
Parliamentarians in Uniform

by Louise Rousseau

The Canadian Forces Parliamentary Program is a way for Members of Parliament and Senators to improve their understanding of life in the Army, the Navy or the Air Force. The goal is to reach out to parliamentarians and show them what the Canadian Forces accomplish. The CFPP brings MPs and Senators into one of Canada's most important national institutions for hands-on experience. The pilot completed in 2002 was so successful, the Department of National Defence has now made it a permanent program. This article looks at the experience of parliamentarians who participated in the 2002 Program.

The Canadian Forces Parliamentary Program (CFPP) was developed in 2000 by the Director of External Communications and Public Relations of the Department of National Defence (DND) to provide parliamentarians with comprehensive knowledge of DND/CF's roles, responsibilities, and mandate. The objective of the program is to help members participate in debates on CF issues. Citizenship engagement is a key priority for the Department and the Government of Canada as a whole. Coordinated by the Directorate of External Communications and Public Relations, the CFPP options are developed by the Navy, Air Force and Army but operators on the ground are the ones who ensure the experience is a meaningful one.

Each Fall, a pamphlet describing the coming year's program options is sent to parliamentarians for a calendar year start. Applications for the program have been received from all parties and all geographical regions. The CFPP is non-partisan and participants are chosen on a first come first served basis. Each participant is expected to complete his or her program within one year of beginning.

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The CFPP for 2002–2003 offered three programs: The Army in Action, Experience the Navy, and Maritime Air. The CFPP for 2003–2004 promises to be very similar, and can accommodate approximately 15 MPs and Senators.

Last year the following parliamentarians took part in the Canadian Forces Parliamentary Program:

Rob Anders,
Canadian Alliance, (Calgary West, Alberta)

Claude Bachand,
Bloc Québécois Party, (Saint-Jean, Quebec)

Stéphane Bergeron,
Bloc Québécois Party, (Verchères - Les Patriotes, Quebec)

Jean-Guy Carignan,
Liberal Party, (Quebec East)

Rick Casson,
Canadian Alliance, (Lethbridge, Alberta)

Paul Crête,
Bloc Québécois Party, (Kamouraska - Rivière-du-Loup -
Temiscouata - Les Basques, Quebec)

Bev Desjarlais,
New Democratic Party, (Churchill, Manitoba)

Wayne Easter,
Liberal Party, (Malpeque, Prince Edward Island)

Raymonde Folco,
Liberal Party, (Laval West, Quebec)

Roger Gallaway,
Liberal Party, (Sarnia - Lambton, Ontario)

Ivan Grose,
Liberal Party, (Oshawa, Ontario)

Rick Laliberte,
Liberal Party, (Churchill River, Saskatchewan)

David Price,
Liberal Party, (Compton – Stanstead, Quebec)

Monte Solberg,
Canadian Alliance, (Medicine Hat, Alberta)

Brent St-Denis,
Liberal Party, (Algoma – Manitoulin, Ontario)

Peter Stoffer,
New Democratic Party, (Sackville – Musquodoboit
Valley – Eastern Shore, Nova Scotia)

Each participant's experience is unique, but Roger Gallaway's comments are typical:

Our soldiers are young, energetic, and proud. ... Today's soldier has participated (on average) in some 2.5 six-month foreign missions, a measure of our international commitments ... Our soldiers are a most diligent and competent group in whom we should have pride.¹

When they join the program, participants shadow an officer (typically a Major or Lieutenant-Commander) and are fully integrated into their unit. They learn how the equipment works, they train with the troops, and they deploy with their units on operations. Parliamentarians are integrated into the unit by wearing the same uniform, living on bases, eating in messes, using CF facilities and equipment. The options may vary as the CFPP options depend on military operations.

Parliamentarians who choose *The Army in Action* train with a unit that is preparing to go overseas to Bosnia Herzegovina. When their unit has deployed into the



**Roger Gallaway MP takes part in the
Army Program**



**Monte Solberg MP during his deployment phase in
the Army Program**

theatre of operations, participants join their company or squadron for a period of seven to ten days.

Monte Solberg had never served in the CF. He got involved in the CFPP because he hoped it would show him what conditions are like for soldiers, including their regular routine and the dangers they face. Mr. Solberg said:

Sgt. Willie MacDonald is a section commander in 7 Platoon. He is a Regina boy now on his fourth rotation to Bosnia. Part of his job is to lead patrols around and beyond the battle-scarred town of Bosanko Grahova. In one settlement we visit the village leader and his wife. They are old friends. After a warm greeting Sgt. MacDonald produces some batteries for their radio. They thank him profusely. Electricity has yet to return to their village seven years after the end of the war. Now they must burn candles for light. The sergeant has his mother mail candles from Canada. The people of the village have no jobs and no money. Sgt. Willie MacDonald provides batteries, candles and over-the-counter drugs with money from his own pocket to these people and others ... I am very proud of Canada's soldiers.²

