

Table of Contents

<u>Going Out.....</u>	1
<u>Troops want support; Quebec-based soldiers on Afghan mission can't fathom antiwar sentiments at home.....</u>	13
<u>Taliban officials want guarantee of safety for any talks with South Korean diplomats.....</u>	15
<u>Report; on the Harper Conservatives – the last six months; This report card evaluates the last six months of the Conservatives' performance in Ottawa. The mark in the brackets is the mark awarded after their first year. On balance, they earned a lower mark this time. This is John H. Redekop's third report on the Conservatives.....</u>	17
<u>Army MD under fire for article.....</u>	20
<u>Soldier's return home prompts son's arrival; Baby born just hours after Amherst native returns from Afghanistan.....</u>	21
<u>Air strikes target Taliban; Dozens killed or wounded in southern Afghanistan.....</u>	23
<u>Canada's Afghan mission 'misinterpreted'; Quebec-based troops in Afghanistan can't fathom anti-war sentiment back home.....</u>	25
<u>Troops can't fathom antiwar sentiment.....</u>	27
<u>Letters to the editor Ex-soldier issues invitation to weekend peace protest.....</u>	29
<u>Welcome home; In our view: Troops are back and families now begin the adjustment to every day life.....</u>	32
<u>Anti-war sentiment astounds soldiers.....</u>	34
<u>Mother: "I just wish I had seen it first"; Article about Stellarton soldier's final few minutes upsets family.....</u>	35
<u>U.S. kills 3 Taliban leaders; Boy, civilians among wounded in air strike, officials say.....</u>	38
<u>In defence of Afghanistan; Quebec forces dismayed, disheartened by province's opposition to mission.....</u>	40
<u>Quebec-based troops can't fathom antiwar sentiment.....</u>	42
<u>Afghanistan is a mission of honour.....</u>	43
<u>A positive presence in Afghanistan.....</u>	44
<u>Quebec-based troops despair antiwar sentiment.....</u>	45

Table of Contents

<u>U.S. air strikes hit Taliban gathering.....</u>	47
<u>Several dozen soldiers back home after six-month tour of Afghanistan.....</u>	48
<u>'Disaster' in Afghan garden with cold beer; The importance of keeping visas current and devoid of exit stamps in place where bribes work 99.5% of the time.....</u>	50
<u>Freedom tags mean home's days away.....</u>	52
<u>U.S. air strike targets Taliban public execution gathering.....</u>	54
<u>Amnesty International tells Taliban to free South Korean hostages.....</u>	55
<u>Canadian doctor under fire for writing about N.S. soldier's death.....</u>	57
<u>Afghan-Cda-Soldiers.....</u>	60
<u>Afghan-Attack.....</u>	61
<u>INDEX:Defence, International, Politics.....</u>	62
<u>Officials check reports of civilian bombing deaths.....</u>	63
<u>'Freedom tags' say tour of duty ending; Their rotation finished, Canadians are excited about coming home.....</u>	64
<u>Army sings a different tune.....</u>	66
<u>S. Korea tells Taliban it has limited influence.....</u>	67
<u>Home only days away for Afghan vets.....</u>	69
<u>S. Korea, Taliban fail to agree on site for talks; Afghan doctors refused access to surviving hostages..</u>	71
<u>Homeward bound; Soldiers of Hotel Company can hardly believe they will soon see loved ones.....</u>	73
<u>Even bribe goes awry for jinxed scribe.....</u>	75
<u>'Should know better' Van Doos irked by anti-war sentiment.....</u>	77
<u>U.S. waiting may lead to new al-Qaida attack Trouble is brewing for the U.S. in Pakistan.....</u>	79
<u>Quebec troops can't fathom antiwar feelings.....</u>	81
<u>Afghanistan Incidents.....</u>	82

Table of Contents

<u>Van Doos sound off on critics of mission.....</u>	83
<u>Air strikes target Taliban But locals claim civilians hit.....</u>	84
<u>Quebec regiment wants support.....</u>	86
<u>U.S.-led air strikes kill three militants.....</u>	87
<u>Taliban seeks UN safety.....</u>	88
<u>THE AFGHAN MISSION Doctor's gory tale angers soldier's family Military investigates published account of dying moments.....</u>	89
<u>THE AFGHAN MISSION: CANADIAN FORCES: 'THEY LOOK AT US LIKE DIMWITS' Vandoos puzzled by anti-war sentiment of fellow Quebecers.....</u>	92
<u>AFGHANISTAN Strikes kill Taliban officials, general says.....</u>	94
<u>THE AFGHAN MISSION: CANADIAN FORCES A tough trek begins for the Vandoos Paired with Afghan police officers, Quebec's historic regiment makes its first trip into hostile territory to take on the Taliban threat.....</u>	96
<u>PAKISTAN: BENAZIR BHUTTO'S RETURN Wishing on a star It'll take more than the former civilian prime minister to ward off the country's extremists.....</u>	98
<u>HOSTAGES IN AFGHANISTAN Out of their minds for God.....</u>	101
<u>... and in Afghanistan.....</u>	103
<u>HOSTAGES IN AFGHANISTAN No Taliban 'flexibility'.....</u>	104
<u>Foreign war threatens our domestic unity; Quebec and the Rest of Canada are deeply split over Canada's involvement in the war in Afghanistan.....</u>	106
<u>Air strike kills dozens of Taliban; Many civilians feared dead at execution gathering.....</u>	108
<u>Chilling out in Cyprus; Soldiers decompress after Afghan tour.....</u>	110
<u>Perogy Cat ships out to Afghanistan; Comic created by Victoria artist. Book aims to entertain Canadian troops.....</u>	112
<u>Doctor's article too graphic.....</u>	114
<u>Antiwar sentiment in Quebec dogs soldiers in the field.....</u>	115
<u>Troops glad to go home.....</u>	117

Table of Contents

<u>Hostage negotiations can only go so far, S. Korea tells Taliban.....</u>	118
<u>Battle-hardened troops excited to head home; Members of the Hotel Company are being rotated out of Afghanistan after six months of increasing Canadian deaths, writes Andrew Mayeda.....</u>	119
<u>Still waiting to leave Kabul; Where's A Crooked Cop When You Need Him?.....</u>	122
<u>S. KOREA: OUR HANDS ARE TIED; Hostage Crisis; 'A Limit' To What Government Can Do For 21 Captives.....</u>	124
<u>Ottawa bomb control firms merge; Security; \$650-Million Deal.....</u>	126

Going Out

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CONCERTS

Free Concerts in Andrew Haydon Park: As the Poets Affirm: 2 p.m. Sunday, Nepean Concert Band, 7:30 p.m. Wednesday. Carling Avenue at Acres Road.

4th Annual Riverside Jam, Riverside Park, Carleton Place: Featured performers The Road Hammers and John Conlee, Saturday, George Canyon, Sunday, and many more. Schedule and camping, 613-253-5257 or www.riversidejam.com.

Gilles Girard(Classels): A trip down memory land, 1:30 p.m. matinée Wednesday to Aug. 17 at Casino du Lac-Leamy box office or Admission Network, 1-800-361-4595. Tickets \$20.

Perth Citizen Band: 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Band Stand behind Perth Town Hall, Perth. Bring a lawn chair. Free.

Joint Concert: Band of the Ceremonial Guard and the North Irish Territorial Army Band, 6:30 p.m. Thursday at the Canadian War Museum, 1 Vimy Place. Free.

Louis Mercier: French Canadian music and stories, 1-2 p.m. Thursday at Kiwanis Park, 395 Lévis St. at Lafontaine. Rain date Aug. 10. For children and youth. Free.

THEATRE

Theatre Under the Stars: A Curious Mishap by Carlo Goldoni, presented by Odyssey Theatre, 8:30 p.m. to Aug. 26, 3 p.m. Sunday matinées in Strathcona Park, Laurier Avenue east at Range Road. Tickets \$23, \$19 seniors/students, \$9 children 12 and under. Matinées half price. 613-232-8407.

Bedtime Stories: By Norm Foster, 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. Saturday, Sunday at Upper Canada Playhouse, Morrisburg. Tickets at the box office 613-543-3713.

Dramamuse: Experience History: Interactive plays presented by the Canadian Museum of Civilization, 100 Laurier St., Hull: Of Rum and Water, by Jean Herbiet, 4:30 and 6 p.m. Thursdays; 1:30 and 3 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays to Sept. 1; A Taste of the Wildcat, by Ben Nind, 11 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 3 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday, to Aug. 16. Free with museum admission. 819-776-7000.

