

May 2026

Building closer connections between Canadians and members of our Military Community

From the desk of the President

Welcome to the latest edition of *Connections*, the official newsletter of the Garrison Community Council, London and Region.

This edition is made possible through the efforts of a dedicated team of GCC members:

- **Kevin Patterson**, Vice-President of Publications and editor of *Connections*
- **Grant Hopcroft**, Vice-President of Programming, who consistently brings outstanding speakers to the GCC, with their presentations featured in *Connections*
- **Eric Thomson**, Vice-President Bursaries, who photographs GCC meetings and contributes images to *Connections*
- **Gary Nash**, GCC member, who has long been responsible for capturing Zoom screenshots for *Connections*
- **John Martin**, GCC Treasurer and proofreader
- **Randy Harden**, GCC Secretary, who distributes *Connections* to members and community leaders.

We thank each of these members for their time, effort, and ongoing commitment to the GCC.

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CDR NAMES GDLS-CANADA TOP DEFENCE COMPANY FOR 2026



For 2026, CDR has named General Dynamics Land Systems–Canada (GDLS-Canada) as Canada’s Top Defence Company.

It marks the third time the company has claimed the #1 spot in the 22 years the ranking has been published. The recognition reflects the company’s leadership in armoured combat vehicle manufacturing, long-standing support to the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), and a year marked by major program milestones and international impact.

Based in London, Ontario, GDLS-Canada has been a cornerstone of Canada’s defence industrial base for nearly five decades, delivering advanced light and medium armoured combat vehicles along with full life-cycle support. The company’s continued excellence, including progress on the Armoured Combat Support Vehicle (ACSV) program and the Logistics Vehicle Modernization (LVM) program, contributed significantly to this year’s top ranking.

A major highlight for 2026 was the achievement of Initial Operational Capability on the ACSV program and the delivery of key variants to the Canadian Army.

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From the desk of the President

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We also appreciate the co-operation of **Canadian Defence Review** and **Esprit de Corps** for allowing us to reproduce articles for *Connections*.

Under Kevin Patterson's editorial leadership, *Connections* continues to provide informative and timely coverage of local and national defence initiatives.

As a recipient of *Connections*, you are encouraged to forward a copy to friends, associates, and family members. It can be a good way to introduce a prospective member to the GCC.

As summer begins, it is also an ideal time to explore some of the military museums in the London region.

Among the excellent local destinations are the RCR Museum, the Jet Aircraft Museum, and 427 Wing, which is also home to the Secrets of Radar Museum.

We currently have a vacancy on the GCC Executive. If you are interested in serving in this role, please let us know. We would be pleased to speak with you about this opportunity.

Tom Dean
President, GCC



Jet Aircraft Museum, London



Every Member should be a GCCPP
(Garrison Community Council Project Person)

2026 GCC Executive

President	Tom Dean
Past President	Geoff Hutton
VP Communications	Kevin Patterson
VP Special Projects	Eric Thomson
VP Programming	Grant Hopcroft
Secretary	Randy Harden
Treasurer	John Martin

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Connections Editors

Kevin Patterson - VP Communications
Tom Dean - President and Editorial Consultant
On site photos: Eric Thomson
Screenshots: Gary Nash



GCC's Mission to build a greater understanding, support and appreciation of Canada's military.

Our three fundamental tenets are
Support, Assist and Connect.

CDR NAMES GDLS-CANADA TOP DEFENCE COMPANY FOR 2026

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These vehicles are already contributing to NATO operations in Latvia, reinforcing Canada's role in allied deterrence and readiness.

Beyond domestic programs, GDLS-Canada continues to play an important role internationally, including supporting Canada in their donation of armoured vehicles and training support to Ukraine. At home, the company supports thousands of jobs across Canada through a vast supplier network and remains a critical driver of sovereign defence manufacturing capability.

Commenting on the selection, CDR Editor-in-Chief, Peter Kitchen, said, "GDLS-Canada represents the very best of Canada's defence industry. With nearly 50 years of continuous support to the CAF, combined with its ability to deliver advanced, combat-proven platforms at home and abroad, the company exemplifies operational excellence and industrial strength."

He added, "From the success of the ACSV program to its leadership in sustaining Canada's armoured fleet and enabling future capabilities, GDLS-Canada has clearly earned its position as Canada's Top Defence Company for 2026."

"We are honoured to receive this recognition by CDR," said Dave Haggerty, GDLS-Canada's Vice President and General Manager.

"To be named Canada's Top Defence Company for 2026 is especially meaningful for our employees, who take great pride in what they do. Having supported the CAF in continuous production in Canada since the late 1970s, our workforce

reflects that legacy—often spanning multiple generations. That continuity among employees brings a deep sense of ownership and commitment to the vehicles we build," he added.

