



WEBNEWS

This Week's News From www.rclbr50.ca



Ontario : Branch 50 - FRED GIES, Kitchener. 🇺🇸

Volume - 2 Edition 8

Week Ending March 1, 2008

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Our Condolences to Sarah Jane Dick



On behalf of the members of Branch 50, I would like to extend our sympathies to Comrade Sarah Jane Dick. Sarah Jane's mother passed away on Saturday, February 23, 2008.

Sunday, February 24, 2008
Vivian Peddle
Section: Sick and Visiting

More Get Well Wishes



Comrade Past President Floyd Moore is recuperating at home following a recent fall, which left him with some bruised ribs.

Comrade Immediate Past President Laurie Pollock, got home from Grand River Hospital last Friday after a 10 day stay.

Comrade Deanna McCormick is also

recuperating at home following a fall last weekend, which injured her back.

Comrade Gary Proctor (a.k.a. 'Squiggy' from the Monday Night In-house Pool League) is recuperating at home following minor surgery.

Comrade Mike Kapshay is recuperating from surgery after being hospitalized in St. Mary's Hospital.

Best wishes to all for a speedy recovery.

Sunday, February 24, 2008
 Vivian Peddle
 Section: Sick and Visiting

Message purported to be sanctioned by The Royal Canadian Legion



Subject: ALL BRANCHES (08-003) - Message purported to be sanctioned by The Royal Canadian Legion

Please be advised that a current e-mail making the rounds with regards to Canadian rights and freedoms and a case in B.C., which is being passed to many members, is not sanctioned by The Royal Canadian Legion even though it bears a Legion logo. The logo attached to the message has been out of use for a number of years. Sanctioned messages from the Legion would not be passed in this manner.

Monday, February 25, 2008
 eLegion Bulletin Board
 Section: RCL

Tories partially expand veteran benefits program after criticism



OTTAWA - The new federal budget sets aside \$282 million to improve home-care support for the elderly spouses of Canada's war veterans.

It is only a partial extension of the Veteran's Independence Program - falling short of what bureaucrats had initially proposed

Briefing notes prepared last year for Veterans Affairs Minister Greg Thompson outlined two options.

One involved a partial expansion of the program - covering just housekeeping and grounds maintenance - for approximately 150,000 veterans and their spouses - or survivors.

It was estimated to cost \$333 million.

The price tag for a full-fledged extension of the program to include a variety of health benefits was expected to be \$595 million.

The new federal budget allows only the surviving spouses of veterans to spend \$2,400 a year on housekeepers and grounds maintenance.

Late Tuesday night a federal official, speaking on background, said that the new program is aimed at only about 12,000 people, all of whom must be low-income earners - or disabled.

While in opposition, Stephen Harper promised to expand the program, and was criticized by an elderly veteran's widow for failing to fulfil the pledge after becoming prime minister.

Tuesday, February 26, 2008
 THE CANADIAN PRESS
 Section: Veterans

War widow accuses Tories of breaking promise over veterans benefits



OTTAWA - Only a fraction of Canada's elderly war widows will be eligible for a new \$2,400 home-care program announced in the federal budget.

Opposition critics and a surviving spouse were quick to condemn the move after reading the fine print Wednesday of the \$282-million extension of the Veterans Independence Program.

Liberals accused the Tory government of backtracking on a 2005 promise to expand the program to all widows of First World War, Second World War

and Korean War veterans.

"The important word in that (Tory) statement was 'all'," said Liberal MP Dan McTeague, citing a March 2005 Conservative policy declaration that put no limits on the extension.

New Democrat veterans affairs critic Peter Stoffer described the program as a "pittance," and criticized its tough eligibility restrictions.

"I am incensed by the Conservatives' callousness and boldface lies," he said.

While still in opposition, Prime Minister Stephen Harper reaffirmed the party's pledge in writing to the widow of a Nova Scotia veteran.

In a letter dated June 28, 2005, Harper said: "A Conservative government would immediately extend the Veterans Independence Program services to widows of all Second World War and Korean War veterans - regardless of when the veteran passed away or how long they had been receiving the benefit prior to passing away."

Frustrated with no action by last spring, Joyce Carter brought her complaints to Ottawa, where she confronted Harper in the foyer of the House of Commons.

In a private meeting last June, Harper told Carter that the promise would be fulfilled in the next budget, which Finance Minister Jim Flaherty tabled Tuesday.

Veterans Affairs Minister Greg Thompson defended the decision, saying he never assured Carter or anyone else that the extension would cover all war widows.

"It's aimed at the people most in need, people who've waited 25 years in some cases for assistance," he said. "It's a significant step."

The program was "generous," the minister insisted.

"No matter how much we do, we can never repay our veterans for what they've done."

Background documents show the new program will be restricted to low-income and disabled widows. A government official, speaking on background late Tuesday, said the

extension would help about 12,000 individuals - far below the estimated 150,000 widows that Veterans Affairs bureaucrats estimated would be eligible under the Conservative promise.

"He promised to give it to all the veterans' widows," Carter said in an interview from her home in Sampsonville, N.S.

"That would mean each and every one of the veterans widows should be receiving this (veterans independence program) in this budget. He lied to me again. He did not keep his promise and I'm outraged."

Carter already receives the benefit but had been fighting on behalf of others who don't.

Anyone applying for the \$2,400 yearly benefit, meant to cover the cost of housekeeping and grounds maintenance, will have to show they're in receipt of the Guaranteed Income Supplement or the Disability Tax Credit, as well as demonstrate a "health need and require (veterans independence program) housekeeping and/or grounds maintenance services to remain independent in their home," say Veterans Affairs Canada background documents.

McTeague says that amounts to a means test.

"Not only is there the insult of breaking the promise, but they're now saying prove you actually need it," he said.

"Tell me something: Was there a means test given to them - or their spouses - when the country called them to duty?"

