

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Thursday, October 8, 1998

Committee Room 1

Halifax Rifles Armoury Association

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Murray Scott (Chair)
Hon. Wayne Gaudet
Hon. Russell MacKinnon
Charles MacDonald
Frank Corbett
Peter Delefos
William Estabrooks
Gordon Balser
James DeWolfe

[Frank Corbett was replaced by John MacDonell.]

In Attendance:

Darlene Henry
Legislative Committee Clerk

Rodney Caley
Hansard Editor

WITNESSES

Halifax Rifles Armoury Association

Maj. James Jollota
President

Maj. Kendall Foster
Chair of Reactivation Committee

Capt. Edward Wheeler
Member



HALIFAX, THURSDAY, OCT. 8, 1998

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

1:00 P.M.

CHAIR
Murray Scott

THE CHAIR: I will call this meeting to order. There may be some members arrive late. There are other meetings going on so if they do, we will let them in as they come. My name is Murray Scott, I am the Chairman of this Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I am the members for Cumberland South. What we usually do is go right around the table and introduce ourselves. We already have, I know, but we will do it for the record anyway and start from there. So maybe we could start with Mr. Delefes.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Gentlemen, first of all, thank you very much for coming today. I know we have met with various committees throughout the summer and had presentations made to us. We are looking forward to your presentation today. I know we have it in print here but whoever wants to start, it is fine with us, whenever.

MAJ. JAMES JOLLOTA: I will start off, if I may. Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the Halifax Rifles Armoury Association, I would like to express our thanks for allowing us to appear before you today. We very much appreciate your support. With me today - we just introduced ourselves - it is Mr. Ken Foster in the middle. He is Chairman of the Reactivation Committee and that is the engine that drives the association in its attempt to regain our place in the Canadian militia. Ken is the immediate past-president of the association and has been with the rifles since World War II. The other gentleman on the end here is Mr. Ned Wheeler. He joined the Halifax Rifles in 1936, fought through World War II, was awarded the military medal. He joined the regiment after the war and has been a valuable member of both the regiment and the association.

My name is Jim Jollota. I was elected President of the association in May of this year. I joined the Halifax Rifles in 1953 as a private, a 17 year old, and remained with the unit until we were reduced to nil strength in 1965 as a result of a cost-cutting measure of the government of the day. I will start off by giving you a brief history of the Halifax Rifles Armoury Association followed by Mr. Wheeler and Mr. Foster will conclude.

The fact that after 33 years we are discussing this matter today indicates the commitment the association has in attempting to have the Halifax Rifles reactivated. It certainly says much about the quality of leadership of the regiment around the turn of the century. Actually, the regiment was founded in 1860 and the association in 1902. Just prior to 1900, the Armouries, as we know it today, was completed and the local militia units moved in. It was soon evident to the 63rd Regiment Halifax Rifles, as we were known at that time, that there was not adequate space for our unit, particularly the junior ranks. The regiment formed a committee and from this, an Act to incorporate the association was passed by the Nova Scotia Legislature in 1902.

The objectives of the corporation were stated as follows: to promote the social, literary, physical and military welfare of the regiment. Money was raised, property purchased, plans submitted, turned down by the minister of the militia council. Then part of the property was expropriated by the city. After much frustration and attempts to resolve the problems, then World War I broke out, 1914 the project was put aside. Eventually the money that was raised was put in a trust fund and the interest from this trust, along with ever-decreasing membership dues, is the source of our revenue today.

The association has been active over the years and since 1965 when the unit was deactivated, it has become very active. Although our membership is declining and probably our average age is somewhere in the vicinity of 65 years of age, we carry on with three main objectives and programs. Number one is a continued effort to have the Halifax Rifles reinstated in the militia order of battle, even as a skeletal, recce squadron.

Number two, the sponsorship through financial and other assistance of the 2841 Halifax Rifles Army Cadet Corps who proudly wear our regimental hat badge and our shoulder flashes. As a matter of fact, Monday evening, the chairman of the Cadet Committee and myself on behalf of the association presented a cheque to the Corps for \$700 and provided them with new shoulder flashes at an additional cost of around \$400.

Number three, last but not least, since 1960 there was a Memorial Scholarship Fund established. We have presented two to three university scholarships every year and over the years in excess of 70 scholarships have been presented. On October 29th we will be presenting three more at a get-together at the Armouries.

In conclusion, I would say that the Halifax Rifles, even though we were reduced to

nil strength over 33 years ago, are still very much contributing to our community and to Canada. We strongly feel that with a defence budget somewhere in the order of \$8.5 billion our request to again serve Canada as an active militia unit is not an unreasonable one. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr. Wheeler.

CAPT. EDWARD WHEELER: I am Edward Wheeler. I joined the Halifax Rifles in 1936. I was in the school cadets at the time. My vice-principal happened to be the Adjutant of the Halifax Rifles and he decided I belonged in the militia instead of the Halifax Rifles regardless of my age. So he told me to come up to the Armouries, which I did, and in a ceremony that lasted less than 15 minutes I became a 16 year old into an 18 year old. Since then, I became a member of the 63rd Battalion, the Halifax Rifles. I served with them up until August 1943. I went overseas with them and I was transferred to the Canadian Grenadier Guards until the end of hostilities. On my return home I rejoined the Halifax Rifles as a warrant officer and I became the regimental sergeant major and later on I became the captain and adjutant. How much time do I have?

THE CHAIR: Whatever.

EDWARD WHEELER: There is nothing more I can add. That's my complete history but even though I served in action with the Canadian Grenadier Guards my heart has always been with the Halifax Rifles. It has been part of my life, around 60 years, and we are trying to get this regiment reactivated. It is getting to the point where we're willing to settle for motorcycles with sidecars and a couple of men. It is frustrating but it is an effort that is well worthwhile. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MAJ. KENDALL FOSTER: My name is Kendall Foster. Perhaps we are not going at this quite right but we had provided to you an outline and a little history of our regiment and why we are here. This morning we brought an article that had appeared in last Sunday's Herald which was one of the bright spots in our long battle. I hope that we have enough information there for you. I will just conclude and then if you have any questions, we would be pleased to try and answer them for you.

