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• (1110)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 103 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 March 9, 2023, and Tuesday, December 5, 2023, the committee resumes its study on the recognition of Persian Gulf veterans and wartime service.

Before we begin, I would like to ask all members participating in person to read the guidelines on the updated cards on the table regarding any acoustic problems that may occur, as these can cause hearing injuries to participants, but especially to the interpreters. I ask everyone to keep their headsets away from the microphone.

As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair.

[English]

Now I would like to welcome our witness.

We have with us today Kevin “Sammy” Sampson, president of the Rwanda Veterans Association of Canada.

Mr. Sampson, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks. After that, members will ask you questions, but just before that, I have Mr. Desilets.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Chair, since we're starting the meeting 15 minutes late, I just want to know how this is going to work. Will we still end the meeting at 1:00 p.m. or at 1:15 p.m.? If we're going to cut time from the meeting, what part will it be?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desilets.

Since we have a witness and have set aside an hour for his testimony, we're going to spend an hour with him. The second part of the meeting will be held in camera to consider the draft report on the transition to civilian life, so it will be up to the members of the committee to decide whether they want to stop at 1:00 p.m. for question period or continue the meeting.

[English]

Let's get back to Mr. Sampson.

You have five minutes for your opening statement.

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson (President, Rwanda Veterans Association of Canada): Thank you very much, Chair.

My name is Kevin Sampson. I go by “Sammy”. I'm a veteran of Iran, Rwanda, Haiti, Bosnia, central Africa, Afghanistan and the liberation of Kuwait. I'm also the president of the Rwanda Veterans Association, and I am the primary researcher behind the wartime service claim for the Gulf War veterans.

Today, I'll be able to answer any policy-based questions that you have concerning wartime service, as well as any cultural questions you have about wartime service—for example, why don't we see it and what does it mean and so forth.

I've been asked to come here today and speak to you on two very specific issues. One issue is insurance. The other issue is why this policy is hidden and relatively unknown to Canadians, to members of Parliament and also to veterans? I think that's going to be an interesting discussion to explain.

I'm going to begin the discussion, however, by talking about insurance and talking about the difference in insurance between wartime service and special duty service.

To be clear, members of Parliament place Canadian Armed Forces personnel on active service using national defence legislation. You decide to send us to a dangerous country with a weapon, and you ask us to live in a war zone. In doing so, you place us on active service so that officers of Canada, military officers, can order us to do things that are very hazardous and generally against, you know...it's not a good idea.

• (1115)

How do we get people to do those things? The answer is not volunteerism. The answer is active service legislation, which holds Canadian soldiers accountable for failing to comply with legal orders to take on dangerous tasks. Members of Parliament do that for us. You place us on active service.

It is the Department of National Defence, on its own accord, that in turn takes that active service and delineates it into two different types of services. There is wartime service, which no Canadian Forces personnel has obtained since 1953 and not without a multi-decade battle with Parliament. Second World War veterans had to fight. Korean War veterans had to fight. Merchant marine veterans had to fight. Everybody has had to fight for it, for 30 years.

That's the gift that the Department of National Defence gives to veterans when you place us on active service and send us into harm's way. They immediately subjugate all service down to the "special duty service" category. Everybody wants to know why.

This is unlike the Government of Australia, which allows their soldiers to achieve wartime status for fighting in the more dangerous...or being in conflicts where there are more risks of injury. They allow their soldiers to get to that level, and the insurance is at a higher level because they are taking on higher risk.

Our system does not ever allow anybody to achieve wartime service status: Persian Gulf, special duty; Afghanistan, special duty service. If we are going to look at fixing the problem of insurance, you first have to recognize that DND is taking and manipulating it nefariously once you have done your job by placing us on active service.

They are nefariously and maliciously changing the definition of our service from active service to special duty service, and this is why. In the early 2000s, the Government of Canada committed the military to the toughest provinces in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Prior to making that commitment to our partners, it is certain that the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada projected a forecast of what the injuries would cost Canadians over the next 50 years. This is data that is available to members of Parliament and to the Department of National Defence, but it's not available to us. If we look at a general 10% to 15% injury rate, it could cost billions of dollars over 50 years to pay for the injuries and the deaths that are associated with high-risk conflicts like Afghanistan.

It is obvious that the government was quite aware of what the mission would cost. It was at that point they did the unthinkable: The government slashed our insurance for special duty service to 20%. If we had a labour relationship team managing our labour, they would be in here screaming that you have not reduced the legal capacity to order us to do things that may result in our death, but you have in fact reduced our insurance for injuries to 20%. That's 20% compared to wartime service and 20% compared to our RCMP, who use the same benefit system.

You're essentially telling Canadians that a German bullet will pay 100% insurance and a Korean bullet will pay 100% insurance, but if you're unfortunate enough to be shot by the Taliban, you're getting only 20¢ on the dollar for that injury. Nothing tells Canadian soldiers that you do not value our active service more than reducing our insurance in such a drastic way. The next political party came into power and it was upped to 40%. That's currently where we sit—at 40%.

To close out my remarks, there is another country in the world that uses this language. Vladimir Putin makes a big deal out of calling his mission a "special military operation". We've made a lot of

jokes about that, but I remind you, as members of Parliament, that it's only funny until you realize that he stole that idea from us.

