

Legion Magazine

Defence Today

The Life [And Death] Of Erin Doyle

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PHOTO: ADAM DAY

Master Corporal Erin Doyle on patrol near Haji Beach, Afghanistan, in April 2008.

“He died pulling the trigger. He died screaming into the face of the enemy.”

The Canadian army has a policy on facial hair. Moustaches are OK, but beards are pretty much forbidden without medical cause and even then growing anything longer than the allowed one inch is a sure way to bring a crusty sergeant major down on your own personal head.

It is called a ‘jacking.’ And it’s what happens in the Canadian Forces when a superior officer has some kind of issue with you, or with your beard.

Master Corporal Erin Doyle was not worried about getting jacked. He was, in fact, legendarily unworried about getting jacked. He may have been, to be honest, the least jacking-averse soldier in the entire CF.

Seriously, he seemed to like getting jacked. It didn’t really matter what the rank was doing the jacking, either, from sergeant to colonel, Doyle was as unworried about rank as he was about getting in trouble. I met Doyle, who was with the 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry, a couple of times in Panjwai in April 2008 and he made a singular—sort of scary—impression.

Doyle was a tattooed and wildly-bearded giant. He had the unmistakable swagger of a man for whom solid rules were mere suggestions. He had a way of leaning into a stare that could make anyone nervous. Hell, he didn’t just look at you, he estimated you. It was a look that seemed to leave everyone, even officers, feeling a little less than certain. It was an interesting effect, and I’m not sure where he learned it, some kind of finishing school for outlaws maybe.

The first time I saw him, he was quite literally presiding over a meeting between two sets of patrol leaders—one captain and one sergeant—during a long and arduous hike in the deep outback of western Panjwai.



PHOTO: COURTESY NICOLE DOYLE
Doyle in Afghanistan in 2008.

The captain and sergeant would make plans, then kind of quietly look up at Doyle. With a headshake and a grunt, he'd torpedo their idea and they'd go back to the map. This went on for half an hour or more, as gunfire and explosions rippled overhead. With his rank obscured by his gear—his battle rattle—I assumed he was a warrant officer or maybe the company sergeant major, based solely on the deference and respect he received from the other soldiers, many of whom I knew to be cynics of the first order.

When the planning conference broke up, I hurried to get up to where Doyle was, figuring I was better off standing near him than anywhere else. "This is bullshit," Doyle growled at me as the two patrols finally moved off in the direction of the police substation at Zangabad, where he was then stationed. "Somebody thinks it's a live-fire patrol exercise out here—on a two-way range."

He had a point. There was patrolling with intent to achieve a tactical purpose and then there was walking in circles in brain-shrinking heat simply to prolong the patrol to its preordained length. This was now clearly the latter. "What's that patch mean?" I asked him as we walked, pointing at the symbol on his shoulder that featured the text '20%'.

Doyle explained that during a pre-deployment speech, the sergeant major complained that 100 per cent of the problems in their unit were caused by 20 per cent of the soldiers. He said it in a much more profane way than that, however.

Some guys, I thought, would hear that speech and silently tick off the troublemakers in his mind, some would smile inside knowing they may well belong to that club, some would embrace it by smiling openly and calling themselves a 20 per center, and then some, probably a very few, maybe only one, would go out and get 20 per cent patches made and have his whole platoon wear them into combat.

That last guy—that was Doyle.

But there was way more to him than just being a badass among badasses, as I learned the second time I met him a few days later. Not only was he the most impossibly polite outlaw you could imagine, being friendly to even outcast journalists, but the respect with which everyone treated him turned out to have an incredibly strong and undeniable basis in fact.

On that day in late April, Doyle and his section had patrolled several hours down to Police Substation Haji—the place where he was eventually killed—in order to take over for another section that was being pulled out of the field.



PHOTO: COURTESY NICOLE DOYLE
Doyle in Afghanistan in 2008.