Briefing notes prepared for Veterans Affairs Minister Greg Thompson show the department reviewed different scenarios to find a way to live up to the Conservative promise.

One option involved a partial expansion of the program - covering just housekeeping and grounds maintenance - for approximately 150,000 veterans and their spouses or survivors. It was estimated to cost \$333 million.

The price tag for a full-fledged extension of the program to include a variety of health benefits was expected to be \$595 million.

McTeague said the Tories have spent the fiscal cupboard bare and rather than help all of the people who've cared for the country's veterans, they've given away money in tax breaks.

Wednesday, February 27, 2008
Murray Brewster, THE CANADIAN PRESS
Section: Veterans

Legion disappointed with budget announcements on Veterans Independence Program (VIP)



Subject: ALL BRANCHES(08-004) - Legion Disappointed with Budget Announcement

OTTAWA: The Royal Canadian Legion is disappointed and very concerned with the budget announcement relating to the planned expansion of the Veterans Independence Program (VIP).

The VIP is a national home-care program that helps eligible veterans and their survivors remain healthy and independent in their own homes and communities. The planned expansion is intended to provide the same housekeeping and/or grounds maintenance benefits to eligible low-income or disabled survivors of certain traditional war service veterans.

"This planned expansion is spending money on survivors of deceased veterans and not on the living veterans who are in need of assistance," says Legion Dominion President Jack Frost. "While we generally support an initiative to compensate needy and disabled survivors of those who died before 1981, we cannot accept that frail veterans, allied veterans now living in Canada and Canada service only veterans themselves are being excluded from assistance."

"The needy, frail veteran who cannot afford the expense to hire a contractor to tend to the basic maintenance items such as snow clearance, lawn cutting, window cleaning, etc., that the veteran himself was once able to do, must

now face losing his home as he is forced into a long term care facility, possibly separated from his spouse, at great emotional cost" he continues.

"The Government would rather place him or her in a more expensive long term care facility than provide the basic VIP benefit," he says. This is totally unacceptable and disregards the findings of the Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) Health Services Review, which has been ongoing since 2004, and the recommendations of the Gerontological Advisory Council in its report Keeping the Promise," he says. "Instead of adopting a comprehensive approach based on needs, VAC is continuing to introduce patchwork, ad hoc measures which overestimate the financial costs associated with these so-called improvements."

"We cannot support the type of action that denies government funding to frail veterans even though it may be going to survivors," says Mr. Frost. "We are losing 70 veterans a day right now. An allocation of VIP to the frail and other groups of worthy veterans cannot wait any longer," he concludes.

For more information call Bob Butt at (613) 591-3335.

Wednesday, February 27, 2008
eLegion Bulletin Board
Section: Veterans

New LEGION'S LEGACIES Website Launched.



The Royal Canadian Legion has launched a new interactive website called "The Legion's Legacies"

"This is a new online community for everyone to post online stories of Canadian war veterans. Proud Canadians, who want to embrace the ideals that are brought forth on Remembrance Day, can share what it means to them personally.

This is your chance to share a family story, or adopt a veteran, post a tribute to our Canadian Forces and contribute to Canada's Legacy... by

posting tributes of their sacrifice for our freedom.

The result of this ongoing project -- will be a growing volume of connected stories, pictures, songs, educational resources and videos; a kind of Facebook meets YouTube for Remembrance.

A great resource for families, educators, students and veterans. No post is too small or seemingly insignificant. We encourage everyone to participate. Our tribute section is not meant to be legalistic in it's nature. It's about sharing what we (as Canadians) know and in some cases believe to be true. If your grandmother baked cookies for the young men on the front lines or worked in a munitions factory or served with the Resistance in Europe, she deserves to be remembered on our site! If your grandfather was a merchant sailor who bravely sailed the Atlantic Ocean during the war, or worked at home in the Civil defence corps, he deserves to be remembered on our site too!"

Canada's nationhood, our values and our respect for human rights and freedoms are defined by the sacrifices, accomplishments and valour of our men and women in uniform. Their legacies live on from one generation to another, as it is our sacred trust to "Remember" the grave implications of duty, service and sacrifice. By sharing your story you are helping to build and preserve an essential part of our History.

A great resource for families, educators, students and veterans!

Thursday, February 28, 2008
Webmaster
Section: RCL

Pushing Back The Insurgents



Maj Dave Abboud, commander, B Coy, R22eR Battle Group, gives orders during the operation in the Arghandab district.

Under the blazing Afghan sun, B Company, 3rd Battalion, Royal 22e Régiment Battle Group, was trying to complete the expansion of the forward operating base (FOB) in the Zhari district in time for the official opening of the district co-ordination centre. However, Afghan reality soon caught up with the soldiers as they were told that about 200 insurgents had invaded the Arghandab district. This is a crucial area given its proximity to the city of Kandahar and the fact its population is favourable to the Afghan government. Preparations were launched immediately to go into battle jointly with the Afghan National Security Forces personnel.

After having received their orders, prepared their equipment and got some rest, B Coy, R22eR Battle Group members, left the FOB in the early morning hours. Determined and battle-hardened, we headed out on foot to meet the enemy over rather tough terrain.

After crossing a relatively dry riverbed and reaching the first objective without encountering any resistance, we arrived at the second objective in the early afternoon. There, a villager pointed out an enemy position about 300 metres off. Following the precise orders of the company commander, we headed towards the indicated area, guided by our informant. Once the objective was relatively defined, a detachment of snipers took up a position from where they could fire effectively, while the two platoons to the south moved in to engage combat. We encountered an insurgent who seemed quite surprised to see soldiers, and bullets started flying.

Taken by surprise of our approach to their flank on foot, the first group of combatants was easily overcome, given our extraordinary fire power. As darkness fell, we took up our defensive positions for the night. No one was going to cross our security perimeter.