Since 1965 there have been many studies made on the militia and on the situation as it stood when the studies were being made. Unfortunately, from our point of view these studies were in part flawed because nowhere have we had a study that looks at the militia and says what the organization and what the make-up of the militia should be. These studies have all been taken on the basis as to how are we going to cut the expenditures on the militia and never have they ever said should the Halifax Rifles be reinstated or not be reinstated. All

they're doing is looking at what they have today and how can they cut it. That's why we feel that these sort of things have been flawed.

As you know, any combat team is made up basically of the infantry as the fighting arm and the supporting power to enable them to fight. In the supporting field must be, of course, the armoured regiments, the artillery, and the engineers that make up the fighting team. In Halifax, which is the largest centre of the militia today, there is no armoured part. To me, this is like trying to train a hockey team with your forwards and your goalies in Halifax, and your defencemen in Charlottetown. There should be an armoured presence in the militia in this area to train and to help train with the other people.

There is another role that can be carried out by the armoured corps. As we have said, we realize - and we are quite pragmatic about this - that to fit out a tank regiment in Halifax would be very difficult and very costly. As a matter of fact, the only tanks in the Maritime Provinces are in Gagetown, and any of the armoured units that want to train on tanks have to go to Gagetown. Well, we have said that a better branch for us of the armoured corps would be as a reconnaissance group, even as a sub-group, half a squadron. Training could be carried out very easily, using jeep-type vehicles or four-wheel drive vehicles equipped with good radio communication facilities.

Not too long ago, when Mr. Young was Minister of National Defence, in a report to Cabinet he stated that one of the biggest challenges that Canada faces in the years to come is to protect its long shorelines and vast ocean areas from those who would misuse those areas for the smuggling of contraband or people into Canada. We have discussed this with the RCMP and while they will not, of course, try and tell the Department of National Defence what they should do, they would welcome a mobile reconnaissance unit, and it would be of vast help to them during our ordinary or normal weekend exercises to keep an eye on the coast, to spot likely landing places and where the observations points could be to watch them. If a landing was made there, how would people move the goods and so on or people away from there. The RCMP have said to us that they would be happy to have us on board.

We would also be able, of course, to give aid in any emergency situation that might arise. A lot of the reasons that we put forward - and there is no question - they are emotional, and we feel very strongly about this. I would point out to you that although a regiment might appear to be something that is a piece of paper - or an organization - it is like a good company. A company is not a piece of paper, and the only thing that makes a company operate are the people that are in it.

Just as the Halifax Rifles has been a fine regiment and a credit to the City of Halifax, as we pointed out to the mayor that the people who have served in our Rifles have included two Prime Ministers of Canada, five Premiers of Nova Scotia, five Lieutenant Governors of Nova Scotia, and many mayors of the City of Halifax.

We would like to thank you for listening to us today, and the way we feel that you could help us, you are all elected representatives of the people of Nova Scotia. You, in turn, each have Members of Parliament who represent you and your same people. Could you not put in a good word for us? Could you not talk to your MP and say, this is something that should at least receive serious consideration?

Thank you and if we can answer questions, we would be glad to try.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much and that is what we will do now. If any of the members have questions they will indicate so and we will go from there.

KENDALL FOSTER: May I add, just for a moment, I guess that you know that there was a resolution passed and introduced by Terence Donahoe some time ago. Premier Savage did write to the Minister of National Defence. When the Minister of National Defence wrote back with the standard answer that, we haven't any money, we are just cutting, we felt that maybe it would have been nicer if we could make a stronger stand. This, to me and to us, is a win, win situation: Halifax, the city on its 250th Birthday, would get its regiment back; the militia would get an armoured presence in this area, in Nova Scotia; and certainly the Halifax Rifles would be elated.

GORDON BALSER: If the Halifax Rifles were to be reinstated, would they be regular, full-time military personnel or would they be part-time reservists?

KENDALL FOSTER: Part time in the militia.

GORDON BALSER: I realize it has been some time since it was active, but what would be a ballpark cost? Obviously, the decision to do away with them was based on cost reduction. So, if it were to be reinstated, have you got an idea of what it would cost?

JAMES JOLLOTA: No, but militia units, if you are familiar at all with them, they train now one night a week and they train on the occasional weekend. Then there is a summer concentration, and maybe they are away for a couple of weeks. So, in terms of wages, it is minimal. In terms of clothing, it is in the system anyway. In terms of equipment, the militia generally gets the hand-downs and it has been traditional, in my experience, that we usually get fairly worn-out, well-used equipment. So, really there is not a huge cost there. It is really a bargain to the city and to the government. It costs very little and you are getting young people who are interested in a little bit discipline and it gets them off the street. You usually end up with a couple of useful citizens that may have otherwise gone another way, and it is money well spent. The cost, really, as you point out, we do not have a figure. We could certainly work one out probably, but in terms of what it costs to run a regular force, or a regular unit, it is very minimal. We are talking not a unit like we were, not a regiment size, it is cut down to squadron size. It must be 30 to 50 people.

GORDON BALSER: Have there been expressions of interests from people who would become involved if it were to be reinstated? Is there a waiting list, so to speak, that if it came to be that the Halifax Rifles were reinstated there would be enough interest in the public at large?

JAMES JOLLOTA: I have been speaking to the CO of the PLF the other evening. They were a sister unit of ours in the Armouries. They say they have no problems getting another company but they just do not have the money. They can only operate with a smaller group as it is now because of cost restrictions. But in a city the size of Halifax and the outlying areas and the knowledge that people have of the Halifax Rifles, there are an awful lot of people around here, be it grandfathers and fathers who would say, well, I would like my young fellow to get in the Halifax Rifles.

GORDON BALSER: Your training facility would be the Armouries, is that correct?

JAMES JOLLOTA: That is correct.

KENDALL FOSTER: General Amy and I have done a rough estimate and our feeling is that for the first year, it would be somewhere in the range of \$200,00 to \$250,000, if we could say 40 people to start off with this thing. The main cost at this point in time would be the cost of the jeeps and so on.

