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Chair: Charles Sousa





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• (1630)

[English]

**The Chair (Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 30 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 16, 2025, the committee is meeting to study the situation of francophones and indigenous peoples in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. Members are attending in person and remotely using the Zoom application.

Before we begin, I ask participants to consult the guidelines on the table. These measures are to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of the interpreters.

I would like to remind the witnesses and members to please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. For interpretation, use the earpiece and select the appropriate channel. I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

[Translation]

Welcome, everyone.

[English]

We have Lieutenant-General Erick Simoneau, chief of military personnel and commander of military personnel command; Major-General Martin Gros-Jean, defence team co-champion for official languages and deputy commander of military personnel command; and Anne Rahming, director of general culture and chief of professional conduct and culture.

We will proceed with Lieutenant-General Simoneau's opening statement. You have up to five minutes.

Thank you.

**Lieutenant-General Erick Simoneau (Chief of Military Personnel, Commander of Military Personnel Command, Canadian Armed Forces):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, for the opportunity to appear before you today.

[Translation]

I am Lieutenant-General Erick Simoneau, and I am appearing before you as chief military personnel. I am accompanied by Major-General Martin Gros-Jean, deputy commander of military person-

nel command and also the champion for official languages for the Canadian Armed Forces, as well as Ms. Anne Rahming from the chief professional conduct and culture group, at the Department of National Defence. She is also responsible for the department's official languages policies. Together, we are responsible for the personnel management system and the policies that shape the recruitment, support and retention of Canadian Armed Forces members.

[English]

As a national institution, the Canadian Armed Forces must reflect the country it serves. Diversity—in linguistic, cultural, regional and experiential terms—is not an abstract value. It is a concrete operational requirement.

Our effectiveness depends on our ability to attract, integrate and retain talent from across Canadian society, including francophones, indigenous people, visible minorities, women and others whose perspectives and skills strengthen decision-making, legitimacy and public trust.

[Translation]

With respect to this study, I would say that francophone members are an integral part of the capacity of the Canadian Armed Forces and contribute positively to the advancement of a truly bilingual institution capable of communicating in both official languages. With respect to personnel, we are responsible for ensuring that the personnel management system allows francophone members to enlist, work and train in their first language and to advance in their careers under equitable conditions.

[English]

Retention of francophone members is closely linked to language of work over time. Access to training services, supervision and evaluation in French directly affects career progression, professional credibility and long-term engagement. Where gaps persist, particularly in training capacity and support services, their effects can accumulate and influence career outcomes.

A fundamental reality underpins this work: People are the mission.

[Translation]

Operational readiness and the sustainability of our forces depend on our ability to recruit and retain qualified and motivated members. Recruitment is only sustainable if the experience acquired is professional, credible and fair. Retention depends on the ability of members to envision a viable career without having to compromise their identity or language.

[English]

Today we are positioned to speak to both the indigenous and francophone dimensions of the committee's study and understand that a second appearance is being planned to allow members to pose additional questions to senior national defence officials.

I know these dynamics are central to the committee's study, and we welcome the opportunity to contribute to your work.

I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Simoneau.

[English]

I appreciate your comments, Lieutenant-General.

The first round is six minutes each. We'll start off with Mr. Kibble.

**Jeff Kibble (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today, and thank you for your service.

I'm glad to ask questions on this important topic. Where do I want to start? I would start with some basics, and we can focus on establishing some ratios. Is there a target ratio for francophones and anglophones in the Canadian Forces across the services?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** There's no target ratio per se. I can answer this by saying that in the Canadian Armed Forces currently, 24% of our population is francophone. We can compare this to the ratio for Canada, which is 21%. I would say that we are overrepresented in the Canadian Armed Forces.

I would add, if you're interested, that at the entry level we are at 24%, but at the most senior level of the organization—the general officer and flag officer for example—we represent 35% of the population. It's the same for the chief warrant officer, at 34%. This speaks to the accessibility to progression within the forces for francophones.

**Jeff Kibble:** Thank you. I appreciate your efficiency, because you answered three of my questions in one. That's excellent.

If you could speak a bit more as to the.... You said the flag officer rate is at 35%. Why is it higher there?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I would coin it in a way that for francophones, in the early stage of our career—I'm a francophone, obviously—it's much more difficult to be trained and to access services, so we're forced to learn a second language very rapidly in our career.

For anglophones, the training and the accessibility are easier. At some point in time, to be promoted, they are forced to learn their second language because it requires what we call CBC on oral, written and understanding. It's more difficult for them, and it's later in their careers. We invest early in francophones by necessity.

• (1635)

**Jeff Kibble:** Thank you for that analysis. Maybe we could also speak to the rate of first nations in recruiting, in current strength and in flag rank.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Just for precision, are we talking about indigenous peoples?

**Jeff Kibble:** Yes.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Currently, in the CAF, we're at 2.8%. This is the onboarding we've done this year. Enrolment is at 2.8%. We had a target of 3.5%, so this is an area I'm taking very seriously. However, I don't have many statistics on the GOF—general officer and flag officer—cadre in terms of indigenous. We could return to you with statistics if we have any, but we all know each other. I'm not tracking any of them.

**Jeff Kibble:** That would be helpful. Thank you.

Quickly, both on the indigenous side and francophone numbers you gave, how does this relate historically, say, over the last 20 years? Is it on par, or are we improving ratios? What is the general trend?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I cannot answer for the last 20 years, but for the past 10 years—which I've prepared for—it's fairly stable. We've been orbiting at around 24% to 25%. We went low to 23%. It varies, but essentially, the average is 24% over time. For the indigenous, we're seeing an increase. We're still not meeting our targets, but we're seeing an increase because we have dedicated efforts that we're putting in place to increase our percentage there.

**Jeff Kibble:** Thank you.

We've seen a significant increase in permanent residents who are being recruited. Do we have a number or rate of members in CAF who can't speak either official language?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, as part of our recruiting process, we need to ensure that people can operate in one of the two official languages. However, there are some difficulties with this to ensure that people can actually function in the full scope of one of the two official languages in Canada.

We are taking this very seriously because we value diversity. We value permanent residents and onboarding them as part of the forces. Therefore, we're putting in place language training in order to enable permanent residents to be fully integrated into the Canadian Armed Forces.

**Jeff Kibble:** I appreciate that there's language training. For example, right now, I'm aware of one recruit in basic training who requires a phone to talk—to use for interpretation—in order to operate. I learned about another platoon that has five recruits who can barely speak English or French, or who can't speak them at all. It's causing challenges there.

Is the language training you mentioned before or after recruiting?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, currently, I cannot speak about those five recruits, because I have no data on who they are.

However, we are observing difficulties in basic training at our schools in Borden and Saint-Jean. We are putting in place.... As soon as we realized that some recruits were enrolled without the full capacity of one of the two official languages, we moved them to either tools or training.

**Jeff Kibble:** I would hope they get their language training or proficiency before getting to recruit school.

Are there any challenges you can share with us in recruiting and retaining both indigenous and francophone personnel in the Canadian Forces?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** In terms of challenges, I will defer to the champion for official languages.

The realities are the same for indigenous and first nations peoples, in that there are some cultural aspects we need to be mindful of, especially with permanent residents we're putting in. We're standing up a cultural awareness package to enable our instructors to be more efficient with respect to the wide diversity we're onboarding. In terms of onboarding statistics, 33.7% of our intake this year was for visible minorities. This speaks to diversity.

More specifically on francophones, I will turn it over to the champion, if you will allow me, Mr. Chair.

• (1640)

**The Chair:** Your time is up. It's a bit over, now.

We will be going to you, Mr. Watchorn. You have up to six minutes.

[Translation]

**Tim Watchorn (Les Pays-d'en-Haut, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will allow Mr. Gros-Jean to continue.

**Major-General Martin Gros-Jean (Defence Team Co-Champion for Official Languages, Deputy Commander of Military Personnel Command, Canadian Armed Forces):** Thank you, Mr. Watchorn.

Mr. Chair, it's my first time appearing before the committee, so I am a little nervous.

To answer the question on the retention of francophone members, as my boss, General Simoneau mentioned, I would say that francophones typically obtain their bilingual status or become bilingual very quickly over the course of their career. According to the statistics and surveys we possess, francophones are generally satisfied with their career in that respect.

**Tim Watchorn:** I will continue along the same lines and my question is for anyone who wants to respond.

Are the anglophone members of the Canadian Armed Forces strongly encouraged to learn a second language or do they not have time for that?

**Anne Rahming (Director General Culture, Chief Professional Conduct and Culture, Department of National Defence):** Our Official Languages Act modernization implementation plan addresses this very issue. We are currently rolling out a series of activities to promote bilingualism and even require higher-ranking members to be bilingual.

**Tim Watchorn:** The documents we received refer to operational cohesion. I would like to hear your thoughts on how this cohesion is implemented in practice. We are talking about cohesion between the two languages.

How can a commander ensure that the troops understand exactly what is expected? How can the commander ensure that the results obtained match the orders given?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** A commander must be able to communicate in the language of the troops and staff. This is very important.

By extension, I will also answer the previous question regarding whether we encourage English speakers to learn French and French speakers to learn English in order to be leaders within the institution and among their staff.

