

Government Orders

way, and when the circumstances require, every bit as dedicated as the men and women who indeed put their lives on the line as 1,488 people are doing right now, and to their families as well who indeed make the same kind of sacrifices, although it may not be over the same period of time.

I have to make reference—although the hon. member for Dartmouth and the hon. member for Halifax and members from the other side of the House have made mention of this, but I feel that I want to do it one more time and I do not think it would be too often if every single member of this House got up and did it—to what we saw in Halifax, something that we have not seen for a long time. We have seen the turn to of HMC dockyard and their talented men and women, their supervisors, their management teams. In two and a half weeks, with the supervision and co-operation of the three ships' companies, in fact the ship repair unit and everybody involved in the maintenance, repair, we saw a refit, in this case it was a retrofit of defensive weapons, and indeed the ships' companies.

I remember in one case, the *Athabaskan*, the dockyard put in 4,000 hours in one week and people were working 16 to 20 hours a day with four hours sleep a night. Over a period of a week, and in some cases longer than that, that extracts a tremendous toll and it requires a great dedication and talent to be able to accomplish that.

I use this not in a flippant way, but it is an order of magnitude with some experience behind it. I would estimate, and I could be wrong by an order of magnitude of 50 per cent, that the retrofit of the defensive weapons that have put our ships and our men and women in a much better position where they are right now in defence of their country, what was accomplished with the total cost in round figures of \$15 million in less than three weeks, that had we done it in the normal way we do it, through the bidding procedure and through the procedures that are laid down, it probably would have taken 20 times as long and may have cost 10 times as much.

I think it is a reflection on what we can do when we put our backs to the wheel. I do not think I need to elaborate on that any more, but I would say that every single member who has spoken here has in some way made

reference to that kind of dedication. I think it has made all Canadians, not just people from Halifax, not just the men and women in uniform or the civilians from National Defence, but all men and women in Canada very proud of what has happened.

Somewhat later of course, Mr. Speaker, you are aware that we dispatched a squadron of CF-18s. The purpose of that was not as clear to me as it was in dispatching our ships.

However, I do not want to put water in the wine by discussing my opinion on that. Suffice it to say the decision was made and the aircraft were sent. I am assured that their purpose there was primarily for the defence of our ships.

They could be called to defend our ships on a national basis. I am prepared to accept that, although initially I was a bit concerned why we needed to send aircraft. Aircraft and ground personnel are not as easy to move around in the Middle East once you get them there as ships are, Mr. Speaker. You can get them in and out.

The other aspect of this I would like to comment on is we are the 50th in order of magnitude armed forces in the roughly 200 countries in the world. That puts us in the top 25 per cent. In NATO, we are sixth or seventh, depending on how the size of our forces is counted. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that we are not 50th in talent, in leadership and in the dedication of our men and women.

I would venture to say, and this has been borne out by NATO exercises over the last 20 to 25 years, that the men and women in our ships, aircraft, ground crews, maintenance squadrons, support forces and in the land troops deployed to look after the low flight missile defence systems, are as well trained as any of the armed forces in the world. I would say that they are among the best, if not the best.

I stand here with great confidence and with great pride that those who are there want to be there. Those who are there are proud to be there. While the business of being away for Christmas is not a very pleasant thought for anybody, it has to happen. We do not have any real indication of how long this is going to go on. If that should happen, I know that they will do it in the knowledge that they are doing it for their country and for