

Transcripts from presentation by MGen Robert Meating, Colonel Commandant of the Royal Canadian Army Cadets and Col (ret'd) Gene Lake, National President of the Army Cadet League of Canada on the occasion of the Honoraries' Conference hosted by the Chief of Land Staff (Edmonton, AB , 15 August 2009)

Robert Meating: Generals, Honoraries, ladies, gentlemen and friendsgood afternoon. Our subject today and the nearly 'full-time' focus of both of us and therefore our passion are - the Royal Canadian Army Cadets. We intend to ask you for help in the next 20 minutes and then take questions until the red light comes on.

I am Bob Meating, the Colonel Commandant of the Royal Canadian Army Cadets. Many here know of my service career; in this forum I'd like to highlight or make mention of my specific cadet experience:

- o I was a cadet.
- o I was the regular force area cadet officer in Toronto, responsible for 110 army, air and sea cadet units.
- o I was the standards/training officer of Army Cadet Summer Camp Ipperwash for 1 year.
- o I was the standards/training officer of the Army Cadet Summer Training Centre Camp Borden for 2 years.
- o Since October 2007, I have been the Colonel Commandant RCAC.
- o Euphemistically I am known as and promote myself as being the "oldest army cadet in Canada".
- o Having been the Colonel Commandant for two years now, I have determined that the best qualification I need for this job is to have been a parent of teen-agers and to have a genuine love of kids.

I have learned that the only qualification I need to be Col Cmdt is to have been a parent to kids in their teens & to have a love of kids.

Gene Lake: My name is Gene Lake and it was great spending time in your company last evening.

Following my retirement from the Canadian Forces, I became Commanding Officer for the Pacific Region Cadet Support Unit in Victoria. Following that I became the president of the British Columbia Branch of the Army Cadet League of Canada....and I am presently the national president of the Army Cadet League of Canada.

It is important to recognize that the Army Cadet Program is a community-based program and not a directed program. If a community does not want a cadet corps it doesn't have to have a cadet corps. Community support for cadet corps is based on civilian sponsors and civilian sponsoring committees and affiliated units.

There are Army Cadet Corps in 400 cities, towns and villages from coast to coast to coast. In these communities are 20,000 Army Cadets. As a result, the footprint of the army cadet program reaches at least 200,000 people – these are the moms, dads, uncles, siblings, grandfathers, etc. I guarantee you they are interested in what happens to their cadets.

There are also 7000 Army Cadet League volunteers, and a conservative estimate is that these volunteers raise 4.5 to 5 million dollars annually to support their local cadet corps.

Meeting: In November 2008, Gene Lake and I asked to visit and speak with the Chief of the Land Staff (CLS), General Leslie) to

- Expose a shared concern to him about army cadets
- Determine his interest in army cadets
- And to ask him to express his interest, personal support and that of the Canadian Army for this magnificent youth program to his Army Council

General Leslie certainly did more than that to satisfy our request of him

- He has expressed his personal interest and support as well as that of the Canadian Army in the Army Cadet Program at least twice to his Army Council.
- He invited both Gene Lake and I to attend and speak to Army Council in May 2009 on the subject of the challenges facing the program.
- He accepted an invitation to attend the annual Army Cadet League national awards dinner in May 2009 to meet and present awards to winning cadets and their parents.
- And.....the CLS invited both of us to speak to you, this August group of Honoraries on the subject we are presenting today.

My conclusions on the challenges facing army cadets today are based on my personal experiences and interaction as Col Cmdt – meeting and talking to and learning from thousands of cadets and their parents over the past 2 years.

My conclusions are fully supported by each of the Army Cadet League presidents in the provincial and territorial branches who work intimately and very regularly with the sponsoring and parent support organizations of existing cadet corps of all types, of cadet corps that are strong and thriving, and, of cadet corps that are small, weak and struggling.

Lake: We both believe that what we will say to you, as Honoraries, will be of interest to you. Why?

- Because you represent the regiments and units, which today have cadet corps wearing your flashes, cap badges and regimental regalia.
- Because you represent the old guards, the senates and regimental mafias.....and I know you have exceptional access and influence in all of the communities with army cadet corps.
- And finally, it may be of interest for no other reason than the kids.....the youth in the program who represent the future of towns, villages, cities and Canada – they are our leaders of tomorrow.