In the morning, we enjoyed the warm rays of the sun after the cold of the night. While still occupying the same position, we met several delighted villagers on their way home. Some even offered us bread and tea as thanks for the work we were doing. The gesture touched us deeply. Shortly thereafter, we started to hear the sounds of combat to the north of us. This time, it was the turn of the Afghan National Security Forces and their Canadian mentors to take on the Taliban. They came out victorious, though our Afghan comrades lost one of their men.

After this initial skirmish, a few insurgents went up against our mighty LAVs unsuccessfully, and then a company platoon tried to seize a village, but retreated under fierce light-arm fire. Then, just as night fell, the company launched an attack against another objective, once again a village, with the support of a few attack helicopters. The soldiers seized the village without coming under enemy fire and moved in. Needless to say, the soldiers spent a much more comfortable night sheltered from the cold in village houses.

As the company only had about 50 men and the task at hand was a tough one, a platoon of infantry men from Force Protection (FP) Company of the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team joined us. The company set off again early in the morning. As we moved towards the legendary orchards of Arghandab, we found an improvised explosive device, which was neutralized by the sappers. We also met numerous groups of villagers who, reassured by our presence, were calmly returning to their homes. We attained our final objective at the end of the day without having to engage in combat. The local population welcomed us as saviours.

Despite limited personnel and tough terrain and conditions, we succeeded in pushing back the insurgents from a

district favourable to the government of Afghanistan. The successful operation was very satisfying for B Company members.

Thursday, February 28, 2008
 Cpl Jonathan Fontaine, From The Maple Leaf
 Section: Afghanistan

Updated Manitoba yellow ribbon story



Col Robert Poirier, commander of 38 Canadian Brigade Group signs one of the yellow ribbons. The Yellow Ribbon Campaign will invite Manitobans from across the province to sign yellow ribbons in support of Manitoba troops deployed to Afghanistan.

The people stand proudly, backs straight, eyes front, although they are not all soldiers. They will watch the news anxiously over the coming months and hold their breath whenever there is an injury or loss in Afghanistan. They are the families and this campaign launch is in their honour.

Manitoba Premier Gary Doer and members of the legislature lined up recently to sign long yellow ribbons to show support for the Manitoba soldiers serving in Afghanistan.

“This campaign is one way we can show our support for Manitoba soldiers who are being deployed to Afghanistan,” said Mr. Doer. “Our soldiers live and work in the

community and are people we meet at the corner store, in the hockey rink and on the soccer fields. We want them to know that we support their dedication and bravery.”

The yellow ribbon has long been a symbol of soldiers away and also a welcome back home. Although this launch took place at parliament, politics were left aside as the speakers’ spoke of sacrifice and courage.

The ribbons will make their way all over Manitoba in the coming weeks to be signed by members of the public before being hand carried to display in Canada House, at Kandahar Airfield.

The families and loved ones lined up, adding their names to the growing list on the yellow satin. Other people may sign their names and give a moment of thought and prayer for the men and women going over to help secure rebuilding efforts. These families will spend the next several months in vigil, waiting and praying for safe return and proud of their family members for going.

Thursday, February 28, 2008
 OCdt Donna Riguidel, The Maple Leaf
 Section: Afghanistan

Petawawa soldier became member of very select Club



Pte Michael O'Rourke, 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment, Petawawa, (centre) receives the Peace through Dialogue medal from NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer (right) and 44th Munich Conference on Security Policy conference Chair, Dr. Horst Teltschik.

MUNICH, Germany — Here’s a great Trivial Pursuit question: What do Petawawa’s Private Michael O'Rourke, 1 RCR; the European Union’s foreign policy chief and former NATO Secretary General, Javier

Solana; US Senator John McCain, who’s currently vying for the Republican presidential nomination; and former UN secretary general Kofi Annan all have in common?

The answer: Since 2005 they have all been invited to Munich, Germany, one at a time, to receive the Peace Through Dialogue medal from the organizers of the Munich Conference on Security Policy.

“I was just delighted in the first instance to learn that this offer was being extended to Canada, and secondly that it should be Pte Michael O'Rourke specifically, who has been awarded this,” said Vice-Admiral Glenn Davidson, Canadian Military Representative to the NATO Military Committee in Permanent Session at NATO Headquarters Brussels, who was also at the presentation in Munich. “This peace award is a marvelous thing for us at this time, with all the commitments that we have in Afghanistan at this time and with all the attention that Afghanistan is receiving in Canada and the sacrifices our soldiers have made, that Canada should be offered this opportunity. I think that it is particularly wonderful that a Medal of Military Valour winner, Pte O'Rourke, who comes from a military family with a distinguished wonderful record of service to Canada should be privileged to receive this.”

The 23-year-old Pte O'Rourke, who was awarded the Military Medal of Valour in March 2007, for his actions during Operation MEDUSA in Afghanistan in September 2006, was nominated by Canada’s military leadership after the conference organizers informed NATO’s Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, that NATO was to receive the award for all its efforts towards attaining peace and stability in Afghanistan. The Secretary General replied without hesitation that a Canadian soldier should receive the award on behalf of all NATO soldiers and requested that Canada provide a name.

Over 250 delegates from all over the world, ranging from prime ministers, presidents, defence ministers, as well as various politicians and diplomats attended the three-day conference. After the presentation they stood for at

least two minutes applauding the soldier.

Pte O'Rourke, a quiet soldier, had very few words to describe his feelings about all the attention. "It means everything almost. This was a once-in-a-lifetime chance to represent not only my country alone, but all of the other countries that belong to NATO. I feel very proud and honoured to accept this on behalf of all NATO soldiers," he said.

"Your mindset is always to think of others before yourself. My main concern was getting my fellow soldiers off the battlefield," he went on to say with reference to his actions that led to the awarding of the Military Medal of Valour.