The enemy, nothing if not superbly unpredictable, chose to attack at the moment when more than 200 coalition soldiers were converging on Haji. In the resultant chaos, Doyle and his section were ordered to load the withdrawing platoon's massive pile of equipment onto a truck while the rest of the convoy lay pretty much belly up in a sandstorm on the Arghandab riverbed.

Now, we've all moved heavy boxes before and it's not exactly fun. Doyle was already sick—with Afghan hanta virus, as he called it—but that didn't stop him. He jumped up and moved boxes with his troops. And he moved them way past the point where any normal

person would have stopped. He moved them until he nearly died.

No, really. I'm not just saying that. He moved boxes until he passed out and his vital signs got so bad the medic came over the radio saying he was unsure if Doyle would live and requested an emergency nine-liner medevac back to Kandahar Airfield.

No one who knew Doyle is surprised by this story. Troops were in danger so he pushed past all of the body's normal warning signs because a job had to be done. It's just what it was.

Doyle made it back to Kandahar and with the help of a tasty intravenous buffet, he survived the day. He would not survive the war.

Numberless Are the Dead

Numbers are numbers, they tell you something but it's probably nothing vital. There is no code hidden in the numbers, nothing to tell you whether the war was just or if the man was loved or what life now feels like for the people he left behind.

Nonetheless, maybe big digits do tell some kind of story too, so here are some rough numbers. Doyle was the 90th Canadian soldier to die in Afghanistan since 2002. And he was approximately the 2,100th Canadian to die in the service of his country since the end of the Second World War, and very nearly the 118,000th soldier to have his name listed in the official Books of Remembrance since Canada first sent armed men overseas in 1884 to fight alongside the British in Sudan.

Beyond the numbers stands the other story. It's Doyle's story. And even more, it is the story of his wife Nicole, his friends and comrades and the unimaginable cost of losing someone—one man—at war. These are the people whose world changed when Doyle died. And it's not now a better world.



PHOTO: COURTESY NICOLE DOYLE
Doyle with M.Cpl. Matt Yaschuk.

The news comes quickly

The way they still speak about him in the present tense is one of the things you'll notice if you talk to his friends.

Master Corporal Matt Yaschuk, one of Doyle's best friends, is not the kind of guy who normally sits down for interviews with journalists, you can tell just by looking at him.

But yet, on a freezing cold December day in Edmonton, he sat patiently, waiting for me, wearing a blue plaid jacket and a toque, his hugely muscled arms protectively cuddling a little Tim Hortons coffee.

Yaschuk was in the 3rd Bn. with Doyle, same company, and had been for years. The two of them had been through a lot together. From Bosnia in 2000 to Kabul in 2004, they'd seen pretty much everything.

Yaschuk was at Forward Operating Base Sperwan Ghar, sleeping in on that early morning in August when Doyle's section of about 10

guys—at that time holding the Haji base all on their own—came under attack.

Normally when a soldier is killed, the news is spread out to the unit all at once, as soon as possible. But in this case, because everybody knew Doyle and Yaschuk were so tight, he was told first. “A warrant officer came in and woke me up,” said Yaschuk. “He just asked me to come with him. And I knew there was a contact going on because I could hear the guns firing, but there’s always contact, rounds going out all the time, so you get used to that.”

The warrant officer took Yaschuk outside and told him Doyle was dead, and that the fight was still going on. “He told me that Erin was killed. And then I felt like shit,” said Yaschuk sternly, with something that seemed stronger than reluctance. “I just lost one of my best friends and there’s not much you could do. He’s out there and you’re in here. You wish that you were out there with him.”

Yaschuk was among the first of Doyle’s close friends and family to hear of his death. Many others still hadn’t heard, like Nicole, his wife of 11 years, or his daughter Zarine or his many friends or the rest of Canada, even.

It didn’t take long for Yaschuk’s higher-ups to tell him he would be going back to Kandahar with Doyle in order to follow his coffin up the ramp of the Hercules and escort his body back to Canada. “I was happy I was going with him. It’s the biggest honour I’ve ever had in my life,” said Yaschuk, looking down at his coffee. “But at the same time, I was pretty broken.”

