

Table of Contents

<u>Canada has always tried to get by with a too-small military.....</u>	1
<u>Suicide bomber kills 2 Afghan soldiers.....</u>	3
<u>Auditor raises warning over Afghan aid.....</u>	4
<u>Ottawa hired foreign prof to buttress case on detainees.....</u>	5
<u>Hundreds bid farewell to soldiers killed in Afghanistan; Quebec-based soldiers Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier, Master Cpl. Christian Duchesne died Aug. 22 after being hit by a roadside bomb.....</u>	7
<u>Soldiers deserve our applause; In our view: Afghan mission has been a difficult one.....</u>	9
<u>FROM CHAOS TO CANADA War in Afghanistan will leave a lasting impression on troops; Changes Soldiers face tough mental battles to readjust to life at home.....</u>	11
<u>Fallen Quebec soldiers honoured.....</u>	13
<u>Afghanistan war zone leaves lasting impressions.....</u>	15
<u>NATO pushes extension of Dutch mission in Afghanistan; Politics Decision will be watched by Ottawa.....</u>	18
<u>Expert defends detainee policy.....</u>	20
<u>NATO woos Dutch to stay put.....</u>	22
<u>Canada's top soldier hires controversial academic to defend policy on detainees.....</u>	23
<u>Family, friends can write soldiers for free.....</u>	25
<u>Tough to track aid spending, auditor says; Money for projects in Afghanistan pooled with funds from other countries.....</u>	26
<u>NATO seeks extension of Dutch mission.....</u>	28
<u>Tracking millions in pooled aid looming challenge, auditor says; It's tough to trace aid dollars once they're consolidated with donations from several other countries.....</u>	29
<u>Dutch moves on Afghanistan affect Canada.....</u>	31
<u>Welcoming Task Force '07.....</u>	33
<u>Bring back the blue berets.....</u>	34

Table of Contents

<u>Suicide bomber kills two Afghan soldiers Wounds 10 others.....</u>	36
<u>Tracking aid money to Afghanistan a challenge: auditor.....</u>	38
<u>Canadian soldier laid to rest.....</u>	40
<u>Canadian cannon fodder in Afghanistan.....</u>	41
<u>Promises, promises; Dion talks Canadian Ice Centre, Williams and Afghanistan.....</u>	43
<u>Van Doo killed by roadside bomb in Afghanistan remembered yesterday as a solid soldier and 'the best dad ever'.....</u>	45
<u>Troops in the hot zones; Canadians serving abroad in areas other than Afghanistan.....</u>	46
<u>Soldiers find ally in N.B. woman.....</u>	50
<u>Deal has ramifications.....</u>	51
<u>Security is what Afghanis need most.....</u>	52
<u>'Papa, you are our hero' Van Doo's officer mourned in Quebec City.....</u>	54
<u>Police don't have 'authority' on ribbons.....</u>	55
<u>War on drugs should be waged here; Users, not producers, the root of global trafficking problems.....</u>	56
<u>South Korea paid \$20-million ransom.....</u>	58
<u>12 Afghans killed in attacks.....</u>	59
<u>French-language TV gets perks: journalists; Radio-Canada anchors get same treatment as CBC's, military says.....</u>	60
<u>Defence team shields Conservatives: critics; Records show national security not only priority.....</u>	62
<u>'Papa Bear' laid to rest in emotional service; Residents line streets to honour fallen soldier.....</u>	64
<u>Questions and answers from Kandahar.....</u>	66
<u>Condolences for dead officer.....</u>	68
<u>Afghans short of water, hydro, leadership.....</u>	69
<u>Afghan aid plan raises alarm A federal auditor queries how Ottawa cash can be tracked once donations are consolidated.....</u>	71

Table of Contents

<u>Blair adviser backs Canada over detainees</u>	73
<u>If I was an Afghan I'd have these concerns</u>	75
<u>Afghanistan Sunflashes Column</u>	77
<u>Granatstein's errors of omission</u>	80
<u>'You are our hero forever'</u>	82
<u>Mail free to soldiers overseas; Program will run until 2009</u>	83
<u>10 steps forward, 5 steps back – Afghan war winnable; Canadian veterans of battles with Taliban see progress being made, particularly with Afghan army, but say the Afghan national police are the weak link right now</u>	85
<u>Bernier browbeats Asian ally</u>	88
<u>'We love you. You are our hero'; Fallen soldier's family and friends grieve for Van Doo</u>	90
<u>Quebec journalists get perks in Afghanistan, military admits; Until Van Doos arrived French-language media had few reporters here</u>	92
<u>\$20million ransom paid by S. Koreans will buy arms, Taliban say</u>	94
<u>Family mourns fallen soldier; Funerals for two servicemen killed in Afghanistan Aug. 22</u>	95
<u>Letters to overseas soldiers to be postage-free</u>	97
<u>Soldier's daughter hails her hero; Neighbours turn out to pay respects as cortege arrives in Quebec town near military base</u>	98
<u>Quebec journalists favoured in Afghanistan, military concedes; Managing the message being delivered to a province where seven out of 10 oppose the war is a Forces priority, writes Andrew Mayeda in Kandahar, Afghanistan</u>	100
<u>Layton was right about the Taliban</u>	102
<u>Securing Afghanistan's future</u>	103
<u>Soldier's aunt wins free postage for mail sent to war zones</u>	105

Canada has always tried to get by with a too-small military

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Why does Canada have troops in Afghanistan? The short answer, I suppose, is that we have to have troops somewhere, and Jean Chr tien preferred the legal war there to the illegal war in Iraq. In the post-9/11 world, sitting on the sidelines was not an option, though we probably would have done it if it was.

Canada's Armed Forces were in a poor state of preparedness. Its members were of high quality and very well trained, but they were supplied with obsolete equipment. Their pay was low, so morale suffered. They were not given enough time at home between missions and, as a consequence, burnout increased the attrition rate.

Canada prided itself on its role as a peacekeeper, but its willingness and ability to participate in peacekeeping operations dwindled over time. We never were the leading player, but we were once in the top 10. Now we rank 59th, with 141 peacekeepers deployed, and that's only because the police serving in missions such as Haiti are counted.

The countries ahead of us include Mongolia, Peru, Guatemala, Qatar, and Malawi. The major contributors are Pakistan (9,989), one of the poorest countries in the world, Bangladesh (9,656), India (9,612), Jordan (3,819) and Ghana (2,907). The United Nations has 50,000 peacekeeping troops deployed around the world, and the secretary-general is looking for 30,000 more.

Of course, Canada has 2,300 or so troops serving in Afghanistan (fewer than Nepal, Uruguay, Italy and Nigeria contribute to peacekeeping operations), so we're in no position to contribute to peacekeeping operations as well. The fact is that we were overstretched before we took on the Afghan mission, and have had to devote all of our resources to it.

The total complement of our Armed Forces is 62,000 regular force members and 25,000 reserve force members. That's not very big, but Canada with the exceptions of the First, Second, and Korean Wars have never been prepared to defend themselves -- or, more accurately, to pay for our defence.

There were times when we needed defending. The Americans were certainly a threat throughout the 19th century, but it was the redcoats who led the expedition to quash Louis Riel's two rebellions. British warships patrolled our seas. Did we want to pay for any of this? Not particularly.

During the Second World War, Canada more or less handed the defence of North America over to the Americans, though the transfer wasn't complete until Lester Person confirmed that the Americans were in charge of anything to do with nuclear policy. The consequence of this dog-in-the-manger attitude to defence was that Canada had more money to spend on social policy.

Mexico, incidentally, adopted the same attitude, with the consequence that its small army and lack of a military tradition insulated it from the coups d' tat that were the bane of most other Latin American countries.

NDP Leader Jack Layton wants to bring the troops home, although morale is high and there is no indication that the troops want to be brought home. But there should be more of them, so that they have to spend less time there and can spend more time at home before they are redeployed, hopefully to a peacekeeping operation somewhere else in the world.

Canada is a rich country and soldiers are not necessary evils. They are necessary goods.

William Christian is a professor of political science at the University of Guelph.

Suicide bomber kills 2 Afghan soldiers

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A suicide bomber blew himself up next to a German military patrol outside the gates of the capital's airport yesterday, killing two Afghan soldiers and wounding 10 people, including a German and four Belgians, officials said.

In eastern Afghanistan, a barrage of rockets fired at a U.S.-led coalition base instead hit houses in a nearby village, leaving 10 civilians dead and seven injured, coalition and Afghan police said.

Violence has been soaring in Afghanistan, where over 4,200 people, most of them insurgents, have been killed this year, according to an Associated Press count based on figures provided by western and Afghan officials.

Most of the bloodshed has been in the south and the east where Taliban militants are strongest, although suicide attackers have been targeting foreign and Afghan security forces in Kabul.

The attack in the capital yesterday, apparently aimed at the German patrol, tore into a group of Afghan soldiers waiting at a checkpoint outside the military wing of Kabul International airport. NATO said an Afghan soldier and four civilians were among the 10 wounded.

Auditor raises warning over Afghan aid

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A major shift toward putting aid dollars into multinational pools of cash has raised alarms about how Ottawa can track its spending in Afghanistan, a federal auditor says.

Paul Morse, a member of Auditor General Sheila Fraser's team, said in an interview it's tough to trace aid dollars once they're consolidated with donations from several other countries.

Officials with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) "don't really know how they can report the performance" of those contributions, Morse added.

"We can't really follow the money right to the very end in an audit sense."

Value for money is not as easily traced when cash can't be handily matched with demonstrable results, he said.

"In our long-range planning, that's certainly one of the risks that we're going to be looking at for CIDA. I know that other government auditors around the world have some of the same concerns."

Bev Oda, Canada's new international development minister, insists as did her predecessor that more than \$1 billion to be spent in aid to Afghanistan by 2011 is going to experienced partners on the ground who are accountable for it through regular public reports. The money is meant for hundreds of projects, from small business loans to new schools, well drilling and bridge building.

The CIDA website describes rigorous attempts to oversee spending.

But due to the "operating environment in Afghanistan" — notably widespread corruption and a fledgling cash-based economy — "neither CIDA nor any other donor can completely eliminate risk," it says.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has taken pains to stress what the Conservatives say is a focus not just on military action but humanitarian aid as well.

Eighty per cent of Canadian cash — about \$139 million is to be spent this year — is channelled to Afghan-designed programs overseen by such multi-donor agencies as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme.

Ottawa hired foreign prof to buttress case on detainees

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: CANADIAN PRESS / Pallbearers carry the casket of Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier yesterday following a Quebec City funeral service. Mercier died last week in Afghanistan when a roadside bomb killed three people and injured a CBC camera operator. ;
DATELINE: OTTAWA
SOURCE: Canadian Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
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The Canadian government has hired a controversial international academic to argue that Canada's military has no obligation to accord Afghan detainees Canadian-style legal rights.

Christopher Greenwood, a professor of international law at the London School of Economics, submitted an opinion in mid-August to the Federal Court, which is hearing an application by Amnesty International to halt all prisoner transfers by Canadian soldiers to Afghan authorities.

Greenwood was the author of a 2002 legal opinion commissioned by the British government entitled *The Legality of Using Force Against Iraq*. He concluded an invasion was justified on the grounds of a 1990 UN Security Council resolution, and also on the grounds of self defence if Britain could show the threat of an imminent Iraqi attack.

His opinion was reported to be at odds with lawyers in Britain's own Foreign Office and many other international law experts. It was revealed in 2005 that Greenwood had been paid 46,000 pounds (more than \$100,000) by the Blair government for providing various legal advice on Iraq.

Greenwood's 34-page opinion says it was prepared at the request of Gen. Rick Hillier, the chief of defence staff.

The Defence Department did not respond to questions about the cost of contracting Greenwood's legal advice nor why he was chosen for the task.

New Democrat MP Dawn Black, the party's defence critic, questioned yesterday why Canada's top soldier is hiring a foreign lawyer to defend government policy in Afghanistan.

With all the international legal expertise available within Canada's Foreign Affairs Department or the broader Canadian legal community, Black said, the government clearly went shopping for what she called "a discredited, right-wing expert."

"Professor Greenwood set himself up just to be a prop for Tony Blair to justify going into Iraq. Now the Conservatives, or the CDS, are trying to use Greenwood to justify their disastrous detainee policy."

In his brief, Greenwood said that Amnesty's application to force the Canadian military to provide secure facilities and legal representation for suspected militants detained by Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan is "based upon a number of serious misconceptions regarding international law."

Since Canada is in Afghanistan under a United Nations mandate, Greenwood argues, this country's international treaty obligations don't apply.

Alex Neve, secretary general of Amnesty Canada, took great exception to his line of argument.

"He's argued that in a multitude of ways, Canada is not bound by its international human rights obligations while it's in Afghanistan -- all of which, in our view, are very debilitating arguments for a country like Canada which seeks to strengthen international human rights standards and wants governments to be more responsible and more accountable."

Greenwood wrote that any given Afghan detainee "is not within the separate jurisdiction of Canada and Canada's obligations under the international human rights treaties . . . would not be applicable."

The Harper government was under intense scrutiny all winter as reports surfaced of Afghan detainees being abused by local authorities after they were handed over by Canadian soldiers.

After initially denying any knowledge of torture, the government finally conceded it knew of allegations in six specific cases.

On May 3, the Conservatives announced they had negotiated new terms with the Afghan government to further safeguard detainees.

Hundreds bid farewell to soldiers killed in Afghanistan; Quebec-based soldiers Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier, Master Cpl. Christian Duchesne died Aug. 22 after being hit by a roadside bomb

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Soldiers stood at attention and military drums rolled as the casket of Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier was carried into a Quebec City church yesterday.

Mercier, 43, of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal 22nd Regiment and Master Cpl. Christian Duchesne, 34, of the 5th Field Ambulance, died Aug. 22 when their light-armoured vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb.

A private funeral was held earlier yesterday in the Quebec City area for Duchesne.

Mercier's family, including his wife Lucie and his three children Myriame, 17, Simon, 15, and Maude, 9, as well as hundreds of friends, gathered at the Saint-Gerard-Majella Church in suburban Quebec City to say their last goodbyes.

"You gave us the best set of values that we could ever have hoped for," said Myriame, the eldest of Mercier's three children.

"We thank you for everything you gave to us and everything you did for us. And for everything you accomplished in your life. Bravo papa. We love you. You are our hero forever."

Master Warrant Officer Stephane Bergeron paid tribute to Mercier as a superior human being and friend.

"He was much more than just a co-worker," Bergeron said, his voice breaking as the tears began to flow.

"He was the best dad ever, a well intentioned husband, a best friend, one of the guys ... we will miss you, we will miss you. We will never forget you."

Mercier had spent more than 20 years in the military and had been deployed in the past to the former Yugoslavia on two occasions as well as on missions in Haiti and Afghanistan.

Another one of Mercier's colleagues remembered him as a man who always there when you needed him.

"When we talk about a friend who is always there when you need them, Mario was always there ... he took the time. You always felt important around him," said Warrant Officer Justin Morneau.

Hundreds bid farewell to soldiers killed in Afghanistan; Quebec-based soldiers Master Warrant Officer Mario

Visibly moved by the funeral was Heritage Minister Josee Verner, who attended the funeral along with Quebec Health Minister Philippe Couillard and Lt.-Gov. Pierre Duchesne.

Pte. Simon Longtin was the first Van Doo to die in Afghanistan when he was killed by a roadside bomb on Aug. 19.

Longtin's funeral was held on Monday in the Montreal area.

All three were based at CFB Valcartier, near Quebec City, and were part of the 2,500 Canadian troops who are taking part in Operation Athena, a mission to bring security and assist in the rebuilding of Afghanistan.

Hundreds bid farewell to soldiers killed in Afghanistan; Quebec-based soldiers Master Warrant Officer Mari

Soldiers deserve our applause; In our view: Afghan mission has been a difficult one

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Over the last few weeks our soldiers have slowly returned home from six months of combat duty in Afghanistan.

They served their country well and did so while believing they were making a difference.

These soldiers should be commended for willingly putting their lives on the line in an environment that is anything but friendly. They performed their jobs well and professionally.

While the happiness of being reunited with families was written all over the faces of soldiers as they returned home, so was their sadness that they were coming back missing some of their colleagues who lost their lives in the line of duty.

More than 600 Gagetown soldiers made their way to Afghanistan during the middle of a bitter cold winter to form the 1,150-strong battle group of The Second Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment (2RCR).

Over those months, 18 members were killed.

The loss of those soldiers profoundly affected many of their comrades, including Master Cpl. Scott Seeley of Rusagonis.

The former champion wrestler at Oromocto High School was riding in the last of three light armoured vehicles on Easter Sunday when the lead one struck a roadside bomb – claiming the lives of six soldiers, including his good friend, Sgt. Donald Lucas of Burton.

"It was easier for us to deal with it over there," Seeley said.

"I (recently) drove by where Sgt. Lucas lived and it's still hard to believe it happened – even after all these months."

Aside from the Easter Sunday experience, Seeley and his comrades also came under fire numerous times from enemy forces.

In July, shortly after returning to Afghanistan from leave, Seeley and the remainder of his crew survived a suicide bombing when a van loaded with explosives rammed the LAV 3 armoured vehicle he and others were in.

