS *Gloucester*, and we were overflowed by several Scuds fired in the vicinity of Admiral Summers' headquarters in Bahrain. We were always prepared to evacuate him and his staff if necessary.

There's no doubt in my mind that we were in a war: 150 Americans and 37 British soldiers died in the war, and countless were injured. A number of Canadians have suffered and still suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of being in the war, with all of the stresses that entails.

As for whether it was defined as a war, several bodies declared it as such, including the United States, the United Nations, Google, Wikipedia, and Encyclopædia Britannica. Even the Veterans Affairs Canada website has as its title “Gulf War 1990-1991”.

The Canadian government issued the Gulf and Kuwait Medal for all those who participated in the war. This medal is authorized by the government as the third-highest war medal in the Canadian honours system. The ships *Athabaskan*, *Terra Nova* and *Protecteur*, as well as 423 Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron and 439 Tactical Fighter Squadron, were awarded battle honours by the government. Battle honours are awarded for combat in a war.

The Canadian Armed Forces defined the Gulf War as a war. General John de Chastelain, chief of the defence staff at the time, wrote the introduction for the book I co-authored with Sharon Hobson on the Canadian naval operations during the war, entitled *The Persian*

Excursion: The Canadian Navy in the Gulf War. His first line was, “The Gulf War was the first time since the Second World War that a Canadian Joint Force Headquarters commanded elements of Canada's sea, land and air forces in a joint and combined combat operation.” He finishes his introduction with this: “Commodore Miller and Sharon Hobson have compiled an entertaining account of Canada's role in the Gulf War which should be of interest to the military and civilian reader alike.” Note that he uses “Gulf War”.

● (1555)

The official history of Operation Friction references the Gulf War as a “war” on numerous pages, including the jacket, which states, “The crisis in the Persian Gulf in 1990-1991 saw Canada's armed forces sent off for war for the first time since the intervention in Korea.”

The recognition being sought from the Canadian government has been spearheaded by a master corporal, who is the president of the association, and a warrant officer, who is the vice-president. They represent all of the sailors, airmen and women and army personnel who participated in the Gulf War. I fully support them. A coalition of the willing went to war to expel Iraqis from Kuwait, and a war ensued. There can be no doubt in this committee that veterans of the Gulf War in 1990-91 are indeed war veterans.

In closing, I would like to pass on former member of Parliament Peter Stoffer's advice to me when coming before this committee. By the way, he informed me that he founded the first ACVA. He wanted me to remind you that it took 50 years for the government to recognize merchant naval veterans from World War II as war veterans, with a similar delay for Korean War veterans. As it's only been 34 years since the Gulf War, his hope was that you wouldn't take another 16 years to do the right thing and recognize Gulf War veterans as war veterans.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Miller.

Thank you, both, for your service and also for your courage during those battles.

We will now start the first round of questions. Members will have six minutes each.

I invite Mr. Fraser Tolmie to start the questions.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to give a brief thank you to my fellow colleagues. I was away two weeks ago and received some very nice messages from everybody with the loss in our family. I passed those on to my family. I want to say thank you and that I recognize the outreach and outpouring of love.

To our witnesses, I'd like to say thank you very much for your service. I'm very grateful to have your perspective here with respect to what has happened and the challenges we're facing with wartime recognition of service.

Rear-Admiral Summers, I'm going to ask a question and I'm going to follow up with a bit of a statement. Would you say that we are allowing other governing bodies to dictate what we as a nation should be recognizing as wartime service? I ask that because you talked about the United Nations and about resolutions. We as a nation adhere to a lot of international bodies with regard to what war is and what the rules of war and engagements are. I know that Canada is very sensitive to that because of the way we want to be seen in the world.

Would you say that this is something that is impacting the decision being made with regard to recognizing the Persian Gulf as wartime service for our vets?

• (1600)

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: Thank you for the question. I hope I can answer it.

War has changed in a lot of ways. If you think of the First World War, the Second World War and the Korean War, those were more classic wars that we grew up with and know. Once the 1960s came in, Lester Pearson was the man who really got peacekeeping going. That became the modus operandi on how you resolve conflicts. That went so far and held true all the way up until the Gulf War. That's when something happened that really went beyond. The resolutions didn't work. You had to have the oomph behind it. That's recognized in the United Nations charter. When they turned around and saw that the resolutions would not be effective, they had to use a particular force.

I think it's all changed. If you look at what's happening in the world today, I think you'll find the same thing. I guess the United Nations in many ways in the western world can set the tone and scene through their actions and discussions at the UN, but in the final analysis, it still comes down to the nations themselves to back it up.

It was the coalition of the willing, at the time, that came together. It was not really command and control as we know it in the military. It was nothing more than coordination and co-operation. That's how we did things. We talked to all the other commanders. We didn't ask any nation to do more than their government had authorized them to do. Doing that, we were able to actually mesh together a pretty damn good plan.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: That leads to my next question.

During your opening statement, you mentioned asking Veterans Affairs to change this. Are you aware that the Minister of National Defence can do this without our committee and without a vote within the House? If so, what do you think the holdup is?

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: That's a loaded question, isn't it?

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: You've faced gunfire. You've already talked about Scud missiles.

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: I haven't talked to parliamentarians recently—at least, not the ones in the House. The Senate, right-

ly, can look at things, make some judgments and pass on its observations. That goes to the House as well. Eventually, the House has to do something about it. The ministers have to do something about it.

I hope what will come out of this committee is the recognition that this was a war and this was wartime service. I hope that this message is passed over to the minister and the House and that they take appropriate action to rectify what has maybe been a disservice.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: The organizations and the people who have served have been coming and advocating since 2017. This is something that's coming up to almost 10 years in the making.

I think there is a very simple solution to what seems to be a convoluted situation. What we see and what we recognize as war, from your perspective, don't seem to be lining up. It's policy not matching what our priority should be, as a committee, to recognize the service you've gone through.

I have just a couple more minutes.

I find you very engaging. Being an ex-air force guy—

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: We talk with our hands.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Yes, we do.

I thank you for recognizing the service of all services that were involved.

What do you see as the differences between what went on in Korea, which is being recognized, and what went on in the Gulf War?

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: My dad went to the Korean War. Again, that was something. The ships went over there after a UN resolution, not unlike what we did. Quite honestly, I don't know why that was seen as a war but what we did in replying to a UN resolution is not seen as a war. That does not make sense to me. I think they're one and the same.

Again, I'll go back to what I said initially. There are the classic wars, if you want to call them that, because that's what they were—infantry against infantry and that sort of stuff, like the Second World War, the First World War and the Korean War—and there's what we're doing now, which is far more technology-oriented. All we have to do is look at what's happening in Ukraine and Russia. They're not sending soldiers back and forth quite so much; they're sending drones. Technology has taken over. It is a different kind of warfare that's going on now.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Tolmie.