Pte O'Rourke was accompanied by his father, Chief Warrant Officer Kevin O'Rourke, CFB Petawawa Base CWO. It was not hard to notice how very proud he was of his son. "I just thought it was fabulous, I know what he went through. I was in Afghanistan the tour after him. As a father you couldn't be more proud, but as a soldier," said CWO O'Rourke. "That's one of the highest honours you can achieve. I'm overjoyed."

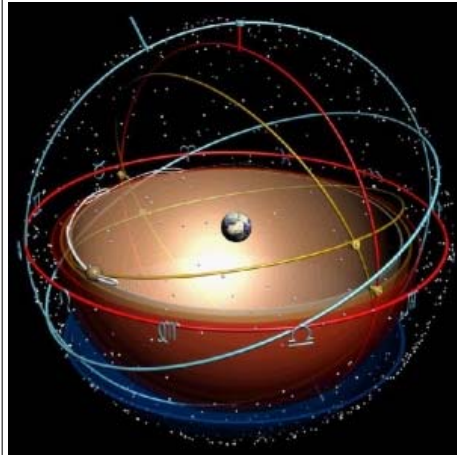
This was the 44th Munich Conference on Security Policy and marks only the fifth time that the Peace Through Dialogue medal has been awarded since 2005, when it was created by the organization to honour outstanding contributions to international peace and security. The large medalion and accompanying citation will be on permanent display at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. Pte O'Rourke will wear the small silver pin containing a diamond stud and depicting the globe surrounded by a wreath of olive leaves. Two hands are also depicted in a handshake above the globe.

"Head up, gun up, keep the fight going!" said Pte O'Rourke.

Capt Mietzner is a Reserve PAO living in Germany.

Thursday, February 28, 2008
 Capt Michael Mietzner, The Maple Leaf
 Section: Afghanistan

A Great Leap Forward



Exeter, England

WHEN Frederic, the hero of Gilbert and Sullivan's "Pirates of Penzance," learns that his Feb. 29 birthday means that he is not 21 years old but 5, he figures he'll have to serve out his apprenticeship to the Pirate King for 60 more years, and swears to the love of his life that he will return in his 80s and marry her. Such are the tales that have always been told about today's date. But now we're in the 21st century, and time is measured according to oscillations of vaporized atoms of cesium-133. Why do we still need something as oddly quaint as leap year?

The answer lies in the fact that days and years are not neatly synchronized. This problem has confounded calendar makers for centuries, and prompted corrections far more clumsy than an occasional extra day in February.

Many of the earliest calendars were based on the phases of the moon. Each 29.5-day cycle amounted to one month, and the first versions counted only 10 months in a year. That turned out to be too few months, but even when two more were added, the problem remained: the calendar could not keep up with the seasons.

A group of Roman priests was charged with the task of adding days through the year, but they were easily corrupted. They'd frequently add or delay the extra days either for personal financial gain or to see their preferred candidates hold offices of power for as long as possible.

By Julius Caesar's time, the calendar

was running 90 days behind. Acting on the advice of an astronomer, he created a calendar based on the time it takes the Earth to circle the Sun. During the well-named "year of confusion," in 46 B.C., Caesar lengthened several of the months and added a couple of temporary ones as a correction. The jubilant Roman public believed Caesar had extended their lives by the extra 90 days (you just can't buy publicity like that). And by 45 B.C., the calendar was back in phase with the seasons.

The Earth's trip around the Sun does not take exactly 365 days, however. It lasts an extra 5 hours and about 49 minutes. By adding an extra day every four years, Caesar could roughly make up for the discrepancy. Even then his scheme ended up being 11 minutes a year too long. This may not sound like much; you wouldn't notice the difference during your lifetime. But by the mid-16th century, the calendar had moved ahead 10 days.

This shift had serious implications for the question of when to celebrate Easter. In 1582, a task force called by Pope Gregory XIII proposed that 10 days should be removed from October that year. And to make sure the calendar would then be self-correcting, leap years were subtracted from the last year of most centuries. Only those divisible by 400 would get the extra day. (That means 1600 was a leap year, but not 1700, 1800 and 1900.) This way, the calendar would gain only half a minute a year, and it would take 2,880 years before another day would need to be added. The trusty Gregorian calendar had arrived.

This wasn't the best time in history to establish a new calendar, however. The Reformation had swept across Europe, and Protestant nations were reluctant to accept the pope's invention. Some countries devised their own ways of making corrections. In what is now Belgium, the calendar went from Dec. 21, 1582, straight to Jan. 1, 1583, depriving everyone there of Christmas.

By the time Britain adopted the calendar, in 1752, 11 days had to be eliminated, and many people were enraged at the loss. "Time rioters" took to the streets of London and other cities chanting, "Give us back

our 11 days!" And so the stage was set, the next century, for Gilbert and Sullivan.

Chris Turney, a professor of geography at the University of Exeter, is the author of "Bones, Rocks and Stars: The Science of When Things Happened."

Friday, February 29, 2008
CHRIS TURNEY, The New York Times
Section: Miscellaneous

Royals who went off to battle



Serving in the Armed Forces has long been a distinguished tradition of royalty

English royalty, from Boadicea onwards, won respect and fealty for their leadership in battle. From Henry V, celebrated especially by Shakespeare for his derring-do at Agincourt, to Richard III, whose unhorsed end was seen as a fitting death for a monarch, kings throughout the centuries have taken military command.

Some were successful: William III's victory at the battle of the Boyne is still remembered by Ulster Protestants three centuries later. Even those whose cause was doomed are still respected for their courage on the field: Charles I and Bonnie Prince Charlie were defeated but engendered an enduring romantic myth.