Fat Pig: By Neil LaBute, presented by Breathing Time Productions, 8 p.m. Saturday and Tuesday to Saturday, Aug. 11 at the University of Ottawa's Studio Léonard Beaulnes, 135 Séraphin Marion. Tickets \$15, \$12 students/seniors, pass-the-hat night Thursday, tickets on Aug. 7 are two for one. Tickets at 613-565-2107.

Flower Power: Multimedia show, a total musical and visual immersion, 8 p.m. to Sept. 8 at Casino du Lac-Leamy in Gatineau Tickets at the box office or Admission Network, 1-800-361-4595.

Fort Wellington National Historic Site, 370 Vankoughnet St., Prescott: The Trial of John Dale, 8 p.m. Thursdays in July and August. One-hour candle-lit performance features music, muskets and mayhem. Reserve at 613-925-2896.

Here on the Flight Path: By Norm Foster, presented by BarnDoor Productions, 8 p.m. Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday and Aug. 12 at Perth's Studio Theatre, 63 Gore St. E. Perth. Tickets \$17 reserved or \$20 at the door. Students \$12. 613-267-1884.

It Runs in the Family: By Ray Cooney, Thursday to Sept. 2, 8 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 2 p.m. Wednesdays, Saturdays at Upper Canada Playhouse in Morrisburg. Tickets at 613-543-3713.

Scarlett's Dinner Theatre: Presents The Velvet Dolls Revue, 8 p.m. Thursdays in the Velvet Room, \$25, three-course dinner, \$22; Deadly, Desperate Housewives, 7 p.m. Saturday at Scarlett's is at 62 York St. (above Fat Tuesdays) Cost is \$25 for show, three-course dinner available from \$22. Reserve at 613-850-9700.

St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival: Summer of Love: alternate performances of A Midsummer Night's Dream and Romeo and Juliet, to Saturday, Aug. 11 in the amphitheatre on the bank of the St. Lawrence River in Prescott, tickets and schedules stlawrenceshakespeare.ca or 613-925-5788.

Theatre on the Veranda: Take a tour of this former Prime Ministers residence, have tea on the veranda and watch history come to life, 1 and 3 p.m. Sundays through August at Laurier House National Historic Site, 335 Laurier Ave. East (at Chapel St) Sandy Hill. Reserve at 613-992-8142. ASL interpretation of shows and tour provided for the Deaf.

COMEDY

Yuk Yuk's Comedy Club, 88 Albert St.: Aaron Berg and Tony Krolo, The Naughty & Nice Show, Saturday; New Talent Showcase, 8:30 p.m. Wednesday; Laurie Elliott and Kristeen Von Hagen, Thursday to Saturday, Aug. 11. Reserve at 613-236-5233.

AUDITIONS

Kiwanis Idol Auditions: Singing contest, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday, Sunday, Monday, semi-finals Sept. 1, finals Sunday Sept. 2 at Ottawa City Hall. For ages 13 to 19. \$20 cash entry fee. www.kiwanisidol.org .

SPECIAL SCREENINGS

Cine-Parc Templeton Drive-in, 1779 Maloney Blvd., Gatineau: Harry Potter et l'ordre du Phénix (g), Danny Ocean (13+) and Hairspray (g), 1480 (13+), Saturday to Tuesday at dusk. 819-663-0915.

Templeton Drive In, 1779 Maloney Blvd., Gatineau: The Bourne Ultimatum, Evan Almighty and Transformers (French version), Shrek Le Troisième, to Tuesday. 819-663-0915.

LIVE MUSIC-ROCK

Barrymore's, 323 Bank St.: Twelve34, Scarlet Fever and The Hoolie Snatch, Saturday, \$15 advance.

Bassline Station, 2557 Baseline Rd.: Musicians Without Borders, 9:30 p.m. Friday, live CD to be recorded.

Bourbon Street Music Hall, 2557 Baseline at Greenbank: Trevor Finlay, 9 p.m. Tuesdays.

Zaphod Beeblebrox, 27 York St.: Roz Bell, Thursday.

LIVE MUSIC–BLUES–WORLD–FOLK

Auberge Héritage Restaurant, 2607 Montreal Rd., Cumberland: Live music by Jean–Pierre Henley, 7 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays.

Avant–Garde Bar, 135 1/2 Besserer St.: My Tiny Circus, Saturday; Ottawa Jazz Collective open jam, Tuesday; Brian Downey Jazz, Wednesday; Ottawa International Connection, Wednesday; Marc Victor, Friday.

The Bay Street Bistro, Black Bear Pub, 160 Bay St. at Albert: Denis Turbide, 7 p.m. Saturday.

Blacksheep Inn, 753 Riverside St., Wakefield.: Craig Cardiff, Creature, Peter Krief, 9 p.m. Saturday; The Rizdales, Casey Comeau, 9 p.m. Friday.

The Brig British Pub, 501 Hazeldean Rd., Kanata: Karaoke by Dog and Pony, 9 p.m. Thursdays.

The British Hotel, 71 Principal St., Aylmer: Karaoke with Vanylou, 3:30 p.m.–1 a.m. Sundays; DJ spins Thursdays to Saturdays.

Charlies Pub and Grill, 308 Palladium Dr., Kanata: Karaoke Night, 9 p.m. Thursdays.

Daniel O'Connell's Pub, 1211 Wellington St.: Open stage, Saturdays; Irish traditional music session, 9 p.m. Thursdays.

Duffy's Tavern, 6 Lennox Rd., Richmond: Karaoke, Thursdays.

Harry McLeans Pub, 111 St. Lawrence St., Merrickville: Terry Tufts, 9:30 p.m. Saturday.

Irene's Pub, 885 Bank St.: That's The Spirit, CD release party with guests The Polytones, 8:30 p.m. Saturday. \$5 at the door; The Soiree, Soft Disaster and Poorfolk, Friday.

Lieutenant's Pump, 361 Elgin St.: Acoustic series, 9:30 p.m. Sundays.

Main Street Pub, 1408 Main St., Stittsville: Karaoke, Fridays.

The Manx Pub, 370 Elgin St.: Male Nurse, Sunday.

The Old Mill at Ashton, 113 Old Mill Rd., Ashton: Open stage with Jaan Kolk and friends, 2–4 p.m. Sundays.

Pendradon Pub, 1490 Merivale Rd.: Karaoke, Thursdays.

Rainbow Bistro, 76 Murray St.: Open rock jam with Erthjuice, 3–7 p.m., The Mighty Popo, 9:30 p.m.

Rasputin's Folk Cafe, 696 Bronson Ave.: Closed to Monday; jamalong, with Peter Conroy, Tuesday; Ben Suresd & Kevin Grant, Friday.

The Royal Oak, 188 Bank St.: Guy Del Villano and friends, 3–7 p.m. Sundays.

Red Canoe Cafe, Wilno Station Inn: Kirby, Yates and Mazurek, Saturday; Rev. Ken Ramsden and Fiddlin Zeke, Friday and Saturday, Aug. 11.

The Roxy, 292 Elgin St.: DJ Jamie C, Fridays; Ebony and Ivory Soundcrew, Saturdays.

Sonny's Restaurant, 1119 Baxter Rd.: Sing and dance with A-Sharp, 9 p.m. Saturdays.

South Side Bar & Grill, 1670 Heron Rd. (Heron Gate Mall): Sing and dance with A-Sharp, 9 p.m. Fridays.

Tucson's, 2440 Bank St. at Hunt Club: Terry Gillespie, Friday.

LIVE MUSIC-JAZZ

The Baldachin Inn, 111 St. Lawrence, Merrickville: Terry Tufts, Saturday.

Cafe Paradiso, 199 Bank St.: Elise and friends, 8 p.m. Saturday.

Café Nostalgica, 603 Cumberland St.: Yves Laroche and friends, 9 p.m. Wednesdays, No cover.

Chez Lucien, 137 Murray St. at Dalhousie: Jazz Sundays with the Hugh O'Connor Duo, 4-7 p.m. Sundays.

Fiddleheads Bar and Grill, 53 Herriott St., Perth: Clay Young, piano, Art Katona, trombone, noon-3 p.m. Sunday.

Fresco's, 354 Elgin St.: Jeff Rogers and Kelly Craig, Thursdays.

