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MackKay smooths the way for troops, families to keep in touch

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BYLINE: David Jackson Provincial Reporter
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PREMIER Rodney MacDonald harkened back to his younger years while addressing the youth crime issue with the media last week.

"When I was going to school and someone told me that they were going to call my parents – it's a much different thing, perhaps, than it is today – and I tell you, you were scared when you would hear that," said the premier, now the ripe old age of 35.

Was the youthful premier a step–dancing, fiddling bad boy in around Cape Breton's Celtic heartland? Reporters wondered what misdeeds may have led to the phone ringing at Mr. and Mrs. MacDonald's Mabou home.

"I can't remember," the premier said with a chuckle. "It couldn't have been that bad." We're told new Defence Minister Peter MacKay deserves the credit for last week's move by Canada Post to provide free mail service between Canadian troops overseas and their families.

Canada offered the service during the holiday season last year, but no decision had been made for this year. A government source says that while Mr. MacKay was being briefed on his new portfolio, he was informed Britain was providing a free mail service and said Canada should offer it year–round. The source says the Central Nova MP got on the horn to cabinet colleague Lawrence Cannon, the minister responsible for Canada Post, and it was done.

The Harper government was already under pressure to make the move before Mr. MacKay got on the case. June Dobson of New Brunswick started a campaign in the spring after a letter to her nephew in Afghanistan was returned for being six cents short on postage.

And the issue had gone to Parliament. Ms. Dobson's MP, Saint John Liberal Paul Zed, took up the cause and introduced a bill to make the free mail service permanent. It's now scheduled to run from late October to early 2009. It's not often the Marx Brothers come up in discussions of Nova Scotia public policy, but it happened at the legislature's human resources committee meeting last week.

MLAs were considering appointments to the film classification board on Tuesday morning when New Democrat Howard Epstein raised concerns about an apparent lack of diversity in the applicants.

In his preamble to making his case for deferring the appointments, Mr. Epstein told his colleagues he had had a long day on Monday and unwound that evening with the 1939 comedy *At the Circus*.

"I was struck by how out of date some of the standards were that appeared in the film, in this case particularly race issues," he said.

"It reminded me when I was thinking about this committee that we had to deal with this morning that sensitivity to diversity in our society is something that we should think about very carefully when it comes to making appointments to a film classification board."

The Halifax Chebucto MLA didn't have information on the race of board applicants, but he was able to glean from references to graduations and work experience on their resumes and letters that too many of them were older than 60.

Committee chairman Dave Wilson seemed impressed. "You had a full day yesterday, a movie, and you still did all of that?" the Liberal said, drawing laughs.

Despite the ribbing, Mr. Epstein was successful in getting his colleagues to defer the appointments. Federal Liberals are trying their best to gain favour with Canadians, including members of the fourth estate.

Leader Stephane Dion swung open the doors for his speech at the national caucus meeting in St. John's last week, inviting media coverage, complete with a banner that trumpeted a welcome to the media.

It was a not-so-subtle jab at the federal Conservatives, who had RCMP officers shoo away journalists from the Charlottetown hotel where the national Tory caucus met in early August.

But the banner's message would have had limited use during Mr. Dion's day-long stop in Halifax on Monday before he went to St. John's. Media were barred from a round-table discussion on the Atlantic economy organized by Kings-Hants MP Scott Brison's office. One reporter who walked in unaware of the policy was asked to leave. However, the Liberals did invite the media to scrum Mr. Dion, Mr. Brison and several others during a break. Hacks in the Nova Scotia press gallery already grumbling about the MacDonald government's apparent attempts at media control got more fodder for their discontent last week.

Journalists who showed up 45 minutes early for the scheduled end of the weekly cabinet meeting were lucky to snag Justice Minister Murray Scott, the lone minister left after the session broke up early without notice.

Although not at fault, Joe Gillis, the premier's press secretary, bore the brunt of the media's displeasure. He did an admirable job of scrambling to get reporters scrums and interviews with the premier and various ministers.

Still, the incident won't build support for the premier's office's recent policy on post-cabinet scrums – reporters must submit a shopping list of ministers, and the scrums will be done in a room where the ministers can stand in front of provincial flags rather than in a hallway.

It's also not likely to make it easier to sell a proposed \$500,000 project to turn the room into a press theatre, considered a waste of money by some.

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MacKay: mission has made progress

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OTTAWA – Peter MacKay, the newly minted defence minister, says the government has to do a better job of telling Canadians about the progress being made in Afghanistan.

MacKay, who swapped foreign affairs for defence in the cabinet shuffle two weeks ago, is still boning up on the details of his new ministry. But he clearly sees that selling Afghanistan to a skeptical public is a big part of the job.

"We have to articulate, perhaps a bit more forcefully, just what we've been able to accomplish," he said in an interview with The Canadian Press.

His predecessor, Gordon O'Connor, who was moved to the Canada Revenue Agency in the shuffle, was perceived as a stiff, even uncomfortable speaker when it came to offering a vision of the Afghan mission.

Public opinion polls have shown growing opposition to Canada's combat role in the country. Pollsters suggest the growing casualty lists – 70 dead and counting since 2002 – seem to be fuelling that opposition.

MacKay said the emotion surrounding the casualties can overshadow what's been accomplished. "That's not to in any way diminish the sacrifice, but people have to translate that. These are sacrifices that have paid enormous dividends." He said he wants Canadians to understand that there has been progress and that progress is directly linked to the military presence which helps provide the stability needed for development. "In my opinion, there's a lot of important, tangible evidence and information that has to be relayed to the public more effectively."

Canada and its NATO allies are helping "to bring peace and security and stability to that country that for decades has been war-torn," he said.

Canadians need to hear about "the millions of Afghans who have returned, the six million children who are now in schools – who were not there previously – that fact that girls can attend school where they couldn't previously, the fact that women can not only work and contribute and access micro finance to help feed and clothe their families, but they can even sit in the government."

"These are landmark changes that have occurred during the last five and six years."

He spoke of infrastructure improvements, from wells and roads to schools, hospitals and clinics. There have been complaints from some quarters that aid seems to be flowing slowly, that some hospitals in Afghanistan remain short of supplies and personnel.

MacKay countered that many of these clinics didn't even exist before NATO moved in. While they may not be up to Canadian standards, they are far ahead of where things were.

The government is committed to keeping troops in Afghanistan until Feb. 9, 2009. Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion has said he will bring a motion into the House of Commons setting that date as a firm end to Canada's combat role.

MacKay said the government wants a vote in the Commons, adding that Dion wasn't big on Commons approval when he was part of the former Liberal government. The Liberals deployed troops with a take-note debate in the Commons, but no vote.

MacKay wouldn't say whether the Conservative government might consider a vote on Afghanistan as a confidence measure which could precipitate an election. "We would want to see exactly what that motion stated."

Meaford residents put 'soldiers first'; In 1942, more than 100 families gave up land for military training centre, now a stop for soldiers en route to Afghanistan

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The tough fighting men, their rippling muscles gleaming with sweat, gather around the dainty 75-year-old lady in the white cardigan and listen spellbound as she talks of her family's sacrifice for war 65 years ago.

"They needed the land, so we didn't have any choice," Leata Ashby tells a group of young soldiers who now train for future missions in Afghanistan on what was once her family's farm.

The soldiers, although anxious to head off on a weekend's leave from their military training course, stop to listen to Ashby as she relates stories about the more than 100 families whose land was expropriated in 1942.

In all, 7,000 hectares of farmland and orchards along the shores of Georgian Bay west of Collingwood, in what is now the municipality of Meaford, were gobbled up and four schools, five churches, two cemeteries, two small hotels, numerous cottages and two summer camps were closed. Locally, the area, which first became known as the Meaford Tank Range and later as the Land Force Central Area Training Centre, is still called "the range."

These days, families can visit the grounds on the annual open house day at the training centre, held last Friday this year. They can also ask the military for special permission to visit.

The training centre's commanding officer Lt. Col. Rob Kearney, who says such requests are given high priority and are accommodated whenever training schedules allow, accompanied Ashby on her July visit.

Kearney tells Ashby that he wants to honour her for "putting soldiers first" by vacating her home.

"You did a permanent tour of duty," says Kearney.

For safety reasons, former residents haven't always had access to the range. In October 1944, brothers Elmer, 15, and Ronald McCallum, 10, were killed after the military allowed them onto the range to harvest apples and they picked up a live mortar. In 1945, the range was decreed unsafe for the return of civilians.

Meaford residents put 'soldiers first'; In 1942, more than 100 families gave up land for military training centre

Access remained very limited until 1984, when a group spearheaded by local historian Marjorie Davison got permission from the military for a reunion as part of Ontario's bicentennial celebrations.

"It was really something, emotions were running high, just thinking about it still sends shivers up my spine," Davison says in an interview, recalling the day that hundreds of people returned to the range for the first time since 1942.

Davison remembers one woman breaking down in tears when she saw a rose bush that her mother had planted outside the church door.

The church was gone, but the roses still bloomed.

"People helped her dig it up with their bare hands," says Davison.

The military set its sights on the stone farmhouse built by Ashby's great grandfather, George Bishop, around 1850. Her grandfather and father, Gordon Bishop, had added extensions and by 1942 it was a comfortable five-bedroom home the army wanted as a headquarters building.

"So we were the first to go," says Ashby.

The government evaluator's calculations were based on land worth alone, putting no value on the home that three generations of her family had toiled to build with their bare hands.

"My parents' farm was valued at \$100 less than they paid my grandfather for it in 1924," says Ashby.

In 1942, it would have been considered unpatriotic not to comply and no one wanted to be branded a traitor.

"If Hitler came we would be getting nothing for our farms and I feel that to give up our farms is only a trifle compared to those who are giving their lives," Mrs. James McCartney told the Owen Sound Sun Times in 1942.

Don Cowling was 22 in June of 1942 when rumours began to circulate that the army was going to take the land, including the 24 hectares his family farmed under a lease agreement with the property owner.

"Then we heard that we had to be out by the end of September, it wasn't a whole lot of time," says Cowling in an interview from his Meaford home.

Apples had to be picked before they were ripe and hay was left behind in barns because it couldn't be packed up due to a wartime shortage of binder twine.

"Back then you didn't oppose these things. It was wartime and they had a job to do," says Cowling.

Perhaps because her father was first to leave, Ashby's family fared better than most.

They found a farm about 15 kilometres away and although the farmhouse was dilapidated, the land was good and fertile and the cattle and sheep her father herded there on foot thrived.

Other families, forced to move further afield, far away from the social networks that bind rural communities, dreamed of the day after the war when they would be able to come home.

"They were led to believe they would get their land back, but it never happened," says Cowling.

Meaford residents put 'soldiers first'; In 1942, more than 100 families gave up land for military training centre

Davison, the historian, wrote a book, *The Tree with the Broken Branch*, that tells the story of the range most people believed they would get back. She says families hurried to repair roofs and buy blinds so their homes could be shut up securely, but in some cases, the military blew up their homes as they left in wagons piled with their belongings.

Provisional clauses on the land purchase agreements, giving vendors the first option to re-purchase their properties after the war, turned out to be non-binding.

Ashby was only 10 years old in 1942, but she has very clear memories of her home on the range.

By today's standards, life was harsh.

There was neither electricity nor inside plumbing, but their farm supplied the family with plenty to eat and each fall, her father would pick apples at neighbouring orchards to make the cash to pay the annual taxes of \$25 a year.

Like all the buildings on the range, the Bishop family home was blown up by mortar shells. Ashby, standing on the top of the hill overlooking the firing range, can point to the home's exact location, but she turns down Kearney's offer to drive her over.

"Thank you, but no," she says, clearly fighting back unspoken emotions.

The next stop is a well-kept cemetery. On the way, they pass a replica of an FOB (Forward Operating Bases used in Afghanistan) surrounded by coils of razor-sharp barbed wire.

At the cemetery Ashby notes a broken headstone. "It was broken when my father used to bring me here," she says.

Ashby doesn't have any direct ancestors buried in the cemetery, but several of her distant cousins are buried there and her great grandfather is buried somewhere on the Bishop farm.