Meeting: Why are we here? What is the issue?

As the oldest army cadet in the country and speaking on behalf of the boys & girls who are already enrolled and parading with cadet units, and Gene speaking as the voice and advocate of the parents' and local sponsoring bodies in communities from St John's through Victoria to Rankin Inlet, the reason we are both here is to make you aware:

- That the Army Cadet Program is at a critical point.
- To say its future is at risk might be an intelligence gamble, but there are few signs right now that are readily apparent to suggest otherwise.
- The numbers of youth.....kids between 12 and 19 years of age in army cadets (that is joined up and participating) is at an all-time low..... and the decline continues.
- There appears to be no corner of the country unaffected.

The situation we present to you is not unique to army cadets – the Canadian cadet movement in total is experiencing the same decline trend.

Lake: MGen Dennis Tabbemor’s organization, specifically his Directorate of Cadets, the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff and every Regional Cadet Support Unit Commanding Officer are seized with the situation they and their staffs are working to find a way to stop the bleeding and reverse the trend.

The reversing of trends however, is not going to be easy and is going to take the imagination and involvement of not only those in uniform but it also going to call upon significant civilian partnership and engagement. This civilian involvement may or may not have any military background.

Resolving this, arresting and reversing the numbers decline trends, is a community-based issue that the chain of command and staff cannot resolve. Existing community partnerships need to be reinforced and new, community-centric partnerships need to be created. This will have the best chance of achieving results.

Meating: Now, what are our asks of you? As Honoraries of reserve and regular units, we both know you are completely au-fait with the business on which your unit and its Commanding Officer is operationally focused – the *raison d’être* of our Army. The units and the COs have plenty facing them as higher priorities without specifically and singularly being asked or tasked to focus on army cadet corps.

In our assessment however, Honoraries and former Honoraries should be able to provide local expertise, involvement, leadership and attention to assure the future health and well- being of army cadet corps.

Therefore, we ask that you Honoraries and through you to ex-Honoraries and seniors in your senates, become aware of the population decline concern, and specifically aware of the local situation in your regimental or unit affiliated cadet corps.

We also ask that each of you who find your particular cadet corps in stress and difficulty, to give some focus on what you might be able to do to assist both the cadet corps leadership that is the CF-uniformed Cadet Instructor Cadre, and your Commanding Officers. The youth – the cadets share your cap badges and accoutrements and are very much a part of your regiment’s and the Army’s future – they have your DNA.

Lake: The challenge is complex; the solution is local; and success will not be achieved in the short term.

To quote General Leslie: “this is not a 100 yard dash ...this is a marathon”

The problem is complex because:

- Youth are not compelled to join.
- Nor are they compelled to stay – they vote on the program and the delivery of the program with their feet
 - For example, last year in British Columbia, we recruited 900 new cadets....but by year’s end 1200 had left the program.
- Youth want to belong to an exciting, dynamic program – a program that will bring them back week after week after week.
- Generally, parents let kids decide their extra-curricular activities (to join, to stay and to leave) - if you don’t believe me ask the Prime Minister whose son joined an Ottawa army cadet corps in September 2008 and then left it in February 2009 because the program was not as challenging and interesting as advertised.
- Parents want a safe, challenging and fun program that is well delivered and develops life skills in their kids.
- And probably most importantly, today’s young people have plenty of choice ... and it is they who have the initiative.

It is now easy to understand why this is very complicated problem

Meeting: Gene said the solution was local:

- Whatever the solution..... it needs to address local community realities facing parents and potential cadets in Summerside PEI, Magog QC, Cross Lake, Manitoba and Salmon Arm, BC.
- It is not a one size fits all or cookie cutter solution.
- If the problem in Cross Lake is a lack of community support, then the Army Cadet League needs to build or find community support and individuals or organizations in and near Cross Lake to help.
- If the problem in Salmon Arm is poor program delivery, then the Army Cadet League and the Canadian Forces need to work together to find better, more capable people in or around Salmon Arm to deliver the program.

