

# Lieutenant-General RICK HILLIER

## Experience is Shaping Army Transformation

*Gaining trust of the Afghan people is an important tool with which to further the stability process.*



Appointed as Chief of the Land Staff (CLS) in May 2003, LGen Rick Hillier served in Afghanistan as Commander of the multinational International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2004. Combined with his previous experience in volatile countries, he is well positioned to tackle the prickly job of transferring the lessons learned while fighting rebel forces, to the Canadian Forces (CF) transformation process. A dynamic and well-respected leader, he has a clear idea of what the CF can become, and seems to be keen to get things in motion. He recently met with our editor, Chris MacLean, to discuss how his front-line experience has been influencing and guiding the new Army transformation and regeneration.

Reflecting on his time in Afghanistan has served to “crystallize” recent experiences from dangerous missions such as Afghanistan and Bosnia into an understanding of the new security dynamic prevalent today. For one thing, he says that “warfare today is undeniably and vastly different – not only structurally, but in the way soldiers were trained and prepared in past decades and centuries.”

For another, he believes that “as a part of the western advanced industrialized economically sound world, Canada has a responsibility to help bring stability to areas that are inherently unstable.” And if we can’t do that, “those areas will end up generating instability that will be delivered to us in various forms, whether that is direct attack or a different method, it will still affect us just as much.” LGen Hillier often cites the example of recent insecurity, instability and chaos affecting the price of oil.

“Doorstep defence, as a sole option, is not an option in this very wealthy country in which we live.” By that, he means that if you simply defend your perimeter, you will not be successful in defending your country in the long run. However, by bringing stability to unstable regions, you can effect long term security. “We are talking failed or failing states, usually with destitution and poverty as factors within that,” says Hillier, “and unless we help bring stability to those places and the centres of population within them, then we are not going to be successful in effecting stability around the world.”

How can we help make that happen? “You do that by projecting power into the centre of the population mass, otherwise

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known as complex terrain [cities]. Given our very enviable position in the world and our enviable lifestyle,” he continues, “what I believe we have to do, as a country, is to empower citizens of these failed states to regain control of their lives and their government in a stable environment.”

### 3-BLOCK WAR

“It all comes down to the three block war,” explains LGen Hillier. “You are fighting in *Block One*, while simultaneously helping secure, stabilize and nation-build in *Block Two*, and all the while, you are also helping people through disaster relief, humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping in *Block Three*. The important part is that you are doing all three simultaneously using complex training in the centres of population.”

The Army has done a lot of work on the transformation to date, but that effort has been focussed primarily on block one, the fighting force. According to the CLS, “we have not put sufficient intellectual energy, and resources, and work toward the other two blocks specifically, and then all three blocks together.” This appears to be one of the LGen Hillier’s main transformation priorities. He says the three-block war concept will “significantly alter how we structure, how we prepare, how we command, how we train, how we operate and how we sustain ourselves.”

To illustrate this, he explains some of the ways in which the Army must alter its concept of how to command: “When you are doing just the fighting portion of command it is easy to show a friendly force as an arrow on a map moving to the middle of an enemy concentration painted in red. You can see it clearly taking place and it helps you get an understanding of the situation so that you can make accurate decisions that will help ensure success. But when you are in the middle of that centre of population, and you are living among friendly people, but you are also living among people who are trying to kill you and trying to ensure that you are not successful in bringing stability, it is much more difficult to portray that in a digitized command format that can help you understand the situation and make those intelligent decisions.

“The vast majority of our command support work has previously all been focussed on block one, and now we have to take into account the complexities of



*As commander of ISAF, LGen Hillier greets children in the foothills of Afghanistan.*

blocks one, two and three – all done simultaneously.”

Simultaneous performance of the three blocks is fundamental to this new vision. In preparing to execute a fighting operation “you must also deal with the other two blocks at the same time or the sustainment may be interrupted,” he says. “You are dealing with police, you may be involved with crowd or riot control, you may have NGOs added to the equation, all these are going to be a factor.”

Many of the lessons learned from the Afghanistan mission are not new, they seem to be a combination of lessons that CF members have learned in recent years during operations such as IFOR in Kosovo and SFOR Bosnia. But for LGen Hillier, and possibly many others, these experiences and lessons crystallized with the Afghanistan mission.