"We were all related up here, two brothers would marry two sisters, so the ties go deep," she says.

Nearly half of the 69 Canadian soldiers who have died in Afghanistan trained at Meaford. On the way back to Kearney's office, Ashby is reluctant to talk about the war, however she is anxious to meet the troops and wish them well.

Members of the 48th Highlanders from Toronto, the Cameron Highlanders from Ottawa and the local Grey and Simcoe Foresters are in their tents packing up for their weekend leave.

They tell her they are about two weeks from completing a 14-week training course and will rejoin their units in mid-August for unit training before possible deployment to Afghanistan.

Ashby says that her father, who died in 1988, was never bitter about the expropriation although he was distressed when the range closed down for three years in 1970. "He hated to think his land was going to waste."

The range re-opened in 1973 and in 1989 upgrades costing nearly \$480 million turned it into the largest facility for individual skills training in Ontario. Up to 10,500 soldiers pass through each year.

"My father would be pleased to see that it's being put to such good use," says Ashby.

Meaford residents put 'soldiers first'; In 1942, more than 100 families gave up land for military training centre

Talks with the Taliban not out of the question

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The hostage agreement reached last week between the Taliban and South Korea has profound implications for all countries fighting in Afghanistan. It puts the lie to those, including the current Canadian government, who say it is impossible or counterproductive to strike a deal with the Islamist insurgents. Clearly South Korea found the talks quite productive.

On the surface, the deal appeared to deny the Taliban anything substantive. The insurgents released 19 South Korean missionaries they were holding hostage. In return, South Korea reiterated a previous commitment to withdraw its 200 troops from Afghanistan.

Seoul also agreed to bar any more of its missionaries from travelling to Afghanistan. But it had already done that too.

There are rumours that South Korea paid an under-the-table ransom. Yet even if true, that would be relatively immaterial. The real gain for the Taliban was that it forced a NATO-allied country not only to negotiate but to publicly acknowledge those negotiations.

This provided the insurgents with a patina of legitimacy they have lacked since being driven from power in 2001. By doing the deal, Seoul pointedly ignored the objections of President Hamid Karzai's government, nominally the sovereign authority in the country. In the end, flanked by their Korean counterparts, Taliban officials even staged a press conference.

For a movement routinely branded as medieval, it was public relations and diplomatic coup. Lost in the euphoria of the hostages' release was the fact that the insurgents had already cruelly murdered two of the missionaries.

But this too was secondary to the main message. That message – delivered to citizens of all of the 37 nations with troops in Afghanistan – is that the Taliban are willing to talk. They may be harsh in religion and brutal in their methods. But in the end, they are willing to sit down and hammer out deals.

No wonder that governments determined to prosecute the Afghan war are so spooked. Washington decried the negotiations. So did Canada.

"The Canadian position on dealing with terrorists is well-known to all those with even a passing familiarity with the subject," Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier announced. "We do not negotiate with terrorists for any reason."

Leaving aside the question as to whether Taliban insurgents are guerrillas, terrorists or both, Bernier's statement is quite simply incorrect. Canada has negotiated with terrorists – most notably in 1970, when the

federal government allowed Front de liberation du Quebec hostage-takers to fly to Cuba in exchange for the British diplomat they were holding.

And if a similar situation were to arise in the future, Ottawa would almost certainly do the same. This is not because Canada is uniquely pusillanimous. Most countries end up negotiating with enemies they cannot defeat. Israel routinely negotiates hostage swaps with groups it calls terrorist. Britain brought an end to the Irish troubles when it talked to the hard men of the Irish Republican Army. Such is the way of the world.

Bernier warns that deals such as last week's can only lead to "further acts of terrorism." If he means the insurgents will be encouraged to take more foreigners hostage, he is probably correct. But the fact that the Taliban is now back in play diplomatically may also lead to more diplomacy, which is not such a bad thing. As Winston Churchill famously said of the Korean War: "To jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war."

Thomas Walkom's column appears Thursday and Sunday.

Hostages home

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Nineteen former hostages of Afghanistan's Taliban arrived home in South Korea today amid conflicting reports about whether their government paid \$20 million (U.S.) in ransom.

One of the tired-looking Christian aid workers apologized to Koreans for "causing trouble" by being abducted July 19.

quoted an unnamed senior Taliban leader as saying South Korea paid more than \$20 million ransom. But a Taliban spokesperson and the Korean government denied there was any payment.

Agence France-Press

Canadian terror suspect out of solitary

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DATELINE: MINNEAPOLIS
WORD COUNT: 85

A federal judge has ordered a Canadian terrorism–support suspect transferred from solitary confinement to more typical pretrial detention.

Mohammed Warsame, a Canadian of Somali descent, was attending college in Minneapolis in 2003 when FBI agents questioned him about time he allegedly spent in two terrorist training camps in Afghanistan three years earlier.

He was arrested as a material witness and indicted on charges of conspiring to provide material support to al–Qaida and of lying to federal agents about travelling to Afghanistan and sending \$2,000 to an associate there. **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

Taliban: \$20M for hostages will go to arms

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BYLINE: SAEED ALI ACHAKZAI, REUTERS
DATELINE: SPIN BOLDAK
WORD COUNT: 162

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

But Seoul denies paying a ransom and there were signs of confusion among the Taliban when a spokesman also said no money had changed hands to secure the Koreans' freedom.

"We deny any payment for the release of South Korean hostages," an official at South Korea's presidential Blue House said yesterday.

But the senior Taliban leader disagreed. "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.

However, Taliban spokesman Qari Mohammad Yousuf told reporters no ransom was paid, saying it would discredit the group.

The freed hostages flew out of Afghanistan Friday to Dubai en route for South Korea.

If a ransom was paid, analysts said it will make Afghanistan more dangerous for foreign nationals who already curb their movements for fear of abduction by the Taliban or bandits. **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

MacKay talks up mission

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ILLUSTRATION: photo of PETER MACKAY New defence minister
BYLINE: JOHN WARD, CP
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 139

Peter MacKay, the newly minted defence minister, says the government has to do a better job of telling Canadians about the progress being made in Afghanistan.

MacKay, who swapped foreign affairs for defence in the cabinet shuffle two weeks ago, is still boning up on the details of his new ministry. But he clearly sees that selling Afghanistan to a sceptical public is a big part of the job.

"We have to articulate, perhaps a bit more forcefully, just what we've been able to accomplish," he said.

Opinion polls have shown growing opposition to Canada's combat role in the country. Pollsters say growing casualty lists — 70 dead since 2002 — are fuelling opposition.

MacKay said the emotion surrounding the casualties can overshadow what's been accomplished. "That's not to in any way diminish the sacrifice, but people have to translate that. These are sacrifices that have paid enormous dividends." **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

70 militants dead U.S.–Afghan forces striking back at rise of insurgent violence

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ILLUSTRATION: photo by Musedeq Sadeq, AP An Afghan man is seen near the wreckage of a vehicle that was exploded by U.S. and Afghan forces west of Kabul, Afghanistan yesterday. The car, full of explosives, was found by Afghan forces and was blown up by coalition troops at the site, officials said.

BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: KABUL
WORD COUNT: 279

U.S.–led coalition and Afghan security forces killed about 70 suspected militants in Afghanistan, where violence is running at its highest level since the ouster of the Taliban regime six years ago, authorities said yesterday.

The surge in militant attacks comes despite the presence of more than 50,000 foreign troops and 110,000 Afghan police and military officers, as well as a multimillion dollar reconstruction effort to rebuild the shattered nation.

Late Friday, Afghan security forces backed by U.S.–led troops raided compounds in three villages in the remote Pitigal Valley border region, where the coalition said intelligence showed that top militant leaders take refuge as they travel between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

TIES TO TALIBAN

Afghanistan has accused Pakistan of failing to do enough to prevent the movement of militants and weapons across the frontier. Pakistan — which before 2001 had close ties with the Taliban — denies the charge, saying it has deployed tens of thousands of troops.

The troops killed more than 20 insurgents and detained 11 others in the raids, which were just five km from the border.

BOMB FACTORY

They discovered a bomb–making factory and seized weapons and communication gear, the statement said. One coalition soldier was wounded in the raids, it said.

Meanwhile, a bomb attached to a bicycle in a commercial district of the northern city of Mazar–e–Sharif wounded nine people, two seriously, police spokesman Sher Jan Durani said.

In the central province of Ghazni, where the Taliban last week released 19 South Koreans they had held hostage for six weeks, Afghan police attacked a group of Taliban planning to strike security forces, killing 18

and arresting six others, provincial police Gen. Ali Shah Ahmadai said.

A coalition statement said the raid resulted in the seizure of mortar and artillery rounds, numerous hand grenades, rocket-propelled grenades and other ammunition, it said. It gave no more details.

KEYWORDS=WORLD

70 militants dead U.S.–Afghan forces striking back at rise of insurgent violence

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ILLUSTRATION: photo by Musedeq Sadeq, AP An Afghan man is seen near the wreckage of a vehicle that was exploded by U.S. and Afghan forces west of Kabul yesterday. The car, full of explosives, was found by Afghan forces and was blown up by coalition troops at the site, officials said.

BYLINE: AP

DATELINE: KABUL

WORD COUNT: 279

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KEYWORDS=WORLD

Taliban: \$20M for hostages will go to arms

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MacKay talks up mission

SOURCETAG 0709020308
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun
DATE: 2007.09.02
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PAGE: 12
ILLUSTRATION: photo of PETER MACKAY New defence minister
BYLINE: JOHN WARD, THE CANADIAN PRESS
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 139

Peter MacKay, the newly minted defence minister, says the government has to do a better job of telling Canadians about the progress being made in Afghanistan.

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Opinion polls have shown growing opposition to Canada's combat role in the country. Pollsters say growing casualty lists — 70 dead since 2002 — are fuelling opposition.

MacKay said the emotion surrounding the casualties can overshadow what's been accomplished. "That's not to in any way diminish the sacrifice, but people have to translate that. These are sacrifices that have paid enormous dividends." **KEYWORDS=CANADA**

70 militants dead U.S.–Afghan forces striking back at rise of insurgent violence

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PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun

DATE: 2007.09.02

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 8

BYLINE: AP

DATELINE: KABUL

WORD COUNT: 279

U.S.–led coalition and Afghan security forces killed about 70 suspected militants in Afghanistan, where violence is running at its highest level since the ouster of the Taliban regime six years ago, authorities said yesterday.

The surge in militant attacks comes despite the presence of more than 50,000 foreign troops and 110,000 Afghan police and military officers, as well as a multimillion dollar reconstruction effort to rebuild the shattered nation.

Late Friday, Afghan security forces backed by U.S.–led troops raided compounds in three villages in the remote Pitigal Valley border region, where the coalition said intelligence showed that top militant leaders take refuge as they travel between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

TIES TO TALIBAN

Afghanistan has accused Pakistan of failing to do enough to prevent the movement of militants and weapons across the frontier. Pakistan — which before 2001 had close ties with the Taliban — denies the charge, saying it has deployed tens of thousands of troops.

The troops killed more than 20 insurgents and detained 11 others in the raids, which were just five km from the border.

BOMB FACTORY

They discovered a bomb–making factory and seized weapons and communication gear, the statement said. One coalition soldier was wounded in the raids, it said.

Meanwhile, a bomb attached to a bicycle in a commercial district of the northern city of Mazar–e–Sharif wounded nine people, two seriously, police spokesman Sher Jan Durani said.

In the central province of Ghazni, where the Taliban last week released 19 South Koreans they had held hostage for six weeks, Afghan police attacked a group of Taliban planning to strike security forces, killing 18 and arresting six others, provincial police Gen. Ali Shah Ahmadai said.

A coalition statement said the raid resulted in the seizure of mortar and artillery rounds, numerous hand grenades, rocket–propelled grenades and other ammunition, it said. It gave no more details.