• (1120)

Canada has not been at war since 1945, with the Germans, and we've decidedly cut the insurance for people. That's exactly why Vladimir Putin does that in Russia—to avoid accountability for war and to reduce the insurance he has to pay his soldiers. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for your testimony and also for your service.

I'd now like to give the floor to Mr. Blake Richards for six minutes.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thanks for being with us today, and thank you for your service to our country.

In your opening remarks, you had a bit of an opportunity to indicate the difference between active or wartime service and special duty service in terms of what it means when you come home. I want to make sure it's really clear. What is the difference operationally on the ground? When you go to serve, if there's this designation of special duty service versus wartime or active service, does it change anything about the service you do on the ground, the operational service on the ground?

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: Thank you very much for that question. That's a great question. The answer is that legally on the ground, an officer of Canada, once he has soldiers who have been placed on active service, is allowed to make the most difficult decisions with their lives. We are asked to do things from time to time. If we're in a combat arms profession, it might be to go take that location away from the Taliban. Some of us are going to die, but we're going. That legislation forces us to go.

On the ground, that legislation doesn't change anything. The fact that we get 20% insurance and we're on special duty service is not of interest to the Taliban. They don't care that we're being paid less insurance. They don't care that there's what is basically a labour issue over how many rights and freedoms a Canadian soldier has on the ground. At the tip of the spear, where people are interacting with enemy combatants—which could be Rwandan genocidaires, Iraqi soldiers from the war, the Taliban or ISIS—the orders of the commander on the ground are expected to be followed, and we are expected to follow them.

There is no discernible difference in the labour from a legal perspective. We do exactly the same thing. You just pay us less in insurance when we get injured doing it.

Mr. Blake Richards: You still put your life on the line in exactly the same way. You still risk life and limb. You still do what's asked of you by your country. The difference is what your country does for you when you come home or if you don't come home.

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: That's absolutely right. Yes, sir. We're very proud to serve Canada. We're very proud to wear the Canadian flag on our shoulders. What happens when we come home is that the Canadian people and the Canadian government have basically taken advantage of the most vulnerable members of our society, which are injured veterans.

You've taken advantage of the system that we're not allowed to argue with. We're not allowed to argue against our generals and tell them they're wrong. We don't have that capacity. We are the only employee base within the Government of Canada that has no labour relations group sticking up for them. We have to come here 30 years later and fight for our rights.

Mr. Blake Richards: You have people like you. I see Michael McGlennon, who's been a big part of advocating for this, sitting in the room with us today. There are guys like Harold Davis and many others, including even a former prime minister, the late Brian Mulroney, who have been advocating for this change to be made.

Why do you think it hasn't been done?

• (1125)

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: It's all about money. When we look at it purely from a numerical perspective, when you're making 40% of what your peer makes, in order to get you up to the level that your peer makes, it will take a 150% increase in benefits. I completely understand. First off, once we resolve the Gulf War, which the government calls a war but which wasn't one, there will be other missions. Being a veteran of seven missions, I'm getting ready for the next one. The next one is Rwanda, a mission the Government of Australia has already classified as "warlike".

Mr. Blake Richards: Is your understanding different from mine? Would this actually be that difficult to do? To my understanding—and correct me if you think I'm wrong—the Minister of National Defence could simply make this designation change tomorrow essentially.

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: Yes, sir. First off, I think when we look at that, we have to look at the problem, the entire problem. It's the absence of a mission classification system that makes sense. I'm going to explain to you very quickly where the problem is.

We went to Afghanistan and fought the Taliban, and you called it a war. We went to Mali and fought ISIS, who were more dangerous than the Taliban, and you called it peacekeeping. That right there should cause questions. First off, from my perspective, these agencies are nothing more than contracting agencies for foreign affairs to bring their soldiers in.

The Government of Canada called what we had in Mali a multi-dimensional peacekeeping force, which is essentially, from a legal perspective, identical to what we had in Afghanistan in every way. We were fighting insurgency. We were just doing it with a blue hat instead of a green hat. Right at the core, sir, we need a mission classification system that people understand, even the veterans, because

right now veterans don't even understand what kinds of missions they're being asked to do.

Mr. Blake Richards: I agree with you. There's no question that we need to recognize the service for what it actually is. If you want to fight a war, it should be recognized as such. We do need a proper classification system.

What's missing here? Is it just the political will?

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: Once you classify a system, then you have to follow it.

Mr. Blake Richards: Right.

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: When you have to follow the system, then you inevitably start paying more insurance for wartime service. Wartime service—

Mr. Blake Richards: Right. What's preventing it from happening, though?

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: Money. I will very specifically point at the people who are stopping it from happening, and it is the executive level of the Department of National Defence. Most veterans will sit and think that it's members of Parliament who are short-changing the veterans. Unfairly, you have been on the hook for the reduction in our insurance rates for the past 20 years.

However, it's quite clear, especially when we talk about our 2% NATO, and Canada says, "We're paying 2% because we put 1.4% in DND and 0.6% in veterans." That's where the money is. If they want to stay inside of that range, they're never going to increase that number. That's the problem; it's the fact that our commitment to NATO includes our injured veterans, and it will never go over 2% GDP.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you. This was a really good starting place to this step.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Now let's go to Mr. Wilson Miao for six minutes, please.

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

Thank you to our witness, Sammy, for being here today. I also would like to acknowledge Mike in the room, especially your career and your service to Canada throughout these years.