Part of the reintegration process into Canadian society is learning to live with those associated memories and emotions.

The important thing now is to ensure the resources required to meet the mental health needs of all soldiers are made available over the next several months.

CFB Gagetown mental health workers and other associated professionals would seem to be up to the challenge.

For soldiers like Seeley, now on leave for a few weeks, the path to normal life could be a bumpy one.

Statistics indicate that anywhere from three per cent to five per cent of returning soldiers suffer from some form of operational stress injury.

FROM CHAOS TO CANADA | War in Afghanistan will leave a lasting impression on troops; Changes | Soldiers face tough mental battles to readjust to life at home

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More than 600 soldiers from Canadian Forces Base Gagetown deployed to Afghanistan in February for six months.

Local soldiers – part of the 1,150– strong Second Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment (2RCR) battle group – were sent to help Afghan authorities extend and exercise their authority and influence across the country.

The idea was to create the conditions necessary for Afghanistan's stabilization and reconstruction.

By the time the mission ended last month, 18 members of the battle group had been killed, including five soldiers who called CFB Gagetown home.

Master Cpl. Scott Seeley of Rusagonis was among the local soldiers who travelled to the wartorn region.

The former champion wrestler at Oromocto High School was riding in a convoy of three light–armoured vehicles on Easter Sunday when the lead one struck a roadside bomb – claiming the lives of six soldiers, including his friend Sgt. Donald Lucas of Burton.

Seeley, who also survived a suicide bombing in July, said the experience of serving in Afghanistan changed him and made him appreciate life in Canada.

Since arriving home on Aug. 8, he has been busy spending time with his family and enjoying home life.

He sat down this week with The Daily Gleaner's military reporter MICHAEL STAPLES to discuss his time in Afghanistan and how it has affected him.

Mission to Afghanistan

A look at how the recent mission to the wartorn country affected local troops:

- Canadian Forces Base Gagetown employs about 4,000 military members and 700 civilians.
- About 1,150 members of The Second Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment (2RCR) battle group, including more than 600 from CFB Gagetown in Oromocto, served in Kandahar, Afghanistan, for six months,

FROM CHAOS TO CANADA | War in Afghanistan will leave a lasting impression on troops; Changes | Soldi

starting in February.

- Eighteen members of the battle group, including five from CFB Gagetown, were killed over six months.
- Statistics indicate anywhere from three per cent to five per cent of returning soldiers will have an operational stress injury.

Fallen Quebec soldiers honoured

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A private funeral was held earlier Friday in the Quebec City area for Duchesne.

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"You gave us the best set of values that we could ever have hoped for," said Myriame, the eldest of Mercier's three children.

"We thank you for everything you gave to us and everything you did for us. And for everything you accomplished in your life. Bravo papa. We love you. You are our hero forever."

Master Warrant Officer Stephane Bergeron paid tribute to Mercier as a superior human being and friend.

"He was much more than just a co-worker," Bergeron said, his voice breaking as the tears began to flow.

"He was the best dad ever, a well intentioned husband, a best friend, one of the guys ... we will miss you, we will miss you. We will never forget you."

Mercier had spent more than 20 years in the military and had been deployed in the past to the former Yugoslavia on two occasions as well as on missions in Haiti and Afghanistan.

Another one of Mercier's colleagues remembered him as a man who always there when you needed him.

"When we talk about a friend who is always there when you need them, Mario was always there ... he took the time. You always felt important around him," said Warrant Officer Justin Morneau.

Visibly moved by the funeral was Heritage Minister Josee Verner, who attended the funeral along with Quebec Health Minister Philippe Couillard and Lt.-Gov. Pierre Duchesne.

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Longtin's funeral was held on Monday in the Montreal area.

All three were based at CFB Valcartier, near Quebec City, and were part of the 2,500 Canadian troops who are taking part in Operation Athena, a mission to bring security and assist in the rebuilding of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan war zone leaves lasting impressions

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Afghanistan has changed Scott Seeley.

The 32-year-old master corporal from Rusagonis said six months of combat duty in the wartorn country has given him a different perspective on life.

"I definitely look at things differently," said Seeley, with Hotel Company of the Second Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment (2RCR). "What were issues before are not issues now.

"When you get shot up, blown up and see friends blown up, everything else is pale in comparison. If the tour hasn't changed you, then you have problems to deal with."

The former champion wrestler at Oromocto High School was riding in the last of three light-armoured vehicles in a convoy on Easter Sunday when the lead one struck a roadside bomb. The incident claimed the lives of six soldiers, including his friend Sgt. Donald Lucas of Burton.

"It was easier for us to deal with it over there," Seeley said. "I (recently) drove by where Sgt. Lucas lived and it's still hard to believe it happened -- even after all these months."

Seeley is one of more than 600 soldiers who has returned to Canadian Forces Base Gagetown over the last few weeks from Afghanistan.

The soldiers are going through the process of reintegrating themselves into Canadian society.

Part of that process is learning to live with a barrel of bad memories and emotions.

Seeley said there are times he catches himself raising his voice or being short-tempered with members of his family when he shouldn't have been.

Many soldiers have a lot to come to grips with.

Capt. Kim Grondin, the psychological program manager for the CFB Gagetown mental-health clinic, said dealing with such grief is a common theme after soldiers come home.

"From what we are hearing, it is probably the No. 1 issue," Grondin said. "They survived and their friends, colleagues and comrades did not, and so they are grieving that loss."

Soldiers are close-knit groups and now that they have returned, they have more time to think, he said.

"It's part of their reintegration that they let go," Grondin said. "It becomes tough."

Grondin said such grieving wouldn't be classified as an operational stress injury (OSI), but could lead to one down the road if the soldier is unable to deal with it.

The military defines OSIs, which includes post-traumatic stress disorder, as being "any persistent psychological difficulty resulting from operational duties performed by a Canadian Forces member."

Statistics indicate that anywhere from three per cent to five per cent of returning soldiers suffer from some form of OSI.

Seeley, who praised the military for taking soldiers to Cyprus and allowing them to decompress before bringing them back to Canada, said members should talk about their experiences in Afghanistan.

"Holding things in doesn't do anyone any good," he said. "You need to talk about the experiences and explain them."

Seeley was part of a group of soldiers who was always on the move while in Afghanistan -- operating under high stress and more open to the possibility of roadside bombs or ambushes.

"You were constantly looking for threats on the road," Seeley said in describing the daily routine. "Your mind was going a 1,000 miles an hour."

Aside from the Easter Sunday experience, Seeley and his comrades also came under fire numerous times by enemy forces.

In July, shortly after returning to Afghanistan from leave, Seeley and other soldiers survived a suicide bombing when a van loaded with explosives rammed their LAV 3 armoured vehicle.

Miraculously, there were no life-threatening injuries, although a friend was hurt.

"It felt like somebody took a shovel and beat my back," he said in describing the explosion. "I was sore for two weeks."

Despite everything that happened, life and duty in Afghanistan continued, he said.

In late November or early December, a mass post-deployment assessment will be carried out, and returning soldiers will be checked for OSI symptoms.

It takes about that long for peculiarities to show, Grondin said.

Signs include recurrent thoughts of the tour, irritability, emotional ups and downs, and crying.

"We are talking about soldiers who are tough, combat-ready soldiers who find it uncomfortable that their emotions have risen to the surface quickly," Grondin said.

"They become concerned that they are not in control. In the military, we are all about control (and) we ask men in theatre to control everything about themselves, to keep themselves and their comrades safe."

Most of the time, such feelings resolve themselves naturally, Grondin said, but when that doesn't happen, anxiety and depression often result.

"That becomes a major source of identifying, from a diagnosis point of view, and assessing individuals."

In most cases, short-term treatment will resolve the issue for soldiers, but there are other times when additional help is required.

More long-term problems could start to develop, however, when the base begins redeploying personnel over and over.

"We get into burning out soldiers," Grondin said.

"If Canada wants to increase their complement of military (personnel), so that we have a number of people that can share the load, from a soldier's point of view, we will be able to treat the other soldiers with a bit more time."

Grondin said the suicide rate among troops here, unlike those in the United States, isn't an issue because rotation lengths and taskings are different for Canadian soldiers, resulting in less pressure being placed on them.

"We have just not seen that kind of issue with our troops," he said.

"It's at such low levels that we haven't even identified it as a significant issue."

Robin Geneau, a licenced psychologist based in Fredericton, has helped treat veterans from the Balkan campaigns of the 1990s.

She said it's not unusual for soldiers to experience adaptation difficulties when they return home.

Geneau said an unknown percentage won't adapt and will require psychotherapy.

"The long-term prognosis for each individual is unique depending on a number of factors.

Some will continue to engage in tours and others will ultimately be released from the forces. Proper treatment will give each individual soldier his best chance at recovery."

Seeley, meanwhile, said he's moving forward with his reintegration.

He said the military is doing a good job at helping returning soldiers, including himself.

Despite everything that's happened to him, Seeley said he thinks he's a better person for having gone to Afghanistan and that Canadian troops are making a difference in the region.

NATO pushes extension of Dutch mission in Afghanistan; Politics | Decision will be watched by Ottawa

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DATE: 2007.09.01
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PAGE: A9
BYLINE: PAUL AMES The Associated Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 The Daily Gleaner (Fredericton)
WORD COUNT: 435

"Don't fight the enemy, make him irrelevant."

That slogan, summing up the tactics of the 1,500 Dutch troops in Afghan's Uruzgan province, once raised concern in other NATO countries whose troops are battling the resurgent Taliban in neighbouring southern regions.

Now NATO is wooing Dutch politicians to ensure an upcoming parliament vote in the Netherlands won't lead to the withdrawal of troops who have been praised for playing a key role in the alliance's strategy by boosting security in Uruzgan, a hotbed of Taliban activity.

"They've done exceptionally well, not only with the security but also the stability aspect," said Gen. John Craddock, NATO's top operational commander who visited the Dutch base on the edge of Tirin Kot this week.

"Recent Dutch actions have gained the respect and trust of the people and the Taliban now know that that region is not theirs, so they have performed admirably. We want them to stay."

The decision by the Dutch parliament on whether to extend the mission beyond its planned August 2008 end date could be influential for other nations such as Canada, where the government is also under pressure to curtail its deployment in the face of heavy casualties.

Canada has about 2,500 troops involved in the NATO mission in Afghanistan, most of them operating in Kandahar province. Since 2002, 70 Canadian soldiers and one diplomat have died in Afghanistan.

The Canadian military mission is slated to end in February 2009 and opposition parties are opposed to extending the commitment.

Craddock is struggling to persuade the 26 NATO member countries to provide more troops to the Afghan mission, particularly for the southern battlefields, and NATO commanders fear the withdrawal of key countries could threaten what progress has been made.

"Any time gaps are created, every time we have to adjust and move around forces and thin the ranks, it can be very difficult," Craddock said. "We're all locked arm-in-arm. If one of those arms comes loose, we've got to

get in pretty quick, and that's the hard part."

In their sprawling camp overlooking a rare strip of fertile land between the desert and the parched mountains of central Afghanistan, Dutch officers explained their approach.

They seek to talk to local tribal leaders — even those suspected of links with the Taliban — to resolve local disputes, support economic development and undermine potential support for the militants.

Rather than measuring success by the number of insurgents killed, the Dutch point to a revival in local commerce and development projects that have brought clean water and electricity to remote areas.

Summing up the Dutch approach, one local commander said the Dutch will fight and kill hard-core Taliban fighters and their foreign al-Qaida supporters — he said Arab, Pakistani and Chechen fighters were active.

However, he made a distinction between the committed militants and local men who may take up arms because they are paid or coerced.

Expert defends detainee policy

PUBLICATION: Kingston Whig–Standard (ON)

DATE: 2007.09.01

SECTION: National/World

PAGE: B1

SOURCE: CP

BYLINE: Bruce Cheadle

DATELINE: OTTAWA

WORD COUNT: 689

The Canadian government has hired a controversial international academic to argue that Canada's military has no obligation to accord Afghan detainees Canadian–style legal rights.

Christopher Greenwood, a professor of international law at the London School of Economics, submitted an opinion in mid–August to the Federal Court, which is hearing an application by Amnesty International to halt all prisoner transfers by Canadian soldiers to Afghan authorities.

Greenwood was the author of a 2002 legal opinion commissioned by the British government entitled "The Legality of Using Force Against Iraq." He concluded an invasion was justified on the grounds of a 1990 UN Security Council resolution, and also on the grounds of self defence if Britain could show the threat of an imminent Iraqi attack.

His opinion was reported to be at odds with lawyers in Britain's own Foreign Office and many other international law experts. It was revealed in 2005 that Greenwood had been paid more than C\$100,000 by the Blair government for providing various legal advice on Iraq.

Greenwood's 34–page opinion for Canada's Federal Court, dated Aug. 14, says it was prepared at the request of Gen. Rick Hillier, the chief of defence staff.

The Defence Department said late yesterday that Greenwood was paid \$50,000 for his services.

"Professor Greenwood, who is a renowned international law expert, was engaged by the Government of Canada, and has prepared a comprehensive report that reflects his interpretation of the relevant international law and his opinion and views about the applicants' legal assertions," Marc Raider, a National Defence spokesperson, said by e–mail.

New Democrat MP Dawn Black, the party's defence critic, questioned why Canada's top soldier is hiring a foreign lawyer to defend government policy in Afghanistan.

With all the international legal expertise available within Canada's Foreign Affairs Department or the broader Canadian legal community, Black said, the government clearly went shopping for what she called "a discredited, right–wing expert."

"Professor Greenwood set himself up just to be a prop for Tony Blair to justify going into Iraq. Now the Conservatives, or the CDS, are trying to use Greenwood to justify their disastrous detainee policy."

In his brief, Greenwood said that Amnesty's application to force the Canadian military to provide secure facilities and legal representation for suspected militants detained by Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan is "based upon a number of serious misconceptions regarding international law."

Since Canada is in Afghanistan under a United Nations mandate, Greenwood argues, this country's international treaty obligations don't apply.

Alex Neve, secretary general of Amnesty Canada, declined to comment on Greenwood himself but did take great exception to his line of argument.

"He's argued that in a multitude of ways, Canada is not bound by its international human rights obligations while it's in Afghanistan – all of which, in our view, are very debilitating arguments for a country like Canada which seeks to strengthen international human rights standards and wants governments to be more responsible and more accountable."

Greenwood wrote that any given Afghan detainee "is not within the separate jurisdiction of Canada and Canada's obligations under the international human rights treaties ... would not be applicable."

Moreover, Greenwood said Canada has no legal right to build a detention centre in Afghanistan to safeguard detainees from brutal local prison conditions.

"Under general international law, it is unlawful for one State to exercise governmental authority on the territory of another State." The Harper government was under intense scrutiny all winter as reports surfaced of Afghan detainees being abused by local authorities after they were handed over by Canadian soldiers.

After initially denying any knowledge of torture, the government finally conceded it knew of allegations in six specific cases.

On May 3, the Conservatives announced they had negotiated new terms with the Afghan government to further safeguard detainees.

Greenwood, in his opinion, states that Amnesty International's court petition doesn't "attach sufficient weight" to the safeguards.

Yet he notes they were purposefully designed not be legally binding. "I do not believe that these Arrangements are treaties as they were never intended to be legally binding as a matter of international law," says his report to the court.

"In this respect, the deliberate choice of an informal title ('Arrangements'), like the use of 'Memorandum of Understanding' ... and the employment of non-mandatory language ('will' rather than 'shall') point clearly to the Arrangements being non-binding instruments," Greenwood writes.

Nonetheless, he concludes: "In my opinion, the safeguards afforded by these Arrangements are some of the most extensive ever concluded ..."

NATO woos Dutch to stay put

PUBLICATION: The
Chronicle–Herald
DATE: 2007.09.01
SECTION: World
PAGE: A5
SOURCE: The Associated
Press
BYLINE: Paul Ames
WORD COUNT: 352

TIRIN KOT, Afghanistan – "Don't fight the enemy, make him irrelevant."

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Canada's top soldier hires controversial academic to defend policy on detainees

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle–Herald
DATE: 2007.09.01
SECTION: Canada
PAGE: A4
SOURCE: The Canadian Press
BYLINE: Bruce Cheadle
WORD COUNT: 402

OTTAWA – The Canadian government has hired a controversial international academic to argue that Canada's military has no obligation to accord Afghan detainees Canadian–style legal rights.

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His opinion was reported to be at odds with lawyers in Britain's own Foreign Office and many other international law experts. It was revealed in 2005 that Greenwood had been paid more than \$100,000, or 46,000 British pounds, by the Blair government for providing various legal advice on Iraq.

Greenwood's 34–page opinion for Canada's Federal Court, dated Aug. 14, says it was prepared at the request of Gen. Rick Hillier, the chief of defence staff.

The Defence Department said late Friday that Greenwood was paid \$50,000 for his services.

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Family, friends can write soldiers for free

PUBLICATION: The
Chronicle-Herald
DATE: 2007.09.01
SECTION: Canada
PAGE: A4
WORD COUNT: 115

OTTAWA (CP) – Canada Post is following Britain's example, and offering free delivery of mail to Canadian soldiers stationed in Afghanistan and elsewhere around the world.

