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Mr. Steven Blaney

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• (0905)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Order, please.

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this 22nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Today we begin a new study, which should normally be quite brief. So on the agenda we have the study of the Official Languages Program Transformation Model and training of francophone recruits in the Canadian Forces. For that purpose, we will be hearing, for the first time in the Standing Committee on Official Languages, from Mr. Pierre Daigle, who is the National Defence Ombudsman. He is here with Mr. Denis Egglefield, who is Director of Investigations.

We are pleased to see you this morning. Without further ado, I'll invite you to begin your opening remarks.

Mr. Pierre Daigle (Ombudsman, Office of the Ombudsman, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to thank the committee for inviting me here this morning to discuss the treatment received by unilingual military members at Canadian Forces Bases Borden and Gagetown and St-Jean Garrison. As you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, I am here with Denis Egglefield, who was the director responsible for this investigation.

Mr. Chairman, with your permission, I would like to begin by saying how honoured I was to have been appointed ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces in February 2009.

The office has helped to bring about real, positive and lasting change for all members of Canada's Defence community over the past decade. And it has served as an important tool of openness, transparency and accountability. As ombudsman, I am determined to uphold this fine legacy. And I am absolutely committed to ensuring the fair and equitable treatment of all of the members of our Defence community—including, in this case, unilingual members of the Canadian Forces.

Over the next few minutes, I will update the committee on the work undertaken by the office in the area of official languages since Ms. Mary McFadyen, the interim ombudsman, appeared before you in March 2008.

Now I'm going to give you some brief background. As committee members may recall, the ombudsman's office conducted an

investigation at Canadian Forces Base Borden in 2007 after the previous ombudsman, Mr. Yves Côté, found that unilingual francophone members were experiencing significant difficulties working, training and accessing essential services in their first official language.

During the interim ombudsman's appearance at this committee in 2008, Ms. McFadyen indicated that the ombudsman's office was in the process of verifying the progress that had been made in addressing these problems following a visit to Borden by investigators in January and February 2008. The interim ombudsman also informed the committee that investigators had been dispatched to Canadian Forces Base Gagetown and St-Jean Garrison to determine if unilingual Canadian Forces members there were experiencing the same types of difficulties in getting access to training and services in their first official language.

[*English*]

Following the visit to Gagetown and Saint-Jean, Ms. McFadyen wrote to the Chief of the Defence Staff to inform him of a number of serious problems that were identified by ombudsman investigators. Generally speaking, Mr. Chairman, the office found that the concerns at Gagetown and Saint-Jean were similar in nature to those at CFB Borden. At Gagetown, francophone members were having difficulty accessing training and basic services in their first official language. More specifically, there was a lack of bilingual instructors and training materials, and many Canadian Forces members were simply unaware of their official language rights. At Saint-Jean, anglophone members were having difficulty accessing services, including health care services, in their first official language.

Concerning CFB Borden, on August 6, 2008, Ms. McFadyen wrote to the Chief of the Defence Staff to report on the progress that had been made in addressing the office's concern regarding the treatment of unilingual francophone members at that base. She informed him that investigators had observed a number of improvements, including an increased level of awareness of language rights as a result of the creation of a section on the base's website dedicated to official languages and the appointment of an official languages champion.

At the same time, however, Ms. McFadyen made it clear that many of the most serious concerns raised by the office still had not been resolved, including, in the area of training, the availability of essential services in both official languages and access to second-language assistance and training.

• (0910)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chairman, even though I have only been the military ombudsman for just over three months, I find this unacceptable. The Canadian Forces had a year and a half to address these issues of fundamental fairness and simply did not do enough.

In her August 2008 letter to the Chief of the Defence Staff, the interim ombudsman advised him that the outstanding systemic issues were being referred to the Commissioner of Official Languages given that his office was beginning an audit of training establishments within the Canadian Forces. The commissioner's mandate also enables him to examine all aspects related to official languages, including compliance with the Official Languages Act.

In referring outstanding concerns to the Commissioner of Official Languages, the interim ombudsman highlighted two areas of critical importance. The first was related to training. As a result of insufficient numbers of bilingual instructors, a lack of quality training material in French, and a lack of available French courses, francophone students were not being provided equal access to training opportunities, consequently delaying their career progression.

The second area of importance related to services. More specifically, the office found that a number of essential services—including medical and police services—were not available to Canadian Forces members in their first official language at Borden. The office also found serious health and safety issues at Gagetown and St-Jean regarding the communication of food allergies, the conduct of fire drills, and the commands provided on firing ranges.

[*English*]

After becoming the ombudsman in February of this year, this case became my top priority. I met with the commissioner in April and informed him that we will continue to assist his office in addressing systemic problems related to official languages.

I'm also committed to monitoring the progress made in implementing our recommendation and dealing with all individual complaints regarding official languages. I will be paying particular attention to any linguistic challenges faced by Canadian Forces members when I visit Borden, Gagetown, Saint-Jean, and any other military establishment installation across the country in the coming months.

[*Translation*]

In closing, I believe that this is an issue of fundamental fairness for the men and women of the Canadian Forces. It is essential that all Canadian Forces personnel receive equal opportunities to training and equal access to services, no matter their first language. At this time, we stand ready to provide any assistance that we can to the committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you for that introduction, sir.

We'll now hand over to Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for being with us, Mr. Daigle.

After hearing your comments, I must admit it is extremely disturbing to see the current situation. It's as though there are headquarters staff people who aren't taking language issues seriously.

Earlier you talked about problems related to health, food allergies and evacuation exercises. All the situations you referred to are common in the lives of military members. One would say that it's taken for granted that people are supposed to know exactly what to do when there is a fire alarm, for example. It's no longer a matter of language. At some point, you have to be there, to show people what to do and to protect their health.

Imagine the problems that can arise when you're not able to obtain care in your mother tongue. That's previously been said in this committee. We've often cited the example of a somewhat older person who does not know the other language, who arrives at the hospital and cannot explain the nature of his illness. He may obviously wind up with medication that can do him more harm than good.

Today we're talking about appreciably the same things, but with regard to our military members. We're hiring people to serve the country and assigning them various duties, whether it be here in Canada or abroad. However, we aren't in a position to offer them basic services in their first language. We can't even ensure we care for these people in the language of their choice.

The situation regarding the transmission of orders on firing ranges is even worse—I previously raised that point with the former Minister of National Defence. Imagine, Mr. Daigle, that a problem may arise on a firing range and people can't clearly hear orders, as you said. What kind of disaster could we witness? That's one thing.

I also cited another example to the minister at the time. I told him to imagine that we sent men and women on a combat mission overseas, as is currently the case. If those people don't understand the orders they are given because we don't have the tools to speak to them in their mother tongue or in the language of their choice, whether it be English or French, what could happen? The lives of these people are at stake, the lives of ordinary citizens.

We're jeopardizing the lives of our military members and we don't even seem to be taking that seriously. You spoke eloquently. It was clear that you do not seem absolutely satisfied with what is going on. That's normal, since we don't have to accept this kind of situation.