### MULTINATIONAL STRENGTH

Multi-nationality is going to be fundamental to all future operations.

“Everything we do is going to be multinational,” Hillier confirms. “Every single direct action against terrorists that we performed inside of ISAF involved a minimum of eight nations. At one point or another, Canadian soldiers and units in Afghanistan worked with each of the other 36 nations that were part of ISAF.”

Adjusting how the Army trains in order to be able to operate more efficiently and effectively in these multinational roles, even at the very low tactical levels, is incredibly important to the Army transformation vision.

### MULTI-AGENCY

The CLS is very clear about Canada’s role in Afghanistan. “We were supporting the Afghan government on the road that they were trying to lead the country – for increased stability and a better life for Afghans. That’s a different role than what we normally train to, where we take the lead and execute completely.” But ISAF was operating in an area with some 1500 non-government organizations (such as the United Nations, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, les medecins sans frontières, and some very small agencies, and was obliged to try to coordinate efforts. “What we did had a direct impact upon them, one way or the other, good or bad, and what they were doing certainly had an effect upon us, and we saw their work as being fundamentally essential to our end state.” Military assistance is a temporary security window, he says, and those agencies are working to “help build the police force, build the economy, build the rule of law, build a justice system, to provide the ability to sustain that. So we saw their work as absolutely hand-in-glove with what we were trying to achieve, and therefore we had to make sure we support them to be successful too.

There were complications. Some agencies were harder to work with than others. Sometimes honourable intentions were complicated by discord with the Afghan government’s direction.

Sometimes the problem was inefficiency, as in the construction of a hospital in one small community being funded by three different organizations while other communities had no funding.

Coordinating military forces with the international and civilian organizations is a challenge, but it’s becoming a fact of life. According to LGen Hillier, it’s one of the areas where Canada needs to better prepare CF members – through education at the staff colleges, professional military institutes, and training sites preparing for the mission. He suggests that having the various groups working together during training ops can offer the best combination of capabilities. However, that can be difficult, as “some organizations simply don’t want to have anything to do with us, we understand that, but at the same time they need to understand that we are going to co-exist in the same location and hopefully work towards the same ends whether they want to coordinate it or not,” he says, matter-of-factly.

## BASIC TRANSFORMATION

There are some clear priorities for the army regeneration and transformation. “What we will be going through over the next 18-24 months is putting the army, the land force component of the CF on an assembly-line process to produce the task forces, the headquarters, and all the enablers that we need to conduct operations, so that it will be come a systematic, routine way of doing business. We will know that each year we will produce this number of task forces, they’ll have within them specific modules (sub-unit levels, infantry, etc.), and we will know months and years in advance, exactly what capabilities we are producing for foreign or domestic operations. We need it to be predictable.

“Our soldiers and their families will benefit from that predictability. It is fundamentally important to be able to schedule your life.

“The next 18-24 months, as we get into the process of generating units, bringing them to a certain level of readiness at the sub-unit level, then advancing to the Manoeuvr Training Centre (CMTC) in Wainwright, and bringing them to complete readiness, we are also transforming at the same time by incorporating new technology and lessons learned to produce a task force that’s ready to go into operation.

“It will be a modular system, so that we can build a task force based on the right mix of subunits and enablers to fit the exact mission, no matter where it is. Both CF leaders and the Government of Canada will know its full capability.

“I think that predictability is fundamentally important. From the regeneration phase we get the process in place, incorporate the new technology and start producing the task forces that are ready to go into operation with all the enablers and train so that they can be task-tailored to the exact kind of job – whether it’s streets of Kabul or Africa or any other mission that our Government, representing Canadians, decides we need to play a part.”

## Feedback from Within

Will soldiers embrace these departures from the traditional set up? LGen Hillier believes that Canada’s soldiers will recognize this as a structured realization of the *ad hoc* procedures that have been developing over the past few years. The restructuring is intended to formalize, enhance

and strengthen training systems, incorporate technology and build successful units that can perform missions from within a well-qualified system. He is convinced that soldiers will embrace this new system and wonder what took so long. “What we are doing is putting flesh to the skeleton of the words that were in the Army Strategy,” he explains. “We are going to build a force structure that can be an incredibly powerful tool... we are going to have people who are trained, educated, experienced, equipped and prepared as a team to go in and be successful at doing whatever needs to be done.”