This year's Top 100 Defence Companies survey reflects a sector that continues to grow in capability, innovation, and strategic importance. With increased global instability and renewed focus on domestic production under Canada's Defence Industrial Strategy, companies like GDLS-Canada are playing a critical role in ensuring national security and economic resilience.

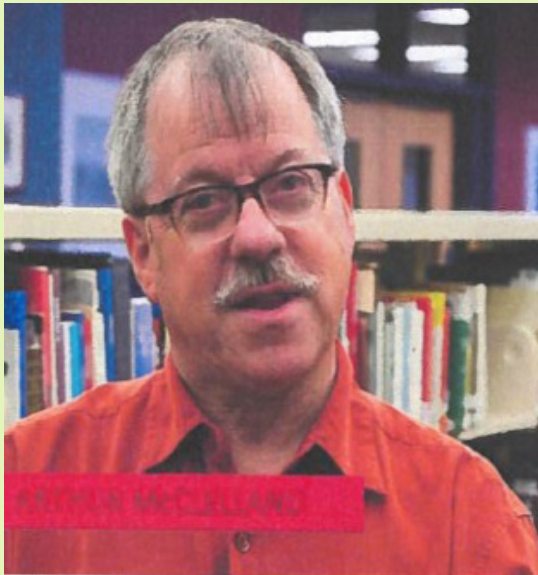
As always, with the publication of its annual ranking, Canadian Defence Review aims to showcase the strength, diversity, and global relevance of Canada's defence industry.



Who Can Participate in the GCC? All of Us!

The Garrison Community Council is open to any individual, or organization representative wishing to participate in any activity to raise awareness of and support for the local military community - past and present.

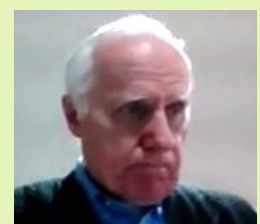
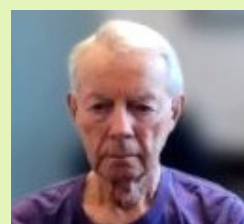
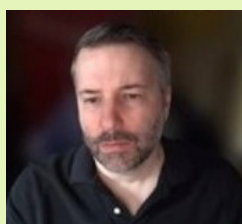
GCC May General Meeting



The guest speaker for our May Meeting was **Arthur McClelland**. His presentation for the GCC was; **The Rich Trove of Military Resources at the Ivey Family London Room at the London Central Public Library.**

Mr. McClelland is a military historian who has travelled through the villages and hamlets of Middlesex and surrounding counties detailing historical events that have taken place.

Arthur McClelland grew up in Oxford County and received his Masters in Library Science from the University of Western Ontario in 1984. He has been a librarian at the London Public Library for 38 years and has been in charge of the Ivey Family London Room for 28 of those 38 years. He has written entries in several local history books on London and newspaper articles on genealogy and local history.



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GCC May General Meeting



On Sunday, May 3rd 2026, The Battle of the Atlantic 81st Anniversary was commemorated at HMCS Prevost and locations across the country. The article below is from May 2019 GCC Newsletter

Battle of the Atlantic

By SLt Chris Niesel

The Battle of the Atlantic was the longest continuous military campaign of World War II, running from 1939 until the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945. At the core was the Allied naval blockade of Germany which took effect shortly after its declaration of war. Subsequently, Germany opted to pursue a counter blockade of Allied countries. The Allies considered the Battle of the Atlantic as a 'no-fail mission' upon which victory in Europe depended. Canada and its allies prevailed through the tenacity, grit and sheer determination of our veterans – shipmates of yesteryear; sailors, airmen & merchant mariners too.

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An RCN sailor at a gun aboard HMCS Assiniboine, while escorting an HX convoy, 1940

Battle of the Atlantic

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During the years of which the battle was waged, Canada's accomplishments were fuelled by an impressive shipbuilding effort that saw 400 merchant ships built in Canadian shipyards along with 281 destroyers/corvettes and frigates, 206 minesweepers, 250 tugs, and 3,000 landing craft. The victory however came at a high price; 24 Canadian warships and 62 Canadian merchant ships were lost. The loss of life included over 1,990 sailors and Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (Wrens).

Every year on the first Sunday of May, we recall these facts and recognize the service of our veterans, their families and the sacrifice of the many shipmates who never returned. We also pay tribute to the ladies of the Women's Royal Canadian Navy Service; almost 7,000 of these women served their country in a variety of areas during the War.

Now, over 80 years after the start of WWII, this generation is quickly fading; only a handful of veterans are left to speak first-hand of the struggles they faced. We are at a moment in time where we are seeing our final opportunities to honour them and their loved ones, and to enable these esteemed men and women to pass the torch to our youth, the custodians of Canada's future.