It is extremely important that they make an effort and meet the bilingualism requirements. We take this very seriously. In fact, bilingualism is one of the assessment criteria considered by the national promotion boards, which ensure our members' advancement. Once you reach a certain rank, if you aren't bilingual, you cannot advance.

That's why I say that francophones learn English more at the start of their careers when they have to learn how to do their jobs, whereas anglophones need to learn French when they start to be in command. However, they're already pretty busy by the time they get there. Waiting to take the courses puts them at a bit of a disadvantage, so we need to make that happen earlier in their careers to allow them to do it.

It all comes down to diversity within small teams. The complex problems they have to solve are found within these teams and at the tactical level. That's where we need diverse mindsets and opinions to come up with innovative solutions. That's really where we're focusing our efforts.

**Tim Watchorn:** Do you see any conflicts between people who speak different official languages? Do some people get upset because a certain group doesn't speak English or doesn't speak French? Do you see this on a daily basis, or not really?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I would say no, but that's just my opinion. I would have experienced that as a francophone. What I see is an institution that firmly believes in bilingualism and diversity, especially since the cultural storm took place. We truly recognize the importance of diversity now, which includes both official languages and more.

I don't really see any friction. However, what I often see are missed opportunities early in one's career, when people have fewer responsibilities and a little more time. Moreover, let's face it, when you're younger, your brain is more flexible and capable of learning, whether it's languages or something else. That's really where the focus should be.

● (1645)

**Tim Watchorn:** I have one last question. If I understand correctly, you're an engineer. I'm an engineer, too. I therefore attended an engineering school, the École polytechnique de Montréal, which is a French-language university. During my studies, I'd say that 80% of our textbooks were in English.

Do you face the same challenges, for example regarding the training materials you're required to translate in advance? What difficulties do you encounter?

**MGen Martin Gros-Jean:** That's a very good question. I earned my bachelor's degree in electrical engineering at Laval University. Back then, there wasn't much available in French.

Within the Canadian Forces, a huge effort is being made to support francophones who need to learn material available in English. Naturally, there are trades and professions that require a command of English. I'm thinking, for example, of a pilot.

Yes, we face those challenges, but I can assure you that we take this extremely seriously. Bilingualism is seen as the cornerstone of our national identity. That's how we view things. With the upcoming legislative modernization of official languages, we will double down on our efforts in this area.

**Tim Watchorn:** That's an excellent answer, thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Savard-Tremblay, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot—Acton, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Allow me to welcome the witnesses and thank them for being here today.

If I'm not mistaken, the last review of official languages in the Canadian Armed Forces was conducted in 2021. In any case, the most recent data published on the Department of National Defence website is from 2021—at least as far as publicly available data is concerned.

We can see that several positions where French is essential were held by unilingual English speakers or English speakers who did not have a sufficient level of French for the position. For positions designated as “French essential,” 12.3% of these were held by English speakers who did not meet the minimum BBB language profi-

ciency level. Even for positions designated bilingual, 63% of employees did not meet the BBB language proficiency requirements for a second language in the public service.

Has there been another review since 2021? Is another one planned?

**Anne Rahming:** I'd say that we're currently reviewing the results of the first year of implementation of the modernized Official Languages Act. Our plan directly addresses what you just described, ultimately.

First, a joint directive has been available on our website since last October, I believe. This directive includes a realistic, phased approach over 10 years to implement the CBC profiles, at least for essential service occupations—that is, health services, police services and administrative services. This would be the BBB profile for the operational level of competency, and CBC for the rank of sergeant.

We also have a plan to implement a phased approach for warrant officers with the BBB profile. This plan will give us the full capacity to implement this approach over a 10-year period. That said, we have already begun the work as part of the first year of the plan. As the general just mentioned, we're ensuring that those moving up the ranks, receiving promotions or taking on new positions must go through a process where we review their language profile and try to find someone who can either fill a bilingual position or supervise those in bilingual regions.

To do this, we have two strategies to ensure that everyone in bilingual regions has a supervisor with a CBC profile.

This is our plan for the next ten years. That said, we understand there may be some gaps in the early years. We're doing our best to ensure this is the policy and practice in place for the coming year.

● (1650)

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** I'd still like to understand something.

In the Canadian Armed Forces, there are quite a few francophones—in fact, a higher percentage, to be precise. How is it normal or even possible for someone who doesn't meet the necessary language requirements to hold a position designated as bilingual or even exclusively francophone? In my view, even one such position is too many. This isn't normal. It is an anomaly from a statistical standpoint.

**Anne Rahming:** I thank the member for his question.

Once again, we're talking about a framework of mitigation measures. Yes, it's true that there are people already in positions who may not have the required bilingual rating. However, they're currently being trained. When these people are already in a position, we do our best to prioritize bilingualism. If a position becomes vacant, that position will be offered to someone who isn't currently in a position but who is bilingual.

Indeed, it's truly a gradual approach, but we're moving forward by prioritizing bilingualism and the oversight of bilingualism in bilingual regions. Is that clearer?

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Currently, is there still an official target regarding the percentage of employees who meet the job requirements? You mentioned ten years, but is it—

**Anne Rahming:** The policy applies to everyone.

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** At least it applies to everyone, because it seems to be the norm. It's simply the way things are.

In the same review, there's also a difference between the number of positions where French is essential and the number of positions where English is essential. We're talking about 6,484 positions compared to 31,795 positions. That's a total imbalance. So that means only 16.9% of non-bilingual positions are held by francophones, even though francophones make up a much higher percentage of the Canadian Armed Forces.

How can we explain that as well?

**Anne Rahming:** I will turn the floor over to the Lieutenant-General. I believe this is a question concerning the structure of our organization rather than policy, if I understand correctly.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Indeed, Ms. Rahming is in charge of policy.

The policy is clear: We want to close this gap. The 24% figure really applies to the Canadian Armed Forces. The positions you're referring to, I believe, pertain to civil service positions. That's where job offers are made to people who often don't meet the requirements needed to obtain the bilingual rating for the position.

From the Canadian Forces' perspective, positions aren't designated individually. It's the entire unit that's designated as francophone. For example, I come from 430 Squadron in Valcartier. That unit was considered bilingual. We could send both English-speaking and French-speaking personnel on missions, whereas other units in the west, in Edmonton, are English-speaking only.

I believe you were referring to public service positions. As a department, however, we acknowledge that we are not perfect in this regard. We really need to do better in terms of providing the right training, on the one hand, and hiring people with the right language proficiency, on the other.

I don't know if that answers your question. I just wanted to distinguish the 24% of armed forces members from those in the public service. It really is 24%.

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** We'll come back to this in the next round, since I'm out of time.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Gallant, it's over to you for five minutes.

**Cheryl Gallant (Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Through you, how is the CAF expanding indigenous youth involvement in our military using existing programs like the cadets and the junior rangers on reserves?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We are rolling out new programs. They're still new in my mind. There's the ILOY, or the indigenous leadership opportunity year, that we have at our Canadian military colleges. We offer a year to indigenous people to come and learn and live the military life, and then they can elect to continue in the regular forces, to go to the reserve force or to be released, but at least they're being offered those opportunities. I should also state that in the program, we have 31 on a yearly basis, and it's just the beginning for the ILOY program.

It's the same with indigenous summer camps. For the indigenous summer programs, every year we host around 200 people, and we try to generate interest in the Canadian Forces.

• (1655)

**Cheryl Gallant:** Okay, but the CAF isn't doing any outreach on the reserves, where the young people have nothing to do. This would provide them with direction and perhaps steer them away from things they shouldn't be involved in. Is there nothing like that going on at this point? Are there no attempts to get a cadet corps or a ranger cadet corps going on the reserves?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** We are looking into this, in fact, Mr. Chair. We're looking into expanding our recruiting centre footprint and sending them to where those communities are, or closer to those communities, for example, in Saskatoon and Yellowknife; I could go on listing them. We're trying, by proximity, to place ourselves closer to them.

**Cheryl Gallant:** Does the current retention crisis CAF is facing extend to the Canadian Rangers?

**Anne Rahming:** Through you, Chair, the Canadian Rangers' representation rate went up by 5% between 2021 and 2026. In 2021, it was 22.8%, and currently, it's 27.7%. There has been a significant effort made within the organization to improve and build on what has been successful with the rangers.

**Cheryl Gallant:** Russia's Wagner Group often recruits mercenaries from friendly West African juntas, such as Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, where people mainly speak French.

Now Ukraine alleges that there are almost 1,700 African mercenaries fighting for Russia in Ukraine. With the new stream that's opened up through immigration to encourage new Canadians and give them priority in the military, how will CAF ensure it won't be letting these mercenaries into the Canadian Armed Forces?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That is an excellent question, and it's a concern that is front and centre in our screening process.

We do select, and we have a very rigid and thorough security clearance that they need to obtain. We've put in place a period of probation to allow people to come in with some uncertainties, but as soon as we find that they cannot obtain medical, security or physical clearance, they're expelled from the Canadian Armed Forces before they even reach operational status. Therefore, we see this before what we call the OFP, or operational functional point, during their training. We screen for this.

