



# WEBNEWS

This Week's News From [www.rclbr50.ca](http://www.rclbr50.ca)



Ontario : Branch 50 - FRED GIES, Kitchener. 🍁

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Week Ending December 22, 2007

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## The Royal Canadian Legion, Ontario Command Winter Indoor Track & Field Championship 2008



Track & Field

PRESS  
RELEASE  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION,  
ONTARIO COMMAND  
WINTER INDOOR TRACK & FIELD  
CHAMPIONSHIPS 2008

On February 9th, 2008, approximately 300-400 young amateur athletes will gather from across Ontario at the Track & Field Centre, York University, Metro Toronto, Ontario.

### Age Limits

Male and Female Athletes, 17 years of age and under at December 31st in the year of competition.

Male and Female Athletes, 15 years of age and under at December 31st in the year of competition.

Events for both male and female athletes

|                                 |              |
|---------------------------------|--------------|
| 60 MH                           | Long Jump    |
| 60 Meters                       | High Jump    |
| 200 Meters                      | Triple Jump  |
| 400 Meters                      | Shot Put (4  |
| Kilo – Girls & Boys 15 & Under) |              |
| 800 Meters                      | Shot Put (12 |
| lbs. – Boys 17 & Under)         |              |
| 1500 Meters                     | Pole Vault   |

(Boys & Girls 17 & Under)  
3000 Meters  
1000 Meter Walk – Male and Female  
Athletes, 17 years of age and under  
only. Bantam Girls and Boys may  
enter if they so desire.

Provincial President George  
O'Dair or in his absence his  
representative along with Provincial  
Track & Field Chairman Robert  
Tucker, other V.I.P.'s and Legion  
dignitaries will be present for the  
official opening ceremonies at the  
complex on Saturday, February 9th for  
9:15a.m. No Substitution or post  
entries will be permitted.

The Royal Canadian Legion is  
pleased to have the continued support  
from our Track & Field corporate  
sponsors Home Hardware Stores  
Limited and Programmed Insurance  
Brokers Inc.

For further information  
concerning the 2008 Legion Winter  
Track & Field Meet, please contact the  
Chairman Robert Tucker (613)345-  
5808, or Mrs. Robyn Zettler at the  
Ontario Command Office (905)841-  
7999.

RCL Fred Gies (Ontario No. 50)  
Branch Contact: Gloria McKibbin  
(519) 745-5101

Kitchener, ON December 15, 2007

Sunday, December 16, 2007  
Gloria McKibbin, Track & Field Chairman on  
behalf of Ontario Command  
Section: RCL

## The Future Of The Dugout Newsletter



The Dugout Newsletter has been a  
part of The Royal Canadian Legion -  
Fred Gies (Ontario No. 50) Branch  
history for over 70 years. The  
newsletter is mailed to upwards of 450  
members every two months, while 125  
copies are made for members to  
pickup in the branch. The remaining  
members receive their newsletter by e-

mail.

The costs associated with publishing  
and mailing the Dugout have  
increased over the years, and your  
executive would like to know what  
changes you, the general members,  
would like to see happen to help  
reduce some or all of these costs.

Please sign into the members area of  
the website and complete the survey.

Monday, December 17, 2007  
PRO  
Section: Executive

## Judge made a mistake



I'm writing regarding the Dec. 8 article,  
Judge Frowns On Poppies In  
Courtroom, regarding the remarks of  
Justice Margaret Woolcott who told a  
police officer that a poppy may not be  
acceptable to everyone who comes to  
court.

I gather from this that even the highest  
of the high in our society occasionally  
make a mistake. I would like to remind  
Woolcott that the poppy is a symbol of  
remembrance and not a symbol of  
support. She need remember nothing  
more than that a veteran -- whether on  
active duty, retired or on reserve -- is  
someone who at one point in his or  
her life wrote a blank cheque made  
payable to Canada for an amount of  
up to and including their life.