KEYWORDS=WORLD

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SOURCETAG 0709020573
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun
DATE: 2007.09.02
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 8
ILLUSTRATION: photo of PETER MACKAY New defence minister
BYLINE: JOHN WARD, CP
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 139

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Taliban: \$20M for hostages will go to arms

SOURCETAG 0709020572
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun
DATE: 2007.09.02
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 8

ILLUSTRATION: photo by Musedeq Sadeq, AP An Afghan man is seen near the wreckage of a vehicle that was exploded by U.S. and Afghan forces west of Kabul, Afghanistan yesterday. The car, full of explosives, was found by Afghan forces and was blown up by coalition troops at the site, officials said.

BYLINE: SAEED ALI ACHAKZAI, REUTERS
DATELINE: SPIN BOLDAK
WORD COUNT: 162

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But Seoul denies paying a ransom and there were signs of confusion among the Taliban when a spokesman also said no money had changed hands to secure the Koreans' freedom.

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But the senior Taliban leader disagreed. "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.

However, Taliban spokesman Qari Mohammad Yousuf told reporters no ransom was paid, saying it would discredit the group.

The freed hostages flew out of Afghanistan Friday to Dubai en route for South Korea.

If a ransom was paid, analysts said it will make Afghanistan more dangerous for foreign nationals who already curb their movements for fear of abduction by the Taliban or bandits. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Korea denies payout A Taliban leader claims South Korea paid more than \$20 million for the release of its missionaries.

SOURCETAG: 0709020161
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.02
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 7

ILLUSTRATION: photo by AP GOING HOME: South Korean hostages leave a Dubai hotel to fly back home yesterday. The 19 South Korean hostages were set free by the Taliban after successful negotiations. They were flown to Dubai on a UN special chartered flight from Afghanistan.

BYLINE: REUTERS
DATELINE: SPIN BOLDAK
WORD COUNT: 410

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But Seoul denies paying a ransom and there were signs of confusion among the Taliban when a spokesperson also said no money had changed hands to secure the Koreans' freedom.

"We deny any payment for the release of South Korean hostages," an official at South Korea's presidential Blue House said yesterday.

But the senior Taliban leader disagreed.

"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 Taliban leader rejected an Afghan government statement 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 commander is on the 10-man leadership council of the Islamist Taliban movement, which is led by the elusive Mullah Mohammad Omar and runs all of the insurgent group's affairs.

However Qari Mohammad Yousuf, a Taliban spokesperson, later told Reuters no ransom was paid, saying it would discredit the group. There was no immediate explanation for the discrepancy.

The freed hostages flew out of Afghanistan on Friday to Dubai en route for South Korea.

If a ransom was paid, some say it will make Afghanistan more dangerous for foreign nationals who already curb movement for fear of abduction either by the Taliban or bandits. Some embassies and aid organisations impose curfews on foreign staff.

"If it has happened, for sure it puts us in a difficult situation as it will encourage other kidnappers to take foreign hostages," said one Afghan government official, asking not to be named.

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 yesterday.

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

Some of the freed hostages on Friday 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, 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.

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

They dropped their main demand that a group of prisoners held by the Afghan government be set free.

Seoul had already decided before the crisis to withdraw its 200 engineers and medical staff from Afghanistan by the end of 2008. Since the hostages were taken, it has banned its nationals from travelling there.

KEYWORDS=WORLD

MackKay sees some progress in Afghanistan

SOURCETAG 0709020160
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.02
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 7
ILLUSTRATION: photo of PETER MacKAY
BYLINE: JOHN WARD, CP
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 288

Peter MacKay, the newly minted defence minister, says the government has to do a better job of telling Canadians about the progress being made in Afghanistan.

MacKay, who swapped foreign affairs for defence in the cabinet shuffle two weeks ago, is still boning up on the details of his new ministry. But he clearly sees that selling Afghanistan to a skeptical public is a big part of the job.

"We have to articulate, perhaps a bit more forcefully, just what we've been able to accomplish," he said in an interview.

His predecessor, Gordon O'Connor, who was moved to the Canada Revenue Agency in the shuffle, was perceived as a stiff, even uncomfortable speaker when it came to offering a vision of the Afghan mission.

Public opinion polls have shown growing opposition to Canada's combat role in the country. Pollsters suggest the growing casualty lists — 70 dead and counting since 2002 — seem to be fuelling that opposition.

MacKay said the emotion surrounding the casualties can overshadow what's been accomplished.

"That's not to in any way diminish the sacrifice, but people have to translate that. These are sacrifices that have paid enormous dividends."

He said he wants Canadians to understand that there has been progress and that progress is directly linked to the military presence that helps provide the stability needed for development.

"In my opinion, there's a lot of important, tangible evidence and information that has to be relayed to the public more effectively."

Canada and its NATO allies are helping "to bring peace and security and stability to that country that for decades has been war-torn," he said.

Canadians need to hear about "the millions of Afghans who have returned, the six million children who are now in schools — who were not there previously — the fact that girls can attend school where they couldn't previously, the fact that women can not only work and contribute and access micro finance to help feed and clothe their families, but they can even sit in the government." **KEYWORDS=CANADA**

70 militants dead U.S.–Afghan forces striking back at rise of insurgent violence

SOURCETAG 0709020475
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.09.02
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 20
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: KABUL
WORD COUNT: 279

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The surge in militant attacks comes despite the presence of more than 50,000 foreign troops and 110,000 Afghan police and military officers, as well as a multimillion dollar reconstruction effort to rebuild the shattered nation.

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TIES TO TALIBAN

Afghanistan has accused Pakistan of failing to do enough to prevent the movement of militants and weapons across the frontier. Pakistan — which before 2001 had close ties with the Taliban — denies the charge, saying it has deployed tens of thousands of troops.

The troops killed more than 20 insurgents and detained 11 others in the raids, which were just five km from the border.

BOMB FACTORY

They discovered a bomb–making factory and seized weapons and communication gear, the statement said. One coalition soldier was wounded in the raids, it said.

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KEYWORDS=WORLD

Taliban: \$20M for hostages will go to arms

SOURCETAG 0709020474

PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun

DATE: 2007.09.02

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 20

ILLUSTRATION: photo by Amusedeq Sadeq, AP An Afghan man is seen near the wreckage of a vehicle that was exploded by U.S. and Afghan forces west of Kabul, Afghanistan yesterday. The car, full of explosives, was found by Afghan forces and was blown up by coalition troops at the site, officials said.

BYLINE: SAEED ALI ACHAKZAI, REUTERS

WORD COUNT: 167

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MackKay talks up mission

SOURCETAG 0709020473
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.09.02
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 20
BYLINE: JOHN WARD, CP
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 139

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SOURCETAG 0709020661
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.02
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 10
BYLINE: SAEED ALI ACHAKZAI, REUTERS
DATELINE: SPIN BOLDAK
WORD COUNT: 162

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PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.02
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 10
ILLUSTRATION: photo of PETER MACKAY New defence minister
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WORD COUNT: 139

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SOURCETAG 0709020659

PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun

DATE: 2007.09.02

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 10

ILLUSTRATION: photo by Musedeq Sadeq, AP An Afghan man is seen near the wreckage of a vehicle that was exploded by U.S. and Afghan forces west of Kabul, Afghanistan yesterday. The car, full of explosives, was found by Afghan forces and was blown up by coalition troops at the site, officials said.

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KEYWORDS=WORLD

Hostages held in Afghanistan return to South Korea

IDNUMBER 200709020021
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.02
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A8
COLUMN: World Briefing
DATELINE: SEOUL
SOURCE: Reuters
WORD COUNT: 67

SEOUL – A plane carrying 19 South Koreans held hostage by the Taliban in Afghanistan for six weeks arrived in Seoul today.

A senior Taliban leader told Reuters the South Korean government had paid \$20 million for the release of the Christian volunteers. South Korea's presidential Blue House denied paying any ransom but has already come under criticism for negotiating with the kidnappers.

Secretive anti-bomb unit scans for IEDs; Improvised explosives more lethal than guns

IDNUMBER 200709020010
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.02
EDITION: Early
SECTION: News
PAGE: A3

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Photos by Andrew Mayeda/CanWest News Service / A member of Canada's counter-IED team wears a Kevlar bomb suit to defuse improvised explosive devices. With all that protection, the hands must remain gloveless because they must handle sensitive explosives. ; Photo: The Canadian military doesn't hesitate to show components of improvised explosive devices because instructions for making them are readily available on the Internet. ;

DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 657

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — Tucked away in a small compound at the sprawling NATO military base here, the handful of specialists who make up Canada's counter-IED team liken themselves to firefighters.

But they could just as easily be compared to the shadowy members of the JTF-2, Canada's secretive special-forces unit.

When reporters received a briefing this week on the basics of improvised explosive devices, Canadian counter-IED operators refused to be photographed or quoted by name. Some removed the name tags from their uniforms.

Their secrecy is not unfounded.

Since the military moved the bulk of its troops to this volatile southern province of Afghanistan last year, improvised explosive devices have become the gravest threat to Canadian soldiers.

Canadian soldiers are now far more likely to be killed by a makeshift homemade bomb planted at the side of the road than a bullet from an AK-47. Of the 25 soldiers killed so far this year in Afghanistan, all but three have been killed by IEDs.

That has made counter-IED operators, the men and women called upon to defuse such devices, precious assets to the military. It has also turned them into high-value targets for the Taliban.

"They know if they can get us, we lose our ability to counter their number 1 weapon," said an operator who agreed to speak to CanWest News Service this week on condition of anonymity.

Before Afghanistan, the Canadian military had little experience dealing with IEDs in a war-zone setting.

The military began to develop its bomb–disposal expertise around the time of the FLQ crisis of 1970, said the operator. At the time, Canadian soldiers were called upon to thwart bombings orchestrated by the Front de Libération du Québec, a radical separatist group.

Over the three decades that followed, the military helped civilian law–enforcement agencies dispose of bombs used by biker gangs and other criminal elements.

The military has also deployed bomb–disposal units in Bosnia–Herzegovina, where Canada has helped keep the peace. But the primary threats there have been mines and unexploded ordnance.

Military officials therefore had to adapt quickly to the more sophisticated threat posed by amateur bombmakers in Afghanistan, who combine open–source techniques culled from the Internet with the latest methods used by insurgents in Iraq, Lebanon and Chechnya.

By definition, IEDs are "improvised." As a result, counter–IED operators often arrive at a scene with only a vague sense of the threat.

"Compare a hand grenade to an improvised explosive device. A hand grenade is built by an arms company. It comes with a manual. You know that hand grenade will work exactly the same way every time," said the operator.

"That's not the case with an improvised explosive device."

Military officials will not reveal the exact procedures they use to disable IEDs, or even the classification system they use to identify them. But they will talk freely about the basic components, because such information is already available online.

Most IEDs have five components: a power supply, switch, detonator, main charge and container. However, the potential combinations are myriad.

The main charge can be anything from a stack of anti–tank and anti–personnel mines to a kitchen pot filled with a fertilizer–based homemade explosive.

Insurgents can use cellphones or walkie–talkies to remotely detonate the devices. Or IEDs can be "pressure plated" so they detonate when a vehicle passes over them.

Canadian operators often receive training from experts based in countries with more counterterrorist experience, such as Britain and Israel.

Given their work conditions, it is not surprising that counter–IED operators are a special breed.

"It takes guts to do this, but it also takes imagination, and it takes a level–headed mind," said the counter–IED specialist. "I can give my guys three things to think about at once ... and they can figure out which of them is the most important to focus on."

Operators often used bomb–disposal robots to probe for IEDs or pick up dangerous objects. But most of the time, a human has to eventually check out the scene.

To do so, they wear Kevlar bomb suits that make them look like deep–sea divers. But they usually do not wear gloves, because they need to handle hyper–sensitive explosives.

So far, no Canadian counter–IED operator has been killed or seriously injured in Afghanistan. During the

previous six-month rotation, the military discovered and successfully removed 150 IEDs.

"You have to trust your partner, you have to trust your training and your team," said the operator. "This is not a solo effort by any means. We're just the guys who zip up the suit and take that long walk."