**Cheryl Gallant:** If IRCC is not even interviewing people who are coming in and who may go down this stream, how will CAF take into consideration applicants who have served in China's PLA or paramilitary groups associated with the PRC?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** The security screening process is very thorough and screens all applicants to include Canadians to the same degree. If they were to raise any concerns, they would not be enrolled in the Canadian Armed Forces.

**Cheryl Gallant:** IRCC doesn't, but will the CAF take into consideration an applicant who served in any nation's military that has been responsible for human rights abuses?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I cannot speak to IRCC processes, but we do our own vetting. Once IRCC declares them permanent residents, they could, in theory, access Canadian citizenship. We then apply the increased and additional layers of scrutiny on every member. Should something like this be flagged with us, they would not be enrolled.

• (1700)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Gallant, go ahead.

**Cheryl Gallant:** I want to know if we have enough Canadian Rangers to protect our Arctic.

**The Chair:** Do we have enough Canadian Rangers to protect our Arctic?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** No, Mr. Chair, we don't. We want to expand this very important capability.

**The Chair:** Ms. Lapointe, it's over to you for five minutes.

[Translation]

**Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Lieutenant-General Simoneau, of the recruitment initiatives under way, which ones are yielding the best results in terms of recruiting francophones and indigenous people? Why do you think they are effective?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** We don't really have any quotas yet for recruiting francophones. We do have one for first nations and indigenous people. The recruitment system is currently undergoing a major transformation, a complete overhaul. We've reduced barriers to entry and introduced a probationary period to ensure we attract people, but also to allow them to join the Canadian Armed Forces.

I can't really mention any specific programs other than the ones I mentioned earlier, the aboriginal leadership opportunity year and indigenous summer camps. We don't really have anything for francophones, apart from our presence at recruitment centres in Montreal and Quebec City. At job fairs, we really want to connect with the community to generate interest.

The Canadian public often doesn't know much about the Canadian Armed Forces unless someone in their family is a member. Proximity is very important, and we make sure to be present as much as possible.

We're even in the process of buying mobile recruitment vehicles. We will be able to take them to the appropriate places, places that are more temporary, such as exhibitions and so on, so that we can do more local and targeted recruitment.

**Viviane Lapointe:** Okay.

Recruitment is important, but so is retention. What are the main improvements observed in retention among francophone and indigenous members, and what factors contribute to that?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Again, these are not programs that target francophones or members of first nations. However, they benefit from it like all other members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

You probably know that last August, the Prime Minister announced eight initiatives that we were going to put in place, including the wage increase. Some initiatives have been aimed at attracting quality instructors to our schools, so that the soldiers we recruit have success in their basic training. That's where it starts. It's having a good first experience when you join and when you start.

This is followed by measures such as the military service pay, which is intended to encourage people to continue serving their country by providing compensation based on certain ranges. It also involves making it easier for them to travel across Canada, because we ask a great deal of our people to be transferred across the country. As a result, we've enhanced the benefits associated with the relocation of our members.

This is part of a series of eight initiatives whose effects we're already seeing. Normally, we have an annual attrition rate of about 8% or 8.1%. We therefore expected to lose about 6,900 people this year, but the statistics show that we're actually going to lose about 5,500. So retention has improved, and I attribute that directly to the eight initiatives we are currently putting in place. There is still one more to be put in place.

**Viviane Lapointe:** Thank you.

Ms. Rahming, what cultural changes have the greatest effect on members' sense of belonging?

**Anne Rahming:** Again, these are large-scale changes that we're making, as opposed to changes that are directly aimed at those two communities. We've put in place a culture evolution strategy over three years. We will continue our planning and implementation of this strategy in the future.

The major points we discussed mainly concerned establishing governance processes so that everyone could address structural issues. We went through a period when we looked at each case individually, and now we're talking about governance, policies and processes that are more systemic and structural. I think this modernization of the way we work is starting to have an institutional effect.

• (1705)

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Savard-Tremblay, it's over to you.

You have two and a half minutes, and a little extra, just for you.

[Translation]

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** That's so generous of you, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

Mr. Simoneau, I was able to do some cross-checks. First of all, we were talking about the Canadian Armed Forces earlier, not the public service. I will reiterate some of the findings of the review.

First, 63% of forces members in bilingual positions requiring an intermediate level of second-language proficiency did not meet the language profile required for their position. Second, 26.3% of the 4,732 francophone members in positions designated as "English essential" did not have an intermediate level of English proficiency.

Furthermore, 76.9% of the 1,026 anglophone members of the forces in positions designated as "French essential" did not have an intermediate level of French proficiency. In addition, 87.7% of the professions within the forces did not have enough bilingual members to meet staffing needs.

Finally, and this is where the problem lies, there's a retention issue, and this comes at a time when the forces are looking to increase their personnel. Each year, they expect to lose approximately 1,347 members with a valid language profile.

I remind you that we're talking about the forces and not the public service.

So I'm going to ask you a vague but evocative question: How is that possible?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** It's possible, because that's what the report says. That isn't acceptable, and that's why we're in favour of modernizing the Official Languages Act. We have to fix that. We take this very seriously.

Just for the coming year, we will provide second-language training for up to 1,000 positions, depending on need and that's not a cap. It's simply to meet current needs. We will allocate the necessary resources to go further, if needed, so that this kind of situation doesn't happen again, as you mentioned.

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** I'm wondering about the cost effectiveness. At this point, are second-language training courses operating at full capacity?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Yes, but I would add a caveat. We're meeting 100% of the demand, but I think the demand could be higher, especially early in a member's career. There are many people waiting between courses who would benefit from further developing their second-language skills at the Canadian Forces Lan-

guage School in order to obtain the CBC or BBB language proficiency level. At present, they are encouraged instead to get a head start on their flight or infantry training and to gain hands-on experience.

That will be an integral part of the implementation plan for the modernization of the Official Languages Act, namely, providing greater support to members early in their careers so they can acquire these skills. It has to happen early in a member's career, much as francophones are required to do out of necessity.

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** So, it's already being changed.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Yes. Absolutely.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson, it's over to you.

• (1710)

**Scott Anderson (Vernon—Lake Country—Monashee, CPC):** Thanks, Chair.

Thank you for appearing today.

I've heard the same rumours as my colleague about training problems with language and the inability to speak either official language. Is the language training offered before or after recruitment? I don't think we heard a straight yes or no on that.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I did not say yes or no, Mr. Chair, because by policy we want to onboard or enrol people who are fluent in one of the two official languages. We may have had some mishaps in terms of testing this up front, allowing some members to be enrolled without being fluent in one of the two languages—

**Scott Anderson:** If I may, do you do medical testing before recruitment?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Yes.

**Scott Anderson:** Do you do psychological testing before recruitment?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** We do.

**Scott Anderson:** However, you don't do language testing.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** We don't as of now, but as we speak, this is something we're observing. We've been enrolling permanent residents for two years now. They're going through the training pipeline, and we are observing the need for this. We are actively remediating this by sending them on course when we feel they're not fluent enough in one of the two official languages. We need to do something beforehand, absolutely, but we also need to make sure we select.

**Scott Anderson:** Are there plans right now to test language beforehand?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Not as of now, no.

**Scott Anderson:** Is there something being planned to do that?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Well, of course, we're planners by profession, so we will plan to rectify any problems.

**Scott Anderson:** You have—

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** We're in a fact-finding mode on this particular aspect as we speak.

**Scott Anderson:** I see. Okay.

What level of language proficiency is required?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** You need to be able to function in one of the two official languages, French or English, to be enrolled in the Canadian Armed Forces.

**Scott Anderson:** What level of proficiency is required? I can operate in Hindi, but that doesn't mean I speak Hindi.

**Anne Rahming:** Mr. Chair, as for the point the member is making, because there's no testing at the beginning, we're talking about the policies. The policies with the Government of Canada are AAA, BBB, CBC, etc. The level of language, given that there is no screening, would be undetermined right now. We wouldn't be able to speak to it in policy. However, once people are in a position, each position has its own language profile. It depends on the region. It also depends on the profession, the trade and the level.

**Scott Anderson:** Okay.

You said that security risks are rooted out before operational status. Between recruitment and operational status, it can sometimes be years. I know of one second lieutenant who was a second lieutenant for 10 years beforehand.

It wasn't me, incidentally.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Scott Anderson:** In the meantime, they received the lion's share of the training, and they received an automatic weapon and ammunition for it. I'm talking about the land army.

Is this ideal? Is this the ideal way to test security?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, I would say that operational status is the very end, the maximum, which we never reach in terms of security clearance. The training that leads to operational status varies by occupation. They all have different training paths, if you will. Therefore, they need to achieve their security clearance way before operational status.

I was trying to demonstrate earlier that we would not employ operationally someone who has not had their security clearance. This is not when they need it. They need it way before in order to train.

**Scott Anderson:** Okay.

What specific efforts are being made to recruit indigenous personnel?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** In terms of recruiting, I discussed earlier the ILOY summer camp program. We're trying to reposition and generate new recruiting centres closer to their population. These are all initiatives we're undertaking as we speak. We have mobile recruiting centres and displays that we're trying to put together.

**Scott Anderson:** Are indigenous personnel involved in this?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Yes.

**Scott Anderson:** Okay, that's excellent.

Is the military actively seeking out immigrants for dual-use skills like medicine or engineering and things that are more advanced?

