



# WEBNEWS

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## IN THIS ISSUE

- Seasons Greetings
- Troops' celebration tempered by loss
- Hearing Loss Disability Benefits
- Harper stands firm on Afghan mission
- Canadian Medic in Kandahar
- More Poppy Letters
- Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan encouraged to face mortality issue
- Proud to wear poppy
- Navy bomb defusers adapt to Afghanistan roads

## Seasons Greetings



I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. As each and every one of us celebrates the holidays with our friends and families, let us not forget OUR TROOPS and their families here at home. Say a prayer for Our Troops still serving abroad, and THANK YOU, to those who have served and returned safely home to their families. May the year ahead, 2008, be a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous one for all.

Tuesday, December 25, 2007  
Gloria McKibbin, PRO  
Section: Executive

## Troops' celebration tempered by loss



KANDAHAR AIRFIELD,  
AFGHANISTAN

It's a military tradition at Christmas to leave a single empty table and chair to

remember those who have died in the line of duty.

At this year's Canadian Christmas feast at Kandahar Airfield, coming at the end of what has been dubbed the bloodiest year for Canada's troops in Afghanistan, the empty table was eerily conspicuous.

The war in Afghanistan has claimed 29 lives this year.

Military padre Maj. Pierre Bergeron explained the meaning of the setting to more than 1,000 soldiers and civilians at the meal.

"It is here to commemorate (the fallen soldiers') efforts and to remind us that certain members of our profession fell in combat."

The table bears a simple white tablecloth as a symbol of their willingness to "answer the call to arms of their nation," while a rose represents families and friends who "keep the faith" by remembering their sacrifice, he said.

A red ribbon tied around a vase signifies their determination, while a lemon represents the bitterness of their fight.

"The salt is an element symbolizing the tears of the family left to mourn. The glass is upside down because it cannot celebrate with us. The chair is empty because they are absent," Bergeron explained.

In his brief taped Christmas message to the nation, Prime Minister Stephen Harper asked Canadians to "reflect on our good fortune to live in the greatest country in the world" and made a special mention of those serving in Afghanistan.

"Of all the joys of the season, perhaps none is more satisfying than the joy of giving." Harper said he was not referring just to gifts exchanged among family and friends, "but the gifts of time, money and effort many give to people less fortunate than ourselves.

"That spirit of generosity is one of the things that defines us as Canadians and its purest expression today is the Canadian mission in Afghanistan, where our soldiers, diplomats and aid workers are, at great cost to themselves, helping the Afghan

people rebuild their shattered country."

Most of the 73 fatalities since Canada's Afghan mission began in 2002 are the result of improvised explosive devices.

Visiting from Ottawa to celebrate Christmas with the troops, Defence Minister Peter MacKay later told reporters many of those IEDs are now believed to be coming into the country from Iran.

MacKay's comments mark the first time a Canadian government official has made that accusation publicly.

MacKay's accusation is also the first time the government has said Iranian weapons are being used to target Canadian soldiers.

MacKay said the Iranian government is aware of his concerns.

"We have asked the Iranians to deal with the problem because it is very hard to cut the supply lines when you have, in another country, people who are providing the arms for use against Canadian forces and others," he said.

Mackay's comments came after he helped dish out plates of turkey, ham and Quebecois tourtiere to the hungry masses -- many of whom were visiting the relatively cushy Kandahar Air Field from far more primitive forward operating bases.

Joined by a slate of special guests that included Defence Chief of Staff Gen. Rick Hillier, U.S. Ambassador to Canada David Wilkins and Tim Hortons co-founder Ron Joyce, MacKay gave a message of pride and encouragement to the troops.

Hillier, a frequent visitor to Afghanistan, commended his troops for the "extraordinary" job they're doing for the people of Afghanistan and Canada.

"All the Canadians are very proud of you. They are proud of your work, your devotion, your professionalism and certainly your courage," he said.

While the Canadian commitment to Afghanistan is slated to end in February 2009, the Conservatives are hoping to extend the mission until at least 2011.

Ottawa is awaiting a report in January from former deputy prime minister

John Manley, and Parliament is expected to vote this winter on whether to extend the mission.