Lake: As I said before, success will not be achieved in the short term. Just as recruiting for the Canadian Forces requires a long-term campaign, a long term campaign will be required to solve the problem of retaining cadets in the program. Now that we’ve told you the problem, identified some of the challenges pertaining to the problem; We will now propose how you as Honoraries might help us and your communities address the issues

Meeting: Through your undoubted local influence and access:

- We would suggest that you are extremely well positioned to positively market and present army cadets to community leaders, parents and potential cadets.
- We would suggest that you are extremely well positioned to recognize and reinforce success where you find it.
- And, we would suggest that you are extremely well positioned to identify other people to become involved in the cadet program.

Regarding marketing and representing army cadets positively within communities – it can best, perhaps only, be done by you. Why? Because, everything we have said to you so far should lead you to our conclusion that this is indeed a grass roots – local focus issue.

- That is where you have the advantage over any of us in this room.
- You are part of that community dynamic.

To advertise, market and represent this great program:

- We ask you to be a friend and vocal supporter of army cadets;
- We ask you to facilitate opportunities to promote the army cadet program;
- We ask you to recognize people who contribute and are committed and involved to the program:
 - Recognize and commend committed parents;
 - Recognize and commend those on the sponsoring bodies;
 - Recognize and commend local businesses that allow staff to work with cadets;
 - Recognize and commend principals and school boards that provide accommodation or promote students in cadets;
 - Recognize and commend media outlets in small and large communities that provide newsprint or on-air coverage of cadets and their programs;
 - Recognize and the program deliverers from within the community (the Cadet Instructor Cadre, who this year are celebrating a century of service to cadets),
 - And lastly but certainly not least – recognize and commend the program's product – individual cadets and teams of cadets. Indeed, it is the cadet who is the focus of the program – without cadets, there would be no program.

Lake: You, as Honoraries can create opportunities to publicize local army cadets' success stories....these success stories are easy to identify and include the accomplishments and the opportunities presented to and completed by individual cadets or groups of cadets.

Something as simple as you taking a cadet to a Rotary or Kiwanis luncheon as a guest speaker, or as your personal guest, would do wonders for highlighting the success of a local cadet corps or as a confidence builder to a deserving cadet.

Meating: The last thing we are asking you to do is to identify & approach other people or organizations who might contribute to the cadet program. It might be that they have never been approached and they know nothing of the merits of this national treasure – Army Cadets.

- Identify & approach potential groups from which to recruit cadets (schools and new demographic groups come to mind).
- Identify & approach potential groups or businesses from which to recruit suitable cadet instructors.

- Identify & approach potential groups or individuals to contribute personal resources (leadership, time, fiscal, moral and/or, editorial support).
- Identify & seize opportunities for cadets to perform individually or collectively (you should be aware that cadets are terrific advocates and accomplished confident speakers who captivate audiences).
- Finally, identify & approach potential VVIPS to become involved. We are not necessarily looking for more in-uniform senior VVIPS. While retired generals and colonels appreciate being asked and performing as reviewing officers, it is of far greater return if the VVIPS has the influence and access within the local community to advance the cause of our cadet program. Thus we are speaking of arranging the involvement of mps, MLAs/MNAs; LtGovs; mayors & councilors; chiefs of police; sports celebrities; local, regional and national newsmakers)

Lake: The affiliation between army cadet corps and regular and reserve regiment is greatly valued and the wearing of regimental badges and buckles is seen by cadets as a great honour. However, it is sometimes difficult for cadet corps to get access to regimental accoutrements or the accoutrements are very expensive for the cadet corps or parents.

To engender a sense of belonging to a larger organization, it is also important for army cadets to be exposed to people

- Who believe in and live the army ethos.
- Who believe in concepts like truth, duty, valour, courage and family.

Cadets need to be exposed to people who live and understand the principals of value based leadership. They need you to encourage proven leaders within the community to join the cadet instructor cadre. Army cadets need you to pay attention to them. Youth – cadets - will not reach forward; adults, like us, have to reach back to them

Meating: Finally, Colonels of regiments and Honoraries, please remember that affiliated cadet corps are part of your regimental family and please confirm that your affiliated cadet corps is doing well.

If you as Colonels of regiments and Honoraries encourage regimental senates, civilian community leaders and other community organizations to support army cadet corps in their midst, then I am convinced that the army cadet program can rebound. Cadets (in Canada) is a national treasure – a truly magnificent youth citizenship program that is not replicated anywhere else in the world

Thank you for this opportunity to have spoken to you about your army cadets.....they are worthy of your attention and deserving of your support.

Gene Lake and I thank you