Now let's go to Mr. Sean Casey for six minutes, please.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to start with Vice-Admiral Miller.

Vice-Admiral Miller, I also had the honour of serving with your friend Peter Stoffer. There aren't many people who could completely fill out the profile of a gentleman and a character around this place as Peter Stoffer could. My friend Charlie Angus will probably attest to that. I actually served with him on this committee in 2011 and 2012. I would say his story of being the founder of the veterans affairs committee is probably not far off, so good on you for seeking advice from him on coming here. I have a great deal of respect for Peter Stoffer.

On the Veterans Affairs website, there's a piece about you. One of the things you said in that piece was that the Gulf War "was probably the most successful naval and naval air deployment in Canada's history." Can you expand a bit on that, please?

VAdm (Ret'd) Duncan Miller: We went to the war as a Canadian task group. As Admiral Summers said, the interdiction was entirely successful. With 5% of the ships there, we did 25% of the boarding, with the aircraft. The seeking aircraft would challenge merchant ships, and we boarded the merchant ships. Then we moved into the central gulf area, where we were asked to coordinate the logistics efforts and the protection of the four United States aircraft carriers. My job was to assign the anti-air warfare escorts for those carriers. My job was also to assign escorts for all the shipping that came in through the Strait of Hormuz and to stop those that were sending ammunition to Iraq.

Our job was to pull out the USS *Princeton*, which had almost lost its fantail, from a minefield. There were injuries. We took that ship out of the minefield. If you can, imagine a ship being totally silent for 48 hours, with the crew wearing socks, wondering if we were going to hit a mine, knowing we had the best anti-mine sonar, we had the helicopter going overhead and we had the tug behind us that was eventually secured to the USS *Princeton*. She towed the *Princeton* down to Bahrain. We had to go there because we couldn't get to Dubai since the ship was damaged so heavily. Then we went off Kuwait City, again through minefields, to protect the hospital ship from missiles. That all happened.

I can tell you there was a sense of satisfaction with this naval operation, which had many facets to it, with live ammunition and watching on CNN every day the Tomahawk missiles going into Baghdad that were fired from the cruisers and the U.S. ships in the gulf. It was, indeed, a war.

We were there. We were right in the whole thing. We were right underneath it all and working it. Part of my job was to ensure that all of the ships there were refuelled and reammunitioned. We set up a grid system with the names of the provinces of Canada on one side and numbers 1 to 12 on the other side, so that every ship that came into "Manitoba 3" would know it was being controlled by a Canadian group. As Admiral Summers said, what else are you going to do during a war? You have a task group of personnel there who can organize all of this.

Having painted that picture, that was the most successful naval operation and naval air operation. It was remarkable. The CF-18s provided cover for us. Sometimes they asked us to—

• (1610)

Mr. Sean Casey: Thank you. I'm really sorry to cut you off. I have only one minute left, and I want to get a question in for Rear-Admiral Summers.

Sir, did the Gulf War lead to any significant changes in Canadian military policy or at Veterans Affairs? Given the view you had of all aspects of it, I wonder if you could tell me whether there was a lasting impact and if you could identify it.

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: The bottom line, sir, is that I don't know what was done or if there were any changes. It all happened and we all came back home, thankfully, and got on with our lives. I'm not aware—perhaps I should be aware—of whether there were any changes made to Veterans Affairs and how they were made. All I know is that today, we're in a situation where I can't understand why it was not done, as opposed to what was actually done.

I have to go back to one quick point, if I may. I'm taking up your time, sir, but I went to the American admiral on the carriers there, and we had our squadron of Dusty and his team out there. When I talked to the American commander, he said, "One thing I can't get my head around is how we're going to keep all these guys supplied, rearmed, reprovisioned and fuelled." I said, "Well, I have someone on staff who has been doing this for a while and knows all the players here. Let me give him the responsibility." The answer came back, "Yes, okay." Dusty was the only non-U.S. commander in the gulf during the Gulf War. That, to me, is a testament to the professionalism and the capability of our people.

I'm sorry. That was beyond your question.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

We'll now give the floor to Mr. Luc Desilets for six minutes.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening, colleagues.

I want to thank our two witnesses for appearing and I thank them for their military service.

Mr. Summers, when does a government appoint or form a war cabinet?

[English]

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: It was shortly thereafter that they formed this war cabinet. This has been done before, in the Korean War, I'm sure, but in this case, because there were so many aspects involved.... It's an all-government affair when we do that. Think about it. All the ministers have a role to play, but by doing that, it also brings the decision-makers together, the key decision-makers, so that when an issue comes up.... In this case, it could have been on going for the sweep and escort, going above that certain line in the gulf. In fact, the best example would have been the sweep and escort.

I'm sure you don't know what a sweep and escort is. Neither did the members of the war cabinet at the time, so when I saw that this was going to happen, I talked to the people in Ottawa. They went to the war cabinet and said, "Gentlemen, they're potentially going to ask us to do sweep and escort. Here's what 'sweep' is. Here's what 'escort' is." After it was explained to them, they understood it and they gave permission, or delegated authority, to the chief of the defence staff, saying, "We understand what you're talking about and when in fact they ask for that, you have the authority to tell them you can do it."

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: I understand clearly what you're saying, but when does it form a war cabinet? Is it when it feels that Canada is potentially at war or that it'll be asked to participate in a war?

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: If I understand your question correctly, the war cabinet was formed after the war began. I think that it was a few days after January 15 or 16, but I don't know exactly.

• (1615)

Mr. Luc Desilets: Wonderful. Your French is excellent.

What was your reaction to what the deputy minister said here a few weeks ago? She said that the Gulf War was a war, but that Canada itself was not at war.

[English]

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: When you go back to the debates that were going on, it is quite clear, as I said, that on the 15th they were still debating in Parliament whether we should even be in the gulf. In fact, some of the parties.... One party in particular was opposed to being in the gulf, point-blank, but they had to grapple with that question, and it was a *fait accompli*. Again, being a member of the United Nations and having been very vocal and strong in establishing the resolutions, part of that, if the resolution is not abided by, is that there is an implicit requirement to enforce the resolution by force.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: In your opinion, was Canada at war?

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: Could you repeat the question?

Mr. Luc Desilets: In your opinion, was Canada at war?

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: Yes, of course, without a doubt.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Fine. Thank you.

How do you explain the fact that, here, nearly all the witnesses have the same interpretation as you, that Canada was at war and that there are consequences to that? In your opinion, is the financial impact the only reason why the Canadian government refuses to recognize it as a war?

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: I don't know why the government doesn't recognize that it was a war, instead of a conflict or something like that. I don't know.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Agreed.

[English]

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: I wish I were a member of Parliament or a senator. Maybe I could do something about it.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: In your opinion, is the only way to resolve this dilemma for Parliament to adopt legislation?

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: Of course. You can acknowledge the circumstances but it's up to the House of Commons to pass legislation.