The restructuring is intended to be strategically relevant to Canada’s needs for the next 20-25 years. “But we also have to be tactically capable on the ground when we arrive,” he says, “and that’s why we are undergoing a series of changes and acquisitions to make sure that our direct fire capabilities in particular are the kind we can deploy no matter what scenario, that they can be effective across all blocks, and can give us the kind of direct fire we need – for a deterrent, for survival, and for fighting to win – no matter what circumstances we encounter.”

It is expected to take a while to mature the complete process, but LGen believes that, as they depart the training centre at Wainwright after completing a battle group rotation or brigade exercise, soldiers will consider themselves better prepared than they have ever been.

“It is a change for our regimental families,” he admits. “No longer will we be sending up one complete battalion of a regiment, because we can’t continue to maintain that if it’s five, 10, or 12 years, such as occurred in the Balkans. You are not going to have one regiment projecting a battalion out on an operation, complete,

and then bringing it back in. It’s going to be a change. You are going to have a piece of that organization go out, sometimes it will be the battalion headquarters, sometimes it will be one of the companies or squadrons, one of the sub-units or other bits and pieces of it, and that is a significant change.”

Until now, the entire regiment made a cohesive unit; they all went off to war together, came back together, and prepared to do it all over again. The new system sounds more like a modern family, with members heading out on different missions before returning home.

“The challenge is that the regimental families and the system have to adapt themselves to be able to do that kind of thing. That’s going to cause some stresses and strains, and we are well aware of that. I believe there is a powerful role for the regimental family here, but it’s going to be different. We simply need to adapt to get the best of what the new security dynamic requires that we do, and the regimental family can ensure that we link with our tradition of excellence and that we continue to have that regimental family as a caring heart for our soldiers and their families too. But it is a change, this is not the way we have done it for the past 50, 60 or 100 years. The regiment allows its members to get through the very difficult times, but we are going to need the regiment to play a role which is slightly different than the one we’ve been playing all along. That’s going to take a while.”

## ACQUISITIONS

“Priority number one for me – crystallized after Afghanistan – is tactical airlift,” states Hillier emphatically. That’s not an unusual statement for an Army commander. Without tactical airlift, there is no bridge into that mission. “We know across the Canadian Forces that we have a challenge with our C-130 fleet, and we need to ensure that we have a tactical airlift capability that can maintain that lifeline to wherever we are going to be conducting operations on behalf of Canada.”

Priority number two? “There is clearly an overwhelming requirement for heavy lift in-theatre. We have certain capabilities with the Griffin helicopter fleet we now have, but what we need truly is a heavy lift aviation capability to project power inside the theatre and move it around. For



Members of 3 R22nd R BG prepare for a reconnaissance patrol in Kabul.

PHOTO: SGT FRANK HUDEC, CANADIAN FORCES COMBAT CAMERA



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*Canadian gunners with Task Force Kabul prepare to board a German CH-53 helicopter during Op ATHENA, Canada's contribution to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).*

example, during this mission we used the German CH-53, which is a massive helicopter, but it's 30 or 40 years old now, and very hard to maintain. You cannot always depend on your allies or coalition partners to bring that capability – or for it to be available when you need it.

“There’s no doubt that in these kinds of missions, you need to project power around the theatre – be it soldiers or weapons systems or a whole variety of things and the way to do that is with aviation – and light helicopters don’t meet the requirement. You need something to take a load, either a platoon of soldiers or sling a gun underneath it, and lift it some significant range, such as a couple of hundred miles to be able to deploy, and then you refuel and carry on further than that; but the lift and weight it can carry and cargo space is important. For conditions like Afghanistan, you need something that can do much more than what our Griffins can do. It really would be tremendously valuable to have that heavy helicopter lift ourselves with our deployments into those centres of population for sure. Something along the lines of those CH-53s is magnificent, but we need something that is obviously much newer. It gives you a capability and flexibility which really helps you set the conditions for success.”

Priority number three: “Without question, the direct fire piece is a fundamental part of reducing the new level of risk on missions that we are deploying on now. We have to be prepared to face down, deter and deal with whomever we encounter when we arrive – from militia forces to terrorist groups or suicide bombers. The mobile gun system, a direct fire cannon on a wheeled armoured vehicle (the LAV chasis), was announced by the Minister just over a year ago and is a fundamental part of that need. The U.S. is developing that system, and we feel it meets our requirements exactly.

