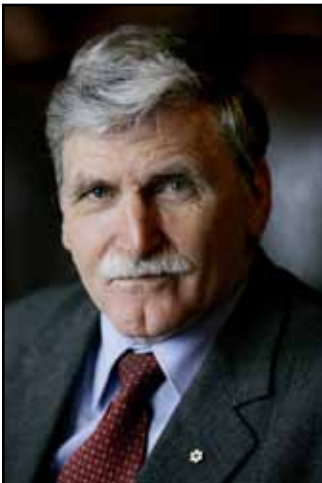


Interview with Senator Roméo Dallaire

(interviewed by Normand Carrey MD, February 22, 2012, Senate Office, Parliament of Canada)

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Brief Biographical Sketch

Roméo Dallaire is a Canadian Senator (appointed to the Senate effective March 24, 2005 and sits as a member of the Liberal Party of Canada) and retired Canadian Army Lieutenant-General. A devoted humanitarian, Lieutenant General (LGen) Dallaire is President of the Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire Foundation; founder of the Child Soldiers Initiative, a project aimed at eradicating the use of child soldiers; an outspoken advocate for human rights, particularly war-affected children, women, the Canadian First Nations, and military veterans; a respected champion of genocide prevention initiatives, the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, and nuclear non-proliferation, as well as a best-selling author.

Throughout his distinguished military career, LGen Dallaire served in staff, training, and command positions throughout North America, Europe, and Africa, rising in rank from Army Cadet in 1960 to Lieutenant-General in 1998.

Most notably, LGen Dallaire was appointed Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) prior to and during the 1994 genocide. LGen Dallaire provided the United Nations (UN) with information about the planned massacre, which ultimately took more than 800,000 lives in less than 100 days, yet permission to intervene was denied and the UN withdrew its peacekeeping forces. LGen Dallaire, along with a small contingent

of Ghanaian soldiers and military observers, disobeyed the command to withdraw and remained in Rwanda to fulfill their ethical obligation to protect those who sought refuge with the UN forces.

His courage and leadership during this mission earned him the Meritorious Service Cross, the United States Legion of Merit, the Aegis Award on Genocide Prevention, and the affection and admiration of people around the globe. His defiant dedication to humanity during that mission is well-documented (e.g. *The Last Just Man*, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey of Romeo Dallaire*, *The Lion*, *The Fox*, and *The Eagle*), as are the personal consequences he continues to suffer and his subsequent commitment to fellow victims of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Upon being medically released from the Canadian Army in 2000, LGen Dallaire has served on the UN Advisory Committee on Genocide Prevention, as Special Advisor to the Minister of Veterans Affairs Canada, as Advisor to the Minister of National Defense, and as Special Advisor to the Minister responsible for the Canadian International Development Agency on matters relating to war-affected children.

LGen Dallaire was born in Denekamp, Holland, on June 25, 1946, to Canadian Army Sergeant Roméo Louis Dallaire and Catherine Johanna Dallaire. He was raised and educated in Canada, joining le Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean in 1964 (later assuming command of this institution as Brigadier-General in 1989), and graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree from the Royal Military College in 1969. He also attended the Canadian Land Forces Command and Staff College, the United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College in Virginia, and the United Kingdom Higher Command and Staff Course. LGen Dallaire holds honorary doctorates and fellowships from nearly three dozen universities in Canada and the United States.

LGen Dallaire is an Officer of the Order of Canada, a Grand Officer of the National Order of Quebec, and a Commander of the Order of Military Merit. He is the recipient of the United Nations Association of Canada's *Pearson Peace Medal*, the *Arthur Kroeger College Award for Ethics in Public Affairs* from Carleton University, the *Laureate of Excellence* from the Manitoba Health Sciences Centre, and the Harvard University *Humanist Award*.

He is author of two best-selling books. His harrowing experiences in Rwanda are detailed in *Shake Hands with the Devil—the Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, which won the Governor General's Literary Award for Non-Fiction in 2004 and the *Shaughnessy Cohen Prize* for political writing awarded by the Writers' Trust of Canada. It provided the basis for an Emmy Award-winning documentary as well as a major motion picture of the same name; it has also been entered into evidence in war crimes tribunals trying the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide. LGen Dallaire's most recent book, *They Fight Like Soldiers; They Die Like Children—the Global Quest to Eradicate the Use of Child Soldiers*, introduces the Child Soldier phenomenon and solutions to eradicate it—a mission to which LGen Dallaire has committed the rest of his life.