[English]

It needs to pass a law, with the Minister of Veterans Affairs, to recognize that in fact it was a wartime service.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: What's your reaction to the fact that soldiers awarded the Gulf and Kuwait Medal aren't allowed to wear it on their military uniform?

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: Can you please repeat the question?

Mr. Luc Desilets: What do you think about the fact that veterans awarded the Gulf and Kuwait Medal apparently cannot wear it on their military uniform?

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: That's an excellent question, sir.

Mr. Luc Desilets: I'd ask you to give me an excellent answer.

[English]

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: When the question came up, everyone was very proud that we had served in the gulf and very pleased that we had been given medals by the Saudi Arabian government and other governments. I often thought that it's a piece of metal that you put on your chest, and as a Gulf War veteran, I pictured a grandchild on my knee who would say, "Papa, what is that?" and I could say, "Well, I was in the war."

It didn't cost very much, but the reason we were only given one medal was that the Canadian government at the time, or National Defence, had decreed that the Canadian government had given you a medal, and therefore that's for your service in the gulf. Whatever was being given to you by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain or other places, you couldn't wear that one. You could only wear the one that Canada gave you. I don't agree with that.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Desilets.

[*English*]

Now let's go to MP Charlie Angus for six minutes, please.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

What a pleasure to be at this committee. I want to thank you, gentlemen, for your service to our country.

I come from northern Ontario, home of the Algonquin Regiment. Many of our young people through the years have gone to the Royal Canadian Regiment, the Princess Patricia's, the Van Doos—lots went to the Van Doos—and the navy and the air force. There's an understanding that some may be in combat and some may not, but when they sign up, the understanding is that if there's a war, they and their families know that they are going to go and put their lives on the line. That's the contract. The contract with Canada has to be that once you have signed up, we will be there for you when you come home.

Do you feel that Canada has lived up to its part of the contract, Admiral Summers?

• (1620)

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: I think in many ways it has, in terms of providing benefits and looking after the families. Certainly, when we were over there, there was great care taken by our own military and the government, quite honestly, in recognizing there were implications for the families.

In terms of recognition, it's there. I guess what has failed to happen is the legislation to follow through, which in some cases, for those people who.... As I said, the thing called the Gulf War syndrome came up there, during the Gulf War. We didn't know what the heck it was, but it morphed into PTSD, which we all know about now. People had Gulf War syndrome. They had PTSD. We just didn't know it or recognize it.

The obligation now on behalf of the government is the fact that those types of ramifications of being in war need to be looked at and supported by the government.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I thank you for that response.

Certainly, I'm very proud of the Veterans Affairs workers in Kirkland Lake, in my region. I have had the honour to travel to commemorations in Sicily, Italy, and Normandy, and I've been told by many Europeans about how special it is, the way Canada commemorates, even compared to our allies.

I want to ask you an extension of the question on the Gulf War syndrome.

When I was elected, one of the first things I faced was that we were sending Canadians to what was called Operation Enduring Freedom. We were sending Canadians into Kandahar, and nobody called that special duty. We knew they were going to war. I realized then that the most important decision I might make in my career is sending people to face death or serious injury.

That was also the time when they changed the veterans from the pension to the lump sum payment. I remember thinking then, when I was much younger, that when you come back, maybe a lump sum doesn't seem so bad, but the effects start to happen as you get older. Certainly, in my office, I've dealt with many frontline workers and veterans for whom, through the years, it was long after that it started to affect them, and this is where we needed to be.

Could you talk to us about what you saw with the Gulf War syndrome, what we've seen in terms of our understanding of PTSD and why we need to frame the support and pension for a whole-of-life approach?

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: Again, you make an excellent point.

I was in Afghanistan a number of times, and I met some of the soldiers over there who got involved. I remember one who had his face all cut up because a bomb had gone off near him.

Yes, I know that, for a young soldier, sailor or airman, a lump sum payment is very attractive. They can go out and buy a car, a home or something like that, but you're correct that there are long-term ramifications. They need to have that long-term pension if they suffer those types of injuries. I think that's the key. We should be looking at that again.

Mr. Charlie Angus: We've heard some excellent testimony on that from Sean Bruyey. He said that when we compare the benefits that all veterans had from World War I right up to 2006, they were covered under the Pension Act. Prior to that, there were other life-long pensions in place.

He said:

There is one important aspect for a committee that cares about families, spouses and children: They were always compensated separately under the Pension Act. That changed in 2006, and since then, the situation has not improved. There is no extra money for a married person or a person with dependants or a person with children. In order to harmonize the benefits, yes, we know what the costs would be, and Parliament would not be happy about approving that, but it's an easy fix if we ignore the money part. All we have to do is replace the pain and suffering compensation under the Veterans Well-being Act with the Pension Act, and there, it's done.

That's his testimony. How do you see that?

[*Translation*]

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: I agree.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Okay, I was expecting you to give me a much harder, more complex answer, but it seems so simple, does it not?

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: That's only the first five minutes. I go on and on.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Charlie Angus: Ah, okay.

I want to follow up on that because, again, I've seen in my political career people who've come into my office who had extraordinary backgrounds, served us in dangerous theatres, served in all manners, then came home, and then things began to fall apart. Veterans Affairs was there, but for the family, the question is that they were also in combat when it wasn't recognized that they were in combat—again, special duty. They were on policing missions.

How important is the recognition that they were in combat, like for the Persian Gulf, the recognition of that, separate from all the other supports we need to put in place?

• (1625)

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: I think it's important, certainly to the people who served and to the families.

I can recall, and Dusty would agree with this, that we had a situation where a media person was on one of the ships, and not much was going on in the interdiction. We were just doing our thing on the gulf interdiction, and he was bored, so he talked to a young sailor on the wing, and the guy says, "I'm kind of lonely, and I want to go home." This thing blew up in *The Globe and Mail*, I think it was, if I recall correctly.

Anyway, it got people really upset. The families back home heard this and said, "Hey, they all want to come home. What's going on here?" It became a big foorfaraw in Halifax, and it took quite a bit of work by the admiral down there and the staff to say, "Hey, this is not the case." We had to send messages back to our families saying that it was one sailor, and he was lonely, and he wanted to get back to talk to his family. They were doing an awful lot for us.

I think, you know, it comes on the families. I know my own family was well aware of where I was and what I was doing, and they had their fears. My daughter and my young son very much wanted dad to be home. It's a hard thing. You're there. The anxiety is there. I think in many ways—and maybe Dusty would agree with this—because we were there and we knew what was going on, we could understand what was happening, but they didn't know that back in Halifax. They didn't know that back in Valcartier or places like that. We may have been more comfortable, but the families were not so much. They weren't at ease. Let's put it that way. The families are very much a part of it.