David Davidson, chairman  
Kitchener-Waterloo Poppy Fund  
Kitchener

Monday, December 17, 2007  
Dave Davidson, President Fred Gies Branch 50  
(On.) RCL  
Section: Poppy Campaign

## Poppy is a symbol of the high price of war



I wonder how Rev. Paul Bosch  
acquired his definition of what our  
poppy means when he wrote his Dec.  
15 letter to the editor. He supported a  
judge who objected to a police officer  
wearing a poppy in her courtroom and  
wrote that "for a small but growing  
percentage of Canadians, the poppy  
has become a partisan symbol of  
acquiescence to the necessity for war  
and violence as a solution to human  
conflicts."

I have seen a lot of news clips of the  
wars of the 20th century, and the one  
that we are struggling with today in  
Afghanistan. I have never seen a  
soldier wearing a poppy into battle.  
But I have seen countless examples of  
soldiers wearing and carrying their  
national flags as they face the enemy.  
I know dozens of veterans, and  
although many agree that the time of  
their youth spent overseas was the  
most exhilarating -- this is mostly  
heard from those who came back in  
one piece -- not one would want to  
repeat it.

I met one vet several years ago who  
wears a poppy every day. He doesn't  
do it to remind him of war. He doesn't  
need any reminding. He wears the  
poppy to honour his best friend whose  
body he cradled in the last minutes of  
his life during a battle in Holland in  
April 1945.

If Rev. Bosch is correct that most  
pacifists focus on the poppy as a  
symbol of war, I trust they can accept  
that to me and to many of those who  
came back alive, and to many of those  
related to those who fought and died,  
the poppy does not represent war nor  
the taking of lives. Instead, it  
represents the freedoms we enjoy  
today, personal sacrifice, unbelievable  
hardship, lifetime comradeship,  
gravestones in a far-off country and  
the knowledge that we need to try  
harder to avoid letting people like  
Adolf Hitler ever again rise to power.

The poppy is a symbol of peace. The poppy cries out "Please, never again. The cost is way too high."

Tuesday, December 18, 2007  
John McVicar, Kitchener, From The Record  
Section: Poppy Campaign

## Christmas packages flood Kandahar; boost morale among Canadian troops



KANDAHAR, Afghanistan - "This one's for you," one of the postal workers at Kandahar Airfield said as he picked a small parcel wrapped in snowman-covered Christmas paper out of a giant skid of mail for Canadian troops in Afghanistan.

A beaming Master Cpl. Carlo Gagnon proudly boasts that it happens to be his 40th birthday and carefully sets the gift aside to open later.

He's got far too much work ahead of him to really enjoy it right now. After all, it was just one of thousands of letters and parcels - 6,000 kilograms in total - to arrive at the post office of the sprawling military base Tuesday.

"The busiest time of year is before Christmas," said Sgt. Sylvain Boucher, the post master. "Halloween and Valentine's Day we receive a lot of mail, but it's nothing compared to Christmas."

With the holidays just a week away, Canadian Forces postal workers certainly have their hands full.

In the last two weeks alone, they've received some 43,000 kilograms worth of letters and packages for the troops.

That's nearly a third of the total volume of mail received since August when the current batch of soldiers first arrived in Afghanistan.

Shipments of mail usually come in every two days but that's just because there's not enough flights to get it to Kandahar sooner.

This is the second year Canada Post has agreed to ship parcels to the troops from friends and family for free over the holidays.

Gagnon said the incentive saw deliveries triple last year and suggests things are about the same this year.

Far too "mellow" to get stressed out over the huge task of sorting the mail and handing it to the troops, Gagnon said getting the job done quickly is crucial. Many of the soldiers are stationed in remote forward operating bases and police substations kilometres away from the main base.

"That's their morale," he said. "They're expecting a parcel so it's their morale. We're doing it as fast as we can so they can have it in their hands."

