



Address to the Vimy Gala  
Lieutenant General Christine Whitecross  
2 Nov 2018

I'd like to send a quick shout out to two groups, my friends in the AWWR, and to two of our daughters and their partners, that are here this evening, Shaynah and Paraic and Brianne and Cody.

Bonsoir et merci à mon mentor et ami, Daniel Gosselin, pour son aimable présentation, and to the CDA Institute selection committee for selecting me for this incredible award.

I am honoured and absolutely thrilled to be here this evening, and to be on the receiving end of an award that by its name – Vimy – has continued to recognize and remind us of the bravery and sacrifice of Canadian soldiers who served, and were ultimately victorious, in the battle of Vimy Ridge in April 1917. Je suis très émue de voir mon nom s'ajouter à la liste des Canadiens remarquables qui ont remporté ce prix.

Matthew Overton and Daniel Gosselin told me I could speak about whatever I wanted this evening – so, I'd like to speak to you

about the tenets underpinning this very award – and to share with you, some of the reasons why I am proud to be wearing the uniform of the Canadian Armed Forces. And I hope to be able to articulate why I think these reasons are increasingly important in our unpredictable world of today – in terms of security, Defence and preserving our democratic values.

You know, I pretty well grew up in the military – in uniform. I've had the pleasure to visit more than 60 countries, done interesting and fascinating things and been part of some innovative thinking. On the flip side, I've also done some difficult and challenging things both in terms of my professional and personal life. I've lived in 5 countries including Germany, Croatia, Afghanistan and now Italy, and met some incredible people and some not-so-incredible people.

Through it all – in my 36+ years of service – I have learned that whether I did or didn't know the issues at play, the one thing I could always rely on, the one constant that many of us look to – is that we, as Canadians and as professional military, are respected and relied on to get the job done, and to do it well, honorably, while respecting our values. This I believe is our legacy – as it was in Vimy over a hundred years ago.

When I first joined the Canadian Armed Forces, in 1982, the Canadian Military Engineers were having a “Get-well program” aimed at increasing their numbers – and coincidentally, the Engineers had just recently opened their recruitment to women. I had no idea how this would work out, but I naively signed on the dotted line, and to this day, I see it as one of the best decisions of my life. Chimo!

Je croyais que le programme d'ingénierie de l'université Queens était difficile – et je me suis demandée dans quoi je m'étais engagée dès mes premiers instants à l'école du génie militaire des forces canadiennes ; – it was difficult both mentally and physically.

Let's face it, being 5 foot 2, and a lot lighter those days, weren't great enablers when you're part of a group assembling a steel girder bridge as a member of the top panel party or laying out minefields. But tenacity, humble work ethics and a tremendous sense of teamwork by all of us worked in our favor and set us all up for success. These traits may have started for me in the training sites of Chilliwack, but they are truly hallmarks of our Canadian Military.

Speed ahead a few years to my time in UNPROFOR in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia or as part of ISAF in Afghanistan, where that same sense of duty and teamwork were prevalent. I will admit I may have been a bit of an anomaly there, though I don't think I would have characterized it that way then. The reality was, my Canadian colleagues – and many others - welcomed me as a valued member of the team. Though there were moments when I felt the odd man out, probably a poor choice of words there, I never thought I was being set up for failure. Whether in our Canadian Arctic, while deployed or in a command position, I felt that I was accepted for who I was and for what I brought to the team.

The reality of course, as I have come to understand while travelling and working in more multinational environments, is that this is not always the case. And this, I believe, is our strength. Diversity – and by this word I mean that each individual is unique, and recognized for their individual differences of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion and others. This diversity comes in many dimensions, and through these differences, through our strengths and weaknesses, we form stronger, better

teams that think more critically, more comprehensively and more innovatively than homogenous groups can.

Is this only a Canadian attribute? No, but we are seen as leaders in this area, and for good reasons. Are we there yet? No again, but we are continually moving forward.

So why am I telling you this and what has it got to do with security and defence? Well, I believe that this simple act of inclusiveness will help us positively influence our role in the future security environment, ensuring a robust security and defence posture that is essential to the preservation of democratic principles. And I submit it's more important now than ever before. I wouldn't be here tonight standing in front of you, 36 years after I joined the Canadian Forces, had many of my peers, superiors, and even subordinates, especially the non-commissioned members, not taken the time to be inclusive with me and to ensure I was part of "The Team."

Leading in an environment that embraces our differences and encourages new ways of thinking, inspires trust, dedication, loyalty and excellence.

Fred Manske, a successful business leader and author has been quoted saying, “The ultimate leader is one who is willing to develop troops to the point that they surpass him or her in knowledge and ability.” I believe if we make our people feel indispensable they will function at a level that is indispensable to our success. They will bring their best effort to work every day. Creating a diverse team built between the pillars of trust and motivation where people are allowed to take risks, and to come up with better ways of doing business are critical to addressing the defence and security challenges today and in the future.

Leaders in any environment are expected to adjust to change. Military and Defence leaders must evolve in response to the ever-changing security environment – to develop better and more responsive tactics, techniques and processes – so we meet the enemy at our advantage.