The people at the head of the department, on staff, should be more serious in their work. I don't think they understand the importance that must be attached to respect for both official languages across the country, and more specifically to the duty to offer basic health services in the language of the soldier, anglophone or francophone, regardless of where he or she is.

Imagine giving military members orders on a firing range, in the field or in a war situation. In that context, what kind of dramatic situation could we be facing?

Do you think these kinds of things are acceptable?

•(0915)

Mr. Pierre Daigle: Thank you, sir.

As I was saying, there is still a lot of progress to be made. Of course, the Canadian Forces people have informed us that, since my predecessor gave them his remarks at the time of his visit to CFB Borden in early 2007, they had made progress. A team was sent to verify those statements, and nothing has been done thus far.

On a second occasion, in December, we were informed that progress had been made. After two follow-up visits, a team of investigators was sent to verify those statements. Indeed, some progress has been achieved. Unfortunately, however, it has been observed that most of our major recommendations have not yet been followed.

Issues related to safety, health, training and services to people are fundamental. In February, when I took up my duties, I examined the files and I believe not enough progress has been made.

Why has the reaction time been so long? Perhaps you should put that question to those who are responsible for implementing measures to comply with those recommendations. We are reporting that there has not been enough progress made in this regard. We've been saying these things for two years.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: You said that well.

As you said, providing access to information via a website is one thing. However, who will check every half hour to see that useful information has been added to the website? This is a serious problem. People have to be given information in the field. The website can be useful, but it's in the field that we have to act. Not everyone can go onto the website during working hours, to see if additional services are available.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. D'Amours.

We'll now go to Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Mr. Ombudsman and Mr. Egglefield.

With regard to unilingual Canadian Forces recruits, I would like to know what the situation is in military schools, whether it be in the maritime, land or air force. Are francophones receiving their instruction completely in French, in the same way as anglophones receive it entirely in English? Is the same true for the services they receive outside their courses in order to help them progress?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: Mr. Chairman, this matter is further to the visits we conducted at Borden. At Borden, they mainly offer instruction in the combat weapons support trades. As part of our investigation, we sent a team to determine whether there were similar injustices at Gagetown, New Brunswick, and in St-Jean. The schools offering instruction belong to the land force. We didn't investigate training institutions belonging to the maritime or air forces.

All Canadian Forces recruits, whether anglophone or francophone, must do their basic training at Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. It's a national school for all recruits from across the country. The schools are mainly grouped together in Borden. The instruction provided is intended for all those wishing to qualify in those trades, both

anglophones and francophones. In our investigation, we did not check to determine the situation at the bases you mentioned.

•(0920)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Following your investigation, would you say that anglophones can get 100% of their training in French?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: Where? At Borden?

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Yes.

Mr. Pierre Daigle: We noted some problems regarding the instruction of military members in their mother tongue.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: All right. That updates that situation.

I heard—and this is from someone who is quite familiar with the situation—that, in the air force, only 16 out of 600 courses were given in French. That's a very disproportionate figure. I don't have any evidence to give you on that point, but it's definitely an area where improvements could be made and where francophone recruits from across the country might be treated unfairly.

Mr. Ombudsman, I'd also like to know whether the bilingualism of candidates for appointments to high-ranking positions has been considered since the Official Languages Program Transformation Model went into effect. In other words, are all the generals and colonels in the Canadian Forces able to speak French and English?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: Mr. Chairman, from what I've read, the purpose of the Official Languages Program Transformation Model is to ensure that the National Defence work force, both military and civilian, are ordered, trained, managed and supported in the official language of their choice. I don't know any more about the model. I haven't examined it in detail. So I can't confirm or verify anything. However, I can say that the problems we noted with regard to official languages are unacceptable. I would like the Canadian Forces to address the recommendations concerning what we've been referring to for the past two years, which are still outstanding. The model is definitely a step in the right direction, but I can't tell you any more about the matter for the moment.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Daigle, I had the pleasure of looking at your career path. I believe that you yourself were in charge at Borden.

At the time, you very probably saw what the situation was. This is not new for you. What steps did you take to make the situation fairer and to enable francophones to receive 100% of their services and courses in French? Would you be able to help correct the remaining deficiencies?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: Mr. Chairman, when I was at Borden, my headquarters was located on the Borden base. It was the headquarters for the recruitment, education and instruction service of the Canadian Armed Forces. I was responsible for military colleges and recruitment centres across the country, various staff schools and schools at Borden. From 1999 to 2002, I was the commander of that training and I indeed noted problems with regard to instruction given to francophones. We began to take certain steps to correct the situation. It looks like we didn't do enough since, 10 years later, the situation remains. I see that's the case at Borden, and I think it's important that we examine that situation.

• (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

We'll now go to Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First I'd like to welcome you and congratulate you on your appointment.

I also want to say hello to Mr. Egglefield.

It's interesting to see that, since January 2008, the ombudsman left and was replaced by an acting ombudsman, who did her best but only had the time to surf the wave a little then leave without being able to do anything. I don't want to blame her, however. You now have a permanent position. So there should be some continuity in your research efforts, particularly since you're very familiar with the situation.

The information we've received indicates that 77% of dental services courses are not offered in French. We're told that 33 courses are offered in English, that six are provided in French and that one is given in both languages. We know the situation: they simply don't care about the official languages. We're celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Official Languages Act and yet things are going from bad to worse. There were improvements until September of last year, but nothing has happened since the last election. It's as though everything had fallen back into the void.

In your opinion, what is the attitude of the Canadian Forces? Do the generals and colonels want us to stop bothering them with this because they think their mission is to defend people in Canada and abroad? Do they want us to stop bothering them with official languages? Is that their attitude?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: I couldn't state an opinion on that subject, but it appears from the two follow-up visits we made to see whether the corrective action we recommended had been applied that the Canadian Forces have not done enough. The recommendations regarding instruction and services—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, but, Mr. Daigle, I'm speaking with you, who have experience, who have experienced the situation. Referring to the other one's report, we know the outcome. You're a member of the Canadian Forces and you saw what happened. Did you get the impression most people simply didn't care?

For years now, the official languages committee has been studying this issue. We question National Defence officials and the minister, but we get the impression nothing changes. Now you tell us in

addition that it's no better at Gagetown or Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. It must be terrible in Alberta and Petawawa.

Are you now going to conduct an investigation to determine what's going on across the country?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: As you mentioned, these problems haven't been solved satisfactorily by the Canadian Forces. After exchanging numerous letters with the Chief of Defence Staff, we submitted the matter to the Commissioner of Official Languages. He will be conducting his audit on the bases where the Canadian Forces provide training. In addition, I'll be paying special attention to this matter when I visit all the Canadian Forces bases in the country in the coming months.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You transferred it to the Commissioner of Official Languages. At the same time, did you also forward complaints from military members on the bases?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: The entire file you are studying has been transferred to the Commissioner of Official Languages. All the systemic problems that have been raised and recommendations that remain outstanding have therefore been put before him.