The last ruling monarch to have led soldiers into battle was George II in 1743 at the battle of Dettingen in Germany, with questionable effect. He brought with him 600 coaches and attendants, blocking the road to the battle, and when the cannon fired, his parade ground-trained horse bolted back through the lines. The horse and its rider took refuge under an oak tree and had to be rescued by the Cheshire Regiment, which was awarded an oak leaf decoration for their gallantry.

The Grand Old Duke of York, the

second son of George III and commander-in-chief of the British Army during the Napoleonic wars, hardly fared any better: he never actually engaged in battle, having led his men up and down a tiny undefended hill near Kassel, and is now remembered only in mocking song.

With the advent of a constitutional monarchy, military leadership was devolved to professionals. But a military career was still regarded as fitting for a prince or even an heir. In the First World War, Crown Prince Wilhelm, the son of the Kaiser, led the German offensive at Verdun and complained bitterly that the German generals restrained him.

On the British side, a shy, young 20-year-old prince, the son of George V, was a midshipman on HMS Collingwood and saw action at the Battle of Jutland. It was the future George VI.

Royalty was also engaged in the Second World War. The King's eldest daughter, Princess Elizabeth, was enrolled as a driver in the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) — largely to set a symbol of service.

More active command was given to a more distant member of the family, Lord Louis Mountbatten, who joined the Navy in 1916. By 1939 he had gained command of a flotilla of destroyers, which saw considerable action in the Mediterranean. In May 1941 his ship HMS Kelly was sunk by German dive-bombers off the coast of Crete with the loss of more than half the crew. The Kelly and her captain were later immortalised in Noël Coward's film *In Which We Serve*.

A military career was seen as suitable for the present generation of royalty. The Prince of Wales served for five years in both the Navy and the RAF, though never saw action. His brother Andrew, however, who signed on in 1979 as a trainee helicopter pilot in the Navy, was aboard the HMS *Invincible* at the time of the Falklands conflict. Prince Edward began a career in the Royal Marines, largely at his father's urging, but controversially left the service after only a few months.

Friday, February 29, 2008

Michael Banyan, The Times
Section: Afghanistan

Prince Harry withdrawn from Afghanistan for security reasons, defence chief says



LONDON - Britain's defence chief decided Friday to immediately pull Prince Harry out of Afghanistan after news of his deployment was leaked, citing concerns that media coverage could put him and his comrades at increased risk.

Air Chief Marshal Jock Stirrup, chief of the Defence Staff, said he decided to withdraw the prince after senior commanders assessed the risks, the Defence Ministry said in a statement.

Harry, third in line to the British throne, has been serving on the front line with an army unit in Afghanistan's southern Helmand province since mid-December. He was originally due to return to Britain within weeks, but "the situation has now clearly changed," the statement said.

The ministry asked the media not to speculate on Harry's location, or how and when he would return, until he was back in Britain.

British officials had hoped to keep Prince Harry's deployment secret until he had safely returned, but they released video of him serving in Helmand province after the leak. The Australian women's magazine *New Idea* reported on Harry's deployment in January. The news appeared Wednesday in the U.S. website the *Drudge Report*, and media around the world subsequently reported it.

The ministry deplored the leak by "elements of the foreign media."

"However, this was a circumstance that we have always been aware of and one for which we have had

contingency plans in place," the statement said.

The Queen said her 23-year-old grandson had performed "a good job in a very difficult climate."

Prime Minister Gordon Brown said the prince had demonstrated that he was an exemplary young officer and the country owned him a "debt of gratitude."

"Security considerations come first. That has been the deciding factor which was made by our defence staff and I think that everybody will respect that is the right decision," Brown said.

Harry is the first royal to serve in a combat zone since his uncle Prince Andrew flew helicopters during Britain's war with Argentina over the Falkland Islands in 1982.

Tours to Afghanistan usually last six months; Harry has served 10 weeks.

Harry conceded in an interview filmed last week that when he returns to Britain he could be a "top target" for Islamic terrorists.

"Once this ... comes out, every single person that supports them will be trying to slot me," he said.

But he said his deployment was a welcome chance to escape from paparazzi and hostile headlines. He said it was probably the best chance he'll ever get at being a normal person.

"To be honest with you the one nice thing is not knowing what's in the paper, what kind of rubbish people are writing," he said.

Harry, a regular in London's nightclub circuit, has made steady headlines over the years. He's been snapped wearing a Nazi uniform at a costume party, cavorting with strippers, and scuffling with the photographers outside trendy London nightspots.

His red hair coated in dust, Harry said he had been eating military rations and drinking nonalcoholic beverages.

The deployment plan had been disclosed to reporters, with no specific date, but was not reported previously because of an agreement between the Ministry of Defence and all major news organizations operating in Britain. The news blackout was

intended to reduce the risk to the prince and his regiment.

Harry was supposed to go to Iraq with the Blues and Royals regiment in May last year but the assignment was cancelled because of security fears. Iraqi insurgents made threats on Internet chat rooms, saying he would not make it home alive.

Harry trained at Sandhurst military academy and joined the Blues and Royals as a cornet, the cavalry regiment's equivalent of a second lieutenant. After being held back from his Iraq assignment, the prince threatened to quit the army if he was not given the chance to see combat.

He said the news of his Afghan assignment had been delivered by the Queen herself.

Harry said his older brother, William, who also graduated from Sandhurst and is training as a military pilot, is jealous of his deployment. As Britain's likely future king, Prince William is unlikely ever to see combat.

Harry said his brother wrote to tell him his late mother, Diana, would have been proud.

"She would be looking down having a giggle about the stupid things that I've been doing, like going left when I should have gone right," Harry said.

Helmand province is where most of the 7,800 British soldiers in Afghanistan are based. It has seen some of the country's fiercest combat in recent years, with NATO-led forces fighting the Taliban and al-Qaida militants.

Harry's work in Afghanistan has involved calling in air strikes on Taliban positions as well as going out on foot patrols. He spent part of his deployment at a base about 500 metres from Taliban positions, the military said.