I understand there's a notable difference between the terminology "wartime service" and "special duty service". Currently, under the Pension Act and the Veterans Well-being Act, what is the impact on the long-term care that our veterans will be receiving?

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: That's a great question.

When veterans talk about “disability benefits”, we are primarily talking about the single and sole benefit that every veteran gets. There is only one. That is the monthly disability tax-free injury benefit. In the context of wartime service, that's \$3,000. That's the maximum amount. It's a \$3,000 tax-free amount of money that if you are 100% incapacitated, you will receive \$3,000 tax free.

Some of the really important pieces about that are that it doesn't show up in your taxes. It also doesn't show up in family court. It can't be divided in divorce. That means it's tied to the individual because it's compensation from the government for your injury during active service. For that piece, it stays with you no matter what. No matter where you go, that's always your piece for your injury.

In the context of the Veterans Well-being Act, they've reduced that number to \$1,200. Mathematically, that is at the 40% number, which I've indicated. They originally started at 20%. They were giving \$600 a month. They increased it to \$1,200, which is 40% compared to the wartime service pension. Right away we see significant disparity between the two pension systems.

I keep leaving them out, but the RCMP as well has that system for a reason. They chose to keep that system when the government tried to force them onto our system. They chose that system because it's a better system.

That monthly disability benefit is by far the most contentious piece of data when it comes to veterans. Again, a German bullet pays \$3,000. A Taliban bullet pays \$1,200.

• (1130)

Mr. Wilson Miao: Thank you for sharing that.

Sammy, you mentioned that some of the members getting deployed may not understand whether or not they're deployed under a wartime service or service; active service or service. Can you share with the committee the experience of the members deployed under the National Defence Act, under section 31 and section 33.

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: Okay. There are a bunch of moving parts in your question. I'm going to write them down.

The difference between section 31 and section 33 is one step back from active service and then eventually wartime service. I'll bring it all the way back to talk about it further. Section 31 of the National Defence Act is “Active Service” and section 33 of the National Defence Act is “Service”. Ninety-five per cent of a soldier's career, a navy person's career or an air person's career will be spent in service and going home to their mothers, fathers, families and kids, playing on sports teams and working nine to five.

Workplace safety is a factor in service. Someone is given a task and it's dangerous. When you're only performing service, workplace safety kicks in and you can refuse the task. One of the biggest examples I use for a search and rescue technician is that of sitting on a ramp and getting ready to jump out over the Labrador Sea to save a mariner's life from a ship in a storm. That member of the search and rescue team is on service. That person ultimately has the choice to jump out of that plane and save that person's life or to say that it's too dangerous. That person retains choice.

In the context of active service, I have been in situations where you are simply given the four-finger point and you are told that you

will do this, and you have no other choice but to go off and do it. You don't bring up safety and you don't bring up risk of death. You don't bring up anything. That is the difference between service and active service. It's one word: choice.

When you're placed on active service, there's a gray area. Does the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom supersede the National Defence Act's section 31, or does section 31 supersede the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms? That is the question that plays out in the field. When a commander gives you an order, you don't bring up the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms because you don't have any. When a commander orders you to do some of the most difficult tasks that you can imagine, you do them.

That's an explanation of service versus active service.

You asked a question regarding people who don't understand the type of mission they're on. Everybody already understands that they're not on wartime service because the government never gives it without a fight. Clearly, that's why we're here.

The problem with not having a mission classification system means that when you're put on special duty service and you're sent somewhere and it's given a name like “multi-dimensional peace-keeping mission”, it could be lost on the soldier as to exactly what it is they're doing. That happened to me in Rwanda. We were in Rwanda and we didn't know whether we were on a blue beret mission or a green beret mission. We didn't know if we were there to save people's lives or to take people's lives. It was confusing for a solid 30 days. Having no mission classification system is really key.

Mr. Wilson Miao: Thank you very much for sharing that.

My time is up.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Desilets now has the floor for the next six minutes.

• (1135)

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

Good morning to all my fellow members.

Mr. Sampson, thank you for being here. Greetings also to Mr. McGlennon, who is with you today.

Mr. Sampson, what you said was very, very clear and extremely interesting. That said, I would like a clarification.

You say that the rate has been increased from 20% to 40%. Can you give us a concrete example? If I take part in such and such a war and I lose a leg, what does that mean in terms of money?

[English]

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: I'm driving in a car with a member of the RCMP, a Korean War veteran and a World War II veteran, and I'm an Afghan or Gulf War veteran. We hit a mine. All four of us lose the right leg of our body and suffer no other injuries. We are each given a benefit from the Government of Canada. All of them will receive 150% more than I'm receiving for the exact same injury, because the Government of Canada has chosen to put them on wartime service or under the Pension Act and has decided that I'm only going to be put on special duty service.

To understand completely, sir, the government's position would be "we're losing money on these three, but we're saving money on the one guy who only gets 40% insurance."

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Great, that's very clear. That's the clarification I wanted.

I would like to ask you another question.

You appeared before our committee on May 5, 2021, to take part in the study on a strategy for commemorations in the 21st century. During your testimony, you referred to Veterans Affairs Canada's policy document 1447. The document refers to the wartime service and special duty service categories. In your words, it is "quite possibly one of the most repulsive policy documents in Canada".

Can you tell us why you described this document as repulsive? What message did you want to get across?

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: Thank you for your question, Mr. Desilets.