Yaschuk and Doyle rode on the Hercules back to Camp Mirage, a nearby Canadian base, before transferring to a Canadian Airbus for the flight back to Trenton.

He remembers sitting quietly those many long hours, separated from Doyle by a draped curtain.

Waiting for Doyle and Yaschuk on the tarmac in Trenton alongside Nicole and Zarine were two other members of the tight 3rd Bn. crew, M.Cpl. Gerry Fraser and M.Cpl. Kevin Nanson, both of whom had been on this tour with Doyle only to be seriously injured and evacuated to Canada.

Not incidentally, many who witnessed the scene believe Doyle probably saved Nanson’s life after the improvised explosive device strike in which Nanson was so badly injured, but more on that later.

“It was emotional,” remembered Yaschuk. “Very emotional. Especially with Gerry being hurt.”

Fraser had been repatriated after suffering major injuries in a vehicle accident in Kandahar City.



PHOTO: COURTESY NICOLE DOYLE
Kandahar, 2002.

The three—Yaschuk, Nanson and Fraser—remember standing together on the tarmac in Trenton when all of a sudden it seemed like their endlessly mischievous friend Doyle was still with them.

See, Doyle used to love pranks. Whether it was duct-taping rotten yogurt to a guy's locker or sending truly illicit emails from a friend's accidentally left-open account, Doyle could always be counted on to cause trouble.

So, when Chief of Defence Staff General Walter Natynczyk approached the trio and said, quietly, conspiratorially, “Would it mean anything at all if I said to you ‘Hey ——!’”

What Natynczyk said will forever remain a mystery to all but those who knew Doyle, but it may be enough to say that it was Erin's favourite politically incorrect greeting.

The trio just shook their heads and laughed. It was as if Doyle had gotten them yet again, in the most unlikely way possible.

What had actually happened was that Natynczyk had asked Nicole if there was anything at all he could do for her, and she figured the

boys could use a good laugh, so she put him up to it.

Nicole and Erin

Nicole Doyle doesn't let many people call her Nick, and if you try for 'Nicky' you'd better have some sort of armour-plating system to protect your softer organs from attack.

Nicole is in the forces too. Currently a corporal in the air force, she's been to Afghanistan before and she's going back again.

Beyond that, she seems to share something way down inside with Erin: a love of mischief with a hard edge, impatience with weakness and a strict policy of never ever abiding fools.



PHOTO: COURTESY NICOLE DOYLE

Nicole and Erin in Bosnia.

During my second interview with Nicole, I asked her a question that I'd already asked a few days earlier, Nicole glanced over, then down at the ground. "You suck," she said quietly. "You already know that answer."

She was right, of course.

The issue of when Nicole and Erin first met isn't all that easy to resolve, but they were definitely married on April 25, 1997. (I know this for sure because I asked this question twice.)

When Nicole was young, she moved out near the Westsyde area of Kamloops, B.C.

She remembers her school bus would stop on Dairy Road and pickup this red-headed kid who was always acting boisterous and wild. Later, Nicole remembers watching the same redheaded kid play football at Westsyde Secondary School.

After school was done, Nicole joined the Rocky Mountain Rangers reserve unit in Kamloops and it was there she and Erin, well, got married. “We went to one party and shortly after there was another party,” said Nicole. “There was no linking up or nothing, it was just hanging out.

“We just went to this party together. We weren’t together or anything. We were both leaning against the lockers and someone came up and congratulated us on getting engaged. We’re just like, ‘Thanks!’

“But we just looked at each other and said, ‘What was that about?’ Apparently we’re engaged. And then we both just looked at each other and he goes, ‘Well, why don’t we?’ And I was like, ‘OK.’”

And just like that, without even a kiss, they were engaged.

