

February 10, 2006.

Dear Army,

I had a blast. Thanks so much for the wild ride, the incredible adventures, and the absolute confirmation that I did not miss my calling.

I learned a lot about you, about myself, and about this great country of ours.

- First, I froze my ass off in Wainwright. Then I froze my ass off in Kingston. Then in Valcartier. And then in Petawawa. I learned the invaluable lesson that anywhere across the land, your ass will freeze. (Although in Quebec, of course, it will freeze in a distinct manner.)
- I learned that a helicopter ride is only safe when both side doors are wide open, the better to let the cool breeze (-40° wind chill, like a warm spring day in Winnipeg) gently nibble off your skin and peel off the sole of your feet. Also, when I walked off that helicopter in Petawawa, I could not feel my butt-crack. So I found out that a) you can quite literally freeze your ass off, b) that you can still walk with your butt-crack completely numb AND the sole of your feet peeling off, and of course, c) I learned not to take for granted that most of the time, you can actually feel your butt-crack.
- The only good thing about having to use a porta-potty (or as you call them, blue rockets) at -25° : nothing stinks when it's frozen.
- On the subject of Petawawa, if you had asked me about it a year ago, I would have thought it was a made-up name. I mean, what's a wawa, and why would you want to pet one?¹ But now, I know it is a real place, with its own exit off the highway and its very own Tim Horton's.
- In Ottawa, I learned that the Army conducts "top secret" operations, and that we could not shoot video in any environment where "top secret" information would be seen, heard, implied or hinted at, whether in "top secret" language, impenetrable code, or other mysterious ways of communication. (May I suggest: just slip in a few of those acronyms and we'll all be safe.)
- At the risk of stating the obvious, dearest Army, I would like to point out that it is difficult to make videos about "top secret" jobs that we cannot show and that no one is allowed to speak of. If you have any suggestion on how to proceed on this matter, please let me know. (NOTE: Turning off the computer monitors in the rooms where you did allow us to shoot was not helpful, as young recruits could be under the impression that working with black screens is the norm in the Army.)

¹ punchline courtesy of Michal Morein

- I now understand that security clearance procedures at “top secret” facilities require that your people take a full hour to scan and dismantle all of our video equipment on the way in. But given that they demand to scan it all on the way out as well, for future reference, it would be nice if they could stay on the job until our shooting day is over. However, I am greatly reassured to know that if a war strikes between 07:00 and 15:00 EST sharp, our country is in good hands.
- Remember that day at the “top secret” facility when you told us that we were asking for too much access and we just don’t understand what you do? “Something big is happening” you said. “Just watch the news tonight and you’ll understand”. So what was this international crisis, pray tell? The top story on the six o’clock news that night – some petty thieves stole the cans collecting donations from the sale of Remembrance Day poppies. ...At a Tim Horton’s. Yep. I couldn’t make this stuff up if I tried.
- Just a couple more things, Army: in our efforts to comply with your very laudable employment equity program, we tried to showcase as much diversity as possible in our videos. For future reference, though, can you please send a memo to remind your people, when they provide us with interview subjects, that “female” is not the same as “visible minority”? Thanks.
- Lastly, while I appreciate the ingenious design of your uniform, may I suggest that the name-plate be moved to a different place, perhaps on the cap badge or somewhere near the eye line? This would prevent me in the future from starting every conversation with “Excuse me while I stare at your chest”, which can lead to unnecessary embarrassment and confusion.

That’s all for now, Army. I have a feeling we might work together again. So I’m enclosing a couple of photos just so you can remember my face. (And it will save time at the “top secret” security desk.)

Over and out.

Corporal Nardella, signing off