The post office says it will provide free delivery of letters from family and friends to Canadian troops overseas, starting Oct. 26 and lasting until the beginning of 2009.

Canada Post says it will also provide free parcel service for family and friends of deployed Canadian troops for the coming holiday season, as it did last year.

However, letters and parcels must be processed at Canada Post retail outlets. Those dropped off in regular street boxes will not qualify. Saint John MP Paul Zed had been urging the Harper government to offer the free mail service.

Tough to track aid spending, auditor says; Money for projects in Afghanistan pooled with funds from other countries

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle-Herald
DATE: 2007.09.01
SECTION: Canada
PAGE: A4
SOURCE: The Canadian Press
BYLINE: Sue Bailey
WORD COUNT: 512

OTTAWA – A major shift toward putting aid dollars into multinational pools of cash has raised alarms about how Ottawa can track its spending in Afghanistan, says a federal auditor.

Paul Morse, a member of Auditor General Sheila Fraser's team, says it's tough to trace aid dollars once they're consolidated with donations from several other countries.

"I mean, we don't even know how we would audit it," Morse said in an interview.

"They don't really know how they can report the performance" of those contributions, he added, referring to officials with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

"We can't really follow the money right to the very end in an audit sense."

Value-for-money is not as easily traced when cash can't be handily matched with demonstrable results, he said.

"In our long-range planning, that's certainly one of the risks that we're going to be looking at for CIDA. I know that other government auditors around the world have some of the same concerns."

Red flags were raised again this week when the Senlis Council, an international policy think-tank, released a report and disturbing video. They detail what Senlis says is an appalling lack of evidence that Canadian aid is easing suffering at Kandahar's main hospital or in one of the region's largest refugee camps.

Bev Oda, Canada's new international development minister, insists as did her predecessor that more than \$1 billion to be spent in aid to Afghanistan by 2011 is going to experienced partners on the ground who are accountable for it through regular public reports. The money is meant for hundreds of projects, from small business loans to new schools, well drilling and bridge building.

The CIDA website describes rigorous attempts to oversee spending.

But due to the "operating environment in Afghanistan" – notably widespread corruption and a fledgling cash-based economy – "neither CIDA nor any other donor can completely eliminate risk," it says.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has taken pains to stress what the Conservatives say is a focus not just on military action but humanitarian aid as well.

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Eighty per cent of Canadian cash – about \$139 million is to be spent this year – is channelled to Afghan–designed programs overseen by such multi–donor agencies as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme.

As of last April 1, Treasury Board approved new terms and conditions for CIDA grants and contributions, said Morse.

"It's definitely allowing for a greater use of grants, and working much more through multilateral institutions than before."

The auditor general raised concerns in 2005 about CIDA's "sharply increased" use of grants to fund aid projects.

"We are concerned this could lead to its sacrificing too much control and oversight over how its funds are spent without having analyzed the impact on results," Fraser's office reported at the time.

Morse acknowledged that pooling cash for greater efficiency and impact is a major trend in international development.

"That seems to be the perceived wisdom in their world that this is the way to go. I wouldn't want to say that we know better or anything off–hand.

"But our focus is on accountability and probity. It's still up to CIDA to be accountable to the Canadian Parliament and the Canadian people for the results and how the money was spent. They have to justify the reliance they're putting on others, and show that they're taking reasonable risks in terms of what reporting they're accepting."

The auditor general's office rarely comments in detail except when reporting to Parliament on a specific file. Morse said evaluators will likely turn their attention to aid spending in Afghanistan in the next year or two.

NATO seeks extension of Dutch mission

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.09.01

SECTION: World

PAGE: B10

SOURCE: AP

DATELINE: TIRIN KOT, Afghanistan

WORD COUNT: 104

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Tracking millions in pooled aid looming challenge, auditor says; It's tough to trace aid dollars once they're consolidated with donations from several other countries

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.09.01

SECTION: Canada

PAGE: A10

SOURCE: CP

DATELINE: Ottawa

WORD COUNT: 333

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Dutch moves on Afghanistan affect Canada

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.09.01

SECTION: Opinion

PAGE: A7

COLUMN: National analysis

BYLINE: Chantel Hébert

WORD COUNT: 520

Any day now, the government of the Netherlands is expected to chart the future of its deployment in the southern Afghan province of Uruzgan. One way or another, the decision will add fuel to the raging fire of the debate on Canada's own role in the region.

If the Dutch pull out of the province at the end of their tour, they stand to trigger a domino effect that would almost certainly see Canada follow suit in early 2009. In the absence of volunteer countries to step into the breach, the mission as it is currently configured by NATO would have to be put back on the drawing board. But if the Dutch opt to extend their stay, the burden of rocking the NATO boat by bailing out stands to fall squarely on Canadian shoulders.

The Netherlands' rotation in southern Afghanistan is slated to end in 12 months, but the country is under intense NATO pressure to sign up for another tour.

There, as in Canada, the external pressures to extend the mission are on a collision course with public opinion.

A majority in the Netherlands is dubious as to the merit of the deployment and hostile to its extension.

The advent this week of a 10th Dutch casualty in Afghanistan prompted headlines that have become familiar in Canada. One newspaper wondered how many deaths the Netherlands public would tolerate before it lost all faith in the deployment. Government officials scrambled to state that there would be no premature end to the mission.

Like Paul Martin's former Liberal government, the Dutch government stressed the reconstruction aspects of the mission when it first signed its troops up for their current duties in 2006.

Ten casualties later, there are those who feel the case was deliberately misstated.

A Radio Netherlands program broadcast last month pointedly asked whether the Dutch had been "hoodwinked" into a combat role in Afghanistan. That report and the range of views it presented could just as easily have been assembled in Canada.

When Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende visited Ottawa in June, the Dutch journalists on hand were almost exclusively concerned with the Afghan issue. With his Canadian colleague watching, Balkenende fended off their questions by repeating that he would propose a follow-up plan to his parliament by the end of the summer.

It was shortly after that visit that Prime Minister Stephen Harper took to stressing that he would be guided by a parliamentary consensus in deciding the future of the Canadian deployment beyond February 2009.

Like the Harper government, the Dutch leadership sounds like it is leaning toward extending the deployment, possibly phasing out the country's presence over time rather than picking up stakes and leaving next summer.

The Dutch and Canadian debates are carbon copies of each other in many ways but one.

In contrast with Canada's Conservative government, the Dutch political leadership has been careful not to isolate itself in its pursuit of a high-risk military mission.

In February 2006, 125 of the 150 members of the Dutch Parliament – where 10 parties hold seats – endorsed the deployment, a consensual outcome that stands in stark contrast with the narrow, divisive Canadian vote on the same matter last year.

As a result, the Dutch mission in Afghanistan, while it clearly is a lightning rod with the public, has not emerged as the wedge issue that it is here.

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Welcoming Task Force '07

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.09.01

SECTION: Opinion

PAGE: A7

COLUMN: Letter of the day

WORD COUNT: 100

Editor:

On behalf of everyone at the P.E.I. Military Family Services Centre, I would like to extend our warmest and heartiest welcome home to all our troops returning home from Afghanistan. In particular, we welcome those tasked from our local Units, PEIR and 721 Comm Regiment.

The P.E.I. MFSC is in the process of organizing a family based welcoming activity for Saturday, Sept. 29, and we would like to invite all Island organizations, businesses and individuals who would like to take part, to call Charlene McInnis at 892-8999; 393-1310 or email: pmfrc@pei.aibn.com.

Charlene McInnis, co-ordinator,

P.E.I. Military Family Services Centre,

Charlottetown

Bring back the blue berets

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.09.01

SECTION: Opinion

PAGE: A7

COLUMN: The Meddler

BYLINE: Holman, Alan

WORD COUNT: 680

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) is the investigative arm of the U.S. Congress, it's a bit like the auditor general's office is in Canada. Reports from the GAO, like the auditor general's reports, have a credibility that makes their findings hard to refute and difficult to ignore.

On Thursday the Washington Post reported that it had seen a copy of a "strikingly negative" draft of a report the GAO will deliver to the American Congress next week. The Post says according to the draft, Iraq has failed to meet all but three of 18 benchmarks that were put in place last spring when Congress approved President Bush's request for an increase in the size of the American forces in Iraq.

The report calls into question the positive assessments of the situation in Iraq that have come recently from President Bush and others in the White House.

September will be Iraqi report month in Washington. Congress will receive the GAO report next week, along with a second study from an independent commission headed by a retired Marine general which was mandated to assess the Iraqi security forces.

In mid-month, the White House will deliver its own benchmark report which will be accompanied by testimony before Congress by both the American ambassador in Iraq and Gen. David Petraeus, commander of the U.S. forces in Iraq.

More and more American politicians, including senior Republicans, are opposing President Bush's conduct of the Iraq war. They are just catching up with what most of the American public has believed for more than a year.

As the pressure builds in Washington for an American withdrawal from Iraq, two Canadian public policy scholars wrote in an article in the Toronto Star on Thursday that this is a scenario that could see Canada drawn into the Iraqi quagmire.

David Eaves and Taylor Owen write that "within a year, Iraq will have shifted from a precipitous and ill-executed American invasion and occupation, into an internationalized humanitarian crisis."

It is a crisis of some considerable proportion.

A recent United Nations report says there 1.8 million displaced people within Iraq and two million refugees in neighbouring countries, with another 40,000 to 50,000 leaving each month.

Despite the billions of dollars the American have spent in Iraq, 54 per cent of the people there live on less than a dollar a day and 43 per cent of children under five suffer from malnutrition.

In 2006, 34,452 civilians were killed and 36,685 civilians were injured, according to the UN report.

Last week the UN Security Council voted to increase the UN's role in Iraq, to try and engage in essential diplomacy, negotiations and humanitarian efforts.

None of this will happen overnight, but it is likely the American troop withdrawal will occur within 18 to 20 months, not years. The religious factions in Iraq will be forced to reach some kind of accommodation with each other. This could involve partitions and peace agreements, and it will certainly require delicate diplomacy. As was pointed out in the Star article, while Canada is an ally of both the British and the Americans, it did not take part in the invasion. It is not burdened with any colonial or imperialist past in the region and unlike some of the major European countries it has limited financial interests in Iraq.

And, we do have some experience as a peace broker in the region.

"During the 1956 Suez crisis," write Messrs Owen and Eaves, "the world's powers were equally hamstrung. What made us so useful then is what could make us so useful today."

The one restraining factor is Canada's limited military assets are tied up in Afghanistan. But, though it might rattle Gen. 'Rambo' Rick Hillier, most Canadians would quickly cashier the macho militarism of the Afghanistan mission in favour of a return to the peacekeeping role at which we once excelled.

As the Star article points out, regardless of the cause Iraq today is a humanitarian crisis and a geopolitical time bomb, whose collapse or breakup could destabilize the region.

There could be a serious role for Canada to play here.

If the Americans pull out of Iraq they would have ample forces to replace our troops in Afghanistan, freeing the Canadians to don the blue berets they wear so well.

And who knows, if the Americans went back to Afghanistan with a serious commitment to finish the job, they might even capture bin Laden.

They almost had him before they were distracted by Saddam.

Alan Holman is a freelance journalist living in Charlottetown. He can be reached at: acholman@pei.eastlink.ca

Suicide bomber kills two Afghan soldiers Wounds 10 others

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.09.01

SECTION: International

PAGE: C15

SOURCE: AP

BYLINE: Fisnik Abrashi

DATELINE: Kabul, Afghanistan

ILLUSTRATION: A Forensic expert collects material at the site of a suicide attack Friday. A suicide attacker detonated his vehicle close to the airport in the Afghanistan capital, killing at least one soldier and wounding six others, officials and witnesses said. – Photo by The Associated Press

WORD COUNT: 328

A suicide bomber blew himself up next to a German military patrol outside the gates of the capital's airport Friday, killing two Afghan soldiers and wounding 10 people, including a German and four Belgians, officials said.

In eastern Afghanistan, a barrage of rockets fired at a U.S.-led coalition base instead hit houses in a nearby village, leaving 10 civilians dead and seven injured, the coalition and Afghan police said.

Violence has been soaring in Afghanistan, where over 4,200 people, most of them insurgents, have been killed this year, according to an Associated Press count based on figures provided by western and Afghan officials.

Most of the bloodshed has been in the south and the east where Taliban militants are strongest, although suicide attackers have been targeting foreign and Afghan security forces in Kabul.

The attack in the capital Friday, apparently aimed at the German patrol, tore into a group of Afghan soldiers waiting at a checkpoint outside the military wing of Kabul International airport.

"A car drove fast and blew up next to a crowd of people, including Afghan National Army soldiers," said Mansur, a witness who gave only the single name. "A lot of people were left lying on the ground."

An Afghan soldier said the bomber tried to ram a convoy of cars carrying foreigners. Instead, most of those hit were members of the Afghan National Army bound for training in Italy, he said.

"All the shrapnel came toward us," said the soldier, who declined to give his name since he was not authorized to speak to journalists.

NATO said an Afghan soldier and four civilians were among the 10 wounded.

The German Defence Ministry said the blast damaged two of its vehicles and wounded a German soldier.

Belgian Defence Minister Andre Flahaut said four Belgian soldiers were slightly wounded, with one suffering minor burns and the others hearing damage. Some 300 Belgian soldiers, serving in NATO's International Security Assistance Force, are in charge of security at the airport.

The U.S.-led coalition said militants fired 10 rockets at its base in the Chawkay district of Kunar province Friday.

The rockets landed in the nearby village of Babul, killing 10 civilians and wounding seven, said Abdul Sabor Allayar, a deputy provincial police chief. A number of houses were destroyed, he said.

Tracking aid money to Afghanistan a challenge: auditor

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.09.01

SECTION: National

PAGE: A14

SOURCE: CP

BYLINE: Sue Bailey

DATELINE: Ottawa

WORD COUNT: 505

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"We are concerned this could lead to its sacrificing too much control and oversight over how its funds are spent without having analyzed the impact on results," Fraser's office reported at the time.

Morse acknowledged that pooling cash for greater efficiency and impact is a major trend in international development.

"That seems to be the perceived wisdom in their world that this is the way to go. I wouldn't want to say that we know better or anything off–hand.

"But our focus is on accountabilitY. It's still up to CIDA to be accountable to the Canadian Parliament and the Canadian people for the results and how the money was spent. They have to justify the reliance they're putting on others, and show that they're taking reasonable risks in terms of what reporting they're accepting."

The auditor general's office rarely comments in detail except when reporting to Parliament on a specific file. Morse said evaluators will likely turn their attention to aid spending in Afghanistan in the next year or two.

Canadian soldier laid to rest

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.09.01

SECTION: National

PAGE: A14

(Top photo) The casket of Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier is carried to the church for his funeral Friday in Quebec City. Mercier died last week in Afghanistan. (Bottom

ILLUSTRATION: photo) Mercier's wife Lucie Ardouin and his children (from left) Myryam, 17, Maude, nine, and Simon, 15, follow the casket and the procession. – Photos by The Canadian Press

Canadian cannon fodder in Afghanistan

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.09.01

SECTION: Editorial

PAGE: A10

BYLINE: Rowe, Bill

WORD COUNT: 671

Canadian soldiers are being killed in Afghanistan at more than three times the rate of troops from other nations. That figure, from veteran foreign correspondent Paul Koring, is appalling in its own right. But when you realize that many countries, supposedly helping over there, continue to pursue moronic practices that will guarantee needless Canadian deaths, it becomes intolerable.

We have to ask ourselves why we should go on putting our young Newfoundland and Canadian soldiers at risk of injury and death in Afghanistan in the face of such incredible stupidity.

Six months ago in this column, I listed some strong arguments for pulling Canadian troops out of Afghanistan, but concluded that one powerful argument in favour of our mission should keep us there: a civilized Canada must fully engage in honest attempts to maintain world order; we are in Afghanistan as part of a world effort to impose and maintain a civil life for fellow human beings. Therefore, I agreed with the young Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who have chosen to serve in that brutal place at terrible risk to their lives.

That position seemed sensible at the time, based on perceptions by knowledgeable observers that NATO was propping up a reasonably popular government there and that the allies were making progress against the insurgent Taliban. And although, even in a best-case scenario, it might be many years before Afghanistan would be able to stand alone, there seemed to be a realistic basis for hope which made the gut-wrenching sacrifices of our young soldiers worthwhile. But since then, the continual moronic policies in play over there have caused me serious second thoughts.

Deal after rotten deal with the Taliban by governments and aid agencies have given those murderous thugs a wholly undeserved legitimacy in the eyes of many Afghans, plus vast amounts of dirty money to continue their vicious cause.

Litany of stupidity

Item: after an Italian photographer was abducted by the Taliban and later let go, it became evident that the Italian government had paid a US\$2 million ransom to the kidnappers.

Item: a Colombian aid worker with a French-funded non-governmental organization, kidnapped by the Taliban, was released three weeks later after a ransom was paid by the aid agency.

Item: an abducted journalist was later released in exchange for five Taliban prisoners.