Grillman's Restaurant, Highway 16 and Colonnade Rd.: The Grillman Hot Jazz Trio, 6-9 p.m. Fridays.

The Royal Oak, 1981 St. Joseph Blvd: Nev J, 7 p.m. Saturday.

The Royal Oak II Pub, 161 Laurier Ave. E.: Rick Knowles, 2 p.m. Saturday.

Vineyards Wine Bar and Bistro, 54 York St.: Mike Rud Duo, Sunday; Bill Gobby Duo, Tuesday; Massie and Johnson Duo, Wednesday.

LIVE MUSIC-COUNTRY

Le Bar Spectacle La Maison, 836 St. Louis, Gatineau: Gary Fairburn and Unwound, 9 p.m. Saturdays.

Barrhaven Legion, 3023 Cedarview Rd.: Terry McCann, 7 p.m. Friday.

Eastview Legion, 294 Cyr Ave.: Terry McCann Saturday, 7:30-11:30 p.m., 4-8 p.m. Sunday.

Vanier Grill, 159 Montreal Rd.: Chris McCann open jam 7 p.m. Sundays.

LIVE MUSIC-LOUNGES

The Aloha Room, 323 Bank St.: Rock n' Roll and Country with DJ Billy, 10 p.m. Saturdays.

Banco, 1 Casino Blvd., Gatineau: Saxophonist 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Sundays.

The Collection and Bar 56, 56 Byward St.: Martini and Manicure Mondays; DJ Joe Juarez, Tuesdays; DJ

Dusty, Wednesdays; DJ Illo, Thursdays; DJ Craig Hooper, Fridays; KJ Jim Reilly, Saturdays, DJ Adam White, Sundays.

Frescocielo, 354 Elgin St. (upstairs): Slow grooves, rhythm and blues, 9 p.m. Thursdays; Dee and Lil-Sis, Urban jazz and classic R&B, 9:30 p.m. Fridays; Maya and friends, classic and contemporary soul and R&B, 10 p.m. Saturdays.

Friday's Roast Beef House and Piano Parlour, 150 Elgin St.: Noel at the piano, 8 p.m. Tuesdays to Saturdays.

Full House Restaurant, 337 Somerset St. W.: Robert Clarot, 8:30 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays.

Le Baccara (3rd level), Casino du Lac Leamy, 1 boulevard du Casino, Gatineau: Classic harp nightly from 7–11 p.m.

Mooney's Bay Bistro, 731 Ridgewood Ave. Elyssa and Lucas Haneman, 6:30–9:30 p.m. Saturday.

Myranda Restaurant, 2440 St. Joseph Blvd.: Auréle LeCompte, piano, Saturdays.

Shanghai Restaurant, 651 Somerset St. W.: Shanghai Hi-Fi, 9 p.m. Thursdays.

Thirsty Toad Lounge, 1344 Bank St.: Miller's Groove, DJ Music Master, Ras Lee & weekly special guests, Thursdays. 613–738–8623.

Villa Lucia Steak House, 3430 Carling Ave.: Robin Haydon on piano and Pablo Juarez on drums, 7–11 p.m. Wednesdays, Thursdays; Amigo Band with Luis and Pablo, and Emily Vinett, 8 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays. 613–829–6801.

DANCE CLUBS

Babylon, 317 Bank St.: Punk Rawk with DJs Mike and Murielle, Wednesdays; Ready, steady with DJs Cam and Brodie, Thursdays; Progressive techno with international DJs and residents S4 and Quake, Fridays; Dance music alternative style with DJ Simon, Saturdays; R&B with old-school hip hop, Sundays.

Barrymore's, 323 Bank St.: Retro '80's with DJs JP & Ellen, 8 p.m. Sundays; Retro '90's with DJs Cowboy & Indian, 8 p.m. Thursdays; New Music Fridays with DJs Cowboy and Indian, 8 p.m. Fridays.

Bulldog Pub, 380 Elgin St.: Retro '80s Gender Bender with DJ Chemical Cam, Thursdays; The best music in town with DJ Chemical Cam, Fridays, Saturdays.

The Cornerstone Bar and Grill, 92 Clarence St.: DJ's, Fridays, Saturdays.

Balcony Bar and Lounge, 360 Elgin St.: Hip hop and house with Dj Flip and DJ DV8, Thursdays; Hip hop and Top 40 with DJ DV8, Fridays; Hip hop and techno with DJ DV8, Saturdays.

The Great Canadian Cabin, 95 York St.: DJ's Spanky Todd and Chris play a variety of new and oldschool favourites, Thursdays to Saturdays.

Heaven Nightclub, 400a Dalhousie St: Hip-Hop party with DJ Illo and guests, Thursdays; International world class DJs; Fridays; Martin Villeneuve, Saturdays.

Maxwell's Bistro, 340 Elgin St.: DJ and dance floor, 8 p.m. Thursdays to Saturdays.

Ottawa English Country Dance Club, John G Mlacak Centre, 2500 Campeau Dr.: 7:30 p.m. Fridays.
Experience and partners not necessary.

Paraiso, 300 Preston St.(upstairs): Salsa, merengue, bacchata, all Latin, Fridays, Saturdays.

Suite 34, 34 Clarence St.: DJ Wet Willy Electric Ballroom, Saturdays.

Swing Dance Night: The Ottawa Swing Dance Society, 8:30 p.m. One-hour lesson included. Fridays, 151 Chapel St. \$5.

Tantra Night Club, 212 Sparks St.: Quattro Rouge with resident DJs MistaSho, Richniques, Mes, BoJangles, Fridays.

Whiskey Bar, 112 York St.: DJ's Best of '80s Rock DJ Grime, Thursdays; Best of '80s, '90s Rock, Fridays; DJ Spanky, '70s, '80s, '90s Dance DJ Tommy Segin, Saturdays.

Whiskey West, 1280 Baseline Rd.: DJ's Thursdays to Saturdays.

Zaphod Beeblebrox, 27 York St.: The Electric Ballroom with DJs Simon & Tim, Saturdays; Ice Cream Sundays with DJ Lady MsMyrrh; Manic Mondays with DJs Tim and Matt; Industrial Strength Tuesdays with DJs Leslie & Jairus; PopScene with DJ Emmett, Wednesdays; Full Flavour with DJ Simon, Thursdays; The Electric Ballroom with DJs Stef and Fiver, Fridays.

LITERARY EVENTS

Reading: British author BA Payne Jones reads from her novel, Dreamdome Slave and conducts a workshop for 10–13 years olds, 2–3:30 p.m. Saturday at Books on Beechwood, RSVP 613–742–5030.

Canadian War Museum Book Club: Hands-on Technology series: Using Sound to See, 10 a.m.–4 p.m. Saturday to Friday, free with admission; Discuss the latest books on military history with their authors: Thursday at 6 p.m. Serge Durfinger, Fighting From Home: The Second World War in Verdun, Quebec, 6 p.m. Thursday in Atelier B of the museum, 1 Vimy Place. \$10 or \$5 members includes wine and cheese. 819–776–8600.

SINGLES

Active Singles Group: Meets 6:30 p.m. Mondays at Malone's, Dow's Lake Pavilion. 613–235–6337.

At Eight: For single professional people over 50 to meet for good conversation and fine dining.
www.ateight.biz

Le Cercle Amical Tremblay: 8 p.m. Saturday at Centre Pauline Charron, 164 Jeanne Mance. Proper dress. Andre 819–663–5610 or Bernadette. 613–744–1648.

Cercle d'amitié Jonathan: For French-speaking, 45-plus singles, non-smoking. Sunday breakfast served until 10:30 a.m. at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull. 613–746–2204.

Magic Encounters Dances: Single's Dance, every Sunday night for 30+ at 270 Marier Ave. 819–246–3363.

The New Friendship Singles Club: Dance 8:30 p.m.–12:30 a.m. Fridays with door prizes at 1000 Byron Ave. close to Woodroffe Avenue and Richmond Road. 613–729–3631.

One Parent Families Association: Friendship group for single parents (custody not required) meets on the fourth Thursday of every month at Dempsey Community Centre, 1895 Russell Rd. Ongoing adult and family activities. 613-834-1308.

Ottawa Valley Social Group: Linking friends throughout the Valley with parties, skiing, day trips and more. 613-832-4653.

Ottawa Single Girlfriends: Social and friendship group for single women ages 35-45. 613-324-7479 for event schedule.