Mr. Yvon Godin: National Defence reports to someone. It must report to the Minister of National Defence. Are you prepared to say that there is a lack of will on the part of this government and even on the part of the previous government? None of this started yesterday. Is there a lack of will on the government's part to tell the Canadian Forces people that we're sending them to other countries to establish democracy and to enforce the law, whereas here, where we have the Official Languages Act, people in our own national defence department aren't able to enforce this one? Our soldiers are going to fight in other countries to establish democracy and to enforce the laws of those countries, whereas they aren't even able to comply with our laws. There's a problem.

• (0930)

Mr. Pierre Daigle: The Minister of National Defence and the Chief of Defence Staff welcomed our recommendations.

Mr. Yvon Godin: They did nothing, Mr. Daigle. They merely welcomed the recommendations. Do you agree?

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I'll try to respect the time allotted to us.

To do that, I'll now go to Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you for being here today. This is a very important issue.

I'm a member who represents a lot of Ontario francophones, from the riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. Young francophones have to have the opportunity to pursue careers in French. I know there are positive things. For example, I went to the Cité Collégiale. The Canadian Forces have ties with the Cité Collégiale to train military members in their trades in French. There was also the Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean, which I had the opportunity to attend when I joined the Canadian Forces at the age of 17. It was unfortunately closed by the former government, but we reopened it. That's a positive aspect for young francophone non-commissioned officers.

At Borden, however, there are problems that have to be solved.

[English]

In my time in the military, what I found was that the military was very good at looking at a problem and understanding it, breaking it down into subcomponents, objectives, and then they're good at attacking it. But there are always conflicting priorities.

One of the questions I wanted to ask was how you and your office take notice of or how you incorporate perhaps conflicting priorities in your reports.

I'll just give you an example. You mention in your reports that there has been good progress made, and that's good; however, there are still some huge deficiencies, for example, to have instructors

[Translation]

who are able to teach in French at CFB Borden.

Most of the francophones in the 5th Brigade probably live at CFB Valcartier. However, the 5th Brigade may be engaged in Afghanistan.

[English]

How do you take that into account, or do you take that into account? How do you weigh other priorities that the military may have—for example, operational priorities that would obligate them to transfer...? The people who would be good francophone instructors might be serving in Afghanistan when they are deployed there. So how do you incorporate that into your report or into your assessment?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: *Monsieur le président*, we realize, obviously, the environment in which everybody is working, and we realize the commitment and challenges of the institution of the Canadian Forces.

When we do an investigation we need to concentrate on fairness and on justice. What we found out in Borden was that there was an unfair situation for those unilingual francophones getting their training and so on. So obviously this has to be our priority and we need to focus on the unfairness as such.

We don't do any qualifying of this unfairness in the overall environment. We understand the operational tempo because we are also facing other problems with our troops, regarding PTSD and so on, but when we look at an unfair situation, we address that situation as a stand-alone.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Are you working with the Canadian Forces to put realistic timetables in place for other priorities, for example?

We could conduct a study now and conclude that 75 things have to be resolved. However, perhaps it isn't possible to resolve all those matters at the same time. Perhaps we have to have an action plan to solve the first 25 problems, and then the next 25 problems, and finish by solving the last 25, in accordance with established timetables.

Are you following that kind of process, or are you merely identifying the problems that have to be solved?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: We're identifying the problems and, after studying them, informing the chain of command and Chief of Defence Staff of them and requesting follow-up. When we receive

answers, we normally send out investigators to check that the actions taken have indeed been implemented in the field.

• (0935)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I noted the comments on—

The Chair: You have a few seconds left.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Is the training material in a language primary or secondary? When I was in the forces, they made major efforts to ensure that the material was in English and in French. All the books were bilingual, but perhaps additional material came from the armed forces of the United States or another country. However, that was supplementary material.

Mr. Pierre Daigle: In many cases, the course material that students need to take their courses was not in their mother tongue.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

We'll now start our second round.

Ms. Zarac.

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Mr. Daigle and Mr. Egglefield. Thank you for being here with us today.

I find it troubling that this problem isn't just at Borden, but at Gagetown and St-Jean as well. It's virtually the rule everywhere. Health and safety are basic responsibilities of employers. As the employer is the Government of Canada, is this aspect involved as well? There are laws requiring employers to ensure the health and safety of their employees. Instead we're focusing on official languages, but I nevertheless wanted to mention this very important aspect to you.

Earlier Mr. Godin asked a question to which we didn't get an answer. We're talking about fairness. However, some people don't have career opportunities, and that's troubling. There must surely be complaints.

Mr. Pierre Daigle: We receive complaints. When Mr. Côté visited in November 2006, people complained directly to him.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Is there a complaints process that soldiers can use when they aren't satisfied?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: Absolutely. Our office receives complaints directly. They can submit their complaints by various means. Every complaint that we receive is examine individually.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Can you give us the approximate number of complaints you've received in the past two years?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: I couldn't give you that number, but perhaps the Director of Investigations remembers it.

Mr. Denis Egglefield (Director of Investigations, National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman, Department of National Defence): Mr. Chairman, in fact, we receive very few complaints. We recommended to the people at Borden that they establish a complaints mechanism to solve problems where they arise. They put in place a mechanism that is better than the previous one, which amounted to virtually nothing. When we completed the investigation, the mechanism wasn't entirely up to the level we would have liked.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I don't think that's true. You're told that there's been progress, whereas that's not the case. So to resolve the complaints that you must receive, there is a lot of work to be done in other areas. You obviously must receive some. It must be troubling for a soldier to see that there are no opportunities for advancement.

You say you're ready to cooperate with the Commissioner of Official Languages. Are you involved in the action plan to solve the problems at Borden?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: While we were doing the study, the investigations and the two follow-up visits to Borden, we received complaints from Gagetown and St-Jean. We sent investigators to Gagetown and St-Jean. It was after those visits that we learned that there were similar problems on those bases.

The review of this systemic problem continues and we've referred the file to the Commissioner of Official Languages. The Commissioner has probably even started auditing the Canadian Forces bases where training is provided.

On our side, we'll continue handling each complaint individually. During my subsequent visits to all the Canadian Forces bases, I will pay particular attention to official languages. I met with Mr. Fraser and we agreed on how we will work in cooperation on this matter.

● (0940)

Mrs. Lise Zarac: All right. You take action when you receive complaints. Are you going to follow up with the Commissioner at regular intervals?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: Yes, absolutely. We're going to stay in touch. As I previously said, I'm going to conduct visits. It's part of my mandate to meet all the people I serve. I have mainly focused on this situation. It's a very important issue.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Did you make any specific recommendations to the Commissioner concerning the action plan?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: What action plan?

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I'm talking about the action plan submitted in 2007 to solve the problems. Is there an action plan?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: Are you talking about the Canadian Forces' action plan?

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Yes. Is there an action plan to solve the problem?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: The Canadian Forces have developed a transformation model. As I mentioned at the outset, I haven't looked at it closely enough to be able to validate or verify what's been done. It's a step forward because, under that plan, we must ensure that people receive all services in their mother tongue in their work place. For my part, I'm going to study the model and subsequently conduct follow-up.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: All right.