“Then the next day we went to The Fox and Hounds,” she said, referring to a local pub in Kamloops. “That’s where we kissed before we got married. So it was checked out. And that weekend we went and got married,” Nicole added with a laugh. “He was that good, he was that nice and I just saw that he was awesome. He had a huge heart. He was awesome.”

After having rings tattooed on their fingers, the two were married in a brief ceremony at a commissionaire’s house before having to run off to a military exercise in Kelowna, where, as Nicole said, the government paid for a hotel room—their honeymoon.

“Maybe it was kind of weird, but it was pretty cool,” she said of their brief engagement, smiling. “I just knew. It’s not something stupid, like no big production happens. It’s just something about a person: you know.



PHOTO: COURTESY NICOLE DOYLE
Doyle befriends a dog in Kandahar in 2008.

“We’d worked together so we had conversations about stuff and we both matched on a lot—and what we differed on was good enough. You’re not supposed to be the same. You’re supposed to be your own individual. He was such a redneck guy, NASCAR kind of guy and he just killed me, he was pretty funny.

“He was such a boy-boy man and half the shit he did, I was just shaking my head laughing. I was like, ‘I can’t believe you thought you’d get away with that.’ And he’d just look at me and go, ‘Love me, I’m cute.’ I’d say, ‘No, you’re not.’

“That was his big thing, ‘Love me, I’m cute.’ No, but I think I’ll keep you anyway.

“No one we knew thought it would last, but we made it right until the day he died. Eleven years.”

Perhaps not surprisingly, Erin's sense of mischief spread into his sense of romance. Nicole remembers going on exercises only to come back to find that "he'd have gone into my tent space to gun tape a rose to my pillow or something. So every time I came back there was something like a teddy bear. And I'd get mad because it was dark and I'd say, 'Who the hell threw their shit on my bed?' And it wasn't that, it was a present from him to me. I'm just like, 'Oh, my, God,' because I wasn't really the girly kind of person."

Erin was 21 when they married and Nicole was 26. Her daughter Zarine was five.

Over the next few years Erin would become a fixture in Zarine's life. Whether it was when Zarine accidentally lost one eyebrow to an unfortunate over-plucking incident and Erin did what had to be done, with his beard and all his tattoos, going out to shop for appropriate makeup, or later when Zarine would bring home boyfriends and Erin would be waiting in the garage to check them out.

"He was a great gift to me," said Nicole. "That's for sure. I didn't deserve him that much. He was really good. He was perfect. That's it. He was."

She stopped talking. There was a pause.

"It's OK. I just miss him a lot."

Nicole, in her preternatural calm, seems to see it all from some great height, from what is perhaps a distance necessary now, for her to get by. "I just need to get an everyday life going. It's hard enough getting up to go to work and stuff and to not want to just sit at home. It takes quite a bit. But I've never been one to be like that, and a lot of people know me because of that. But it's hard to keep that going when you've got people always standing in front of you kind of pitying you. Because, like Erin, I have no problem telling you: 'OK, fuck off—enough already.' That's the way I am. But it's hard to move on."

And as for the men who killed Doyle, Nicole is dealing with that, too.

"It's just what happens in war. It's not personal," she said, but added with a twinkle in her eye. "But there's karma, I'm sure of it. And they'll get theirs. They'll get what's coming to them."

Doyle's friends, the soldiers, mostly agree, but with a small twist.

"It's war. It's not personal," said M.Cpl. Bruce Otto, who spent time with Doyle in Bosnia. "That said, if I ran into those three guys on the street," he continued, very quietly, as if he didn't want anyone to hear, "I'd kill them all on sight."



PHOTO: COURTESY NICOLE DOYLE
Doyle test fires an AK-47 in Kabul in 2004.

Too Far From Civility

Most of the time in the military a person's rank means a lot, pretty much everything. The whole system is rigged so that a certain kind of soldier gets promoted, and it often works, but there's a fine line between obedience and passiveness.

In some places, like out in the heavy clench of a tiny Canadian outpost in Panjwai, for example, it seems like a different kind of order takes over.