Q. You have witnessed a lot of atrocities, atrocities we cannot even start to imagine. What keeps you optimistic?

A. My optimism came from a very deliberate decision, after my fourth suicide attempt, from the realization that having short-term objectives, we risk not reaching them which then turns into a negative state. The area I was evolving in i.e. human rights, mass atrocities, conflict resolution, needed a much longer-term perspective—and so I used my experience in equipment acquisition for the military, where it takes 25 years to accomplish anything, so three or four years is not long. In a world where human beings seek serenity and not conflict and with the advancement and revolution of communications, the growing strength of non-government agencies (NGOs), the creation of international forums like the criminal courts—all these are positive developments but it may take a few centuries to accomplish something, but that is ok I will do my little part, others will do theirs, so the optimism comes from adopting this long-term view to very difficult problems versus trying to imagine resolving these big problems in the short-term and simply hitting what seems to be insurmountable obstacles.

As one of my friends told me “How do you eat a one ton marshmallow?” One bite at a time. That's where my optimism comes from. There is movement towards progress and resolution of these issues, it's up to us to further encourage it, but one must take a long-term view.

Q. Why the fourth time, anything special about that?

A. Ya, something like the Holy Ghost appeared, ha-ha. No really it was a culmination, the realization that I was not going to be able to wipe myself out because I was so closely guarded, and surrounded. Also I had peer support, the medications were helpful and the book, “Shake Hands with the Devil” was taking shape about my experiences in Rwanda. The therapy was breaking down the horrific extremes of which I was re-living, starting to attenuate them, then I was able to think more clearly, the book started to take shape and make sense for me.

Q. Was the process of writing helpful to you?

A. The writing of the book was absolutely useless in the therapeutic sense because it threw me back to the hell I had lived seven years earlier in Rwanda, because the only way to write it was to relive it. Even the smell of the notes I had taken back in Rwanda gave me horrific flashbacks, I was reliving every day. However what came to the fore when I started to write is that I found a satisfaction, writing gave a discipline to my thinking, a discipline that I had completely lost, that intellectual discipline was making things become clearer. But it did not attenuate the reliving of the Rwandan experience in the period of three years while writing the book.

Q. Was it your first time writing?

A. I had done some military publications in the past but it was mostly technical material.

Q. What more do child psychiatrists and mental health therapists need to know about military families, especially those of us not in the milieu?

A. There is a whole uncharted territory to discover here, not only on how to intervene but to bring a new dimension to caring for these families.

The children of military families are very different than the normal population. My wife taught these kids for 12 years, herself being a kid from a military family. These kids are independent, more autonomous, adapt better to circumstances, can make friends more easily and they have a wider perspective because they have had to move a lot, either within the country or abroad. Their parent in the military has had to travel so the parent brings an international dimension to the family. These kids are resilient and they are better equipped to deal with change and difficulties. They have been exposed to multicultural or multi-ethnic situation, so they are more aware of those nuances and slight differences, especially those living on the big military bases.

Another facet of their experience is that they live a family life that few other children live. One of the parents is gone for a long period of time, not on a business trip for three or four days. Also the parent who has gone away, is not there as a tourist but under situations of danger and risk.

Separate from this there is also the fact that there can be, if not hostility, certainly antagonism towards these families and children by teachers, the hockey coach, other people in their social environment if people outside of the military are not in agreement with the mission, whether it's Afghanistan or the decision not to go to Iraq. The teachers or other adults will lose patience, too often the child will be chastised by the others because these adults don't understand what the kid might be going through. This creates a situation where

children can sense the tension but they are not sophisticated enough to understand the whole situation or how to handle it.

All of this puts an incredible level of stress on these kids and their families.

Also it creates more difficulty if the spouse is not handling it well, that will exacerbate the pressures on the kids. Sometimes it may be other members of the extended family, aunts, uncles or cousins who may be antagonistic to the mission. Or it may be that the grandparents are pissed off because their son has gone away and he is in a dangerous at-risk situation and they are having a hard time dealing with it, so they end up taking it out on the family.

The older the child is, i.e. teenagers, the more they are aware, and more conscious of their vulnerability (i.e. of something happening to their parent)—they understand more, but they can't assimilate it all either.

In addition to coping with the absence of his parent, the child or youth must cope with all the media attention surrounding military missions and consequently his/her parent.

Q. That's interesting. Can you say a bit more about that aspect, i.e. the media aspect?

A. Like my mother-in-law said to me in 1994 when I returned from Rwanda, from her experience in the past with WW2 when the whole country was at war, everyone had to sacrifice, so everyone was in it together. Also in the past they did not have the means of communication as they exist today, the ubiquitous presence of the media, and there was more censorship around reporting.