The Chair: Ms. Zarac, there is a strategic plan for the Borden base that was submitted by the Canadian Forces in August 2007. We're going to get it, and you will be able to ask your questions.

We'll continue with Ms. Guay.

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Chairman, Mr. Daigle, I'm really wondering. You have a very important role to

play. You are the ombudsman. However, it seems to me that you don't have all the necessary resources to solve this problem.

Do you have the power to do that? That's the question.

Mr. Pierre Daigle: The means at my disposal under my mandate are not binding. I have a mandate to analyze, investigate, make recommendations, conduct follow-up and pursue follow-up until I'm satisfied that corrective measures have been taken to—

Ms. Monique Guay: You're telling me you can't change things. Ultimately, you have a power of recommendation, like the Commissioner of Official Languages. If you receive complaints, you forward them to the Commissioner, who will make his report. He doesn't really have any power, but he will nevertheless make a report. That report is sent to the committee. Ultimately, it's the business of the departments. It's the Minister of Defence who should be here instead of you today. We should be putting these questions to him. You're presenting a report and it's very important that we have that information. However, the committee should perhaps consider whether we should meet with the Minister of Defence so that he can tell us why this is not working. Ultimately, he's the one who has the real power.

Am I right?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: We're reporting on what we've discovered. The issues become important when there is an injustice. That's why I've given this file priority. If the idea is to determine how this issue is evolving and what is being implemented, it's the Canadian Forces that have the means to explain to you why—

Ms. Monique Guay: So it's up to the Minister of Defence. You're saying you don't get a lot of complaints, that you prefer that complaints be handled on the military bases. Between the two of us, if a person files a complaint on his own military base, he could well wind up cleaning the tiles with a toothbrush. It causes conflict situations on a military base. As you know very well, these are small homogeneous groups. Everything is known.

If a complaint is filed directly with you, the ombudsman, it isn't handled directly on the base. I don't understand why you prefer that complaints be handled directly on the bases rather than be forwarded to you. That might protect the military members and you could react more quickly than when the complaints are handled on the bases.

Mr. Pierre Daigle: I'd like to correct one point. The complaints come to my office. I don't know the number of complaints we've received on this matter. However, the complaints started when the previous ombudsman, Mr. Yves Côté, conducted a visit of CFB Borden. He met francophone groups that informed him about this problem. At my office, the complaints process is still the same and will continue to be. Whoever has a complaint to make can do so directly with the ombudsman, without any fear of reprisal.

● (0945)

Ms. Monique Guay: That's important. That often happens, as you know. We won't conceal that fact.

Mr. Pierre Daigle: As regards the Borden file, the persons responsible there haven't done enough. However, they have established a website and appointed an official languages champion. Recruits and candidates are increasingly being made aware of their official languages rights. During the subsequent visits that we are going to conduct, we'll be highlighting that and questioning people to determine whether they are having problems in that regard. So we'll be doing quite continuous follow-up.

Ms. Monique Guay: When are you going to develop a complete report? Have you scheduled a date? Are you going to do a quarterly or annual report? Exactly how are you going to do this?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: In this matter, we've had a main report and two follow-up visits. We've submitted the entire file. We've referred the systemic official languages investigation as such to the Commissioner of Official Languages a little more because that's part of his mandate. My mandate doesn't focus mainly on official languages, but rather on all situations of injustice.

So we're going to continue following up and reporting to the Commissioner of Official Languages on situations that we think are even more deplorable so that he can include that in his audit as such.

Ms. Monique Guay: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds left.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Ombudsman, I read in the documents that the bilingual instructors, precisely because they are bilingual, have twice as much work as the unilingual instructors, that they have obsolete material in French and that they have to translate it themselves.

I hope you'll have occasion to travel to all Canadian Forces facilities to ensure that those people get all the help they need when they have to give training in both languages, so that they have all the course material required to do that.

You probably won't have time to answer my next question, but we'll come back to it. If a young francophone from Borden settles with his young family on a military base in Alberta or Saskatchewan, when will he be able to receive all services in French so that his children are not assimilated by the community? This is a major problem. Francophones are being assimilated by the Canadian Forces. I have a military father who did not experience that misfortune.

I would like to come back to this later. When will it be possible to offer all services in French to families and military members on military bases across Canada?

The Chair: We'll come back to that. Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

We'll continue with Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Mr. Daigle. Good morning, Mr. Egglefield.

In 2007, we put some questions to your predecessor, who had come here. Here's what we got. I'm going to summarize this for you in a few words.

First, I come from the province of Quebec, as do you. You know as well as I do that the closing of the Collège militaire royal de Saint-

Jean for nearly 10 years hurt us badly with regard to the chain of command because non-commissioned officers receive their instruction there. Those NCOs are subsequently assigned across Canada. That hurt us very badly. Naturally, we reopened it, but it was opened very recently. We're the ones who reopened it.

There's something else, and here I agree with the opposition people. Isn't there a tendency toward inertia at staff headquarters, regardless of whether it's bilingual or not? I'll explain what I mean by inertia. You testified about your experience: you enlisted in the Canadian armed forces, you belonged to the Royal 22nd Regiment, you were posted to Borden, where you tried to improve things. However, you weren't the commandant there; there were others above you. And perhaps those people didn't understand your desire to apply the Official Languages Act. That's the second thing.

There is a third thing. The National Defence Official Languages Program Transformation Model has been introduced and it is a model that extends over a number of years. Naturally, you are like me: you've just arrived, and I've just recently been elected. For those 10 years when the Royal Military College Saint-Jean was closed, I couldn't be here because I wasn't even a member of Parliament. They were there and they kept it closed. So that hurt my province.

I want to know whether you—as Ms. Guay asked—can prepare a report for us so that we can see how that program has evolved. Otherwise, I'm going to ask you to come back, and we'll still be at the same point. Will you be able to provide us with a report based on your experience. You saw how it was at CFB Borden without the official languages. And what is the situation now? We're giving you a push so that you can give us an answer because that's what we need. We need to reassure our young people who are enlisting in the Canadian Forces.

Can you give us an answer in a few seconds because I'll have another question to ask you?

• (0950)

Mr. Pierre Daigle: As I mentioned, Mr. Chairman, the details of the National Defence Official Language Program Transformation Model are not completely known. We're going to study the model and perhaps validate it and perhaps verify the outcomes following from it.

It's important for me to ensure this follow-up as well, since this is part of file of injustices that have been raised concerning the official languages.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Daigle, you belonged to the Royal 22nd Regiment at CFB Valcartier and perhaps another regiment that is stationed on that base. On site, there are francophone doctors, firefighters and nurses, whom you have the power to transfer. Why, in some cases, do you keep them all in Quebec, as Mr. Lemieux said? I agree, but you can also transfer them to Borden so they can provide services in French. Your superiors have the power to transfer military members to another base, whether they be physicians, dentists, nurses, firefighters or police officers, so that they can provide services in French.