One of the good things we did was have good communication. If mom was having trouble with Johnny, mom could get on the phone and talk to her husband. The husband could then get on the phone to Johnny and say, "Come on, get your act together. Do what your mother says." We were able to establish that type of communication during the Gulf War, which we had never done in operations before, so there are things we have done. That was Inmarsat. We were able to do that type of thing. It certainly gave a lot of comfort to the families when things went awry.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Summers.

Let's start the second round of questions.

I'm going to start with Mrs. Wagantall for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you both for your service and for sharing with us today. It's very vital to understanding a lot of the dynamics that we wouldn't understand as civilians who are not family members.

I just want to take note of some things that you said, Mr. Summers. You talked about needing "to make the peace in order to keep the peace", and then you talked about going in to expel Iraqis and facing hostility daily. Was this originally considered a peacekeeping tour, or did they just not name it until—

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: When we left, we weren't really sure what we were getting ourselves into, quite honestly. The government had been talking with the UN. The Prime Minister had been talking with the President of the United States and other leaders, so we left. There was a UN resolution. The resolution was that Saddam Hussein had to take the Iraqis out of Kuwait. Then we did the embargo and tried to put emphasis behind that to make him economically say, "Okay, I better get out." He didn't, so that's what happened there.

It was a resolution that did not involve hostilities as we went over there. We were prepared for hostilities, and we trained for hostilities, both the navy and the air force, but when we got there, there weren't any. When the time came, we had to be able to do it, so that's when it went from a UN resolution to a conflict of war.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: In reality, though, I did hear from other witnesses who were told that they were going over there and they weren't sure, but they might not come back. That's pretty broad. That sounds a lot like the potential to be in a war, and it was called a war. However, what we hear now is that there's this confusion on the ground in Ottawa in regard to what the definitions are. We did have testimony from VAC's assistant deputy minister for commemoration, saying that the Persian Gulf War is not defined as a war, and then she clarified that it was their perspective because Canada itself was not at war. I'm sure that must drive you as crazy as it does some of these other folks who have experienced what you experienced.

What would you have had to experience for it to not be a war? What made it a war? Let's go in that direction. In your hearts and minds, as serving members—

• (1630)

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: What made it a war? A deadline had passed, and it was very clear. In fact, the Iraqis still maintained control over Kuwait, and most of the Kuwaitis had left, and their money had left too, and this type of thing. That deadline was there. It would have been all too easy if Saddam Hussein had gone back because, clearly, the world community had said, "You can't do this; you shouldn't do this."

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: He didn't listen, though.

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: He didn't, so that goes back to what the Prime Minister said at the time. When you get involved in these resolutions, there is an implicit.... I think it's article 1, if I'm not mistaken, of the UN charter that says member nations have the obligation to enforce the resolutions if they're not met.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Okay.

When I hear how we served.... I had the opportunity to be in France to celebrate Canada's Hundred Days. Everywhere Canada has gone, even in Syria when we were playing a part there.... When we took our two air force jets back home, the U.S. said, "Whoa, wait a minute." We are appreciated for what we do, wherever we are. What you did there was put your lives on the line and work to serve Canadians.

How do we fix this? What I'm hearing from Veterans Affairs and from the folks serving in DND is that with the new veterans charter, the term "war" does not exist. It's not defined. It's now a different term. We have "modern-day vets". Does that make sense to you? What is a modern-day veteran?

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: I have no idea what a modern-day vet is, other than someone who has probably gone into peace-keeping or war operations. I don't understand. In Veterans Affairs now, anyone who has served in the military is deemed a veteran.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: There are different kinds of veterans, apparently, and we need to clarify this. I appreciate what you're saying. It's ridiculous that we have gotten caught by definitions and bureaucracy, rather than thinking the most important—

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: It's common sense.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: That's a good term. It's about caring about what our veterans have done.

Do I have a little more time?

The Chair: I'm sorry, no. Thank you, Mrs. Wagantall.

Don't forget we have Mr. Miller on Zoom, too.

For five minutes, I invite Mr. Sarai to ask questions.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you to both of you, Mr. Summers and Mr. Miller.

For that very reason, I'm going to ask Mr. Miller and give you a break for a few minutes. I'm sure there will be more questions for you.

Mr. Miller, one of the dangerous situations the Canadian contingent played a key role in occurred when the *Athabaskan* went to the aid of the USS *Princeton*, an American ship that had been seriously damaged by Iraqi mines off the coast of Kuwait. Could you provide our committee with more first-hand context of the situation, and the role Canada and Canadians played to support the coalition and our allies at that time?

VAdm (Ret'd) Duncan Miller: Certainly. As I said in my opening comments, the U.S. commander called me up—you'll probably appreciate this—and said the USS *Princeton* had been damaged off Kuwait in a known minefield. He said he needed an escort for the tug going up there to escort that ship out. He said the ship should have a helicopter, communications with all of us and anti-mine sonar systems. He said, "There's only one ship that meets all of

those criteria, and you're sailing on it." He was asking me whether I could get the authorization to be the ship that goes off Kuwait and rescues the USS *Princeton*.

That's when I called Admiral Summers and said, "Here's the deal. *Athabaskan* is perfectly prepared to go north, off Kuwait, to rescue the USS *Princeton*." In fact, we did. We had to sail at a certain speed so we wouldn't activate any of the other types of mines in that area. There were floating mines the Iraqis had let go in the Persian Gulf. It was a pretty dangerous mission. Certainly, the crew was.... I talked to the captain and said, "It's up to you, Captain. You know, you're the one who's going to put your ship in danger." He said, "There's no question. We're well prepared. We can do this." Therefore, that's what we did.

I'd like to add one thing about the fact that Canada did not declare war on Iraq. That's irrelevant, in my mind. There was a war going on, and Canadians were in it. It may not have been declared by Canada, but we were in it. When you look at the Webster dictionary, it says that if two factions with combat capability go at each other, a war is declared. You can look up all the definitions. There are legal definitions, too. You can put the Gulf War in every definition and it comes out as a war. There's no question. It was a war, and the Canadian public knew it as a war. We went through dangerous things.

I can't tell you how glad we were when we came back—and that all of us came back. One of the things about the most successful naval operation in our history is that we all came back alive, and I'm thankful every day.

• (1635)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you, Mr. Miller.

I think Mr. Summers wants to add to that.

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: It's just a quick interjection.

No one ever declared war. However, no one ever declared a ceasefire, but a ceasefire occurred. Eventually—I think it was 45 days later—peace was declared, if you want to call it that.

That's the type of operation we were involved in. War was never declared. It all happened when he didn't do that. At two o'clock in the morning on the 16th, all hell broke loose, and that's how we got involved in it. Eventually, at some point in time, a ceasefire was declared and they stopped fighting. However, it was never declared. Saddam Hussein never declared a ceasefire. They all stopped.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Mr. Miller, I read something about you, about letters from across Canada from schools and concerned citizens, and how the sailors responded to every one of them. Can you share a bit about that?