Mother keeps 'Boomer's' legacy alive; Army medic was killed a year ago; a charity inspired by his sacrifice will raise money to be given directly to needy Afghans by Canadian soldiers

IDNUMBER 200709020009
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.02
EDITION: Early
SECTION: News
PAGE: A3
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Family photo / Cpl. Andrew Eykelenboom, a Canadian soldier killed in Afghanistan, is the inspiration for Boomer's Legacy, a charity to aid needy Afghans. ;
BYLINE: Richard Foot
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 617

One year after Afghanistan took the life of her son, Maureen Eykelenboom of Comox wants to keep giving to that war-weary country -- this time in the form of money for a unique fund, doled out to needy Afghans by Canadian soldiers in Kandahar.

Eykelenboom's son -- Cpl. Andrew Eykelenboom, 23, a popular army medic known by his mates as "Boomer" -- was killed in August 2006 in a suicide bombing attack.

After months of careful planning, the Eykelenboom family has launched what it calls Boomer's Legacy, a charitable foundation to raise money for Afghans living in the valleys and villages where Canadian troops operate.

While other families who have lost loved ones in Afghanistan have launched charitable works of their own, Eykelenboom said Boomer's Legacy is the first foundation whose funds will be dispersed directly by soldiers on the ground, based on the needs they see during their travels and patrols around Kandahar province.

The foundation's first fundraising dinner takes place next Sunday in Courtenay. It's a \$100-a-plate night of food and entertainment, featuring Canada's chief of defence staff, Gen. Rick Hillier, as the guest of honour.

Among the items donated for a silent auction on the same evening is a flight with the Snowbirds, the military's air acrobatic team.

So far, 230 tickets to the dinner have been sold.

When Eykelenboom was establishing the foundation earlier this year, she wasn't sure how best to distribute its funds in Afghanistan. Before he died, her son had written letters and e-mails home about the desperate needs of the Afghan children he encountered.

His mother wanted to make sure the money she raised was effectively spent, to reflect the care -- not of Canada's government -- but of its ordinary soldiers.

Mother keeps 'Boomer's' legacy alive; Army medic was killed a year ago; a charity inspired by his sacrifice w

"That was a little difficult," she said, "because I wanted to target the Kandahar area, and in Kandahar there are very, very few non-governmental charities operating. I couldn't find one that was concrete enough."

She then discovered the Assistance to Afghanistan Trust Fund, a special fund created by the military last year to administer direct aid donations by Canadian civilians.

The trust fund's first donor was John Race, an Ontario farmer and Second World War veteran, who last year sent a \$10,000 cheque to Hillier, asking that the money be spent on deserving Afghan children or farmers.

The fund is administered by a committee of soldiers at Canada's Provincial Reconstruction Team, the development and diplomacy arm of the military mission in Kandahar.

Eykelenboom said any Canadian soldier deployed to Kandahar can make a request that money from the trust fund be spent on a specific village or aid project in the area.

"So if the soldiers are patrolling in a certain village, and that village does not have proper drinking water, the soldiers can access funds to purchase purification tablets for the water system," said Eykelenboom. "Or if children at an Afghan orphanage have no shoes, troops can access funds for shoes."

Eykelenboom also said her family is covering the operating costs of the Boomer's Legacy foundation and that every cent raised by the charity will find its way to Afghanistan.

She also intends to go there herself next year.

"I'm not sure how yet," she said. "Hopefully General Hillier will help. But I intend to go, and if he tells me I can't go, I'll go on my own."

Meanwhile, Eykelenboom is planning future fundraising events, including a series of music concerts across the country.

Another grieving parent — Nova Scotian Jim Davis, whose son Cpl. Paul Davis died in an armoured car crash in Afghanistan last year — has also been enlisted to act as a trustee of the Boomer's Legacy foundation.

Eykelenboom said the passage of 12 months hasn't eased the pain of losing her youngest child in the war.

"It definitely does not go away," she said. "You learn to cope and move forward, but it's still one day at a time, one step at a time."

She said she's upset about the possibility of Canada leaving Kandahar, and she's angry that other NATO nations aren't doing more.

"I'd sure like to see more help," she said. "There should be more countries in there. They should just get in there and get the job done."

Information on Boomer's Legacy, including how to donate, can be found at www.boomerslegacy.ca.

Secretive anti-bomb unit scans for IEDs; Improvised explosives more lethal than guns

IDNUMBER 200709020008
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.02
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A3

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Andrew Mayeda, CanWest News Service / A member of Canada's counter-IED team wears a Kevlar bomb suit to defuse improvised explosive devices. With all that protection, the hands must remain gloveless because they must handle sensitive explosives. ;

DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 658

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — Tucked away in a small compound at the sprawling NATO military base here, the handful of specialists who make up Canada's counter-IED team liken themselves to firefighters.

But they could just as easily be compared to the shadowy members of the JTF-2, Canada's secretive special-forces unit.

When reporters received a briefing this week on the basics of improvised explosive devices, Canadian counter-IED operators refused to be photographed or quoted by name. Some removed the name tags from their uniforms.

Their secrecy is not unfounded.

Since the military moved the bulk of its troops to this volatile southern province of Afghanistan last year, improvised explosive devices have become the gravest threat to Canadian soldiers.

Canadian soldiers are now far more likely to be killed by a makeshift homemade bomb planted at the side of the road than a bullet from an AK-47. Of the 25 soldiers killed so far this year in Afghanistan, all but three have been killed by IEDs.

That has made counter-IED operators, the men and women called upon to defuse such devices, precious assets to the military. It has also turned them into high-value targets for the Taliban.

"They know if they can get us, we lose our ability to counter their number 1 weapon," said an operator who agreed to speak to CanWest News Service this week on condition of anonymity.

Before Afghanistan, the Canadian military had little experience dealing with IEDs in a war-zone setting.

The military began to develop its bomb-disposal expertise around the time of the FLQ crisis of 1970, said the operator. At the time, Canadian soldiers were called upon to thwart bombings orchestrated by the Front de Libération du Québec, a radical separatist group.

Over the three decades that followed, the Canadian Forces helped civilian law–enforcement agencies dispose of bombs used by biker gangs and other criminal elements.

The military has also deployed bomb–disposal units in Bosnia–Herzegovina, where Canada has helped keep the peace. But the primary threats there have been mines and unexploded ordnance.

Military officials therefore had to adapt quickly to the more sophisticated threat posed by amateur bombmakers in Afghanistan, who combine open–source techniques culled from the Internet with the latest methods used by insurgents in Iraq, Lebanon and Chechnya.

By definition, IEDs are "improvised." As a result, counter–IED operators often arrive at a scene with only a vague sense of the threat.

"Compare a hand grenade to an improvised explosive device. A hand grenade is built by an arms company. It comes with a manual. You know that hand grenade will work exactly the same way every time," said the operator.

"That's not the case with an improvised explosive device."

Military officials will not reveal the exact procedures they use to disable IEDs, or even the classification system they use to identify them. But they will talk freely about the basic components, because such information is already available online.

Most IEDs have five components: a power supply, switch, detonator, main charge and container. However, the potential combinations are myriad.

The main charge can be anything from a stack of anti–tank and anti–personnel mines to a kitchen pot filled with a fertilizer–based homemade explosive.

Insurgents can use cellphones or walkie–talkies to remotely detonate the devices. Or IEDs can be "pressure plated" so they detonate when a vehicle passes over them.

Canadian operators often receive training from experts based in countries with more counterterrorist experience, such as Britain and Israel.

Given their work conditions, it is not surprising that counter–IED operators are a special breed.

"It takes guts to do this, but it also takes imagination, and it takes a level–headed mind," said the counter–IED specialist. "I can give my guys three things to think about at once ... and they can figure out which of them is the most important to focus on."

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To do so, they wear Kevlar bomb suits that make them look like deep–sea divers. But they usually do not wear gloves, because they need to handle hyper–sensitive explosives.

So far, no Canadian counter–IED operator has been killed or seriously injured in Afghanistan. During the previous six–month rotation, the military discovered and successfully removed 150 IEDs.

"You have to trust your partner, you have to trust your training and your team," said the operator. "This is not a solo effort by any means. We're just the guys who zip up the suit and take that long walk."

Mother keeps 'Boomer's' legacy alive; Army medic was killed a year ago; a charity inspired by his sacrifice will raise money to be given directly to needy Afghans by Canadian soldiers

IDNUMBER 200709020007
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.02
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A3
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Family photo / Cpl. Andrew Eykelenboom, a Canadian soldier killed in Afghanistan, is the inspiration for Boomer's Legacy, a charity to aid needy Afghans. ;
BYLINE: Richard Foot
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 617

One year after Afghanistan took the life of her son, Maureen Eykelenboom of Comox wants to keep giving to that war-weary country -- this time in the form of money for a unique fund, doled out to needy Afghans by Canadian soldiers in Kandahar.

Eykelenboom's son -- Cpl. Andrew Eykelenboom, 23, a popular army medic known by his mates as "Boomer" -- was killed in August 2006 in a suicide bombing attack.

After months of careful planning, the Eykelenboom family has launched what it calls Boomer's Legacy, a charitable foundation to raise money for Afghans living in the valleys and villages where Canadian troops operate.

While other families who have lost loved ones in Afghanistan have launched charitable works of their own, Eykelenboom said Boomer's Legacy is the first foundation whose funds will be dispersed directly by soldiers on the ground, based on the needs they see during their travels and patrols around Kandahar province.

The foundation's first fundraising dinner takes place next Sunday in Courtenay. It's a \$100-a-plate night of food and entertainment, featuring Canada's chief of defence staff, Gen. Rick Hillier, as the guest of honour.

Among the items donated for a silent auction on the same evening is a flight with the Snowbirds, the military's air acrobatic team.

So far, 230 tickets to the dinner have been sold.

When Eykelenboom was establishing the foundation earlier this year, she wasn't sure how best to distribute its funds in Afghanistan. Before he died, her son had written letters and e-mails home about the desperate needs of the Afghan children he encountered.

His mother wanted to make sure the money she raised was effectively spent, to reflect the care -- not of Canada's government -- but of its ordinary soldiers.

Mother keeps 'Boomer's' legacy alive; Army medic was killed a year ago; a charity inspired by his sacrifice w

"That was a little difficult," she said, "because I wanted to target the Kandahar area, and in Kandahar there are very, very few non-governmental charities operating. I couldn't find one that was concrete enough."

She then discovered the Assistance to Afghanistan Trust Fund, a special fund created by the military last year to administer direct aid donations by Canadian civilians.

The trust fund's first donor was John Race, an Ontario farmer and Second World War veteran, who last year sent a \$10,000 cheque to Hillier, asking that the money be spent on deserving Afghan children or farmers.

The fund is administered by a committee of soldiers at Canada's Provincial Reconstruction Team, the development and diplomacy arm of the military mission in Kandahar.

Eykelenboom said any Canadian soldier deployed to Kandahar can make a request that money from the trust fund be spent on a specific village or aid project in the area.

"So if the soldiers are patrolling in a certain village, and that village does not have proper drinking water, the soldiers can access funds to purchase purification tablets for the water system," said Eykelenboom. "Or if children at an Afghan orphanage have no shoes, troops can access funds for shoes."

Eykelenboom also said her family is covering the operating costs of the Boomer's Legacy foundation and that every cent raised by the charity will find its way to Afghanistan.

She also intends to go there herself next year.

"I'm not sure how yet," she said. "Hopefully General Hillier will help. But I intend to go, and if he tells me I can't go, I'll go on my own."

Meanwhile, Eykelenboom is planning future fundraising events, including a series of music concerts across the country.

Another grieving parent — Nova Scotian Jim Davis, whose son Cpl. Paul Davis died in an armoured car crash in Afghanistan last year — has also been enlisted to act as a trustee of the Boomer's Legacy foundation.

Eykelenboom said the passage of 12 months hasn't eased the pain of losing her youngest child in the war.

"It definitely does not go away," she said. "You learn to cope and move forward, but it's still one day at a time, one step at a time."

She said she's upset about the possibility of Canada leaving Kandahar, and she's angry that other NATO nations aren't doing more.

"I'd sure like to see more help," she said. "There should be more countries in there. They should just get in there and get the job done."