The list goes on, and the last straw for me happened this week. The Taliban, after murdering two of their South Korean hostages, were permitted to negotiate as equals with the South Korean government, where they obtained concession after concession in return for releasing the remaining 19 hostages. No one doubts that a huge ransom was also paid to the Taliban. Can you imagine a better way to give the Taliban standing and esteem in the eyes of locals, and to encourage more and more kidnappings, and utterly defeat the NATO cause? Good God, when Canada's Rick Hillier is not in grief at the homecoming of young Canadian soldiers

in coffins, he must be climbing the walls in outrage.

Poppy production up

Add in the fact that under the misguided poppy eradication program, opium production in Afghanistan has not declined but has galloped upwards to the point where it now represents 90 per cent of the world's illegal opium, with enormous amounts of protection money from it going to support the Taliban's murderous insurgency, and you really have to wonder where any hope for success lies in our mission there.

Unless the practice by any government or agency of paying ransom to the enemy is halted immediately, and unless a rational program is instituted to legalize the poppy production for morphine to be exported legitimately for medicinal purposes, I, for one Newfoundlander, would demand that our soldiers come home from a mission that remains noble in principle, but where they risk becoming just cannon fodder in a cause made impossible by the brainless actions of many at the top.

Promises, promises; Dion talks Canadian Ice Centre, Williams and Afghanistan

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.09.01

SECTION: Provincial

PAGE: A5

BYLINE: Jamie Baker

ILLUSTRATION: Stephane Dion

WORD COUNT: 376

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion isn't backing away from his party's past promise to relocate the headquarters for Canadian Ice Centre to Newfoundland from Ottawa.

But he isn't exactly signing a commitment in blood either.

"I think it makes more sense to bring it here than in Ottawa," Dion told The Telegram during his recent visit to St. John's for federal Liberal caucus meetings.

In the twilight of the most recent federal election, the Paul Martin-led Liberals promised to move the ice centre, and the 75-or-so high-end jobs that come with it, to this province – specifically, to Gander.

Such a plan would've had to cross Dion's desk because he was the environment minister at the time.

"What we need to do is be a good custodian of the resources of the Arctic – it's one of the most frail ecosystems in the world and one of the most needed," Dion said.

"Here in Newfoundland and Labrador we will have a good opportunity to invest in the science, the monitoring, in the coast guard."

Dion wouldn't, however, make any commitments as far as 5 Wing Goose Bay is concerned – or how that base could play into plans for the arctic region – other than he expected daily lobbying from Liberal Labrador MP Todd Russell.

He would only say that, "We'll figure out how we need to do a something great for Goose Bay."

In the meantime, what about this new found air of mutual love and understanding between the federal Liberals and this province's Tory premier, Danny Williams?

United in a political battle against Prime Minister Stephen Harper, surely Dion and Williams must have converged to form a solid alliance on the ABC (Anything But Conservative) front during their tête-à-tête earlier in the week.

"No, that's too strong," Dion says of the word "alliance."

"He'll do what he has to do – he has responsibilities – and I'll do what I have to do."

They do, however, see eye-to-eye in their desire to torpedo Harper politically.

"He is convinced the prime minister broke his word and he is not happy about that," Dion said. "The fact is I am convinced the prime minister broke his word and I am sorry to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

"I want to offer them a much better option – I know what integrity means, I know what honesty means."

Dion is also daring Harper to tell Canadians his plans for Afghanistan.

The Liberals are calling for Canada to end the mission by 2009, charging that Harper intends to stay well beyond that time frame.

"I'm sure, because it is not a majority government, he will not bring Canada his vision of where we need to go beyond February 2009 without going to the polls. Why not announce it today?" Dion said.

"He would have been pleased if we were involved in the war in Iraq. It's the same kind of Bush logic about Afghanistan. He wants an open war in Afghanistan with no time deadline."

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Van Doo killed by roadside bomb in Afghanistan remembered yesterday as a solid soldier and 'the best dad ever'

IDNUMBER 200709010114
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Star
DATE: 2007.09.01
EDITION: Ont
SECTION: News
PAGE: A15

ILLUSTRATION: JACQUES BOISSINOT cp Soldiers carry the casket of Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier yesterday in Quebec City. Mercier, killed Aug. 22, was described by Master Warrant Officer Stephane Bergeron as a great soldier and "the best dad ever, a well-intentioned husband, a best friend, one of the guys. " Master Cpl. Christian Duchesne, killed in the same blast in Afghanistan, was also buried yesterday. ;

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WORD COUNT: 78

JACQUES BOISSINOT cp Soldiers carry the casket of Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier yesterday in Quebec City. Mercier, killed Aug. 22, was described by Master Warrant Officer Stephane Bergeron as a great soldier and "the best dad ever, a well-intentioned husband, a best friend, one of the guys. " Master Cpl. Christian Duchesne, killed in the same blast in Afghanistan, was also buried yesterday.

Troops in the hot zones; Canadians serving abroad in areas other than Afghanistan

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PUBLICATION: The StarPhoenix (Saskatoon)
DATE: 2007.09.01
EDITION: Final
SECTION: World
PAGE: D6
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: CanWest News Photo / Capt. Jean-Francois Dufour(right) and Col. Larry Aitken hold children from an orphanage in Kinshasa ;
BYLINE: Richard Foot
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 1293

Col. Acton Kilby works in a war-torn land haunted by murder, fear and violence, its roads strewn with landmines, its border towns filled with refugees, and its people a fractious mix of tribal rivalries.

Just like Afghanistan.

Yet, Kilby is nowhere near Afghanistan. A seasoned Canadian infantry officer, he's in the midst of a year-long assignment as deputy chief of staff to the commander of the United Nations mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, arguably the most lethal and difficult conflict zone in the world today.

While Afghanistan hogs the headlines and the welfare of the 2,500 Canadian troops deployed there dominates public discourse at home, Canada does have other soldiers abroad, toiling in obscurity in forgotten corners of the globe, where the military challenges often equal those in Kandahar.

Since July, Kilby has been stationed in the Congo with eight other Canadian soldiers as part of Operation Crocodile, a largely Indian-led UN mission to impose peace on what some have called "Africa's world war."

They are among the 128 Canadian troops posted overseas outside Afghanistan, from the slums of Haiti and the sandy wastes of the Sinai to the war-ravaged villages of Sudan. More than 200 Canadian sailors are also on a six-month mission, sailing the frigate HMCS Toronto with a NATO task force making the alliance's first-ever circumnavigation of the African continent.

Such land and sea missions are a testament to Canada's small but ongoing contribution to international commitments beyond the Afghan imbroglio. And Kilby is quick to point out that, in the Congo at least, the work is anything but traditional peacekeeping.

"The conduct of combat operations by UN forces here is more frequent than what happens in Afghanistan," he said in a telephone interview from Kinshasa, the Congolese capital. "The Indians and Pakistanis who conduct operations here on a regular basis would be really hurt if somebody thought they were not in combat. We impose the international will from time to time within the UN mandate."

Yet, so foreign is the Congo to most Canadians that even Kilby's friends and family don't understand exactly where he is or what he's doing.

"Everybody I know, all my friends, were saying, 'Where is he going, and why is he going there?'"

"It's too bad," he says. "There is a lot of good to be done here. And Canadians have a disproportionate role in the staff, deliver a lot of the effort, and represent our nation well."

Kilby once commanded the 1st Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment in Petawawa, Ont. He now supports a multinational force of 17,000 soldiers charged with bringing law and order to a huge swath of equatorial Africa.

A 2003 ceasefire between the Congolese government and its various opponents, including the armies of Rwanda and Uganda plus an array of home-grown jungle militias, ostensibly ended a five-year conflict that took four million lives, the deadliest conflict since the Second World War.

But Kilby says murder, rape and bouts of ethnic cleansing remain common. Stemming such violence isn't easy, particularly when the Congolese army that the UN is trying to train and mentor commits abuses of its own.

"We're dealing with a problem the magnitude of which the world just doesn't understand," says Kilby. "Congo is the size of Europe. Each region is unique, which causes constant friction and violence. There are estimates of 600,000 internally displaced people, with another 100,000 outside refugees waiting to come back in. And the murder rate is about 100 to 200 a week."

Kilby and his Canadian colleagues, stationed in Kinshasa and in the central city of Kisangani, try to mitigate such problems amid a backdrop of almost medieval chaos. Roads, where they exist, are potholed and broken. Buildings are crumbling and pock-marked with bullet holes. Electricity and telephone service is scarce, and cholera outbreaks are common.

"I get involved in things here that are absolutely depressing human tragedies," says Kilby. "It's demanding, and my days are long. But I've got a place to sleep and food to eat, which is better than half the population."

Providing assistance

Three thousand kilometres away in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, a dozen other Canadian soldiers are providing technical and logistical advice to the African Union's military mission to Darfur, where the local population faces famine, genocide and war as it is preyed upon by militias and by the Sudanese army.

The commander of the Canadian Forces in Sudan, Lt.-Col. Ron Allison, works out of the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

This is the first time Canadian soldiers have been dispatched to an African Union mission, and Allison, who comes from Miramichi, N.B., offers a polite assessment of the organization's ability to intervene in a foreign hot spot.

"The African Union is a very interesting and very challenging organization to work in for Canadians," he says. "It's a fledgling military organization and in some areas they need our expertise."

"There are a lot of highly trained and intelligent people here. It's just that things don't move very quickly in Africa."

Canadian troops are advising Nigerian, Rwandan and Senegalese forces how to run the mission. They are also providing airlift operations to fly food and people in and out of Darfur.

"Going into Darfur you really are moving back in time," says Allison, who has been there himself. "There's no state infrastructure. The temperature is 45 to 50 degrees. It's the Sahara desert. Things don't move quickly in the daytime. The facilities of the African Union are barely adequate to house, accommodate and sustain vehicles, troops and aircraft."

Allison says a recent UN commitment to intervene with its own resources and take charge of the mission by the New Year is welcome news.

"We need a peace accord in the near future, and more troops and humanitarian support on the ground."

Enjoys more comforts

Lt.-Col. Chantal Cloutier enjoys many more comforts than her counterparts in Sudan. She and seven other Canadians are all that remains of Canada's once hefty contribution to the international forces in the former Yugoslavia.

Cloutier, who normally lives in Ottawa, runs the communication networks at NATO headquarters in Sarajevo, Bosnia, where she is on a six-month assignment.

Fewer than 3,000 NATO troops now remain in Bosnia, helping to ensure the stability of the government there and to reform its armed forces, in the hope that Bosnia itself can one day join the military alliance.

Cloutier says Sarajevo has come a long way from the terror of the early-1990s, when beleaguered Canadian troops hunkered down amid the crossfire of an urban war zone.

"Life here is pretty good these days," she says. "There's an enormous amount of reconstruction going on and we are free now to walk around downtown. The main shopping street could be in any European city."

Even so, she noted, there are still "a lot of damaged buildings, and the country is still heavily mined. Driving outside Sarajevo you don't go off the main routes.

"Most people here have lost their taste for conflict, but that doesn't mean there aren't lingering resentments and hostilities in the hearts of people who suffered."

HISTORIC VOYAGE

Lt.-Cmdr. Angus Topshee and 234 sailors on board HMCS Toronto, a Halifax-based frigate, are showing the Canadian flag this year on a historic voyage around Africa, along with five other warships with a NATO task force.

Topshee, the frigate's second-in-command, says no NATO fleet — and possibly no Canadian warship — has ever made the 12,500-nautical-mile circumnavigation of Africa before.

The voyage is designed to find out how well NATO navies can operate, on an extended mission with limited supply stops, far from any home port.

After leaving the Mediterranean in July, the fleet reaches Cape Town on the Labour Day weekend for exercises with the South African navy. It then pushes north up the Indian Ocean coast toward Somalia, where it will carry out surveillance operations for terrorists and pirates.

"It's an interesting part of the world to operate in," said Topshee in a telephone interview from the ship. "We're sailing in waters notorious for piracy. If we come across anything suspicious, we're mandated to

intervene."

While Topshee has friends serving in Afghanistan, which remains in the public spotlight, he says almost no one in Canada even knows about HMCS Toronto's historic voyage this year.

Still, he says, "I would not begrudge anyone in Afghanistan the support and attention they're receiving at home. They really are fighting on the front line."

Soldiers find ally in N.B. woman

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PAGE: C15
COLUMN: Canada in Brief
DATELINE: SAINT JOHN, N.B.
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 109

SAINT JOHN, N.B. (CNS) — She may not be a soldier, but when it comes to Canada Post, June Dobson sure fights like one.

Dobson took on the postal service in a campaign for free postage for letters sent to soldiers overseas. This week, Canada Post announced that starting Oct. 26, letters can be sent free year-round to soldiers in a war zone.

The start date coincides with the date that Canadians can begin sending Christmas parcels free of charge to members of the military.

"This is good, this is really good. I'm really pleased with it," Dobson said.

Dobson began her campaign when a letter to her nephew serving in Afghanistan was returned because it was short six cents on the postage.

"Our country depends on these men and women. Surely they're worth a stamp," Dobson said.

Deal has ramifications

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PAGE: A14
SOURCE: Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 336

The world watched with uneasy relief this week as the Taliban freed their South Korean hostages. There are many ways the outcome could have been worse, but there is no such thing as a good deal with terrorists.

If we can take South Korea at its word that no ransom will be paid, its concessions were not materially significant. It promised to remove its 200 troops from Afghanistan by the end of the year. That was what South Korea had planned to do even before the Taliban took 23 South Korean Christian aid workers hostage on July 19.

The Christians were travelling between Kandahar and Kabul. The terrorists killed two of the hostages and freed two others earlier this summer.

South Korea has also promised to prevent activities by its church groups in Afghanistan --- also not a major concession, since the church groups are understandably spooked anyway.

The Taliban had been demanding the freeing of prisoners in exchange for the hostages' lives, so South Korea is somewhat justified in claiming that the terrorists didn't win.

But what history will remember is not the substance of the deal, but the fact that South Korea negotiated with the Taliban at all, and that it allowed the hostage crisis to be forever linked to its decision to withdraw its troops.

The message is clear: foreign policy can be put on the bargaining table with the lives of hostages. South Korea has legitimized the Taliban's demands.

What's to stop the Taliban or some random gang of shiftless thugs from now kidnapping Canadian civilians in an attempt to force this country to withdraw its troops? The Taliban have taken other hostages, including a German engineer.

It's always easier to stand on principle in the abstract. Everyone knows that negotiating with terrorists will, in the long term, endanger more people. Yet it takes a heart of stone to ignore the plights of terrified hostages and the pleas of their families back home.

The happiness of South Koreans this week is tempered by the sure knowledge that the Taliban has been emboldened by this deal. We might not know the consequences of that today or tomorrow, but one day, we will.

Security is what Afghanis need most

SOURCETAG 0709010393

PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun

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SECTION: News

PAGE: 8

BYLINE: MAST. CORP. MARTIN FORGUES

DATELINE: KANDAHAR journalism and political science major at Concordia University in Montreal, and a serving member of the Canadian Army Reserve since 1999 at the Montreal-based Regiment de Maisonneuve, holding the rank of Master Corporal. Having previously served in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2002, he's currently in Afghanistan as a member of the Provincial Reconstruction Team, based at Camp Nathan Smith in Kandahar City. An infantry soldier, he is part of the Force Protection Company, charged with the PRT's security, and will do so until returning home in March 2008.

WORD COUNT: 460

As this column is reaching its first-month anniversary, questions and comments have been numerous. Most have been very positive, some were critical towards the mission, but all of them showed support to the troops. I am very thankful for this, as are my comrades-in-arms who also extend their gratefulness to this writer's readership.

Some questions have been raised through your letters, and this week I will answer a couple of them.

If I were an Afghan ...

A reader asked a few weeks ago: "If you were an Afghan, what kind of help would you want from the international community?"

Excellent question, that is. However, not being an Afghan makes it difficult for me to answer it fairly. But my own observations, combined with many conversations with locals allow me to identify at least four issues about which the population is concerned.

In Kandahar, one major concern remains security. More than three decades of uninterrupted wars and occupations have turned the region to rubble, hence making it hard for people to meet their most basic needs. The international aid effort is well underway, but the current Taliban insurrection often interrupts reconstruction and humanitarian projects. Worse, the local authorities still lack the strength to tame the insurrection, and this is why we must support them until they have the means to secure the region.

Also, water and electricity are quite scarce for a city of 400,000 people. Electric current is cut on a regular basis, and only the privileged few owning fuel-powered generators can profit from permanent light and heat. As for water, heavy pollution has made it not only undrinkable, but putrid.

Water purification programs are under way in many places already, but it is obvious there is still much to do.

Finally, confidence in local political institutions is something Afghans wish to achieve. In fairness to them, one must remember Afghanistan's context of perpetual political reshaping in the past few decades.

CONFIDENCE SHAKEN

This resulted in a complex situation in which warlords and, eventually, the Taliban succeeded the Soviets. Some of those former tyrants have renounced violence since then and embraced the fledgling political process, but one might guess a history of oppression and terror can somewhat shake the people's confidence in them.

Some local organizations strive to bridge this gap between the electorate and politicians by advising the latter on how to gain the people's trust.