*Local veteran of the Battle of the Atlantic Memorial
HMCS Haida*

Images from last year's ceremony at Majesty's Canadian Ship (HMCS) Prevost. It was also the unveiling of the enhanced Battle of Atlantic memorial



Canada to procure CT-157 Siskin II (Pilatus PC21) for Canadian Forces Snowbirds



The Honourable David J. McGuinty, Minister of National Defence, announced a commitment to purchase a future Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) air demonstration capability. The announcement was made alongside Lieutenant-General Jamie Speiser-Blanchet, Commander of the RCAF, at 15 Wing Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan.

The Canadair CT-114 Tutor first entered service with the RCAF as a jet trainer in 1963. Since 1971, the Canadian Forces Snowbirds have represented Canada and the RCAF with dignity and pride. After 55 years of air demonstration, 2026 will mark the final season for the CT-114 Tutor aircraft fleet which has served as both a trainer and air demonstration aircraft for more than six decades.

The Department of National Defence will procure the CT-157 Siskin II (Pilatus PC21) for the future Snowbirds team. It too will serve as both a training and air demonstration aircraft.

This will ensure that Canada continues its strong tradition of air demonstration capability with a modern fleet that will ultimately rebuild to the team's distinctive nine-plane formation. This new capability will be based at 15 Wing Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, and is expected to be operational in the early 2030s.



During the period of onboarding for the new aircraft, the RCAF will continue to support air shows, events, and engagements across Canada with aircrafts and personnel. These efforts raise awareness about the important roles of the RCAF, enable engagement with communities, and attract new members to Canada's rapidly modernizing Air Force.

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Canada to procure CT-157 Siskin II (Pilatus PC21) for Canadian Forces Snowbirds

The RCAF is incredibly proud of the women and men who, for decades, have represented the Canadian Armed Forces with pride at airshows across North America. The RCAF looks forward to joining with Canadians to celebrate the team's rich history, heritage, and excellence in its farewell season.

This new fleet will ensure that Canadians, and supporters across North America, will continue to enjoy the iconic nine-plane Snowbirds formation for generations to come.

"For 55 years, the Canadian Forces Snowbirds have been a powerful symbol of excellence for Canadians at home and abroad. Their performances have brought Canadians together in moments of celebration and resilience, while showcasing the professionalism and dedication of the Canadian Armed Forces. As the Royal Canadian Air Force advances its air and space modernization efforts, we remain firmly committed to a future air demonstration capability that continues this proud legacy. The skilled members of 431 Squadron will carry forward their expertise, teamwork, and passion, so that Canadians can continue to be inspired by the Royal Canadian Air Force for generations to come."

The Honourable David J. McGuinty, Minister of National Defence

"For decades, the Snowbirds have inspired Canadians from coast to coast to coast with performances that reflect the professionalism and experience of the Royal Canadian Air Force. I know that the Snowbirds hold a special importance to the community of Moose Jaw and to Saskatchewan as a whole. Today's commitment to future air demonstration capability ensures that this proud tradition will continue, all while supporting the next generation of aviators and maintaining Moose Jaw's enduring role as a home for both military flight training in Canada and the Snowbirds themselves. As we honour the remarkable legacy of the CT-114 Tutor, we also look ahead with confidence to the future of the Snowbirds and of Moose Jaw."

The Honourable Buckley Belanger, Secretary of State for Rural Development

"The members of 431 Air Demonstration Squadron – the Canadian Forces Snowbirds – past and present have been more than ambassadors for the Canadian Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Air Force: they have been a source of pride and inspiration for generations. Their skill, professionalism, teamwork, and dedication have left an indelible mark on Canada's aviation heritage. Like so many Canadians, I am immensely proud of all they have accomplished. As the iconic CT-114 Tutor prepares for its final flights, I encourage all Canadians to take in these last opportunities to witness this legendary aircraft and celebrate the team's incredible 55-years of excellence."

Lieutenant-General Jamie Speiser-Blanchet, Commander, Royal Canadian Air Force

ADDITIONAL INFO

- The Canadair CT-114 Tutor was the primary jet trainer for the RCAF from 1963 until 2000. The Snowbirds have flown the Tutor since 1971. These aircraft were slightly modified for show features and enhanced performance during low-level aerobatic flying.
- 2026 will mark the final air show season for the CT-114 Tutor aircraft prior to the fleet's retirement. The performance schedule for the Canadian Forces Snowbirds is available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/air-force/services/showcasing/snowbirds/schedule.html>
- There are 86 Regular Force, Reserve Force, and public service personnel in 431 Air Demonstration Squadron of whom 56 are Regular Force members. These members will continue to contribute to the RCAF's missions and modernization projects.