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Mother keeps 'Boomer's' legacy alive; Army medic was killed a year ago; a charity inspired by his sacrifice w

MackKay launches Afghan sell job Mission successful despite casualties

PUBLICATION: WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

DATE: 2007.09.02

PAGE: A7

SECTION: Canada Wire

WORD COUNT: 384

CP Wire John Ward OTTAWA — Defence Minister Peter MacKay said the government must do a better job of telling Canadians about the progress being made in Afghanistan.

MacKay, who swapped foreign affairs for defence in the cabinet shuffle two weeks ago, is still boning up on the details of his new ministry.

But he clearly sees that selling Afghanistan to a skeptical public is a big part of the job.

"We have to articulate, perhaps a bit more forcefully, just what we've been able to accomplish," he said during an interview with The Canadian Press.

His predecessor, Gordon O'Connor, was perceived as an uncomfortable speaker when it came to offering a vision of the Afghan mission.

Public opinion polls have shown growing opposition to Canada's combat role in the country. Pollsters suggest the growing casualty lists — 70 dead and counting since 2002 — seem to be fuelling that opposition.

MacKay said the emotion surrounding the casualties can overshadow what's been accomplished.

"That's not to in any way diminish the sacrifice, but people have to translate that. These are sacrifices that have paid enormous dividends." He said he wants Canadians to understand that progress is directly linked to the military presence.

"In my opinion, there's a lot of important, tangible evidence and information that has to be relayed to the public more effectively." Canadians need to hear about "the millions of Afghans who have returned, the six million children who are now in schools — who were not there previously — that fact that girls can attend school where they couldn't previously, the fact that women can not only work and contribute and access micro finance to help feed and clothe their families, but they can even sit in the government." He spoke of infrastructure improvements, from wells and roads to schools, hospitals and clinics.

There have been complaints that aid is slow to arrive and that some hospitals remain short of supplies and personnel.

MacKay countered that many of these clinics didn't even exist before NATO moved in.

The government is committed to keeping troops in Afghanistan until Feb. 9, 2009.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion has said he will bring a motion into the House of Commons setting that date as a firm end to Canada's combat role.

MacKay said the government wants a vote in the Commons, adding that Dion wasn't big on Commons approval when he was part of the former Liberal government. The Liberals deployed troops with a take-note debate in the Commons, but no vote.

— Canadian Press

Anti-bomb squad a precious asset

PUBLICATION: WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

DATE: 2007.09.02

PAGE: A7

SECTION: World Wire

WORD COUNT: 692

CP Wire Andrew Mayeda KANDAHAR, Afghanistan -- Tucked away in a small compound at the sprawling NATO military base here, the handful of specialists who make up Canada's counter-IED team liken themselves to firefighters.

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Why I won't wear red; We all support our troops, for heaven's sake, not to mention their suffering families. But your ribbon or Friday red is actually saying: Yes, we should be in Afghanistan

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PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
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SECTION: The Citizen's Weekly
PAGE: B2
COLUMN: Janice Kennedy
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Peter J. Thompson, National Post / A woman adds her signature to hundreds of others on a banner in support of the troops during a rally at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto late last month. ;
BYLINE: Janice Kennedy
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 1428

What a sad difference a year makes. Last fall I had the privilege of spending time with several women in Petawawa, military wives who had soldier husbands serving in Afghanistan. Every one of them displayed a cheerful, if wry, sense of humour, despite the stress they lived under day and night. And every one of them shone with a kind of inner strength and courage most of us will never have to know.

They impressed the heck out of me. Still do, when I think of them. Because of women like them -- and the obviously good men overseas they worried about constantly and spoke of so lovingly -- I was happy to make the simple, undemanding gesture of wearing red for a few Fridays. But I felt compelled to stop some time ago.

What used to be an uncomplicated show of pure human support has become political, and the politics is distinctly ugly. Under Canada's New Government, we're witnessing the rise of Canada's New Militarism.

It is both disturbing and scary.

And it's everywhere. It's in the sprouting right across the land of those American-style yellow ribbon decals, second-hand imagery with a sad little Canadian flag to make it appear not second-hand.

It's in ideas like the proposed "Highway of Heroes," a euphemistic designation to tack on to the stretch of roadway over which the coffins of dead young soldiers are driven in the repatriation process. Calling them heroes, rather than victims of tragically misguided policy, helps us justify the waste of their young lives.

There are echoes of the new militarism at the War Museum, where authorities have suddenly decided -- or been persuaded to decide -- that the appraisal and phrasing of history is best dictated by the Legion, that the most vocal members of the vets' group should be the official editors of our past.

And, perhaps most dramatic of all, it's in the politicization of the "support our troops" campaign.

Why I won't wear red; We all support our troops, for heaven's sake, not to mention their suffering families. B

Gestures like red shirts on Friday and decals on cars now create no end of uneasiness, evidenced by the controversy over stickers on public vehicles across the country. In Calgary, they've refused to put "Support Our Troops" on their police cars — much to the dismay of many — while in Ottawa, Vancouver and Toronto (after a reversal of position), they have decided in favour of the decals. That has also caused widespread dismay.

Three days after Ottawa police Chief Vernon White announced that the city's 180 marked cruisers would now sport the stickers, councillor Alex Cullen condemned the decision. Public vehicles should not be "billboards for political beliefs," he said.

No, no, said White. It wasn't "a political statement." And police services board vice-chairwoman Maria McRae observed that it was "wrong for anyone to politicize this."

Too late. And Cullen is absolutely right.

No matter how passionately people try to characterize it as a benign gesture of warm fuzziness, the issue of Friday red and support-our-troops decals has indeed become politically charged. Wear red on Friday or stick that decal on your car, and you're making an unequivocal political statement. You're not really saying you support our troops (no matter what the printed words say) because — come on, who doesn't support the troops? We all support our troops, for heaven's sake, not to mention their suffering families.

No, your yellow ribbon or Friday red

is actually saying: Yes, we should be in Afghanistan. And yes, I do approve of our military presence there.

That is not a position I hold, but at least it's a realistic political reflection. What is not realistic is to pretend that your decal means anything different. It does not. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has made that very clear. "You can not say you are for our military and then not stand behind the things they do," he said. Support the troops? Then you have to support the mission.

And the mission, as has become painfully obvious, is war. The mission is a steady flow home of young soldiers in body bags, wounded soldiers with tragically altered futures, Afghan civilian casualties so numerous international organizations can't even keep an exact count, and devastation on a massive scale. And over this blighted landscape designated for "reconstruction," the red maple leaf flutters bravely.

Not surprisingly, Gen. Rick Hillier has become an enthusiastic cheerleader for the mission. The personable Chief of Defence even showed up recently at the big Red

Friday rally in Toronto — along with Don Cherry, predictably — whipping off his camouflage jacket to display a red T-shirt underneath. What is a little more surprising (though perhaps not to demoted former defence minister Gordon O'Connor) is just how outspokenly political the good general has become.

Except that he doesn't call it political.

"From the soldiers' perspective," he told a Globe and Mail interviewer recently, "we do not believe a group of people who will whip women for wearing heels that click on pavement should be allowed to reassume control of their country and the lives of those people in it." Soldiers' perspective? Sounds more like something you'd hear

in the House. Since when do soldiers — at least Canadian soldiers — decide who should and shouldn't be the government of a foreign nation?

Why I won't wear red; We all support our troops, for heaven's sake, not to mention their suffering families. B

But let's accept the general's premise, even with its political baggage. If we really believe we should occupy foreign countries to change governments driven by ethical principles in conflict with our own, why aren't we in some of the other fundamentalist countries that also frown aggressively on the clicking of high heels? Why aren't we in Sudan, helping oppressed minorities? Why have we avoided occupying Zimbabwe, where the corruption of Robert Mugabe's regime is destroying his people? Why not North Korea, where another mad despot has presided over the starvation and oppression of millions?

A lot of countries in this world are rife with persecution and abuse, a lot of places run by totalitarian regimes and dictators with medieval views on human rights. And if it's the evil-doing terrorists we're trying to cut off at the knees, why aren't we in the one place that spawned Osama bin Laden and the 9/11 hijackers? Could it be because the ruling class of that place, the great oil-rich nation of Saudi Arabia, is on excellent terms with the current ruling class of the United States?

Beyond the clichés and ragged bits of doled-out wisdom, there's really no logical justification for the whole adventure. If we were really trying to help oppressed peoples or stop the terrorists, we'd also be in all kinds of other places around the world. If, on the other hand, we just desperately want to play with the big boys on Team Bush (yes, I know its official name is NATO), then we're on track. We're right to accept Stephen Harper's militaristic worldview, get incoherently schmaltzy with Don Cherry and salute Gen. Rick and his red

T-shirt.

If, that is, we can live with the insidious mob psychology clearly at work. Smoothly abetted by a government that seems to love rattling sabres and waving big sticks (even if the sabres and sticks are a bit the worse for wear), we're being pushed and shoved into cheering simplistically for war.

You don't approve of U.S.-style political decals on police cars? Shame on you. You must hate our soldiers.

You think the mission in Afghanistan is a big, tragic mistake? Shame on you. You must hate Canada.

You believe we should get out — now? Shame. You obviously hate freedom.

It's become nasty out there, and stifling. Try to debate issues that used to be open for discussion in this country — issues that go to the heart of our collective sense of morality — and suddenly you're charged with lacking patriotism, or backbone, or some other fragment of cheap and borrowed jingoism.

The new rules of discourse are wartime rules (loose lips might sink ships, after all), and the only admissible consideration of war is the one that all but chokes itself on its own meaningless clichés. Wallowing in cheap sentiment — as long as it's not our sons who have been blown to bits — we say things like, "they're putting their lives on the line for us." Or "they're fighting for Canada." Or, in the words of Ottawa councillor McRae (though they could be anybody's), our uniformed men and women are "willing to sacrifice their lives to make sure this country stays as great as it is." (Could someone please explain to me how any of the debacle in Afghanistan is a fight for Canada, Canadians or our national greatness? Please?)

These days, on the combative watch of Canada's New Government, real value is measured in brass buttons, bombs and casualty lists.

And no matter what anyone says, it is deeply political. Every last poisonous bit of it.

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South Korea paid \$20M ransom: Taliban leader

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PAGE: A8
DATELINE: SPIN BOLDAK, Afghanistan
SOURCE: Reuters
WORD COUNT: 123

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

But Seoul denies paying a ransom and there were signs of confusion among the Taliban when a spokesman also said no money had changed hands to secure the Koreans' freedom.

"We deny any payment for the release of South Korean hostages," a South Korean official said yesterday.

But the senior Taliban leader disagreed. "We got more than \$20 million from (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."

Secret team of specialists targets enemy No. 1: road-side bombs

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SECTION: News
PAGE: A8
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 439

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – Tucked away in a small compound at the sprawling NATO military base here, the handful of specialists who make up Canada's counter-IED team liken themselves to firefighters.

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That has made counter-IED operators, the men and women called upon to defuse such devices, precious assets to the military. It has also turned them into high-value targets for the Taliban.

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By definition, IEDs are "improvised." As a result, counter-IED operators often arrive at a scene with only a vague sense of the threat.

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Mother's unique idea keeps Boomer's legacy alive; Maureen Eykelenboom has created the first foundation whose funds will be dispersed directly by soldiers on the ground, writes Richard Foot.

IDNUMBER 200709020027

PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen

DATE: 2007.09.02

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SECTION: News

PAGE: A8

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Cpl. Andrew Eykelenboom, 23, a popular army medic known by his fellow soldiers and friends as Boomer -- was killed in August 2006 in a suicide bombing in Kandahar. ;

BYLINE: Richard Foot

SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen

WORD COUNT: 553

One year after Afghanistan took the life of her son, Maureen Eykelenboom wants to keep giving to that war-weary country -- this time in the form of money for a unique fund, doled out to needy Afghans by Canadian soldiers in Kandahar.

Ms. Eykelenboom's son -- Cpl. Andrew Eykelenboom, 23, a popular army medic known by his friends and fellow soldiers as Boomer -- was killed in August 2006 in a suicide bombing.