So going back to the way kids experience their parent being away at war somewhere, the neighbor's dad could be a plumber or a civil servant but that parent comes back home every night whereas for the military parent, the kid may find out about his dad (or mom if that's the case) through another kid who saw a news clip reporting on the conflict, announcing soldiers were killed or wounded, raising the possibility that it might be that kid's dad or mom being killed or injured.

As an example of the power of the media in my own life, it took a year after my return from Rwanda before my family would talk at 6:30 when the radio program "As it Happens" was on the air because I used to get interviewed at that time by Michael Enright when I was in Rwanda. So I told my family, I am here now, you can start talking to me and you don't have to listen in silence to "As it Happens".

So this continuous media coverage contributes to the sense that military families are there, experiencing the mission with their dads or moms, experiencing the tensions and the conflicts, whereas back at home the rest of country is oblivious because the country is really not at war.

Q. How are we doing as military and non-military mental health (civilian) providers for families and veterans?

A. For families, not only is there professionally a gap, but the therapeutic community is not grasping the scale of the impact on the children and youth, including not only depression but suicide and we are just starting to hear about suicide in the youths in these families.

So what we discovered is that even those who have worked in the military milieu are not knowledgeable of children because the federal government has refused to really commit itself to assisting families. It is doing it haphazardly, on a case-by-case basis, be it National Defense, or Veterans Canada.

But then when you turn to elements to attenuate that suffering in veterans, when a decision is made to send someone in distress to therapists for psychotherapy or for medications—and from my personal experience that is a bit like you are a chemistry set for a while until they find a pill that works—there is also the peer support aspect. Family support centers on big bases like Val Cartier are helpful but not available to the reservist who is sitting in Matane, a long way from the Val Cartier base and he is the only guy in town who was sent to Afghanistan.

For the veteran, if you look at the mission itself as phases, the first phase is preparation for the mission and the stresses that entails, then deployment and the stress that causes, but the next phase is when the member comes back home—is the parent coming back the same one as the one who left—I know that I was not the same husband, not the same father as when I left. The family has been going through stresses and trauma and all of a sudden the member who has come back has changed psychologically if not physically. It creates a whole new dynamic in the family.

Then the question becomes, can the family sustain that next phase of the adjustment, i.e. with everything the family has been through already, can they now handle a PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) father where you do not know by looking at him if he will explode or start crying. His own inability to cope with the re-adjustment may lead to excessive drinking or physical abuse in the family, so you cannot assume with the return of the member that things are going to come back to normal. If anything it may exacerbate all the family tensions that pre-existed.

So there is a dearth of depth by even those knowledgeable of the military milieu on how to handle the family.

When you ask the civilian therapists to assist a military family, there are even further challenges to understanding the military culture. There are some therapists who have experience working with policemen, firemen who have been traumatized etc., but working with people who come from a Darwinian culture—meaning the military is very Darwinian—you are either performing 100 per cent or we don't

need you—the military is very ruthless because of what it is demanding from the soldier—that sort of atmosphere is pervasive in the military. It's not a culture that will easily project its weaknesses particularly if it's not visible, because the second dimension of this military subculture is that it is very visual. If it's not visual it then becomes difficult to grasp.

So imagine coming from the outside into this environment that is culturally different than the general population, and has a very demanding code of activity, of knowledge, its own language. So the civilian therapist coming into this has a steep learning curve, how are they even deemed as acceptable to offer help by the veteran seeking help. What I mean by this is if they, the therapists, don't know the difference between corporal and general, any of the military acronyms, how pilots are different than maintainers, infantry different than mechanics then the credibility gap is vast, so by the first encounter the therapist may have created an unscalable wall between him and the veteran.

Q. What do you think is needed to address that situation?

A. What is needed is research, far more exchange of knowledge and skills from that environment into your therapist community, that it be peer reviewed and intellectually rigorous research so it can be accepted, and not anecdotal BS—that has not been done. That to me is scandalous, on both sides, those in the military are not writing enough and those who are outside being brought in, have not really searched it out thoroughly enough.

The last point is peer support—no matter how much therapy and meds you get, which are important, even fundamental and essential, but in addition you need peer support. I needed at least a few sessions a week of three or four hours with a peer that would simply listen, not ask stupid questions, this peer being preferably someone outside the family.