Raymonde Folco a former Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources Development, was another participant in *The Army in Action*. Ms. Folco describes the training she received with her unit:

On the very first evening, after receiving our uniforms and equipment, we had our first shooting lesson with our personal weapon, the C-7 service rifle. The next day, I was assigned to the "combat trail", where we acted as infantry soldiers. This exercise consists of moving along a trail through the forest. With all our equipment on our backs, we walked through the mud dreading "enemy" fire. When the "enemy" shot at us, we flung ourselves to the ground and fired right back. ...³

Parliamentarians who choose *Experience the Navy* work with Navy crews for three weeks. The first week is



Raymonde Folco MP experienced the Army Program

a detailed overview of the Navy. The second includes three days aboard a YAG training vessel, one day with HMCS *Oriole*, the Navy's Bermuda-rigged sailing ketch, and a chance to work on the ship simulator. During the third week, participants spend five days at sea in a warship or take part in a major exercise.

Stéphane Bergeron describes his experience with the Navy:

... The first phase of my "integration" took place in August 2001, on the west coast. After visiting the base facilities at Esquimalt and meeting CF members of all ranks who work on the base, we were taken by Sea King helicopter to HMCS *Regina*, which was conducting a navigation exercise for junior officers. After about three days at sea, we returned to port and then went straight



Stéphane Bergeron MP at sea with the Navy

back out to sea, this time in the sail training ship HMCS *Oriole*. We then cruised for the day, contributing manual labour to help the crew handle the sails.

The second phase was more like being thrown into the deep end — the theatre of operations. At the end of March 2002, I was flown to the Arabian Gulf region to join the Canadian Naval Task Group patrolling in the area, in company with other ships of the international coalition fleet. We arrived in one Arabian Gulf port and went by road to another, where we boarded a Sea King helicopter to fly to the task group's supply ship.

After a brisk presentation on the ship's characteristics and a brief tour, we took part in the impressive business of a double replenishment at sea. We were then taken to HMCS *Toronto*, where we stayed for several days except for a few hours the next day in HMCS *Iroquois*, where the Task Group Commander gave us a presentation on the nature of the mission. The program of this second phase featured exercises in gunnery, boarding procedures, firefighting and damage control.⁴

The pilot Air Force Program options included Search and Rescue and Transport programs. This year's Air Force option offers the Maritime Air option that has three phases. The first is an introduction to maritime warfare with familiarization training at Shearwater with the Sea King host crews. The second phase includes familiariza-



Bev Desjarlais MP with the Air Force option of the CFPP

tion at Greenwood with Aurora host crews. During the third phase, participants deploy to a theatre of operations with their host crews.

Bev Desjarlais took part in the Search and Rescue program and relates her experience with the Air Force:

I was based in Trenton, Ontario, and went up with the Labrador helicopter and the Hercules aircraft rescue teams. While on the Labrador, the Search and Rescue team did a parachute jump into a river to simulate a water recovery. They also left me and a crew member in an area of forest then returned and hoisted me back into the helicopter. Aboard the Hercules, with the back cargo access door open (and with a safety harness on) I flung ribbon markers as would be done to mark a search area.

I was most impressed by the professionalism of both aircrews and the support staff on the ground. Even though I am afraid of heights, I felt comfortable and safe during the exercises.⁵

Wayne Easter, Solicitor General of Canada, was another Air Force participant before he was appointed to Cabinet. He was integrated into a Search and Rescue unit. Here is what he had to say about it:

At Trenton, I had the opportunity to fly in a Hercules and to observe SAR personnel in training exercises. Their skill is second to none. Working in Search and Rescue is a high-risk occupation; these people are very proud of the job they do and Canadians should feel secure in the knowledge that our Search and Rescue people rank with the best in the world.⁶

As the war on terrorism continues and current world events unfold, the Department of National Defence and

the Canadian Forces are continuously called on for personnel and equipment resources. Currently, more than 3,000 Canadian soldiers, sailors and Air Force personnel are deployed overseas on thirteen operational missions. About 7,000 CF members have served or are serving now on *Operation APOLLO*, Canada's military contribution to the international campaign against terrorism, which began in October 2001.

The Canadian Forces Parliamentary Program is a great success story because of the dedication of the men and women in uniform. MPs and Senators who have accepted the invitation from the Minister for National Defence to don the CF uniform and spend some time with Canada's soldiers, sailors and Air Force personnel agree the CFPP is a once in a lifetime opportunity. Parliamentarians who have lived this enlightening experience say it gave them a clearer understanding of CF roles, and they are now better prepared to make decisions about the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces.

Notes

1. Testimonial of Roger Gallaway, *Army Option*, 2002.
2. Testimonial of Monte Solberg, *Army Option*, 2002.
3. Testimonial of Raymonde Folco, *Army Option*, 2002.
4. Testimonial of Stéphane Bergeron, *Navy Option*, 2002.
5. Testimonial of Bev Desjarlais, *Air Force Option*, 2002.
6. Testimonial of Wayne Easter, *Air Force Option*, 2002.