Since Harry's arrival, his battle group has been responsible for around 30 enemy deaths, a Ministry of Defence official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to release the information.

Video showed the prince in camouflage fatigues walking across arid and dusty terrain, calling in air support, firing a machine gun and

patrolling the streets of Garmsir, the southernmost part of the province. He has since left Garmsir, and his current whereabouts are being kept secret.

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Associated Press Writer Raphael G. Satter contributed to this report.

Friday, February 29, 2008
D'Arcy Doran, The Associated Press
Section: Afghanistan

Cases of soldiers with post-traumatic stress skyrocketing



Canadian Soldier
Credit: DND

OTTAWA: The number of former soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress has more than tripled since Canada first deployed troops to Afghanistan, say new figures released by Veterans Affairs Canada.

With the country's involvement in the war set to continue until 2011, the numbers are only expected to get worse.

The rising tide of psychiatric disorders among relatively young men and women is the biggest challenge facing the system of veterans' care, which until recently had been geared toward geriatric issues, said Veterans Affairs Minister Greg Thompson.

"It is the challenge of the future," he said in an interview with The Canadian Press.

Of the 10,252 Veterans Affairs clients with a psychiatric condition, 63 per cent have a post traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD condition, said a briefing note prepared for Thompson last summer.

"Over the past five years, the number of clients with a psychiatric condition has tripled, increasing from 3,501 to 10,252; the number of clients with a PTSD condition has more than tripled,

increasing from 1,802 to 6,504 as of March 31, 2007."

The statistics represent those who are no longer serving in uniform. The Defence Department keeps its own, separate tally of members suffering from stress injuries.

Figures obtained last summer by The Canadian Press show that of 1,300 Canadian Forces members who served in Afghanistan since 2005, 28 per cent had symptoms suggestive of one or more mental-health problems. The numbers are based on post-deployment screening.

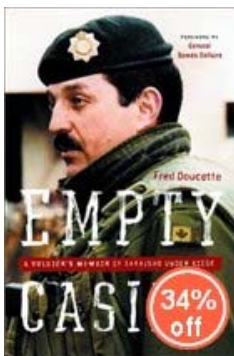
Of those, just over six per cent were possibly suffering from PTSD and another five per cent showed symptoms of major depression.

Both National Defence and Veterans Affairs have faced repeated warnings during the last year about the looming mental-health crisis.

"Without an aggressive response, many veterans have the potential to harm themselves or others," Veterans Affairs staff wrote in a note to Thompson.

Friday, February 29, 2008
The Canadian Press
Section: Afghanistan

Book Review: Empty Casing, Testament of 'an honest man and a soldier'



It has been said with some truth that in war there are no unwounded soldiers. Yet the nature of those wounds, particularly the psychological ones, and their effect on the lives of the men (and increasingly, the women) involved are as different and multitudinous as the individuals.

Whether you call it battle fatigue, shell shock, PTSD (posttraumatic stress

disorder) or OSI (operational stress injury), the mental trauma that can occur in conflict areas is still barely understood. It is often governed, particularly in the military, by ignorance and hidden by a culture of macho denial. Why some are affected, while others remain apparently uninjured, by the same circumstances remains largely a mystery. In Empty Casing, Fred Doucette tells the story of one soldier, Doucette himself, who rises through the ranks of the Canadian army until, faced with the extraordinary stresses and particular viciousness of the Bosnian conflict, he finally succumbs to mental injury and is ultimately medically discharged from the army.

The story Doucette tells is, in many ways, a quite ordinary soldier's tale, filled with the small struggles and triumphs of life in the military and family life, and the business and boredom of professional soldiering. And yet, its very ordinariness is partly what makes it compelling. When Doucette is finally posted to Bosnia as a United Nations Monitoring Officer, everything changes. In Bosnia, Doucette is sent to Sarajevo in the midst of the siege, a posting that Doucette, whose previous UN tours of Cyprus were his only experience of war, didn't really want. He comforts himself with the thought that it couldn't be that bad, adding, "I could not figure out why all the military observers who had been 'in country' kept wishing me luck."

Luck was something Doucette would need. The road to Sarajevo, pocked with devastated villages and the obvious remains of recent war and destruction, was but a small introduction to Sarajevo itself. Doucette eloquently paints a picture of a city under siege, of a United Nations Protection Force that protected no one and a lopsided conflict that seemed to have no end.

In Sarajevo, Doucette experiences the frequent, if intermittent, shelling, sniper fire and general constant threat that characterized the city at the time, narrowly escaping death and injury a number of times until he is finally wounded.

Billeting with a local family, Doucette comes to share the opinion that the

Serbs are "the bad guys." It is an understandable reaction from someone whose life is constantly under threat from Serb firepower, and one that has some truth to it. But at one point, Doucette goes further in his gruff, plain-speaking manner: "When it came down to morals, the Serbs had none. I've argued this with people in and out of the military and the fact I point out is, 'I've never stood at a Serb mass grave.' Bosnian mass graves abound, usually full of old men, women and children, and if the cutthroat Serbs were lucky, they would have thrown in a few young men to top it off."

This is perhaps a point too far. I have stood at the side of Bosnian mass graves, watching the sickening and wretched remains of more than 200 innocent Bosnians retrieved. But I have also walked through the blackened and devastated remains of a Serb village in what is now the Serb portion of Bosnia, with the graffiti of Bosnian forces still in evidence and not a living soul left.

The Serbs may have started the cycle of atrocities, and they almost certainly did more than anyone (although the Croats might dispute this dubious honour), but they all - Serb, Croat and Bosnian - took part when given a chance and had a share in the horrific crimes of that sad decade.