For youth there is no such structure of peer support. How do you build peer support among the youth, how to nurture that, how to create communication among them, in order to get to the one youth who is affected. There has been practically nothing built in the schools to create that peer youth-to-youth or professional-to-youth peer environment and this lack of peer support is causing hemorrhaging in between therapist sessions.

Q. Africa seems like an open wound with all the conflicts going on there (Rwanda, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Congo). In your book on child soldiers, you state that we see that as a problem that does not concern us, but we are creating the next generation of problems if we do not act now. Is the first world in collective denial of the problem? What must we do to stop the hemorrhaging?

A. The question that comes to mind is whether we believe that we in the developed world believe whether all humans are humans—is a kid who has been abducted, abused, drugged up and indoctrinated under duress and fear and then armed and then trained and programmed to kill and maim—whether that child is equal to your own child? Is the child in the middle of a civil war, or genocide, is that ten year old, as human as your own child? We will go in our sophisticated societies absolutely nuts on an Amber alert—as we should, we can mobilize the country on an Amber alert yet there are hundreds of thousands of children abused in these conflict zones. It has not generated the momentum in those same societies that believe in human rights, to attenuate that problem except in the most clinical fashion which is international conventions, legal structures, NGOs dedicated to rehabilitation and reintegration, but with all that effort going on, even the laws making it a crime to use children as soldiers, none of that has fundamentally attenuated the use of child soldiers since the 80s. What I just mentioned, it is all solid stuff we need to fight impunity, to recuperate those children who have been abused and there is a lot of resilience in those kids, especially a 14 year old who has the leadership capacities of a 25 year old but there has been nothing done to stop the adults recruiting them and using them as weapons of war.

Nor has there been much done to neutralize the child soldier as a weapons system. If it's a tank, we use an anti-tank gun, but if it's a child armed with an AK-47 or a whole gang of them, is the answer just shooting them like any other belligerent? So far all the doctrines around the world have said that because nations have the right to self-defense and that child is armed, the response has been that we can use lethal force to stop them. That vacuum has permitted the continued use of children as soldiers, and has made people in the developed world go to the easier of the solutions i.e. demobilize and then rehabilitate and reintegrate them. It is much harder to stop them before that i.e. how do you stop the adults from recruiting them, how do you make them a liability to the adult who wants to use them? That is the essence of what I am doing right now—going after the tactics, the training, the organizations, the equipment like non-lethal weapons to neutralize these kids and finding ways to prevent their recruitment in conflict zones. I am not looking at how to stop a conflict, but taking the kids out of the equation.

Q. Again, referencing your second book on child soldiers, you speak of your own childhood and the role of the imagination, especially the novel "Le Petit Prince" by St Exupery as a source of resilience to cope with the challenges of the future. How did that help you to overcome your own challenges? How can we assure a more humane childhood and imagination for the rest of the kids from the third world, especially those in conflict zones?

A. There is a NGO called Clowns without Borders. It was started by a group of young comedians from Montreal. I met them and asked them what they were doing. They told me they will go into refugee camps and teach children how to play, sing, laugh. This seems to give these kids the capacity to cope with their difficult situation. It seems to me there has been an explosion of NGOs recently that put the emphasis on developing the less serious, the more playful side of the child. I think that there is finally this realization that the imaginary world inside each one of us, whatever that is depending on our culture, whether it's the legend of Prince Charming, a more intimate link with the animal world or simply an adaptation of the environment to the imaginary, this imaginary world never disappears. It may be forgotten or suppressed but even those made prisoners can go back and seek comfort from the imaginary or use it as a guidepost when they are coping with suffering.

I think that St Exupery tried to explain that in his book "The Little Prince", and this was when he was going through the second world war, that the imagination is an innate capacity in all of us, but especially in the child, and it can help the adult in times of distress or hardship, protecting ourselves from physical or psychological pain, but it has to be nurtured. Nurturing and encouraging that capacity was what I was trying to write about in my book.

I've had people say to me, "Roméo you are a romantic"; that can be complimentary, but also can be pejorative, because I was in such a dangerous world back in Rwanda, but I would argue the rubric of the romantic is the strength of the imaginary.

Q. Is that not contradictory with military values?

A. No because I think some of the greatest romantics are military. After my grade 12 graduation there was a priest that brought us for a three-day retreat. At the retreat, there was an older priest, an army padre from WW2 and he said there is no doubt that those in the military who are the most disciplined, rigorous, even aggressive can be the most sensitive, especially if they have seen the extremes of life and death. The one most sensitive to the human being and his suffering is the soldier. He is the last one to use force because he has been disciplined in the use of force and he knows the impact of suffering on fellow human beings.