The message is clear: If you have two children, you have to choose which one will receive all the benefits for the family. The other one will receive only 40%.

[English]

That makes it one of the most heinous documents. It's like telling your kids you are going to put more money into one education, one injury and one benefit. You are automatically telling the second son or the second daughter they're never going to go to university, they're never going to go anywhere, they're going to be stuck in lower class, they're going to be impoverished and they're never going to receive more than 40% of the benefits.

Exactly, sir.

I will note that Veterans Affairs Canada's document 1447 is the document you are referring to. It's called "The Insurance Principle". At least Veterans Affairs Canada has a document which demonstrates that the government delineates wartime service and special duty service.

The Department of National Defence has no such document. It's like a unicorn. Until we started asking questions of the Department of National Defence about how this is chosen.... The Department of National Defence suddenly just said, "We decide arbitrarily, and we systematically choose special duty service every single time."

That was their message.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Did they really say that they arbitrarily decided on the amounts allocated?

[English]

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: No. The decision on the amounts is not arbitrary. The decision on the amount of money an injured person gets is based on policy definitions within Veterans Affairs Canada. I'm not even going to challenge that. I think that when it comes to injuries, the policy people do a fair job of making sure that the person is getting the right amount of money for the injury they have.

What I'm saying is that if we go all the way back to when the government places us on active service, the Department of National Defence decides for us that we are special duty service and, therefore, will only receive 40% of the insurance benefits the wartime service veterans get.

• (1140)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: If I'm not mistaken, there are other differences between the two regimes. The treatment is not the same for long-term care versus hospitalization. Am I wrong?

[English]

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: The new veterans charter has a number of exceptional programs in it. It might be beneficial to help you understand that, when we're talking about wartime service, it means the entire benefit program for a veteran would change from special duty service to a new program entirely, which is more lucrative—the wartime service plan. As a result of this study, the committee should understand that veterans are really only interested in that monthly disability benefit. They want to make sure that's what they get for going to war and for taking on dangerous tasks.

The other really big thing, which is a big sticking point for veterans, is the death benefit when a person dies. The death benefit between the old system and the new system differs. There is no clause to allow your benefits to be carried over by your partner and your family, whereas the wartime service benefit does permit you to do that. When we die, we leave less for our family.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: Thank you, Mr. Desilets.

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

[English]

Now we are going to have questions from Ms. Blaney for six minutes, please.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank you so much for being here with us, Sammy. I hope it's all right that I call you Sammy. Thank you so much for your service, and thank you for taking the time to rigorously explain a lot of these things.

One of the things I've learned in this role is that you think you know a little something, and then you find out how much you don't know and you just have to work harder. Thank you for helping us understand.

This is just for my own clarity. You talked a couple of times about insurance, and then you talked about the pension in terms of the 20% and the 40%. Can you just explain that so I understand what we're talking about?

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: My perspective on Veterans Affairs is not unique. I see Veterans Affairs Canada as an organization within the Government of Canada that deals primarily in commemoration and insurance of veterans benefits.

When I talk about insurance and I talk about pensions, I'm very specifically talking about the monthly tax-free disability benefit. If you want to show a Canadian that their service has equality with that of wartime service veterans, then you pay those injured the same amount. When I'm talking about insurance and pensions, I'm simply reminding you that the pension we are getting is not a pension because we served. This is not a service pension. This is not money that Canadian veterans are getting for being good people. This is because we've lost a leg.

I came back from Rwanda with PTSD, multiple intestinal parasites and parasites in the topical skin, and these things stuck with me for a decade. You don't get a pension for that. You get injury insurance for that, and that is managed under various pensions.

Veterans commonly refer to "pensions", which often misleads people into believing that this is something other than injury insurance. It is, in fact, injury insurance.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: That was very helpful. Thank you so much. It really helped me understand.

In your first intervention you talked about Australia having a model that's based on risk. When we look at what we're hoping to suggest to the government...and I agree. We know, as you said in your presentation, that the Korean veterans fought for this. They had to go through a whole 30 years, and now the Persian Gulf veterans are going through the same thing. After that, it will be the next set of Afghanistan veterans. It seems to me to be very time-consuming that veterans who served now have to come back and fight this fight just to get something that respects their service.

I'm just wondering. You talked about Australia. Is that a model we should look at? How does it assess risk? I think what you said is so important—that it can be classified as anything, but the risk is really what matters.

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: That's a great question, and that's a question the Department of National Defence does not want me to answer, because there is legal documentation out there that will help us classify missions and it comes from the organizations we're a part of—the United Nations and NATO.

First off, on the question concerning Australia, there is a Commonwealth insurance model that has three tiers. Australia uses bronze, silver and gold. Their soldiers who get injured in a war are awarded a gold insurance card—the colour is actually gold—and that gives them more benefits. They get that because they're in a place where there's more disease and more risk of death, and they're being asked to do things that will often result in serious injury or harm.

Those are what the UN calls chapter VII missions. Are you familiar with those? As a rule-of-law country, Canada will never go into a foreign country with a weapon unless the United Nations provides a United Nations resolution clearly stating that this is a chapter VI or chapter VII mission. Those chapter VI and chapter VII missions each have legal documents to indicate when we are allowed to shoot people. These legal documents are what we use to determine whether it's a peacekeeping mission or a war.

For peacekeeping missions they invite you into the country to do peacekeeping. In a war they don't invite you into the country, and you're going there to take their property from them. They each have inherent documentation with them, and that documentation is what the Australian government uses to classify its missions.