GORDON BALSER: So a lot of the \$200,000 would be start-up costs?

KENDALL FOSTER: Yes.

JOHN MACDONELL: I am not familiar with what militia means or how a militia is different from any other group. Could you explain that, please?

JAMES JOLLOTA: I will just give it a shot, quickly. I will take it from the top down. There is the regular force, where you are certainly on a full-time basis and they have all their benefits and so on; it is like a full-time job. The next step down is the militia. The militia are at this time, as I said earlier, are trained maybe one night a week and they have weekend exercises maybe at Gagetown or Aldershot and then the summer concentration, but they are trained up to regular force standards. It takes a little longer, certainly and they don't work at it every day; they are businessmen and so on, in the city. I guess the next step down would be the cadets corp that we sponsor. These would be children who start at 12 and they can go up to the age of 18. But the militia is the part-time business and there are a few more benefits today than there was at one time. I understand they get a few minimal benefits now but, at one time, there were no benefits whatsoever.

JOHN MACDONELL: Has there been any interest brought to you, I mean have you been approached by people saying that they would like to see this reactivated, the Halifax

Rifles?

JAMES JOLLOTA: I think it mostly has been driven by our own association which has been involved very strongly since 1965, but certainly the cadets ask the question, can we go from here to the Halifax Rifles? Of course, it isn't possible.

JOHN MACDONELL: For cadets, presently they have to go regular service, I suppose?

JAMES JOLLOTA: Well, they either go militia or regular force, if they want to continue on with a military career.

KENDALL FOSTER: There is a point that the militia very often some of the people who get their feet wet - if you like - in the army then go on to the regular force and they have had some sort of basic training. In June 1951, there was a call from the militia to provide armoured people for the Lord Strathcona Regiment who was serving in Germany. The Halifax Rifles at that time provided a complete troop, which was an officer and about 25 men that went completely, they called it Y Troop of the Halifax Rifles who went to serve with the Lord Strathcona.

I think also that maybe this is another thing if a young man is looking for a career in the army, he might want to consider whether he went into the army in the armoured corp or the infantry or engineers and so on. At the present time, he does not have any opportunity in this area to find out what it would be like or what the armoured corp do. We feel that would be helpful because certainly Nova Scotia, for its size, provides much more on a percentage-wise basis than any other province in Canada, people to the Armed Forces.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Delefos.

PETER DELEFES: Are there any other armoured squadrons in Nova Scotia?

KENDALL FOSTER: There is no other armoured unit in Nova Scotia.

PETER DELEFES: No other armoured unit in Nova Scotia at all?

JAMES JOLLOTA: The only two provinces that don't have armoured presence are Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.

PETER DELEFES: Now, apart from this sort of coastal patrol function you mentioned, would the squadron have any other specific duties to perform? What would its role be? If we are trying to promote this, we have to some sort of . . .

KENDALL FOSTER: Part of our training, of course, would be mobile training. To do that we would use wireless equipped units. My thought was that we could help the RCMP;

for example, it is just on our regular weekend training, we could look at a portion of the shoreline of Nova Scotia. With their help, they would probably, I am sure, know places that might be likely landing points. We could have a real good look at those, how you get there, and where you can watch them and so on.

[1:30 p.m.]

PETER DELEFES: Have you had any sort of official endorsements from the RCMP, anything on paper, that can be used to support your case?

KENDALL FOSTER: Not officially.

EDWARD WHEELER: The Canadian Legion, the Mounted Police, organizations like this, they are very reluctant to publicly come out and support one group of people, they talk about that as disregarding the others. If we got our foot in the door, then there are umpteen others who would want their foot in the door. We are not worried about the others, we are worried about the Halifax Rifles.

We need publicity, and we need clout at the political level. You people have the clout on the provincial level, you rub shoulders with Cabinet Ministers, whoever has the authority in Ottawa, you know these people. It certainly wouldn't hurt us if you could knock on doors and pound on desks, and say, this group deserves a little recognition. See if you can pry loose \$300,000. That is all we are asking.

JAMES JOLLOTA: Going back to the question, the organization now, the militia in this area and the brigade, and as Ken mentioned earlier, the brigade concept is armour, infantry armour, artillery, engineers. We don't have that element, that armoured element is not there. We would certainly be part of that training, along with the recce facility, we would be able to offer RCMP and those type of organizations. It would fill the training out, as it is supposed to be, if ever, God forbid, we had to put a brigade in the field. Now, we have to go to the Island or New Brunswick to find any kind of armoured presence.

THE CHAIR: Mr. DeWolfe.

JAMES DEWOLFE: It just seems to me, just sitting back listening to the conversation, that perhaps we are getting off on the wrong direction, they are just trying to link you with the RCMP. The whole idea is to have an armoured group presence that is trained and ready to roll should that need arise, that you could be called out for a situation. Isn't that correct?

JAMES JOLLOTA: That is correct.

JAMES DEWOLFE: To have the men trained, and certainly if your group could be

called upon by Ottawa to perhaps even go overseas to a conflict or a peacekeeping operation. Isn't that correct?

JAMES JOLLOTA: Yes. The militia are very much involved in that today.

JAMES DEWOLFE: Yes they are.

JAMES JOLLOTA: And they have also taken part, have you seen that article on the floods in Quebec and the ice storm, and just recently the Swissair disaster, a bunch of people were called out. You have an organized force that are disciplined, they know how to take orders, and they work together and cooperate. It is ready-made. It is not like picking a group of people out of the neighbourhood, you pick a group that are already in that mode.

JAMES DEWOLFE: And it is a low-cost way to provide that service. Is it not?

JAMES JOLLOTA: Exactly.

JAMES DEWOLFE: Other than have the full-time presence.

JAMES JOLLOTA: Exactly, and at the same time, they are training for an eventuality that sometime there may be a conflict . . .

JAMES DEWOLFE: And it is the real thing, it is not like the cadets in the sense. These people are trained and know their business. Point taken.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Balser.

GORDON BALSER: Just out of curiosity, a province the size of P.E.I., they do in fact have a militia presence? What is different, and I am not asking you to compare provinces, but what allows them to have that, whereas Nova Scotia is not able to?