Has any thought been given to doing that or is there an exclusion?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: In the files I've read, it was recommended that instructors and people be sent to provide services to military members on certain bases. Mr. Egglefield may know more about that, but, based on the latest information I've read, an effort has been made to increase assignments of bilingual staff to those bases. However, I remember that this wasn't enough, that it did not meet the demand at that time.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Have you checked to see whether the Canadian Forces have entered into agreements with the French, Belgian or Tunisian armed forces, which can provide you with physicians, nurses and firefighters? There are exchanges between armed forces.

Mr. Pierre Daigle: Mr. Chairman, as that is not part of my mandate, I didn't look at that aspect.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Petit.

We'll complete the second round with Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You've taught me something. Correct me if I'm wrong. When we asked you how many complaints you had received, you answered that you did not know. I can understand that because you've just arrived. You then directed the question to Mr. Egglefield, who answered that the formal complaints, if I correctly understood, are not really... I believe instead that the complaints were filed in 2006. A recruit who enters the armed forces, whether male or female, must be strong and take what is going on or else he'll be washing the floor somewhere.

In the fall of 2006, the ombudsman went to CFB Borden and outlined his challenges in a letter to the Chief of Defence Staff, General Hillier, on January 8, 2007. In that letter, Mr. Côté explained that he had met a number of groups of unilingual francophone recruits who said they were having a lot of trouble getting services in their language. He said this was an urgent problem, that there was no reason to doubt the truth of the recruits' statements, and the base chiefs themselves acknowledged that it was difficult to provide services in French. The problems raised included, in particular, instructions and orders given in English only.

Has that changed in 2009?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: I read the letter you are referred to. After two follow-up visits conducted since that letter, there have been some improvements, mainly thanks to the creation of a website and the appointment of an official languages champion. Most of the recommendations that we made, mainly on instruction, services offered on the base and second-language courses, had not been implemented.

• (0955)

Mr. Yvon Godin: That makes me think of the Minister of Finance who has just said that, for credit cards, they're going to set that at the highest level. You won't be using them, but it will be the same interest rate.

We currently have a problem at Borden. An official languages champion has been appointed. Was he appointed by the recruits?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: No, he was appointed by the chain of command.

Mr. Yvon Godin: All right. Then they established a website, but that doesn't give any instructions. You're telling me that the other

recommendations haven't been implemented. So there hasn't been much improvement.

Mr. Pierre Daigle: Our report on the February 2008 visit mentioned that those recommendations had not been put in place.

Mr. Yvon Godin: All right.

There are other problems, in particular the fact that it is impossible to do well on assignments for which instructions are given in English only. Once again, that falls into the same category. Apart from the website, not much has happened.

Mr. Pierre Daigle: We aren't satisfied with the progress achieved in the past two years. That's why, when the matter was put before me, I gave priority to the main recommendations regarding training and services.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I believe you went further; you said that absolutely nothing had been done.

Mr. Pierre Daigle: The first two—

Mr. Yvon Godin: You pointed out the lack of vehicle maintenance manuals in French and the fact that this was justified on the grounds of financial restrictions. Is that still a problem?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: When we talk about education and training difficulties, that involves the students who aren't receiving instructions in their mother tongue and instructors who may be bilingual but have to work overtime. It also includes course material.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Can you guarantee that recruits who turn to you won't be subjected to reprisals?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: In the context of our visits, we make people aware of the fact that they can freely file their complaints directly with the ombudsman, without that resulting in reprisals.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Do you provide them with complaint forms, advertising designed to let them know that, if they aren't satisfied, they can complain to you? If not, do people simply wake up one morning and realize that they've had more than enough of the situation and want to find someone to complain to?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: When we were on the base at Borden, we talked about a site that we've set up that people can use to make observations, in particular.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You're talking about a website? Is there a big poster in the building advertising the website and stating its address? Do you encourage people to use it to file complaints?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: That's why my subsequent visits will—

Mr. Yvon Godin: That's not my question, sir.

Is there a poster somewhere in the building stating that people wishing to file complaints can do so via the website, the address of which is given?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: I haven't gone to Borden since I took up my duties, but—

Mr. Yvon Godin: If there is a website, but people don't know about it, that will produce no results.

Mr. Pierre Daigle: During our visits, we increase people's awareness. We tell them that, if they've been unfairly treated in certain situations, they can—

Mr. Yvon Godin: That's what the ombudsman did in 2006.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to take a minute and then let Mr. D'Amours continue. I have to leave to attend the tabling of the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, which is unfortunately taking place at the same time as this appearance. We already know it will concern the situation at Borden and in the armed forces in general. It would have been interesting for the meeting to be held before it, but, whatever the case may be, I must leave shortly.

The situation seems to be endemic. It also appears to be evolving in the wrong direction. Is it a problem of resources, will or leadership? If we invested a lot of money, would that change anything? As is often the case, it might change nothing because, in the event of a fundamental problem of leadership or lack of will, matters won't be resolved regardless of the resources allocated. What should be done to resolve them?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: I think that the very essence of the answer should come from the Canadian Forces. However, I agree that, if members of the Canadian Forces are dealing with an unfair and inequitable situation in their everyday work context, it's also a matter of leadership. We have to make the rest of the organization aware and ensure that importance is attached to this situation.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: It may even be the cornerstone. Moreover, the Commissioner's last report, last year, concerned that lack of leadership. If there isn't any leadership at the senior levels, it is hard to ensure that the rest of the people will abide by the rules and use the necessary determination. In my opinion, people at the top of the hierarchy must show unshakable leadership for the situation to be corrected. That's not only part of the solution; it may perhaps be the most important factor.

I'll now hand over to my brilliant colleague Mr. D'Amours.

• (1000)

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Daigle, I understand your role. Since you are independent, no one above you decides how things will work. However, you must ensure that the rules are obeyed.

Decisions are made at National Defence. They may concern matters both in and outside the country and decisions concerning humanitarian aid, for example. However, regardless of the decision made, it has been suggested to us that its involvements warrant that bilingual objectives should not be achieved. I don't think that's a valid reason.

Do you consider the reasons given acceptable, unacceptable or deplorable?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: I find it unacceptable that no action has been taken to remedy this situation, which puts unilingual members of the Canadian Forces at a disadvantage, whether they are francophone or anglophone. We've found similar situations on other military bases. That's why I've made this my priority. I think it's unacceptable that members of the Canadian Forces, who are serving their country, are not receiving fair instruction, training and services in their language, so that they can advance and do their work within the Canadian Forces.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Ultimately, regardless of the decisions that those responsible make, whether it's the decision to get involved in an Afghanistan mission or a peacekeeping mission or an aid mission in a province, you find that unacceptable. Regardless of the decision made, the two official languages must be respected.

Mr. Pierre Daigle: Since my role is to ensure that situations of injustice, inequity and so on are corrected, I'm going to consider those situations that are unacceptable. I'm not going—

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: —to try to amplify the problem to find reasons justifying inaction.

Mr. Pierre Daigle: It's not up to me to find reasons. I underscore the problems and the facts associated with them, and I make recommendations to remedy the situation.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: That's perfect. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. D'Amours.