• (1715)

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, in terms of enrolment, we value people who come in with skills. Regardless of whether they're a doctor or plumber, when they arrive with those skills, they're prioritized in the queue in order to be onboarded. It's one of the add-ons or the value added that they bring, absolutely.

**Scott Anderson:** Thank you so much.

I'll turn the rest of my time, if I have any, over to James.

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson, that is very kind and generous of you, but you are over your time.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** I love the tactic, though.

**Scott Anderson:** I was just trying to be a Liberal.

**Tim Watchorn:** Are you announcing something?

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Scott Anderson:** No.

**The Chair:** Mr. Malette, it's over to you.

**Chris Malette (Bay of Quinte, Lib.):** Owing to my limitations in the French language, I'm going to ask one question in English and acquiesce the rest of my time to my multilingual colleagues here.

Thank you very much for your testimony today.

Recruitment in the Canadian Armed Forces, as we've heard, has increased by 13%. What initiatives have been implemented to boost francophone recruitment within the CAF? What encouraging results, if any, have you observed?

Anybody among our witnesses today can answer this.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** We are in fact enrolling more applicants. We're growing the Canadian Armed Forces. Two years ago, we were at 63,000 in the Canadian Armed Forces, and as of today we're beyond 67,000. We closed the gap by close to 5,000 over the past two years. We're in good stead and on par to reach 71,500 on our reg force by 2029, as directed by the chief of the defence staff.

This is thanks to lowering barriers at entry where we could. We still need to be selective—let me make that clear up front—but we're lowering barriers where we can by accepting a certain degree of risk with the period of probation.

As part of lowering barriers, we used to treat all 107 occupations the same, with all the same medical entry standards. We went occupation by occupation to see if we could accept people with an allergy, for example. This way, we can onboard more people and have access to more people from a pool of excellent people who were otherwise ruled out previously.

As of March 31, today almost, we have a pool of 44,000 applicants who are serious. It's not people who were clicking on our site only once, but people who have gone back and forth with us to produce their age, identity, citizenship and education reports. Those are people who are actually serious. We have a database of 44,000 as we speak, thanks to all those initiatives we put in place.

We're not perfect. This was not transformation. This was tweaking the processes we had. We still need to transform. To do this, we need to digitalize the whole pipeline.

**Chris Malette:** Further to my question—this is going to the focus of our discussion today—are there any specific initiatives that may have been implemented or will be implemented to help boost francophone recruitment specifically?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, there are some specific initiatives, but they're very localized because we have no targets for francophones. We have a good representation of francophones in the forces. They can make it right up to the top of the organization.

This being said, I'm very mindful that we need francophones, and we need quality francophones. We need to select from a broader pool. Therefore, in the resourcing of our centres in Quebec, Montreal, across the province of Quebec, and in Ontario, Manitoba and other provinces, we're ensuring that we have truly bilingual people.

I would throw in the gender aspect as well. I feel as though we don't have enough women in our recruiting centres—women in combat arms. Speaking to one ratio in which we're not doing well... I'm going beyond your question, if you'll allow me, Mr. Chair—

• (1720)

**Chris Malette:** It's important.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** With women, we've onboarded 17%. Our goal is 25%. The bulk of our positions are in combat arms. If we want to be successful to onboard women to the Canadian Armed Forces, I need to attract them to the combat arms occupations. I need to resource my recruiting centre accordingly so that they can tell the story, for those who are currently in the system.

**Chris Malette:** We heard some mention earlier, to my panellists, that there's a retention crisis. Do we have a retention crisis in the CAF?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I would say we don't. We attrit at a fairly healthy rate of 8%, which is on par with industry and other like organizations.

I would coin it this way: We don't have an attrition issue, but we have a retention issue in certain gates and occupations. For example—there are reasons we're studying that, and I'm gathering facts as we speak—we tend to lose our women at 15 years of service, more than men. We lose a lot of people at 25 years of service,

which is understandable, because they are pensionable at that point. One of the eight initiatives I was talking about earlier will address this and provide incentives to sign for another tranche of service.

Besides this—

**Chris Malette:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm glad you were able to share your time. You and Mr. Anderson operate the same way, I see.

Mr. Bezan, I go over to you.

**James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC):** I just hope that Scott and Chris's time doesn't eat into my time and I pass along deficits.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**James Bezan:** Anyway, thank you for being here.

Canada's most decorated indigenous soldier is Sergeant Tommy Prince, who was from my riding. He was born in Petersfield, and was a member of the Brokenhead Ojibway Nation. He was part of the 1st Special Service Force, the "Devil's Brigade", which was a multinational Canada-U.S. special operations force, so not only was he the most decorated Canadian indigenous soldier, he was also the most decorated member of the Devil's Brigade of Canadians and Americans. Then, after World War II, he went on to fight in Korea with Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in the Battle of Kapyong, Hill 677.

It is very much a proud history and one that still resonates throughout the community, a community that has a pretty significant representation still serving in the Canadian Armed Forces as well as in the U.S. armed services. A lot of them become U.S. rangers down there. It's interesting that you see so many show up at Remembrance Day who have also been serving in the U.S.

You talked about the 2.8% of CAF that is currently indigenous. Can you break that down into how many are first nations, how many are Métis and how many are Inuit?

**Anne Rahming:** Unfortunately, I cannot break it down in that way. There are a few caveats in the way in which we collect the self-identification data. It is voluntary, and it is aggregated, which means that the most important aspect of self-identification data is to protect the individual's privacy and the reason for which the data was collected. Given the small counts in many of the units, disaggregating has some risks associated with it, and this has not been happening to date.

Currently, the way in which the information is collected and shared is through the parts of the organization. We can break things down by reg force, reservists and COATS, and we can break out rangers. We cannot provide subpopulations within those groupings at this point.

**James Bezan:** It would be interesting to find out. If you want to make sure that you have proper representation.... We talk about how francophones, as a percentage of Canadians, are 21%, and within the CAF, they are 24%. We know those numbers. We should have those numbers as well for the indigenous communities, whether first nation, Inuit or Métis.

Let's talk about the aggregate. You said you have numbers. How many are in the Rangers? How many are in the army, at least in the reg force and reserve force? If you have it by service as well, that would be phenomenal.

• (1725)

**Anne Rahming:** Through you, Mr. Chair, I have a breakdown that I can give you for 2026.

The percentage for reg force is 2.9%. For reservists, it's 2.4%. We have a breakout of 2.5% for COATS—the cadets. The Canadian Rangers, as I mentioned earlier, are at 27.7% at present.

**James Bezan:** For the rangers, you mentioned that it was not big enough. We need more. How much bigger are we going to make them?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, I don't have the exact numbers, since we are determining things as we speak. We're planning how to own more of the north. The policy is called "Our North, Strong and Free". We are developing plans to grow the forces and put the focus on the defence of Canada first, as well as on the importance of the north.

I don't have an exact number, nor do I understand the pool capacity we can draw from. This is exactly why I'm opening a recruiting centre in Yellowknife, for example. We need to move closer in order to understand capacity and their willingness to be part of it. I'm not doubting this. I'm sure they're very interested. We just need to understand this, and at what level.

**James Bezan:** The current ranger cadre is at near full strength, is it not?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I don't think there's a maximum strength for the rangers, for example. We would welcome it if more came to our door. We don't need to wait to have the final number in order to implement a plan to onboard more, because it's all part of the growth of the armed forces, which we're doing right now.

**James Bezan:** We know that 27% of rangers are first nations, Inuit or Métis.

What are you doing on the recruitment side to provide a greater percentage within the reg force, whether it's army, navy or air force? Are we targeting communities?

Yellowknife has one centre, but there are three territories up there, and it's a big space. We should be in every capital city in those territories.

What about getting into first nations and Métis communities throughout the rest of Canada?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, I don't think we're doing enough. This is the first salvo in a broader plan we're developing as we speak.

Starting this year, we're going to be implementing things in Yellowknife, as I mentioned, as well as Grande Prairie, Prince George, Red Deer, Saskatoon, Rouyn and Bathurst. We are looking at all locations by proximity so that we can be closer to them in order to gauge, influence and attract more first nations.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Romanado, it's over to you.

[Translation]

**Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for joining us today and for their service.

My first question concerns recruitment. Do Canadian Armed Forces recruiters need to be bilingual in order to answer questions in both official languages?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I would say yes, especially in recruiting centres in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and New Brunswick. Is this currently the case? No, it isn't. I don't have enough francophones. I can't ask all the francophone members of the forces—or 24% of the members—to serve at recruiting centres. I need them throughout the chain of command to supervise people in their first language.

Ideally, we're trying to achieve an all-Canadian compromise. We want one bilingual member per recruiting centre for every shift, even when we open our doors during the holiday season between Christmas and New Year's Day. That's when people have the time to visit us. We make it a point to ensure that a bilingual person works in every recruiting centre during these peak periods. Otherwise, we miss out on opportunities. For example, when I started working at the Quebec City recruiting centre on Saint-Jean Street, I could speak only French. I couldn't work in English at all. I'm still struggling, as you can see. However, the first person whom people encounter must be able to speak to them in their first language.