SUPPORT THE TROOPS ... LITERALLY

The question that came back most often pertains to supporting the soldier's families. Several readers are keen to help military spouses and children who might be in need of something. Some have proposed to directly get involved with those families. This wind of generosity has been felt here, believe me.

The best I can think of is to contact the Valcartier Family Centre at crfmv.com and get information on ways to get involved. Even if you're not from the CFB Valcartier's area, they will refer you to the right place.

I gladly invite you to ask me more questions and post more comments at afghanistan@journalmtl.com. I will continue answering question on a regular basis through this column. KEYWORDS=CANADA

'Papa, you are our hero' Van Doos officer mourned in Quebec City

SOURCETAG 0709010392

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SECTION: News

PAGE: 8

ILLUSTRATION: 1. photo by Jacques Boissinot, CP Fellow soldiers carry the casket of Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier, 43, during his funeral yesterday in Quebec City. 2. photo of MARIO MERCIER Killed Aug. 22

BYLINE: REMI NADEAU, THE CANADIAN PRESS

DATELINE: QUEBEC

WORD COUNT: 249

Soldiers stood at attention and military drums rolled as hundreds of friends and relatives turned out yesterday for the funeral of Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier.

Mercier, 43, of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal 22nd Regiment, and Master Cpl. Christian Duchesne, 34, of the 5th Field Ambulance, died Aug. 22 when their light-armoured vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan. A private funeral was held earlier yesterday in the Quebec City area for Duchesne.

Mercier's family, including his wife Lucie and his three children Myriame, 17, Simon, 15, and Maude, 9, as well as hundreds of friends, gathered at the Saint-Gerard-Majella Church in suburban Quebec City to say their last goodbyes.

"You gave us the best set of values that we could ever have hoped for," said Myriame. "We thank you for everything you gave to us and everything you did for us. And for everything you accomplished in your life. Bravo papa. We love you. You are our hero forever."

Master Warrant Officer Stephane Bergeron paid tribute to Mercier as a superior human being and friend.

"He was much more than just a co-worker," Bergeron said, his voice breaking as the tears began to flow. "He was ... a best friend, one of the guys ... we will miss you."

Mercier had spent more than 20 years in the military.

Visibly moved was Heritage Minister Josee Verner, who attended the funeral along with Quebec Health Minister Philippe Couillard and Lt.-Gov. Pierre Duchesne.

Pte. Simon Longtin was the first of the Van Doos to die in Afghanistan when he was killed by a roadside bomb on Aug. 19. Longtin's funeral was held on Monday. All three were based at CFB Valcartier, near Quebec City. **KEYWORDS=**CANADA

Police don't have 'authority' on ribbons

SOURCETAG 0708311654
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun
DATE: 2007.08.31
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 4
ILLUSTRATION: photo of ALOK MUKHERJEE Sent letters
BYLINE: ZEN RURYK, CITY HALL BUREAU CHIEF
WORD COUNT: 130

Toronto's police union has jumped the gun by purchasing yellow ribbons for the city's cop cars, police services board Chairman Alok Mukherjee says.

The Toronto Police Association spent \$10,000 on 5,000 ribbon decals -- a symbol of support for Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan -- so they could be placed on squad cars and handed out to members for their own use.

Mukherjee wrote association president Dave Wilson to inform him that Chief Bill Blair is now looking into ways the force can show support for Canadian troops. City council in June invited the police services board to display the ribbons on cruisers when it dealt with a controversy surrounding the placement of support-the-troop decals on ambulances and fire trucks.

"As you know, city council does not have the authority to direct the board," Mukherjee wrote in his Aug. 28 letter.

War on drugs should be waged here; Users, not producers, the root of global trafficking problems

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PAGE: A14
COLUMN: Iain Hunter
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Afghan poppies: War on drugs failing.;
BYLINE: Iain Hunter
SOURCE: Special to Times Colonist
WORD COUNT: 799

I've never understood how plowing up poppy fields in Afghanistan's more inhospitable provinces is going to win the hearts and minds of the poor peasant farmers who depend on them.

And I can understand when people like Gordon Smith, Canada's former ambassador to NATO, say diverting illicit poppy production to make medically required drugs like morphine and codeine is a better way to eradicate the trafficking problem that has become so closely tied to the Taliban and everything else that makes so many parts of that country miserable. It sounded sensible to me when Smith suggested it, and I said so.

But now I wonder how turning illicit substances into licit ones will help us make Afghanistan a better place. And I'm not convinced that's what Canadian troops are there to make possible.

It may be easy for Americans to identify their declared war on terror as a war on drugs — that war has taken them to a few countries already — but I don't think my country is a willing member of that coalition.

There's a connection, though. NATO's mission in Afghanistan has had an effect on opium cultivation. Last year the number of poppy-free provinces increased to 13 from six.

But in the more volatile southern provinces opium production has increased to record levels in the six years that western nations moved in. In Helmand, where British troops are serving, opium cultivation rose 48 per cent in the past year. In Kandahar, where the Canadians are, it rose by 32 per cent.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has reported that 193,000 hectares are under opium cultivation. The total opium harvest is expected to be 8,200 tonnes.

We're told by the westerners who go there to help that war-weary populace, that without the income from poppy cultivation, a lot more would be hungry and miserable. Yet those areas where they're grown most are some of the most fertile in the country — in many places thanks to the irrigation work financed by U.S. aid. It should be, I think, pretty easy to grow a wide range of things, like figs, that are legal to grow.

There's not nearly as much poppy cultivation in the poorer areas in the north and central provinces where the income is needed. That's not because the soil is poor; it's because these areas, ostensibly at least, are under varying degrees of control by the government, supported by western troops.

And the Taliban, which issued a religious edict against poppy growing in 2000 — and received millions of dollars from a grateful American president for doing so — is now encouraging it in the south, and profiting from the drug trade, which is pretty brisk, even in the more "secure" areas of the country where poppy cultivation has stopped.

And it's the trafficking that lives off the Afghan crop that makes money. The UN has reported that the "farm gate" price of opium produced there in 2006 was \$560 million. The take for those who help get it onto the streets in Europe and North America, and increasingly in Asia, is estimated to be 100 times that.

And are the Afghan warlords the only ones in the country getting rich off what the peasants grow? Does anyone still believe Afghan police and government officials aren't in on it? Does anyone doubt that the countries that are supplying the "liberators" aren't also supplying the poppy profiteers?

They're certainly supplying the customers, as police and social agencies in any Canadian city can testify.

So I don't know how an enterprise that is considered illegal by the international community can suddenly be declared to be legal. I don't know how turning an illicit crop into a licit one can be accomplished — even in the unlikely chance that the UN can agree on anything so bold — without huge licensing, inspection, quality control and other bureaucratic infrastructures.

Who supervises the cultivation, the transport, the rendering of opium into medically required substances, and who supervises its distribution?

And who says the world needs more stuff like morphine and codeine? The UN's International Narcotics Control Board doesn't. It has reported that total production of opiate raw materials exceeded global demand between 1999 and 2004. It says stockpiles are more than enough to meet any foreseeable emergency, and the board is urging producers of medical opiates, such as India and Turkey, not to produce more than is needed.

Enormous subsidies would be required to support legal opium-growing in Afghanistan. More peasants would be encouraged to take part in the international grow-op. The price offered for a legal product will always be lower than the black-market price for a far larger and eager illegal market.

This is the kind of international tinkering that persuaded Asians to grow coffee and left South Americans to starve.

The place to wage a war on drugs is at home, where the druggies are. There are better things to fight for in Afghanistan.

cruachan@shaw.ca

South Korea paid \$20-million ransom

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DATELINE: SPIN BOLDAK
SOURCE: Reuters
WORD COUNT: 288

SPIN BOLDAK (Reuters) — South Korea paid Afghanistan's Taliban more than \$20 million US to release 19 missionaries they were holding hostage, a senior insurgent leader said today, vowing to use the funds to buy arms and mount suicide attacks.

The freed hostages flew out of Afghanistan yesterday to Dubai en route for South Korea. Seoul has denied paying a ransom, but critics say negotiating with the Taliban sets a dangerous precedent that could spur more kidnappings — which the Taliban have vowed to carry out.

"We got more than \$20 million from them (the Seoul government)," the commander told Reuters on condition of anonymity. "With it we will purchase arms, get our communication network renewed and buy vehicles for carrying out more suicide attacks."

"The money will also address to some extent the financial difficulties we have had," he said, but did not elaborate.

The commander is on the 10-man leadership council of the Islamist Taliban movement, which is led by the elusive Mullah Mohammad Omar.

He rejected an Afghan government claim that a senior Taliban leader, Mullah Brother, was killed in a U.S.-led operation on Thursday in the southern province of Helmand.

"This report is just propaganda," he said.

The South Korean Christian volunteers, part of a group of 23 missionaries kidnapped in southeast Afghanistan in mid-July, arrived in Dubai on a chartered United Nations plane overnight and were due to fly on to Seoul today.

The Taliban killed two male hostages, while two women released earlier as a goodwill gesture have already flown home.

Some of the released hostages yesterday told of how they lived in constant fear for their lives and were split up into small groups and shuttled around the Afghan countryside to avoid detection.

One Taliban member would tend to a farm by day and then grab a rifle and stand guard over hostages at night.

The kidnapping was the largest in the resurgent Taliban campaign against foreign forces since U.S.-led troops ousted the Islamists from power in 2001.

12 Afghans killed in attacks

IDNUMBER 200709010026
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.01
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A8
DATELINE: ASDADABAD, Afghanistan
SOURCE: Agence France–Presse
WORD COUNT: 149

ASDADABAD, Afghanistan (AFP) — Ten civilians were killed when Taliban rebels fired rockets at a U.S. base in eastern Afghanistan yesterday, while two Afghan soldiers died in a suicide bombing outside Kabul airport.

The attacks were the latest in the war–torn country that have targeted international troops combating the al–Qaeda–linked Islamist movement but ended up claiming the lives of Afghans instead.

The 10 civilians died and another five were wounded when insurgents fired rockets at the U.S.–led coalition base in eastern Kunar province's Chawkai district that hit a nearby village, police and officials said.

"The Taliban fired several rockets over the base, but the rockets fell short and landed on civilian homes," police official Abdul Sabour Allahyar said. Government officials described the attack as "intense."

The coalition, which has around 12,000 troops mainly in eastern and southern Afghanistan on counterterrorism duties, confirmed that its base came under attack but could not provide information on casualties.

French-language TV gets perks: journalists; Radio-Canada anchors get same treatment as CBC's, military says

IDNUMBER 200709010025
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.01
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A8

ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Mathieu Belanger, Reuters / Lucie Ardouin, wife of Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier, hugs her daughter, Maude Mercier, after the soldier's funeral in Quebec City yesterday. Her son, Simon Mercier, looks at his father's casket. Mercier died in Afghanistan on Aug. 22. ;

DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 580

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — Some journalists stationed with the Canadian military here complain that the Forces are unfairly catering to Radio-Canada, the French-language public TV network, in a strategy that at least one military official has conceded aims to address the sensitivity of the mission in Quebec.

Since arriving in Afghanistan about a week ago, Radio-Canada's lead news anchor, Bernard Derome, has had a barbecue organized in his honour, been escorted by armoured vehicle to a site that journalists usually reach by pickup truck and received a private helicopter tour of the region with Canada's top military commander. A military public-affairs officer has also been assigned exclusively to Derome and his two-man crew.

Military officials insist that Derome is simply receiving the same perks offered to CBC News anchor Peter Mansbridge when he visited the country in March 2006. Radio-Canada is the French-language counterpart of the CBC.

"Bernard Derome has greater privileges than you — as Peter Mansbridge did, as any TV anchor will receive," military spokesman Capt. Sylvain Chalifour told journalists here. "They have special needs that are different from yours."

But other journalists, both English- and French-speaking, complain that French-language television is getting more than perks.

"It appears as though, because there's a Quebec regiment here now, that Quebec television journalists, particularly those from Radio-Canada, are getting special access," said Christie Blatchford, a columnist for the Globe and Mail.

When a CTV reporter recently complained to the military's senior spokesman here about the unequal access, she was told the military was deliberately focusing on Quebec media coverage.

That senior spokesman was later replaced, and military officials have since rejected the notion that they are biased toward Quebec-based TV. They promise that all media will now receive equal access.

French-language TV gets perks: journalists; Radio-Canada anchors get same treatment as CBC's military

Since the Aug. 1 arrival in Afghanistan of the Quebec-based Royal 22nd Regiment, known as the Van Doos, the mission has come under intense scrutiny in Quebec. Support for the war in that province is the lowest in Canada, with some polls showing that seven of 10 Quebecers oppose the mission.

Major Canadian media organizations, including CanWest News Service, Global Television, CBC, CTV and the Globe and Mail, have had journalists "embedded" with the military in Kandahar since early 2006. Until now, few French-language media outlets have participated in the program.

But with the war in the headlines almost every day, several Quebec-based organizations, including the TVA network and La Presse newspaper, have dispatched journalists to Afghanistan.

To get closer to the action, journalists often join convoys of Canadian soldiers heading into battle. In the past, journalists would be briefed on upcoming operations and told how many seats were available for media. They would then decide among themselves which reporters would go out to observe the operation, according to Blatchford.

"It was a system where everyone in the press knew what was going on. So, even if you didn't have a seat on the convoy, you could write what was happening. So it was equitable and fair."

However, when Radio-Canada reporter Patrice Roy and cameraman Charles Dubois arrived earlier this month, the military organized a special convoy to show them the operating bases in the area.

And when the Van Doos launched their first major combat operation on Aug. 22, only Roy and Dubois were informed of the operation the night before. That operation took a tragic turn when the armoured vehicle the journalists were travelling in struck an improvised explosive device, killing two Canadian soldiers and an Afghan interpreter. Dubois lost part of his leg, and another Canadian soldier was wounded.

Defence team shields Conservatives: critics; Records show national security not only priority

IDNUMBER 200709010027
PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald
DATE: 2007.09.01
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A10
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Rick Hillier;
KEYWORDS: !@DATELINE=OTTAWA
BYLINE: David Pugliese
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 267

OTTAWA – A special team put in place by Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Rick Hillier to ensure information requested by the public doesn't put troops in Afghanistan at risk has turned its sights on new security threats — military records about garbage being chucked from navy ships and files on contracts awarded to lobbyists, some alleged to have special access to Hillier himself.

Such records are among documents sent for special review to the general's Strategic Joint Staff (SJS) to ensure the information, to be eventually released publicly, doesn't violate security.

But critics allege the real job of the team is to keep embarrassing information requested under the Access to Information law from the public.

The team has ordered previously public details about Afghanistan detainees to be withheld, prompting claims by opposition MPs the review is designed to protect the Conservative government and stifle debate on alleged prisoner abuse.

But according to both Hillier and Defence deputy minister Ward Elcock, the information is being reviewed to protect soldiers in Afghanistan.

A list of records sent to the SJS for review, obtained by the Ottawa Citizen, tells a somewhat different story.

Among the files is a Defence Department analysis on how strict guidelines preventing garbage from being dumped overboard affects the navy's operations and policies.

Another is a report on how many medals were handed out during the military's mission to help hurricane Katrina victims in the U.S.

Records requested on contracts given to lobbyists, some alleged to have special access to Hillier, were also sent to the SJS. Hillier has in the past denied the lobbyists, all former senior officers, have special access to his office.

When files reach the SJS they have already been censored. The SJS conducts yet another review.

Some Defence officials have acknowledged privately they view the SJS as being involved in political damage control.

'Papa Bear' laid to rest in emotional service; Residents line streets to honour fallen soldier

IDNUMBER 200709010018

PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald

DATE: 2007.09.01

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: A5

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: The widow and children of Mario Mercier mourn at his funeral, held Friday in Val Belair, Que. ; Colour Photo: Photo, Mathieu Belanger, Reuters / An honour guard carries the flag-draped coffin of Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier into the church. ;

KEYWORDS: BYELECTIONS; AFGHANISTAN

DATELINE: VAL BELAIR, QUE.

BYLINE: Marianne White

SOURCE: CanWest News Service

WORD COUNT: 342

VAL BELAIR, QUE. – Canadian soldier Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier was hailed as a hero by his daughter Friday at his military funeral.

"Thank you, Dad, for all you did," said his daughter, Myriam, 17, her voice cracking with emotion. "We love you very much. You are our hero."

Myriam said her father was always there for her and her brother Simon, age 15, and sister Maude, 9.

"You always encouraged us in our activities. You passed on to us the best values we could hope for," she told the crowd of over 500 family, friends, soldiers and dignitaries who packed the St. Gerard Majella Church in Val Belair, Que., near both CFB Valcartier and Quebec City, for the funeral.

Mercier's casket arrived at the church in a military cortege as drums beat in the quiet streets. Many residents lined the sidewalks to pay their respects to Mercier.

The flag-draped coffin was carried into the church by an honour guard of eight fellow sergeants, followed by around 150 soldiers in uniform.

Canadian Heritage Minister Josee Verner attended the funeral along with Quebec's lieutenant-governor Pierre Duchesne and provincial Health Minister Philippe Couillard.