People Meeting People: Dance, 8 p.m. Saturday at Carleton Heights Community Centre on Appeldorn St. 613-825-7083.

Prinzo's Dance Bar, 85 O'Connor/Slater: Dance for singles 30 and up, 9 p.m. Saturdays featuring great DJ dance music. Neat casual dress, no denim. \$5 cover 613-565-1328.

Single Gourmet: Friday night dance party and astrological match-ups, 7:30 p.m. Friday at the Delta Hotel. Reserve at 613-236-2000.

Single Seniors Friendship: With other women on a unique journey into new beginnings, 10 a.m. Fridays at The Olde Forge, 2730 Carling Ave., Carling and Richmond Rd. 613-828-4515.

Sunday Brunch Group: For singles has brunches in various restaurants Sundays at 11:30 a.m. Reserve at 613-825-7083.

OTHER EVENTS

Garden Party: Horse-lovers are invited to tomorrow's 20th annual garden party at Rideaufield Farms, 756 Heritage Dr., in Merrickville. The Arabian stallions, mares, foals and saddle horses will be shown at 1 p.m., with the barns open before and after. Info: 613-269-2627 or www.rideaufield.com.

80's Theme Dance: 8 p.m. Saturday at Mlacak Centre, 2500 Campeau Dr. Cost is \$10. 613-860-1036.

Family Summerfest: Amusement rides for children, games etc. to Tuesday, Singers Alex and Kira with guests from the Elaine Hunter School Dancers, Sunday at Ray Friel Centre. Presented by Fallingbrook Community Association. 613-990-7621.

Celtic Heritage Day: A full program of traditional activities celebrating Glengarry's Celtic heritage, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday at MacKinnon Hall, in St. Elmo. \$7 includes lunch. 613-527-2724 or www.glengarryPlace.ca.

Family Fun Day: At the historic Chutes Coulonge, Gates open at 11 a.m. Sunday. \$2 per person. 819-683-2770 or www.chutescoulonge.qc.ca.

Garden Party: A Celebration of Summ! and fundraiser for LAWS, 1-4 p.m. Sunday at Down to Earth Gardens, 420 Haskins Rd., Burritt's Rapids, Merrickville. 613-269-2687.

Valleyview Little Animal Farm Annual Corn Roast: Puppet shows and music for the children by Uncle Jack, Monday. 4750 Fallowfield Rd. 613-591-1126.

Puppet Workshops: Full-day workshop by Jim Napolitano from PBS's Between the Lions, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Thursday. \$40; Three workshops: Puppets for Adults, 10 a.m.-11:30 p.m., Fantasy & Improvisation, 11:30 a.m.-1:15 p.m.; Punch and Judy (the development of Mr. Punch), Friday. All workshops at the Almonte

Curling Club, 160 Bridge St., Almonte. \$40 for all three. Reserve at Williams@igs.net .

Annual Ottawa Greek Festival: Live music and traditional Greek dances, Greek cuisine, children's activities and more, Thursday to Aug. 19, 4:30 p.m.–11 p.m. weekdays, noon–11 p.m. weekends at 1315 Prince of Wales Dr. 613–225–8016 ex. 221.

High Tea at City Hall: For seniors in collaboration with the Office of the Mayor, 1–3 p.m. Thursday in Place Jean Pigott on the ground floor of City Hall, 111 Laurier Ave. W. Entertainment by the Grey Jazz Big Band with traditional high tea service. Tickets \$7 at 613–247–0500.

Caribe–Expo 2007: Ottawa's Caribbean Festival, Aug. 10–19 at various locations. For information on events, locations and times call 613–729–1408 or visit www.caribe-expo.com .

The 57th Annual Canadian Open Old Time Fiddle Championship: Wednesday to Sunday, Aug. 12 in Shelburne, Ont. Information at www.shelburnefiddlecontest.on.ca .

Pembroke Waterfront Festival: Family activities and entertainment by Doc Walker, Alannah Myles, Jeff Healey, Fred Eaglesmith, 5 Man Electrical Band, Friday, Saturday, Aug. 11, Sunday, Aug. 12 in Pembroke. \$15 per day or \$25 all weekend. www.pembrokefestivals.com .

Festival of Quilts: noon–6 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 11, 11 a.m.–3 p.m. Aug. 12 at St. John Catholic High School, 2066 County–Road 10, Scotch Line, Perth. Presented by Lanark County Quilters Guild. Admission \$5, children under 12 free. 613–345–7862.

The Casino du Lac–Leamy Sound of Light: Saturday to Aug. 11. Teams from various countries compete in this spectacular show. Spain, Saturday; Russia, Wednesday; The Casino Lac–Leamy's Grande Finale, Saturday, Aug. 11. Tickets at the box office, 819–771–3389, 613–599–3267, www.CapitalTicket.ca and Gatineau–area Loblaws stores. Packages and other entertainment available throughout the event. Details at www.casino-du-lac-leamy.com .

Waterfront Live!: Free, live entertainment at the Amphitheatre in Pembroke 7 p.m. nightly in July and August.

Around About Ottawa: Guided walking tours of historic landmarks and tourist sites in Ottawa's downtown core. Minimum two people. Reserve at 613–599–1016.

Brockville Ghost Walks: Costumed volunteers of the Friends of Fulford Place Association lead visitors through Brockville, stopping at various haunted spots to recount spook tales, Friday evenings to Sept. 7. Tickets \$9.50 in advance or half hour before each walk begins at 8:30 p.m. Call 613–498–3005.

Ghosts and the Gallows: 8 p.m. nightly. Departs from corner of Sparks Street and Elgin Street. Reserve at 613–232–0344.

Crime and Punishment Jail Tour: 7 p.m. nightly. Depart from lobby of the Ottawa Jail Hostel, 75 Nicholas St. Reserve 613–232–0344.

Naughty Ottawa Pub Walk: 7 p.m. Saturdays, depart from ticket office, 73 Clarence St. Reserve 613–232–0344.

The Original Haunted Walk of Ottawa Tour: 8 p.m. nightly. Departs from the corner of Sparks Street and Elgin Street. Reserve at 613–232–0344.

Ottawa On Foot: Historical walking tours of downtown Ottawa. Private tours only. 613-447-7566.

Parliament of Canada --- Tours: Free Centre Block guided tours available daily; schedule varies throughout the year and when Parliament is sitting. Visit www.parl.gc.ca/vis or call 613-239-5000. (Tours may be re-routed or cancelled without notice due to parliamentary activity). 613-239-5000.

Tour of the Supreme Court of Canada, Wellington Street: Law students conduct free guided tours daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. 613-995-5361.

Upper Canada Village, Morrisburg: An 1860s Scottish Country wedding enactment, Sunday; Old-fashioned horse-drawn wagon rides. 613-543-4328 or 1-800-437-2233.

MUSEUMS

Billings Estate National Historic Site, 2100 Cabot St.: Beyond Billings, The untold story of the people working on the farmstead, 1 p.m. Sunday; Tea and Tour: See How Our Gardens Grow, 2 p.m. Sunday. Open noon-5 p.m. Wednesday to Sunday, closed Monday and Tuesday. Fee. 613-247-4830.

Bytown Museum, 1 Canal Lane: Harp music by Pat Marshall, 1-3 p.m. Saturday; The museum showcases the early days of Ottawa and the founder of Bytown, Lt.-Col. John By and offers new permanent exhibitions, a community gallery and new play space for families and students. Open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., it is between the Rideau Canal locks and the Parliament Buildings. Admission applies. Open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. daily to Thanksgiving weekend. 613-234-4570 or www.bytownmuseum.com.

Canada Agriculture Museum, Prince of Wales Drive, south of the traffic circle: Knit-Out event, Sunday and a variety of informative daily demonstrations which are featured throughout the month of August; Tractors exhibition; The Museum Passport; Access to the animal barns and exhibitions, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Food for Health Exhibition, to Oct. 31; New themes for birthday parties year-round for ages three-12. Fee. Seniors Free on Tuesdays to Oct. 613-991-3044.

Canada Aviation Museum, 11 Parkway: Aerotech summer day camp, for ages six to 12 and nine to 12 in Aug., register at 613-993-8109; Sunday Flying Visits, 11 a.m.-2 p.m. to Sept. 9; Art Flight 2007; Introduction to Aviation Art Workshops, New Storage Wing Tours. Daily 9 a.m.-5 p.m. until Labour Day. 613-993-2010.

