
Thank you for inviting me to give the O.D. Skelton lecture for this year. I am honoured to follow the distinguished men and women who gave the lecture in the past. I would start by telling you that I have long been an admirer of this Department. I worked closely with it during my senior appointments in the Canadian Forces and my brief time at the embassy in Washington and I have long been impressed by the skill and forward-thinking of your members. I am also impressed by the way you continue to operate so effectively in spite of the fiscal restraints you've faced since the beginning of the nineties.

When I was studying for a history degree at RMC in the fifties, my tutor was the late Dr. George Stanley, a distinguished soldier, historian and former Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick. Knowing that I was a recent British immigrant, and that my historical interests lay mainly in the period of the Tudors and Stuarts, and the Renaissance and the Reformation, Stanley insisted that if I were to be a professional Canadian soldier I should have a better than passing understanding of Canadian history. Among the courses he prescribed was one in Canadian Constitutional History which he himself taught. The course was conducted in the Oxbridge tutorial fashion with only three students – one of whom was Desmond Morton, the noted Canadian historian – and each of us was required periodically to prepare a paper for discussion within the group. One paper I was assigned dealt with Canada's involvement in a proposal made by the League of Nations in 1935 to apply sanctions against Italy in consequence of the latter's invasion of Ethiopia.

You probably all know about the incident and Canada's role in it. Italy's attack on Ethiopia took place at a time when fascism was on the rise in Europe, and many felt that swift action by the League was needed to demonstrate world solidarity against the movement. The Canadian delegate to the League, Walter Riddell, on his own initiative and in the absence of direction from Ottawa, proposed adding the strategic resources of fuel, iron and steel to the sanctions being considered by the League,