Out there in the mess, conducting what one officer called doctorate-level counter-insurgency operations in a place no longer ruled by the kind of civility senior officers were feeling back at Kandahar Airfield, guys like Doyle rose to a prominence all out of whack with their actual rank.

Captain Reg McMichael was Doyle's platoon commander during the tour. McMichael is a full half-decade younger than Doyle (and many inches shorter) and he recalls that, "as a commander you want guys like Doyle because there are soldiers that you trust and there are soldiers that you lead. He was a soldier I trusted, so I often found myself not deferring, but I found myself seeking his guidance on things that a captain wouldn't normally seek guidance from a master corporal on.

"I trusted his perspective on what was going on. I trusted that there would be no bullshit. I trusted that he wouldn't lie. I trusted that he didn't care what I thought of what he said—that he was just going to tell me the honest information. What he told you was exactly what he thought. You knew where you stood based solely on what he would say. There were no games."

Now, that's not to say that McMichael and Doyle always got along perfectly. Doyle, being Doyle, loved to screw with those in authority until they managed to earn his respect.

McMichael remembers, quite clearly, the first time he met Doyle, when he took command of the platoon as a lieutenant.

As McMichael says, he'd already seen Doyle's picture on the regiment website and knew he was a handful, but he wasn't expecting the welcome he got. "I walked into the platoon office and he was sitting there. He looked up at me and said, 'get the fuck out of here.'

"So I did."

McMichael then sought some advice from another officer, who told him to go back in and sort Doyle out.

"So I walked back into the office and Doyle said, 'I told you to fuck off.'

"And I said, 'go fuck yourself!' And that's how it started."

"He was a pretty big paradox," said McMichael. "You look at him and see the huge bushy beard, which definitely provoked people, and right on, you know, the big tattooed biker guy who doesn't really fit into the norm of the clean-cropped, clean-shaven young soldier that we generally stamp up on posters, but nobody could really argue with how competent he was.

"It was weird because he would go from the rough, cursing, angry, Viking barbarian to the quiet, mannered, polite ambassador of Canadian foreign policy in a ravaged land. And I don't know, it's funny, but it's that big dichotomy of soldiers that we want them to be capable of so much, yet crammed into the gentleman. Though with Doyle the gentleman was a bit harder to find sometimes, that's the way he was.



PHOTO: COURTESY NICOLE DOYLE

Younger days spent with his train set.

“He had this really like mischievous smirk on all the time, kind of like that knowing, ha, ha, ha sort of deal. Like he knew a joke you didn’t. And you wanted to know the joke. But he always would do that even when rounds were coming in—I remember distinctly him standing in these shitty shorts that he had on, up on the tower, shooting, and he’s looking back, and he’s like, ‘Hey, can you see over the wall, boss?’ while the rounds are hitting the other side of the wall. And I’m like, ‘You’re a dick,’ and he’s like, ‘I can get you a platform if you want.’ It was always that kind of stuff.

“And if I didn’t handle it well, he would say I was spinning. He always used to do that to me. ‘Hey, you look like you’re a little stressed right now. Are you allowed to get stressed?’ It was funny because it turned into this whole thing, like, ‘I have to look totally disassociated from what’s going on so that Erin doesn’t make fun of me.’ As if that was more upsetting than actually getting shot at, which is weird.”

The Viking Goes Priority Echo

McMichael was in the operations room at Sperwan Ghar listening as Doyle’s section fought off a concerted insurgent attack out at substation Haji.

He listened as the section’s sergeant gave battle reports over the radio, as artillery was called in, as bombers were called in, and then he listened in horror as another call came in. Men had been hit. There was someone wounded. A nine-liner medevac was called in priority Alpha, which meant it was urgent. Then another was called in priority Echo, which meant, well, dead.

They don’t use names on the radio, so they had to wait for the identifying Zap numbers to follow. Everybody in the room gasped as they heard, “R69194106” crackle through the speaker.