For Doucette, the final outcome of his immersion in the insanity of Bosnia is that once he returns to Canada, he begins to exhibit all the symptoms of PTSD. After years of denial and suffering, both his own and his family's, and almost criminally negligent inaction by the Department of National Defence, Doucette is finally forced to seek and find the help he really needs. He leads us through his journey toward some form of recovery, his own ongoing understanding of his illness and injury, and on to his current position working with the DND's Operational Stress Injury Social Support program, providing peer support to veterans suffering from PTSD.

Like the straight-talking soldier he is, Doucette neither holds back nor exhibits self-pity. He describes his feelings and despair, the sudden and uncontrollable rages, the long periods

when he didn't care about anything at all. In doing so with plain, understated simplicity, Doucette helps the reader gain a little insight of what a mind injured by war is like.

It has to be said that Empty Casing doesn't add much to our understanding of the war in Bosnia, but then that is not its aim. And, to be honest, Doucette could have used a little help in the editing, as the language is uneven and sometimes repetitious, occasionally reading as though it were written as therapy rather than to be read by others. But as a guide to the tortured mind of a soldier injured by the stresses of modern war, and the hard road to recovery, told by a straightforward and proud man "wont to speak plain and to the purpose, like an honest man and a soldier," as Shakespeare put it, it is compelling and revealing.

And, sadly, given the amount of conflict our men and women in the military are now called upon to engage in, it is a story we will hear many times over as time goes on. Let us hope that the policy-makers learn the necessary lessons to help those increasing numbers of our soldiers injured like Fred Doucette.

Patrick Rengger is a writer and journalist living in Calgary and a former officer who served with both the British and Canadian armed forces. In 1996, he travelled throughout the former Yugoslavia in the immediate aftermath of the Dayton peace conference.

The lost boy

I was sitting in the food court at a local mall, sipping coffee. All was well; the crowd was small, I felt safe and in control. Looking up from my coffee, I caught sight of a boy about eight years old. His hair was messed up, his coat hung off his bony shoulders, his eyes were big and dark and he was looking for someone. My eyes locked on him. I felt my heart leap into my throat, my mouth was dry and tears began to well up in my eyes. He was one of those images of innocence but panic filled his eyes and quickened his movements as he searched for his mother or father. Then, in a second, his expression changed to joy as he spotted his mom walking towards him

with a McDonald's tray. His eyes brightened, he smiled and ran towards her.

But this incident launched me on an emotional roller coaster. The young boy's look had stirred up images of other children looking and straining to see a familiar face, fearing that they were alone. I had seen their faces in Bosnia and could do nothing to help their hopelessness and fear. In Sarajevo I had been unable to help or care for those hopeless, unknown children caught in the turmoil of war. My chest ached; the tears overflowed and ran down my cheeks, and I hung my head so that no one would see them fall.

From Empty Casing

Saturday, March 01, 2008
Patrick Rengger, Globe and Mail
Section: Veterans

Wartime plane crash locations found



A Bristol Beaufighter with D-Day markings sits on the runway in June 1944 . A Canadian dive company, along with a Halifax film crew, recently discovered the wreck sites of several Bristol Beaufighters that disappeared during the Black Friday battle of Feb. 9, 1945, at Fordefjord, Norway.

Credit: Canadian Forces Joint Imagery Centre

It was a sneak attack that should have lasted no more than five minutes.

Make one pass: Fly level, aim just under the water, fire at the last possible second and sink one of the last remaining German destroyers, a ship guarded by enemy ships in a Norwegian fjord.

But the Allied flyers, including mostly Canadian crews aboard 11 fighter bombers from the 404 Squadron,

quickly realized they had lost the element of surprise.

German fighter planes filled the daytime sky, and the nine enemy ships below them were ready for the attack.

The disastrous barrage lasted 30 minutes. Planes exploded into cliffs and crashed into the waters of the Fordefjord.

"It was just like flying through metal. These guys really didn't have much of a chance," said Maj. Chris Larsen, historian for the 404 Maritime Patrol Squadron, which today flies out of Greenwood.

Of the 404 Squadron's 11 Bristol Beauforts that went into battle that day, only five returned to their base in Scotland. Eleven crew members were dead. One was captured as a prisoner of war. Another three Allied planes were also lost, with mostly British and Australian crews on board.

Known as Black Friday, Feb. 9, 1945, is one of the darkest days in the history of the Royal Canadian Air Force.

But more than 60 years later, a Canadian dive company accompanied by a Halifax film crew has shone light on the tragic tale with the recent discovery of the wreck sites of several of the planes that disappeared in a watery grave.

Maj. Larsen said the divers, led by Rob Rondeau of Calgary, were planning Friday to raise a section of the tail of one of the planes in order to use its serial number to confirm its identity.

"Now that we know where most of the crash locations are, it's almost like a sense of closure," Maj. Larsen said.

"It's very symbolic to know exactly where these guys died, where they rest. It can be logged, it can be written about and people can pay their respects."

Maj. Larsen said the courage of those men, who remained in battle knowing that they would likely be shot down, is remarkable.

"A lot of the guys, when they came back, talked about seeing their buddies blow up and hit the cliffs, and

yet they carried on and did it. I think we tend to forget that kind of courage is just amazing. It would have been so easy for the guys to cop out . . . even not to put in an attack at all. (But) they were there to get the job done."

The story is all the more harsh for its timing, just a few short months before the war would end in victory for the Allies, and its futility, he said.

"They didn't sink anybody, which makes it even more tragic. For that kind of sacrifice, it's numbing."

While the story of Black Friday is well known in Norway and among members of the 404 Squadron, it will soon be brought to a wider audience.

On Friday, John Wesley Chisholm said his company, Arcadia Entertainment of Halifax, is producing a documentary for National Geographic and the History Channel on the search. The documentary is to air this fall.