VAdm (Ret'd) Duncan Miller: Yes, that's a great story. Just about every school across the country wrote letters to the ships. We would have a big bucket outside the sick bay with the letters in it. We encouraged every sailor to pick one and write back, and that's what they did. It was remarkable.

My son was at university, and he said, "Dad, they have a stress room for us, because everybody is watching those missiles going into Baghdad." The capability to fire one into the third storey and the third window of the Iraqi headquarters was what was happening. People were stressed by that. Right across the country—high schools, elementary schools—they wrote to the sailors, so we had this system aboard every ship to share all those thousands of letters.

We responded to every single one. I must have written about 10-15 myself, going by the sick bay, picking out a letter and writing back, saying, "Yes, war is not fun; it's terrible. You should be thankful that you're lucky in your lovely city where there aren't tanks rolling in to destroy your houses." That's what happened in Kuwait when the Iraqis invaded, and they started a war. No question, it was a war.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We have two other interventions of two and a half minutes each.

I will start with Mr. Desilets.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd ask the witnesses to please provide short answers, given my limited time.

Mr. Miller, did Canada have the choice to take part in this war or this non-war, or not?

[*English*]

VAdm (Ret'd) Duncan Miller: I don't have translation here, but from what I understand, you are asking whether or not the Canadian government accepts it as a war.

If you're telling me that the Minister of National Defence can declare that it was a war, I'm going to call him up, believe me, and say, "Hey, Minister, declare it as a war." No question, it should be a war.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Miller, did Canada have the choice to take part in the Gulf War or not, in your opinion?

[*English*]

VAdm (Ret'd) Duncan Miller: It certainly had an obligation to all those who served in the Persian Gulf.

I think of young people today. We're wondering why they're not joining the military. Well, here's a perfect reason. When we went to war and came back, we didn't get all the benefits that should be ac-

rued by going into that war and being shot at. What do you think a young person is going to do today on social media? They're not going to join the military, because when you join it and you get into trouble, your government isn't going to give you all the benefits that it should.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you.

Mr. Summers, I'd like to ask you the same question, if you could give a brief answer.

[*English*]

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: Canada has had a proud history of being involved, and getting involved in things that are right, like Lester Pearson with the United Nations. We all ended up getting involved. We want to do these things, and do what's right for the world. We want to be proud of ourselves, showing that we're a member of a community that has taken on these obligations.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Summers, in your opinion, did Canada play a secondary role in that war or did it play an active role in the conflict?

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: In my opinion, it played an important role.

[*English*]

It was a key role that we took, and one that the allies very much wanted us to take. At the time, we looked to take on challenging roles, ones that we were fully capable of doing, and ones that, in fact, gave the highest visibility to Canada. That's why we ended up in the central gulf.

The aircraft were taking on these CAP missions, and close air sweep escort missions. It was what was needed most by the allied effort, and that's what we tried to meet if we were capable of doing it, and if it was safe to do so.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Angus, you have the floor for two and a half minutes to close.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

Commemorations are super important. They're at the centre of every one of our little towns across Canada. My town of Cobalt has 100 names that we lost in a town that doesn't have streetlights, and we remember that. When you go to Ortona, and go to the centre of the community and see the beautiful statue, the angel of Ortona, it reminds people of the sacrifice.

I would like to ask both gentlemen, if we had 4,000 Canadians serving in the Persian Gulf, what would be a fitting commemoration that you think we should have for the veterans?

RAdm (Ret'd) Ken Summers: I would think the most important thing, quite honestly, is not something that's in stone, a monument or something like that. It would be more just the recognition that they had served, and served in a wartime environment. They would like that: recognition that this is what had taken place. Other things would follow, like the monuments. There's a peacekeeping monument here on Sussex, and throughout the country there are others. Maybe the Persian Gulf War should be on there as well.

Things have changed, as I mentioned. What was World War I, World War II and the Korean War, it is not the same anymore. We don't have those anymore. What we have are drones flying in, this type of thing. It has changed.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Admiral Miller, what would you say?

VAdm (Ret'd) Duncan Miller: I agree with Admiral Summers. I don't think we need any monument, but the recognition is very much important.

I can't understand why they can't be called war veterans. I mean, you've got to be kidding me. No, we don't need a statue or anything. That we all came back alive is probably testament enough to the fact that we were clever. I can tell you, we had help from our allies when we went over there. The French provided a simulation of the Exocet missile, which the Iraqis could fire at us. They sent aircraft every day towards us. If we saw a missile launch, we would fire back. They provided that so we would know the best aspect to put the ships in when we thought an attack was coming, and we sailed that way. That's one of the reasons we all came back, I can tell you, because there were missiles flying around. We were lucky.

As for what kind of recognition, I think anniversaries are important. I went to the 25th anniversary of the Swissair disaster. I was the commander of the search and rescue and recovery of Swissair. To remember with the proper commemorative ceremony is extremely important. We did have one for the 30th anniversary of the Persian Gulf War. It was held in Halifax. In fact, the HMCS *Athabaskan* sailed by the jetty. I would say there were thousands of Haligonians on the jetty. When we left for the unknown, tens of thousands were lining the jetties to wave goodbye to us, because they didn't know if we were coming back.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That's the end of the first panel.

[*Translation*]

We heard from Mr. Duncan Miller, Vice-Admiral (Retired), by video conference, and Mr. Ken Summers, Rear-Admiral (Retired) and former Commander of the Canadian Forces in the Middle East, both appearing as individuals.

[*English*]

Thank you for your testimony.

[*Translation*]

The meeting is suspended.

• (1645)

(Pause)

• (1650)

The Chair: We will now resume our meeting.

[*English*]

For the second panel, we have here with us in the room, as an individual, retired master corporal John Senior.

You're going to have five minutes for your opening statement, and after that members of the committee will ask you some questions.

The floor is yours, Mr. Senior.

Mr. John Senior (Master Corporal (Retired), As an Individual): Thank you, Chair.

I remember the last time I was here I had five minutes, and I was told not to talk too fast. Last time I definitely talked way too fast.

In regard to this meeting today, quite briefly, I signed up in 1990. I did my training in Germany in the armoured corps and was part of the Cold War. I understood what the Cold War was. What I didn't realize at the time—after hearing today's testimonials and discussions—was that if I got hurt at that time, I wouldn't have gotten the same benefits as a World War II veteran or a Korean veteran or a First World War veteran. I didn't know that. I guess what happened is that I joined the military under false pretences. I was ready to give all, because I signed on the dotted line.

What I didn't realize was within the fine print was that the Canadian Armed Forces/Government of Canada was not prepared to cover me the same as a World War II veteran. I think it's a tragedy. Being called to do this, this meeting here for the Gulf War veterans.... We knew that they got shortchanged, because I was in Germany at the time serving under the Cold War, ready to die if I had to. You were told quite clearly at that point in time that you as a tank gunner had to take out 36 Russian tanks before you died. We had to be at a 75% minimum manning at all times. We knew that if anything happened that red horde would come over the hill towards the Rhine River, and we were to slow them down.