GCC April General Meeting

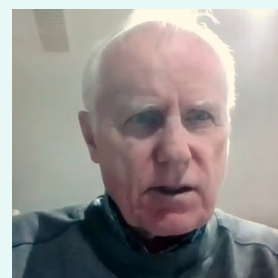
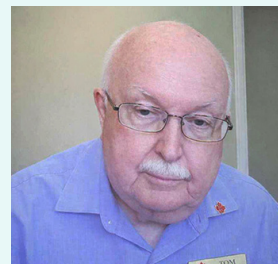


The guest speaker for our April Meeting was Honourable David Pratt - Principal of David Pratt & Associates, a government relations and strategic consultancy firm located in Ottawa which he founded 14 years ago.

Mr. Pratt was an elected representative at the municipal, regional and federal levels for 16 years. Mr. Pratt will discuss current geopolitics, what's happening in the US, Ukraine and Iran, with a little Greek philosophy thrown in to pay homage to the wisdom of the ancients.

First elected to the House of Commons in 1997, he was Chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs from 2001 to 2003. He also served two foreign ministers as a Special Envoy to Sierra Leone during the rebel war and was the Honorary Consul for Sierra Leone for 10 years.

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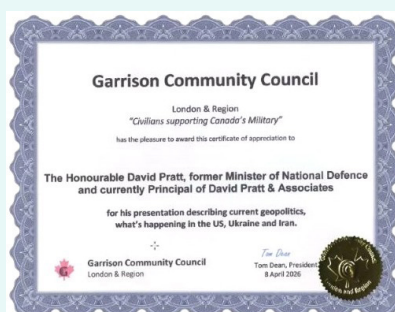
GCC April General Meeting

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He became Canada's 36th Minister of National Defence in 2003 in the Government of Prime Minister Paul Martin. As Minister, he initiated several major procurements. After politics, he spent four years as a Special Advisor to the Secretary General of the Canadian Red Cross where his focus was improving relations between the Red Cross and all levels of government. He wrote two major reports on the role of the Red Cross as "Auxiliary to Government" and helped draft legislation to renew the mandate of the organization.

After his work with the Red Cross, he became an independent consultant and spent five months in Baghdad, Iraq as a Senior Parliamentary Expert with the USAID sponsored Iraq Legislative Strengthening Program – the largest legislative capacity building project in the world. Mr. Pratt has written scholarly papers, newspaper articles and lectured on a variety of subjects including grand strategy, Canada's Army Reserves, democracy promotion, foreign intelligence, Canada-US interoperability and emergency preparedness.

In 2014, he was inducted as a Knight in the Order of St. George. In 2018, he participated in the prestigious Oxford Union debates at Oxford University and in 2022, 2023, and 2025 he completed three triathlons.



ON TARGET: Canadian Army's New Arsenal on Order



Photo Credit: Colt Canada
By Scott Taylor

Close observers of the Canadian military will know that although former Prime Minister Stephen Harper had promised at a NATO summit in 2014 to reach the 2 per cent of GDP on defence spending, that goal was never met. In fact, under the Harper government defence spending dipped below one per cent.

Following the election of the Trudeau Liberals in 2015, additional funding was allocated to DND. However at the start of the 2025-2026 fiscal year, it was only planned to spend 1.3 per cent of GDP on national defence.

That was prior to the inauguration to a second term for US President Donald Trump. To justify a tariff war and support his threats of annexing Canada into becoming his 51st state, Trump bemoaned a lack of border security and highlighted our 'shirking' when it came to our defence spending.

Newly elected Prime Minister Mark Carney spoke defiantly of getting Canadian 'elbows up' with regards to the tariffs.

However as an act of appeasement to Trump the Carney Liberals leased a couple of helicopters to demonstrate their willingness to secure an already secure border.

On the issue of defence spending Carney vowed mid-June 2025 that Canada would balloon defence spending to \$93.3 billion to reach the 2 per cent of GDP within that fiscal year. It was a tall order for a dangerously under strength Canadian Armed Forces that already struggles to administratively procure already contracted hardware.

Thus, Carney made some clever moves to boost the defence ledgers.

One major move was to simply transfer the Canadian Coast Guard from the Transportation Ministry to National Defence.

While this did not actually increase Canada's defence capability, it made sense to add this expenditure to our defence budget. The US and many NATO allies consider their Coast Guard as a branch of their armed forces.

In my opinion this was a long overdue re-structuring. Whether or not Canada chooses to actually arm the Coast Guard with some serious weaponry remains open to debate.

Another boost to the defence budget was a sizeable pay increase for all personnel with the largest per cent increases being made to the lowest ranks. Once again, this did not add a single bayonet or bullet to Canada's defence but it did improve the sagging morale of our understrength combat forces.