“We also need the Tube-launched Optically-tracked Wire-guided (TOW) missiles put on the LAV III (the main fleet for our medium weight army).

“And we need to take the ADATS (Air Defence Anti Tank System) that was prioritized for air defence, and convert it to a ground attack system that will reach out with precision and lethality to strike a target at distances up to or beyond 8km, because that is where the threat is now.

“If we have those three systems together, we’ve got a direct fire capability which is world class and will allow us to be effective in that three block war.

“Beyond that, the ISTAR piece, inclusive of the command and control piece, is

fundamental to everything we do. All of our operations have to be focused on achieving a very real effect and must be conducted with knowledge. So we have to have the intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance assets linked to our command support system to allow everyone from the most junior soldier to the most senior commander to understand the same information and make smart decisions about what to do next and how to be most effective.

“In the slightly longer term, what we need is a long range indirect fire capability that has terminal guidance and fits in our medium weight fleet, and that is not yet on the market. We just don’t see a system there right now that we would want. And we are talking extremely long range here, so if you have an area with low manoeuvrability you can cover that entire area. That requirement is a little further out simply because we don’t see the kind of systems that we desperately need. We’ll take some risk in the shorter term here as we wait to see what developments will lead us to on those indirect fire systems.”

## COMMAND CAPABILITY

Because of Canada’s many missions in the past decade, LGen Rick Hillier is confident that Canada is well suited to take command of multi-national missions like ISAF because the CF has “many experienced, knowledgeable and trained personnel who are practiced in multi-national operations and used to working with many other countries and disparate cultures, and languages, and ways of doing business that you get when you mix in 37 different nations.”

We even have experience working alongside countries that we were previously assisting. LGen Hillier recounts the tale of a fire at the Canadian Embassy in Afghanistan, when the ISAF fire department, consisting of Bosnians, responded to the emergency, they were escorted to the site by a Croatia Military Police platoon. “Every Canadian soldier will recognize that as a sign of success from a previous mission,” he says with obvious pride.

“We’ve done this, we teach this, we train this and I think our Canadian characteristics allow us to do this well. We are very comfortable dealing with ambiguity, where things are not specifically black or white, we can deal with civilians and mil-

itary together, we are experienced in dealing with multi-national, multi-factional, and multi-ethnic groups. Then you add the fact that, of those 37 nations, Canada's contribution to ISAF was the second largest (after Germany). Not only were we well suited to play a lead role in command of that mission, but I think it was our right almost to have command of that mission. Our contribution to Afghanistan has been huge, well seen by the Afghans themselves who look upon Canadian soldiers as saviours, well seen by the Afghan Government, who appreciate immensely what we as a country have done over there and I think it was appropriate that Canadians should be part of the command of ISAF this past year."

When asked if Canada should narrow its focus on choosing foreign initiatives, the CLS diplomatically defers to government decision-makers. But he does admit that after serving on numerous missions, he gets somewhat frustrated when "Canada's enormous contributions are not always focused geographically or functionally, and as a result, our contributions do not always get the *profile* we deserve, and as a result of that, the *credibility*, and as a result of that, the opportunity to *influence* those missions the way we should." He is optimistic, however, that a new understanding of that process is growing, and that Canada will begin to focus more and therefore get the profile and credibility to influence matters in accordance with Canadian values. "And I think we saw that occur in Afghanistan where we did have a significant focussing of the Canadian Forces' assets to give a high

profile that resulted, obviously, in us getting an opportunity to have command of ISAF and I think that is a highly recommended way to get the best profile we can for that Canadian flag and, as a result, get a chance to recognize Canada's interest in that region and then work towards achieving those interests."

## NATO

LGen Hillier believes that Canada needs NATO. "We use it superbly, and need it still to help balance our relationships with the United States and the rest of Europe. We should be a driving factor in ensuring that NATO succeeds in transforming itself into a flexible and agile institution, able to conduct missions in this new security dynamic." He is impressed by the energy being put into that effort by current Secretary General of NATO, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, the former Dutch Foreign Minister, "but NATO will be what the 26 nations want it to be, and if they want it to be successful they will provide the forces and drive the transformation to success. Canada's contributions over this past year have already played a huge part in helping NATO be successful, but the other countries will also have to play their role. This is a challenge, it's not easy."