Rev. Rejean Lussier, the priest leading the service, said Mercier, a veteran soldier planning to retire after his tour in Afghanistan, was known as "Papa Bear" by his colleagues, whom he in turn called his "cubs."

Mercier's friend and brother in arms, Master Warrant Officer Stephane Bergeron, recalled him as a "fighter with a big heart."

"He will always be remembered as an extraordinary man, as someone we could always rely on. We will never forget you," Bergeron said.

Mercier's coffin was carried out of the church for one last farewell. A trumpet played the Last Post and there was a volley of gunfire in salute. The flag was folded and presented to Mercier's widow, Lucie Ardouin.

A private funeral was also held Friday for his fellow soldier Master Cpl. Christian Duchesne. Around 60 people attended.

The Aug. 22nd deaths of Mercier, of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal 22nd Regiment, and Duchesne, of the 5th Field Ambulance, along with those of Pte. Simon Longtin Aug. 19 and Maj. Raymond Ruckpaul, who died in his room at the International Security Assistance Force in Kandahar on Wednesday, bring the Canadian death toll in Afghanistan to 71, including one diplomat.

Questions and answers from Kandahar

SOURCETAG 0709010559
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun
DATE: 2007.09.01
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 4
BYLINE: MARTIN FORGUES
DATELINE: KANDAHAR
COLUMN: In Kandahar
WORD COUNT: 554

Master Cpl. Martin Forgues is a 26-year-old journalism and political science student at Concordia University, and serving member of the Canadian Army Reserve since 1999 at the Montreal-based Regiment de Maisonneuve, holding the rank of Master Corporal. Having previously served in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2002, he's currently in Afghanistan as a member of the Provincial Reconstruction Team, based at Camp Nathan Smith in Kandahar City. An infantry soldier, he is part of the Force Protection Company, charged with the PRT's security, and will do so until returning home in March 2008.

As this column is reaching its first-month anniversary, questions and comments have been numerous. Most have been very positive, some were critical toward the mission, but all of them showed support to the troops. I am very thankful for this, as are my comrades-in-arms who also extend their gratitude to this writer's readership.

Some questions have been raised through your letters, and this week I will answer a couple of them.

If I were an Afghan: A reader asked a few weeks ago: "If you were an Afghan, what kind of help would you want from the international community?"

Excellent question, that is. However, not being an Afghan makes it difficult for me to answer it fairly. But my own observations, combined with many conversations with locals allow me to identify at least four issues about which the population is concerned.

In Kandahar, one major concern remains security. More than three decades of uninterrupted wars and occupations have turned the region to rubble, hence making it hard for people to meet their most basic needs.

The international aid effort is well underway, but the current Taliban insurrection often interrupts reconstruction and humanitarian projects. Worse, the local authorities still lack the strength to tame the insurrection, and this is why we must support them until they have the means to secure the region.

Also, water and electricity are quite scarce for a city of 400,000 people. Electric current is cut on a regular basis, and only the privileged few owning fuel-powered generators can profit from permanent light and heat.

PUTRID WATER

As for water, heavy pollution has made putrid and undrinkable. Water purification programs are underway in many places already, but there is still much to do.

Finally, confidence in local political institutions is something Afghans wish to achieve. In fairness to them, one must remember Afghanistan's context of perpetual political reshaping in the past few decades. This resulted in a complex situation in which warlords and, eventually, the Taliban had succeeded to the Soviets.

Some of those former tyrants have renounced violence and embraced the fledgling political process, but one might guess a history of oppression and terror can somewhat shake the people's confidence in them.

Some local organizations strive to bridge this gap between the electorate and politicians by advising the latter on how to gain the people's trust.

Support the troops -- literally: The question that came back most often pertains to supporting the soldier's families. Several readers are keen to help military spouses and children who might be in need of something. Some have proposed to directly get involved with those families. This wind of generosity has been felt here, believe me.

The best I can think of is to contact the Valcartier Family Centre at crfmv.com and get information on ways to get involved. Even if you're not from the CFB Valcartier's area, they will refer you to the right place.

I gladly invite you to ask me more questions and post more comments at afghanistan@journalmtl.com. I will continue answering questions on a regular basis through this column. **KEYWORDS=NATIONAL; WORLD**

Condolences for dead officer

SOURCETAG 0709010558
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun
DATE: 2007.09.01
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 4
ILLUSTRATION: photo of RAYMOND RUCKPAUL Shot in Kabul
BYLINE: CP
WORD COUNT: 68

Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Defence Minister Peter MacKay have both offered condolences on the death of a Canadian soldier in Afghanistan this week.

"On behalf of the government of Canada, I would like to extend my deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Maj. Raymond Ruckpaul," Harper said in a statement yesterday.

Ruckpaul was found dead in his barracks room in Kabul. The military is not commenting on the circumstances of Ruckpaul's death. KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

Afghans short of water, hydro, leadership

SOURCETAG 0709010178
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.01
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A4
BYLINE: MASTER CPL. MARTIN FORGUES
DATELINE: KANDAHAR
WORD COUNT: 295

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But my own observations, combined with many conversations with locals allow me to identify at least four issues about which the population is concerned.

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The international aid effort is well underway, but the current Taliban insurrection often interrupts reconstruction and humanitarian projects.

Worse, the local authorities still lacks the strength to tame the insurrection, and this is why we must support them until they have the means to secure the region.

Also, water and electricity are quite scarce for a 400,000-people city.

Electric current is cut on a regular basis, and only the privileged few owning fuel-powered generators can profit from permanent light and heat.

As for water, heavy pollution has made it not only undrinkable, but putrid.

Water purification programs are underway in many places already, but it is obvious there is still much to do.

Finally, confidence in local political institutions is something Afghans wish to achieve.

In fairness to them, one must remember Afghanistan's context of perpetual political reshaping in the past few decades.

This resulted in a complex situation in which warlords and, eventually, the Taliban had succeeded to the Soviets.

Some of those former tyrants have renounced violence since then and embraced the fledgling political process, but one might guess a history of oppression and terror can somewhat shake the people's confidence in them.

Some local organizations strive to bridge this gap between the electorate and politicians by advising the latter on how to gain the people's trust.

SUPPORT THE TROOPS

The question that came back most often pertains to supporting the soldier's families.

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KEYWORDS=WORLD

Afghan aid plan raises alarm A federal auditor queries how Ottawa cash can be tracked once donations are consolidated.

SOURCETAG 0709010176
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.01
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A4
BYLINE: SUE BAILEY, CP
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 258

A major shift toward putting aid dollars into multinational pools of cash has raised alarms about how Ottawa can track its spending in Afghanistan, says a federal auditor.

Paul Morse, a member of Auditor General Sheila Fraser's team, says it's tough to trace dollars once they're consolidated with donations from other countries.

"I mean, we don't even know how we would audit it," Morse said.

"They don't really know how they can report the performance" of those contributions, he added, referring to officials with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

"We can't really follow the money right to the very end in an audit sense."

Value-for-money is not as easily traced when cash can't be handily matched with demonstrable results, he said.

"In our long-range planning, that's certainly one of the risks that we're going to be looking at for CIDA. I know that other government auditors around the world have some of the same concerns."

Red flags were raised again this week when the Senlis Council, an international policy think-tank, released a report and disturbing video.

They detail what Senlis says is a lack of evidence Canadian aid is easing suffering at Kandahar's main hospital or in one of the region's largest refugee camps.

Bev Oda, Canada's new international development minister, insists as did her predecessor that more than \$1 billion to be spent in aid to Afghanistan by 2011 is going to experienced partners on the ground who are accountable for it through regular public reports. The money is meant for hundreds of projects, from small business loans to new schools, well drilling and bridge building.

The CIDA website describes attempts to oversee spending. But due to the "operating environment in Afghanistan," notably widespread corruption and a fledgling cash-based economy, "neither CIDA nor any other donor can completely eliminate risk," it says.

Afghan aid plan raises alarm A federal auditor queries how Ottawa cash can be tracked once donations are

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has stressed what the Conservatives say is a focus not just on military action, but humanitarian aid. KEYWORDS=CANADA

Blair adviser backs Canada over detainees

SOURCETAG 0709010170
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.01
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A1
BYLINE: BRUCE CHEADLE, CP
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 364

The Canadian government has hired a controversial international academic to argue that Canada's military has no obligation to accord Afghan detainees Canadian-style legal rights.

Christopher Greenwood, a professor of international law at the London School of Economics, submitted an opinion in mid-August to the Federal Court, which is hearing an application by Amnesty International to halt prisoner transfers by Canadian soldiers to Afghan authorities.

Greenwood was the author of a 2002 legal opinion commissioned by the British government entitled *The Legality of Using Force Against Iraq*. He concluded an invasion was justified by a 1990 UN Security Council resolution and by self-defence if Britain could show the threat of an imminent Iraqi attack.

His opinion was reported to be at odds with lawyers in Britain's own Foreign Office and many other international law experts. It was revealed in 2005 that Greenwood had been paid more than \$100,000, or 46,000 British pounds, by the Blair government for providing various legal advice on Iraq.

Greenwood's 34-page opinion for Canada's Federal Court, dated Aug. 14, says it was prepared at the request of Gen. Rick Hillier, the chief of defence staff.

The Defence Department said late yesterday that Greenwood was paid \$50,000 for his services.

"Professor Greenwood, who is a renowned international law expert, was engaged by the Government of Canada, and has prepared a comprehensive report that reflects his interpretation of the relevant international law and his opinion and views about the applicants' legal assertions," Marc Raider, a National Defence spokesperson, said by e-mail.

New Democrat MP Dawn Black, the party's defence critic, questioned why Canada's top soldier is hiring a foreign lawyer to defend government policy in Afghanistan.

With all the international legal expertise available within Canada's Foreign Affairs Department or the broader Canadian legal community, Black said, the government clearly went shopping for what she called "a discredited, right-wing expert."

"Professor Greenwood set himself up just to be a prop for Tony Blair to justify going into Iraq. Now the Conservatives, or the CDS (chief of defence staff), are trying to use Greenwood to justify their disastrous detainee policy."

In his brief, Greenwood said that Amnesty's application to force the Canadian military to provide secure

facilities and legal representation for suspected militants detained by Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan is "based upon a number of serious misconceptions regarding international law." KEYWORDS=CANADA

If I was an Afghan I'd have these concerns

SOURCETAG 0709010652
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.01
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 24
BYLINE: MASTER CPL. MARTIN FORGUES
WORD COUNT: 511

Master Cpl. Martin Forgues is a 26-year-old journalism and political science student at Concordia University, and member of the Canadian Army Reserve. He's in Afghanistan as a member of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Kandahar City.

* * *

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Afghanistan Sunflashes Column

SOURCETAG 0709010650
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.01
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 24
COLUMN: Afghanistan Sunflashes
WORD COUNT: 812

CONTROVERSIAL ACADEMIC HIRED

OTTAWA (CP) -- The Canadian government has hired Christopher Greenwood, a controversial international academic to argue that Canada's military has no obligation to accord Afghan detainees Canadian-style legal rights.

Greenwood was the author of a 2002 legal opinion commissioned by the British government entitled *The Legality of Using Force Against Iraq*.

He concluded an invasion was justified on the grounds of a 1990 UN Security Council resolution, and also on the grounds of self-defence if Britain could show the threat of an imminent Iraqi attack.

AID TRACKING EYED

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His opinion was reported to be at odds with lawyers in Britain's own Foreign Office and many other international law experts. It was revealed in 2005 that Greenwood had been paid more than C\$100,000, or 46,000 British pounds, by the Blair government for providing various legal advice on Iraq.

Greenwood's 34-page opinion for Canada's Federal Court, dated Aug. 14, says it was prepared at the request of Gen. Rick Hillier, the chief of defence staff.

The Defence Department did not respond immediately to questions about the cost of contracting Greenwood's legal advice nor why he in particular was chosen for the task.

New Democrat MP Dawn Black, the party's defence critic, questioned Friday why Canada's top soldier is hiring a foreign lawyer to defend government policy in Afghanistan.

With all the international legal expertise available within Canada's Foreign Affairs Department or the broader Canadian legal community, Black said, the government clearly went shopping for what she called "a discredited, right-wing expert."

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In his brief, Greenwood said that Amnesty's application to force the Canadian military to provide secure facilities and legal representation for suspected militants detained by Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan is "based upon a number of serious misconceptions regarding international law."

Since Canada is in Afghanistan under a United Nations mandate, Greenwood argues, this country's international treaty obligations don't apply.

Alex Neve, secretary general of Amnesty Canada, declined to comment on Greenwood himself but did take great exception to his line of argument.

"He's argued that in a multitude of ways, Canada is not bound by its international human rights obligations while it's in Afghanistan -- all of which, in our view, are very debilitating arguments for a country like Canada which seeks to strengthen international human rights standards and wants governments to be more responsible and more accountable."

Greenwood wrote that any given Afghan detainee "is not within the separate jurisdiction of Canada and Canada's obligations under the international human rights treaties . . . would not be applicable."

Moreover, Greenwood said Canada has no legal right to build a detention centre in Afghanistan to safeguard detainees from brutal local prison conditions.

"Under general international law, it is unlawful for one State to exercise governmental authority on the territory of another State."

The Harper government was under intense scrutiny all winter as reports surfaced of Afghan detainees being abused by local authorities after they were handed over by Canadian soldiers.

After initially denying any knowledge of torture, the government finally conceded it knew of allegations in six specific cases.

On May 3, the Conservatives announced they had negotiated new terms with the Afghan government to further safeguard detainees.

Greenwood, in his opinion, states that Amnesty International's court petition doesn't "attach sufficient weight" to the safeguards.

Yet he notes they were purposefully designed not be legally binding.

"I do not believe that these Arrangements are treaties as they were never intended to be legally binding as a

matter of international law," says his report to the court.

"In this respect, the deliberate choice of an informal title ('Arrangements'), like the use of 'Memorandum of Understanding' ... and the employment of non-mandatory language ('will' rather than 'shall') point clearly to the Arrangements being non-binding instruments," Greenwood writes.

Nonetheless, he concludes: "In my opinion, the safeguards afforded by these Arrangements are some of the most extensive ever concluded"

A CIDA official said the department's own evaluation reports haven't been released sooner because of the need for approvals from co-funding third parties.

Partial records made public earlier this year include a damning evaluation of a Canadian program to teach Afghan women about journalism and the law — except that it wound up breaking Afghan media ownership rules. It also featured a now defunct newspaper that most local women couldn't read.

Illiteracy rates for girls and women are about 80 per cent in Afghanistan, says the UN.

Ottawa aid officials pulled the plug on the flawed effort run by Vancouver's Institute for Media Policy and Civil Society after almost \$3 million was spent.

Evaluators found the media project sorely lacked managerial oversight on the ground. Financial reports were spotty or non-existent.

Strong, detailed monitoring was essential "because of the extreme under-development of Afghanistan and its institutions," said the report. "This was seriously lacking in all project sites." KEYWORDS=WORLD

Granatstein's errors of omission

IDNUMBER 200709010036
PUBLICATION: The Hamilton Spectator
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EDITION: Final
SECTION: Opinion
PAGE: A16
BYLINE: Reuven Kitai, Ancaster
SOURCE: The Hamilton Spectator
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 325

Letters@thespec.com

Re: 'O'Connor's demotion not deserved' (Opinion article, Aug. 18)

Historian J. L. Granatstein's article should be regarded with skepticism because of its omissions and questionable logic.

In January, Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor said, "When the Taliban or al-Qaeda came out of Afghanistan, they attacked the twin towers and in those twin towers 25 Canadians were killed. The previous government and this government will not allow Canadians to be killed without retribution." Granatstein made no reference to this speech.

There were 2,819 people killed in the twin towers; 1,100 were not identified; the victims were from 115 countries; Osama bin Laden's fatwa gave the grounds for retribution as "crimes and sins committed by the Americans."

Prior to 9/11, Canada had not wronged the Afghan peoples. The 25 Canadians killed were not specifically targeted, they were among many multinationals and were likely employees of U.S. companies with offices in the twin towers. No case can possibly be made for us to avenge.

So our government has now spent a huge sum on heavy armaments. Granatstein heaps praise on O'Connor for having acquired the moneys needed to pay for them. But the armaments seem particularly suited to combat abroad, and hardly to enhance search and rescue, surveillance or defence of our own country.

Only brief reference is made to the Afghan detainees file, where Granatstein gently lets O'Connor off the hook by writing that he "seemed ill-briefed on occasion." The publicity of this exposure on torture in Afghanistan, combined with Mahar Arar's ordeal in Syria, has impacted badly on Canada's image abroad.

At the end of his article, Granatstein smears the Liberal and NDP military critics, calling them "know-nothings." Tiresome slurs such as this make one wonder whether the Conservative core had attended a Karl Rove workshop on the art of denigration.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper had also played tricks by accusing those who are opposed to our Afghan combative mission as wanting our troops to "cut and run."

This is a grievous misrepresentation of a proposed orderly troop withdrawal from combat in Afghanistan, while we continue to provide civilian reconstruction there if called for.

'You are our hero forever'

IDNUMBER 200709010006
PUBLICATION: The Hamilton Spectator
DATE: 2007.09.01
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Canada/World
PAGE: A3
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Mathieu Belanger, Reuters /;
DATELINE: QUEBEC
SOURCE: The Canadian Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 225

Soldiers stood at attention and military drums rolled as the casket of Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier was carried into a Quebec City church yesterday.