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Saturday, March 01, 2008
 KELLY SHIERS, Nova Scotia Chronicle Herald
 Section: Veterans

Prince Harry: Sacrifice for Queen and country



Prince Harry has acknowledged that his time in Afghanistan will make him a target for terrorists in the UK.

Even those of us who hold rather mixed views about monarchy in general and Prince Harry in particular watched Cornet Wales's television interview from Afghanistan on Thursday evening slack-jawed.

Prince Harry has acknowledged that his time in Afghanistan will make him a target for terrorists in the UK.

He chatted about his "Dad", letters from brother William and about his proud mother "looking down, having a giggle about the stupid things I've been doing, like going left when I should have gone right".

True, the interviewer referred to the Queen as "grandma" and the young officer then pointedly called her "my grandmother", but a young Prince Edward would have called mama "Her Majesty" and probably genuflected, too.

Prince Harry managed to convey affection and respect for the Queen's position, and her judgment, without sounding fawning.

"Her knowledge of the army is amazing for a grandmother," he said, before adding, "I suppose it's slightly her job."

His inarticulacy was rather endearing – he seemed like any twenty-something bloke.

At the same time, he was hugely conscious of what he was saying and how it might reflect on his family, commanding officers and fellow soldiers. Yet all of this came across as more than spin.

A young man who cheerfully sits in a building riddled with mortar holes tends to tell it straight, and he did.

Here was the nightclub habitué talking about being a "bullet magnet" rather than a babe magnet and acknowledging that his time in Afghanistan would make him a target for terrorists in the UK.

"Now that you come to think about it, it's quite worrying," he said ruefully.

All in all, it was a triumph, even if those who are predicting that this celebratory wall-to-wall coverage of the 23-year-old Household Cavalry officer and his frontline exploits will result in queues at recruitment halls exaggerate the stardust a royal can sprinkle these days.

If some spoilt celebrity such as Lewis Hamilton or Wayne Rooney signed up, then maybe; but not a Windsor.

None of this, though, takes anything from Prince Harry's professional dedication and uncomplaining demeanour.

For years, those of us who write about the Firm have been told quietly that in private, Harry is hugely engaging, with enough of Diana's magic touch to be potentially one of the Royal Family's greatest assets.

This week, for the first time, we saw that for ourselves, and in the Prince's eye it was possible to detect a flicker of the man he might become.

The little boy who broke female hearts when he walked behind his mother's coffin has, for so many years, been without a role or purpose.

He had a less than starry school career at Eton (a D in his Geography A-level and allegations of cheating in Art); there was also a skirmish with drugs, drunken antics outside nightclubs and bar bills that regularly ran into thousands of pounds.

Sandhurst seems to have suited him – his passion for soldiering was evident from childhood – but then he was denied the chance to go with his men to Iraq last year. His bitter disappointment was common knowledge.

When the Luftwaffe bombed Buckingham Palace, Prince Harry's great grandmother, the late Queen Elizabeth, announced that she could now look the East End in the eye.

Now, after 10 weeks in Afghanistan, Harry can look any other serving soldier in the eye.

For a prince whose life has necessarily been about status, he seems to have found himself while disguised as a nobody, denied a shower for four days at a time; or rather, as a courageous, unshaven young guy, known to the pilots he would call in to attack enemy positions as "Widow Six Seven".

He has seen what his peers have seen, shared the freezing cold nights, boiling days, bland rations – and the fear. And what was evident from the television interviews was that he relished every moment.

His comment about army life – it "could be the best thing in the world and the best job you could ever, ever wish for. It has got so much to offer." – was totally believable.

Yet just as Prince Harry's reputation soars to uncharted heights, he must be contemplating a hard choice: what next?

Army sources indicate that the top brass are unlikely to send him into the front line again. The feeling is that he

got away with it this time, but a return match might tempt fate.

So will this be viewed as his high water mark, akin to the Duke of York returning from the Falklands with a red rose between his teeth watched by an adoring nation, only to retire to the golf course and a lifetime of ridicule as "Air Miles Andy"? Or will Harry find some new mission, perhaps away from the Armed Forces?

He is not overly qualified for civvy street, nor does he have the mentality to embrace that kind of life.

The slogan on the baseball cap he was seen wearing out in Taliban country encapsulated a straightforward approach to work, and to life: "We do bad things to bad people."

Yet the third in line to the throne possesses a rare ability to relate to ordinary people that is not always obvious in his father or his uncles. This could make him a powerful force for good, perhaps as a charity campaigner, like his late mother, and as an ambassador for his country.

More easily still, he could slip back into a life of frivolity with his very blonde girlfriend, Chelsy.

Undoubtedly, there will be more pictures of a hammered Harry tottering out of Mahiki or Boujis and scuffling with the paparazzi.

Such coverage would be problematic, but some might also be uneasy about the recent media adulation – among them the families of those who will not be coming back from Afghanistan.

For those coping with loss, there is little media attention, and few mentions of the hell that is Helmund province. All most families have to cradle is a body bag, cold-shouldered by an indifferent nation.

I've met those who have served in Afghanistan and families who have lost men there, and though their strength is profoundly humbling, it does upset them that the nation that some accuse of having sleepwalked into war is sleepwalking through it, as well.

A photograph was recently published of a parade of soldiers returned from Afghanistan, showing citizens walking

by, quite indifferent.

When I wrote that this was shaming, several soldiers contacted me: "At last someone is saying this. Why are the public so heartless?"

We might not agree with the mission in Afghanistan, but it is not about to end any time soon.

If coverage of Prince Harry's involvement has shaken the nation out of its bored indifference towards it, then he will have served his country with greater distinction than he is ever likely to realise.

He did his duty in the ground war, but his real contribution could prove to be in the media war, confronting us in our living rooms about the sacrifices being made for Queen and country.

Saturday, March 01, 2008
 Jasper Gerard, The Telegraph (UK)
 Section: Miscellaneous