JAMES JOLLOTA: They have the 17th recce, is it Ken? I believe they have been in existence for a long time. They escaped the Sutti Commission back in 1965. I am not sure, I think they are at squadron strength now, I am not absolutely sure of that.

GORDON BALSER: So basically the axe fell once and that was it? Has there been a continuous downsizing of militia presence or was it basically you were cut in 1965 and that was it?

JAMES JOLLOTA: Yes. Regiments or battalions were cut down to companies. For example, West Nova's were cut down. They had a company in Kentville and another company in Windsor, that type of thing. So it has been eaten away and there are other, as I understand it, irons in the fire suggesting there should be further cuts.

EDWARD WHEELER: They're toying with the idea of downsizing the Black Watch and the Cape Breton Highlanders. All these things are being talked about in this downsizing thing. So you see we have a formidable task ahead of us.

THE CHAIR: Just for clarification, if I understand it right, there are other militia units presently organized in this area but you're specifically talking about the Halifax Rifles?

EDWARD WHEELER: Yes. (Interruptions)

KENDALL FOSTER: There's an artillery regiment here.

JAMES JOLLOTA: There's a small engineer group. There is also what they call a service battalion. At one time it used to be the Service Corps and Ordinance and so on. Now it is one group called service battalion and all these groups like REME and Ordnance and so on are all within that group. They're active. They go in the field with people like the PLF, which is an infantry unit and the first field which is artillery but, you know, that organization isn't filled out, that armoured presence is not there, whether it is in armoured form or in reconnaissance form.

THE CHAIR: Mr. MacDonell.

JOHN MACDONELL: Yes, thank you. I guess we could debate all day as to the benefits of reactivating the Halifax Rifles and I think that maybe Mr. DeWolfe has hit on one of the best arguments for doing that. I do agree that it is probably pretty tough sledding to push forward the argument if you look at just the way the regular force has been cut in the country and probably due to the overall feel, globally, for aggression, I guess would be the best way to put it. But there definitely is a social and a recognized advantage whether this unit would work with the RCMP or with anybody else. There is even above and beyond the social, to a real practical asset there.

I don't find that it is a hard argument to try to push with anybody. I think the real push is against the present mindset, federally, that you are dealing with and that if they're even talking about cutting in other areas, then that really is a cause for concern. I think that maybe our role is to try to push for all the advantages that there would be, not only in keeping those, but also in promoting this armoured division which you said would fill out the landscape in a much better way. So, definitely, in an area that I certainly would have no knowledge of what was going on, you have helped me a lot, anyway. I would be more than happy to help in any way that I could.

JAMES JOLLOTA: That's what we're asking, I guess, is for your support and you certainly have more clout than we would as individuals, or even as an association, with the federal people and that's where the answers lie; the bottom line, I guess you could say.

KENDALL FOSTER: There's no question that if we are to be reactivated, it must be decided by the political masters of the forces that this will happen, and that's the only way it is going to happen. General MacInnes, who served here and his successor, General Crabbe, and lately General Ross, they all support what we're doing but they cannot say anything because they are being cut in every way. Somebody has to say to whoever is going to take General Ross' place, here is an establishment of 50 people specifically for the Halifax Rifles to be reactivated.

JOHN MACDONNELL: Mr. Wheeler, you had mentioned that their argument may be if we open the door for one, there will be a lot of others trying. I am just wondering what you meant by that. What other groups might also be looking for similar reactivation, or just what did you mean by that?

EDWARD WHEELER: It has been made known to me, different organizations to which we have spoken have voiced this concern, if they go on record as saying they want to support the Halifax Rifles reactivation. I have no knowledge of how many people would get their foot in the door, but it would be a few, bearing in mind that the downsizing would affect a heck of a lot of people who are presently serving in some parts of the militia now and even in some of the regular force.

JAMES JOLLOTA: We have made it very clear too that we are not trying to bump anybody else out to put ourselves in. We feel we should be added to them to make the logical, to flesh this thing out as it is designed to be.

KENDALL FOSTER: We used to have, in the Maritimes, three armoured regiments: the 8th New Brunswick Hussars, the P.E.I. regiment, and ourselves. We had an armoured brigade. At the present time, the P.E.I. regiment is down to squadron strength, we are gone, and the 8th New Brunswick is part of the total force, but they are down to squadron strength also. It makes it very difficult.

EDWARD WHEELER: We just want a piece of the pie, that is all.

THE CHAIR: I am sorry, I apologize, we have two more members that have arrived that I would like to have them introduce themselves.

HON. WAYNE Ken: I am sorry, Mr. Chairman, that I am late. We were tied up with something else, but anyway I am glad that I was able to make it. My name is Wayne Gaudet, I am the MLA for Clare.

CHARLES MACDONALD: Charles MacDonald, MLA for Inverness.

The reason behind this, why was it just the one unit in Eastern Canada that was taken out, or one armoured unit? Is there any, outside of financial, I mean, is there . . .

KENDALL FOSTER: I think in the final analysis, it came down that somebody had to go. We lost.

JAMES JOLLOTA: We were more expensive to operate too, certainly, than a regular infantry battalion because of the equipment, tanks, and the associated maintenance and so on.

CHARLES MACDONALD: And your cost on the other side, would it continue to be in the vicinity of \$250,000 to \$300,000 a year, or is that just the start-up year, or is that continuous?

KENDALL FOSTER: If we got up to 75 people, then it would probably add another \$75,000, somewhere in that order.

CHARLES MACDONALD: On a yearly basis?

KENDALL FOSTER: Yes.

CHARLES MACDONALD: So basically we need a budget in the vicinity of \$250,000 a year, just to maintain it.

KENDALL FOSTER: Right. Some of that, in the first year if we started off with zero people and ended up with 50, in effect we would have 25 people that year, so most of the \$250,000 would probably be for jeeps and wireless sets, things of that order.

THE CHAIR: Any further questions of our guests?

KENDALL FOSTER: We would like to thank you very much for this opportunity to tell our story.