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While other families who have lost loved ones in Afghanistan have launched charitable works of their own, Ms. Eykelenboom said Boomer's Legacy is the first foundation whose funds will be dispersed directly by soldiers on the ground, based on the needs they see during their travels and patrols around Kandahar province.

The foundation's first fundraising dinner takes place next Sunday in Courtenay, B.C., not far from the town of Comox, where Ms. Eykelenboom lives. It's a \$100-a-plate night of food and entertainment, featuring Canada's chief of defence staff, Gen. Rick Hillier, as the guest of honour.

When Ms. Eykelenboom was establishing the foundation earlier this year, she wasn't sure how best to distribute its funds in Afghanistan. Before he died, her son had written letters and e-mails home about the desperate needs of the Afghan children he encountered.

His mother wanted to make sure the money she raised was effectively spent, to reflect the care -- not of Canada's government -- but of its ordinary soldiers.

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The fund is administered by a committee of soldiers at Canada's Provincial Reconstruction Team, the development and diplomacy arm of the military mission in Kandahar.

Ms. Eykelenboom said any Canadian soldier deployed to Kandahar can make a request that money from the trust fund be spent on a specific village or aid project in the area.

"So if the soldiers are patrolling in a certain village, and that village does not have proper drinking water, the soldiers can access funds to purchase purification tablets for the water system," said Ms. Eykelenboom. "Or if children at an Afghan orphanage have no shoes, troops can access funds for shoes." Ms. Eykelenboom also said her family is covering the operating costs of the Boomer's Legacy foundation, and that every cent raised by the charity will find its way to Afghanistan.

She also intends to go there herself next year.

"I'm not sure how yet," she said. "Hopefully, Gen. Hillier will help. But I intend to go, and if he tells me I can't go, I'll go on my own." Meanwhile, Ms. Eykelenboom is planning future fundraising events, including a series of music concerts across the country.

Ms. Eykelenboom said the passage of 12 months hasn't eased the pain of losing her youngest child in the war.

"It definitely does not go away," she said. "You learn to cope and move forward, but it's still one day at a time, one step at a time." Information on Boomer's Legacy, including how to donate, can be found online at www.boomerslegacy.ca

The terrorist hunter; By day, Shannen Rossmiller is a Montana mother of three. At night, she tracks terrorists on the web. It's lonely, nerve-wracking work. And a compulsion even she can't explain

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ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Bloomberg News, File / The trans-Alaskapipeline was the purported target of Michael Curtis Reynolds. He was convicted of terrorism in July 2007. ; Colour Photo: Michael Perez, Philadelphia Inquirer / Shannen Rossmiller walks to the federal courthouse in Scranton, Pa., where she would testify. ; Colour Photo: CBS News, MCT / Rossmiller's quarry: Michael Curtis Reynolds ; Colour Photo: Larry Beckner, Special to The Edmonton Journal / Shannen Rossmiller, a municipal judge, wife, and mother of three in small-town Montana, made it her personal quest to study the Arabic culture and language so she could pose online as a radical Islamist. Her moonlighting has brought down two suspects in the United States. ;

KEYWORDS: 0
BYLINE: Alfred Lubrano
SOURCE: The Philadelphia Inquirer
WORD COUNT: 3612

Michael Curtis Reynolds, a failure from Wilkes-Barre, Pa., leaves Room 205 of the Thunderbird Hotel in Pocatello, Idaho, in December 2005 and heads for a rest stop on a remote stretch of I-15.

His agenda for the day is to pick up a bag of money from al-Qaida so he can destroy America.

A belligerent drifter who once tried to blow up his parents, Reynolds, 47, is a regular in the Osama bin Laden Crew chat room, searching for jihadists to help him cripple the U.S. economy.

Reynolds has made contact with a self-described Islamic extremist who says he'll pay Reynolds \$40,000 for his scheme to blow up U.S. energy pipelines.

Hurricane Katrina taught Reynolds that disruption of oil hurts America.

And in that chaos, he believes, lies opportunity.

Shannen Rossmiller spends Sept. 11, 2001, frozen in front of the TV in her Montana home.

"Oh, my God," she tells her husband, Randy. "They're going to need thousands of body bags. This doesn't seem possible. It's so surreal."

Randy had never seen his wife so tense. "We can't do anything about it, Shannen," Randy says. "Just take a Jacuzzi or something."

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Rossmiller, a municipal judge in a small town, complies, but the hot water doesn't help. Still shaken, she steps out of the tub and slips. She lies on the cold, white tile, staring at the two towels on the rack, willing them to fall and cover her in case one of her three kids comes in. She can't get her legs to work.

Calling for help, she waits until Randy finally runs in and carries her upstairs. But it is agony. She has broken her pelvis.

Rossmiller spends the next six weeks in bed, becoming "radicalized." Fox News, MSNBC, CNN — they saturate her brain.

She asks Randy to go into Great Falls and buy her the books about radical Islam and the Middle East written by the experts she sees on the news shows.

For reasons she cannot articulate, Rossmiller immerses herself in all things Arabic, studying the culture and learning the language.

It's as if a powerful force has taken hold of her, compelling her to think about Sept. 11 and little else, save for the spasming pain.

"I can't figure it out," she thinks. "Is this post-traumatic stress? It's more than passion. It's anger. This is the ugliest, darkest thing I've ever seen."

Depressed and aching, Rossmiller reads Middle East Quarterly on the computer and wonders why people hate America.

She reorders her cheques to have them read, "9-11: We will never forget." She festoons her car with American flags.

"You're not the same woman I married," Randy says. Before Sept. 11, Rossmiller would laugh, watch Melrose Place. Now it's 24.

"You're right," Rossmiller says. "I'll never be the same."

R

Recovering from the fall, Rossmiller moves around the house on a walker. She is petite and blond, with green eyes and a warm smile. She projects a down-to-earth style, from her deferential politeness to her attire — flip-flops and jeans. If you didn't know she's a mom, a wheat farmer's daughter and a former cheerleader, you might guess.

But if you think that's all she is, you misread her entirely.

Breaking her pelvis is the first in a string of events that will lead Rossmiller, now 38, to become a highly valued al-Qaida hunter who works with the FBI in an extraordinary partnership to expose terrorists, domestic and foreign. Recently, the FBI publicly acknowledged her efforts.

But much of Rossmiller's work is considered confidential, and U.S. law-enforcement officials will not comment about it. Other law-enforcement officials say Rossmiller has received death threats, and they monitor her to try to keep her safe.

In 2001, though, Rossmiller is only beginning to understand how terrorism works. One of the first lessons she learns is that many Arab extremists connect on the web.

The terrorist hunter; By day, Shannen Rossmiller is a Montana mother of three. At night, she tracks 56 terrorists

With the help of a translation program, she reads the websites and postings in Arabic chat rooms. Slowly weeding out the pompous and the blow-hards, she homes in on radical Islamists who sound dangerous — though she learns to turn down the sound on the beheadings. This world of anger and hatred holds her in thrall. Rossmiller can't sleep much. Never could, really. So her post-Sept. 11 routine is to wake about 3 a.m. and monitor extremists.

Now moving around on a four-post cane, Rossmiller feels more capable, more daring. She wants to participate. Her plan is to break through the wall of anonymity the Internet provides and interact with the jihadists. She knows she can't communicate as a woman, let alone an American.

"Women in extremist cultures are lower than the family goat," she says. So Rossmiller invents a persona, a young radical bent on the destruction of the United States.

In early winter, she posts some rudimentary Arabic online, basic "Death to America" cheerleading. And waits.

No one bites.

"Come on, Shannen, you look like an idiot out there," she tells herself. "Get it right."

Rossmiller studied criminal law at the University of Montana at Missoula, then became a municipal judge in Montana, where sitting on the bench doesn't require a law degree.

She had a reputation for being tough, even fining her father for speeding.

One day on the bench, she has an epiphany: "The criminal mindset is like jihadi thinking. It makes sense.

The toughest people in court are in for assault, fuelled by drugs and alcohol. The jihadists are like those assailants, Rossmiller decides. Their intoxicant isn't crystal meth but fundamentalist Islam, a perversion of the Muslim religion.

Believing in the wisdom of the law, she locks up bad guys, then goes home and sleeps well. For a couple of hours.

It's 3 a.m., early May 2002. By now, she is continuing physical therapy, but she's done with the pain pills and the cane. The jihadists, though, have become central in her life.

"Go on, I dare you," she murmurs as she finds her way to a new website, The Arab Castle. "Death to America," she types in Arabic, a phrase now as familiar as "Good morning."

It has been eight months since Sept. 11, and Rossmiller is well on her way toward completing online Arabic courses from the Arab Academy in Cairo and from the State University of New York at Buffalo. She waits for a reply.

An answer comes quickly enough: "I wish someone would blow up the American base in Afghanistan," a person writes in Arabic.

"It would be great," another responds.

No one corrects her, which must mean Rossmiller has said it right, in the right spot. She's elated.

Having digested a clutch of Arab novels, Rossmiller uses the devices of fiction to invent characters she can be on the web. She must be specific and nuanced to be believed, she thinks, but one persona is not enough.

The terrorist hunter; By day, Shannen Rossmiller is a Montana mother of three. At night, she tracks 57 terrorists

Rossmiller begins to fill notebooks with detailed aspects of her made-up characters -- names, photos, occupations. Some are good at bomb-making. Others are facile with small weapons.

Soon Rossmiller has created about three dozen "people." She searches websites for obituaries with pictures, then alters the images so relatives wouldn't recognize them.

The photos are mostly for herself, to keep a picture in her head of whom she's supposed to be, a sense of her character. Once in a while, someone asks to see whom he's talking to, and Rossmiller can oblige.

She researches mosques in Jordan and Pakistan to learn their street locations and the names of their imams. This way, she can make authentic references during online chats.

After several months, she has developed quite a correspondence with dozens of people who seem to believe she is whoever she says she is.

Many of the men with whom she communicates seem to be uneducated and indigent, judging from their poor language and computer skills.

They don't have web access at home. So they crowd into Internet cafes to chat and bluster, Rossmiller learns by reading the Internet protocol addresses. Over time, she has become so precise with her computer sleuthing that she believes she can tell within a block in which cafe in Abu Dhabi, for example, they're gathered.

All these young men seem to know is the fanatical side of Islam, and they believe in martyrdom for the cause. Ultimately, they trust Rossmiller because they're convinced they're always interacting with people like themselves.

To her uncomfortable surprise, Rossmiller discovers that impersonating extremists is getting easier.

"That's a little scary," she says to herself. "What's inside me that lets me do this?"

"I have Stingers to sell," a Jordanian writes to Rossmiller in July 2002. He says he has gotten them from a source in Pakistan.

Rossmiller stares at the computer screen. She reads everything about the Mideast, and she knows from old news reports that the United States sent Stingers to Pakistan in 1987.

"You are an infidel undercover," Rossmiller berates the man, hurling one of the worst insults in radical Islam. "You have no missiles."

The man bites: "I do, I do" -- then types the serial numbers.

Rossmiller can't believe it. Excited, she goes on an FBI tip site and writes what just transpired.

Soon, an FBI agent for the Joint Terrorism Task Force in New Jersey calls, demanding to know how Rossmiller got such information. He keeps her on the phone, grilling her, she thinks, as if she's a terrorist.

On a frigid morning in November 2005, Rossmiller boots up her computer. It's 4:30 a.m., and she's awake. She pops open a Diet Coke.

Rossmiller takes a run through the Osama bin Laden Crew chat room to see what the jihadists are up to.

A posting jumps out at her like a mountain lion. Every e-mail here is in Arabic. This one's in English.

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Apparently, some Pennsylvanian is sitting in Thailand, of all places, chatting about a "real opportunity falling from the sky."

"If any real member of the OBL crew is reading these," Michael Curtis Reynolds writes, "do something besides ignoring them. E-mail me."

Reynolds, the Pennsylvania drifter who is looking for al-Qaida funding to help him blow up the trans-Alaska and transcontinental pipelines, is now on Rossmiller's radar.

Conspicuous as a barroom braggart, Reynolds is writing boldly — and in English — in the all-Arabic Osama bin Laden Crew chat room, making no pretense about his background or his mission: He's an American out to destroy his country.