Again, we signed on the dotted line. We knew what we were up against. We did not realize this, but in retrospect, now I'm sitting here listening and thinking that a World War II vet did the same sort of thing but gets a whole lot more coverage and respect, because they're a war vet.

I went to Afghanistan, and I knew what was going on there. I knew it was a war. I look at this combat star, and it tells me that I was in a war, but why am I finding out now—I got home in 2010, and it's now 2024—that I'm not really, truly considered a war vet by the Canadian government for coverage?

How can you, as members of Parliament, Government of Canada representatives, try to recruit from your particular population and say, “Hey, there’s this little line at the bottom of the contract that says ‘unlimited liability’. What that means is that if we need you to go to war for us or fight for us or represent us, you are willing to give up your life for your country. The fine print below that says that if you manage to survive and come back to Canada, you’re only going to get 20% or 34% or 45% of what a real war vet back in World War II did”?”

If you wind the clock back, I was in Afghanistan with the air force on the X-ray ramp with the helicopters. We went over there with our six Chinooks, which we purchased from the Americans, and we rotated our troops out. Do you think those troops came back any dirtier or any cleaner because they weren’t recognized as war vets? I guarantee you that you could take any one of those pictures of real life that I was looking at and make it a black and white photo, and the harshness on their faces would look just the same as those from World War II or Korea, or World War I. Those particular Gulf War vets, whom everyone else is recognizing except the benefits and services, have a really hard time, because they are forgotten vets. The Government of Canada, in certain places, can easily say that as long as there’s no tie to benefits, you’re a Gulf War veteran.

What does being a war veteran really mean to me, or to them? Being a war veteran is a completion of mission. I’m not a modern vet. I know that. It says I’m not a modern vet. I fought in a freaking war. I was willing at that time, if anything happened, to prepare my family for the fact that I might be one of those 158 people who came back in a box with a flag.

• (1655)

Now, all of a sudden, I’m sitting here an hour later, finding out an hour ago that I don’t have the same coverage. Forgive me for being a bit warm under the collar. I’m perspiring. I’m a little angry. I feel betrayed. It’s up to you to fix it.

That’s my speech.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Senior.

Thank you for your service and also your courage.

Now we’re going to start the first round of questions.

I’m pleased to invite Mr. Richards for six minutes, please.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

You just made the statement, “It’s up to you to fix it.” It’s up to the Minister of National Defence. That’s who it’s up to.

The last time you were before this committee, you raised some concerns about the lack of respect that Canadian veterans have had, just in basic things like recognizing and commemorating service. Given the fact that they can’t even get those kinds of things right, what sort of confidence do you have in the Minister of National Defence and in this current government to actually address this issue for veterans like yourself who served in Afghanistan, veterans who served in the Persian Gulf and others?

What sort of confidence do you have that they’ll actually get this and fix this?

Mr. John Senior: To be quite honest, right now, I think the lack in the government at this point in time for veterans is at an all-time low. That’s the end of the story on that. It is at an all-time low. When this particular thing here goes mainstream, I think there are going to be a lot more upset veterans who will want to get things fixed. Currently, there’s a deficit of street credibility of the government toward veterans.

We’ve been taking a hit for quite a few years, to be quite honest—ever since the new veterans charter kicked in. We call it a pizza pension for a reason. They’ll take a lump sum, divide it up and give it to us. You’ll get \$36 a month. Then, this improvement came along afterward because...ever since that famous saying that you’re asking more than we can give. I’m sorry, but it’s actually the other way around. The Government of Canada is asking more than the veterans are now willing to give. Therefore, you guys are at a deficit as a government. It’s no wonder there’s a recruiting problem. It’s no wonder there’s a retention problem. It’s because of that lack of trust from the person going into the Canadian Armed Forces and learning about these deficits.

Does that answer your question, sir?

Mr. Blake Richards: I think it does.

I know that you engage with your fellow veterans on social media. You’re quite active there. You have a pretty big following on social media. Can you tell us how many veterans your online community reaches?

Mr. John Senior: I do have the ability to reach 18,000 veterans.

Mr. Blake Richards: That’s a pretty significant number of our veterans in this country.

What would you say the general consensus is among those veterans in terms of their confidence in this government to be able to properly care for our veterans and to be able to maintain a capable military?

Mr. John Senior: Again, there’s a drastic lack of confidence. That’s why, on social media, there are so many start-up, local groups that take care of our own. It’s because the government can’t do it. Veterans Affairs can’t do it, through bureaucracy, stonewalling and a denial-until-death kind of policy. That’s what we call it. The pizza pension earned that name because you cannot buy a pizza once a month with less than \$36, which is what you get for missing a leg.

We have to take care of ourselves because it’s not happening, at the end of the day.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes. You used the word “can’t”. I would use the word “won’t”. I think they won’t do it right or get it right. That’s more accurate. They could, but they won’t.

I'd like to ask you about another matter. We had the commander of military personnel here last year at this committee. We asked about how many people leave the Canadian Forces each year and where that was tracked. They told us that they didn't actually have those numbers and they didn't track them. Do you believe that?

Mr. John Senior: They have the numbers. They don't want to disclose them because it shows a deficit.

Just in the last six months, I put two more people back into the Canadian Armed Forces through recruiting. A lot of us, as veterans, are discounted for the lack of.... People figure that we get out and that's it. The reality is that we're still loyal to the Canadian Armed Forces. We're still loyal to the military and reputation. We do put back in a lot more than we get back out.

If the numbers actually did come out on how many are leaving, thinking of leaving or just barely hanging on but not serviceable, it would be a scary number for the average person to have to listen to.

• (1705)

Mr. Blake Richards: I think you're right on that one. I hear it every day from veterans like you, who say, "I wouldn't recommend it to others and I wouldn't recommend it to my own children." I've heard that many times.

We also had the Minister of Veterans Affairs here. She told us that they actually don't know how many homeless veterans there are out there. I guess I really struggle.... How the heck can you not know how many people are leaving? How can you not know how many homeless veterans you have out there?

I would ask you about this. How do you think your fellow veterans and you would feel about the possibility of getting your well-documented service recognized as wartime service when we have a government that can't even be bothered to help veterans who are relying on food banks or homeless shelters just to get by? What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. John Senior: It's an embarrassment. It's not going to come forward any time soon, because being able to track what is a true homeless veteran.... Picturing a veteran on the street.... It doesn't really happen. We are too well connected and, as homeless, we couch surf. There are homeless out there who don't have a house over their heads but are not going hungry because of the food banks, because people are sliding money under their doors and because people are keeping their cars running. The community is taking care of itself because of the failure.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm glad there are those people out there to do that, but it shouldn't have to be the case.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I'd like to invite Mr. Miao to take his six minutes, please.