THE CHAIR: Well, for myself and, I am sure, on behalf of the committee, we would like to take the opportunity to thank you for coming here today and sharing your stories and your concerns with us in regard to your endeavours to have the Halifax Rifles reinstated. As you are aware, we have met with several organizations and had several presenters previous to you, throughout the summer. Our intent is to prepare and present a report to the House with recommendations. Certainly your group and your presentation here today will be included in that report. You will be receiving copies of that report once it is prepared. I would like to say, once again, thank you very much for coming and we look forward to seeing you again in the future. Thank you.

JAMES JOLLOTA: Thank you very much.

KENDALL FOSTER: Thank you.

EDWARD WHEELER: Thank you kindly.

THE CHAIR: We have a couple of other items on the agenda. There is a letter from Mr. John Britton regarding memorial stained glass windows. Mr. Balser, I believe this is from your area, isn't it?

GORDON BALSER: Yes, it is.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to comment on that issue?

GORDON BALSER: When CFB Cornwallis was closed, some of the infrastructure was transferred to the Cornwallis Park Development Agency. Included in that building and facilities was the former church that was used to serve the people serving at CFB Cornwallis. To commemorate wartime sacrifices, they had placed in the church building stained glass windows. When operations ceased, there was a decision made to transport those windows and place them in an active church that would be used by servicemen. So the windows are currently in a church in Dartmouth.

There has been an ongoing effort to have the windows returned to the site at Cornwallis because that building is now being used to house a navy war museum and the feeling of the people involved in that is that part of the facility should include those windows to commemorate the sacrifices and the association with the naval aspect of CFB Cornwallis. When the war began, CFB Cornwallis was the training site for all navy personnel. In fact, it was the largest training site for the Allied Forces on the Eastern Seaboard. Their efforts so far have focused extensively in Ottawa, lobbying with the Minister of Defence and working through that avenue. I know the MP for the area, Mark Muisse, has raised it a number of times in Question Period in the House but to date there has been no real commitment to see that the windows are returned. So this letter was generated by the committee in the hopes that the Veterans Affairs Committee could lend their support to their ongoing efforts.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Any questions or comments?

WAYNE GAUDET: What committee . . .

GORDON BALSER: Probably it is included in here, my understanding is it is the Naval Military War Museum Committee and I guess the sub-group committee would be Restore our Windows. It is sort of an offshoot of a community group. The houses that were formerly PMQs have been purchased, by and large, by people to some degree who had had a passing association with Cornwallis. When they returned, interest was generated around having a museum there that would focus strictly on the naval history of CFB Cornwallis. So out of that group, when they saw the windows were missing, they struck a committee who have been lobbying. This gentleman who wrote this letter, John Britton, is one of the people who has been instrumental in this ongoing battle.

PETER DELEFES: Gordon, I see from the letter here that the windows were installed

in a church in Shannon Park?

GORDON BALSER: That's correct.

PETER DELEFES: Shannon Park Chapel?

GORDON BALSER: Yes.

PETER DELEFES: They have been installed actually without removing the existing windows?

GORDON BALSER: Yes.

PETER DELEFES: Well, it shouldn't be really a problem in that sense, removing them.

GORDON BALSER: There are all kinds of sides to this argument. I do know that the group who wants the windows reinstated from Cornwallis had intended to hold a media event to bring attention to the fact that the windows were housed in the church over here but it was at the same time that the Flight 111 people were returning and it was going to be used for grief counselling, and so the decision was made not to intrude upon that. My understanding of the reality is that that church is used only periodically, and so you are right. My feeling is that the rightful place for those windows would be in Cornwallis as part of a museum.

PETER DELEFES: Yes, and it seems most appropriate since it will be a museum, that the beautiful windows be returned and installed in the museum. I would certainly be in favour of that.

GORDON BALSER: I am sure the people involved would be most appreciative of that.

WAYNE GAUDET: I still don't understand, why are the windows in Dartmouth?

GORDON BALSER: There was concern that when the facility is closed that there was a risk of damage and there were a whole lot of questions about what happened to items at the base as a result of a closure. There were questions around that. I think there was a desire on the part of the military to ensure that the windows were not damaged, and that they would be moved somewhere where they would be of use. At the time that the base was closed and the windows were transported, there was no museum committee, so it looked as if the windows would be in an abandoned building at CFB Cornwallis.

After the fact, the museum people formed a committee and brought in artefacts and so, over time the museum has grown. Then when the museum became viable, they realized that the windows weren't there and they began an active lobby to have them returned as part

of the museum.

WAYNE GAUDET: I am trying to understand why the windows from Cornwallis are in Shannon Park. Were these people transferred from Cornwallis to Dartmouth? Why did the windows come to Dartmouth?

GORDON BALSER: My understanding is, and I don't profess to know the ins and outs, but I believe Shannon Park is a naval base, and so the church there had the windows because it would continue that naval kind of heritage and would be in a church that was actively being used by naval personnel. If the windows had stayed at CFB Cornwallis, they would have just been windows in an empty church.

THE CHAIR: Charlie.

CHARLES MACDONALD: Can't we approach the people in Shannon Park or in Dartmouth? For us to pick a side on this issue, I am not sure. Has the group from Cornwallis actively talked to the people in Shannon Park, if that is where they are in Dartmouth?

GORDON BALSER: I believe the decision to move the windows was a decision made by a military commander somewhere. My understanding is, at least somewhere in terms of Maritime Command, a decision was made to move those windows, and that the decision to remove the windows would equally be a decision made by commanding officers, as opposed to a community-based decision.

CHARLES MACDONALD: But, I mean, are you going to get the backlash from that community again? I guess that is what I am trying to understand.

GORDON BALSER: I am not privy to all of the discussions and so on, but it is my understanding that it is more of a military decision, the concern is being expressed at the level of the military as opposed to the community. The community is involved in the museum, but I don't know that the community of Shannon Park is involved in saying, we want the windows to stay, that would be my understanding, but I don't know for sure. You are certainly right, that before any decision is made, more information should be sought.

THE CHAIR: So, what are your wishes? Could we write Mr. Britton and tell him that we brought it forward today, and maybe express these concerns and ask him if he could clarify those for us?

