

Brigadier-General Jennie Carignan: An Army frame of mind

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Brigadier-General Jennie Carignan, the commanding officer of Task Force Kandahar Engineer Regiment, takes a break in her Light Armoured Vehicle III in the District of Arghandab, Afghanistan in June 2010.

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Ottawa, Ontario — Now a Brigadier-General, Jennie Carignan's first steps in the Canadian Army (CA) were made with new challenges in mind. Literally.

“My journey in the military started as a young adult looking for something more. I was attending CEGEP in Sherbrooke, Quebec in science and I was very much interested in engineering. So, I took it from there,” said BGen Carignan, the Canadian Army's first female general in Combat Arms. She went on to attend Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario and studied fuels and materials engineering.

BGen Carignan, who is from Asbestos, Quebec, joined the CA in 1986, recently went back to school – this time at the Canadian Forces College in Toronto – prior to her promotion to Brigadier-General on June 15. The six-month course focused on national security and was attended by executives in the Canadian public service, representatives of foreign countries and the more obvious Canadian Armed Forces officers.

Between her first degree and this latest course, BGen Carignan also earned a Master's in Business Administration (Université Laval) and a Master's of Military Arts and Science (United States Army School of Advanced Military Studies in Kansas). “It's very important to learn something.”

Learning has much to do with why BGen Carignan remains with the CA after 30 years of service. “There are always good opportunities and I have taken them as they came. I work for four reasons: I want to contribute a little something and I do this through my military service; I want to learn and for me this is very important; I need to make a small difference; and, I have to earn a living. I can do all this through the Army,” explained the recent Order of Military Merit recipient.

Last month, she was also awarded a Gloire de l'Escolle medal from Université Laval in Quebec City for her contribution to society through her work with the CA.

When BGen Carignan arrives in Ottawa to take on the position of Chief of Staff of Army Operations, learning fast will again be necessary. "It is basically overseeing the day-to-day activities of the Army. I will learn more once I get there."

BGen Carignan anticipates that teamwork will play a role in her transition from student in Toronto, and before that Commandant of Royal Military College Saint-Jean, to Canadian Army Headquarters. "Working with the folks at Canadian Armed Forces is a humbling thing as they are so professional and good at what they do. Working as a team to get things done – this is the best."

Teamwork is also the approach BGen Carignan and her husband Eric Lefrancois, a former Army engineer turned high school math teacher, use in raising their children through the moves and deployments that come with military service. BGen Carignan has deployed to Afghanistan as commanding officer of the Task Force Kandahar Engineer Regiment, as well as to the Golan Heights in the Middle East and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

"Family is a team business. I have an extraordinary husband and children. They have been supportive and taught me much about teamwork. Life with the Army is basically an adventure. We move every couple of years. By the time my children graduate from high school they will have attended seven schools. My husband sometimes faces periods of unemployment. But, this is what we have decided to do," said BGen Carignan who has four children, aged nine to 20. Her two eldest children are currently attending Royal Military College.



Brigadier-General Jennie Carignan, as the commanding officer of Task Force Kandahar Engineer Regiment patrols in Nakhonay, District of Panjwai in February 2010.

In a lifetime that, so far, has been full of experiences and accomplishments, BGen Carignan has had to work at prioritizing in her civilian life, something that comes easier in her Army role. "I think that deciding what is important and what is not is my biggest challenge. Choosing what you are going to fight for and what you are going to set aside. I try and focus on the things that I can control."

BGen Carignan's mindfulness, as always, will be rock-solid in her newest role as the Canadian Army Chief of Staff, Operations. "I am looking forward to contributing to the Army's readiness and well-being. My intention is to support the Commander of the Army in leading this great institution to the best of my knowledge and abilities."