As for the March 19 assault rifle purchase announcement, this was long on the wish list of the Canadian Army. Squeezing it in before the fiscal year deadline was only a matter of bringing the project forward by a few years.

In total the Army intends to purchase 65,402 Canadian Modular Assault Rifles to replace the existing stocks of C-7 rifles and C-8 carbines presently in service.

The C-7 and C-8's first entered service in the mid-1980's. Thus, there will be very few who would argue against our military modernizing their basic personal weapons after four decades.

The \$307 million contract is for the first 30,000 CMAR's and these will be general service (GS) rifles.

The delivery timeline will see the new weapons entering service over the next 3 years.

ON TARGET: Canadian Army's New Arsenal on Order

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The remainder of the contract goes into effect in 2030 and this will see the purchase of 19,207 additional (GS) variants along with 16,195 full spectrum (FS) models.

The full spectrum versions are designed specifically for front line combat and urban warfare.

The second tranche of this rifle procurement will bring the total dollar figure closer to the \$1 billion mark.

The good news is that these assault rifles will be built by Colt Canada in Kitchener, Ontario.

According to the DND press release over 80% of the components used in these rifles will be produced in Canada.

There is also the caveat that this contract could still be expanded by an additional 300,000 units if plans move forward to create a Supplementary Reserve.

That plan was first reported in the Ottawa Citizen back in November 2025. According to an internal briefing note, Chief of Defence Staff Jennie Carignan and then Deputy Minister Stefanie Beck had created a Tiger Team to study the creation of a 300,000 strong supplementary reserve based on a core element of civil servants. The proposed force would have one week of basic training and an annual one week refresher course.

While there is no plan to issue uniforms to these reservists, it is expected that they will be armed.

In which case that will be good news for Colt Canada.

Not so much for the untrained 'volunteer' reservists who will be expected to handle these new weapons.



*On Behalf of
The Commanding Officer,
Lieutenant Colonel Wayne Finkle
& Regimental Sargent-Major, Scott Elliott*

*Welcome you to the
82nd Commemoration of D-Day
& Regimental Change of Stick
from Chief Warrant Officer Scott Elliott
to Chief Warrant Officer Richard Sharpe*

*6 June 2026
Holy Roller, Victoria Park, London ON
Guests are requested to be seated by 1045 hrs*

**Friday 5 June 2026 - Meet & Greet
1900 Hrs - Officers Club, Delta Armouries**

**Saturday 6 June - Parade
0930 Hrs - Troops to Form up at Delta Armouries
0930 Hrs - Association Members to meet at City Hall
1100 Hrs - Parade to Commence**

**Reception to Follow for Serving and
Association Member at the Jr Ranks Club,
Wolsely Barracks**

**RSVP - <https://1sthussars.ca/d-day-rsvp>
Dress: No 1A (Medals) or Civilian Equivalent
Mufti**

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Canadian Armed Forces Day

Did you know.....

Canadian Armed Forces Day is observed annually on the first Sunday in June. Established in 2002, the day serves as a national opportunity to celebrate and pay tribute to the dedication, courage, and daily sacrifices of military personnel—past and present—both at home and abroad.

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) represent Canada's commitment to global peace, security, and humanitarianism. Through various operations, they carry out multiple critical mandates that define their role in representing the country.

On this day, Canadians are encouraged to salute the soldiers, sailors, and aviators who put the safety of the country first. You can learn more about their missions and how the government honors them on the Department of National Defence website.

The month of June can be summed up to three key things:

- **Honor:** The first Sunday is CAF Day, recognizing active members and veterans.
- **History:** June 6 marks the anniversary of D-Day (Juno Beach), Canada's definitive contribution to turning the tide in WWII.
- **Logistics:** It is the peak of the Annual Posting Season, where thousands of members relocate, leadership changes hands, and intensive summer field training begins.

Summary: June connects the CAF's greatest historical sacrifices with its most intense modern operational and training cycle.

From the June Newsletter of Southwestern Ontario Military Family Resource Centre (SWOMFRC)

Australia supports Canada's Arctic radar plans



From left, Chief of Air Force Air Marshal Stephen Chappell, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney and Deputy Secretary Capability Acquisition and Sustainment Group Chris Deebie during a Defence Science and Technology Capability showcase in Canberra. Photo by Rodney Braithwaite.

Australia's world-leading Jindalee Operational Radar Network (JORN) is set to play a central role in Canada's ambitions to build the largest and most sensitive over-the-horizon radar (OTHR) system ever developed.

The collaboration will strengthen bilateral defence cooperation with Canada and could become Australia's biggest defence export in history.

The program reflects decades of trust between the two nations and demonstrates the global recognition of Australia's sovereign capability in high frequency radar science, engineering and operations.