GORDON BALSER: That would be a reasonable course of action, I think.

THE CHAIR: Is everyone agreed to that? Agreed. That is a request that we have had, and we have a second one. So should that be part of our report to the House with recommendations, we could base it on, depending on the response we get from him. But if

his response is favourable to the committee, should that be part of our report to the House as well as recommendations?

GORDON BALSER: If I may, Mr. Chairman. It seems to me that that is something we need to discuss here, what we do as a committee. Do we hear presentations or respond to letters and then get the information and table our report to the Legislature and then they act. That has been a gray area, I think, in light of the letter that was generated.

THE CHAIR: Okay. First of all, with the letter. We will ask Mr. Britton for further information, and we can discuss it, I guess, at our next meeting. Is that okay?

Maybe we can go on to what you were talking about there, Gordon. There was some concern that a motion was made at a previous meeting this summer and as a result there was no action taken as a result of that motion. After consultation with the committee people and as well as the Speaker, I guess originally my feeling was that we would meet, we would have presenters, we would gather that information, being an arm of the House, we would make a report back to the House with recommendations. After I got that letter, I did speak with the people on the committee and I did make an appointment to sit down with the Speaker and we talked about it. I still feel, and as a result of that, the information I received was that that would be the right way for us to do it.

I guess there are two reasons. First of all would be, that if we take one single issue and address it ourselves without going to the House, are the rest of the people who made presentations going to feel that someone else was more important to this committee than their concerns were. The second thing is, is it important just to get a letter out there or do we really want to try to help these people bring these concerns to the House, and the House as a whole, all three Parties, with a recommendation on those presenters' behalf, make a concentrated effort to try to really help them get something done. So, although maybe at the time, the thing to do maybe was to send a letter but I don't know of what use the letter itself would be without the support of the House, because we are just a committee, we are just an arm of the House.

As Chairman of this committee I did look into the matter and I still felt afterwards and after talking to the Speaker that that was the way that we should go. So I will throw it out to you people.

JOHN MACDONELL: It sounds perfectly logical what you said and I think probably a letter to that effect to whomever had raised the point that they felt nothing had been done or whatever, that they, I guess, should be aware of how the process will go and that they haven't been forgotten. That might help clarify things for them as well.

THE CHAIR: Just a matter of clarification, Darlene, we do acknowledge the presenters that were here?

DARLENE HENRY: Every person who has presented before the committee.

THE CHAIR: Maybe I have been remiss on one of these names and I usually try to make a point that we will be reporting to the House our recommendations. Maybe it has been overlooked or whatever, but to try to make sure that those people who take their time to come here, John, to present us are aware that we will be meeting, formulating a report, with recommendations to the House. A copy of that report, with recommendations, should go to everyone who has taken the time to come here and present to us.

PETER DELEFES: Mr. Chairman, as I indicated, I am going to have to run in a moment. I have to make a couple of presentations over in the Red Chamber but I expect to be about 15 minutes and I will come back if the committee is going to go on. But I would favour a report on which we consolidate all the presentations we have heard with recommendations to the House. I think that makes good sense and I would certainly favour that. I don't know whether we would start that process today or whether we will have another meeting before the House is in session to do that. I think it would take some time to discuss all the different presenters who have been here and make recommendations one way or another.

THE CHAIR: It is just a suggestion and I don't know what has happened in the past, Darlene, but I am certainly prepared myself and I am sure each one of us is, to individually go through the reports ourselves and come back with what we see as resolutions or recommendations. I think the report itself would just be, maybe a few who have been before can clarify, but the report itself would just be the occasions we met which groups and in fact what recommendations came out of each meeting. I don't know what else. (Interruption)

GORDON BALSER: I think consolidating the information and taking it to the House with recommendations of action would help to profile and heighten awareness around the whole issue of veterans' concerns. I think to some degree that is what the presenters have been looking for, is simply the opportunity to have someone listen to their concerns. So it seems more appropriate than individual letters if we make a formal statement and say, here are the issues, here are our recommendations of actions, it profiles it and there is a good opportunity there to heighten awareness.

WAYNE GAUDET: I guess I just have one question, Darlene, not knowing at this time basically what the committee will be reporting back to the House, I am just wondering, if there is someone in the House who objects to some of the recommendations that come forward, is there a process for some further discussions down the road? I am just wondering, basically, what leaves here, is that the position of the House of Assembly and if we decide whatever to react in terms of recommendations, I am just wondering, are we talking on behalf of 52 members or is this report subject to further discussion? I don't know, that's why I am asking.

[2:00 p.m.]

DARLENE HENRY: From my experience, this committee will get it ready and work on this report and go over the recommendations . . .

WAYNE GAUDET: And we submit that to the House.

DARLENE HENRY: We submit it to the House as per any other report and it gets debated. (Interruptions) Maybe it just gets tabled.

THE CHAIR: If I may, I did have a conversation with the Speaker, he said that we would prepare a report with recommendations, present it and table it in the House.

WAYNE GAUDET: Right, under Tabling Reports, Regulations and Other Papers.

THE CHAIR: For the committees but he did not indicate whether there was any discussion or any type of follow-up that may . . .

RODNEY CALEY: You could move a resolution that the committee agreed that the recommendations be adopted if you felt strongly or one recommendation be adopted. Normally, it would just be tabled. But if the members wanted to have something implemented, as they did on the National Unity, somebody would move a resolution with the items that you wanted action on.

THE CHAIR: So each individual recommendation of that report would have a resolution to get some action?

RODNEY CALEY: That should force action unless the government wanted to do it. It is up to the committee, really, and then it goes to the House to decide.

WAYNE GAUDET: You are absolutely right, Mr. Chairman, I think the committee brings back a report to the House of Assembly and then if there is anything that it wishes to be followed it should be raised separately.

THE CHAIR: Very good, thank you. We circulated a letter. We will take the second, on the agenda there was correspondence from Minister Russell on the HST Rebate War Veterans Memorial.

Basically, I guess, the Englishtown Historical Society erected the memorial and they paid the HST on the construction of this and they are looking for support in getting the HST rebated to them. A part of that is provincial and a part of that is federal.

