

## CBC AWOL in Afghanistan

By PETER WORTHINGTON

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Earlier this month, CBC-TV ran a documentary by American filmmaker Scott Kesterson about the Princess Pats in Afghanistan fighting the Taliban, back in 2006.

There was nothing wrong with the documentary, which in some ways was as much about Kesterson as it was about the Pats. In fairness, Kesterson has quite a record as a war photographer -- though some respondents on the CBC blog weren't impressed, and wondered why an American was chronicling our part of the war.

In fact, according to the documentary, many Canadians are still confused about why we are in Afghanistan, and mistakenly think we are there in a peacekeeping role.

Kesterson who apparently was embedded with the Pats, leaves no doubt that it is "war" our guys are fighting, and admires the professionalism and efficiency they bring to soldiering. The Pats gave the Taliban a trouncing. (It was 2006, remember).

Why an American?

But the question still begs why the CBC has an American rather than a Canadian documenting what our troops are doing.

Garth Pritchard, a Calgary filmmaker and Canada's most experienced and respected documentary-maker of our military overseas, is one who is critical of the CBC.

He sent a letter to the CBC about the Kesterson at War documentary, which he hoped would appear of the CBC's blog, but somehow didn't make the cut. So I'll run parts of it here, and let Pritchard tell his own story.

He's been to Afghanistan six times and "produced, directed and shot hundreds of hours of footage about our Canadian troops and their role." "There is one absolute," says Pritchard. "Every time my footage or documentaries were offered to the CBC -- both to the National and the CBC's Documentary Unit (and specifically to Mark Starowicz), they were refused."

Pritchard is "appalled" that the National found that Canadians aren't fully aware of what our military has been doing in Afghanistan -- at war under NATO, not peacekeeping under the UN. He asks: "Where has the CBC been since 2001? If it is not the CBC's job to keep Canadians informed, then whose job is it? Obviously, the CBC has failed miserably, and now turns to an American documentary filmmaker to inform us -- with footage from 2006."

Pritchard recalls talking to Combat Engineer Sgt. Shawn Eades seven months ago in Kandahar. Eades wasn't surprised that the CBC rejected anything filmed by Pritchard, especially footage of Eades' men dismantling a Taliban bomb factory. Despite all the awards Pritchard's documentaries have earned, Eades wasn't surprised.

"What do you expect, Garth," said Eades. "They have no intention of telling our story. Didn't they refuse your documentary on friendly fire?"

Pritchard was the only one to film the "friendly fire" air attack on the Pats in 2002 that killed four and wounded eight. The CBC rejected Pritchard's I-was-there documentary, and later hired a Toronto filmmaker who'd never been to Afghanistan to do a one-hour documentary titled . . . wait for it . . . Friendly Fire.

Killed

A few days after Pritchard returned from Afghanistan, Sgt. Eades and his squad were killed in an explosion. Pritchard says he offered CBC free footage of Eades and the Combat Engineers, "and the incredible work they were doing."

Once again, the CBC refused his footage. "This time they took it to a new level," says Pritchard. "How do we know you are telling the truth?"

The CBC has done a poor job for Canada in its coverage of the Canadian military. As for Afghanistan, Pritchard asks: "Where has the CBC been?"

Certainly not with our soldiers in the field.

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