It was Doyle, and McMichael simply couldn’t believe it.

A few hours later, and a full world away, Nicole was waiting for Erin to get on the Internet for her goodnight chat session. He didn’t show up on time. “It was weird because the time wasn’t right—midnight had passed and normally that’s when he has time to talk to me,” Nicole remembered.

“I’m used to him not meeting the timings, it doesn’t always match up, but this one felt weird. And then the phone rang at 1:30 in the morning. I was just like, ‘That’s not right.’

“I answered the phone and it was the (battalion) commanding officer and he said, ‘Is this Nicole Doyle, Mrs. Nicole Doyle?’ I said, ‘Yes.’

“He says, ‘We need to come to your house.’

“I said, ‘What happened?’

“I said, ‘Is he alive or is he dead?’

“And he said, ‘We need to come to your house, we can’t tell you over the phone.’”

Nicole asked them where they were and they told her they were five minutes down the road. She went out the front door and looked down the road and they were parked alongside a block away. Then their headlights came on and they drove up to her house.

“And I went in the house and they came in. I just looked at the CO and I said, ‘Is he alive or dead?’ And he said, ‘I’m sorry.’

“And I said, ‘Was it quick? What happened?’”

He told her it was quick.

“Everything just goes through your head. Just insane. It was just like it was so complete. I don’t know how to explain it. It was unbelievable for a bit, and then it was like, knowing the life, I just thought, ‘Well, it has to be true. They wouldn’t be standing here.’”

Then Nicole started making phone calls.

Stories From The Field

There are many reasons to become a soldier. Some probably do it for the adventure, some maybe for the money, and some because they don’t have anything better to do.

But for some guys, it seems like they have no choice, or rather that they had no choice. Whether they fit in there or not, whether they do it right or not, they are soldiers because somewhere a long time ago they decided that’s who they were. They are committed to the idea, you could say. Doyle seems to have decided to become a soldier sometime around the time he was born. Or at least that’s the conclusion you could come to if you saw his childhood collection of playing cards which, aside from a few topless girls, were primarily the rare, but quite cool, Desert Storm cards commemorating the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

While Doyle may have questioned anything, or everything, he also knew where the questions had to stop and action had to start.

Early on in the tour, he came upon a scene just near the Zangabad base where his friend M.Cpl. Kevin Nanson had been badly injured in an IED strike and was currently laying still inside the damaged Nyala patrol vehicle.

Doyle waited as long as he could, but things were happening too slowly. He sprung into action, taking control of the scene, getting Nanson help and calling in a medevac.

For his part, Nanson remembers lying on the ground, looking up at Doyle, who’d been called over to calm the wounded man by one of the medics.

Nanson remembers seeing the sun come through Doyle’s beard. Nanson tried to speak to his friend, but his teeth were blown out and his lungs were filling with blood.

Doyle wanted to reassure his buddy, so he punched him in the chest and told him he’d be all right.

“Normally I wouldn’t have minded,” said Nanson, smiling. “But my back was broken at the time, so...”

Despite the extra pain, Nanson has nothing but unending admiration for his friend and is now trying to start a Christmas charity in his name in order to, as he says, somehow thank him for saving his life.

Doyle lived for his guys. That is what everyone said about him. He would have done anything for friends like Nanson, Yaschuk or Fraser, but, equally, he would have done anything for the young privates and corporals under his command.

When Doyle came home on leave in June he was in bad shape. Nicole had never seen him like this. “He was tired. He told me he had been diagnosed with typhoid. I guess he was misdiagnosed at first and jacked up for being dehydrated and then a few days later he got told something else,” said Nicole.

“He said he was extremely tired. He’s like, ‘I just want to come home. I’m done.’ When he was on leave I surprised him with a hot tub because I knew he was tired, I knew he needed to be spoiled. That’s when he went and said, ‘I don’t want to go back, but I have to. I’m not happy.’ That’s when I asked him if he wanted me to go to the padre, to step in for him. He said, ‘No.’ I was like, ‘OK.’”

