

## THE AFGHAN MISSION

## Canada's face in Afghanistan doesn't fully show its diversity



CHRISTIE BLATCHFORD  
[CBLATCHFORD@GLOBEANDMAIL.COM](mailto:CBLATCHFORD@GLOBEANDMAIL.COM)  
JANUARY 1, 2009

It's a simple enough question, posed in a note this week from a reader who asked it first in a recent letter to the editor of the Vancouver Sun, which chose not to run it.

"It was heartbreaking in the Dec. 6 Sun to see the faces - so young, once so alive - of the 100 Canadians who have given their lives for their country, fighting in Afghanistan," he wrote.

"If a picture of 100 Canadians was taken today, you could count on it being politically correct, with our multiculturalism front and centre. But our multiculturalism was nowhere to be seen in the photos of our fallen.

"Does anybody have an answer for this?"

### More Stories

- [Quiz 2008](#)
- [Will 2009 bring quicker thinking?](#)
- [What we said last year](#)



Since he first wrote the letter, six more Canadians have died in service to Canada, the bodies of the three most recent casualties - Private Michael Freeman of the 3rd Battalion, the Royal Canadian Regiment; Sergeant Gregory John Kruse, from 2 Combat Engineer Regiment, and Warrant Officer Ga etan Roberge, a Van Doo attached to the 2nd Battalion, The Irish Regiment of Canada - arriving back in Canada only two days ago.

These three have much in common with their fellow fallen. They were killed, as so many others have been, by an improvised explosive device, or IED. They were young; the average age of the Canadian soldier killed in Kandahar is 28.6 years.

And they were white men, as were all but five of the 106 Canadian soldiers who have died in Afghanistan - the exceptions (though I suspect they might have quarrelled with such a distinction and may not have "self-identified" as such) Trooper Michael Hayakaze, a Japanese-Canadian; WO Hani Massouh, who was Egyptian by birth though raised in Canada and an experienced veteran of the Canadian Forces; two black Canadians, Pte. Mark Graham and Corporal Ainsworth Dyer, and one woman, Captain Nichola Goddard.

So back to my reader's observation, right on the money, that virtually any other sampling of 100 Canadians - certainly any government poster and almost any advertisement - would include black, brown, aboriginal and female faces in ostensible mirror image of how they occur in the population at large, and his question about the lack of same among the Canadian war dead, or, as he put it in his note to me, why "a certain segment of our population is doing the heavy lifting?"

Part of the answer, and this is what I wrote the reader, is that it usually takes new immigrants - and as the 2006 census reports, fully 75 per cent of the immigrants who arrived in Canada between 2001 and 2006 belonged to a visible minority group - a couple of generations before soldiering is seen as a respectable career and/or a couple of generations before immigrant children feel liberated enough to defy their parents' wishes. Many Canadian immigrants hail from countries where the military and policing are carried out by thugs in uniform; it takes time for a family to understand that in this country, soldiering is an honourable profession.

Certainly, the military has attempted to increase representation by women, visible minorities and aboriginal people and has set itself noble goals - recruiting objectives of 28 per cent, 9 per cent and 3 per cent respectively so as to achieve a fix - which it then fails to reach. The most recent information I can find (and it may be that I am merely inept at searching the National Defence website) dates to 2000, and shows that over all, women make up about 15 per cent of Forces members, visible minorities and aboriginal Canadians less than 5 per cent each. The site is chock-a-block with stern reprimands that the "snail-like pace toward equitable representation" must be remedied.

But among all the colour-coded charts I saw, one hints at what I think is the more accurate answer. This shows that among reserve units, visible minority and female representation is almost 10 and 20 per cent respectively. That also accords with my anecdotal observation that the Toronto reserve units really reflect the city's diversity, particularly among army cadets, where, as I recall it from seeing the 48th Highlanders on parade, there are more black and brown faces than white.

And that's where the 2006 Statistics Canada census data really tell the tale.

Yes, Canada is a country of immigrants. Yes, the visible minority population is five-million-plus and growing fast. Yes, Statscan predicts that if current trends continue, visible minorities will account for about one-fifth of the total population by 2017. Yadda, yadda, yadda.

But take the province of Ontario, for instance, which has 2,476,565 visible-minority citizens. Almost half of them - 46 per cent - are in Toronto. The other 1.5 million or so folks are spread out across the enormous province, mostly in urban areas. In Peterborough, which has lost two native sons to Afghanistan, the visible minority population is 2.4 per cent. In Sarnia, it is about 3.4 per cent.

It's much the same in British Columbia, where for the first time in the 2006 census, visible minorities passed the one million mark, accounting for almost a quarter of the population of the province - the highest percentage for any province or territory.

But guess what? Almost 87 per cent of those visible minorities live in one urban area - Vancouver.

What I think this really means, and how it goes some distance to explaining the white maleness of Canadian casualties, is what a soldier friend said when I posed to him my reader's question: "While Canada has a good-sized immigrant population," he said, "it is not nearly as vast as people like to let the CBC delude them into thinking ... I think the military is a fairly solid representation of the actual multicultural Canada.

"It's sort of like the difference between the French Resistance of romantic memory and the actual, substantially smaller French Resistance."

In other words, this divide is less one about white and non-white faces. It is rather - as with many of the other divides in the country - an urban-rural or a city-small town one. I would have guessed, for instance, that the sons of Atlantic Canada accounted for more than its share of the dead, yet the greatest number of the fallen, by far, come from Ontario - 32 of them, only two of whom were Toronto boys. It is the small towns of Ontario - from Keswick, Kenora, Hamilton, Napanee, Orangeville, Niagara Falls - which have suffered so grievously.

Our vision of our country's makeup is skewed, no doubt bolstered by years of ethnically unbalanced government propaganda and advertising posters. It turns out our fallen sons, and one daughter, reflect Canada as, outside the major cities, she remains.

And they have really only one ethnicity, as my soldier pal says - they want to serve.

© Copyright 2008 CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc. All Rights Reserved.

**CTVglobemedia**

globeandmail.com and The Globe and Mail are divisions of CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc., 444 Front St. W., Toronto, ON Canada M5V 2S9  
Phillip Crawley, Publisher