Just like Ryan Anderson, Rossmiller says to herself, recalling another angry American, from 2003. Oh, please don't let him be another one like that.

The 2003 e-mail starts with a typical Arab greeting: Wa salaam alaykum. But the writer is National Guard tank Spec. Ryan Anderson, 27, of the 81st Armor Brigade at Fort Lewis in Washington state. An American.

He's about to be deployed to Iraq. Aside from the opening salutation, he is writing in English on the extremist website bravemuslims.com.

Rossmiller should be in bed, sleeping. But as usual, her racing brain compels her to rise for the radicals. She reads the Anderson e-mail. It's 4:54 a.m. on Nov. 2, 2003.

"Just curious," the e-mail continues. "Would there be any chance a brother who might be on the wrong side at the present could ... defect so to speak? I have been touched by the will of Allah ... (and) may be headed for a great mistake, and I may wish to correct that.... "

Fully alert, Rossmiller runs through her cast of jihadist characters. Which should she be? She decides on Abu Khadija, an Algerian extremist, at khadija1417@hotmail.com.

"Dear brother in Islam," Rossmiller/Khadija begins. "I call my brothers to do your Muslim duty with your brothers in jihad ... and kill all infidels coming united on fronts in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq."

Rossmiller throws in misspellings and bad English. What she has written works.

"I am due to enter the war zone soon," Anderson replies to Khadija. "Unfortunately, due to my position I will be bearing the arms of the enemy, thus putting not only my soul, but the souls of our brave brothers and sisters in peril. ... It may be best if I could arrange to meet in person with a contact once I am over there ... to ... show that I am a friend and willing to give my life for Allah's glorious will."

Happy to comply with Rossmiller's prompts, Anderson suggests that Khadija and Amir, Anderson's Arab alias, sometimes interact as "George" and "Andy," two old schoolmates from Washington State University, from which Anderson graduated in 2002 with a degree in military history.

Writing now as Andy, Anderson is breezy, but includes information about his coming deployment.

Writing as Amir, Anderson sounds serious and grandiose, with the air of a man very much above the frivolous preoccupations of American life. His heart is with Allah, his head in jihad. He believes his fellow American soldiers are "crude" and "immoral."

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As Christmas approaches, Anderson is Amir, gloomy and restless. It is a "badly perverted Crusader holiday," he writes.

Over the next weeks, Anderson's melancholy increases. "I am caught in the middle," he confides to Khadija. "Stay where I am, with the wrong side, and risk my eternal soul because I have fought with the Crusader armies, or take the dangerous path into the unknown and forsake people who are relying on me at home in the U.S. ... not to mention become a criminal in my homeland, never to return."

Oh, he so wants to be accepted by the extremists, Rossmiller sees.

Knowledgeable of the law, Rossmiller is careful not to entrap Anderson. She lets him set the agenda.

And sure enough, one day, Anderson tells Khadija how to disable U.S. M1A1 and M1A2 Abrams tanks, and how to kill their crews without destroying the tanks so they could remain useful to al-Qaida in Iraq.

My God, Rossmiller realizes, he's even telling me troop locations in Iraq. And all from his commander's computer!

On Christmas Day, Anderson has decided. "Let's do this," he writes with chilling simplicity. "It will be a fruitful endeavour for all involved."

"Are you prepared to stand behind the prophet when killing is necessary?" she asks him.

"Yes," he answers quickly. "It's right to kill."

Rossmiller alerts federal authorities, who arrest Anderson for treason. He is set for a court martial, and Rossmiller is summoned to testify.

As she packs for Fort Lewis and says goodbye to Randy and the kids, she has no premonition of the mess that will follow.

At the trial Rossmiller tells of a website that featured pictures of Osama bin Laden and a burning American flag. She explains how an American National Guardsman she'd met on that site wanted to give over U.S. tank secrets to al-Qaida.

And when her nearly full day on the witness stand is done, Shannen Rossmiller has demonstrated to a court martial jury of nine commissioned officers at Fort Lewis, Wash., how Anderson had, in an e-mail correspondence with her, pushed to get a terrorist to hear his plan, and to effect his betrayal.

Acting on Rossmiller's information, authorities arranged a sting that was recorded on hidden video. Anderson says to people he believes to be al-Qaida operatives: "It would be very easy to kill a (tank) driver, or the crew inside."

After deliberating 41/2 hours, the jury finds Anderson guilty of five counts of trying to help al-Qaida. He will be going to prison for life. Rossmiller has known this day was coming, but the severity of the verdict is still a shock.

Anderson's wife and mother weep in the courtroom. Sitting just a few feet away, Rossmiller watches the women break down, and sees Anderson's father, Bruce, put his hand on his daughter-in-law Erin's back to try to comfort her.

Then Rossmiller starts sobbing herself.

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My God, she thinks, what have I done? He's a man, not just some ghost on the Internet, she realizes. People love him. And I've ruined the lives of all of them. They have every reason to hate me.

Her brain is on fire, her stomach churns. But what if I'd left him alone? Wouldn't American soldiers have died?

Rossmiller returns to her hotel room and throws up.

Having ensnared Anderson in an exchange of 30 e-mail messages over four months, Rossmiller is seeing firsthand the reach and power of her late-night cybersleuthing.

It should be a day for champagne. But Rossmiller is reeling. And the bad news continues.

"The newspapers and TV stations started calling at 1:03 this afternoon," Randy informs his wife. "I happened to look at the clock."

By the end of the day, 45 news organizations have called. And about 45 more will ring in the next day.

Rossmiller is enraged.

Before the court martial began, Rossmiller had tried to persuade the army to preclude her from testifying in open court, so her identity could remain secret. The army said no.

Then she asked that her online pseudonym not be revealed. But somehow it gets into the media.

And suddenly terrorist cyberspace is apprised of the invented persona she used to communicate with Anderson. Shannen Rossmiller, a.k.a. khadija1417hotmail.com, has been outed.

Rossmiller and her husband think it's retribution for disagreements Rossmiller had with the army during the court martial.

Prosecutors for whom Rossmiller was testifying, she says, requested all the files she created in her terrorist hunt, tens of thousands of documents she says had nothing to do with Anderson. She refused. She can't say for certain — and army prosecutors won't discuss — whether this explains the release of her name.

Furious, Randy lashes out. "Now you live with the monster!" he tells her.

Soon enough, the monster bites.

A Turkish Muslim from Montreal phones Rossmiller's office. A clerk gets the call and tells Rossmiller that he says, "I get her."

It turns out that Rossmiller had been targeting the Montreal man — as she had Anderson and other extremists — in her guise as Khadija. And now he knows, and has her name and number.

Oh, God, Rossmiller thinks. My children!

I

It's November 2005 and Michael Curtis Reynolds, the loner from Pennsylvania, is driving out from Wilkes-Barre to a job at a semiconductor plant in Pocatello, Idaho.

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Along the way he notices something compelling amid the wide-open Western scenery: the Williams facility in Opal, Wyo., one of the three biggest natural gas plants in the U.S.

Apparently excited about his find, Reynolds e-mails Rossmiller, who he still believes is an al-Qaida terrorist.

Reynolds suggests blowing up gas well heads at Williams before destroying the Alaska pipeline, since it's easier to reach. Maybe the transcontinental pipeline could be next, he says.

Promising to lay out his updated plan in detail, Reynolds says he will provide shopping lists of bomb-making ingredients.

Rossmiller writes: "I suggest that you make details in a document and attach to e-mail so it is not intercepted. You may call me Hani."

Today, she's not herself, a Montana judge, wife and mother. She's Hani, an al-Qaida terrorist recruiter, a killer, and a hater of Americans.

"There's little time, due to how busy we all get during the holidays," Reynolds writes. "There's much shopping to do, travel to plan ... not to mention all the presents to wrap. What I need is to have my Christmas bonus..."

He's writing in code, Rossmiller thinks. This gives her chills. Reynolds is starting to worry Rossmiller. The plan, she says to herself, trying to compel him. Tell me the plan.

Then Reynolds spills it. He wants trucks filled with propane (Reynolds's "presents") driven into the Alaska pipeline, as well as into refineries and gas lines that criss-cross states.

Reynolds tells Hani that in the ensuing chaos of economic collapse, Americans will "trample Washington to recall troops" from Iraq, thus ending America's involvement there.

"The government, the environmentalists and the gas users will be at each others' throats," says Reynolds.

And I suppose anyone who dies in the bombings will just be collateral damage, Rossmiller thinks.

Sending Hani information about the pipeline, as well as a diagram of an Opal, Wyo., refinery in frightening detail, Reynolds convinces her that he is a man of action, not just words.

Rossmiller decides to reward his diligence. "Our leader the sheik is very much in liking this operation idea," Rossmiller/Hani writes back in halting English.

They negotiate a price, Reynolds's "Christmas bonus": \$40,000, to be left in a duffel bag at a deserted Idaho rest stop.

Originally, Reynolds, who has lived in various parts of the world, wants the money wired to a bank account in Austria. No way, Rossmiller/Hani says.

All terrorism is done in cash, Rossmiller says to herself as she writes to Reynolds. Don't you know that?

After the job is done, Reynolds says, he plans to "leave this accursed country forever. ... It isn't the land of the free but the home of the new dictators."

Coward, Rossmiller says to herself. Sadistic traitor.

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People like Reynolds keep Rossmiller up at night. People like Reynolds, Rossmiller believes, show that she can't let her guard down for a second.

After Thanksgiving, sale-savvy Christmas shoppers fill the aisles of the Pocatello Wal-Mart, with items like candy canes and DVD players on their lists.

Reynolds walks among them carrying a very different inventory: road flares, shotgun shells, speaker wire, batteries, superglue.

Noticing the items on the shelves, he then reports back to his al-Qaida operative on the web, really FBI special agent Mark Seyler, Rossmiller's contact at the bureau. On Nov. 9, Rossmiller had informed Seyler about Reynolds.

Reynolds tells Seyler what materials to buy at Wal-Mart, Radio Shack and other stores, how to make and place the bombs, how to escape — even which Motel 6 to stay in.

"Buy. Build. Leave," he writes. "My kind of operation."

Worried about consequences, he delineates the stakes: "If I am discovered, I could get life in prison, perhaps even execution as a traitor."

Reynolds and his online contact agree on a pickup point for the money: a picnic table at a rest area, off Idaho's I-15, called Hell's Half Acre. It gets the name from a nearby field of hardened lava that locals say looks like the moon.

The ground is covered with crystallized snow. The wind blows, and it's -12 C.

An FBI video camera hidden behind sagebrush shows the moustached, six-foot-three Reynolds in a bulky blue waistcoat, dark pants and black ski cap walk toward the spot where the black-and-red money bag is sitting. It's 12:47 p.m. on Dec. 5, 2005.

Reynolds bends over toward the bag, then turns quickly to his right, as though he hears footsteps in the crunchy snow.

An FBI SWAT team closes in, forces him on his belly, then handcuffs him.

In the 20-minute car ride to the Pocatello FBI office, Reynolds says he was merely checking to see the money was there. Then he was going to call a private security group called Northbridge to capture the al-Qaida terrorists he was communicating with.

"I was enticing them," he says.

"That story," an FBI agent tells Reynolds, "makes no sense."

She looks calm, at least. How could anyone in the courtroom know that a minute ago she was getting sick in the women's room?

Taking the stand in the trial of United States v. Michael Curtis Reynolds in Scranton, Rossmiller does her best to keep it together.

She avoids his eyes and ticks off the case against him — how he went online to enlist al-Qaida to take down America by blowing up pipelines.

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Back in 2005 when she was tracking Reynolds on the Net, she knew this day would come. But something about the way Reynolds is defending himself — saying that he was a terrorist hunter just like Rossmiller — upsets her more than she could have anticipated.

Comparing himself to me makes me feel dirty, disgusting, she thinks. It's like a personal attack.

That some guy willing to sell out his country for \$40,000 would say that he and she, a patriot who loves the law, are equals riles her endlessly.

She stewes on the plane ride back to Montana. At least during the trial the FBI finally acknowledged for the first time publicly that Rossmiller indeed works with them.