Mercier, 43, of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal 22nd Regiment, and Master Corporal Christian Duchesne, 34, of the 5th Field Ambulance, died Aug. 22 when their light-armoured vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb.

A private funeral was held earlier in the day in the Quebec City area for Duchesne.

Mercier's family, including his wife Lucie and his three children Myriame, 17, Simon, 15, and Maude, 9, as well as hundreds of friends, gathered at the Saint-Gerard-Majella Church in suburban Quebec City to say their last goodbyes.

"You gave us the best set of values that we could ever have hoped for," said Myriame, the eldest of Mercier's three children.

"We thank you for everything you gave to us and everything you did for us. And for everything you accomplished in your life. Bravo papa. We love you. You are our hero forever."

Master Warrant Officer Stéphane Bergeron paid tribute to Mercier as a superior human being and friend.

"He was much more than just a co-worker," Bergeron said, his voice breaking as the tears began to flow.

Mercier had spent more than 20 years in the military and had been deployed in the past to the former Yugoslavia on two occasions as well as on missions in Haiti and Afghanistan.

Mercier and Duchesne were based at CFB Valcartier, near Quebec City, and were among the 2,500 Canadian troops who are taking part in Operation Athena, a mission to bring security and assist in the rebuilding of Afghanistan.

Mail free to soldiers overseas; Program will run until 2009

IDNUMBER 200709010055
PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
DATE: 2007.09.01
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Cityplus
PAGE: B1 / FRONT
KEYWORDS: WAR; IRAQ; ARMED FORCES; UNITED STATES
DATELINE: EDMONTON
BYLINE: Michelle Collins
SOURCE: The Edmonton Journal
WORD COUNT: 232

Friends and family of Canadian soldiers will soon be able to mail parcels and letters to troops abroad at no cost.

Following on last year's success, Canada Post will provide free delivery of parcels to soldiers unable to be with their families during the holiday season.

The program starts Oct. 26 and will run until Jan. 11, 2008.

Last year, Canada Post handled about 12,000 parcels sent through the program to loved ones serving abroad.

"I've seen them go by the binful," said Canadian Forces Base Edmonton spokesman Capt. Lou Marselje.

"They always like that." Marselje said he notices a significant increase in the amount of mail sent abroad around Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter.

Building on the success of last year's program for parcels, Canada Post announced that this year also friends and family will be able to send letters for free and the service will be offered until the beginning of 2009.

In a news release, Defence Minister Peter MacKay called the program an excellent initiative to offer year-long mail service to troops deployed in combat zones.

The packages and letters are forwarded to Canadian Forces Bases in Halifax, Belleville, Ont., and Victoria then flown overseas on military aircraft along with supplies and munitions.

With limited space for parcels on the aircraft, the free mail service is restricted to friends and family of members serving abroad.

The letters and parcels must be addressed to a specific soldier, along with their rank and their mission information.

Destinations for the mail include Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sinai and Jerusalem, as well as to naval personnel.

Royal Mail in the U.K. recently announced that it, too, will provide free mail service, until early November, to relatives and friends of British troops deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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10 steps forward, 5 steps back – Afghan war winnable; Canadian veterans of battles with Taliban see progress being made, particularly with Afghan army, but say the Afghan national police are the weak link right now

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PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
DATE: 2007.09.01
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SECTION: Ideas
PAGE: A19
COLUMN: Graham Thomson

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Graham Thomson, The Journal / Canadian soldiers relax at Forward Operating Base Gundy Ghar last March as an armoured vehicle stands guard behind a berm. Two soldiers were killed last week reclaiming control of the strategic hill–base in Kandahar province. ; Photo: Graham Thomson, The Journal / A Canadian soldier stands guard in March at the entrance to Forward Operating Base Gundy Ghar. ;

KEYWORDS: 0
BYLINE: Graham Thomson
SOURCE: The Edmonton Journal
WORD COUNT: 916

In a dusty corner of Kandahar province is a rocky hill that juts from the face of the desert like an inflamed boil.

As ugly as it is forlorn, Gundy Ghar is nonetheless a strategic promontory that dominates the province's Zhari district.

It was here last week that two Canadian soldiers, members of Quebec's Vandoos regiment, were killed by a roadside bomb that also wounded a Canadian television cameraman.

News reports on the attack said the soldiers were ambushed during a major mission to "reclaim" control of Gundy Ghar.

As I read the reports, I was bothered by the word "reclaim." As far as I was concerned, Canadian troops had claimed Gundy Ghar long ago.

In March, while embedded with the military, I visited what was then Forward Operating Base (FOB) Gundy Ghar where Canadian soldiers had erected tents, bulldozed the lifeless earth into defensive berms and unravelled rolls of concertina wire to mark a perimeter.

Conditions were primitive and living there was like going on a camping trip from hell. Any further forward and you'd be having tea with the Taliban. But the FOB provided a base for foot patrols, reassured local farmers that coalition forces were there to keep the peace and thus helped keep the Taliban at bay. The base was peaceful enough that soldiers could lounge around smoking cigarettes on the perimeter.

Why then did we have to mount a deadly mission to reclaim it?

For answers I turned to Canadian soldiers who have just returned home to Edmonton after their six-month deployment. One of them, Lt.-Col. Wayne Eyre, had taken me out on patrol at Gundy Ghar last spring to show how Canadians were helping train and mentor the Afghan National Army.

Eyre explained that several weeks after my visit, when the area was deemed secure, Gundy Ghar was handed to the Afghan National Police (ANP) so Canadian troops could concentrate on other areas.

"We turned it over to the ANP and they held it for three or four months," says Eyre. "They withdrew. I'm not sure if it was a Taliban attack or if it was a reallocation of forces."

It's a scenario that has played itself out more than a few times in Afghanistan. Coalition forces clear an area of insurgents and hand the keys over to local security forces who, when left on their own, flee at the first sign of trouble.

To anyone who has studied history, the cycle has unfortunate echoes of the disastrous Vietnam war where American troops regularly had to re-fight for control of territory their South Vietnamese allies abandoned. Is this what Afghanistan is turning into?

Eyre says the analogy is unfair. Yes, there have been setbacks, but Canadian troops have made significant progress.

"It has an ebb and flow -- 10 paces forward, five back. We're still five forward at the end of the day."

At the end of six months Eyre says he saw great improvements in brigades of the Afghan National Army (ANA) that were being trained and mentored in the field by an elite group of 90 Canadian soldiers. When Eyre arrived in February he likened the Afghan army to the "little brother" and the Canadian army as the "big brother."

"We're almost equals now," he says. "These guys can do operations on their own. For example, just as we were leaving on Afghan independence day on the 18th, the ANA brigade and the chief of police came up with a plan for security in Kandahar province on their own, a fairly effective plan, where they put out checkpoints and patrols to secure Kandahar city. ... So, these guys are becoming more and more confident, more and more capable of doing this sort of stuff."

This is the cornerstone to Canada's exit strategy, says Eyre. The idea is to train, equip and educate the Afghan army so it can fight its own battles, thus allowing coalition forces to come home for good.

Eyre won't speculate on how long that will take, but senior officers have already said it will be years before Canadians can withdraw from Afghanistan without the country falling like a deck of cards.

Big.-Gen. Dave Fraser estimates it will take a generation to get Afghanistan solidly on its feet. For Fraser and Eyre the war is not a black-and-white affair, but is filled with shades of grey. There are no easy answers, no quick solutions, no matter how frustrating that is for Canadians back home. Pick a problem, whether it's economic reconstruction or poppy eradication, and the results will be measured in decades, not months or even years.

There is, however, one solution to a major problem that might come much sooner. That problem is the Afghan National Police, which is arguably the weakest link in the Afghan-Coalition alliance. Police officers are ill-equipped, badly trained and notoriously corrupt.

It was the Afghan police, after all, who abandoned Gundy Ghar. Coalition officials admit they made a major mistake several years ago by not concentrating as much effort and resources to build up the police forces as they spent training the Afghan army.

"The police are three years behind the army," says Eyre.

"The police need a fair bit of work -- well, a lot of work. The only way you're going to hold ground there is through their version of community policing where you have a persistent presence. So, you have to get the police to a state where they can do the security piece and then they can do the law-and-order piece."

Maybe then Canadian soldiers can hand over strategic ground, such as Gundy Ghar, to Afghan security forces without having to worry about fighting their way back in to "reclaim" it.

With that in mind, coalition forces are now concentrating on building up the Afghan National Police. However, that work won't be done before Canada's battlefield commitment to Kandahar ends in 2009.

Trying his best to avoid getting embroiled in what is ultimately a political debate, Eyre offers his assessment of what needs to be done.

"This war is very, very winnable and it's not going to be lost over there, it's going to be lost by a loss of will by troop-contributing nations.

"That's what warfare is: the clash of two wills."

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Bernier browbeats Asian ally

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KEYWORDS: FOREIGN RELATIONS; NUCLEAR WEAPONS
SOURCE: The Edmonton Journal
WORD COUNT: 448

Elements of Afghanistan's odious Taliban kidnapped 23 South Korean Christian aid workers in July. They initially murdered two male hostages and freed two women before agreeing to a deal with South Korean negotiators this week. In return for the 19 liberated prisoners, the Seoul government announced the withdrawal of its entire contingent of nearly 200 non-combat troops stationed in Afghanistan.

As well, promises were made to ban South Korean Christian missionaries from travelling to the embattled nation. Thursday, a Tokyo newspaper reported the payment of a \$2 million fee to the insurgents.

This bald capitulation is typical of South Korean foreign policy, which, for example, has consistently kowtowed to the lunatic regime of Kim Jong Il.

But the South Koreans -- a successful and progressive nation by most metrics -- have their reasons. Frankly, at least in public, they are none of our business.

Rookie Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier put his foot in it Thursday in his first major pronouncement in the portfolio, which is not encouraging.

On moral-ethical grounds, he was absolutely correct in proclaiming Canada's refusal to negotiate with terrorists, particularly when such groups hold hostages. Literally rewarding such appalling behaviour is antithetical to all we hold dear. That position is consistent with the views of the American and British governments among others, as well as the Karzai regime in Kabul.

But Bernier's brittle, sanctimonious public hectoring to an ally -- "we do not negotiate with terrorists" -- appears downright un-Canadian, and not in a gutsy, counterintuitive way. It just seems dumb and ham-fisted.

The hallmark of Canadian diplomacy -- as in the case of any intelligent middle power -- has rested on thoughtful, sober, well-informed advice, generally delivered privately to decision-makers.

The idea is to provide sensible counsel, especially to friendly nations, and not to make political points at home or impress other allies. Such careful entreaties are not mealy-mouthed, they are designed to get results. They often do just that.

Imagine if five Albertans were taken hostage in dangerous territory. Weighing the pros and cons of the situation, the government of the day decides to cut a deal. The prisoners are returned and reunited with their families. It may not be noble and the symbolism might stink. But it works, innocent fellow citizens are rescued at effectively little direct cost. What would we think -- and what might we say in blunt reply -- if the South Korean government attacked us as spineless appeasers, giving into global terrorism?

In effect, that is what Maxime Bernier has done. It's not the end of the world for Canadian foreign policy.

But it's a disturbingly naive, elemental gaffe early on. Let's hope our famously hands-on PM has taken note and given Bernier private, but otherwise equally undiplomatic advice.

'We love you. You are our hero'; Fallen soldier's family and friends grieve for Van Doo

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SECTION: News
PAGE: A7

ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Reuters / The wife of Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier, Lucie Ardouin receives the Canadian flag Friday from an officer after the funeral of her husband in Quebec City. Mario Mercier died in Afghanistan on August 22. ;

KEYWORDS: BYELECTIONS; AFGHANISTAN

DATELINE: VAL BELAIR, QUE.

BYLINE: Marianne White

SOURCE: CanWest News Service

WORD COUNT: 391

VAL BELAIR, QUE. – Canadian soldier Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier was hailed as a hero by his daughter Friday at his military funeral.

"Thank you, Dad, for all you did," said his daughter, Myriam, 17, her voice cracking with emotion. "We love you very much. You are our hero."

Myriam said her father was always there for her and her brother Simon, 15, and sister Maude, 9.

"You always encouraged us in our activities. You passed on to us the best values we could hope for," she told the crowd of over 500 family, friends, soldiers and dignitaries who packed the St. Gerard Majella Church in Val Belair, Que., near both CFB Valcartier and Quebec City, for the emotional funeral.

Mercier's casket arrived at the church in a military cortege as drums beat in the quiet streets of this neighbourhood which is home to many military families. Many of them lined the sidewalks under a bright blue sky to pay their respects to Mercier.

The flag-draped coffin was carried into the church by an honour guard of eight fellow sergeants, followed by around 150 soldiers in uniform.

Canadian Heritage Minister Josee Verner attended the funeral along with Quebec's lieutenant-governor Pierre Duchesne and provincial Health Minister Philippe Couillard.

Rev. Rejean Lussier, the priest leading the service, said that Mercier, a veteran soldier who was planning to retire after his tour in Afghanistan, was affectionately known as "Papa Bear" by his colleagues, whom he called in return his "cubs."

"Today, he has reunited them together one last time," Lussier said.

Mercier's friend and brother in arms, Master Warrant Officer Stephane Bergeron, recalled him as a "fighter with a big heart."

Bergeron said Mercier always saw things in a positive light and was a very hard worker.

"He will always be remembered as an extraordinary man, as someone we could always rely on. We will never forget you," Bergeron said, on the verge of tears.

Mercier's coffin was carried out of the church for one last farewell. A trumpet played the Last Post and there was a volley of gunfire to salute the fallen soldier. The Canadian flag was folded and presented to Mercier's widow, Lucie.

A funeral was also held Friday for his fellow soldier Master Cpl. Christian Duchesne. The funeral was held in private at his family's request. Around 60 people, including high-ranking military officials, Verner and Couillard attended the service.

Mercier, 43, of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal 22nd Regiment (Van Doos), and Duchesne, 34, of the 5th Field Ambulance, died Aug. 22 when their light-armoured vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan. The two were part of the recent Afghanistan deployment from CFB Valcartier.

Quebec journalists get perks in Afghanistan, military admits; Until Van Doos arrived French-language media had few reporters here

IDNUMBER 200709010013

PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal

DATE: 2007.09.01

EDITION: Early

SECTION: News

PAGE: A4

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Montreal Gazette, File / Reporters surround Lieutenant-Colonel Hercule Gosselin at the Canadian Forces Base Valcartier after the deaths of two soldiers from the Quebec-based Royal 22nd Regiment, in Afghanistan on Aug. 22. ;

KEYWORDS: !@DATELINE=KANDAHAR, Afghanistan

BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda

SOURCE: CanWest News Service

WORD COUNT: 672

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – Some journalists stationed with the Canadian military complain that the Forces are unfairly catering to Radio-Canada, the French-language public TV network, in a strategy which one military official conceded aims to address the sensitivity of the mission in Quebec.

Since arriving in Afghanistan about a week ago, Radio-Canada's lead news anchor, Bernard Derome, has had a barbecue organized in his honour, has been escorted by armoured vehicle to a site journalists usually reach by pickup truck, and got a private helicopter tour of the region with Canada's top military commander. A military public affairs officer also has been assigned exclusively to Derome and his two-man crew.

Military officials insist Derome is receiving the same perks offered to CBC News anchor Peter Mansbridge when he visited the country in March 2006.

Radio-Canada is the French-language counterpart of the CBC.

"Bernard Derome has greater privileges than you -- as Peter Mansbridge did, as any TV anchor will receive," military spokesman Capt. Sylvain Chalifour told journalists. "They have special needs that are different from yours."

But other journalists, both English- and French-speaking, complain that French-language television is getting more than perks.

"It appears as though, because there's a Quebec regiment here now, Quebec television journalists, particularly those from Radio-Canada, are getting special access," said Christie Blatchford, a columnist for the Globe and Mail newspaper.

When a CTV reporter recently complained to the military's senior spokesman about the unequal access, she was told the military was deliberately focusing on Quebec media coverage.

The senior spokesman was replaced, and military officials have rejected the notion they are biased toward Quebec-based TV. They promise all media will receive equal access.

Quebec journalists get perks in Afghanistan, military admits; Until Van Doos arrived French-language media

Derome declined to comment. A CBC spokesperson did not respond when asked whether Mansbridge received similar treatment.

Since the Aug. 1 arrival in Afghanistan of the Quebec-based Royal 22nd Regiment, the mission has come under intense scrutiny in Quebec. Support for the war in that province is the lowest in Canada, with some polls showing seven of 10 Quebecers oppose the mission.

Major Canadian media organizations, including CanWest News Service, Global Television, CBC, CTV and the Globe and Mail, have had journalists "embedded" with the military in Kandahar since 2006. Until now, few French-language media outlets have participated in the program.

But with the war in the headlines almost every day, several Quebec-based organizations, including the TVA network and La Presse newspaper, have dispatched journalists to Afghanistan.