• (1730)

**Sherry Romanado:** Good.

A few years ago, when my sons were attending the Royal Military College Saint-Jean, the students spent half the month in English and the other half in French. That way, everyone could be bilingual after graduation. Is this still the case?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I can't answer that. However, I imagine that we wouldn't have stopped that type of good practice.

I can tell you that, during the weekly meetings with the chief of the defence staff, we alternate between English and French. It was difficult at first, especially for the anglophones. The issue wasn't their lack of bilingualism, but the fact that the language contains many technical terms. Even for the francophones, it was challenging at first to hold the briefings in French. Now we're getting the hang of it and adapting the technical vocabulary so that we can use it in both languages. This type of initiative will make it possible to improve the institution as a whole. It plays an integral role in implementing the modernization of the Official Languages Act. It starts at the top, with the chief of the defence staff.

In my own command, I hold two meetings a week. My assistant, the chief warrant officer and I are all francophones, so over 50% of our meetings are held in French. This isn't done at the expense of English speakers. It's done at their request. They often tell us that they don't have the opportunity to speak in French because we speak to them in English all the time and that they would like us to speak to them in French. So I speak to them in French until I see them looking puzzled or they stop keeping up with me. At that point, we switch to English. However, we really want to make this happen as a team.

**Sherry Romanado:** I know that, in 2021, we started offering university degrees at the Royal Military College. This gave francophone members of the armed forces the opportunity to obtain a university degree in French. We had been working on this since 2015.

It's posting season. I spoke with francophone Canadian Armed Forces members posted to bases outside Quebec who faced difficulties obtaining services in French. What support do they have? What about their families, who may also need to move to an English-speaking city where no services are available in French?

Is this taken into account in the posting process?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I'll answer this question in two parts.

First, let me start with families. We don't talk enough about families. Personally, I call them "the backbone of the forces". Their real strength makes it possible to serve and to focus on a mission when deployed. If deminers who must touch a bomb have issues on their minds and family challenges, they won't be able to focus. Nothing good can come of this. So family is extremely important.

From a language standpoint, there are three aspects. My first posting outside Valcartier was in Kingston. At that point, I had become bilingual and I could work in English. In order to take the basic flying course, I needed to take a technical vocabulary course to ensure that I wouldn't pose a risk to the public in the air in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. As a result, I quickly became bilingual, or at least I could work in English.

However, my family hasn't had this benefit. Spousal employment presents challenges. Child care also poses challenges. When you arrive in an anglophone environment with young francophone children and no francophone day care, it poses challenges. Access to health care is another issue. Health care services in other provinces aren't necessarily provided in both official languages. This poses challenges. As a result, families often become single-income families. They have only one income because the spouse must remain at home to make up for all these shortcomings.

Ms. Romanado, I know that you're personally working tirelessly with Canada to try to open doors for us in this area. I want to formally thank you for this.

On the military side, we aren't perfect either. As we heard earlier, we still have anglophones supervising francophones. The anglophones are unable to speak to francophones in their language, and vice versa. However, the solution isn't to keep francophones in Quebec, New Brunswick or French-speaking areas. Francophones are everywhere, and they must have access to supervision in their first language. I need to distribute the supervision to all the provinces and to all deployed missions. It wouldn't be effective and it wouldn't be fair to francophones to keep them all in Quebec. That's where second-language education and training really start to matter to me.

• (1735)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*English*]

Monsieur Savard-Tremblay, it's over to you.

[*Translation*]

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** How much time do I have?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You have two and a half minutes plus.

[*Translation*]

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Thank you for that nice answer.

Mr. Simoneau or Mr. Gros-Jean, one of you, I can't remember who, spoke earlier about a modernization operation in 2025. I imagine that this is the same operation that we heard about back then. The idea is to centralize things a bit more and to take responsibility for a number of aspects of human, material and other resources.

We know that only one division is officially francophone. That division is the 2nd Division, in Quebec. In light of this, has its mandate remained the same, or has it been centralized or changed? Has anything happened as a result of this operation?

**MGen Martin Gros-Jean:** I think that you're talking about the modernization of official languages.

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** No. I'm talking about the forces.

**MGen Martin Gros-Jean:** Okay. You're talking about the army. In that case, I can't answer that question.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I can try to answer the question.

I'm not the army commander, but he briefed me. I can tell you that the divisional level will remain. The army commander is currently transforming the structure of this level. He wants the divisions to become specialized. This means that one division will be responsible for expeditionary operations, another for domestic operations and a third for logistical support.

For the 2nd Division in Quebec, this means that it will become responsible for force employment within the country. Will that change?

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** It won't just be in Quebec. So it's becoming—

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** No. It can operate across Canada.

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** It will be Canada-wide.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** It will be Canada-wide. Does this mean that the division's bilingual ratio will change? It probably will. However, I think that, since it's in Montreal and given the location in the province of Quebec and the need to speak to people in both official languages, the division's francophone nature will continue. However, I'm just speculating right now.

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** It does seem dangerous to say that an exclusively French-speaking unit in Quebec will now have a Canada-wide role. How can it keep the same status if its mandate changes in this way?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, on this topic, I would say that this division in Quebec already had a force employment mandate outside Canada that required the members to operate in English. The division has always been strong in French owing to its location. However, it has always needed to operate in English, if only to ensure interoperability with our allies. So the division has always had a bilingual component. I don't think that this will change as a result of the restructuring.

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** So there currently isn't any way to assess this. As we speak, this hasn't been closely verified with specific indicators.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Not at all. The army is in the process of developing a restructuring plan. The restructuring hasn't taken place yet. That's why I'm speaking a bit speculatively. Perhaps I shouldn't have done that. I just want to remain perfectly transparent and to let you know where things are headed.

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** I'm grateful. Thank you for doing this, by the way. It's the right thing to do. When you don't know the answer to a question, feel free to say so as well. It's perfectly fine. It's better to say that than to say anything.

However, should we see any issues with this or notice a change in the workforce, would any accommodation or support be provided for bilingualism?

• (1740)

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** As in the other divisions, the modernization of the Official Languages Act will also be implemented in this division and in the units in Quebec. This will include access to training. It will also include centralization, in order to understand the implementation process. This wasn't necessarily done in the past. There will be briefings up to the level of the chief of the defence staff.

So, yes.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Gallant, it's over to you.

**Cheryl Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Through you to Lieutenant-General Simoneau, the deputy minister of defence defended her hiring of her husband's cousin. Actually, this would be good for Major-General Martin Gros-Jean.

She defended her hiring of her husband's cousin, Björn Charles, to a role at IRCC. However, he was relieved from his employment because he could not speak French.

How can DND maintain confidence under her leadership to improve francophone representation in the department and at CAF, given her blatant disregard at IRCC?

**MGen Martin Gros-Jean:** I cannot answer for the DM, but I can say that through the modernization of the Official Languages Act that we are embarking on, there's a shift in mindset. The shift in mindset in the CAF is going from a compliance focus to an operational effectiveness focus.

From my perspective, as co-champion, it's really about the leadership and the leadership's being bilingual.

**Cheryl Gallant:** Has the deputy minister employed any other individuals at CAF or DND in her new role under the guise of promoting diversity, equity and inclusivity?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, we don't have answers to that question. I'm not tracking those whom the DM's office hires. I'm sorry.

**Cheryl Gallant:** Everyone is francophone, then, who needs to be, to your knowledge.

Again, to Major-General Martin Gros-Jean, have there been any deployments for which the unit being francophone has been particularly helpful?

**MGen Martin Gros-Jean:** It's a very good question. I can speak to it personally, having been deployed in the Congo for a year. The ability to speak the language and being a francophone really enhanced my operational effectiveness. I was the chief liaison officer with the Congolese army over there. Because I am a francophone, I was accepted way faster than I would have been elsewhere.

**Cheryl Gallant:** Do you have any units that are entirely francophone and can be inserted into special situations in which it's particularly operationally favourable and functional to have such a unit?

**MGen Martin Gros-Jean:** We don't necessarily have any units specifically for that. When we build operations and when we build units to go on operations, those would be considerations. For example, if we were to go to Haiti, there would be a very high consideration of having a complement of francophones, but there are no specific units as per...

Units are generally bilingual or anglophone or francophone units.

**Cheryl Gallant:** How are security background checks for applicants under the new immigration stream to attract foreign military talent to be conducted? Have clear red lines been discussed that will immediately disqualify applicants?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I cannot talk about the IRCC process. However, it's irrelevant for us on the CAF side because we have our security screening process, which we abide by. It has a higher threshold of scrutiny and is very thorough, so we trust the process. It's shared with CSIS and other security organizations around us. We share the same process. We always strive to improve it, as required.

That said, this is not in my functional authorities. It's more on the VCDS side, but I'm tracking it closely because it's personnel-related. I can assure the committee that security is of the utmost importance to the military organizations and the Canadian Armed Forces.

• (1745)

**Cheryl Gallant:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** You can ask one more question.

**Cheryl Gallant:** Are there any other languages aside from our official languages—perhaps any Inuit or indigenous languages—for which would it be helpful to have a unit that speaks those languages for insertion into some special mission?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** If we want to own the north and be strong in the north, we need to grow the rangers. We're developing plans to that effect.