We'll now continue with Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for appearing before us today, Mr. Daigle and Mr. Egglefield.

I'm always interested in the passionate questions of our colleague Mr. Godin, and in the answers that are given to his questions. I'm just as interested when I think they don't get an answer.

So I would like to know something. Does the poster that Mr. Godin referred to exist or not?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: I don't know, Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: So let's assume that it doesn't, or even that it does. During the training that is offered to recruits who arrive at CFB Borden, are they told about their language rights and available remedies if those rights are not satisfactorily respected?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: In the first recommendations that we made and that were followed, that aspect was addressed. The recruits, candidates and students who arrive at Borden are now made aware of their language rights and of the remedies they can take. So I suppose that, at that point, they know that there is a website that they can consult on the matter. I know that that aspect has been addressed.

• (1005)

Mr. Royal Galipeau: What kind of teaching material is there?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: Once again, from reading the files, I noted that there were problems with the translation of the teaching material used for instruction purposes. However, I couldn't say any more at this stage about the kind of material that is used, unless my director has any information on that subject.

Mr. Denis Egglefield: We didn't check the details regarding teaching material. We concluded that it was highly likely that the lack of available teaching material and francophone or bilingual instructors was one of the reasons why the courses were not offered in French.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Paré has done some research on teaching material in French. These are apparently the titles of the volumes you have, and that would represent nearly an entire table full of volumes. So these are only the titles. I requested them in 2007. Imagine, I've just received them! That's not too bad; he did a good job.

Mr. Paré mentioned one problem: we don't know whether all these volumes, even if they are in French, are used every day.

I propose that we table the list of volumes in French for committee members and that we also submit it to Mr. Daigle and Mr. Egglefield so that they can check it. They could respond to us in writing on the matter, to tell us whether they are actually used.

The Chair: I'm going to consider that as a request for information.

Mr. Nadeau, we're going to come round to you.

If you'll allow me to interrupt your remarks, perhaps we could make a request for information concerning the documents, the teaching material in French and English that is used at the college. Mr. Paré could make a request for information. Then we'll go back to Mr. Nadeau's comment.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré (Committee Researcher): Based on the analysis I've done of the documents that were tabled with the committee in the spring of 2008, the basic courses are usually quite well provided with teaching material. Sometimes the quality of the translations may be deficient, but the documents are available.

In the case of specialized courses or for more advanced trades, there are significant deficiencies. I noted a few sectors. I can't identify all the areas where there were deficiencies, but there appeared to be deficiencies in the following fields: welding and machining, tank maintenance and container maintenance and handling. I noted significant deficiencies in those fields in particular, but I didn't examine all areas where there might be deficiencies.

The basic courses are well provided for, but problems arise as soon as you move into specializations in the second and third years.

The Chair: The summary document was distributed to all committee members.

We're going to go back to Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: May I ask a question?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: You said that the teaching material for the basic courses was available in both languages. Can you give us a percentage?

There are a lot of basic courses at Borden and a few specialized courses. Can you say that, in 80% of cases, for example—

The Chair: There is a two-page document, Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: I can't say whether that's the case for 80% of the courses. I know that material is there for the specialized courses, but I can't make the connection between the textbook and the course it's used for. That's why I can't give you an exact answer.

The Chair: However, there is information in the document. So we'll take the opportunity to go back to Mr. Galipeau. Thank you for that course material capsule.

Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: It seems that the question I asked was a pregnant one.

Mr. Chairman, with your permission, I'd like to get some clarification from our researcher. When he mentioned tanks, did he mean army tanks or water tanks?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: I meant army tanks.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: All right.

Mr. Daigle, would you like to give me some clarification? I'm interested in this official languages champion concept because I've been an official languages champion for 40 years.

How does it work and for how has it been working? Are those people appointed by their superior officers or do they appoint themselves?

• (1010)

Mr. Pierre Daigle: It was noted in the files that people weren't made aware of their language rights and so on. These problems were addressed by means of a website to convey information and the appointment of an official languages champion.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Is the appointment made by superior officers? It's not an elected position, is it?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: From what I remember, at the time, the appointment was made by the superior officers, probably by one of the chiefs of military personnel at headquarters in Ottawa, since he is somewhat responsible for official languages. If I remember correctly, the director of official languages sort of reports to him. I believe that's how they designate a resource person who must promote all matters pertaining to official languages. He's called the official languages champion.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Is this typically someone who is in the human resources department?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: Mr. Chairman, I couldn't answer that question. I know that a major has been appointed official languages champion at Borden. I don't remember, from my reading, what his primary duties are or whether that's his main function. I couldn't say.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: What I see is that, when someone stands as an official languages champion, even if he's interested in other matters, his colleagues perceive him as a one-trick pony, which makes his job increasingly difficult.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your remarks, Mr. Galipeau.

We'll continue with Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Incidentally, the champion is identified in the document that was submitted to us. It's Mr. Jack Bouchard, who is a major. This is a program that is common in all the departments. Canadian Heritage handles this aspect of official languages. It isn't just in the armed forces.

What you're saying is that this person appears in the picture somewhat like Joan of Arc, to try to solve all the problems. He becomes a resource person, but that will never solve the problem of a lack of course material or a lack of courses within the Canadian armed forces.

When I was in Saskatchewan, during the debate on the heads of the 1997 election campaign, the leader of the Bloc Québécois pointed out that, in Bagotville, for example, the children of anglophone military members had access to English courses, but that, in Moose Jaw, it was impossible to get courses in French. That's since changed because the community has taken charge of the situation. That's always what comes to my mind when I think about the Canadian Forces: non-respect of the French fact.

Mr. Ombudsman, I hope that you'll be plunging into this matter. It's not just the officer, man or woman, but it's the entire family who suffers from the fact that the French fact is becoming non-existent in too many places. Children are assimilated because they don't even have the basics to maintain their knowledge of French. Consequently, instruction must be given in French. That has to be the case on the bases, or else in the public systems around the bases. We have to ensure that they can get access to those services. Where there are no services, we must create them; we must create the active offer. That's the very basis of what the Commissioner of Official Languages provides. We must ensure an active offer; that's an obligation provided for in the act.

We met with Mr. Fraser not long ago. I can't wait to meet with Mr. Semianiw and Mr. Meloche, who are responsible for the Canadian Forces' Official Languages Transformation Model.

I'd like to know whether I correctly understood. The colonels and generals who don't have a CBC-level knowledge of French will be losing their positions and will not be entitled to promotions as of December 2009. Are you aware of that?

•(1015)

Mr. Pierre Daigle: As I mentioned, I haven't had the opportunity to thoroughly examine the transformation model. I couldn't offer an opinion on that subject, unless we have the information here.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: In any case, that's what I've heard from a reliable source. If that's the case, so much the better. When Mr. O'Connor was Minister of Defence, Mr. D'Amours asked him some simple questions in French that he was not even able to answer in French. He was a senior official. The example has to come from above. Don't be embarrassed to say that the example must indeed come from above, from both colonels and generals. Otherwise, why ask soldiers to speak French and English, if the senior officers who give the orders aren't able to do it. I'm not arguing with you, but that's a fact, and I hope the ombudsman will take a kick at this hornets nest and make this major problem disappear.

