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## KAF: If it didn't exist, we'd have to invent it

*By Lieutenant-Colonel Kevin Horgan*

I recently read a news story that highlighted the luxuries of Kandahar Airfield (KAF). Most of it was actually true, although I doubt that McDonald's is on its way as reported. For a base in a conflict zone, KAF has a nice array of amenities: Tim Horton's and Pizza Hut certainly bring a semblance of home to this far-off land. And, of course, it gives forward-deployed soldiers a wonderful target for their envious griping.

KAF is more than an oasis of brewed coffee and hot pizza, however. Both as an airfield and a logistics hub, it is essential to mission success.

KAF handles the flow of personnel, equipment and supplies destined for operations in southern Afghanistan. It is the home of the aircraft that provide close air support to troops in contact with the enemy, and the helicopters that airlift injured personnel. The Role 3 hospital, critical in saving soldiers' lives, is here. If it didn't exist, we'd have to invent it.

Just as KAF supports operations throughout southern Afghanistan, KAF itself needs direction and support. That task falls to a NATO organization called COMKAF (Commander, Kandahar Airfield), and COMKAF Headquarters functions as the great base's headquarters and operations centre. Canada provides 25 percent of COMKAF HQ staff, the people who manage the base's day-to-day operations and force protection capabilities.

The Canadian element of COMKAF HQ is generated by 1 Canadian Air Division in Winnipeg, and its members come from Wings across the CF. Individual and collective training is conducted by the 17 Wing Readiness Flight.

CF positions in COMKAF run the gamut of skill sets. We provide movement experts and cargo handlers, meteorological forecasters and observers, and Military Police for flight-line security and force protection. The Flight Safety Officer is Canadian, as are some of the planners who manage the in-flow and basing of personnel from the 17 nations that use KAF. The Canadian Base Engineer and Deputy J6 (signals and electronics) deal with most of KAF's engineering challenges, and the Canadian-heavy J1 and J8 sections manage personnel, financial, contract and supply issues. Canadian support to J4 Logistics and J4 Engineering helps manage these diverse areas. The Base Operations Centre has both Canadian leadership and a Canadian workforce to deal with the many day-to-day challenges of operating a very busy airfield — KAF handles up to 10,000 air movements a month.

With all its luxuries, KAF has its down side. It's hot, it's dusty and it stinks, and of course it's far away from our loved ones.

But the up side is significant. Every day here is an adventure. The flight line is a constant air show, with military and civilian aircraft of every shape and size. We get to do the important and challenging work of supporting the 17 national contingents, with their countless agencies and contractors, that conduct the complex operations required in this area of responsibility. One minute you're in a meeting planning the expansion of KAF, and the next you're on the airfield watching Slovakian engineers clear Russian mines to support that expansion.

KAF is not only unique and interesting, it is also critical to the conduct of operations in southern Afghanistan. COMKAF HQ and the CF members who work there are essential to base operations.

As for the luxuries, well, any fool can be uncomfortable in the field.



A huge dust storm rolls in behind meteorological technician Cpl Greg Greenway of 14 Wing Greenwood, a member of the Canadian element of COMKAF Headquarters.



From right: Meteorological technicians Sgt Ray Banks and Cpl Greg Greenway release a weather balloon, part of their daily routine as members of the Base Operations section of COMKAF Headquarters. Sgt Banks is a reservist from 17 Wing Winnipeg, and Cpl Greenway comes from 14 Wing Greenwood.

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