During his visit to Australia, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney attended a Defence capability briefing where Defence and BAE Systems Australia showcased the JORN OTHR system and its high-frequency detection capabilities.

Defence has worked closely with the Canadian Department of National Defence (DND) to support Canada's planning for its Arctic OTHR program, including the development of technical and operational requirements.

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Australia supports Canada's Arctic radar plans

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As part of the partnership, the Capability Acquisition and Sustainment Group (CASG) released a request for tender to BAE Systems Australia for the design, manufacture and commissioning of an OTHR system for potential delivery of the first stage of Canada's Arctic OTHR capability development program.

Defence is committed to ensuring any export benefits Australia's sovereign JORN capability, sustaining its position as a global leader in OTHR technology and improving economies of scale for maintenance and upgrades.

"Defence welcomes the mutual advantages that will flow from further development of the JORN technology through collaborative research and development.

It serves to strengthen our domestic sovereign defence industry through engagement among Defence, BAE Systems Australia and Canadian and Australian industry partners," Head of Air Defence and Space Systems Division Air Vice-Marshal Martin Nussio said.

BAE Systems Australia, the nation's largest defence contractor, is currently delivering a major midlife upgrade to JORN under Project AIR2025 Phase 6.

Chief Defence Scientist Professor Tanya Monro noted that the technology underpinning these developments is based on decades of research by Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG) and innovation by Australian industry.

She said BAE Systems Australia has played a critical role in supporting the development of JORN over many years.

"These world-leading upgrades, together with new critical technological development, will provide the capability required for the Canadian Arctic OTHR," Professor Monro said.

"BAE Systems Australia has a long history of involvement in supporting the Defence Science and Technology Group with the development of JORN."

BAE Systems Australia was initially contracted to assist with the development of OTHR technology at the original Jindalee Facility in Alice Springs, which formed the baseline for the JORN specification.

BAE continues to play a key role, developing technology for the Phase 5 upgrade to JORN and more recently winning the competitive tender to lead the Phase 6 midlife upgrade project and provide sustainment support to the JORN capability system.

BAE continues to deliver enhancements and sustainment for JORN.

Defence worked with Canada in August 2025 to establish requirements for the Arctic OTHR mission system, which will be substantially larger than a JORN radar site.

DSTG is collaborating with BAE Systems Australia and Defence Research and Development Canada (DRDC) to leverage decades of Australian expertise with Canada's experience operating high frequency radars in the Arctic.

Found in CONTACT Air Land & Sea plus COMBAT Camera magazine

<https://contactairlandandsea.com/2026/04/09/australia-supports-canadas-arctic-radar-plans/>

Canadian Armed Forces Commemoration dates in June

June 1: The Royal Military College of Canada opens in Kingston, Ontario (1876)

June 2-13: Battle of Mont Sorrel, the Canadian Corps retakes Hill 62 and Sanctuary Wood (1916)

June 6: D-Day, Allies successfully land in Normandy (1944)

June 7: Dedication of the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial in France (1925)

June 12-13: RCAF bombers attack the Schwerte freight yards, their first raid in Germany (1941)

June 11-14: Canadian observers arrive in the Middle East to participate with the United Nations Truce Supervisory Organization (UNTSO) (1954)

June 14: Newfoundland Escort Force ships begin escorting convoys in North Atlantic Ocean (1941)

Update on National Monument to Canada's Mission in Afghanistan



Artist's rendition of the monument design concept.

The project to build the National Monument to Canada's Mission in Afghanistan continues to progress, with construction on the monument beginning later this spring. Veterans Affairs Canada will host a groundbreaking ceremony at the monument site on 4 May 2026. The ceremony will be livestreamed on the Canada Remembers Facebook page.

The National Monument to Canada's Mission in Afghanistan will recognize the commitment and sacrifice of the more than 40,000 uniformed personnel and thousands of civilians who served in Afghanistan, and the support provided to them by Canadians at home during Canada's mission in Afghanistan (2001-2014).

From Salute Newsletter - <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/en/news-and-media/salute/april-2026>

Health Care and Canada's Sacred Obligation



By Mike Blais

First of all, let me acknowledge that the state of health care across our nation is in dire need of improvement to a level wherein all Canadians have access to expedient care dictated by the nature of the emergency or illness which they are confronting. And through this acknowledgment, let me be clear when I state that veterans who have offered national sacrifice on behalf of the nation are being adversely affected not only in the provision of medical service, but also a lack of respect for their service. There was a time in Canada wherein the trauma of national sacrifice was honoured through the provision of care that respected their war-time service, and the obligation therein to provide medical assistance with respect to wounds and injuries sustained in war. For decades, this system was effective and through a network of Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) sponsored hospitals, provided direct medical care for physical or mental trauma and, as veterans required age related services, a hospital dedicated strictly to veterans.