Mr. Wilson Miao (Richmond Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for joining us again, Mr. Senior. It's great to have you back.

What, in your opinion, is the difference between the terminology "war service" and "special duty service"? You mentioned in your

remarks how you're surprised after hearing all of this testimony and knowing the difference in the benefits that you would be getting.

Mr. John Senior: Okay. I can answer that with a question, sir. Are you a member of Parliament or an advocate? A member of Parliament gets benefits. An advocate doesn't: You get paid by the hour.

Being a war veteran.... It was earned. You were there. You made that sacrifice. You had to prepare your family. You have to prepare, and when you're finished and you come back, it closes that mission. People in the military are programmed to complete missions. We do things. You give us a task and we complete it. If I'm tasked to do a peacekeeping mission and I come back, I'm a peacekeeper. I got that, and I got the medal, but completing a mission and saying, "Well, it was a conflict. Are we going to work on technicalities here? It's not really a war".... To me, as a frontline soldier—I'm not talking about commanders or admirals, but as a frontline soldier—I'm a war vet. Again, everyone else can recognize that. Why can't my own government recognize that? It's institutional betrayal.

Calling it something just to wordsmith it so that it sounds better for political reasons really shortchanges a soldier, and it runs against your credibility as a government. I say "your" because I'm a master corporal and I do not have the ability to make that change, and there are thousands of retired people who cannot make that change. We take our orders from the Government of Canada. That's for you to figure out how to get it fixed, not me.

Mr. Wilson Miao: Thank you for sharing that.

Let's talk about the value and importance of local commemorations and the role these initiatives can play, in part, in helping to better integrate and support our veterans during the transition to civilian life.

You have a strong portfolio on this. Would you say that the Department of Veterans Affairs should invest less in commemoration or about the same as it does now, or should it increase funding towards commemoration?

Mr. John Senior: Commemoration drives recruiting. Commemoration drives morale. Commemoration drives everything for the Canadian Armed Forces.

If you look at other nations that invest more in commemoration rather than spending the money somewhere else on feel-good projects.... Without your soldiers, you don't have sovereignty. Without your soldiers, you don't have a military. Without your soldiers willing to lay down their lives, you're not going to be able to complete your missions.

Does that answer your question, sir?

• (1710)

Mr. Wilson Miao: Yes.

Do you think learning materials that are currently available from VAC help Canadians develop a better appreciation for the service and sacrifice made by CAF and veterans, and would you support the department in expanding these efforts?

Mr. John Senior: I would say that right now, at best, they're doing the job at a bare minimum level. I subscribe to the teachers' portion of the Veterans Affairs commemoration portfolio, and I give other material. It is a bit lacking. It needs to be updated and it could do a whole lot more.

It really needs to focus on the war veterans as well, because right now, it uses soft language like “conflict” or “interventions” and other soft words. You need to call things what they truly are. If it's a war, it's a war. If it's a peacekeeping mission, it's a peacekeeping mission. We can't water it down because it might hurt someone's feelings. We're giving guns and we have to make really big decisions about other people's lives. The commander here, as you saw beforehand, made really big decisions. We really have to call it what it is.

Mr. Wilson Miao: Would changing this terminology, between wartime service and special duty service, be better recognized by veterans for the operation that they served in?

Mr. John Senior: I resent what.... Again, it would drive recruiting. You're appealing to a very different audience nowadays. To appeal to this audience you're dealing with nowadays to come to the military.... They will have two or three or more careers in a lifetime.

When I first got in, it was a single career choice. I got into the military, and I was going to do it until the day I died. Nowadays, it's one of your life experiences, so in order to do it and make the changes, you really need to update that whole portfolio and keep it attractive.

Mr. Wilson Miao: If there is any recommendation you would like to share and put forward to support increased recruitment to the CAF, what would that be?

Mr. John Senior: Stop working on the technicalities. This whole thing here right now.... I'm still fuming. I'm sorry. I'm hot under the collar right now about war veteran stuff like this and the differences in benefits.

I'm sorry. What's the question again? I lost track.

Mr. Wilson Miao: Are there any recommendations that you have?

Mr. John Senior: Yes, it was about the recommendations.

The recommendations would, for sure, include the recognition of the Cold War veterans and the commemorations. We don't need any more massive statues. Those are nice, and having a place to go was really nice. The names on the walls are good, and that kind of stuff, but it's the actual commemoration and recognition of those days.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Miao.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mr. Luc Desilets for six minutes.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Senior, if you'd known about the difference in benefits before you enlisted, would you have—

I gather from your gestures that there's no interpretation. We're sending someone over to you now.

• (1715)

The Chair: Just a minute, please.

Mr. Senior, the situation is fixed and the interpretation is working.

Mr. Desilets, I'd stopped the clock. You had used 12—

Mr. Luc Desilets: I'll start my six minutes from the top, Mr. Chair, will I not?

The Chair: You had used 12 seconds of your time, Mr. Desilets, and you now have the floor again.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Okay.

Mr. Senior, if you had known that there would be a difference in the benefits, would you still have enlisted in the army?

[*English*]

Mr. John Senior: Yes, I would have. I am fifth-generation military, so regardless of the situation, I still would have joined. I do think it would have made a difference in my loyalty or commitment levels, for sure. As I said, in retrospect, right now I look back on my service and I feel a little bit of institution betrayal, to be quite honest.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Do you think that this betrayal that you and many others have experienced may impact young people's interest in enlisting? If people knew about it, would that have an impact?

[*English*]

Mr. John Senior: It's a fair question, and to be honest, I think I partially answered that with Mr. Miao as well.

I think people are going to be a lot more risk-averse going under certain missions. They'll try to find a way out of the mission, or they'll say, “My wife is pregnant, so I can't go now” or “Sorry, I just got a good job offer, so I'm going to leave.” When those kinds of reasons happen, it doesn't reflect the true reason why a person left the military, which is, “I am not willing to come back maimed for the rest of my life for the lack of commitment based on the government, so I'm going to keep my life safe.”

I do think it does play a drastic role in the level of commitment of the soldier to the mission, for sure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: In your opinion, does the loss of a leg in Korea have the same monetary value as the loss of a leg in the Gulf War?

[*English*]

Mr. John Senior: Well, for me it would still be the same leg if it got lost, yes. However, the money from Veterans Affairs, or the services related to improving my life or the quality of my life, would change drastically between the new veterans charter and post the new veterans charter, for sure.

I can tell you there were people in Afghanistan on one day who were covered by previous benefits, and the very next day a buddy got hurt and is not covered the same. It creates quite the animosity between soldiers who fought in the same conflict.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: I understand that the difference is totally unacceptable.

In your opinion, is there a connection between the fact that veterans are getting insufficient benefits and homelessness?

[English]

Mr. John Senior: Yes, they are directly linked. They're one and the same. They're very, very linked.