Noting he feels a bit like a year-round Santa Claus, Gagnon said working at the military base post office is a great job to have as "people are always happy to see you."

The other half of the job involves outgoing mail of which the post office has shipped about 80,000 kilograms.

Just as friends and relatives are shipping the troops goodies from home, many soldiers will send home gifts purchased at the Saturday afternoon bazaar.

Sweets and savouries comprise much of the incoming mail, while Afghan chess boards and marble dishes are among some of the most popular outgoing gifts, he said, adding: "I don't know if I should say it because a lot of people will receive it for Christmas."

Canada Post will continue delivering letters and parcels to Canadian troops for free until Jan. 11. Items must be dropped off in person at postal outlets and will be shipped to Canadian Forces bases in Canada.

The Department of National Defence will then forward the mail to the troops overseas. Mail must be addressed to a specific soldier and should include the person's rank and mission information to ensure timely delivery.

Tuesday, December 18, 2007  
Tobi Cohen, The Canadian Press  
Section: Afghanistan

## THE SANDS OF CHRISTMAS



I had no Christmas spirit when I  
breathed a weary sigh.  
And looked across the table where the  
bills were piled too high.

The laundry wasn't finished and the  
car I had to fix,  
My stocks were down another point,  
the Leafs lost by six.

And so with only minutes till by son  
got home from school  
I gave up on the drudgery and  
grabbed a wooden stool.

The burdens that I carried were about  
all that I could take,  
And so I flipped the TV on to catch a  
little break.

I came upon a desert scene in shades  
of tan and rust,  
No snowflakes hung upon the wind,  
just clouds of swirling dust.

And where the reindeer should have  
stood before a laden sleigh,  
Eight Humvees ran a column right  
behind an M1A.

A group of boys walked past the tank,  
not one was past his teens  
Their eyes were hard as polished flint,  
their faces drawn and lean.

They walked the street in armor with  
their rifles shouldered tight,  
Their dearest wish for Christmas, just  
to have a silent night.

Other soldiers gathered, hunkered  
down against the wind,  
To share a scrap of mail and dreams

of going home again.

There wasn't much at all to put their  
lonely hearts at ease,  
They had no Christmas turkey, just a  
pack of MREs.

They didn't have a garland or a  
stocking I could see,  
They didn't need an ornament-they  
lacked a Christmas tree.

They didn't have a present even  
though it was tradition,  
The only boxes I could see were  
labeled "ammunition."

I felt a little tug and found my son now  
by my side,  
He asked me what it was I feared and  
why it was I cried.

I swept him up into my arms and held  
him oh so near,  
and kissed him on the forehead as I  
whispered in his ear.

"There's nothing wrong, my little son,  
for safe we sleep tonight,  
Our heroes stand on foreign land to  
give us all the right,

To worry on the things in life that  
mean nothing at all,  
instead of wondering if we will be the  
next to fall.

He looked at me as children do and  
said, "it's always right,  
To thank the ones who help us and  
perhaps that we should write"

And so we pushed aside the bills and  
sat to draft a note,  
To thank the many far from home, and  
this is what we wrote:

"God bless you all and keep you safe  
and speed your way back home  
Remember that we love you so, and  
that you're not alone.

The gift you give you share with all, a  
present every day,  
You give the gift of Liberty and that we  
can't repay."

Michael Marks

Wednesday, December 19, 2007  
MICHAEL MARKS, The web  
Section: Afghanistan

## Veterans Ombudsman's Website Message



It is both an honour and a privilege to have been appointed as Canada's first Veterans Ombudsman. Throughout my career in the Canadian Forces, I have fostered a deep respect for the sacrifices and accomplishments of our soldiers during the two Great Wars, the Korean War and countless other crises around the world since then - all in the name of peace on Earth. As a soldier myself, I have witnessed first-hand how Canadians have continued to carry the torch of peace on contemporary battlefields, such as the Former Republic of Yugoslavia and Afghanistan.

