



December 16, 2007

More soldiers choosing civilian life

By **KEVIN CRUSH, SUN MEDIA**

Canada's mission in Afghanistan could be driving some soldiers out of the military, says a military analyst.

The University of Calgary's Ron Huebert suspects one of the reasons for the increase is that combat tours in Afghanistan are making some troops rethink their military careers.

"There's this ongoing issue in terms of the fact that the rotation rate of the land forces to meet the requirements in Afghanistan have been quite substantial," says the associate director of the university's Centre for Military and Strategic Studies.

In October, Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie told reporters that in 2003, 8% of soldiers left the military, the attrition rate is now around 12%. That figure includes all discharges, including retirements and medical dispensations. More detailed information wasn't made available by the Canadian Forces.

Constant tours of duty could be stressful for families, said Huebert, causing many soldiers to choose the civilian life.

Some older soldiers may also not be willing to head into combat, he suggested.

Combat will turn some people off of the military, agreed Master Cpl. Paul Franklin, who lost both his legs in Afghanistan on Jan. 15, 2006.

As a member of 3 Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, he was injured while in a convoy protecting diplomat Glyn Berry. Despite his injuries, he's staying in the military.

"As operations increase you're always going to get more people moving on to the next stage in their life," said Franklin.

He now works a desk job in casualty support for the Canadian Forces.

Others are attracted to the military because of Afghanistan, Franklin said. Recruiting numbers are up, he added, but it will take time to train those recruits.

"I think there's going to be a blip in the middle where we will have a training gap. We'll have maybe less sergeants and less master corporals but as more people get promoted into those positions we'll smooth that gap out.

"But that's always the case. After a war, there's always people who want to get out and move on.

"You don't want to do this every day, trust me."

On the flip side, Afghanistan could keep some in the military.

Huebert said recruits may be looking for the band of brothers mentality combat can bring while existing soldiers may see it as looking good for future promotions to have had that combat experience.