If you're in service in your country and you hurt yourself falling down in your office, you get roughly the same thing that an Australian would get on workplace safety. That's normal. When you are placed on active service and you go to do peacekeeping and you're not really being shot at but there are some risks, you get more money. When you go to war and you're being told that, out of the 12 of you, two of you will likely die today and four of you are going to be injured and that we need to take that hill, that's gold-level insurance, and that's what Canada calls wartime, special duty and service.

The only difference between our system and the Australian system is that we only ever get to the bottom two tiers. The Government of Canada always stops us from getting to wartime service, never brings it up and hopes that it will die and go away, and that Mike and Harold and I will never come and speak to members of Parliament about it.

● (1145)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Well—good news—you're here today.

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: That's wonderful.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: You talked about the change from 20% to 40%. What year was that? Do you know?

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: That was the change when the current Liberal government took over. There was a discussion—this is a lesson in not using proper policy definitions—in which veterans stated they wanted the pension for life. They didn't very specifically state they wanted the monthly tax-free disability benefit from the Pension Act. They got a 100% increase in benefits, from 20% to 40%, and they stretched that over a lifetime. However, it is still just 40% of what wartime service and the RCMP get.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Blaney.

Now we're going to start a new round of questions. The second round is going to be a full round, but in the third round we're going to stop. We will have questions, perhaps, from Mrs. Wagantall and Mr. Casey. We're going to close there.

I'd like to invite Mr. Fraser Tolmie for five minutes of questioning with Mr. Sampson.

Please go.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Sampson, for joining us today. Thank you for your service. Thank you for taking the time out to advocate for veterans.

How long have you been advocating for the changes you discussed in your presentation to us?

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: A lot of research had to go into this. There was a research period from roughly 2016 to 2019, when I had to go in.... One of the questions I have from you is, “Why don't many people know about this?”

It's multiple departments, multiple policy documents and some federal legislation. Then there's some experience involved in this. Unless you're able to tie all those documents together and understand that this is how the government is doing it.... The one thing that isn't happening is this: National Defence is not being clear with us. The generals in the executive of DND are keeping all of this information from Canadians and everyone else.

• (1150)

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: I'll touch on that. What are they withholding?

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: For example, when we asked them what “wartime service” was, they said, “Well, you place them on active service and then we use a system to decide whether it's special duty or wartime service.” Where's that policy at?

How do we know there is this subjugation policy from active service down to special duty service if there are no directives on how that actually gets done? What are the metrics and criteria?

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Mr. Sampson, I'm going to ask this question and pre-empt it with a bit of a statement. I want to get your reaction or insight into this.

Whatever theatre of operation the Canadian government sends the military to, whether it be a combat mission or a peacekeeping mission—you said “multi-dimensional mission” and “special duty service”, and there are numerous others—the personnel are trained with specific skills. They're deployment-ready and possess skills

the average person on the street does not have or is willing to commit to. They all wear the uniform.

What you're saying to me is that it doesn't matter what theatre they go to. Their benefits should be based on their service, not theatre of operation. Is that what I'm understanding?

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: To be clear, what I'm advocating for is this: When members of Parliament decide to place us on active service, the Department of National Defence should not then, in turn, come in and say, “Well, we're going to reduce this one and we're going to reduce that one. This one is not going to be....”

Active service is active service. I've been on peacekeeping missions, which you consider to be benign and not really dangerous. In Rwanda, I was forced to live with the genocidaires for two months on my own—with four other guys. In the context of war, it wasn't a war. However, while I was under active service, Roméo Dallaire could give me whatever command he wanted to and I was forced to do it.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: It doesn't matter where we send Canadian Armed Forces personnel. There is the potential for danger. That's the reason we're sending military personnel.

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: I spent three years in Italy. There was no danger to me in Italy. I was working for NATO intelligence. When we send people out of the country, we can send them out of the country on service—seconded to other organizations, for example. However, when the Privy Council and the Governor in Council place people on active service, it's a big deal.

Up until 1994, this involved an order in council. Every time the Government of Canada stripped the rights of Canadian people and sent them off to a war with guns in their hands, there was a debate in the House of Commons under section 32. The government hasn't done this since 1994. None of that is happening anymore.

Yes, sir. Go ahead.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: No, it's okay. I'm just asking. I don't want to cut your time off. I just have one minute.

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: No, you're great.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: We get a red flag and a yellow flag from this chair, and I don't want to be red-carded.

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: I should probably be clear. When we go to war, we're not doing it for Canada. We're doing it for the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Global Affairs Canada is the requesting agency for Department of National Defence soldiers. They're getting that request from an ambassador in either the United Nations or NATO. When we're going off and dying for people, we're not dying for Canadians; we're dying for the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: I have a quick question, and hopefully I can fit it in.

You've been advocating, you've said, for quite a while. How do you feel about the last nine years, having the Liberal government here? It's been claiming to support what you're doing, but are you getting supported? Is this happening with what you're doing?

You're here. You said that you've not really had the opportunity to come and speak. This is your first time. Can you share a little about that?

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: I think that my time is best spent avoiding political discussions and just staying on the issue. I appreciate your question. I appreciate the timeliness of your question, but I choose not to answer it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I'd like to invite Mr. Bryan May for five minutes, please.