There is another responsibility that we, as leaders, are also expected to take on – and that is a better understanding and more comprehensive look at what I call the human dimension of leadership. We need to better understand what makes our fighting force or our corporate or business or academic teams

stronger within, more personally resilient, and more effective as a team.

We need to keep this human aspect in mind as a means of validating what we do and to remind us that it matters. It always mattered, as leaders in this audience know well. But considering the new generation of Canadians joining the Canadian Armed Forces, or any other security-related organizations, such as the RCMP, our intelligence service, it matters even more in today's world. Our focus as leaders must continue to be on our people.

We used to say in the Canadian Armed Forces, “mission first, people always”. And due in large part to VAdm Ron Lloyd's insistence that we change it, we now say “people first, mission always” because as military leaders, it's in our DNA to keep a focus on achieving the mission, but we need to ensure we first take the needs of our people into consideration. Training, education, the right equipment, and tactics go a long way to achieve this aim – we all know this. But I would suggest the same amount, or more importance needs to be put on how we treat our people, how we ensure they can rise to the next level both as individuals and as teams.

These are the organizational issues that require our attention because we are ultimately responsible for creating the working environment where people not only function but thrive, and know they will be respected when bringing their best skills and attributes forward.

We cannot optimize anyone's performance in an environment where they feel personally diminished or powerless.

We cannot tolerate behaviour in our organizations that lowers people's personal value and thereby lowers our own institutional values, reputations and potential.

Over and above that, we have to be honest and not just tell our subordinates what to do – we ourselves have to do it and insist those around us behave with the same level of integrity. We have to take on this responsibility both in and out of uniform and in and out of our boardrooms.

This is one of the reasons I am so proud to wear this uniform, because the Canadian Armed Forces understands that we need more diversity in our ranks; and we further understand that in order to attract quality we must demonstrate quality. Our institutional culture must be one where respect for diversity, going

well beyond the rhetoric, is amongst our core values, much like service before self. Leaders from our most junior to our most senior ranks must truly believe what we are stating loudly is crucial to operational effectiveness and to sustaining our forces.

Security, defence, and democracy are tangibly linked to how we demonstrate we care and respect those around us. So much of the world around us is changing and we need a stabilizing agent. When crisis strikes, our teams will look to us for a way forward, to lead them, to guide them, and maybe even to comfort them.

In the military context, risk and instability are something we face all the time. But, even that is changing. It's not so easy anymore to tell a friend from foe and the nature of war fighting has evolved. It's less about boots on the ground and more about controlling the information space and successfully controlling the narrative.

Fake news, disinformation and weaponized narratives have permeated today's chaotic information environment and will require leadership to ensure these threats to our democratic principles do not take hold. We need leaders who can motivate and guide their people to keep state and non-state actors at bay

who thrive on destabilizing our nation's institutional apparatus and foster fear and chaos amongst the civilian population.

And this adversary doesn't just attack our institutions; this adversary is also looking for inside information and will take it from us without our permission. They make their approach via our networks – digital and human, and these two are interdependent – and uses our own tools against us leveraging it for nefarious influence.

Now more than ever, it's about trust and values. Now more than ever, even as we embrace more and more on technology, we rely on our people to do the right thing, to hold up a high standard of integrity and ethics and to be guided by loyalty. And we know that successful organizations benefit from having the input of a wide scope of perspectives.

We understand that diversity around the table contributes to better ideas, policy, program development, operations, public consultations, services and working conditions. We need only look at examples in deployments such as Afghanistan, where we had men and women combat leaders. The women were the only ones who could speak and garner intelligence from the local

women in a village. The same went for persons who spoke the local languages and could therefore communicate with the local militia or elders. This diversity was a formidable enabler to our mission. Canada's battle-tested experiences at home and abroad have demonstrated the value diversity plays in executing successful operations. Another reason for my pride.

Diverse and inclusive teams, whether in the military or the boardroom, equate to better decisions, solutions and outcomes. I believe we have a key role in ensuring the make-up of our teams provides for as much diversity as possible. And in turn, this diversity will ensure our safety and security as a nation.

Je voudrais faire encore deux remarques avant de conclure :  
"People first" in 2018 means better understanding and applying diversity in all our opportunities of leadership. This is the only way we will continue to be effective in the defence and security realms. And, one can argue, one of the most important responsibilities of leaders to ensure 'mission always'.

And finally, a personal reflection. I believe the future is bright. I see so many incredibly talented, fit, articulate, driven and professional women in the ranks and in society. I am humbled by

who they are and what they are capable of doing. When it is my turn to move aside and take the uniform off, I can relax knowing there will be not one, not two but many ready and willing to take the senior leadership positions of our Canadian Armed Forces and society in general – I see it in my own children. Adaptable, tolerant, engaged, linked – true force multipliers and enablers. Wow, what a great time to be in uniform!

In conclusion, I'd like to leave you with this:

A nation without people is merely land. As leaders we have an obligation to our people, our institutions and our country. Defence and security of Canada is important only because of who lives here – you, me, our families, our friends and our fellow Canadians.

Thank you.