



CANADIAN PEACEKEEPING VETERANS ASSOCIATION



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE ON NATIONAL PEACEKEEPERS' DAY 2015

Nearly 60 years ago, Canadian Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson had the key leading role in the creation of modern peacekeeping through the United Nations. For this highly important initiative, which had an immeasurably ameliorative long-term impact on the entire world, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Despite setbacks, today the various types of peace operations still remain the world's primary hope for international conflict resolution. The Blue Beret has been and still remains a powerful symbol for peace.

As a result of Canada's participation in over 50 military, police and related peace missions in many far-flung corners of the world for over half a century, Canada's identity to the world has been very much molded by that service and sacrifice for peace. As well, the very concept of peacekeeping is deeply ingrained in the psyche of Canadian society and our self image is certainly strongly influenced by the crucial part we have played in striving for peace in the world.

On 18 June 2008, Her Excellency the then Governor General gave Royal Assent in Her Majesty's name to Bill C-287 to proclaim 9 August as the National Peacekeepers' Day. The date was chosen because on that day in 1974, nine Canadian Peacekeepers were tragically killed en route from Beirut, Lebanon to Damascus, Syria when their Canadian Buffalo aircraft was shot down by a Syrian surface-to-air missile. It was the largest loss of life for Canadians in any single incident in peacekeeping operations. For that and much more, the world, and Canada, owes our Peacekeepers a debt of gratitude and this day is a small token of that highly deserved recognition.

While we have a deep obligation to remember those nine and the many other Peacekeepers and Veterans who have given their lives in the service of peace, we must not forget that August 9th is primarily an occasion to celebrate peacekeeping and Peacekeepers. The day is also a time for the people of Canada to recognize and respect the invaluable service and selfless sacrifice so many Peacekeepers have given. From its inception, it has been clear that the intent of August 9th is not to replace the 11 November Remembrance Day to remember the fallen. Rather, it is the officially designated day when all Canadians can acknowledge the hugely important role Canada has had in preserving peace in the world and to rejoice in the tremendously significant contribution that Canadian Peacekeepers have made.

As we all grow older, comradeship continues to be a more highly important part in the lives of Peacekeepers. National Peacekeepers' Day is the ideal occasion to be together in friendship with old comrades. It is also an opportunity to be proud of being a member of a group which has given Canada and the world so much. Although we do not have one central national event to observe National Peacekeepers' Day, we will all be together in spirit on this our special day regardless of how we celebrate it.

Please accept the recognition and gratitude which the National Peacekeepers' Day gives you as a Peacekeeper. Also, be a proud member of the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association on 9 August by being on parade wearing your Blue Beret and attending the associated social events. Remember the fallen but also enjoy the comradeship of fellow Peacekeepers on this important day.

Respectfully, with very best regards,

Ray Kokkonen

PROUD TO HAVE SERVED IN THE SERVICE OF PEACE