Things brighten even more when Rossmiller hears that the jury took little more than their lunch hour to find Reynolds guilty of terrorism on Friday, July 13, after a five-day trial.

Well, Rossmiller says to herself. That's another one locked away.

O

One day, Rossmiller's phone rings with an unlikely caller: Debra Burlingame, sister of Charles Burlingame, the pilot of American Airlines Flight 77, which was hijacked and flown into the Pentagon on Sept. 11.

"I just wanted you to know how deeply what you've done has moved me, and how much it means to me," Burlingame says to Rossmiller. Then she adds a question:

"Why do you do what you do?"

Flustered and honoured, Rossmiller pauses, then says: "I don't know. The people on 9/11, they're not part of my memories. But I still feel it. I just don't know why."

"God bless you," Burlingame tells her, before hanging up.

The why has always been tough for Rossmiller to explain — to her family, to curious outsiders, to herself.

"I'm afraid people think I'm anointing myself as a saviour or something," she tells friends. "But I can't give it a label.

"Who is there to understand the way my mind works?"

Certainly no one in Rossmiller's family. Not her best friend, Chris, or anyone else she knows.

Some who don't know Rossmiller believe she gets paid for the work. Except for reimbursement for expenses, Rossmiller has not accepted a dime from the FBI. Independent of spirit and will, Rossmiller does not want to be told what to do. Nor does she want to become part of a bureaucracy in which she needs permission and a memo to find terrorists.

Besides, Rossmiller is so far advanced in this work that federal authorities have come to her and taken notes on how she does it.

During a long session with the terrorists one night, as she finds herself once more exhorting others to do their duty against the crusader U.S. military, Rossmiller is hit with a kind of epiphany:

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Right now, I don't know what it's going to take to make me stop. Now, I need it. I definitely feed off of it.

So, yes, there is something inside that requires her to continue. But it has a cost.

"What I do is lonely sometimes," she says to herself. "There's no one to talk to to say, 'Oh, God, the terrorists were really nasty online today.' "

Three hundred million Americans saw the towers fall on Sept. 11.

As far as anyone knows, Shannen Rossmiller is the only private U.S. citizen who learned Arabic, lurked on websites, and helped capture terrorists, from 2001 until this very minute.

Even she can't clearly say why. But it certainly has made life difficult.

"All I know," Rossmiller says, "is that if I could go back to pre-Sept. 11 life, I would. I liked life then.

"I used to be happy."

Freed South Korean hostages face relief and anger back home; Critics blast evangelists for 'squandering national energy and money'

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ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Reuters / Freed South Korean Christianvolunteers, part of a group of 23 missionaries kidnapped in southeast Afghanistan in mid-July, arrive at the Incheon airport in Incheon, west of Seoul, on Sunday. ;

KEYWORDS: ARMAMENTS; FAMILY REUNIONS; HOSTAGES; ASYLUM

DATELINE: SEOUL, South Korea

BYLINE: CHOE SANG-HUN

SOURCE: New York Times

WORD COUNT: 380

SEOUL, South Korea – When 19 South Koreans return home on Sunday after six weeks in Taliban captivity, they will face a nation relieved that the hostage ordeal is finally over, but also increasingly angry at the Christians' decision to travel to Afghanistan despite government warnings.

Until now, criticism of the church volunteers was tempered by fears that highlighting the evangelical nature of their mission might threaten their lives. Now that they are free, a backlash is building, with people demanding an accounting of who is to blame for the crisis some feel damaged South Korea's reputation.

"I expect cannonballs of criticism flying at churches for causing such a disturbance, for squandering national energy and money," said the Rev. Kim Myung-hyuk, president of the Korea Evangelical Fellowship. "This is a good opportunity for Christian-bashing in a society that has been frowning upon churches."

The criticism of the hostages, and of missionary work in Islamic countries, has been especially vitriolic on the web, but newspapers' editorial pages have also expressed the feeling that the entire country has been, in a sense, held hostage since Taliban insurgents kidnapped 23 South Koreans on July 19. The nation was bombarded for weeks by frightening news media reports about repeated Taliban promises to kill everyone, and about their eventual execution of two male hostages. Two other hostages were released Aug. 13.

Critics seem especially outraged that their government was put in what they believe was a no-win situation, forced to enter talks with a terrorist group despite international criticism. Debate on that issue is likely to intensify now that the Taliban is alleging South Korea paid them more than \$20 million, which they said would be used for more suicide attacks, according to Reuters news agency. The Korean government has denied such a deal.

"How much national resources have been spent on these 23 crazy people?" said one typical posting in the popular Internet site called dcinside.com. "Proselytizing in an Islamic country? They prayed for their own death."

Shin Yong-gug, secretary-general of the non-profit group People's Association of Religion Critics, said: "Most consider this a man-made disaster sown by Korean churches' indiscriminate zeal to proselytize and their disregard for safety."

Dead soldier's family pledges to help Afghans; Friends of Cpl. Andrew Eykelenboom hope to make a difference by funding individual troops' initiatives

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PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Eykelenboom;
BYLINE: Richard Foot
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 505

One year after Afghanistan took the life of her son, Maureen Eykelenboom wants to keep giving to that war-weary country — this time in the form of money for a fund doled out to needy Afghans by Canadian soldiers in Kandahar.

Eykelenboom's son — Cpl. Andrew Eykelenboom, 23, a popular army medic known by his mates as Boomer — was killed in August 2006 by a suicide bomber.

After months of careful planning, the Eykelenboom family has launched what it calls Boomer's Legacy, a charitable foundation to raise money for Afghans living in the valleys and villages where Canadian troops operate.

While other families who have lost loved ones in Afghanistan have launched charitable works, Eykelenboom said Boomer's Legacy is the first foundation where funds will be dispersed directly by soldiers on the ground.

It will be left to those soldiers to determine where the money will go and will be based on the needs they see around Kandahar province.

When Eykelenboom was establishing the foundation earlier this year, she wasn't sure how best to distribute money in Afghanistan. Before he died, her son had written letters and e-mails home about the desperate needs of the Afghan children he encountered.

His mother wanted to make sure the money she raised was effectively spent, to reflect the care not of Canada's government, but of its soldiers.

"That was a little difficult," she said, "because I wanted to target the Kandahar area.

"In Kandahar there are very, very few non-governmental charities operating. I couldn't find one that was concrete enough." She then discovered the Assistance to Afghanistan Trust Fund.

The special fund was created by the military last year to administer direct aid donations by Canadian civilians.

The fund is administered by a committee of soldiers at Canada's Provincial Reconstruction Team, the development and diplomacy arm of the military mission in Kandahar.

Dead soldier's family pledges to help Afghans; Friends of Cpl. Andrew Eykelenboom hope to make a difference

Eykelenboom said any Canadian soldier deployed to Kandahar can make a request that money from the trust fund be spent on a specific village or aid project in the area.

"So if the soldiers are patrolling in a certain village, and that village does not have proper drinking water, the soldiers can access funds to purchase purification tablets for the water system," she said. "Or if children at an Afghan orphanage have no shoes, troops can access funds for shoes." Eykelenboom also said her family is covering the operating costs of the Boomer's Legacy foundation.

Every cent raised by the charity will find its way to Afghanistan and its people, she said.

She also intends to go there herself next year.

"I'm not sure how yet," she said.

Eykelenboom is planning future fundraising events, including a series of music concerts across the country.

There is a fundraising dinner B.C. next week.

Another grieving parent — Nova Scotian Jim Davis, whose son Cpl. Paul Davis died in an armoured car crash in Afghanistan last year — has also been enlisted to act as a trustee of the Boomer's Legacy foundation.

Eykelenboom said the passage of 12 months hasn't eased the pain of losing her youngest child in the war.

"It definitely does not go away," she said.

"You learn to cope and move forward, but it's still one day at a time, one step at a time." She said she's upset about the possibility of Canada leaving Kandahar, and angry that other NATO nations aren't doing more.

"I'd sure like to see more help," she said. "There should be more countries in there. They should just get in there and get the job done." Information on Boomer's Legacy, including how to donate, can be found at www.boomerslegacy.ca.

Secretive team playing deadly game with Taliban; Anti-bomb squad fights top threat to Canadian soldiers

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Andrew Mayeda, CanWest News Services / A member of Canada's counter-IED team in the Kevlar bomb suit worn to defuse improvised explosive devices. ;
KEYWORDS: WAR; BOMBINGS
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 260

Tucked away in a small compound at the sprawling NATO military base here, the handful of specialists who make up Canada's counter-IED team liken themselves to firefighters.

But they could just as easily be compared to the shadowy members of the JTF-2, Canada's secretive special-forces unit.

When reporters received a briefing this week on the basics of improvised explosive devices, Canadian counter-IED operators refused to be photographed or quoted by name. Some removed the name tags from their uniforms. Their secrecy is not unfounded.

Since the military moved the bulk of its troops to this volatile southern province of Afghanistan last year, improvised explosive devices have become the gravest threat to Canadian soldiers.

Canadian soldiers are now far more likely to be killed by a makeshift homemade bomb planted at the side of the road than a bullet from an AK-47. Of the 25 soldiers killed so far this year in Afghanistan, all but three have been killed by IEDs.

That has made counter-IED operators, the men and women called upon to defuse such devices, precious assets to the military. It has also turned them into high-value targets for the Taliban.

"They know if they can get us, we lose our ability to counter their number one weapon," said an operator who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Before Afghanistan, the Canadian military had little experience dealing with IEDs in a war-zone setting.

The military began to develop its bomb-disposal expertise around the time of the FLQ crisis of 1970, said the operator. At the time, Canadian soldiers were called upon to thwart bombings orchestrated by the Front de Liberation du Quebec, a radical separatist group.

Secretive team playing deadly game with Taliban; Anti-bomb squad fights top threat to Canadian soldiers

Over the three decades that followed, the military helped civilian law–enforcement agencies dispose of bombs used by biker gangs and other criminal elements.

Ex-hostages grateful for S. Korea's gift of life; \$20M ransom will fund more suicide attacks: Taliban

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DATELINE: ANYANG, South Korea
BYLINE: Jack Kim
SOURCE: Reuters
WORD COUNT: 416

Nineteen South Korean Christian volunteers held hostage by the Taliban in Afghanistan for six weeks returned home to an uncomfortable welcome on Sunday, thanking their government for winning their release.

A senior Taliban leader told Reuters Seoul had paid \$20 million US for their release. The South Korean government denies paying any ransom but has been criticized internationally for striking a deal through direct negotiations with the Taliban.

"We got more than \$20 million dollars from them (the Seoul government)," the Taliban 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.

A spokesman for the freed hostages said the group was sorry for the trouble that had been caused.

"We went to spread God's love and carry out his wishes. We regret all the trouble we gave to the people of South Korea and the government and we are grateful for being allowed to return to our families," freed hostage Lyu Kyung-sik said after arriving.

The hostages, with their heads bowed, looking sombre and some fighting back tears, stood behind Lyu as he made a brief statement at Incheon airport outside Seoul. He stood between framed pictures of two other hostages shot dead by the Taliban.

"Had it not been for you and your life-risking rescue operation, our Afghan missionary team would have lost our lives," said Lyu.

The six-week standoff gripped the country, leading thousands to join candlelight vigils praying for a safe return.

But many people harshly criticized the suburban Seoul Saemmul Church that dispatched the group for having a naive view of the world and putting their government in a bind.

Websites of the main Protestant groups and the country's largest Internet portals have been flooded with messages from thousands of people saying the group was to blame for ignoring numerous government warnings and making an ill-advised mission to an obvious danger spot.

The hostages were quickly taken to a hospital near Seoul where many collapsed into the arms of waiting relatives, who cheered when the group entered a reception room. A few of the group, overcome by emotion, had to be carried out of the room. They were then admitted for medical checks.

Ryu Haeng-sik, the husband of one of the hostages who cared for his two daughters while his wife was in captivity, said: "The kids loving having their mother back. After she was admitted a few minutes ago, they are already missing her again."

When asked if a ransom had been paid, Kim Man-bok, the head of South Korea's spy agency, said at the airport: "There was none at all."