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**REAR-ADMIRAL
JENNIFER BENNETT**

I would like to thank my gracious hosts and honorable colleagues. This seminar is a wonderful opportunity for a team of Canadians to join you today. It is an honor to be here and to share my personal experience. There was an excellent overview of the integration of women into our armed services; we hope that through our three panels we will be able to share our experiences of Canadian women in the military in the past, present, and future. The three Canadian military leaders for this conference represent those generations and perspectives across the Navy, Army, and Air Force.

I joined at a time when women were restricted to support positions. Even though I was in the navy, I was not allowed to serve at sea. One of the Canadian participants in this seminar, Major Perron, joined during the period of transition. Another participant, Major Dunlop, joined at a time of full integration and full opportunities open to women, including the deploy-

ment of women in combat. In addition to the three Canadian speakers at the seminar, another participant from Canada is Susan Prescott, a scientist who does research for the Department of National Defense and is very familiar with women's issues.

The Canadian military prides itself as a completely integrated organization where the concepts of merits, qualifications, and experience are the only criteria that govern the advancement and success of our soldiers, sailors, and air men and women. However this was not always the case, and it has taken decades of leadership, organizational change, and persistence to reach the point of a fully integrated force.

As Canadian society evolved in terms of women in the work force, so has the Canadian military. In the early years, many changes in our society involved the rights of women and career opportunities that were the result of wartime service of women who demanded and won the right to serve in our armed forces. The evolution from limited service to full integration has been a long, slow, and steady process that we are still adapting and learning from. I joined a very different military in the mid-1970s when I saw firsthand the challenges and difficulties of getting women integrated into a deeply-rooted male culture, career, and workplace. But I've also had the unique opportunity to be part of an evolution that has opened doors and opportunities for today's generation of service women.

My experiences now seem strange to those who join today's Canadian armed forces, as women are now joining a very different set of expectations, with a full range of opportunities and career options. Canadian women can now enroll in any occupation and can serve in operational trades and special operations in any environment, including combat. Canadian men and women are posted for trainings and all career opportunities in exactly the same way, based on rank, qualifications, and merit, not gender. Women have played an essential role in all of the armed conflicts in which Canada has taken part for more than a century, originally serving in women's corps that weren't actually part of our forces. But following a period of transition and change that began in the 1980s, women are now fully integrated.

Canada has a strong history of women's war service in both military and civilian capacities. The First and Second World Wars allowed women to slowly gain recognition and build experience and esteem, both inside and outside our military. The full integration of women in our military is similar to that of the rest of society, as women shifted from roles within the home to careers outside the home. However, despite the recognition of women's abilities to serve in a more rigorous trade, for a long time, the feminine mystique remained a differentiating point for many occupations across society, including the military. Historically, female workers in most professions work-

ed as juniors to their male counterparts, even when experience and seniority were equal. One measure of the amount of change brought about by the increase of women in the work force during the First World War was the increased acknowledgement of women's skills, experience, and abilities, and that they would take any opportunity offered to them and make it a success. The nineteenth-century image of women as primarily domestic and not interested in technology or world affairs quickly changed and women looked for and demanded greater opportunities.

As the Canadian ambassador commented in the seminar, it was government legislation across 1969, 1978, 1982, and 1989 that compelled the military to welcome occupations and opportunities for women. In 1987, occupations and units with the primary duty of preparing for direct involvement in military combat were still initially closed, but the minister of national defense in 1987 commissioned a study to determine whether women could serve in those types of units. Trials began, and women began to be integrated. In the initial stages of the trial period, women did not flock in huge numbers to training in operational units, particularly in combat arms.¹ Between 1989 and

¹ The Canadian armed forces define "combat arms" as "a collective term used to describe the four combat-focused occupations within the Canadian Army: armour, artillery, infantry and engineer," <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=women-in-the-canadian-armed-forces/hie8w7rm>. [Editor's Note.]

1991, a total of twenty women joined the trials as combat arms officers, nine failed or withdrew, and eleven continued their training. There were questions and complaints about different standards for women and waivers for some requirements just to maintain a critical mass of students. Concerns expressed by some in the army included the perception that women had a lack of physical fitness to carry out their duties, thus obliging men to work harder; women were less aggressive than men, thus undermining overall effectiveness and safety; and some thought that women were just less motivated to do that kind of work.