My deputy stated earlier that being a francophone in the Congo was beneficial for him to operate and be accepted faster; I think the same will occur in the north. Therefore, we need to onboard more northerners to the Canadian Armed Forces—people who are culturally aware, as well as part of that culture.

I don't have an exact number, because we're developing all of those plans as we speak, but I would certainly agree with the statement you made that it could be required. I'm pretty sure it will be, at which point.... However, it won't negate the need for being functional in one of the two official languages.

**Cheryl Gallant:** Thank you.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Tim Watchorn, it's over to you.

[Translation]

**Tim Watchorn:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for joining us. It's reassuring to hear you talk about the changes taking place. We can see your

commitment to the changes taking place in the Canadian Armed Forces. We can see the results and the progress ahead.

I imagine that some situations aren't ideal. In any organization, certain situations aren't ideal.

I would like to hear your opinion on complaint mechanisms. If people complain that they aren't receiving service in their language or that they aren't being properly represented, what do they do?

**Anne Rahming:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yes. Absolutely. This happens to us from time to time. I have some statistics from last year. As we begin to implement the new act, we're seeing an uptick in complaints. This is normal in a transition period.

I'll provide an overview of how these complaints came about last year.

In the past, most complaints received by the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces—again, the data can't be separated—were filed under part V of the Official Languages Act, dealing with language of work.

In 2025, the overall percentage of part V complaints was lower. Normally, it's around 52% to 66%. Last year, it was 31%. The reason for this is the expansion of our denominator, meaning the total number of cases, and the fact that we received several complaints under section 91 of the act. This means that we received several complaints related to the implementation of the act. The drop in the number of complaints is really related to this change. This doesn't necessarily show a change in the situation as a whole.

Here's the most important thing to know about the complaints received. We have an elaborate governance, knowledge-sharing and information-sharing process. It goes all the way to level zero, which means the chief of staff and the deputy minister. We normally spend a great deal of time on these complaints. They constitute opportunities for us to learn lessons. The lessons can be incorporated into the plans currently under way. This analysis also shows us opportunities to move forward. So we use the complaints not only to resolve an issue, but also to try to do better in the future.

• (1750)

**Tim Watchorn:** Do you have a rough idea of the scale? For example, are we talking about 20 or 50 complaints?

**Anne Rahming:** Yes, I have the figures. From 2023 to 2025, the number of complaints relating to part V of the Official Languages Act was 73. As for part VI of the act, there were only three complaints. So it's not too bad.

**Tim Watchorn:** It's not that much.

Do you liaise with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages when dealing with complaints?

**Anne Rahming:** Yes, absolutely.

**Tim Watchorn:** So you have direct interaction with the commissioner's office.

**Anne Rahming:** Yes, absolutely.

**Tim Watchorn:** Very well.

Let's change the subject a little. In Mirabel, two weeks ago, we were lucky enough to host an event for the Department of National Defence. Thank you, because you were there for recruitment. As far as the supply chain is concerned, I think you're recruiting companies rather than individuals. That's fine, though.

Among the people who were there, some had been deployed to the north. I'll give you a rather amusing example. These people said that the mittens provided by the Canadian Armed Forces were no good. Instead, they were buying mittens from the indigenous communities that were there because they were better.

My question is this: Can we learn from indigenous communities in the north to better equip and ready our Canadian Armed Forces?

**MGen Martin Gros-Jean:** I'll try to answer that question, because I took part in an operation in the north, at Arctic Bay. It was one of the best experiences of my career. Being in the north is like taking part in a real operation, and it's really, really cold.

The answer to your question is yes, absolutely. However, I can't answer your question regarding procurement, because that's not what we do. What I can tell you is that, from the operator's perspective, the lessons learned are passed on through a system to our partners who purchase supplies.

Yes, the mittens weren't bad.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I don't remember the question anymore, but I said at the beginning that we really value diversity for that very reason. We have very complex problems to solve, in a world that is increasingly volatile and difficult to predict.

What I've noticed in the north is that it's like an expedition; it's an expeditionary operation. That's what Mr. Gros-Jean just said. Even training in the north is an expeditionary operation. It is harder to go to the north than to conduct a mission in Europe or Latvia.

To solve the problems and overcome the challenges of the north, we need diversity. That is why Ms. Gallant's idea—to have units dedicated to first nations, Inuit, and Métis—is so important. We will learn from them. They are the ones who will help us succeed.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Kibble, we'll go over to you for five minutes.

**Jeff Kibble:** Thank you, Chair.

I want to return to the French language.

What percentage of military courses are not available in both languages?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, I don't have a percentage, but I have courses and I can state what they are. All aviation-related courses, because of the Convention on International Civil Aviation and the need to operate in English in the air and everything that has to do with aviation, are currently in English only by necessity.

The firefighters and the CBRN operators currently receive their training solely in English, but we're tracking them and we're trying to generate capacity in terms of instructorship to solve.

• (1755)

**Jeff Kibble:** You stated that there's no limit for ranger recruiting, which is good to hear. The rangers do some excellent work for Canada.

Are there plans for new specific ranger units, and might I recommend Vancouver Island?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, I welcome the recommendation. Rangers units belong to the army commander. I will certainly relay this great idea to the army commander.

**Jeff Kibble:** Ms. Rahming, you stated that there's no language screening prior to recruiting. You said you do psychological testing. Is that done with doctors, with psychologists? We don't do language but we do psychological testing, you stated.

**Anne Rahming:** On a point of clarification, we don't do language testing. Language screening is part of the recruitment process, but it is not done in a way that is as structured as language testing.

**Jeff Kibble:** You said you do psychological testing in the recruiting process.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, we don't do psychological testing; we do aptitude testing.

**Jeff Kibble:** Thank you for clarifying that.

My understanding is that there's no mental health screening. This ties into the retention issue, because we know that we're below our mandated effective strength for the military and not making gains. This speaks to the retention crisis.

They're building, at basic training, temporary housing to facilitate quarters for people withdrawing because they have mental health challenges. They're not in training, but they're being held. Why are we holding these people and not releasing them? It speaks to this retention crisis.

Maybe you could speak to that.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, I would not subscribe to the retention crisis, because we're growing the CAF. We've grown the CAF by 5,000 over the past two years, and we're well en route to meet the target of 71,500 regular forces. We're under by just 3,500. I wouldn't coin it as a retention crisis.

That said, I don't want to minimize people's mental health issues. Half the releases from the Canadian Armed Forces are currently medical releases.

**Jeff Kibble:** Specifically at basic training, why are we not doing mental health screening before people come into basic training? As I said, right now, there are so many people who are being released for mental health that they have to build temporary shelters just to hold all these people. Why aren't they releasing those people? Are they waiting.... Is there no support for them there? I'm not understanding what's going on.

Can you speak to that, please?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Thank you for the clarification on basic training.

Before they arrive at basic training, we do actually do some screening. It's a selection, and we have an interview process in which we can screen for problematic personas. We can screen them out; we don't just enrol them. We're not perfect. We're trying to lower barriers. That's why we put a period of probation in place; it allows us a tool by which, as we accept more risk at the entry, we can expel them.

Rest assured that we've also delegated the authority to release people from the Canadian Armed Forces to the unit CO level, something that used to be held in Ottawa before, with a very thorough process. Now the school CO releases them. If they are being held at the school, it's because the CO and the instructors think that it's temporary and that they can be rehabilitated for the next course in order to become a member of the Canadian Armed Forces. It's because we see something in them.

**Jeff Kibble:** Do they have the facility to rehabilitate them at the recruit school?

Part two of that is this: My understanding is that if they haven't completed basic training at the recruit school, they have to pay their own way home. Is that correct?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** That's not correct. If they don't pass basic training, we will take them back home. They don't need to pay out of pocket to go back home.

My limiting factor, as I mentioned earlier, is the training capacity. Every bed at those recruit schools is important to me because that's how I'm going to grow the forces. Therefore, if we retain those people, it's because we see value in them, and we have the tools to rehabilitate them. It's also not in two years or five years; it's in the next course or the course after. Otherwise, they would be expelled.

**Jeff Kibble:** Okay. Thank you for that.

I'm assuming that I'm over my six minutes.

**The Chair:** You're a bit over your time.

**Jeff Kibble:** Thank you for your generosity, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** It's my pleasure.

Monsieur Savard-Tremblay, I'll be generous with you too.

[*Translation*]

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** You've been that many times before, but I won't refuse. We've happened to catch you on a day when you're in an exceptional mood, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Simoneau, you mentioned earlier the caveats that still exist regarding training. For example, I don't know if you were referring to this, but an article was published in a newspaper in Ottawa. A journalist reported in 2021 that, for francophone units, career advancement courses were often bilingual or conducted solely in English. I don't know if this is information you were aware of.

In the case of bilingual courses, it frequently happens that francophones are placed in English-speaking sections. In such cases, francophones may fail the training if their English is not good enough. We are referring, for example, to phase 3 for officers or PP3 for non-commissioned officers.

Once again, how can a situation like this be possible?

• (1800)

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I'll start by answering, and then I'll turn the floor over to my official languages champion, since he tracks the issues and challenges we face.