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To correct the record, this is of course not your first time at this committee. You reminded me when we walked in that we have met, although it was virtual. When I was in another chair—I was the chair—I saw everybody in little boxes on the screen. If I'm not mistaken, we were talking about commemoration at that time, as Monsieur Desilets pointed out.

Earlier this year, the world marked the 30th anniversary of the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda. My understanding is that this is again not your first time talking about it to this committee. In that regard, could you share with us some additional background on your advocacy efforts that have been undertaken to address issues related to service classification and benefits, specifically for the Rwandan veterans?

• (1155)

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: Thank you very much for that question. That is a big question.

Mr. Bryan May: Yes.

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: That is a very big question that I will try to push into five minutes.

Before I answer that question, I will quote from document PRB 00-06E from the Library of Parliament, which is the "International Deployment of Canadian Forces: Parliament's Role". I have sent that to the gentleman down there. He can probably share it with you if you would like it. It's in French and English, and it talks about how we get deployed.

One of the things this document talks about in great detail is how successive governments failed to follow federal legislation when it came to the deployment of Canadian Armed Forces, specifically the legislation in section 32, and specifically one party, the Liberal Party of Canada, failed to follow the legislation, unfortunately. What this document doesn't do is that it doesn't tell us why or how it came to be. It doesn't give us any indications of how that happened.

What I've brought for you is a cabinet classified document that has never been revealed before, going back to 1994, about a classified mission in Rwanda that the Department of National Defence wanted to hide from members of Parliament, wanted to hide from Canadians and even kept us veterans on the down-low about. In order to get this mission out the door, there was one big issue—Par-

liament. You members of Parliament and the freedom to ask questions about military operations were going to seriously disrupt the possibility of us rescuing Roméo Dallaire and the mess that he was in Rwanda.

Again, the title of this document is "Rwanda: Involvement of Parliament". It was sent to cabinet with options to avoid accountability and transparency in 1994 amidst the Somalia inquiry, when members of Parliament were asking for just that. This document and this document alone is responsible for successive governments failing to follow parliamentary process, which would ultimately result in questions being asked, like "Is this a war?", "Why are our soldiers in Latvia?" and "Why are we fighting ISIS in Mali and calling it peacekeeping?"

In the context of Rwanda, they would have asked, "Who's going?" They would have been told "nobody". They would have asked, "When are they coming?" They would have been told, "Not for months, we're sending our Canadian soldiers there alone". This mission was hidden until 2019, when I told the CBC the story and I was attacked for stolen valour. The Department of National Defence didn't even know the truth about the mission and called me a liar. In fact, what that created was that it made me the most successful conspiracy theorist in the history of Canada because I floated a story about a secret mission in Rwanda and there were 400 people with me to corroborate that.

I ended up proving the historians at DND wrong and setting the record straight. That doesn't change the fact that Roméo Dallaire, Order of Canada and senator, disobeyed lawful commands from the Prime Minister of Canada and cabinet and then hid the details from Parliament for 30 years. He's still hiding it from Parliament for 30 years. The government hid for 30 years 400 Canadian soldiers who went to Rwanda.

These things do happen and, in the context of active service, of all the missions that I served on, Rwanda was the craziest mission that you could ever imagine. It was just absolutely insane. It was not peacekeeping.

It was not peacekeeping. It was genocide cleanup and cleaning up the nightmarish marketing issue of having the Canadian foreign policy for peacekeeping dragged through the mud in the United Nations and around the globe for failing to save one million Black people.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sampson. The five minutes are up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Desilets, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

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

Could we get a copy of the document? Has it been published?

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: It is not yet available in French.

The Chair: The translation will take a bit of time.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Okay, thank you very much.

I'll go directly to my questions.

Apart from all the financial issues, such as compensation and insurance, I would like to hear you briefly talk about the human consequences. I'm sure it affects a member of the military when a distinction is made between wartime service and special duty service.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: Up to now, I've spoken only about insurance. Now I will talk about commemoration very briefly.

The impact on the man.... You'll notice I'm wearing medals over my heart. This medal is not. This medal is from the ambassador of Kuwait, who gave it to me personally. Because my mission was not wartime service, I am not allowed to wear this medal on this side, over my heart, and every time the ambassador of Kuwait sees it, it's embarrassing for us both.

On a very international level, the suggestion that wartime service and the rules associated with it.... To your very specific question—and I have a second piece—yes, there is an impact on the man and the woman. It is obvious that you don't consider my service in Kuwait to be equal to service in World War II or in Korea.

The second point I'll talk to you about, sir, is the Victoria Cross, which is only awarded for wartime service. I'm not suggesting that the Victoria Cross should be awarded to anyone in the Gulf War, but I am appalled by the government's decision to not award the Victoria Cross for Afghanistan, when all of our colleagues, allies and friends—the Commonwealth countries—all awarded the Victoria Cross. From my perspective, the only reason we have not awarded the Victoria Cross is that our mission was not wartime service. That's the only time the Government of Canada has historically awarded the Victoria Cross—not for Korea and not for Afghanistan. None of them. It's because they're not wartime service.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: What you are saying is a huge deal. You're recognized by other countries for your service, but not by your own country. Is that what I am to understand?

You're nodding your head yes.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: We can certainly accept the “thank you for your service” and the gratitude we get from Canadians. While most Canadians don't understand anything we do, I think they are highly appreciative.