Canada Science and Technology Museum, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd.: Autopsy of a Murder exhibit, to Sept. 3; Collection Tours, 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays. Open daily 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Fee. 613-991-3053.

Canadian Clock Museum, 60 James St., Deep River: Large exhibits of Pequegnat, Westclox, and Snider Canadian clocks. Call to confirm hours. 613-584-9687. Fee.

Canadian Museum of Civilization, 100 Laurier St., Gatineau: A Unique Garden, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, Sunday in Waterfall Court, free; See artist Paul Bruneau complete a stone sculpture inspired by his Ojibway heritage, noon-4 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday. Free with museum admission; Face To Face: The Canadian Personalities Hall, newest permanent exhibition; In My Lifetime, Contemporary Aboriginal Art, to March 8; Treasures from China, to Oct. 28. Open daily 9 a.m.-6 p.m.; Thursday, Friday, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. 819-776-7000.

Canadian Children's Museum, in the Canadian Museum of Civilization: Hip Hop with Bill J, 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. Saturday, Sunday; Weave it in Red and White, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday. Adventure World (Outdoors), Free with museum admission; Let's Play LEGO!, 10:30 a.m.-noon Aug. 13 and Aug. 20. Free with museum admission. Open daily 9 a.m.-6 p.m.; Thursday, Friday, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. 819-776-7000.

Canadian Postal Museum, in the Canadian Museum of Civilization: The Post Goes Pop, exhibition looks at the role played by the postal service in everyday life; Signed, Sealed, Delivered; Reflections of Canada: The National Stamp Collection. Fee. Open daily 9 a.m.–6 p.m.; Thursday, Friday, 9 a.m.–9 p.m. 819-776-7000.

Canadian Museum of Nature, 240 McLeod St.: Renovated West Wing features the new Talisman Energy Fossil Gallery, which represents the end of the dinosaur age and rise of mammals, a refurbished interactive Mammal Gallery and a new Bird Gallery with hundreds of birds plus a special play area for kids; New Discovery Zone with activities and HD movies. Daily in the summer: Trading Post, Specimen Exploration and crafts in the morning. 613-566-4700.

Canadian Ski Museum, 1960 Scott St.: Explore the history of skiing, see how the sport has evolved and learn about Canada's great champions in the Canadian Ski Hall of Fame, 3rd floor Trailhead. 613-722-3584.

Canadian War Museum, 1 Vimy Place: War Brides: Portraits of an Era and Stitches in Time which features 15 quilted artworks, to Jan. 6; Afghanistan, A Glimpse of War: A Journalist's Kit and A Soldier's Kit, daily in August. Open daily 9 a.m.–6 p.m.; Thursday, Friday, 9 a.m.–9 p.m. 819-776-8600.

Champlain Trail Museum and Pioneer Village, 1032 Pembroke St. E., Pembroke: Open 9:30 a.m.–5 p.m. weekdays to Oct. 5, 10 a.m.–3 p.m. Saturdays, 1–4 p.m. Sundays in August. 613-735-0517.

Cumberland Heritage Village Museum, 2940 Old Montreal Rd.: The Cutting Edge; Watermelon festival, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Sunday. 613-833-3059.

Diefenbunker, 3911 Carp Rd., Carp: The Lost Nuke, exhibition, to Sept. 30; See 100,000 sq. ft. bunker that was intended to protect the government and military in the event of an attack. Visits by guided tour only, Monday–Fridays at 2 p.m.; Saturdays, Sundays, 11 a.m., 1 p.m., 2 p.m. Reservations required. Fee. 613-839-0007.

Fort Wellington National Historic Site of Canada, 370 Vankoughnet St., Prescott: Shadows of the Fort: The Trial of John Dale, 8 p.m. Thursdays to Aug. 30, \$8. Guided tour with period costumes, 1 p.m. Sundays and Wednesdays in July and August. Fee. Open daily 10 a.m.–5 p.m. to Sept. 30th. 613-925-2896.

Fulford Place Mansion Museum, 287 King St. E., Brockville: Evening of ghost stories and guided lantern tour, 7 p.m. Wednesday, open to children aged seven to 13, \$5, pre-registration required. Open for tours Tuesday to Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. with last tour departing at 3 p.m. Tearoom. 613-498-3003.

Glengarry Pioneer Museum, County Road 24 at the crossroads with County Road 30: Open 1–5 p.m. Saturdays, Sundays and holiday Mondays to June 30. 613-527-5230.

Heritage House Museum, 11 Old Slys Rd., Smiths Falls: A Snapshot of Rideau Life, a photography exhibition and sale. Six photographers give their visual impression of life along the Rideau Canal which has recently been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to Oct. 28. Open daily 10:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. 613-283-8560. Fee.

Homewood Museum, Hwy 2, between Maitland and Prescott: One of the oldest homes in Ontario, built in 1796–1800 by Solomon Jones, a Loyalist and the area's first physician. The large home remained in the family for seven generations. Open 10 a.m.–4 p.m. Wednesday to Sunday to Sept. 1. Family Day, Sunday, July 29. 613-348-1246.

Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington St.: A Capital Choice, to Aug. 13; Order of Canada: They Desire a Better Country; Constitution 1982: The 25th Anniversary; Literary Landscapes of French Canada; Cultural Celebrities of Quebec. Open 9 a.m.–10 p.m. daily. Free. 613-996-6138.

Macdonell–Williamson House c.1817 National Historic Site, East Hawkesbury: Silent auction bidding opens, noon Saturday, see website for auction items, www.mwhouse.ca ; The Lute in Scotland with John Downing, lutist, 2 p.m. Sunday. Open weekends noon–5 p.m. to Aug. 26. General store, tea room, exhibits, live music. 613–632–6662/1–866–269–2962 www.mwhouse.ca

Mill of Kintail Conservation Area and R. Tait McKenzie Memorial Museum, 2854 Concession 8, Almonte: Open daily 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. until Oct. 16. 613–256–3610.

Mission House Museum and Gallery, 1050 Mill St., Combermere: Algonquin Native Artifacts, to tomorrow; Dr. Joseph Kinder's Medical Instruments Show and Harry and Tena Stevenson's art, to Sept. 2. 613–756–3821.

Mississippi Valley Textile Museum, 3 Rosamond St., Almonte: Unclothing and Uncovering: Revealing Art in Textiles, by Wendy Feldberg, Karen Goetzinger, Carmella Karijo Rother, to Oct. 31; Textile Art: Franco–Canadian Exchange, Laurentian Quilters Guild Association Bezièrs Patchwork, to Sept. 25; Weaving and spinning demonstrations, 1–4 p.m. Wednesdays. Free with admission. The Millennium Journal by Judith Martin, to Sunday. 613–256–3754.

National Gallery of Canada, 380 Sussex Dr: Family Funday, Natural Impressions, 11 a.m.–4 p.m. Sunday; Eye Spy with My Little Eye, Tiny Tots workshop, 10:30–11:30 a.m. Friday and Aug. 17; Renoir Landscapes & Paysages, to Sept. 9; Modernist Photographs from the National Gallery of Canada's collection to Aug. 26; De–con–structions, to Sept. 3; De–con–structions, to Sept. 3; Cheryl Sourkes: Public Camera, to Oct. 21. Free guided tour of the collection with a docent, sign–up in the Great Hall, daily at 2 p.m. Open daily from 10 a.m.–5 p.m., Thursdays to 8 p.m. 613–990–1985.

Nepean Museum, 16 Rowley Ave.: InGrained, Cultivating the Cultures of Nepean, a display of rice, to Sept. 22. Celebrating the 40th anniversary of Canada's Centennial and another Centennial — 100 years — of the Boy Scouts of Canada. 613–723–7936.

Old Stone Mill, National Historic Site & Museum of Early Industrial Technology, 4 Court St., Delta: Open 10 a.m.–5 p.m. daily. 613–928–2584.

The Ottawa Art Gallery, 2 Daly Ave.: Oh So Iroquois, to Sept. 2; Tourist, with E. Holgate, A.Y. Jackson, J–P. Lemieux and more, to Nov. 4. Art Rental and Sales Service, Summer Salon featuring over 30 artists, to Sept. 8. 613–233–8865.

Perth Museum/Matheson House, c1840, 11 Gore St. E., Perth: Four restored period rooms, two galleries with featuring exhibition, Victorian Fashion and Society in Perth; Victorian garden, outdoor bake oven and herb garden. Admission by donation. 613–267–1947.