A cultural perspective and environmental challenges are collectively the biggest hurdles to overcome and require dramatic change throughout our organization. At the initial stage of integration before training even started, women were faced with obstacles and challenges, everything from attitudes to equipment. There were questions about physical abilities, mental toughness, and whether they would diminish the operational effectiveness of the Canadian forces. It was a daunting challenge that women met with pride, determination, hope, and courage, but most importantly, success. It was soon proven that cohesion and operational effectiveness were determined more by other factors such as leadership and teamwork. Specified ships and units were designated as mixed-gender for a period of transition. Unfortunately, the application of this label sometimes meant that logic as it ap-

plied to the rest of the world was lost. But we worked our way through. Women made suggestions; we reminded people that their families were integrated and that we could apply those same rules to the military workplace. In 1989, all military occupations except submarine service were open to women. Women carried purses during parades, wore white or black gloves. Unlike men, we did not carry weapons on parades; a purse was female more important. Today's modern female soldiers appear in the same context as their male counterpart.

So, where are we now? The number of officers who are women has increased from 1996 to 2012. Representation does vary by service, but each occupation has increased the number of women. The changes in the distribution of medical and support trades in our current model show the transition of women from primarily support to the opening of new occupations. The trends are also reflective of Canadian society.

To promote diversity and inclusiveness, the armed services have established representative bodies for women and monitor the progress toward achieving those goals. It is recognized that achieving this goal is a long-term objective. In the bill in force today, passed in 2010, it is 25.1 percent; we are now at 40.8 percent.

Whether the Canadian armed forces will be able to improve in representation of women depends on a number of human resource issues, not all of them

specific to gender. We need family-friendly policies and programs; we need to look at mobility requirements that have disruptive effects on families. We have reviewed *bona fide* occupational requirements not based on gender, but on operational effectiveness. We are meeting the demands of current families and dual-service couples.

Addressing the changes that need to be made to have a culture that is accepting of women is extremely important. The keys for integrating women into combat roles have little to do with physical and mental abilities, but cultural and social issues characterized by the warrior ethos that was felt to be necessary and desirable for military leaders to be successful, particularly in combat operations. Leadership styles: it was important for women in our military to embrace the fact that they brought unique and complementary skills, abilities, and perspectives into an organization and that being different wasn't a bad thing. We could be proud of our accomplishments and the changes that we were influencing, learn from our mistakes, and set an example for those to follow. Success for the first few women in their endeavors meant they had to not only be leaders, but be extremely self-confident and motivated in order to succeed because there were often no other women to guide or show them the way. To many, seeing is believing, having someone like you and seeing them in a similar role, seeing their success, so that you might know what you could achieve, is very important.

Even without a formal mentoring program, leaders at all levels, male and female, play a critical role in mentoring and encouraging future leaders. One lesson that we learned from the trials to integrate women into combat roles was that the greatest threat to combat effectiveness was the mindset of the leaders; it was their attitude toward women and minorities that affected military units. Upon initial integration, we needed to introduce new training and education and introduce policy changes. There were some differences that we needed to consider.

Culture and environment in which operations were conducted continue to be a hurdle in some of the nations where we serve. There remains this question of critical mass: what is the right number? Should women go through training separately or together? We found generally that female classes going through training together as a separate group were highly competitive and not always supportive; integrated teams were generally more successful. For us, mixed gender was better in the long run. So it's encouraging to note that Canadians are finding a place across our armed forces for women to have leadership positions in our units and around the world.

Women serving in international businesses and government posts serve as an example to not only other military members, but to women of the countries in which we have served. Women joining the Canadian armed forces today are doing so as equal partners

and are entering an organization that has experienced a great deal of change in recent history. They are excelling in leadership and command positions. They are serving in positions from private to general and flag-officer rank. The Canadian Armed Forces have learned a great deal about women from active participation over the last century, and as Canadian society evolves, so does the Canadian military.

And although Canada may be ahead of the curve internationally, we are still not completely there; it's a work in progress. The Canadian forces are making positive strides to create an environment that is seen as attractive to all women. We continue to do research projects, outreach, and other programs to increase the number of women who choose to join. The history of Canadian women in the armed forces is an important part of our national military heritage. The accomplishments of these women have contributed to the full inclusion of women in our society and national institutions. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as a trailblazer in our military: both a humbling and a bit of an overwhelming experience. Canadian women are now proudly serving across all of our environments. Thank you.