That is also another reason why PTSD is more prevalent now because at least in the past it was soldier against soldier, it was clearer. Now civilians are destroying each other in civil wars or whatever factions trying to get the upper hand. Soldiers can't tell the difference between who is the enemy and who is the civilian.

Q. What were the values handed down by your parents that inspired you in your life?

A. In my family it was very simple. Make certain the roof does not leak, make sure there is food on the table, oil in the furnace to keep us warm, those were the fundamental responsibilities and duties of the parents. From that fundamental level, to be able to influence us to have a work ethic, to have personal discipline, strive towards your ambitions, being more aware of the religious dimension, those were more lofty values that came after basic needs were met.

But when you grew up with nothing like my father did, you guaranteed the basics for your family, but it was never accomplished by sacrificing anything at the expense of others. It was not by making others suffer that you met your own needs. "You never steal" was a strong value of my father. The worst sin in the army is to steal. Also what my father taught is never to be cheap—what I mean by that is not being foolhardy about it, but you never feared sharing. Sharing was a way of life for my family, because you were surrounded by others worse off than you, you never abandoned other human beings.

That came from my dad's experience struggling as a youth alone, and my mom's experience with the war. My dad came from a mining family and lost his parents when he was very young and ended up working on a farm out west, never had a cent to his name and did not have more than a grade eight education. He worked hard for every penny he had. He joined the army because there was nothing else available. My mom came from a well-established middle class family in Europe, she lived through six years of deprivations because of WW2, so this gave my parents incredible depth about how they should treat other human beings.

Q. You have been a military person all of your life, coming from a military family. When is it that you realized that you had another career as an author, speaker, politician? Was there a decisive moment?

A. My father was a career soldier, we lived in military housing, things military were always around us, I was in the army cadets at school, soldiering was innate in the family milieu. My education was military college instead of civilian university. I married a girl whose dad and grandfather were professional military officers. We lived on a military base, my wife even taught school on the military base. We were immersed in it—our children enjoyed being in the cadets. There was not much debate outside of that. Then all of a sudden, after all the therapy and care following my Rwanda experience, it was decided I would have to be medically released because of my injury, this was back in December 1999. So all of a sudden a horrific scenario presented itself—what the hell am I going to do with the rest of my life now? So what does a retired three star injured general do in Quebec City? All I could see was having to continue to

work, because my children were still in college and because we had married late in life there was no option of sitting on my butt. I saw myself probably as a pretty good shoe salesman! For about three months in the process of being released from the forces there was nothing I could see that I could do to provide a steady income to continue to provide for my family.

Q. Excuse me for this very naive question but can you not live on a military pension?

A. No you don't live on a military pension, it's not enough, especially with two kids in college. Besides I had absolutely no interest on sitting on my ass, I am not very good at that—walk around the house, clean the garden, do maintenance of which I am very ineffective. And so there was a real debate on what to do for the first time in my life, taking the uniform off and finding employment. Fortunately a major conference was planned for 2000 on war-affected children and child protection which Canada was sponsoring and 100 countries were participating—I knew one of the organizers from my time in the military so I simply contacted her and said to her—*you know I was facing these kids in war, I gained insight—would you be interested in me giving a paper.* I had done some speaking on the war in Rwanda but it was very much within the military environment. They accepted and within the four days of the conference I was appointed as Special Advisor to Minister of International Development on war affected children, and never looked back. It was part-time but gave me focus, and there were

more calls for me to write my experiences as a book, even from my family to know what happened in Rwanda. And the two of those things came together.

Q. Has your family read your book “Shake hands with the Devil?”

A. They still have not read it.

Then I was offered a fellowship at Harvard to pursue my research at the Carr Foundation. Shortly after that I was called to the Senate by Prime Minister Paul Martin.

Q. Usually the Senate is perceived by the public as the chamber of sober reflection, in other words the image that comes to mind of a Senator is someone who is not very active. Why did you choose this route? Did you have to think about it?

A. No I did not even think about it, I jumped at the opportunity. In my military experience I had testified in front of House of Commons committees and Senate committees and I knew I could do a lot more from inside rather than snipping at it from outside.

Q. Any last words of wisdom?

A. For your colleagues, the work to be done for children and youth where risk is involved where chances of psychological stress is high, there is an incredible dearth of rigorous intellectually peer reviewed material to get ahead of the game and help these kids and their families—so it's high time to get engaged!

Thank you for your time Senator Dallaire.