If you want to put your money where your mouth is, you can pay for our insurance, you can call us war heroes, you can allow me to move my medal over to the other side and you could give Afghan veterans a hero. This is because Canadian veterans deserve a hero, and the government's unwillingness to make heroes out of Afghanistan veterans and give them the Victoria Cross is a political decision meant to keep heroes out of the media. The government doesn't want a hero coming in and changing opinions.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desilets.

[*English*]

Let's go now to Ms. Blaney for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Wow. This has been very interesting. Thank you again for testifying.

I want to ask you two questions and then give you the very limited amount of time I have to answer them.

The first question is on mission classification. What can MPs do to help? What do you think would be helpful? That's one question.

The other thing I heard you say repeatedly in your testimony was about money. Why aren't they spending the money? My question to you is this: Can Canada afford this?

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: Thank you very much, Ms. Blaney. That's a great question.

If the Canadian government can afford to take billions of injury dollars away from its most vulnerable Canadians who served for them, it can certainly afford to give them back. That is the only answer I have. If you had properly classified these missions as wartime service and paid people appropriately, we wouldn't be having the discussion about having to turn over billions of dollars to veterans to fix it.

However, I say to you that if the Government of Canada is strong enough to take money from injured veterans who can't fight for themselves, it is certainly strong enough to pay for those people when they're caught doing bad things.

My answer to you is yes. I'll remind you that we had one million World War I and two million World War II veterans, and we have the RCMP veterans who have always been paid this benefit since the beginning of time. If Canada could afford to pay for them since the 1900s, there's no reason why 40,000 Afghan veterans, 40,000 Bosnia veterans and 400 Rwanda veterans and so on, who were all placed on active service and forced by the elected officials of this country to go to a foreign country and put their lives at risk....

Come on. I don't think I'm saying anything that's unfair or unjust. If the government has been doing it, it can continue to do it. It has a lack of will to pay up. It should have thought of that before it gave veterans' money away to other agencies within Canada. Right...?

Thank you.

• (1205)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Exactly. For the classification, I really like the model that you gave us from Australia.

As MPs, what do you think are the next steps for us to take?

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: I think there should be some selective outrage here over the fact that we are one of the most bureaucratic nations in the world, and we put a label on everything. We do. We have a process. We sell those processes internationally. They're a big deal.

The fact that the Government of Canada has yet to put a label on its missions to accurately define them for Canadians is a big issue, and the fact that you want to help is really inspiring for me. I really enjoy speaking to members of Parliament. You are helpful, but we're up against the Department of National Defence. Somebody has to go into the Department of National Defence and tell them how things are going to go. Typically, that takes a lot of work from Parliament. That takes bills and laws and so forth.

I'd be happy to share with you a very simple mission classification system, which would help you, as politicians, understand what we're asking Canadian soldiers to do. I'll just ask some very quick questions of the floor.

The people who are in Latvia right now, serving the Canadian government, when they get attacked by Russians with an onslaught of missiles and rockets and bombs, will they be at war? Are they going to be under wartime service? I bet you that it's going to feel like it really quick. There is no process to fix this. The process is fixing the executive level of the Department of National Defence and what I refer to as "toxic white male behaviour", where they basically subjugate everything.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sampson.

Now let's go to Mrs. Wagantall.

You have five minutes for your questions.

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

I do thank you, Sammy. We're learning a lot. It's a lot to parse through, but I definitely appreciate your frankness with us.

I just want to comment, though. You had mentioned that there was no interaction with the House of Commons after 1994. Is that accurate? I just want to draw attention to the fact that as Canadian fighter jets—and I had to look this up—flew over hostile Libyan airspace, all four political parties put aside pre-election posturing for a few hours on Monday to support Canada's role in the mission to contain a Libyan stronghold that was held by Gadhafi. We were compelled to intervene, both by a moral duty and by duty to NATO and to the United Nations. The former defence minister, Peter MacKay, told that to the House of Commons, opening up debate on a motion supporting the deployment. The Liberals, the NDP and the Bloc unanimously supported our Conservative motion. Then, there was more discussion about the fact that, with Afghanistan and things, we need to be aware and engaged on those things. One thing I will take away from what you said today is that we're failing at that, and we need to see our government in the House of Commons engaged in what our armed forces are doing.

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: That's correct.

Mrs. Cathy Wagantall: I have one question for you, and it's around a comment that came to us from the analyst. You did petitions, and he indicates that the main argument against the petition regarding the Persian Gulf, in making the requests that you are, is that if the designation "wartime service veterans" is extended to the Persian Gulf veterans, it should also be extended to all post-Korean war veterans who were deployed, under UN resolution or otherwise, in a theatre of war without Canada's being at war per se, including the 40,000 veterans of the Afghan mission.

In the response—because they always have to give a response to a petition—the Minister of National Defence stated, "Applying these categories is not meant to signal greater or lesser respect for the service of members and Veterans, nor are such categories indicative of a lesser degree of risk on the part of those deployed."

When I hear that, they're not telling us why they're doing it. They're just simply saying, "No, no, this isn't in any way showing any disrespect." I don't even know where to go with that. What was it like when you read these responses? That has to be something that gives you the energy to continue on.

• (1210)

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: First off, on the question about following parliamentary process in section 32 since 1994, I did make a point in saying—or I will, if I wasn't clear, make a point now—that the Library of Parliament document, PRB 00-06E, says a number of things about why you don't know anything about our military operations. In the conclusion, it specifically states that members of Parliament "are not interested in defence [related issues]". That is the conclusion of this document. This was written—

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: [*Inaudible—Editor*] because I wouldn't think that's true.