Whether stabilizing war-torn regions to facilitate reconstruction, preventing tyranny and aggression from holding nations prisoner or providing assistance to disaster relief operations at home and abroad, our veterans characterize what it means to be Canadian. Such historic sacrifices by Canada's sons and daughters in the name of peace and stability formed the cornerstone of our international reputation as a caring nation that lives on today. The continued selflessness of our service personnel around the world will serve to perpetuate that legacy for many years to come. Those of us, who are inordinately proud of what Canada stands for, owe a huge collective debt of gratitude to our veterans. I am therefore delighted to

be in a position to enhance how our nation expresses its appreciation to these national treasures.

As Ombudsman, I will take the lead in championing the cause of all veterans. In doing so, I call on veterans from every era and their respective associations to rally behind me and to offer me advice and constructive criticism. Moreover, I ask all Canadians to join me in expressing our appreciation to those Canadians who have represented our values around the world. Actions speak louder than words. I therefore look forward to the active support of Canadians from every walk of life, in my quest to enhance the lifestyle and well being of those who put so much on the line on our behalf and ask for so little in return. I expect I will receive timely support from those who administer the laws, policies and programs on behalf of the Government of Canada, to streamline any procedures that might impede our ability to live up to our obligations articulated in the Veterans Bill of Rights. Finally, I am confident that all levels of government will live up to our Nation's commitment to deliver the services and benefits that our Veterans so rightly deserve.

In the pursuit of my mandate I will not waver from my commitment to promote the rights of veterans. In doing so I will:

Facilitate the understanding of and access to VAC services; Address complaints regarding the treatment of our veterans, their families or other entitled parties; and Identify and facilitate the elimination of emerging and systemic issues that impact negatively on VAC's ability to provide services and benefits.

To view the complete mandate of my office, the Order in Council is available on the website at <http://www.ombudsman-veterans.gc.ca/content/council.cfm>.

I encourage you to contact the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman any time you might have any questions or concerns.

Wednesday, December 19, 2007  
Colonel (retired) Patrick B. Stogran, MSc, CD,  
Veterans Ombudsman  
Section: Veterans

## Just a short story will do...



His goal is simple—help young Canadians connect with veterans and serving military members. Youth of today are looking for the real stories; they want to know more about their military—beyond Remembrance Day.

So Ron Way, of Creativeway Services, Vancouver B.C., set out on a quest to find the best way to promote the legacy of community service by the Royal Canadian Legion and connect the dots for the young people. Mr. Way has worked with many veterans and young people over the years, when he was writing, directing and producing war history dramas for Veterans Affairs Canada. This is where his deep affection to have youth connect with veterans and the CF began. “They (youth) have a lot of history facts and figures thrown at them in school,” he says. “But there’s nothing like a personal story to communicate the true nature of community service of the Canadian Forces throughout the history of our country.”

Mr. Way along with Legion members discussed how to best promote this legacy of community service and connect with the young people at the same time. So through these needs the concept of Legion Legacies was formed. “Basically it’s an attempt to promote community service, and at the same time tell the story of the Royal Canadian Legion to our young people, and what it represents,” said Mr. Way.

This idea also opens the door for the youth to tell their personal stories about military family members and encourages them to dig a little deeper into their past. “We’re all here because of a near miss somewhere down the line,” said Mr. Way.

The Legion would like to have more CF members take a leading role and help this Web site (Legion Legacies) grow, so young people and ordinary Canadians can connect with veterans

and serving members. And also understand what this community service is all about, and hopefully start a new family activity around Remembrance Day. “There’s no higher form of community service than being willing to lay down your life for your country, your people and your community than that commitment.”

A CF member doesn’t have to be a literary marvel to participate in this project. They just need a little time, use the simplest of terms and even photos. “Just a short story, to make people think and over time we hope this will be an oral history of Canada,” says Mr. Way.

