**ROMEO DELLAIRE**

*A retired Lieutenant-Governor, Senator and former Force Commander for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda, Mr. Dellaire is a celebrated humanitarian, author and public speaker.*

A COPY OF “IN FLANDERS FIELDS,” in John McCrae’s own hand, hung above my desk in Senate. When I first read it, as a boy in the 1950s – decades after it had been written – war had been a part of everyday life for generations. After two world wars, concepts like patriotism and unity against a common enemy felt absolute, and McCrae’s poem was like a torch being passed to every child, women and man, evoking a communal understanding of the importance of sacrifice.

When I read “In Flanders Fields,” I do not reminisce – I relive. I, like many others, have been in the midst of war and human destruction, and McCrae’s words unfurl in each of my senses, awakening in me the smell of death, the sound of children’s cries, the taste of gunpowder in the air. I feel the horror and the fear. I witness again the incredible suffering of the innocent.

It doesn’t evoke a memory; it evokes a *reality*. I would wager that when veterans of any conflict, as well as those humanitarians and diplomats who are, more and more, caught up in today’s complex missions, read McCrae’s words, they are transported, as I am, back to those terrifying places where their work, their duty and their services to humanity brought them.

**KEN DRYDEN**

*A Canadian politician, lawyer, businessman, author and former NHL goaltender. He was appointed to the order of Canada and is a member of the Hockey Hall of Fame.*

“The price of success is hard work,” read the words in the dressing room of the Toronto Maple Leaves. For the Philadelphia Flyers: “You play for the rest on the front, not the name on the back.” For the Boston Bruins: “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act, but a habit.” In Pittsburgh, the words of former Penguins coach Bob Johnson: “It’s a great day for hockey.” In Detroit: “To whom much is given, much is expected.”

In Montreal, first in the Forum and now in the Bell Centre, are John McCrae’s words from “In Flanders Fields”:

To you from failing hands we throw

The torch; be yours to hold it high.

In the season’s opening game ceremony in 2014, after I passed the torch to Canadiens goalie Carey Price, he passed it to the next player introduced, who passed it to the next one after that. In passing the torch, each player was saying to his teammate, “I trust you.” Each recipient was saying, “I accept the responsibility.” There, in the spotlight at centre ice, their witnesses were the fans. Player to player, player to fan, player and fan to team, this sealed their bond.

McCrae’s intention was not to commemorate the past and the fallen but to inspire the future. It is one thing, he was saying, for us to fight the fight. But when we pass the torch, as some day we must, if you who receive it don’t hold it high, if “ye break faith with us,” we shall have died for nothing. We shall have served no purpose and be truly dead.