During the Prime Minister Stephen Harper era, support for these hospitals evaporated under the guise of balancing the budget and the last independent veterans' hospital in Canada, St Anne de Bellevue, was transferred to the Quebec health system. Despite ominous warnings and an actual protest by the staff who had, until that moment, dedicated their lives to serving veterans, the conservatives were not deterred. I would note that when St Anne's was opened to the general public, the only in-patient Operational Stress Injury clinic was also eliminated.

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Health Care and Canada's Sacred Obligation

Continued from Page 15

Despite ominous warnings and an actual protest by the staff who had, until that moment, dedicated their lives to serving veterans, the conservatives were not deterred. I would note that when St Anne's was opened to the general public, the only in-patient Operational Stress Injury clinic was also eliminated.

Of course, the provinces were collectively eager to effect the transition, promising support for those veterans already interned while concurrently eliminating any obligations to subsequent generations of veterans. Disabled veterans no longer had access to VAC sponsored medical facilities or professional help. Instead, the duty-to-care obligation was abandoned and veterans were downloaded to provincial systems bereft of any knowledge or respect pertaining to the reason they need help, (ie, signing on the dotted line and being willing to die or sustain horrific injuries or wounds on behalf of Canada).

This is an important distinction. It is one that directly affects thousands of veterans, particularly those who sustained trauma as a result of the Afghanistan War.

Unlike previous generations of veterans, they have been abandoned to provincial systems and the inevitable backlog obstructions created through insufficient; doctors, mental health professionals and brick and mortar facilities inadequate to the demands of the general population. Without a doubt, this distinction should have been addressed during the negotiations pertaining to the downloading of hospitals and, as part of the arrangement, preferential treatment accorded to clients of Veterans Affairs should they require assistance with respect to their service orientated trauma.

Would that not be fair? Would not that ensure that the veterans of today are treated with the same level of respect as those who served in previous wars? One veteran should equal one standard.

Unfortunately, there are levels of resistance that must be overcome before the sacred obligation can be restored. Division exists within the cohort: Some believe their national sacrifice is not worthy of preferential treatment within the provincial system.

I disagree. It is not a matter of being worthy, it is a matter of lost respect and grotesque inequity. Seriously, when veterans roll over when the government marginalizes or eliminates policies designed to respect national sacrifice, we surrender our very quality of life. Others would claim that changes would involve bureaucratic, perhaps even legislative enactment.

This is very true. But these are not obstacles that cannot be overcome if Canadians embrace the spirit of the nation and acknowledge the national sacrifice of thousands of Canadians' military service in war and peace.

Canada has an obligation to the valiant. The federal government failed the valiant when, in a rush to balance the budget, they downloaded responsibilities for Veterans Hospitals to the province while concurrently disregarding the direct care obligation.

And here we are. In the aftermath of Canada's longest war, where thousands of veterans have been ensnared in never ending loops of federal and provincial bureaucracies seemingly more focused on budgetary restrictions than providing services to veterans. How many veterans have died through suicide while waiting in the queue? How many are suffering today as they confront the prospect of filling out forms requiring the assessments by doctors, pain specialists, psychiatrists or psychologists? I personally know of three instances wherein the catastrophic incident occurred while the veteran was waiting for treatment not because VAC had not responded, but because there were no professional resources available at the provincial level to intervene or provide relief in an expedient manner. What about the physically disabled?

How many veterans do not have a family doctor let alone access to support by a pain specialist?

How many operations have been endlessly deferred for months, sometimes years later for

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Health Care and Canada's Sacred Obligation *Continued from Page 16*

for their name to rise to the top of an ever-changing list determining access to an orthopedic or neuropathic surgeon?

How many veterans are in the queue at VAC, waiting for decisions well beyond the 16 week threshold, not because VAC is inept, but because of prolonged delays in obtaining the necessary documentation from doctors, psychologists and psychiatrists in order to successfully process their claims?

The situation is festering, the solution complex.

Tragically, this adverse situation will continue until the Minister of Veterans Affairs demonstrates a willingness to engage the provincial health ministers on behalf of the wounded instead of cruel deflections that serve no one.

Blazer out.



Canada Names Saab as Preferred Supplier for AEW&C



Canada has announced that they will enter into detailed discussions and formal negotiations with Saab as the preferred supplier of Canada's future AEW&C, enabled by Saab's GlobalEye. At this point, Saab has not signed a contract nor received an order.

The announcement was made by Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney at CANSEC, Canada's largest defence and security trade show.