The End

Back in Afghanistan and back out at Haji, things had not gotten any easier for McMichael, Doyle, and all the men.

Through July and into August they were in contact almost every day. When I was at Haji in April, it was held by about 25 Canadians and a whole bunch of Afghan National Police. Now it was being held by about 10 guys total.

Unable to mount effective clearance patrols to keep the enemy back, they knew it was only a matter of time until the enemy came for them. And come they did. The first rounds hit the sandbagged walls of the base in the very early hours of the morning. Doyle led the charge to man the heavy C6 machine-gun in the southernmost guard tower.

Doyle—who had the rarest talent of always appearing to have a good time, who seemingly had the idea that life is some kind of fierce party—stuck with his guns until the end.

But it was almost like the enemy knew exactly where he would be. Three rockets fired from point-blank range slammed into the tower and Doyle died that day. “When he got killed we all said ‘Well, if he had to die, that’s the way he wanted to die,’” said McMichael, choking back tears. “He died pulling the trigger. He died screaming into the face of the enemy. He died doing what every soldier wants to do. If he had to go, that’s how he’d want to go, defying the enemy to the last.

“He stood against it though, you know what I mean? How many guys do you know have actually stood against evil people?” asked McMichael, gently. “He paid the ultimate sacrifice for it, but didn’t he give the rest of us hope in doing that?”

It was Aug. 11, 2008. Doyle was 32.

EPILOGUE: The Cost

Many of Doyle’s friends had themselves tattooed in memoriam, but they didn’t want to tell me about the tattoos. And they didn’t, in fact. I only learned about it later.

Beyond that, as McMichael said, the loss is really “not quantifiable.”

“We were stunned. I think a lot of us are still stunned. As for me, I literally can’t picture the fact that he’s not somewhere. You just expect to see him.”

For Nicole, well, as her friends say, she’s tough. But it’s no easy road.

“Erin even told me, ‘Just get it done and move on. Don’t sit and dwell on it,’” said Nicole, recalling a conversation she had about the possibility of his death. “I just told him, ‘You have no idea how hard it would be if I had to deal with this. None.’”

“And I did really have a hard time and I still have my bad days but I never have been one to lie down and be kicked around. This is very hard for me because he’s my best friend but I’m not one to stop living because of it.

“I have him down the road anytime I need to go see him. I know he didn’t want me to dwell on it. It’s just going to take time to get past all that. I’ve always got him around. I know he’s always there.

“But the most insane thing that bothers me is having him referred to as a number. Cities of men were lost in the previous wars and they’re still trying to figure out...who certain guys were and until someone can list off the thousands of guys that died in the last two World Wars, they have no right to keep saying that.

“I hate that with all my heart. He wasn’t the 90th. He was Master Corporal Erin Melvin Doyle. He was a very good man and that’s the way I want him remembered. Not as a number.”

Erin Melvin Doyle

Born: March 20, 1976, in Maple Ridge, B.C. Grew up in Kamloops.

Enlisted: May 21, 1998.

Favourite activities: restoring old trucks and cars, shovelling neighbour’s sidewalks, playing pranks on friends and others.

Probable reason he was able to grow his beard so long: Doyle played Santa every year at the PPCLI Christmas party.

Gyms now named after him: two, one at 3 Battalion, PPCLI and another at 1 Bn., PPCLI. There was a third in Zangabad, but that base has been torn down.

He was scared of: heights, bees (he was allergic) and pretty much nothing else.

Surviving Family: Kathleen (mother), Melvin (father), Sean (brother), Barb Loucks (step-mother), Bob Mitchell (step-father) and Keari (half-sister).

His dreams for the future included: becoming a Search and Rescue technician, before retiring with Nicole to Valemount, B.C., where he wanted to pump gas.

Buried: St. Emile Cemetery, Legal, Alta., Aug. 21, 2008.

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