The use of a Web site—a medium youth and adults understand—will help spread these stories. So as the originator of Legion Legacies B.C./Yukon command Royal Canadian Legion is really promoting this site within their legion branches throughout B.C. and the Yukon, with hopes it will spread across the country. “Kids really do want to know their history and where they came from,” said Mr. Way. “And with every pasting generation this is getting dimmer and dimmer.” The idea of this project is to get legionnaires to talk to their children and grandchildren and get their stories on-line. The founders are aware it will take time to get things up and running. “We are committed and five years from now we want it to be an amazing on-line one stop shop for military history,” said an excited Mr. Way.

The main message they want to project is go ask your parents and grandparents about your family history. “It lies with our generation,” says Mr. Way. “Parents need to take the time to realize this is your history, and if you don’t tell your children they’ll never know where they came from.” Mr. Way feels that to give our young people a sense of community they need to know where they came from to bond with that community. In the past the youth he has worked with were excited when they discovered a story from their grandparents. “They were so passionate about finally learning something that meant something to them, this is what gave me the idea that we needed to do something.” Mr. Way says credit really

goes to the B.C./Yukon command Royal Canadian Legion for seeing and understanding this vision and making the site happen.

The torch needs to be passed to our youth so they can pick up and carry on telling the stories of our veterans. Mr. Way would like to see CF members help, “there seems to be a bit of a disconnect with what our military is doing today in Afghanistan and other places,” he says. “We need to tell the stories of our military building schools, and creating situations for people to live freely, these stories are so beautiful.”

The Legion Legacies Web site is catching on quickly—multiple organizations and educators are also linking to site. “The Royal Canadian Legion is thrilled with the initial response,” says Mr. Way. So to share a story, adopt a veteran or post a tribute go to <http://www.legionlegacies.org>.

Wednesday, December 19, 2007  
Cheryl MacLeod, The Maple Leaf  
Section: Veterans

## O Christmas tree...



The holidays are just around the corner, and while many Canadians celebrate with family and friends, troops continue to serve far from their loved ones in sometimes life-threatening situations. There are many soldiers in Afghanistan and around the globe who, as a matter of duty, have sacrificed spending this season of holiday cheer at home.

Fortunately, some gestures remind us that the sacrifice made by Canadian soldiers is not going unnoticed. The Canadian Christmas Tree Growers Association (CCTGA) wanted to express thanks to CF members who are currently serving overseas and came up with an original way to do it.

The growers decided to donate over 3 000 Christmas trees to military bases to be shared in every province, this number included the 2 100 trees, distributed at CFB Valcartier. This initiative has been very well received by military families, from coast to coast.

Larry Downey, president of the CCTGA and one of the directors of the Quebec branch of the association, explained how the idea to distribute trees to the families of CF members was born. "Last year, we wanted to send trees to the troops deployed in Afghanistan so they could enjoy a bit of the Canadian Christmas tradition over there. The plans were to put up trees in some of the tents on the base, but the technical and logistical difficulties involved in shipping an agricultural product overseas via many countries forced us to abandon the project," said Mr. Downey.

However, this year the CCTGA got it right. With DND representatives, the association determined the number of trees needed to cover most of the bases in the country and then called on growers to donate approximately 3 200 trees for distribution to the families of CF members serving overseas, even though there was somewhat of a tree shortage this year. "In Quebec, some growers can barely meet the demand, but this didn't keep those we contacted from joining the cause," said Mr. Downey. "They all wanted to thank the troops for their sacrifice."

Two trailers full of trees arrived at Valcartier, and the trees were distributed to the families at the garrison's main parade ground. It was action stations to pull it all together, a real feat of effective planning and logistics. "Although we only had 30 days to get organized, things went very well overall," said Mr. Downey. The soldiers assigned to unload the trucks wore broad smiles as they distributed the trees to the families one by one.

As noted by the CCTGA's president, the traditional Christmas tree has been a symbol of sharing for many generations, and it is in this spirit that we gather with our loved ones around the decorated and brightly lit tree. May this tradition continue in the homes of

the soldiers serving overseas and may family reunions be happy ones.

with files of Simon Baillargeon, of the Adsum.