"We do not want to leave work undone. We want to make sure Afghanistan is a fully functional, secure and self-sustaining country," MacKay said. "That's the mission and we want to complete that mission."

Wednesday, December 26, 2007  
The Canadian Press  
Section: Afghanistan

## Hearing Loss Disability Benefits



12/20/07 03:23 pm

Subject: **ALL BRANCHS (07-024) - Hearing Loss Disability Benefits**

**VERY IMPORTANT:**

If your application for Hearing Loss disability benefits has been turned down in the past, either by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) or by the Veterans review and Appeal Board (VRAB), you may be eligible for a partial entitlement as a result of a recent Federal Court of Appeal decision.

Please call **1-877-534-4666** or send an e-mail to [pallard@legion.ca](mailto:pallard@legion.ca) or to any other Command Service Officer identified at ServiceBureau / Service Officers.

Thursday, December 27, 2007  
Dominion Bulletin Board  
Section: RCL

## Harper stands firm on Afghan mission



**Many Canadians may be unaware of**

what is at stake, PM says

OTTAWA

Prime Minister Stephen Harper says he's uncertain whether most Canadians understand the importance of remaining involved in Afghanistan.

His observation in a year-end interview with The Canadian Press comes after almost two years of combat operations in Kandahar, the deaths of 73 soldiers and one diplomat, and bitter, often partisan debates back home.

Parliament will be asked by spring to vote on what kind of mission Canada should undertake after the current mandate expires in February 2009.

Asked whether he believes Canadians truly appreciate what is at stake in the decision, Harper said: "I don't know, the short answer is I don't know."

There were times during 2007 when the Conservatives were almost overwhelmed, under daily attack in the House of Commons and on the editorial pages, over their handling of the war.

Poll after poll made it clear that Canadians believed they were paying too high a price to bring peace and stability to the region and wanted out.

As the seemingly endless procession of casualties mounted throughout the spring, there was a point in June when it looked as though Harper blinked, suggesting that the combat mission might not be extended beyond the current deployment without a consensus among Parliamentarians.

But after demoting Gordon O'Connor from defence to the revenue portfolio as part of a broader cabinet shakeup, Harper seemed to get a firmer grip on the direction of the war, enough for the Conservatives to boldly suggest in their fall throne speech that Canada should remain deeply involved in Afghanistan until 2011.

"The government understands we took on an important international commitment for important reasons of international security that in the long run impact directly on our country," he said an interview at 24 Sussex Drive.

A poll released in the weeks after the throne speech suggested the public

was overwhelmingly against continuing for another three years beyond the current mandate.

"So I don't know whether Canadians do -- or don't -- understand. I think Canadians are deeply troubled by the casualties," Harper said.

In June, a Canadian Press-Decima Research survey found 67 per cent of those asked believed the number of casualties in Afghanistan were unacceptable when weighed against the progress that had been made in reconstruction and keeping the Taliban at bay in Kandahar.

"Nobody is more troubled by that than I am" about the rising number of war dead and wounded, Harper said quietly. "These are our finest men and women. When we lose them, these are the worst days I have. I have no worse day than when I get this kind of news."

He said the soldiers and diplomats on the ground understand the importance of staying, despite the heavy price they've paid directly.

In an effort to put some distance between his strong beliefs, opposition critics and public dismay, Harper appointed a blue-ribbon panel, headed by former Liberal cabinet minister John Manley, to review what should come next. A report is expected in early January.

"All we can only hope from the Manley exercise is that it causes Parliamentarians, particularly in our official Opposition -- which as you know commenced this mission -- to sit back and think about what is in the best interest of the country before a vote is actually held," he said.

"We really have got to avoid -- on this one -- taking a decision for reasons of short-term politics. We must take a decision that is in the long-run interest of the country, its international reputation and the respect we should all show for the sacrifice our men and women have made to secure it."

Some critics have argued that Harper could have found no more hawkish a Liberal than Manley to lead the non-partisan panel. They suggest the panel has been rigged to give the Conservatives the answers they want to hear.

Harper dismissed the notion. "We will get the report and look at it."

He said he hopes Manley comes forward with a clear, immediate recommendation for the future of the mission.