To start, I would say that, for basic training courses, the Canadian Forces offer 30% of courses in French, even though francophones make up 24% of the workforce. We therefore have excess capacity to ensure that francophones can complete their basic training in their first language.

I know that the air force is a bit of a special case. I've mentioned this before; it's because of the International Civil Aviation Organization's program. It's different.

The army offers courses in both languages.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Gros-Jean.

**MGen Martin Gros-Jean:** I understand your question very well, sir. We've all been there. Things have improved, and they will continue to improve.

As for our plan regarding the modernization of official languages, which aims to support the act, we really want to focus on these issues and resolve them. That is what I can say.

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Nevertheless, when it comes to courses, there is still a truly glaring imbalance. When you look at it, it's almost discriminatory.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I believe the courses are offered in both official languages. As for the air force, once again, that's a separate issue.

In the military, basic training is offered in French. Francophones have access to all courses in their first language. Perhaps that wasn't the case in 2021. If it wasn't, we've improved significantly. We don't claim to be perfect. That's why we're modernizing the Official Languages Act.

We truly want francophones and anglophones to be able to work and be served in their first language.

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** It's good if things have changed since 2021. I couldn't ask for more, and I'm delighted.

Is there an actual overview, any figures on this? For example, is there data on programs inaccessible to francophones or on bilingual courses taught solely in English? Can we get an overview? If you don't have the document with you, can the committee obtain it?

**Anne Rahming:** I don't have the data with me. I don't know if we have a complete picture for the whole organization. That said, I can always provide the committee with the data we do have, if there is any.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That would be helpful.

Thank you, Mr. Savard-Tremblay. In my haste to satisfy you, I skipped over the Liberal members.

It's over to you, Ms. Romanado.

[*Translation*]

**Sherry Romanado:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I don't mind, because it was Mr. Savard-Tremblay. I always share my time with him.

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Why are you all being so nice to me today? You must want something from me.

**Sherry Romanado:** No, not at all.

Mr. Simoneau, we have talked a great deal about the army and the air force. In Quebec, we have an air base at Bagotville. We also have an army base in Valcartier. We have several naval reserves, but we do not have a naval base in Quebec.

Vice-Admiral Angus Toppsee, who commands the Royal Canadian Navy, suggested that it might be a good idea to have a French-language naval base in Canada to attract more francophones. Do you have any comments or suggestions on this? If we had a naval base in Quebec, would that help you recruit francophones into the navy?

• (1805)

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I am the product of someone who saw the helicopters flying from Valcartier when I was a cadet. Every year, we were offered a helicopter ride. Having a base nearby is important.

That said, whether or not to open a new base in Quebec is not within my authority. However, I do see the value of having a base nearby. When we have a presence somewhere, we interact with the local population. I experienced this when I was the wing commander at Bagotville. I had interactions with the community of La Baie, but also with those of Saguenay and Lac-Saint-Jean. In this way,

we generate interest and are able to talk about what life is like within the forces. Proximity is therefore important.

As for the navy, in particular, we should not underestimate the Quebec Naval Reserve. We often see its members in Quebec City, Montreal and all over the place. It's a good unit to have in Quebec, I believe, and it generates interest in the maritime component among the population. The army or the air force aren't necessarily for everyone, but people can see the navy in Quebec.

I'm not sure if that answers your question. I see benefits in having bases as close as possible to the communities we're targeting.

**Sherry Romanado:** That's great.

I know you told me that you don't specifically target French speakers in your recruitment. That said, are steps being taken to recruit some? Do you advertise in French-language media? Are there specific measures being taken to enlist potential French-speaking recruits in Quebec, and also outside Quebec? I just want to know.

I know the website is bilingual and that there are recruitment centres. Are there also proactive efforts being made to reach out to francophones where they are?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** We really want to increase the numbers of the Canadian Armed Forces. To do this, we are putting a lot of effort into advertising and promotion. That is what we have been doing for the past two years. However, this isn't necessarily aimed at francophones in particular. That said, everything we do is in both official languages.

We are putting the same effort and energy into a population that represents 21% of Canada. I think we have put as much effort and energy into the French language as we have into the English language in the rest of Canada. Perhaps that is why we are succeeding in attracting more francophones to the Canadian Armed Forces relative to the Canadian population.

Where we really need to focus our efforts is on promoting certain roles. At present, attracting people to the Canadian Armed Forces is not a problem, but it is for certain key roles. I will, in fact, be discussing this in more detail on Monday at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

That is where we need to focus our attention. We have 107 different types of jobs, yet very few people in Canada are aware of this. People think you join the Canadian Armed Forces because of the image of the helicopter we see on television at the moment, with people rappelling down on ropes. The Canadian Armed Forces are much more than that. You know this personally, Ms. Romanado, but the Canadian public does not necessarily know it.

That is where I really want to focus our promotional efforts.

**Sherry Romanado:** You mentioned specific jobs. Can you give us an example of a job where you are looking for more French speakers?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I am looking for French speakers in all roles. For example, there are roles such as naval technician, signals operator or weapons engineering technician.

We also face difficulties in recruiting for medical roles and within the military police. This is often because our salaries do not match those in industry or the rest of society. These are challenges we are currently looking at closely.

Previously, we were unable to meet our targets, but we are now achieving them. However, we realize that we need to fine-tune things for certain roles. That is where things stand regarding our progress.

• (1810)

**Sherry Romanado:** Thank you.

Ms. Rahming, you mentioned that as soon as people pass language tests, they must achieve the CBC profile. Are bonuses given to bilingual staff, to those who reach the required level of bilingualism? If not, would this be a way of motivating unilingual English speakers to learn French?

**Anne Rahming:** Let me clarify the question: The bilingualism bonus policy is a policy for the public service. I cannot, therefore, speak on behalf of the Canadian Armed Forces in that regard.

**The Chair:** Understood.

[*English*]

Mr. Anderson, it's over to you.

**Scott Anderson:** For the benefit of Canadians—I know the military loves acronyms—can you tell us what “CBRN” is? You used the acronym before.

**MGen Martin Gros-Jean:** It is “chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear”.

**Scott Anderson:** Thank you.

Lieutenant-General, you mentioned a screening process. I remember that my screening process in the officer stream was a discussion with the major, who basically had a conversation with me and, at the end of it, asked if I was able to kill somebody. To me, that's not an adequate screening process. This was only in 2009, I think.

Is there a more enhanced screening process now?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, this is one of many aspects of the screening process. What you just described with the major is the interview process.

We take their role very seriously, in that we train them to do this. I cannot speak to 2009, but currently they are being trained.

They have to follow a very strict protocol in terms of the questions asked, the duration and how to validate information that applicants have provided us beforehand. We validate the information with the applicants. That's one. We have the aptitude tests that we impose. We have all the documentation going from academic to citizenship, to doing background checks on the members as well—

**Scott Anderson:** I'm sorry to interrupt. That was one part of the question. There is another part of the question. I've been around warfare a bit, and I know that it attracts some people whose legal status is questionable. A lot of those people may be applying here. Does IRCC pass on to you or alert you that there's a lack of paperwork on their end? In the refugee stream, that's often the case.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** That's a great question, Mr. Chair.

Up to last year, we had no agreements with IRCC to share information. We've just produced an information-sharing agreement with IRCC so that they can inform us of those and pass on information for us to validate. We wouldn't accept it without doing any double-checking, but this facilitates and accelerates the security clearance process in steering us to certain areas that need to be analyzed more thoroughly, for example.

**Scott Anderson:** Thank you very much.

I'm going to pass the rest of my time over to my colleague Jeff Kibble.

**Jeff Kibble:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of quick questions.

I will add to your comment, Lieutenant-General, about the use of the naval reserve units in Quebec. There are also naval reserve headquarters and fleet schools, so I think the navy has excellent representation. They do great work in Quebec.

I want to revisit one of my earlier questions. Are there any challenges in terms of retention of francophone or indigenous members—specific to those groups? What is being done to overcome these?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** My colleague doesn't want to say it. He told me that there are no differences between indigenous and francophones. I don't think there are barriers to their progression. We value their contributions, and we're trying to increase their numbers. I'm speaking mainly about the indigenous side.

I briefed you earlier on the ratio of general officers, flag officers and chief warrant officers. They are in the top 34% or 35% of the pyramid. This suggests to me that, once they overcome the hurdles of the early training, they're very successful at making it a career.

• (1815)

**Jeff Kibble:** There are no specific retention issues, then, within these groups.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I haven't observed any specific retention issues for either of these groups.

**Jeff Kibble:** Good. Thank you.

How many complaints does the director of official languages receive annually, regarding official language rights in the Canadian Forces? Maybe you could speak about that as well.

**Anne Rahming:** I provided a few stats earlier that were for the last couple of years, just for your information. For 2023-25, we had 73 complaints related to the language of work, and then we had three complaints related to participation in the language.... I'm going to say this right. I'm reading in French and trying to translate to English right now.

[*Translation*]

**Jeff Kibble:** Say it in French.

**Anne Rahming:** It's easier. These were complaints regarding the participation of French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians.

[English]

That was three out of a total of 201 cases in the two-year period.

I want to remind you that, when we're giving you stats, these stats include National Defence and CAF. They're not disaggregated, because they're anonymous. We have to decrypt that based on the situation.