Wednesday, December 19, 2007  
Steve Fortin, The Maple Leaf  
Section: Afghanistan

### Holiday Greeting from the President



Best Wishes for 2008  
May an abundance of Peace, happiness, goodwill and comradeship Cross your path as we enter into the Festive Season.

My Wife Betty and I would like to wish everyone A Very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year

Yours in Comradeship  
Dave Davidson

Thursday, December 20, 2007  
Dave Davidson, President Fred Gies Branch 50 (On.) RCL  
Section: Executive

### Holiday Message from The Webmaster



I'd like to take this opportunity to post a personal note to all visitors of the new Branch Website. Thank you all for your complimentary remarks about the site.

The site is a work in progress and you can look forward to new an exciting

features appearing in the new year. Feedback from you, the users, is a vital part of development of a site like this. Please feel free to contact me at any time to suggest areas that you would like to see more of, or features you might want to see added. You may also submit news or articles of interest that you think might be of interest to other members although be aware that submissions will be screened for appropriateness.

### My Christmas Message to You All

The "season" is upon us, and I'd like to wish you all a safe and happy holiday and hope that you are blessed with good things in the new year. Whether you are a Christian or not, I believe Christmas is a time when each of us must take some time to count our blessings and cherish those who are near and dear to us.

As we do, let each of us also think a little on those less fortunate. Our comrades who are no longer with us. Our comrades who are in hospital, or sick at home, some of whom will not see another Christmas. The veterans nationwide who are alone at home or living in veteran hospitals. Our young men and women who are standing in harms way for what we believe. The 73 who paid the ultimate price for that freedom. The unsung wounded of our latest cause, and The families and loved ones of all of these.

### God bless them, every one.

Thursday, December 20, 2007  
Trevor German, RCLBR50 Webmaster  
Section: Executive

### Poppy reminds us of things we can't forget



After reading Rev. Paul Bosch's Dec. 15 letter, The Poppy Is A Symbol That Represents War, I felt I must respond.

The poppy is a symbol of what was given for us to maintain the rights and freedom we enjoy every day. The poppy was never meant to glorify war, but was meant to remind us of things

past, so we do not repeat the same mistakes in the future. Human beings do not easily learn from their mistakes, hence we still have wars and needless death, but we must not let this be the reason for us to give up the tradition of wearing the poppy in remembrance.

Not being permitted to wear a poppy in a courtroom could be the beginning of a downhill trend; where next will we not be permitted to wear the poppy? At what point do we stop wearing the poppy altogether? Like many other campaigns for political correctness, labelling the poppy as a symbol of war could give birth to the notion that the poppy must be eliminated, or people may take offence to those who wear it by believing they support ongoing wars. If we no longer wear the poppy, what then will we have to remember our history once all of our veterans have gone? Will we simply forget?

I cannot think of a more appropriate place to wear a poppy than in a court of law. Justice Margaret Woolcott and Rev. Bosch should realize that our very justice system still exists today because of what our soldiers have fought and died for in the past. Without that sacrifice, the very laws of our country, which could have fallen before the enemy, would be radically different from what they are today.

If the poppy is truly no longer a neutral symbol of honour, then we as a society have truly failed in our responsibility to teach our descendants what has happened in the past and what the poppy actually represents, so we will be doomed to continue to repeat the same mistakes again and again.

Thursday, December 20, 2007  
 Warren Schnurr, Kitchener, The Record  
 Section: Poppy Campaign

**Queen now oldest monarch in Commonwealth history**



Queen Elizabeth becomes the oldest-ever monarch in Britain's history today, breaking the record of her great great grandmother, Queen Victoria -- who lived for 81 years and 243 days.

Victoria, born on May 24, 1819, ascended to the throne at the age of 18 and died in 1901.