Now, as we know, the chances of advancement for unilingual francophone military members are not as great as for unilingual anglophone members. Have you seen any evidence of this? Do you have the power to make recommendations to remedy the situation so that course material, in accordance with what I had unanimously passed here on the subject of a study... Imagine, the Minister of National Defence refused to provide the information. It took a

unanimous vote from the committee to get the information. That's the documentation that Mr. Paré studied. Do you have that power?

I hope you'll recommend that everything should be fair and equal. Do you agree on that? How can you present that recommendation to enable all recruits to have an equal opportunity for promotion within the Canadian Forces?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: That's one of the major principles we're advancing. In the investigation we conducted, we touched a little on the issue of advancement. If individuals don't have access to instruction in their mother tongue and have to wait until a course is scheduled or there are enough candidates for it to be created, waiting times can ultimately also affect an individual's advancement through the next steps of his career and so on. That's why there is injustice.

We want to ensure that francophones and anglophones have access to the same benefits in their language within the Canadian Forces so that their careers can advance on the same level.

The Chair: All other things being equal—and I don't know whether that's an anglicism—we've just completed our third round. I'd like to know whether other committee members would like to question our witnesses or whether you want us to proceed with a fourth round.

Mr. Chong, Ms. Zarac and Mr. Nadeau want to speak. We'll proceed in a counter-clockwise manner, starting with Mr. Chong. We'll be able to ask questions all at once.

Mr. Chong.

[English]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for appearing today.

Last May, the office of the ombudsman noted in a letter to the Chief of the Defence Staff that a number of improvements had been made in terms of the treatment of francophones at Borden. However, then, as now, the office has also indicated that a number of serious concerns remain unresolved.

In your opening remarks you note that there's a lack of bilingual instructors. There's a lack of good training manuals in French, and a lack of availability of courses in French. You also note that there is a lack of access to medical services and police services in French.

I have no doubt about the intention of the Minister of National Defence and our government and everybody involved to resolve these issues expeditiously, but where is the difficulty in trying to resolve these issues?

Let's just focus, for example, on the lack of training manuals in an appropriate quality of French. Do we contract out those services? Is it a problem with the company holding the contract to translate these manuals? Is it a lack of translators available to do translation? Where are the problems in the lack of training manuals in French?

•(1020)

Mr. Pierre Daigle: Mr. Chair, unfortunately, I don't think I'll be able to answer this particular question.

We did highlight some of the difficulties and some of the recommendations that were not fully implemented. I cannot really speak to why this has not been done. We were told in May of last year that there was immediate and ongoing correction of what was happening at Borden. We did verify that, and nothing happened.

Hon. Michael Chong: Perhaps you could speak to the fact that some medical and police services are not available in French for service members at Borden. Is it because there's a lack of people available at other bases who could be transferred? Is it a lack of training resources for those staff?

We understand there are issues. That's why the ombudsman has indicated that, previously and today. I think what we're trying to do as committee members is to come up with solutions or ideas as to how we resolve this. It's difficult to do that as a committee if all that's being provided to us are the problems and there's no sense of the roots of these problems or a sense of where the solutions are.

My simple question is whether you could tell this committee what two or three things our government should do to resolve these issues. Is it in terms of money or of reallocating staff from Saint-Jean to Borden and vice versa? Is it a question of tendering again contracts for translation services that may be out there that are not up to standard? What are the two or three things that our government can do to more expeditiously address some of these concerns?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: We do recommend steps and things that need to be done in order to address this issue. It is up to the department and the Canadian Forces to select the best means of delivering what needs to be done.

To be fair, when we verified at Borden in February 2008 and we concluded that most of the major recommendations were not yet implemented, we produced our last letter in August 2008. From February to August 2008, it took us time to go through all the evidence, to collect the evidence and look at the answers, and so on, and prepare a file. I cannot say what has been done since that time.

Obviously, when we did our second follow-up visit to Borden, we found that what was needed in terms of those major concerns about training and services to the people had not been done.

Hon. Michael Chong: The update you're giving our committee today is as of August 2008.

Mr. Pierre Daigle: We sent a letter based on what we saw in February 2008.

Hon. Michael Chong: That's right, so we don't really know that your office hasn't fully assessed what has happened at Borden since August of last year.

Mr. Pierre Daigle: No, Mr. Chair, and I guess the Canadian Forces can give us a better update as to where they stand on this.

Hon. Michael Chong: Just to be clear, this is the situation as of last summer. It's my hope, and I would expect, that further progress has been made in the last 10 months or so. Perhaps it would be good to hear from the Department of National Defence directly as to the progress, any progress, that's been made in the last 10 months.

The Chair: We will, Mr. Chong, on June 9 with Major-General Semianiw and other public servants.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you very much for your presentation today.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We'll continue with Ms. Zarac.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Thank you. My question will be brief. Mr. Nadeau mentioned that there was a problem to solve regarding the offer of services, and I believe that's the case. Language courses are definitely offered on military bases. Are those courses mandatory?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: As regards the Borden base, since students had to wait for their training, we recommended that they be given language courses in the meantime. So there was a possibility of offering language courses at Borden. I believe the results of that request were not very satisfactory: few individuals had access to language courses.

• (1025)

Mr. Denis Egglefield: Mr. Chairman, there were two mechanisms in place. One was a computer system that was not functional at the time of our audit, and the second consisted in sending people to take courses at places such as Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. If I remember the figures correctly, over a three-year period, nine candidates were sent there to take courses.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: So they're unable to offer courses to people who want to take them. Don't you think that should be mandatory from the outset?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: I have a memory blank. I know that language courses are offered to military members, but I don't remember at what stage in their career or at what rank those courses are offered. However, there are measures in place within the Canadian Forces to provide language instruction to our military members.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: In closing, I would like to thank you for making the effort because, as you say, there is injustice. Thank you for giving this matter priority. Moreover, you won't constantly be able to devote your energy to it, so it's important to have a set objective and to determine the results on a given date.

Is that in fact the case? Is there a target date?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: When we make our recommendations, we normally impose, if I can use the word, a date to review the actions taken. It happens that people ask us for an extension since they have to compile the information, and so on. Normally, however, we set a timetable with deadlines that we follow very closely.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarac.

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Last year, 28 complaints were sent to the Commissioner of Official Languages concerning National Defence. National Defence was one of the top 10 departments, agencies and crown corporations receiving the most complaints. That's an item of information that was requested a little earlier and that has just come to mind.

I'm the member for Gatineau. I assume your office is in Ottawa or Gatineau.

MGen Pierre Daigle: It's in Ottawa.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I'd be curious to know—without you giving me their names—whether the people in your circle in the National Defence offices are all bilingual. Are there any unilingual francophones or anglophones? And if there aren't any unilingual francophones, are there any unilingual anglophones. You can somewhat see the inequality of the situation. In addition, the vast majority of people who speak English and French are usually people whose first language is French.