Pinhey's Point Historic Site, Pinhey's Point Road, Dunrobin: Geocaching Treasure Hunt, 11 a.m.–4 p.m. Sunday. Open 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Saturday, Sunday, noon–5 p.m. Wednesday to Friday. Closed Monday, Tuesday. 613–832–4347.

Ross Museum, 2022 Forester's Falls Rd., Forester's Falls: Teddy Bears picnic, 1–4 p.m. Saturday. 613–646–2445.

The Royal Canadian Mint, 320 Sussex Dr.: Along with seeing \$1 million in gold, you can hold more than \$175,000 of pure gold in your hands. 613–993–8990.

The Victoria School Museum, 256 Edmund St., Carleton Place: The Place for All Seasons, view the history of Carleton Place through the decades and the seasons. Displays, original artifacts and hands–on activities. Open

daily 10 a.m.–4, 1–4 p.m. Sundays. 613–253–7013.

Waba Cottage Museum & Gardens, in the Village of White Lake: Several heritage buildings situated in an eight-acre park with 11 themed gardens, picnic tables, boat launch. Open Saturday, Sunday from 10 a.m.–4:30 p.m. 613–623–8853.

NEW ART SHOWS

Arts by the Lake: A juried show, with newly established Land O' Lakes Artisans Guild and more, 10 a.m.–6 p.m. Saturday, Sunday at Sharbot Lake Beach. 613–375–8313.

Art Mode Gallery, 96 George St.: Thirst for Ferst, new works by Jeff Ferst, to Thursday. 613–241–1511, ext. 224..

Bruyère Gallery, Elizabeth Bruyère Centre, 75 Bruyère: Both Fish and Fowl, new works by Ingela Stromberg, to Sept. 28. 613–241–3344, ext. 2.

Colour the Canal Art Show: As part of the Rideau 175 celebration area artists display and sell paintings at 12 lock stations along the Rideau Canal. Call 613–283–7824.

Dalesmith Gallery, 137 Beechwood Ave.: Fever, a group show to Friday. 613–321–0101.

Galerie St–Laurent+Hill, 333 Cumberland: Angela Grossmann, Dana Holst, to Wednesday. 613–789–7145.

Gallery Perth, 16 Wilson St. W., Perth: Larry Bracegirdle exhibition with other fine artists, to Sept. 30. 613–264–8338.

Gloucester Gallery, Main floor, 255 Centrum Blvd. Orléans: Ottawa Camera Winners, to Aug. 26; Liminal Spaces by Sandra Hawkins, to Tuesday. 613–580–2424, ext. 29288.

Green Door Restaurant, 198 Main St.: Harmony Hopes, presented by the arts group SalvAide, to Aug. 19. 613–233–6215.

La Petite Mort Gallery, 306 Cumberland St.: Home by David Barbour, new photographs, to Aug. 26. 613–860–1555.

Men on Women Art Show: Dave Cooper, Juan Carlos Noria, Michael Zavacky, Lawrence Callender and more, Helsinki Lounge, 15 George St., to Sept. 1.

Ottawa Art Bazaar: Talent from various artistic disciplines with proceeds to the Ottawa Arts Court Foundation, Thursday to Saturday, Aug. 1

Troops want support; Quebec-based soldiers on Afghan mission can't fathom antiwar sentiments at home

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: CANADIAN PRESS / Sergeant Steve Dufour (centre) gives directions yesterday as Canadian troops patrol in the area of Shawali Kot, Afghanistan. Some members of the Quebec-based Royal 22nd Regiment who have just begun their mission in Afghanistan are expressing their frustration with the massive antiwar sentiment in their home province. ;

DATELINE: SHAWALI KOT, AFGHANISTAN

SOURCE: Canadian Press

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WORD COUNT: 318

Canadian soldier Pte. Francis Archambault says he couldn't believe what he was hearing in a conversation before he left Quebec for Afghanistan.

"Somebody who's educated, who has diplomas galore, told me there would be no war in the world if people like me didn't exist," Archambault, 23, said in an interview.

"It really shocked me to hear that from someone who should know better."

Archambault and other Quebec-based soldiers in Afghanistan expressed frustration and exasperation with the widespread opposition in their home province to Canada's military mission in the country.

One poll suggested 70 per cent of Quebecers were opposed to the continued presence of Canadian soldiers in the war-torn land, while some members of the national assembly refused to stand up when several soldiers visited the legislature earlier this year.

Archambault said people who are against the mission are misguided when they accuse Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives of wanting to endorse U.S. foreign policy just to stay in the good books of the Bush administration.

"That has nothing to do with it," he said. "Canada is not getting a lot out of its presence here. It costs lives and it costs money but we're trying to give a chance to people who need help.

"It's probably the biggest thing I'll do in my life."

Canada has about 2,500 troops in Afghanistan as part of the NATO force supporting the Afghan government. In the new rotation, most of them will be from CFB Valcartier, near Quebec City.

Canada is slated to leave Afghanistan in February 2009 and Harper has said extending the mission would require the consensus of Parliament.

Master Cpl. David Martel, one of the Van Doos charged with patrolling the Shawali Kot district in southeastern Afghanistan, said the attitude of some people is disheartening.

"You come here because you believe in what you do," Martel said.

"You want to provide security and help people improve their lot, while back home people aren't very receptive to that. They say you're just off to kill people."

Sgt. Steve Dufour said people are entitled to their opinions but believes the Canadian mission is not understood and is often misinterpreted.

"I spoke to one student who was against the mission," he said.

"I told her, 'In Canada, does anyone prevent you from going to school and getting an education?' Well, that's what it's like here (in Afghanistan)."

Taliban officials want guarantee of safety for any talks with South Korean diplomats

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Taliban representatives moved closer yesterday to negotiating with South Korean diplomats over the fate of several hostages that the militants are holding.

The Taliban sought guarantees of safety from the UN mission in Afghanistan should their delegation hold talks with South Korean officials in a government-controlled territory over the hostage crisis, a purported militant spokesperson said yesterday.

Qari Yousef Ahmadi, a purported spokesperson who claims to speak for the Taliban, said that the militants are ready to negotiate about the freedom of the captives with South Korea's ambassador to Afghanistan anywhere if the UN mission guarantees the militant delegation's safety.

"The Taliban are ready to meet them in Kabul, other cities or other country, but only under one condition and that is that the UN guarantees their safety," Ahmadi said, speaking by telephone from an undisclosed location.

Officials from the UN mission in Afghanistan were not immediately available to comment on Ahmadi's offer.

The Taliban abducted 23 South Koreans on July 19 in Ghazni province as they travelled by bus from Kabul to Kandahar. They were part of a Christian church group doing volunteer health work in Afghanistan. The captors have killed two men in the group.

U.S. AIR STRIKES

About 320 kilometres from where it's believed the hostages are being held, U.S.-led air strikes hit a Taliban gathering and killed at least three senior figures of the militant group, government officials said yesterday.

Local officials and doctors said dozens of wounded were brought to hospitals, one of them an eight-year-old boy.

The attacks in Helmand province's Baghran district struck militants who had gathered to watch the hanging of two men accused by the Taliban of spying for the government, said Gen. Mohammad Zahir Azimi, the Defence Ministry spokesperson.

The ministry said its intelligence reports indicated three militant leaders, including Taliban commander for Helmand province Mullah Rahim, were among those killed Thursday.

The Taliban commander for all of southern Afghanistan, Dadullah Mansoor, was at the scene but his fate was not immediately known, Azimi said.

Ahmadi denied Rahim was killed.

A statement from the U.S.-led coalition said it carried out a "precision air strike against two notorious Taliban commanders conducting a leadership meeting in a remote area of the Baghran district."

"During a sizable meeting of senior Taliban commanders, coalition forces employed precision-guided munitions on their location after ensuring there were no innocent Afghans in the surrounding area," the statement said. The coalition gave few other details and no word of casualties.

In apparent reference to the same incident, Mohammad Hussein, the provincial police chief, said several Taliban and civilians were killed Thursday in an air strike in the Shah Ibrahim area of Baghran district.

He said 20 wounded people were brought to the hospital in Helmand's capital of Lashkar Gah.

Twelve wounded men were brought to a hospital in the main southern city of Kandahar, said Sharifullah Khan, a doctor there.

Afghan and foreign troops in the country have repeatedly tried to kill senior militant leadership, while trying to co-opt the low level fighters in their drive to expand government control.