Elizabeth will move past Victoria at about 5 p.m. local time Thursday.

A Buckingham Palace spokesperson told CTV.ca on Thursday that there is nothing special planned to mark the occasion.

"The Queen will just carry on with her normal day's activities," said Stuart Neil, the Queen's deputy press secretary.

"We're not marking the occasion."

Elizabeth, born on April 21, 1926, is the 40th monarch to rule since William the Conqueror took the English throne on Christmas Day in 1066.

She became Queen in 1952, at the age of 25, when her father, King George VI, died and is currently the fourth longest-reigning monarch.

If she continues to reign, the 81-year-old will pass King Henry III on March 5, King George III in 2012 and Queen Victoria on Sept. 9, 2015.

Despite her age, the Queen shows

few signs of slowing down.

Last November, Elizabeth and her husband, Prince Philip, celebrated 60 years of marriage. She is the first monarch to ever reach a diamond wedding anniversary.

A few days later, the Queen arrived in Uganda to formally open the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

According to AFP news agency, the Queen carried out 425 official engagements last year alone.

Her next public engagement will be on Christmas Day, when she will attend a church service with the Royal Family, said Neil.

Thursday, December 20, 2007  
 CTV.ca News Staff  
 Section: Miscellaneous

**Canadian-designed causeway set to open in Kandahar province**



PASHMUL, AFGHANISTAN

A causeway bridging the river separating Kandahar province's Zhari and Panjwai districts is expected to open any day now, completing what officials say is one of Canada's largest and most important infrastructure projects in Afghanistan.

The timing couldn't be better as heavy grey storm clouds have begun moving across the southern Afghanistan horizon, ushering in the rainy season.

Just a week ago it seemed hard to understand why a crew of 50 Afghan construction workers, under the direction of Canadian Forces, was beavering away so feverishly to complete the raised span of concrete culverts, dirt and gravel.

At the time, what passed for the Arghandab River was little more than

a depressed plain of dirt and gravel nestled in the shadows of a towering mountain range. What little water filled the vast wadi was well under a metre deep.

But those in the know insist that when the heavy rains come, the fast-flowing river will stretch some 500 metres across and run up to 1 1/2 metres deep.

"Within a few weeks you would not be able to cross without this (causeway) for sure," said Warrant Officer Simon Germain, the Canadian site commander.

A bridge once spanned the river here, but it was blown up by locals who felt it interfered with their access to the water. That leaves those wishing to cross during flood season typically facing a 40-minute detour to the nearest bridge on the outskirts of Kandahar city.

The diversion was particularly troublesome for Canadian troops working out of forward operating bases in Zhari and Panjwai, forcing them to negotiate roundabout routes often targeted by the insurgents.

"Hopefully it's also going to help their economy," Germain said of the project, which was approved by local and provincial leaders.

Construction began in late October on the causeway, described by military public affairs officials as "175 sections of concrete culvert laid side by side across three river channels and topped with a gravel road."

The \$700,000 project -- designed by Canadian engineers "almost to North American standards," according to Germain -- is built to accommodate both heavy traffic and overflowing waters without eroding the land.

It's also been built exclusively by Afghans from the region, although the acting contractor has told members of the Civilian-Military Co-operation Team (CIMIC) overseeing the project that many of the workers are actually living in Kandahar city for the time being because of a lack of security in the Zhari-Panjwai area.

Still, Germain said half the workers are from Zhari, while the other half are from Panjwai.

"We mixed them together so they could learn to work with each other," he said, noting it's also been a good way to build upon their skills.

"I've got to say, most of them are hard workers."

Managed like any construction site in Canada, the workers were each issued gloves and reflective belts and made about \$6 a day, the standard local wage for general labourers, according to military officials.

After a Taliban rocket landed in the river bed during the first week of construction, members of the Afghan National Army helped secure the site, which has not been attacked since.

Saturday, December 22, 2007  
The Canadian Press  
Section: Afghanistan