

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

(Prepared text - No transcript available)

The Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, PC, CC, CMM, COM, CD

SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF
HER ACCEPTANCE OF THE
2010 VIMY AWARD

Ottawa, Ontario

Friday, November 19, 2010

Je vous remercie, cher excellence, pour vos mots à mon égard. La délicatesse de votre intention et le sens de l'histoire conviennent parfaitement avec l'occasion de cette soirée et la présentation de ce prix Vimy. Vous le faites dans le contexte de la conférence des associations de la défense, un organisme qui fait tant de choses remarquables pour la communauté des canadiens et canadiennes qui s'occupe de nos forces armées et de nos intérêts dans la domaine de la défense. Vous, qui faites partis de cette conférence veille sur une certaine partie de notre sensibilité collective, une sauvegarde à l'écoute de nos besoins nationaux. Pour le moindre à dire, nous avons besoins de vous, de vous tous – soucieux et fiers – pour nous donner le sens de notre engagement – qui continue dans notre conscience paisible de l'intention, avertie pour l'action.

I was proud to be at the 90th anniversary of the battle of Vimy Ridge on April 9th, 2007. Looking towards that magnificent monument sculpted by Walter Allward, bracketing the sky of northern France, we as Canadians remembered that this battle, two and a half years after the war began, was the first that Canadians fought together as a combined force.

A week ago I attended the ceremony of the 11th of November in a small farming village in the south of France that I have known intimately for nearly thirty years. As in every village in France, the monument aux morts, is centrally placed and the words Morts Pour La France are engraved in the stone. The mayor, wearing his tricoloured sash, read out the names of the fallen alphabetically with the surnames first as is the custom in France. The villagers at the ceremony carried some of the same surnames as they have since the 14th century when

the village was founded. At the time of the First World War, the village numbered just over four hundred people. Thirty-nine names were read out; thirty-nine men in their prime were killed, ten percent of the population, twenty percent of the males. As we slowly dispersed, one of my acquaintances in the village asked me why Canadians had come to France to fight when our territory wasn't threatened and we had nothing to gain but everything to lose. I said, "They came because they were called, and they did what they could".

We had an army of volunteers coming from a country with almost no military tradition, distinguished not only by their guts but by their identity with each other. Pierre Berton writes in his definitive book Vimy: "The men spoke a common idiom. There were certain things that were theirs and nobody else's, certain things they knew about that others did not know; Eaton's

catalogue and Marquis wheat...Labatt's Ale...and Louis Riel...this was the glue that held them together and made them proud.”

The unspeakable horror of trench warfare, of mud, and blood, and foul water has been captured for us all by the movie Passchendaele, whose creator, Paul Gross, is here with us tonight. This film shows us for all time what it was really like. It was in 2007 for the second time in my life, that I went through the restored tunnels and trenches of Vimy where officers of my regiment, the Princess Patricia's lived, existed, did their best, as all soldiers do. As my own father, Lance Corporal Billy Poy, did as a dispatch rider with the Royal Hong Kong Volunteers on Wong Nai Chai Gap Road, as my father-in-law Captain William Saul, then with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, did on June 6, 1944 landing on Juno Beach in the first wave. The lance-corporal had left his wife and two small children fleeing Japanese

bombardment from basement to basement; the captain had left his English wife pregnant in London. They are the people deserving of being remembered this evening with this Vimy Award.

As former Commander in Chief and now as Colonel-in-Chief of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, I have committed myself totally to our Armed Forces, the men and women who serve in them, to those in the past who "with courage, with a sense of duty...laid at their country's feet the most glorious contribution they could offer...[leaving] behind them not their fear, but their glory." My commitment is not onerous; my commitment is a privilege as a Canadian; my commitment is a tribute to being a human being. I believe human beings have a primary instinct to protect each other so the maximum number can survive to assure the continuance of

the human race. Giving out Bravery Awards for six years gave me so many examples of strangers risking their lives to save others- from drowning, from being burned alive, and most amazing of all, from committing suicide.

Ultimately, to be a warrior is to offer oneself freely in what society has created through the evolution of competition and the attempts to channel aggression. The organizational structure of armies, even more than the hierarchies of religion and politics, reflects the most sophisticated understanding of leadership and its responsibilities, of triumph and its rich rewards, of defeat and its humiliating consequences. I respond to this and wish that our education taught us and our young the

meaning of caring for others in circumstances where danger can bring disaster immediately and where self-preservation involves looking after others.

We must respect the people who have chosen this as a way of life. We ask them to meet challenges, danger and death for us. We must support them, not by facile sentimentality but by informed understanding of what it is they do because we as a nation have asked them to do it.

Vimy, for Canada, signifies the magnitude of suffering, the enormity of loss and the meaning of sacrifice. I thank you for giving me this award in its name and I accept it with the deepest humility and the most radiant pride.