## SIMULATION

"Simulation is more important than ever before because of one reason, we have moved now from this traditional set piece battlefield into one that's entirely changed," states LGen Hillier. "We no longer have terrain wargame scenarios, we don't know what a brigade may look like when we put it together. It'll be multinational, that's the only thing we know for sure. Whether it will have one, two, or three task forces depends upon the mission itself, we don't know how large a piece of ground it will occupy, or what we'll have to do there, and the threat could be anything from a suicide bomber to a well-armed militia force. So now, instead of being able to lay out a structure based upon the ground, we've put all those threats together and select a structure based on very subjective judgement of those threats. For reconnaissance operations, we're now saying 'here are the kind of threats we have to deal with, it's going to be part of a center of population, and here's the kind of structure

you're going to get.' And then we take that model and put it through all the simulation that we can against those threats to confirm how valid an action would be. So almost completely we've reversed the process of how we get into the structure and we kick out the door. The modeling and simulation part becomes absolutely essential to having the right kind of organization with the right kind of preparation in place to do the job when we need it done, more so than ever before."

Young, computer-literate soldiers are taking to this aspect with great ease. This isn't new to them and this is just part of their lifestyle. "They see the value of it instantly, they adapt to it instantly, and are ready to use it to the fullest degree," Hillier confirms. "In fact, they make folks like myself seem like dinosaurs."

## ADAPTATION

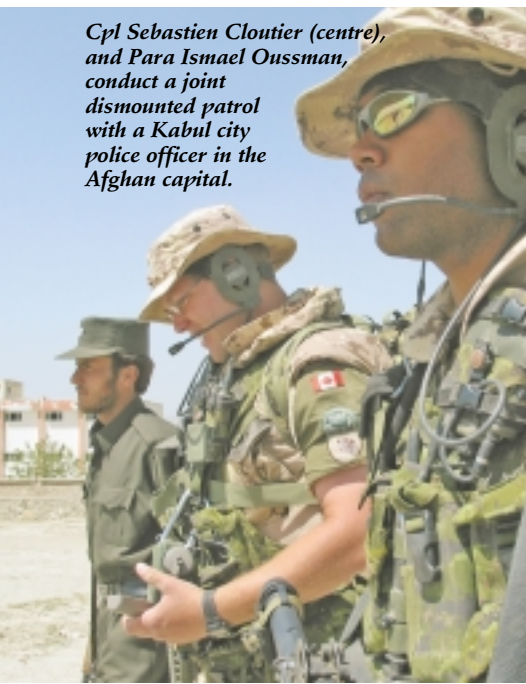
Adaptation to these new technologies and other changes is perhaps hardest on those in those midway through their careers. This group, now advancing to the leadership and command roles across the land force, is coping with a huge change from the way things were handled in the past, to today's new vision.

"The young soldiers adapt quickly," he tells us, "it's those folks in the middle to later part of their careers who now see a significant change coming. But I will tell you, and this is from the heart, we watch Canadian soldiers, officers and NCO's in that melange of 37 nations, and Canadians stand out, without question – as being able to think, as being able to cast their horizons wide open and not be constrained by tradition or other baggage.

"They are adept at incorporating all the disparate parts of a team and getting them all focused on working towards achieving the effect that we want. They are able to do this in a professional manner which kept people on side with positive effect and reduced negative effect all at the same time. Whether it was a young NCO running a patrol on the streets of Kabul, or whether it was a senior colonel trying to orchestrate operations across the entire mission (working with staff, the UN, and various diplomatic communities), those Canadians stood out. We have an advantage in having these capable, smart, educated, imaginative, agile and experienced people in place to do it. No question about that whatsoever."

Cpl Sebastien Cloutier (centre), and Para Ismael Oussman, conduct a joint dismounted patrol with a Kabul city police officer in the Afghan capital.

PHOTO: SGT FRANK HUDEC, CANADIAN FORCES COMBAT CAMERA



Every hour of every day, at the Wainwright Training Centre, the CF is training to the three block war – all three blocks simultaneously. The Weapons Effect Simulation (WES) is an integral part of the training, and it has already begun. The WES allows Canada's military to train with real cause and effect. It allows you to see the effects of your actions so that you can adjust your training to get the effect that you want. The first site acceptance test in late October 2004, demonstrated this ability. The first tests ran the combat team through scenarios, and then checked system performance. It becomes obvious that even one person can actually make a difference and every decision can have an effect on the out-

come. When something goes wrong you can go back through with the observer controller and determine why it occurred, learn from it, and apply those lessons to the next training scenario.