The money coming in per month, or the services per month.... Again, a feeling of abandonment drives up homelessness. A feeling of institutional betrayal increases homelessness because all these questions regurgitate through your head on a regular basis: "What did I do this for? Why did I?" It attacks your esteem, your soul and that kind of stuff for sure, so they are linked.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Did you calculate the amounts you lost or did not receive, as a result of the difference between the two regimes?

[English]

Mr. John Senior: I don't want that headache. I don't want to know the disparity, because I need to be able to sleep at night, so no, I'm not going to do that. I know it is big, and if I did know, I would probably get even more angry. The last thing you need is to have 15,000 or 32,000 veterans—however many people fought in Afghanistan—really, really angry, more so than they would be in the first place.

No, I didn't calculate that, and I'm probably never going to do that, sir. It's a good question, though.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: I don't have enough time left, but I could ask many other questions.

Mr. Chair, if I may, I'd like to ask our beloved Library of Parliament analyst a question.

Mr. Paré, I really enjoyed reading your notes today and I'd like you to tell us what you meant when you wrote: "The Committee could, for example, recommend that the designation 'overseas combat operation' be added to that of 'special duty'."

Could you also tell us how that would resolve the problem or permit some forward movement on this file?

• (1720)

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré (Committee Researcher): The Veterans Well-being Act currently covers those designated under "special duty service". This designation was created to recognize peace-keeping missions in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Starting in the 1990s, there were Canadian missions involving combat operations, which had not been the case for several decades. However, that increased level of risk or danger associated with combat operations equivalent to wartime experience is not recognized. The exact ter-

minology is up for discussion, but it requires a designation above and beyond that of "special duty service". There would then be "normal duty service", meaning outside of operations, "special duty service", and another level of service, for example, "overseas combat operation" or something like that.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Why would that not just eliminate the "special duty service" designation? Isn't it always associated with overseas operations?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: No. An example would be soldiers who battled the wildfires in British Columbia. That's an example of "special duty service".

Mr. Luc Desilets: I see.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: These special duty service operations should be rightfully recognized for the high risk they pose.

Mr. Luc Desilets: As part of that recommendation, do you see changes to the amounts allocated to veterans?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: That's another issue entirely.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Do you have another answer?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: The concept of wartime service is entirely separate from access to benefits paid out under the Pension Act or the Veterans Well-being Act. It's another issue entirely, even if it deserves to be debated.

Mr. Luc Desilets: You mentioned the concept of risk or danger. In your opinion, how does that correspond to the three levels?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: The Department of National Defence would be responsible for that designation, meaning that it would recognize a mission as being a combat mission. As Rear-Admiral Summers indicated, those on one know. Similarly, the special duty service designation is awarded by the Department of National Defence on the recommendation of the chief of the defence staff, a designation equivalent to a higher level would be recommended by the chief of the defence staff to the Minister of Defence.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Why would the government accept such a recommendation?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: That's outside my purview.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Desilets.

Mr. Angus for six minutes.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I remember when the new veterans charter came in, in 2006, just as we were sending so many young people to Kandahar. The idea of a lump sum pension was going to be somehow better than a proper full life pension. I thought about it, because I come from mining country. In the mines, when you're young, you're indestructible, and then you start to get injured, but of course, you're young and indestructible. My office is always full of people who are in their forties and fifties, when the injuries catch up, and obviously that was going to happen coming out of the war.

We had people who were injured in 2005, as you pointed out, and they got a whole different deal than they would have in 2007. How is it that Canada could get away with doing something that was so obviously shortchanging people who were actually going into combat?

Mr. John Senior: When I look at my rank and see "Master Corporal"... At that point in time, we knew we were getting short-changed, and we knew it would have lifelong impacts, but we still did the missions anyway. We weren't fully cognizant or aware of the scope or breadth of the change. As a matter of fact, nobody was. Nobody was aware of how much of an impact the NVC would have on those suffering from injuries, whatever they were, or the need for care after service. The impact of that wasn't known until recently.

I don't really have an answer for that, other than what I just said. If we had known what we know now, which we should have known then, it would have been dumped, but for someone, somewhere, there was a benefit. For someone, somewhere, it sounded like a good idea. As I said, for the Canadian government right now, the impact for everybody here is that you're seeing these changes now. You're seeing that there's a recruiting problem for all uniformed services, but for national defence, it is a big, big problem. You're getting a hard turnover, and when you get a hard turnover, you get a lot more brain drain. You're less able to have that experience to go from one mission to the next, from one war or conflict or whatever it is to the next, and take those experiences to keep the casualty and injury rates low.

The Gulf War was a phenomenal success because you had people with 30 years of experience who went in and led that stuff and did these things. How many years of prior experience did Mr. Summers go in with? Imagine someone going in with only 10 years of experience and leading a whole combat team or brigade or division. You're going to have a lot of casualties regardless.

Again, this new veterans charter is having an effect. We're seeing long-term effects on recruiting and morale.

Does that answer your question, sir?

• (1725)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Yes. That's because it's compounded by the weasel language. I remember the veteran who stopped me at the Cobalt Legion. I thanked him for his service, and he said, "For what?" I said, "Well, you fought in the Korean War," and he said,

"Aha, I fought in the Korean War, but it wasn't a war." I asked, "What do you mean?" and he said, "It was a police action." I asked what that meant, and he said, "Well, that was the weasel language that robbed me of a proper pension." I remember the fight to change that. Now we have "special duty" and all kinds of language. However, the fact is this: When you're facing combat, you're facing combat.

I think of the situation in the Medak Pocket, which was the biggest land battle Canadians fought since Korea. It was heavily traumatic. I don't even know what language they used for that, but it was a war. That was full-on war, and yet people came home after those units were broken up and were not recognized for what they'd done.

You talked about the fine print. The fine print has to be, "When you serve the country, we look after you." It should be that simple, whatever the cost, because the cost has been paid with the lives of the people we sent to represent us and do their best, which they always do.

Mr. John Senior: Mr. Angus, you talked about something there. I'm sorry, but I have to say this now, before I forget.

They will never leave a soldier behind. However, the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs, or the Government of Canada, the way they word it right now, will abandon your ass, no problem, to save money. It comes down to money. At the end of the day, the only thing we can think of is the new veterans charter. When we look at the two numbers, they are very different. When we look at the levels of service provided, it's very different.

At the end of the day, the only way it makes sense is that it really, truly, came down to saving some money.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Absolutely.

Mr. John Senior: However, at the end of the day, you're going to pay more to recuperate and fix that problem than if you had just left it the way it was, properly, the first time.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your testimony.

On behalf of the members of the committee, I would like to say thank you.

[Translation]

We will now hear from Master Corporal (Retired) John Senior, who is appearing as an individual.

Thank you very much.

[English]

On Thursday, we're going to have Sean Bruyca and Louise Richard at the committee.

I'd like to say thank you to our interpreters, technicians, clerk and analysts.

The meeting is adjourned.

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