Thursday, December 27, 2007  
The Canadian Press  
Section: Afghanistan

## Canadian Medic in Kandahar



Medicine woman

'What matters is how you deal with the fear'

After weeks of working the medical station at Kandahar Airfield, screening flu cases and sore throats, what Cpl. Veronica Jobin wanted most was to be in the field, "in the action."

She got her wish. Her superiors threw her in the deep end of the ocean when, during the last two weeks of September, she was transferred to Canadian Patrol Base Wilson, four kilometres north of the Arghandab River - smack in the middle of Op Medusa, the largest military operation in NATO history.

"I remember one soldier, he had an open leg fracture. That means the bones were shattered and sticking through the skin," said Jobin, her face blanching slightly at the memory.

### SCREAMING

"He was conscious, which is always good. Unconscious means he might swallow his tongue and stop breathing. This guy was breathing, all right - he wouldn't stop screaming.

"But he was really, really brave. Everyone is scared, you know. What matters is how you deal with the fear, how you push through."

Jobin's with 2 Field Ambulance, regular army. She's 23, comes from a

very small town with the very large name of St. Catherine-de-la-Jacques-Cartier, near Valcartier in Quebec. She's been in Afghanistan four months.

She's a bit of an adventure junkie. The military sent her to Sri Lanka in 2004 to help some of the thousands who lost their homes to the tsunami.

"Sri Lanka changed me more than Afghanistan has. There, you saw people who had nothing at all. Everything had been taken from them," she said.

"I was working with people who had lost their entire families, their homes, everything. Sheltering in garbage bags, living off rations.

"And they were so brave, so grateful for whatever we could do for them. They were amazing."

Jobin was in a convoy just 10 km from Ma'sum Ghar on the Arghandab on Sept. 4, when American A-10s accidentally strafed an area where Canadians were fighting the Taliban. Pte. Mark Anthony Graham was killed; more than 30 other Canadians were wounded.

"I heard everything on the radio. My boyfriend, he's a medic too, and he was in another convoy in the area then," she said.

"The radio was saying, 'medics down, medics down.' I was scared it was him, but I had to go to work. We dismounted and ran to the field hospital, but all the wounded had already been medevaced out. They lived."

In Wilson, while Canadian soldiers were struggling to push the Taliban out of the Panjwayi district, she learned something about fear - how you face it down, to keep it from killing you.

"The guys were amazing. They were joking about it," she said, grinning.

"They'd talk about getting mortared every day, how they'd just cover and wait it out.

"They'd tell you all these stories about these awful things, and they'd make you laugh so hard, you wouldn't believe it.

"You feel more ... human after an

experience like that. You feel really close to these guys, like you can count on them no matter what. And you feel really lucky to be where you are."

Since then, things have settled down at the medical stations outside the wire. Jobin's off to the Provincial Reconstruction Team office in Kandahar City this week, another Canadian operation that has gotten a lot more comfortable since September.

"The food's amazing, I hear," she said.

Life for a single woman in the military can be complicated. She and her boyfriend roll out with the convoys all the time, and they're seldom in KAF at the same time for very long.

"He just left with a convoy an hour ago," she said. "It's not easy. I worry about him a lot. We see each other long enough to say 'hi' and 'bye,' mostly. We talk a lot by e-mail.

**'A GOOD LIFE'**

"This is going to be my first Christmas away from home. I don't get back until February. But I've got my work here, and my boyfriend, and it's a good life. I'll see everyone soon."

As for the soldiers, she has no complaints about the way they treat her.

Sure, she's usually one of only two or three women in uniform wherever she's working, but it's never been a barrier between her and her friends.

"They know I can't lift a 200-pound pack and run as fast as they can," she said.

"Whenever they start telling a dirty joke, they always stop and ask me if it's all right.

"I never mind ... I laugh along with the rest of them. I don't want them to treat me any different than anyone else in uniform - but when they do, I just find it kind of funny."

Thursday, December 27, 2007  
DOUG BEAZLEY, Canoe.com  
Section: Afghanistan

**More Poppy Letters**



**A bad judgment.**

I am writing to express my disappointment regarding Justice Margaret Woolcott telling a regional police officer he should not have worn a poppy into her courtroom.

We recall that veterans had youth, health and a life to live. We remember they gave all of that for peace. It's time to breathe a prayer of thanks.