Report; on the Harper Conservatives – the last six months; This report card evaluates the last six months of the Conservatives' performance in Ottawa. The mark in the brackets is the mark awarded after their first year. On balance, they earned a lower mark this time. This is John H. Redekop's third report on the Conservatives.

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WORD COUNT: 1391

Cabinet development and performance. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has a mostly strong team. Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor has serious credibility problems, especially after his misstatements about the Red Cross overseeing Taliban prisoners held by Canadian troops. John Baird is doing well in Environment as is Jim Flaherty in Finance. So far, no scandal! Mark: B (B+)

Performance in the House of Commons. The record is uneven. Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day and Baird, despite his occasional bellicose manner, performed well. Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay again hurt his party, this time by announcing that no Conservative MP would be punished for voting against the budget; one did and was kicked out of caucus. Defence Minister O'Connor was unimpressive. House Leader Peter Van Loan sometimes avoided the truth.

Harper lost ground by asserting that the Opposition leader's criticisms lacked credibility because he had not been in uniform. Neither was Harper. Harper also lost ground by suggesting that the Liberals opposed an extension to the Anti-Terrorism Act because Liberal MP Navdeep Bains was on an Air India bombing witness list. An apology would have been appropriate. The MPs need to understand that scoring cheap political points in question period does not score points with the electorate. Mark: B (A-)

Social policies. Achievements include pension income splitting, two extra years to put money into a registered retirement savings plan, removal of limitation on registered education savings plan contributions, \$2 million given to B.C. to prevent gang violence, and numerous family-supportive tax initiatives. Despite the \$612 million wait-times guarantee trust, surgical wait times remain long. Also, we see no new commitment for social housing, little improvement in processing foreign credentials, and little progress in child care for those truly needing it. Mark: B+ (B)

Economic policies. The income trust crisis was not handled well. Simply terminating income trust formation might have created fewer problems for the government than a clear breach of promise. The action was endorsed by Bank of Canada governor David Dodge but most voters seemed unconvinced.

Praiseworthy budget commitments included the removal of 180,000 low income earners from the tax rolls, the \$1,000 a year working tax benefit, a \$2,000 tax credit for children under 18, \$2.2 billion more in health and social transfer payments to provinces, another \$1 billion for farmers, increased capital gains exemption from \$500,000 to \$750,000, \$9.6 billion in debt repayment, \$38 billion in tax relief over two years, and \$39 billion for "fiscal imbalance" over seven years. The key criticism is that the increase in spending was the third highest since 1987. The incentive to buy efficient cars discriminates against North American companies given that the average new Canadian car produces only 1/37th as much pollution as a 20-year-old car. Mark: A- (B+)

Foreign Affairs. Although the Harper government reinvigorated foreign policy and operated with principle and conviction, it lost crucial support in this area. The Afghanistan policy, apparently based on the dubious assumptions that democracy trumps Islamic intolerance and that moderate Muslims will oppose the extremists, alienated many voters. Present policies could cost the Conservatives a majority, perhaps even a minority, victory. The inadequate processing of passport applications angered many. Positive elements include the \$900 million increase in foreign aid over two years and a strengthened presence in Europe and Latin America. Significantly, King Abdullah of Jordan urged Canada to play a larger role in the Middle East peace process. Mark: C (B-)

National unity policies. Much progress was made in addressing the alleged fiscal imbalance. Quebec gets almost half of Ottawa's greatly increased annual transfer of \$11 billion to the provinces. The Atlantic Accord imbroglio was regrettable. Ottawa did the right thing but had made the wrong promise. Significantly, all provinces now run a surplus. Newfoundland Premier Danny Williams alleges betrayal by the Tories. He should remember that 58.7 per cent of his revenue now comes from Ottawa. Mark: A- (A-)

Environment policies. The prime minister has altered his stance: "The science is clear that these changes are occurring. They are serious and we must act." While many climate-change programs deleted by the Tories have not yet been replaced, policies have changed. The \$1.5 billion EcoTrust project is key. Many budget items addressed pollution. The Tories allocated \$400 million over two years to fight pine beetle infestation and \$225 million for conservation groups to buy ecologically sensitive private lands. The government finally cracked down on cruise ship sewage disposal. The oilsands are exempted from pollution curbs. Mark: B- (C)

Crime and justice policies. Government bills outlaw street racing, restrict conditional sentences, generally raise the age for consensual sexual activity, require automatic prison terms for people using guns to commit crimes, and spell out other anti-crime policies. Unfortunately, the Liberal majority in the Senate has prevented enactment. Concerning reforms in gun registration the record is uneven. Crime prevention should receive more attention. The handling of the RCMP problems has been satisfactory. Mark: A- (A)

Defence and military policies. The \$900 million allotted to the strategic aerospace and defence initiative was widely viewed as a sound investment in aerospace technology. A full 97 per cent of Canadians approve the \$4.3 billion investment to defend Arctic sovereignty. The government promised six new ships for west coast use by the Canadian Coast Guard. Creating a veterans ombudsman office and a Veterans Bill of Rights filled important needs. Allegations of mistreatment by Canadian soldiers of Taliban prisoners created serious problems for the government. Also, many Canadians are asking whether the government is focusing too much on the military. Mark: B (A)

Parliamentary reform. Little has been done in this area during the last six months other than projecting additional allotment of House of Commons seats to British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta. The challenge to House of Commons supremacy if the Senate is transformed into a second politically responsible chamber has

not yet been addressed. The promised improvement in House of Commons decorum has not happened. The government sets the tone and must accept responsibility. Mark: B (A)

Specific initiatives. Positive initiatives include the \$100,000 allotted to develop an HIV/AIDS vaccine, the appointment of a judicial inquiry into the 1985 Air India bombing, the \$591 million for the Pacific gateway initiative, the \$1.5 billion allotted for Toronto traffic improvement, several new programs to improve aboriginal health, and the establishment of the Canadian mental health commission. Problem areas include awarding a contract to a former Quebec separatist minister to review Liberal polling and disallowing deductibility for corporate offshore financing costs. Mark: B+ (B+)

Keeping electoral promises. The Conservatives have kept most of their major promises other than reducing surgical wait times which is mainly a provincial responsibility. But promises were made; only marginal improvement has been achieved. There have been delays in providing the 2,500 additional police officers. Mark: B+ (A-)

Overall leadership of the prime minister. Harper impresses as a solid and usually principled performer in the House of Commons, a good communicator, a strong team leader, and a straightforward spokesperson. He was an effective performer at the G8 summit and has generally been effective in international involvements. Unfortunately, he is sometimes excessively partisan and undignified in question period repartee. Considerable muzzling of most cabinet members continues. Harper must be held accountable for his party's decline in public opinion polls to the point that the Conservatives are virtually tied with the Liberals whose leader has not evoked widespread affirmation. Mark: B+ (A-)

The overall mark for the last six months: B (B+)

John H. Redekop is professor emeritus at Wilfrid Laurier University, as well as adjunct professor of political science at Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C.

Army MD under fire for article

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The Canadian doctor who treated a Nova Scotia soldier killed in Afghanistan has come under fire for writing an article detailing the final few minutes of Cpl. Kevin Megeney's life.

A story in the recent edition of Mother Jones provides explicit details of the 25-year-old Stellarton, N.S., reservist's death.

"I just wish I had seen it first," Karen Megeney, the dead soldier's mother, said yesterday. Her family was away on vacation when the magazine sent them an advance copy of the article.

"It was on the stands before we even knew about it," she said.

Five months after Megeney's death, military police are still investigating. Sources have said he was shot in the chest by a member of his own platoon.

In the Mother Jones story, Dr. Kevin Patterson describes the evening of March 6, when the soldier was brought into the hospital at Kandahar Air Field. He writes at length and in excruciating detail about his and other medical staff's desperate and ultimately doomed attempt to save Megeney's life.

Readers posted several comments on the Mother Jones website, praising and condemning the text.

"Beautifully told account of a war that is hardly covered in what our U.S. media calls 'the news' and is mostly the latest breathless goings-on of celebrities," Anne McGravie said in a July 28 posting.

Soldier's return home prompts son's arrival; Baby born just hours after Amherst native returns from Afghanistan

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During his six-month tour of duty in Afghanistan, Pte. Shawn MacIsaac never let up on trying to come home early for his son's due date.

He was granted an early leave, and not even eight hours after arriving home, his son was born.