**Jeff Kibble:** Very quickly, if I may, are there any specific programs offered for only indigenous members and made specifically for them?

**Anne Rahming:** I'm unable to speak to that specifically.

**MGen Martin Gros-Jean:** Could you repeat the question?

**Jeff Kibble:** Are there any specific programs for indigenous members that would support their interest in joining or attract them as an important component of the forces?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, we have two. One is the indigenous leadership opportunity year, the ILOY program. We onboard 31 people every year to our military colleges. We can keep them in the regular force at their choice, in the reserve force or elsewhere. There are the indigenous summer programs as well. There is the navigator program.

**Jeff Kibble:** Is it the Raven program that you're talking about?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Yes, the Raven program. Those are all the summer programs.

**Jeff Kibble:** Okay. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Kibble.

We have an indigenous member of Parliament with us today. Our members are giving her some time as well.

Ms. Lori Idlout, it's over to you for five minutes.

**Lori Idlout (Nunavut, Lib.):** *Qujannamiik, Iksivautaq.* Thank you, Chair.

I thank my colleagues for sharing their time with me.

I thank the witnesses for the great testimony they have shared today, as well as for their service.

Before I ask my question regarding the junior ranger program, I want to acknowledge the great work that Joint Task Force North is doing, as well as the 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group. Their presence is felt every day in Nunavut. They are highly regarded in our communities.

I appreciate your acknowledgement that more need to be recruited. We have great people, such as Sergeant Titus Allooooloo, who is a Canadian Ranger, as well as Major Sean Brinkema, who is with the Joint Task Force North. They are sharing great information about what's going on with the Canadian Armed Forces.

Whose responsibility is it to recruit and retain people for the junior ranger program so that we can continue to increase interest in eventually becoming Canadian Rangers?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, the responsibility for the junior ranger program rests with the director general of reserves and cadets, who is from the VCDS side of the house. It's not within my responsibilities.

What I could say, though, as I said for the rangers, is that we value cadets and junior rangers. Although we cannot recruit from those pools, we value their contribution and their proximity to us, so they are informed of the possibilities of joining the CAF should they wish to at some point. It's a great incubator within society to inculcate values and ethics into our youth, not just junior rangers but cadets as well. I myself was in air cadets as I grew up in Beauport, and I can attest to the benefits associated with those organizations.

Sadly, I cannot answer more about the program and expansion, but rest assured that there are no talks at National Defence now about cutting. There's only talk about growing those very important capabilities.

• (1820)

**Lori Idlout:** That's excellent. Thank you so much for that. I too was in the army cadets when I was young, and I had so much fun participating in competitions. It is so important.

I recall, though, when I met with the Canadian Rangers, that they were sharing challenges in Iqaluit, for example, maintaining junior rangers. The air cadet program in Iqaluit has no problems keeping their cadets, but they struggle to keep their junior rangers because there are no facilities for them. They'll get a high rate of interest, but then they fall out of interest right away because there are no facilities for them to learn what the Canadian Rangers do. It sounds as though it's a lot more work to try to keep junior rangers in the program. That's what I was hoping to understand from this perspective.

That's it for my questions, but I really want to share one more quick appreciation about Operation Lentus, when Canadian Rangers were deployed to Gjoa Haven to help with the crisis that was going on with the community-wide power outage, as well as the water issue. I hope you can send my acknowledgement and appreciation for that too.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Idlout.

We're wrapping it up.

Mr. Bezan, do you want to take us home?

**James Bezan:** I guess so, if that's what we're doing. I'm going home. It's been a long day.

To follow up on previous questions about the rangers, we have talked about increasing the number of rangers. In relation to Operation Lentus and, of course, the restructuring of the Canadian Army and having a homeland force to deal with things like natural disasters, should we be expanding the rangers to include the southern regions of Canada so that they can help with Operation Lentus?

As well, we often talk about the rangers being our eyes and ears of the north. We have a large border that we want to be increasing security on. Why not use the rangers to be our eyes and ears of the 49th parallel, through the Great Lakes? Of course, let's not forget about the Maritimes, which have no ranger units at all. We could utilize a lot of indigenous people in those regions to provide expertise.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Of course, Mr. Chair, I would not opine on the employment of the rangers, because that's squarely with General Boivin at CJOC to be mindful of.

**James Bezan:** I'm sure you guys talk.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** That said, we value the contribution of the rangers, so if they can be so employed, we need more of them. Again, there is no plan to limit their size or location.

As for the previous member's point that the junior rangers don't have the necessary infrastructure, therefore we lose them, I'm really hanging my hat on the fact that we're going to grow the north. We're going to own the north. We're expanding and investing in the north. I hope that it's going to provide the necessary infrastructure. This is not necessarily CAF infrastructure; it could be dual use. It could be other departments. We're going to come up north as a whole of government, and this will provide opportunities for the junior rangers and the rangers wherever they are then employed by CJOC.

**James Bezan:** We talked about the percentage of francophones who are GOFOs—general officers and flag officers. What's the percentage of indigenous members as GOFOs?

• (1825)

**Anne Rahming:** I don't have the current year's statistics. My understanding is that we have a single senior GOFO who was self-identifying, but self-identification is voluntary, so we're unable to confirm.

**James Bezan:** We talked about the navy. We have the HMCS *Ville de Québec*, which is a francophone frigate. Do we have any other vessels that are operationally francophone and/or fully bilingual?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Do you mean for the navy or writ large?

**James Bezan:** I mean for the navy.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Okay, for the navy.

I'm tracking the VDJ, *Ville de Québec*. By the way, I was on board for a day sail three weeks ago in rough seas. I can attest to the fact that they have francophones on that ship.

The HMCS *Montréal* has typically been more bilingual than the VDJ, but there is still a good share of francophone company on board that ship. Those are the two that I'm tracking aside from the naval reserves, for example, in Quebec and Montreal at the HQ.

**James Bezan:** One thing that Admiral Topshee has started through the Royal Canadian Navy is the naval experience program around basic training, because not everybody in the navy needs to be trained as an army infantry officer, and people need different skill sets.

Are we seeing the naval experience recruiting program used by the naval reserves in Quebec and Montreal?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** The answer is yes. The naval experience program is rendering good dividends.

We are observing a good trend of transition between this program and going to the reg force, as well as remaining in the reserve force. I see this as very positive.

We've been going at this.... By "we", I mean the navy. It's Mr. Angus Topshee who runs this. I'm not at the point that I'm going to share a portion of the strategic intake or I'm going to contract it out to the navy. Whatever they're doing—the excellent work they're doing with this—allows us to close the gap towards the 71,500 faster.

At some point we may need to wrap our hands around this. It's still a pilot program, but once we declare that it's permanent, I think it's going to lend great dividends for the Canadian Armed Forces.

**James Bezan:** The Canadian Coast Guard is now part of National Defence. Do we have the same types of criteria and targets for the francophone and indigenous numbers within the Canadian Coast Guard?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, I cannot talk about the Coast Guard because, as you mentioned, they're under National Defence, they're not under the CAF—

**James Bezan:** You're not under National Defence.

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** —so we're not doing their recruiting; they're doing their own recruiting. They have their own systems, but we are looking and seeking efficiencies and opportunities on both ends.

They have the Canadian Coast Guard Academy, which we're in conversation with in our Canadian Defence Academy to see how we could partner up and have synergies between the two organizations.

**James Bezan:** We know that history and heritage play a big part of the pride and the morale within the Canadian Armed Forces. We know this represents every region of the country, especially when you look at our army units, the different brigades that we have and the history they have. In Quebec, we have the Van Doos, and we have a number of different regiments in armouries across the country.

In Quebec, there are francophone units with strong identities, such as Les Voltigeurs de Québec. How are we maintaining this history and preserving it from the standpoint of keeping it embedded within the Canadian Armed Forces, having that pride and improved morale? How do the upcoming changes to the CAF dress manual potentially impact this, especially from an army reserve basis and this historical standpoint?

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** I think—

**James Bezan:** Is this reunification all over again, as we witnessed back in the eighties?

**MGen Martin Gros-Jean:** To the last question, I think that no, it's not that.

One thing I can say is that, from a reserve perspective, from a footprint perspective, it's key that our reserves are strong and well supported with what they need, including from an infrastructure perspective, equipment perspective and all of that. A lot of those reserves are under the army, and they are part of the discussion from an army modernization perspective.

• (1830)

**LGen Erick Simoneau:** Mr. Chair, to supplement what was just said, we value diversity. Therefore, we're not trying to go back to unification. We're really trying to allow the dress manual to be flex-

ible enough to account for all those cultural items and the transition to the reserves in order to onboard new cultures—with indigenous cultures front and centre—and so people can thrive within the Canadian Armed Forces.

The dress manual is meant to be more and more flexible, by nature.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bezan, thank you.

Thank you to the witnesses. I appreciate your thorough discussions and responses as we recognize this increased desire among the public. People are paying greater attention to defence and to the attraction of becoming a member of the armed forces. Congratulations on all you do.

Thank you to the committee. Before I adjourn, I remind you that the deadline for recommendations for the critical minerals study is April 20. Please make sure you have them in on time.

Now, given that time is up, I ask the committee for agreement to adjourn this meeting.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.

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