I feel the presiding judge's opinion was in bad judgment.

Rita Runstedler  
St. Clements

**Poppy a plea for peace**

I was dismayed to see that anyone would support Justice Margaret Woolcott for chastising a police officer for simply wearing a poppy in her court room. The idea that a poppy is not a neutral symbol is absurd.

The Dec. 15 letter from Rev. Paul Bosch, The Poppy Is A Symbol That Represents War, supported Woolcott's notion sighting, "The poppy has become a partisan symbol of acquiescence to the necessity for war and violence as a solution to human conflicts." Both Woolcott and her supporters are reading too far into a common and respectful practice.

The poppy does not symbolize war at all, but rather the loss of lives from war. It not only honours the fallen soldiers, but the innocent who fell, and continue to fall. The most important message is carried in its red petals . . . Lest We Forget.

The poppy is far from discriminating, as its honours all those who have fallen and those who are still living with the scars of war, regardless of race, creed or colour.

The poppy is far from a symbol of war, as it represents peace, and the notion to keep it. The poppy is about respecting the men and women of many nations who have made the

ultimate sacrifice for us, and it honours their last testaments.

Those who view the poppy as a symbol of war need to educate themselves on its meaning and stop using it as a pedestal to launch their own personal political views as I believe Woolcott did. The Poppy is a symbol of peace.

Furthermore, to the point of Bosch's letter being written as a Christian, I write this as a Christian myself and would pose this question rather than argue semantics:

God sacrificed his own son so that we could be forgiven for our sins, and we as Christians honour the symbol of the crucifix to mark this event in history, and as a staple of our faith. If we are to view the poppy as a sign of war rather than what its meant to represent, should we then view the cross as a sign of tortuous execution as opposed to what it really means?

Dave Goodwin

Kitchener

**Symbol of remembrance**

I would like to comment on Rev. Paul Bosch's opinion expressed in his letter to the editor that the poppy is a symbol of war (The Poppy Is A Symbol That Represents War, Dec. 15).

Let me invite him to look at military cemeteries wherein lie the remains of brave men and women who have died so that we are living in a land where freedom is valued. In these burial grounds -- Flanders Fields, Vimy, Ypres, Dieppe, Normandy, Italy and Arlington -- you will find the graves of soldiers who died for their country. You cannot help but note that on the headstones on these graves is a cross that bears the names of the fallen and perhaps poppies are still showing. If by Bosch's reasoning, the poppy is a symbol of war, should it not follow that the cross is also a symbol of war?

A poppy is a symbol of remembrance worn by the public and veterans to show that they have not forgotten the deeds of those who have died on their behalf.

George Hill

Waterloo

Thursday, December 27, 2007

Section: Poppy Campaign

**Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan encouraged to face mortality issue**



GUNDY GHAR, Afghanistan - Soldiers from Valcartier, Que., took a course before they're deployed to Afghanistan - it's called "The Warrior and Death."

It's mandatory. Like it or not, they have to confront the question of mortality. Talking about death may be tabooed but it's a fact that Canadians are being killed in Afghanistan.

At the forward operating base in Gundy Ghar, about 40 kilometres west of Kandahar Airfield, death could be around every corner.

Rocket attacks and ambushes from the Taliban are commonplace.

The biggest threat of all comes from improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, that can engulf an armoured vehicle in a huge ball of flame within seconds because, as one military official put it: "You can always build a bigger bomb."

It's the mournful skirl of the bagpipes that Canadian soldiers dread the most. It marks the end of the road for a friend and comrade, an unmistakable sign that the battles against the Taliban have claimed another life.

When they are deployed to Afghanistan, the men and women from Canada leave behind loved ones half a world away and face the possibility that they may not return home. "The Warrior and Death" is intended as a way to help them deal with the issue.

"It's the first time at Valcartier that we have done training for all of our soldiers on the issue of death,"

explained Maj. Pierre Bergeron, the padre at Kandahar Airfield. "That means the potential of our own death, the death of our friends or those we may bring death to in the theatre of war."

It's a struggle though.

Bergeron said the course discusses the link between life and death, some of the taboos and the correlation between the profession of being a soldier and death. But the soldiers themselves are not keen to discuss the subject.