To get closer to the action, journalists often join convoys of Canadian soldiers heading into battle. In the past, journalists would be briefed on upcoming operations and told how many seats were available for media. They would decide among themselves which reporters would go to observe the operation, according to Blatchford.

"It was a system where everyone in the press knew what was going on. So, even if you didn't have a seat on the convoy, you could write what was happening. So it was equitable and fair."

However, when Radio-Canada reporter Patrice Roy and cameraman Charles Dubois arrived earlier this month, the military organized a special convoy to show them the area bases.

And when the Van Doo launched its first major combat operation on Aug. 22, only Roy and Dubois were informed of the operation the night before. The operation took a tragic turn when the armoured vehicle the journalists were travelling in struck a bomb, killing two Canadian soldiers and an Afghan interpreter. Dubois lost part of his leg and another Canadian soldier was wounded.

At the time of the attack, Blatchford and a wire-service reporter were at Canada's provincial reconstruction team headquarters in Kandahar City.

But they were given few details about the attack until they returned to Kandahar Airfield the next morning. In the past, public affairs officers ensured that reporters were briefed, even if they were stranded at a remote location, Blatchford charged.

"I think there are people who have calculated that it's a good idea to send the most francophone television cameras into the field so they can gain support in Quebec," said one French-speaking reporter on base, who asked not to be identified. Print outlets, English and French, have been "neglected" as a result, said the reporter.

Added Blatchford: "If it's part of a strategy to emphasize Quebec coverage, then it's wrong, and Canadians should know about it."

\$20million ransom paid by S. Koreans will buy arms, Taliban say

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KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM; FOREIGN AID; SOUTH KOREA; AFGHANISTAN
DATELINE: SPIN BOLDAK
BYLINE: Saeed Ali Achakzai
SOURCE: Reuters
WORD COUNT: 213

SPIN BOLDAK – South Korea paid Afghanistan's Taliban more than \$20 million to release 19 missionaries they were holding hostage, a senior insurgent leader said on Saturday, vowing to use the funds to buy arms and mount suicide attacks.

The freed hostages flew out of Afghanistan on Friday to Dubai en route for South Korea. Seoul has denied paying a ransom.

"We got more than \$20 million dollars from them (the Seoul government)," the commander told Reuters on condition of anonymity. "With it we will purchase arms, get our communication network renewed and buy vehicles for carrying out more suicide attacks."

"The money will also address to some extent the financial difficulties we have had," he said, but did not elaborate.

The commander is on the 10–man leadership council of the Islamist Taliban movement, which is led by the elusive Mullah Mohammad Omar.

He also rejected an Afghan government claim that a senior Taliban leader, Mullah Brother, was killed in a U.S.–led operation on Thursday in the southern province of Helmand.

"This report is just propaganda," he said.

The South Korean Christian volunteers, part of a group of 23 missionaries kidnapped in southeast Afghanistan in mid–July, arrived in Dubai on a chartered United Nations plane overnight and were due to fly on to Seoul on Saturday.

The Taliban killed two male hostages, while two women released earlier as a goodwill gesture have already flown home.

The Taliban decided to free the hostages after Seoul agreed to pull all its nationals out of the central Asian country.

Family mourns fallen soldier; Funerals for two servicemen killed in Afghanistan Aug. 22

IDNUMBER 200709010048

PUBLICATION: The Windsor Star

DATE: 2007.09.01

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: A11

ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Mathieu Belanger, Reuters / CRUSHED: The wife of Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier, Lucie Ardouin and their children Myriam Mercier, left, and Maude Mercier, right, mourn at the casket after his funeral. ;

DATELINE: VAL BELAIR, QUE.

BYLINE: Marianne White

SOURCE: CanWest News Service

WORD COUNT: 352

VAL BELAIR, QUE. – Canadian soldier Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier was hailed as a hero by his daughter Friday at his military funeral.

"Thank you, dad, for all you did," said his daughter, Myriam, 17, her voice cracking with emotion. "We love you very much. You are our hero."

Myriam said her father was always there for her and her brother Simon, 15, and sister Maude, 9.

"You always encouraged us in our activities. You passed on to us the best values we could hope for," she told the crowd of over 500 family, friends, soldiers and dignitaries who packed the St. Gerard Majella Church in Val Belair, Que., near both CFB Valcartier and Quebec City, for the emotional funeral.

Mercier's casket arrived at the church in a military cortege as drums beat in the quiet streets of this neighbourhood which is home to many military families. Many of them lined the sidewalks under a bright blue sky to pay their respects to Mercier.

The flag-draped coffin was carried into the church by an honour guard of eight fellow sergeants, followed by around 150 soldiers in uniform.

Canadian Heritage Minister Josee Verner attended the funeral along with Quebec's lieutenant-governor Pierre Duchesne and provincial Health Minister Philippe Couillard.

Rev. Rejean Lussier, the priest leading the service, said that Mercier, a veteran soldier who was planning to retire after his tour in Afghanistan, was affectionately known as "Papa Bear" by his colleagues, whom he called in return his "cubs."

"Today, he has reunited them together one last time," Lussier said.

Mercier's friend and brother in arms, Master Warrant Officer Stephane Bergeron, recalled him as a "fighter with a big heart."

Bergeron said Mercier always saw things in a positive light and was a very hard worker.

"He will always be remembered as an extraordinary man, as someone we could always rely on. We will never forget you," Bergeron said, on the verge of tears.

A funeral was also held Friday for his fellow soldier Master Cpl. Christian Duchesne. The funeral was held in private at his family's request. Around 60 people, including high ranking military officials, Verner and Couillard attended the service.

Mercier, 43, of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal 22nd Regiment, and Duchesne, 34, of the 5th Field Ambulance, died Aug. 22 when their light-armoured vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan. The two were part of the recent Afghanistan deployment from CFB Valcartier.

Letters to overseas soldiers to be postage-free

IDNUMBER 200709010014
PUBLICATION: Vancouver Sun
DATE: 2007.09.01
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A6
KEYWORDS: MONARCHY; PRECEDENTS; POSTAL RATES; BIRTH DEFECTS
DATELINE: SAINT JOHN, N.B.
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 140

SAINT JOHN, N.B. — She may not be a soldier, but when it comes to Canada Post, June Dobson sure fights like one.

Dobson took on the postal service in a campaign for free postage for letters sent to soldiers overseas. This week, Canada Post announced that starting Oct. 26, letters can be sent free year-round to soldiers in a war zone.

The date coincides with the date Canadians can begin sending Christmas parcels free of charge to the military.

"This is good, this is really good. I'm really pleased with it," Dobson said.

Dobson began her campaign when a letter to her nephew serving in Afghanistan was returned because it was short six cents on the postage.

"Our country depends on these men and women. Surely they're worth a stamp," Dobson said.

Her nephew, Master Cpl. Stephen Maher, said the effort is appreciated by his fellow soldiers.

"She did a good job for a lot of people who could actually use it. ... It's good to see someone pulling for us," he said.

Letters sent to soldiers must be brought to a Canada Post outlet — they can't be dropped in a mailbox.

Soldier's daughter hails her hero; Neighbours turn out to pay respects as cortege arrives in Quebec town near military base

IDNUMBER: 200709010012
PUBLICATION: Vancouver Sun
DATE: 2007.09.01
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A6
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Mathieu Belanger, Reuters / The casket of MasterWarrant Officer Mario Mercier, killed in Afghanistan Aug. 22, is borne into the church at Val Belair, near Valcartier, Que., for Friday's service. ;
KEYWORDS: BYELECTIONS; AFGHANISTAN
DATELINE: VAL BELAIR, QUE.
BYLINE: Marianne White
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 454

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Bergeron said Mercier always saw things in a positive light and was a very hard worker.

"He will always be remembered as an extraordinary man, as someone we could always rely on. We will never forget you," Bergeron said, on the verge of tears.

Mercier's coffin was carried out of the church for one last farewell. A trumpet played the Last Post and there was a volley of gunfire in salute. The Canadian flag was folded and presented to Mercier's widow, Lucie.

Mercier, 43, of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal 22nd Regiment, and Duchesne, 34, of the 5th Field Ambulance, died Aug. 22 when their light armoured vehicle struck an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan. The two were part of the recent Afghanistan deployment from CFB Valcartier.

The two deaths, along with that of Pte. Simon Longtin Aug. 19, brought the cost of the Afghan conflict home to Quebec., where one recent poll put support for the mission at about 33 per cent — the lowest in the country.

The deaths, along with that of Maj. Raymond Ruckpaul, 42, who died Wednesday after being wounded in his room at the headquarters of the International Security Assistance Force in the Afghan capital, bring the Canadian death toll in Afghanistan to 71 including one diplomat.

Quebec journalists favoured in Afghanistan, military concedes; Managing the message being delivered to a province where seven out of 10 oppose the war is a Forces priority, writes Andrew Mayeda in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

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ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Mathieu Belanger, Reuters / A Van Dooremembered: Lucie Ardouin, the wife of Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier, and children Myriam, 17, left, and Maude, 9, are pictured during the fallen Van Doo's funeral yesterday. More than 500 people — family, soldiers and dignitaries — packed the St. Gerard Majella Church in Val Belair, Que., near CFB Valcartier and Quebec City, for the emotional funeral. Master Warrant Officer Mercier was killed by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan on Aug. 22. A funeral was also held yesterday for Master Cpl. Christian Duchesne, killed in the same explosion. The funeral was held in private at his family's request. Around 60 people attended that ceremony, including high-ranking military officials and politicians.
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BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 600

Some journalists stationed with the Canadian military here complain that the Forces are unfairly catering to Radio-Canada, the French-language public TV network, in a strategy that at least one military official has conceded aims to address the sensitivity of the mission in Quebec.

Since arriving in Afghanistan about a week ago, Radio-Canada's lead news anchor, Bernard Derome, has had a barbecue organized in his honour, been escorted by armoured vehicle to a site that journalists usually reach by pickup truck, and received a private helicopter tour of the region with Canada's top military commander. A military public affairs officer has also been assigned exclusively to Mr. Derome and his two-man crew.

Military officials insist Mr. Derome is simply receiving the same perks offered to CBC news anchor Peter Mansbridge when he visited the country in March 2006. Radio-Canada is the French-language counterpart of the CBC.

"Bernard Derome has greater privileges than you — as Peter Mansbridge did, as any TV anchor will receive," military spokesman Capt. Sylvain Chalifour told journalists here. "They have special needs that are different from yours."

But other journalists, both English- and French-speaking, complain that French-language television is getting more than perks.

"It appears as though, because there's a Quebec regiment here now, that Quebec television journalists, particularly those from Radio-Canada, are getting special access," said Christie Blatchford, a columnist for the Globe and Mail newspaper.

When a CTV reporter recently complained to the military's senior spokesman here about the unequal access, she was told the military was deliberately focusing on Quebec media coverage.

That senior spokesman was later replaced, and military officials have since rejected the notion that they are biased toward Quebec-based TV. They promise that all media will now receive equal access.

Mr. Derome, who is a household name in Quebec, declined to comment. A CBC official did not immediately respond when asked whether Mr. Mansbridge received similar treatment.

Since the Aug. 1 arrival in Afghanistan of the Quebec-based Royal 22nd Regiment, known as the Van Doo, the mission has come under intense scrutiny in Quebec. Support for the war in that province is the lowest in Canada, with some polls showing that seven of 10 Quebecers oppose the mission.

Major Canadian media, including CanWest News Service, Global Television, CBC, CTV and the Globe and Mail, have had journalists "embedded" with the military in Kandahar since early 2006. Until now, few French-language media have participated in the program.

But with the war in the headlines almost every day, several Quebec-based organizations, including the TVA network and La Presse newspaper, have dispatched journalists to Afghanistan.

To get closer to the action, journalists often join convoys of Canadian soldiers heading into battle. In the past, journalists would be briefed on upcoming operations and told how many seats were available for media. They would then decide among themselves which reporters would go out to observe the operation, according to Ms. Blatchford.

"It was a system where everyone in the press knew what was going on. So, even if you didn't have a seat on the convoy, you could write what was happening. So it was equitable and fair."

However, when Radio-Canada reporter Patrice Roy and cameraman Charles Dubois arrived earlier this month, the military organized a special convoy to show them the operating bases in the area.

And when the Van Doo launched its first major combat operation on Aug. 22, only Mr. Roy and Mr. Dubois were informed of the operation the night before. That operation took a tragic turn when the armoured vehicle the journalists were travelling in struck an improvised explosive device, killing two Canadian soldiers and an Afghan interpreter. Mr. Dubois lost part of his leg and another Canadian soldier was wounded.

Layton was right about the Taliban

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BYLINE: Alexander Sandy Baillie
SOURCE: National Post
WORD COUNT: 102

Re: Taliban Releases 12 Korean Hostages, Aug. 30.

So Jack Layton was right all along: The Taliban are reasonable people with whom we can readily negotiate. They are releasing their South Korean hostages after magnanimously killing just two of them. All we had to do was ask nicely. The only other minor condition they insisted on is that the South Koreans must stop helping the people of Afghanistan to improve their lives.

Those Taliban are even more honourable, more easy-going than Mr. Layton had led us to believe. I think at this point the NDP leader should proudly declare, "Mission Accomplished!"

Alexander Sandy Baillie, Munster, Ont.

KEYWORDS: 0

Securing Afghanistan's future

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PAGE: A24
BYLINE: Omar Samad
SOURCE: Special to the National Post
WORD COUNT: 651

Afghan President Hamid Karzai spoke candidly at the Third National Conference on Counter Narcotics in Kabul on Wednesday. Reiterating Afghanistan's commitment to fight the narcotics problem, and asking the Afghan people to do their share, he asked international stakeholders, the international community and countries of the region to do more to help stem opium production and crack down on the drug trade.

Following the latest report released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime that shows a new high in opium production in Afghanistan for 2007, the President also asked the international community to expand its co-operation with the Afghan government. He said the fact that worldwide trade of opium is in the hands of the international criminal organizations necessitates joint international co-operation to combat it.

The President pointed to several accomplishments, including the increase in the number of poppy-free provinces from six to 13 over the past year, and further reduction in several others where security and government presence is strongest.

Alluding to the growth of opium production in several southern and eastern provinces, especially Helmand, President Karzai blamed the international community for failing to do enough joint planning with the Afghan side. Although the lead country -- in this case the United Kingdom -- has worked hard to help Afghans, he urged donors to do more to co-ordinate security-related and anti-drug activities at the national and provincial levels with Afghan authorities.

As demonstrated by the survey, there is a direct link between the expansion of government authority, security and decrease in poppy cultivation. The production levels

have gone up in provinces where criminality and Taliban activity present the greatest threats. This means that counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency strategies need to be further linked.

Moreover, insecurity has limited the ability of the central government and donors to provide economic development, alternative livelihood programs, new jobs, civil society activities, investment and even education services.

While Afghanistan should be helped to continue to fight a culture of impunity that exists in certain parts of its society, different forms of practical incentives -- development, building infrastructure, providing alternative crops, financial remuneration and job creation initiatives -- have encouraged farmers not to revert to poppy planting. Yet there is still more that can be done. Various approaches to poppy eradication need to be addressed and resolved amongst international proponents first, before they are debated and approved by the Afghan government and parliament.

Calls from certain quarters to legalize Afghanistan's opium poppy crop, given Afghanistan's real challenges with governance, rule of law, institution building and national security, remain a dangerous idea.

The proposal, which calls for a licensing platform allowing farmers to grow opium for medicinal use, will remain unfeasible for as long as violence disrupts normalcy and prevents a viable government presence in all regions affected by the insurgency. Illegal armed activity, farmer harassment and a black market–driven local economy will surely drive the license market out of business.

Conducting polls in countries like Canada about the Afghan poppy legalization scheme (as done by the Senlis Council recently) raises questions about the motivations, the relevance to the target audience and the politics behind the demand for legalization. It is the Afghans who will decide whether a certain plan is best suited to help them resolve this all–encompassing poppy–related problem, not political parties or interest groups overseas.

The present solution to Afghanistan's troubles lies in keeping the population on the government's side through the accelerated buildup and reform of administrative, judicial and security structures while supporting intensive development and alternative livelihoods until full security in all of Afghanistan is reached.

And we can all be certain that it will take several years of collective effort, co–ordination and the will to address all dimensions of this problem, much of it rooted in poverty and a troubled history of warfare, before it is overcome.

–Omar Samad is Afghanistan's ambassador to Canada

KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM; FOREIGN AID; NOBEL PRIZE

Soldier's aunt wins free postage for mail sent to war zones

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She may not be a soldier, but when it comes to Canada Post, June Dobson sure fights like one. Ms. Dobson took on the postal service in a campaign for free postage for letters sent to soldiers overseas. This week, Canada Post announced that starting on Oct. 26, letters can be sent free year-round to soldiers in a war zone. The start date coincides with the date that Canadians can begin sending Christmas parcels free of charge to members of the military. "This is good, this is really good. I'm really pleased with it," said Ms. Dobson, who began her campaign when a letter to her nephew serving in Afghanistan was returned because it was short 6¢ on the postage. "Our country depends on these men and women. Surely they're worth a stamp," she said.

KEYWORDS: POSTAL RATES; POSTAL SERVICES; PRECEDENTS