I'm asking you the question simply out of curiosity. Do you think there are indeed any unilingual francophones who have as much of a chance as unilingual anglophones of getting positions in the region with the Canadian armed forces? Is any special attention paid to that?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: Are you talking about my office in particular?

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I'm talking about your office and in general. You've been in the armed forces for a long time. Are there any unilingual francophones occupying positions in the region?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: Unfortunately I couldn't tell you. My office offers service in both official languages and takes diversity and bilingualism into account, but it's impossible for me to speak for the Canadian Forces in the National Capital.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: It would be interesting to know whether the offices of the armed forces lead by example.

I assume this is a mandate that you've been given and that your predecessors had for Gagetown, Saint-Jean and Borden. I hope you'll examine the services that are provided to military members across Canada, whether they are members of the air force, army or navy.

Do you intend to conduct a study across the armed forces to determine whether unilingual francophone members, regardless of where they are, have as much of a chance of receiving services in their language as their unilingual anglophone counterparts? Are you going to address that subject?

• (1030)

Mr. Pierre Daigle: I've examined a number of files since I took up my position, but this one has become a priority. I intend to visit all the Canadian Forces bases, perhaps even outside Canada, and that's definitely an aspect that I'm going to look at more closely, as regards both unilingual francophones and unilingual anglophones. All anglophone and francophone Canadian Forces recruits go through St-Jean, Quebec. Most of those who want to learn a trade in the Canadian Forces, whether they are francophone or anglophone, go through Borden, where the majority of trade schools are located. So the two language groups must receive the same services across the country. That's something I'm going to check on my visits.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I know that you have held the position of ombudsman for three months. Do you have to make public the reports you regularly submit to the Minister of National Defence and to the person responsible for official languages in the armed forces?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: According to my mandate, I have to make public an annual report to the minister. As for all the other reports on systemic or main investigations, I am entirely at liberty to make them public or not. However, most are. I give the minister 28 days' notice that I'm going to make a document public.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Mr. Daigle.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

Ms. Glover, do you want to add something?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for being here, Mr. Daigle and Mr. Egglefield. I'm a patient person. My questions will be similar to those that my colleagues have asked because they didn't get a complete answer.

Are you aware of the letter that a general wrote in January concerning the promotion of our soldiers, among other things? Mr. Nadeau asked a number of questions on that matter.

Mr. Pierre Daigle: I couldn't tell you, Ms. Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: You also said that you weren't aware of our National Defence Official Languages Program Transformation Model. However, you are quick to criticize it. And yet some good things have been done.

General Walter Natynczyk sent that letter, which I want to share with my colleagues, to all generals in the Canadian Forces on January 5, 2009. That includes the following military ranks: general, lieutenant-general, major-general and brigadier-general in the land and air forces, and admiral, vice-admiral, rear-admiral and commodore in the maritime force.

That letter establishes that proficiency in English and French second language is now a leadership competency. Promotion cannot be obtained without proficiency in those languages.

I am somewhat surprised. This is probably not your fault because you have only been in your position for three months. However, you've learned certain things from other ombudsmen. Mr. Daigle, you've given answers here today that are intended as criticisms, but you haven't shared the good news with our colleagues.

Pardon me, but I would like them to know that this letter demonstrates a will to ensure that French is part of our promotion procedure.

In addition, I sincerely suggest that you look at our National Defence Official Languages Program Transformation Model. I know that you have only been in your position for three months. However, I would like there to be a little more balance and fairness because good things have happened. I don't want our colleagues to get the impression that nothing has been done, since other things have been done of which I know you are not aware.

We will soon be hearing from the minister. He will be coming to explain those other matters that are good news for our land, air and maritime forces. I think we're sincerely taking linguistic duality into account in our efforts. I just want to give credit for that.

Thank you.

• (1035)

The Chair: Thank you for those comments, Ms. Glover.

Earlier I had two speeches. Now two speakers have been added. However, I wouldn't want us to self-feed...

I believe it's Mr. Lemieux' turn.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I want to make a comment on the analysis conducted by our analyst, Jean-Rodrigue Paré. He has prepared a report. There are nearly 35 pages of teaching material on the subject of courses. As I mentioned earlier, most of the material is bilingual. Based on a quick estimate, there are perhaps 1,400 course manuals, perhaps 50 of which are in English only, which represents a percentage of about 3% or 4%.

I also noted that the manuals in English are not military manuals; they are instead manuals intended to assist during the courses.

[English]

For example, they're under ISBN numbers. Here is one: *Machinery's Handbook, 24th Edition*. It's a large book, and it's used as a supplement on the course. There's another here on the technology of machine tools. These are the kinds of books that are in English only.

[Translation]

That's why I asked the question about percentages. I'm not saying there aren't any problems at CFB Borden. I want to emphasize that there are problems that we have to solve. However, there are also important perspectives that help gain a better understanding of where the effort is being made first. I said that military members are recognized for setting priorities.

[English]

That's where they're going to put their effort. I think it's always good to look at some of these statistical numbers that are associated with some of the comments made to understand how big a problem this is.

As I pointed out, I just did a very quick review. I know the analyst is going to hand this out. We can all do a more in-depth review. But certainly, from what I saw here, well over 90% to 95% of the manuals are bilingual. There is just the odd one, and it has an ISBN number, which means that it's one that's commercially purchased on the market.

Thank you, Chair, for indulging me. *Merci*.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemieux. You have recalled for us those English reference books we had to go through in our former studies.

Monsieur D'Amours.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Is it possible to get Ms. Glover's cooperation? She referred to a letter. However, I don't think that letter has been distributed to the members of the Official Languages Committee. It would be good to get a copy of it in both official languages in order to review it later.

The Chair: Is that suitable to you, Ms. Glover?

Mme Shelly Glover: The analyst [*Inaudible - Editor*].

The Chair: All right. We'll try to distribute it before the meeting. In any case, next Thursday, we'll be hearing from the Commissioner of Official Languages and we'll proceed with the study. Then we'll hear from armed forces officials.

If you have a witness list to forward to us concerning the subjects under study, you must ask us to update the witness list. We have three or four meetings left to fill before the summer break.

Mr. Petit?

Mr. Daniel Petit: Could our dear analyst, Jean-Rodrigue Paré, provide the list of books? There's still a doubt in my mind. Mr. Paré has done some very good research, but we don't know whether it's been applied. Would it be possible to submit the list to Mr. Daigle and Mr. Egglefield? I know they're not the ones who prepare them. Could they give us an answer before we meet with the minister?

The Chair: Perhaps we could check with the ombudsman, if he believes that's within his mandate and if that suits him.

Mr. Daniel Petit: He may not even know.

The Chair: Perhaps we can provide them to you.

Do you want to make a comment, Mr. Daigle?

Mr. Pierre Daigle: I'm going to see what I can do, even though I think that's a little outside my mandate.

The Chair: Then you're going to consider Mr. Petit's request.

Thank you very much for your baptism of fire in our committee, Mr. Daigle. I believe you've passed the test with flying colours. We'll be monitoring developments on bilingualism in the training of young military members.

Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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