The end product will be a task force that can roll through the program and come out ready to go on operations anywhere in the world “and they will be more prepared – both as a team and as individuals, from the commander right down to the most junior soldier, across the officers, the NCO's, and senior soldiers – more prepared than they've ever been before in the history of the Canadian forces to do what we ask them to,” LGen Hillier says with confidence.



*LGen Hillier, Chief of the Land Staff.*

### **WRAP UP:** by LGen Rick Hillier

I'd like to summarize. Through the transformation process, we're going to become a land force that's visibly relevant to what Canada needs in order to help bring stability around the world to places that aren't stable and to be available for emergency response in Canada if it's needed here.

We're building a land force to be visibly relevant because it is important. We also want to build a force that can do the job that we ask it to do. When you arrive in a place like Afghanistan, all those folks who have been fighting all their lives immediately recognize you for what you are – either you are a professional military force or a disorganized rabble.

If you are the former, the difficulties that you encounter in conducting your mission are dramatically reduced because you are seen as being capable and this has a deterrent effect. People are less prone to challenge you because they realize that there will be some difficult things occur. On the other hand, if you're seen as a disorganized rabble, your job is much more difficult.

Our commitment is to be relevant to what Canadians want, and we are going to be capable on the ground and have what our soldiers need when a condition is set for them.

There's a connection here that Canadians have gotten away with ignoring for far too long. And that is the fact that these are not my soldiers, they are Canadian soldiers, and they are the sons and daughters of Canadians, the husbands and wives, mothers and fathers in fact, they're neighbors, they're friends or just someone they met down the street. Canadians have to start taking a direct interest in those soldiers who become their credentials around the world. We ask them to do a lot, we ask them to do it in very dangerous situations. And those young men and women, who are representing us while walking those dirty, dangerous streets, have to be certain that every single Canadian is walking with them.

Figuratively, that has not been occurring, the soldiers don't feel valued, don't feel they are being perceived as a national resource, a national treasure, and in my opinion, that's exactly what they are, and they've proven it time and again.

Canadians need to take ownership, these are your soldiers, they are tremendous credentials and the rest of the population of Canada needs to recognize that. ■

“The center of gravity for our commanders is the Manoeuvre Training Centre and clearly part of that is the weapons effects simulation. If you're very good at it you will see the effect because someone's beeper will be going off, and if you aren't very good at it your beeper will be going off, and then we will walk through why that occurred or why that occurred needlessly. It will change the way we train to reflect the realities of life, we have not had that opportunity in detail before, so this is a significant step for us.

“But it will be also more expensive. Simulation when you're yelling ‘bang bang you're dead,’ you issue somebody 100 rounds and that's it for like a week, a machine gun belt of ammo. And so they fire a few rounds and ration the rest to make that belt last as long as possible, but you're simulating the fact that you're carrying on shooting at somebody. Well, the weapons effect simulation system only works when you fire rounds. If you want to train realistically, it has a cost.”

### **BUDGETARY CONSTRAINTS**

Speaking of cost, the CLS is blunt. “We have no choice, we have to. We owe it to Canadians, who entrust us with their sons and daughters, to ensure that they are as well prepared as humanly possible before being put into those dirty and dangerous places to do things on behalf of our country, and we cannot do less than that. So is there a cost, and we will enter into some difficult discussions about how we will be able to meet that cost, yes. But we cannot do less. That includes the use of things such as the WES and I believe it will mean that funding may have to shift from other programs. How much? Where? When? There will be lots of discussions, but we cannot fail, and I believe we won't fail to do everything possible to set our soldiers up for success when we ask them to do something that's extremely difficult and extremely risky and ask them to do it on our behalf. We've got to give them every leeway we possibly can, and that includes the training part, and that includes the simulation piece – and it has got to be done with common sense too, so we're not just [wasting] money,” he adds candidly. “What we want to do, is do it right, do it intelligently, and do it with common sense to get the maximum effect on behalf of our soldiers, on behalf of Canada.” **FL**