CHARLES MACDONALD: I am not sure what the Englishtown Historical Society if they are incorporated or not incorporated under the Societies Act, but I believe they are up to

54 per cent or 50 per cent rebate regardless on the HST as a non-profit organization. I know that is what we operate in community groups and our community structures is that all our HST is rebated at I believe in the vicinity of 50 per cent. It may be a little different now, I am not sure.

WAYNE GAUDET: I think, Mr. Chairman, the committee chair or committee members should maybe do a follow-up with the provincial Department of Finance and maybe bring it back to the committee. So if we are pursuing this at this two levels, then we should know. If this basically only involves one level of government, without knowing it is hard to basically determine as committee members which action we should be taking on this matter.

THE CHAIR: Okay, so we will look for a report back at the next meeting. I can contact them on behalf of the committee if you wish. On just what Charlie said there a minute ago, I know with fire departments and I believe Legions are the same, aren't they, that they get 50 per cent.

CHARLES MACDONALD: They are basically all in the same category, 50 per cent. I am not sure if that is federal or provincial, I assume it is the federal side that is rebated but I am not sure.

THE CHAIR: I will look into this and report back to the committee. Just one other item, it is not on the agenda. I received a letter from Mr. Gaudet in regard to an issue that was raised by . . .

WAYNE GAUDET: Mr. Estabrooks, I believe.

THE CHAIR: Yes. Or Mr. Jerry Pye, whichever. Maybe you could explain the . . .

WAYNE GAUDET: Basically, the question that was raised to the committee as far as Legions across Nova Scotia, were they all exempt of paying property taxes or were there any municipal units across the province that provided exemptions and others that did not? We didn't know. I took it back to our department, we did some follow up on that matter, basically, as the letter points out, under Section 5(1)(n) of the Assessment Act, it specifically exempts property from taxation used for the purpose of the Royal Canadian Legions. So that is straight across. I guess that answers the question that was raised.

At the same time, there was some discussion about other properties that other veterans' organizations were involved with, such as the Army Navy Air Force and others. Basically what we are being told is that these types of requests can be brought forward directly to the individual municipal unit and then, at that local level, they will determine whether or not to provide that tax relief.

However, the Department of Housing and Municipal Affairs is presently undertaking

a review of the Assessment Act, as we are indicating in the last paragraph. With the amendment that is being proposed, we will be providing properties of Army, Navy, Air Force veterans in Canada with the same exemption that currently the Royal Canadian Legion is provided with.

I just wanted to provide the committee members with some points that were raised, and now that we have the information we may pursue this or whatever the direction of the committee may be.

THE CHAIR: So the way it stands today, the Royal Canadian Legion is exempt.

WAYNE GAUDET: That is correct, across the province.

THE CHAIR: And a proposed amendment to the Assessment Act is to exempt those other organizations as well.

WAYNE GAUDET: With the present discussions on the Assessment Act, I can't tell you, because I don't know when it will be coming back to the House to be amended, but presently with the review that is ongoing, we are suggesting with the amending piece of legislation that this exemption will be provided to other veterans' organizations. I think that is basically what the committee was looking at at that time, that there should be some type of uniform level playing field to all veterans' organizations.

GORDON BALSER: So the appropriate response then to the question would simply be to draft a letter that would indicate that in light of the proposed new legislation, the problem will be addressed under the new legislation rather than us trying to get involved. It seems the solution is at hand as soon as the legislation comes forward, so we don't really have to, as a committee, become involved.

WAYNE GAUDET: I think maybe what we could do is have the department prepare a letter for the chair of the committee - I forget exactly the name of the committee who were here and actually raised that - saying that presently with some review process, it is recommended that all other veterans' organizations outside the Royal Canadian Legion will be exempt from property taxes. So if that is the wish of the committee, I can certainly bring it back, prepare something for the chairman of the committee to respond to the group that made that presentation before us.

THE CHAIR: Is that agreeable to everyone? Thank you. Yes, Mr. Balser.

GORDON BALSER: I thought that you would have been in receipt of a letter that I had written but apparently not, so with the indulgence of the committee and so that you're informed and so that I don't miss any of the salient details, I will give you the abridged version of the letter that the chairman should have had. I have been involved in coordinating

an initiative that would see Grade 6 students across the Province of Nova Scotia send individual veterans a personal thank you postcard during Veterans Week this November. I have made arrangements for my office to receive 13,000 postcards that were designed by the Department of Veterans Affairs - it has been done in the past - and these would in turn be sent to all elementary schools in the province so that they could be forwarded to veterans.

The Royal Canadian Legion, the Nova Scotia Command, a contact, Mr. Fudge, is aware of the project and they have endorsed it. We also have Canada Post's endorsement to provide stamps to some degree. The purpose of the program would be to help young people develop an understanding of the sacrifice and dedication that was made as part of the veteran's wartime service in this country. It is my belief that this effort should be promoted as an initiative of the Veterans Affairs Committee with due respect being given to the Royal Canadian Legion, Canada Post, the school boards and the individual teachers who would be involved. The intent would be to promote this during Veterans Week as an activity undertaken by this committee to highlight their efforts and their sacrifice.

Basically what I have done, as I have said, is arrange for 13,000 postcards to be delivered to my constituency office, made arrangements with the Conway Workshop, which is a workshop that employs handicapped youth, to arrange for distribution to all of the school boards in the province who have in turn made arrangements to distribute them to the various elementary schools so that they would be available for release during the week of remembrance. Canada Post was unable to cover the cost of the postage. So what we have done is approach a number of corporate citizens who have agreed to cover the costs of the stamps. It is something in the neighbourhood of \$6,000. To date we have had response from Labatts, the Royal Bank, the Bank of Commerce, Ford Canada, MT&T, J.D. Irving, Hostess Foods, Agora Foods, Pepsi, Farmers, Baxters, GM, Chrysler, Michelin, Stora, and on the story goes.