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: Again, I'm using their words. The conclusion is that members of Parliament are not interested in defence-related issues. Okay. I suggest DND has made it that way.

What this document does state is that it is the Liberal Party that is not following parliamentary process in observing section 32 as a rule of law. It is just the Liberal Party.

The document I discussed earlier, “Rwanda: Involvement of Parliament”.... They began hiding missions in 1994. Again, it's not just Rwanda. They also hid the Medak Pocket at the exact same time in Yugoslavia. They hid two Canadian missions. This went to the Liberal Party. This went to the 35th Parliament, with Jean Chrétien and the Bloc Québécois in opposition. There was no business continuity in the House, as the Conservatives had been reduced to two. It was very easy to manipulate parliamentary process to be something completely different.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Thank you so much. I appreciate that.

You talked about Rwanda. You also briefly mentioned Somalia. We know there was supposed to be an inquiry into the whole issue around mefloquine and its impact on our elite Canadian airborne. That didn't happen. I'm tying that in as something that just—

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: Yes.

What I'd say to this, Mrs. Wagantall, is that, at the time, the Canadian government was answering questions from members of Parliament. You may remember the generals being on the hot seat. It was one of the best days for us soldiers—watching the generals getting grilled by members of Parliament and being told exactly who was in charge. You are in charge, not the generals.

While that was going on, they were hiding and doing worse things than what happened in Somalia. They were hiding an entire mission from the Canadian government. Even while they were standing in front of you in committee and saying, “We're telling you the truth on everything”, they were still lying to you and hiding things from you. They have continued to hide things from you.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: I have one more question.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mrs. Wagantall, but you're over the five minutes.

The last member who's going to intervene is Mr. Sean Casey for five minutes.

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

Thank you, Mr. Sampson, for your service and for your very powerful and clear testimony here today.

I've been listening to the exchange over the last hour, and the message I'm getting is that the principal issue is the disparity the classifications have caused in the \$3,000 monthly disability tax-free allowance for total incapacity.

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: Yes, sir.

Mr. Sean Casey: Secondly, it's the death benefit carry-over associated with that. Then there is the not-insignificant issue of commemoration, which is why you have a medal from Kuwait on your right side and not your left. Underlying it all is the disrespect felt by those who have been identified differently than having done wartime service.

That's what I take from it. My questions will be centred on those four things. If I'm missing one, please include that in your first answer.

The monthly disability tax-free amount is for 100% incapacity, and the determination of “incapacity” is one made by Veterans Affairs to determine how much of the \$3,000 a month someone with

wartime service gets, or how much of the \$1,200 a month folks in special duty service get. Is that right?

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: Yes, sir. It's exactly right.

Mr. Sean Casey: Okay. Has the \$3,000 a month changed over time? Has it always been \$3,000 and \$1,200?

• (1215)

Mr. Kevin (Sammy) Sampson: When I use the term \$3,000, it's a rough number. It's actually a little bit higher. The same thing with the \$1,200 figure. The 100% level is roughly around \$3,000. What veterans get under the special duty service is 40% of that, which is \$1,200.

Your numbers are accurate. Your understanding as to how those funds get awarded is accurate. Veterans Affairs Canada looks at your shoulder and gives you 15%, and then you get 15%. You can't go higher than 100%. You will never make more than that total amount, either \$1,200 or \$3,000, regardless. .

In the context of the wartime service amount, I haven't been completely honest with you because there's more money that wartime service veterans get automatically. If you have a wife and a child, you're awarded another \$500 or \$600 for your wife—and you'll have to excuse me, I don't know the exact numbers—and roughly half of that for your child. In the end, if you're a husband who goes to war or a wife who goes to war, if you have a spouse and a child, and if you get injured, your children and your spouse are automatically compensated by the government.

Today, you have to go fight for spousal compensation because your wife has to care for you. You have to fight with government to get that, where, under the wartime service, that came automatically. You don't have to fight for any additional money for your kids. Special duty service doesn't care. Wartime service will pay you an additional amount for every child.

Why is this important? As a Rwanda veteran, there are many times when I tried to take my daughter to see shows like *Disney on Ice*, and I couldn't even get out of the house. There was something bothering me, or there was stress or whatever it might be. I'm not a feeble person. I cut wood for a hobby. I get out and do things. The idea that I wasn't able to take my daughter to see *Disney on Ice*, that's a big deal. I'm not compensating her, but the \$200 tickets that I lost because of the fact that I have psychological issues tied to Rwanda, that's where that comes in handy.

Giving your wife or your partner some additional money so that they can go to a spa, rather than constantly worrying about having to pay all the bills, figure this out, figure that out because you might be in a vegetative state or incapacitated because of your injury.... Under the old act, they used to get money for that. Under the new act, either we don't get any money or we have to fight for years and years with extensive delays to get that money.

Mr. Sean Casey: Thank you.

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

Now it's over. I'd like, on behalf of members of the committee and myself, to say thank you, Mr. Sampson, for your testimony. I'm pretty sure you will stay in touch because we're going to have more witnesses on that study.

Colleagues, I'm going to suspend the meeting and to go in camera right after that. I'll suspend the meeting for about two or three minutes.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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