Saab has offered to build, maintain and upgrade the Canadian GlobalEyes with a team of Canadian partners. The goal is to transfer knowledge and technology to Canada that will grow the domestic defence industry. Saab also plans to invest in research and development work in Canada, as part of the future programme.

"We welcome Canada's decision to enter into discussions with Saab as the preferred supplier of the future Canadian AEW&C capability. GlobalEye offers proven capability for the Royal Canadian Air Force, sovereign ownership for Canada and comprehensive and skilled work for Canadian industry", says Micael Johansson, President and CEO of Saab.

Saab will now follow the next steps in the process with the Canadian authorities.

GlobalEye would allow Canada to monitor vast areas of land, sea and sky. Based on the Global 6500 aircraft from Bombardier, GlobalEye combines Saab's Erieye Extended Range radar with an advanced suite of sensors and a multi-domain Command and Control (C2) system. GlobalEye detects targets by providing long-range and low-signature detection at a high-update frequency – from low observable, stealthy threats, to drones, ballistic and hypersonic missiles in high clutter and jamming environments.



ITPS Canada Orders Leonardo M-346 T Block 20 Jet Trainers



The aircraft will support expansion of NATO and Allied tactical fighter pilot training at the International Tactical Training Centre in North Bay, Ontario

The contract includes six M-346 T Block 20 aircraft – with options for an additional six units – which are expected to enter service starting in 2029

With a rapidly growing number of air forces dealing with the need to deliver modern training to the next generation of fighter pilots to cope with evolving operational requirements, and as combat air technology becomes more and more sophisticated, the ITPS Canada is responding with the introduction of Leonardo's advanced capabilities and integrated training solutions for the task into its aircraft fleet.

ITPS Executive Chairman Giorgio Clementi signed a contract for six M-346 T Block 20 lead-in jet trainers – with options for an additional six aircraft – at a signing ceremony at Venegono in Italy which also included a final evaluation flight of the aircraft. Clementi stated that: “The M346 continues Italy’s illustrious track record of producing world leading jet trainer aircraft. The new trainers are expected to enter service at the company’s International Tactical Training Centre base in North Bay (Ontario) starting in 2029, providing a major contribution to the first capability enhancement project of the ITTC fleet, currently active in providing training to several international customers and to meet advanced tactical training service demand from in excess of ten different air forces globally.”

training service demand from in excess of ten different air forces globally.”

With more than 25 years of experience delivering advanced and specialist flight test and military tactical training in Canada to over 29 air arms to date, ITPS has been active in providing innovative solutions to satisfy the evolving operational requirements of modern air forces.

In October 2025, ITPS CEO Dave Lohse conducted an airborne evaluation of the Leonardo M-346 advanced jet trainer in the airspace north of Ottawa International Airport.



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In October 2025, ITPS CEO Dave Lohse conducted an airborne evaluation of the Leonardo M-346 advanced jet trainer in the airspace north of Ottawa International Airport.

Following the evaluation flight, Lohse said: “The M-346 is an exceptionally capable advanced jet trainer that aligns closely with the operational requirements of modern fighter pilot training.

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ITPS Canada Orders Leonardo M-346 T Block 20 Jet Trainers

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The aircraft's performance, digital flight control system, and advanced training architecture make it an ideal platform to support the next phase of growth for the International Tactical Training Centre.

As allied air forces look to expand training capacity and interoperability, the M-346 will help enable ITTC to welcome pilots from Canada and partner nations to train together in a modern and operationally focused environment."

Stefano Bortoli, Leonardo Aeronautics Division's Managing Director, said: "The M-346 has made remarkable progress in recent years, from both a system evolution and continued market success perspective, becoming the backbone of one-of-a-kind integrated training capabilities hosting a rapidly growing number of Air Forces on a global scale. The decision of ITPS to select and procure the M-346 to deliver world class lead-in fighter training for the next generation of pilots and allow them to face rapidly changing and increasingly challenging operational scenarios, provides further evidence of the undisputable high performance of the system. We're committed to working with ITPS to make sure they can maximize the benefits of this latest technology and capability in order to maintain and even expand the quality level of the service their customers deserve."



Company General Use

The M-346 is the core element of a cutting-edge and continuously evolving advanced flight-training system that has already demonstrated its effectiveness: a success story that has logged over 160,000 hours in flight with more than 160 aircraft sold to date, enabling several air forces in Europe and worldwide to train pilots for flying high-performance fighters such as, among others, the Eurofighter Typhoon, F-35 and next-generation 'combat air systems'.

Twenty countries – including Canada – already train their pilots on the M-346 or have selected the aircraft, in the multirole light fighter version. Thanks to its high-performance, capabilities and manoeuvrability, the M-346 has also been selected by the Italian Air Force as the future aircraft for the "Frecce Tricolori", Italy's national aerobatic team.