The way it would work is that Canada Post would then provide peel and stick stamps. The post cards will be made available. The local legion branches are going to provide lists of veterans in their various areas so that the children, if they don't have a veteran within their own family or someone they know, will have a name so that they can forward it. What I am saying basically is that the arrangements have been made and it was my intention to bring it forward so that this committee, if they so choose, could coordinate it and perhaps use the program as a chance to highlight the work of the committee and also highlight the veterans during Veterans Week.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Gordon. I know Gordon has been working on this all summer. He has put a lot of time and a lot of effort into it. It is a real good thought. Didn't you tell me, Gordon, you had done something similar back . . .

GORDON BALSER: Actually when I was teaching in elementary school, we did this

on a local basis and it was very well received. The Grade 6 students in the area were always involved, sent postcards that were provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the response from the veterans in the area was overwhelming. It was a nice thing to do.

THE CHAIR: I think that not only is it going to show veterans that we're not only here just to come and sit and listen to their concerns but concerned enough, too, to take a project on like that. It is a lot of work and I want to thank you, Gordon, on behalf of the committee. I think it really shows the concern that you personally have for veterans in this province and I think you deserve a lot of credit for what you've done here. Thank you.

GORDON BALSER: That aside though, there is a hold on the cards, not a problem necessarily but we are in receipt of the remembrance cards and the Department of Veterans Affairs have put a hold on them until October 22nd. I am wondering, is it something that the committee would like to highlight with a press conference, where you could, as Chair, highlight the contribution of the various corporate citizens and highlight the work of this committee and in addition, highlight the activities that will be going on during Veterans Remembrance Week.

THE CHAIR: How does the committee feel?

WAYNE GAUDET: There is nothing wrong with that, it is an absolutely worthwhile project.

THE CHAIR: Okay. So maybe we could put something together, Gordon, for release, and I am sure even the groups that we have met with would probably be pleased to see that we are highlighting the fact that they have been here presenting their concerns and coming to us looking for our support. We will get together and do that then. That is great. Thank you, Gordon. Anything else anyone wants to bring before the committee? Mr. DeWolfe.

JAMES DEWOLFE: We did have some other groups listed, are we still planning to meet with some of those groups?

DARLENE HENRY: Veterans Affairs Canada is coming on October 22nd, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. I had called Everett Baudoux but he is on his way home from England. He will be in tomorrow, so I will contact him.

THE CHAIR: So what was the date, Darlene, of the next one?

DARLENE HENRY: October 22nd.

THE CHAIR: We will have to have some time here for our committee to get together and put together a report with recommendations. We probably shouldn't push too close to the end. The House is going in on October 15th and it is the following Thursday?

DARLENE HENRY: The following Thursday.

THE CHAIR: Should we go beyond that date? The Veterans Affairs representative, I thought, would be great for us to talk to. It is a lady now, isn't it?

DARLENE HENRY: Julie Babineau is coming in, and Barry Gallant.

THE CHAIR: Should we go beyond that or should we have that as the last date, and then try to get together while the House is open and get our report ready?

WAYNE GAUDET: I am just wondering basically, what is our year here? Are we finishing technically at the end of December, or are we running from April to April?

THE CHAIR: When do the committees go from?

DARLENE HENRY: Committees have been run year-round.

JAMES DEWOLFE: Well, that is what I was thinking. This isn't like the workers' compensation or the special committees. I know I have contacted Lieutenant Colonel Baudoux about coming here, and he is probably preparing to do so.

JOHN MACDONELL: I think your point is a good one. I think you have to make a decision as to how much you want to try to get before the House. If you want any kind of a report to get before the House, you will have to have a cut-off in order to get time to have it prepared. That certainly doesn't stop us from meeting with other groups and if the same is going to happen, they will have to have a report prepared for the spring session or whatever.

JAMES DEWOLFE: If I might, Mr. Chairman, I am just wondering, I assumed that this was going to continue on. I think it is important. This committee was dormant for a while. We are doing great things here, and I think it is very important, particularly to the veterans. Why can't we present an interim report to the Legislature?

THE CHAIR: That was going to be my point. I didn't mean that the committee would stop meeting, I just meant stop meeting in regard to the report that we were going to try to prepare, I would think, for this sitting. Somewhere along the line, we will have to put a report together, I would think, for this sitting, won't we?

JAMES DEWOLFE: Yes, and this is a continuation of the previous sitting. It is just all one, isn't it, this fall session? (Interruptions)

WAYNE GAUDET: I think we could certainly bring a report from this committee during the next sitting, but there is nothing that prevents us from bringing it further down the road, at the committee's wish. I would suggest bringing a formal report in at some given time.

THE CHAIR: You mean report on who we have met with so far?

WAYNE GAUDET: That is right, and continuing to report back to the House.

THE CHAIR: Without the recommendations, you mean? I guess what I am thinking is, I would like to see that the people we have met with and the recommendations we are going to make, I would like to see them go somewhere. If we don't do it during this sitting, who knows what will happen? Let's put a report together from what we have done so far. Report to the House with recommendations, and we will continue to meet and at least we will be able to deal with the ones so far. These people have taken the time to come . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIR: Okay, so we are coming back on October 22nd. I know myself, I have made some notes already in regard to the meetings we've had and trying to highlight the recommendations that are going to come from that. I just thought if we all individually did that and we got together some evening while the House is on, I am sure it shouldn't take too long to put a report together. Do you want to wait until after we meet with the Veterans Affairs representative?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

JAMES DEWOLFE: Can you tell me when we're meeting on October 22nd?

DARLENE HENRY: From 9:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m.

JAMES DEWOLFE: The Workers' Compensation Act Committee is meeting here at 9:00 a.m., October 22nd, until noon. Some of us are on that.

DARLENE HENRY: I had booked this way before workers' compensation.

WAYNE GAUDET: Some of us have a Cabinet meeting.

GORDON BALSER: So there may not be too many at your meeting. As long as the Chairman is here, I guess that's okay. (Laughter)

THE CHAIR: Let's go with that date and we will look for alternates to take our place if we can't make it.

JAMES DEWOLFE: The alternates won't know the business.

THE CHAIR: No, but this meeting is to meet with the veterans. We will have to have another meeting ourselves in regard to the report. This meeting would just be kind of the last one before we do a report.

We are adjourned. Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 2:22 p.m.]