"There's a little bit of superstition that if we talk about it, it might happen. But others see it that it is evident that we are in Afghanistan and we will continue to lose soldiers," he said.

"Any one of us who steps outside the gate could find death, so it's important to be honest with our families."

But the reality of talking about death and living with it are two different matters, according to some soldiers.

"We talk about it but not too much," shrugged Cpl. Anthony Drosou.

"In infantry there's a culture that we are tough guys. The guys want to keep this inside so we can't be weak."

Sapper Mathieu Pilon splits his time between being a gunner in the heavily armoured RG-31 and driving the Husky, a vehicle that detects IEDs on the roads.

"We try not to talk about that a lot because it's not a good thing," Pilon said. "I don't talk about it at home. I don't say anything to my mom or my dad about what will happen if I am hurt or something."

But some of the veterans serving in Afghanistan recognize there is a need to share concerns and feelings.

Sgt. Sylvain Latulippe, who regularly travels through the dangerous and dusty Panjwaii and Zhari districts where Taliban fighters still roam, encourages his men to talk.

"We talk a lot about it - the feeling of it," said Latulippe.

"Some people cry. I've got some of my guys who cry because they've got a few guys they know very well who died. I told them to cry is good and not to keep it inside."

Those at the Canadian Tactical Operations Centre at Kandahar Airfield are the first to hear when soldiers are killed or wounded.

"It's essential that we talk about it," said Maj. Eric Laforest.

"It's unfortunate when it happens but I think everyone grows through even the most painful events."

"I've seen grown men cry and grown women cry as well. It's normal. It's good."

It's not known whether "The Warrior and Death" will be extended to future troop rotations. But officials say one thing is clear: it's not "if" but "when" death will come calling.

Friday, December 28, 2007  
 Bill Graveland, THE CANADIAN PRESS  
 Section: Afghanistan

### Proud to wear poppy



In regard to the Dec. 8 Record article, Judge Frowns On Poppies in Courtroom, how does Judge Marjorie Woolcott justify her opinion that a poppy should not be worn in court? The poppy is worn in remembrance of those that gave and continue to give.

My father fought in the Second World War and the Korean War; I wear my poppy proudly wherever I go and enjoy the freedoms and liberties that so many then and now gave their lives for.

All civil servants should be able to freely wear their poppies and pins that support our troops. This has nothing to do with Woolcott's idea of being "neutral." If you live and work in this country and enjoy its freedoms, you need to remember that it is a gift given to you by the veterans of both world wars and the Korean War, and those that sacrifice today.

Friday, December 28, 2007  
 Christina Larabie, Kitchener, The Record  
 Section: Poppy Campaign

### Navy bomb defusers adapt to Afghanistan roads



Canadian navy divers are putting their underwater expertise to use along the sand roads of Afghanistan.

Experts trained to defuse bombs underwater have been stationed in Afghanistan since early 2006, adapting their skills to combat the deadly roadside bombs commonly used by insurgents.

The military asked bomb-clearing personnel to join the mission in Kandahar province to help counter the increasing threat of roadside bombs.

Petty Officer Luc Champagne was among the first group of divers to serve in Kandahar. He said it was a bit of a surprise, at first, to be called to the landlocked country.

"I was like, 'OK, what am I going to do over there,'" Champagne told CTV News. "There is not that much difference between under water and surface."

Most commonly, navy bomb handlers use their demolition expertise to defuse unexploded ordinances left over from the Second World War.

It's a dangerous job offered only to elite divers. Most often, navy divers are noted for their role responding to civilian tragedies.

They helped recover bodies and wreckage following the Swiss Air crash in 1998, and made waterways safe in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

"When you see naval divers it's generally things like Swiss Air. It's in doing rescue-type operations," said Lt.-Cmdr. Leanne Crowe.

Champagne said the desert and danger were new, as most divers have never been to war.

"Every time we managed to find and defuse an IED, it was a great job. It was saving coalition forces," he said.

In the new year, a fresh rotation of

divers will head to Kandahar, to combine their skills with the experience of others, clearing the roads of Afghanistan.

With a report from CTV's Denelle Balfour

Saturday, December 29, 2007  
 CTV.ca News Staff  
 Section: Afghanistan