"I thought I was dreaming, but I got up, got dressed and packed our stuff because I knew we weren't coming back to the hotel," MacIsaac said of how his fiancée went into labour at 1:45 a.m. on Wednesday.

MacIsaac and his fiancée, Crystal Carroll, arrived at the Dr. Everett Chalmers Hospital in Fredericton 20 minutes later. She was already well into labour by then.

"I was so tired, but I couldn't figure out why I couldn't sleep," said Carroll. MacIsaac was already asleep.

Carroll's original due date was today. MacIsaac wasn't due back until next Thursday, but he pulled some strings to try to make it home sooner.

"All I had to do was talk to my boss, who talked to his chain of command. He was pretty receptive," said MacIsaac.

"I made a joke about it. Every day I would say 'I have a question.' It was just that it had to go through so many people."

MacIsaac was called in to see his boss from the operating base, who told him everything was done on his tour, and to turn in his things.

"I was really excited. I called Crystal and she was happy, overwhelmed."

MacIsaac's plane touched down around 9 p.m. on Tuesday but he didn't get to see his parents, Rose and Gerry, or Carroll until 11:30 p.m.

Quinn Francis Andrew was born at 6:25 a.m. Wednesday, after four hours and 45 minutes of labour, weighing in at eight pounds, 11 ounces.

"Seeing my son come into the world in a free nation gave me a better understanding of what we're trying to give the people in Afghanistan and what our mission is set to accomplish," MacIsaac said.

From e-mails sent to him by friends to the letters and cards from the students at Cumberland North Academy, to the support from family, friends and everyone else surrounding him, MacIsaac is thankful his tour ended on a happy note, unlike many others.

"God speed to all the boys that are on their way home."

Air strikes target Taliban; Dozens killed or wounded in southern Afghanistan

IDNUMBER 200708040108
PUBLICATION: Times & Transcript (Moncton)
DATE: 2007.08.04
SECTION: News
PAGE: D7
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Times & Transcript (Moncton)
WORD COUNT: 402

The U.S.-led coalition said yesterday it had launched an air strike on a meeting of top Taliban commanders in a militant stronghold in Afghanistan, and local officials said more than a dozen rebels and civilians had been killed.

The coalition issued a brief statement on the strike Thursday in a remote area of Baghran district in southern Helmand province, saying it targeted two Taliban commanders. It gave few other details and no word of casualties.

Afghan Defence Ministry spokesman Gen. Mohammad Zahir Azimi said the strikes killed three senior Taliban, including the commander for Helmand province, Mullah Rahim. About one dozen other militants were killed, he said.

Purported Taliban spokesman Qari Yousef Ahmadi denied Azimi's claim that Mullah Rahim was killed in the air strike.

An even higher-ranked leader, Dadullah Mansoor, commander of the Taliban for all of southern Afghanistan, was present at the meeting hit by the strike, but his fate was not known, Azimi said.

Azimi said the information about Rahim and other militants deaths was based on their intelligence service reporting. He would not provide further details, and his account could not be independently verified.

"During a sizable meeting of senior Taliban commanders, coalition forces employed precision-guided munitions on their location after ensuring there were no innocent Afghans in the surrounding area," the coalition statement said.

In apparent reference to the same incident, Mohammad Hussein, the provincial police chief, said that several Taliban and civilians were killed in an air strike in the Shah Ibrahim area of Baghran district on Thursday.

Taliban militants were hanging two local people accused of spying for the government. Other villagers had come out to watch when the bombs fell, he said.

He said 20 wounded people were brought to the hospital in Helmand's capital of Lashkar Gah.

Enayatullah Ghafari, the head of the health department for Helmand province, said the youngest victim was an eight-year-old boy and the oldest, a 50-year-old man.

Twelve wounded men were brought to a hospital in the main southern city of Kandahar, said Sharifullah Khan, a doctor there.

Nasibullah, one of the wounded men in Kandahar hospital, said the bombs hit a busy market place. He claimed there were no Taliban in the market at the time of the attack.

Hussein said the area where the attack happened is a known Taliban stronghold.

Dadullah succeeded his brother, Mullah Dadullah, as commander of militant operations in Afghanistan when Mullah Dadullah was killed in a U.S.-led operation in May.

Mullah Dadullah had orchestrated Taliban suicide attacks and beheadings in the region, and Dadullah Mansoor told Al Jazeera in June that he had received a personal message of condolence from al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden for the death of his brother.

Canada's Afghan mission 'misinterpreted'; Quebec-based troops in Afghanistan can't fathom anti-war sentiment back home

IDNUMBER 200708040099
PUBLICATION: Times & Transcript (Moncton)
DATE: 2007.08.04
SECTION: News
PAGE: D7
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Times & Transcript (Moncton)
WORD COUNT: 360

Pte. Francis Archambault says he couldn't believe what he was hearing during a conversation he had before he left Quebec for Afghanistan.

"Somebody who's educated, who has diplomas galore, told me there would be no war in the world if people like me didn't exist," Archambault, 23, said in an interview with The Canadian Press.

"It really shocked me to hear that from someone who should know better."

Archambault and other Quebec-based soldiers in Afghanistan expressed frustration and exasperation with the widespread opposition in their home province to Canada's military mission in the country.

One poll suggested 70 per cent of Quebecers were opposed to the continued presence of Canadian soldiers in the war-torn land, while some members of the national assembly refused to stand up when several soldiers visited the legislature earlier this year.

Archambault said people who are against the mission are misguided when they accuse Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives of wanting to endorse U.S. foreign policy just to stay in the good books of the Bush administration.

"That has nothing to do with it," he said.

"Canada is not getting a lot out of its presence here. It costs lives and it costs money but we're trying to give a chance to people who need help.

"It's probably the biggest thing I'll do in my life."

Canada has about 2,500 troops in Afghanistan as part of the NATO force supporting the Afghan government.

In the new rotation, most of them will be from CFB Valcartier, near Quebec City.

Canada is slated to leave Afghanistan in February 2009 and Harper has said extending the mission would require the consensus of Parliament.

Master Cpl. David Martel, one of the Van Doos charged with patrolling the Shawali Kot district in southeastern Afghanistan, said the attitude of some people is disheartening.

"You come here because you believe in what you do," Martel said.

"You want to provide security and help people improve their lot, while back home people aren't very receptive to that. They say you're just off to kill people."

Sgt. Steve Dufour said people are entitled to their opinion but believes the Canadian mission is not understood and is often misinterpreted.

"I spoke to one student who was against the mission," he said.

"I told her 'In Canada, does anyone prevent you from going to school and getting an education?' Well, that's what it's like here (in Afghanistan)."

Yesterday, some of the Van Doos went out on foot patrol with a contingent of Afghan police officers.

At one point, one of the policemen fired his weapon by mistake, leading the Canadians to believe they were being attacked. No other shots were fired and nobody was injured.

Capt. Stephane Girard said later he was angry that the Afghan police had told villagers not to venture outside during the visit by the Canadian soldiers.

"We wanted to meet the locals and speak to them," Girard said.

"But they (the Afghan police force) got there before us and scared them."

Troops can't fathom antiwar sentiment

IDNUMBER 200708040073
PUBLICATION: The Daily Gleaner (Fredericton)
DATE: 2007.08.04
SECTION: News
PAGE: A9
BYLINE: The Canadian Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 The Daily Gleaner
(Fredericton)
WORD COUNT: 246

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"They say you're just off to kill people."

Letters to the editor | Ex-soldier issues invitation to weekend peace protest

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PUBLICATION: The Daily Gleaner (Fredericton)
DATE: 2007.08.04
SECTION: Opinion
PAGE: B7
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 The Daily Gleaner
(Fredericton)
WORD COUNT: 892

Second World War veterans are pleased to welcome our troops home from Afghanistan. We hope their sacrifices are honoured.

I remember our 1945–6 welcome. We had the United Nations' promise of no more war to celebrate as in 1919 when First World War Veterans celebrated the League of Nations.

I have met non-violent protestors to war, pollution, violence and more. Each time I think of our freedom. Seventy years ago in Germany protesting the status quo brought extreme violence — concentration camp or a bullet to the head in the night.

I was disappointed in June when news reports about protests in Halifax against Atlantica concentrated on the few violent protestors and almost ignored the majority who were non-violent.

At the same time, I saw no news reports about the multi-million dollar settlement given Seattle protestors illegally arrested in a G8 protest.

In Genoa, Italy, a protestor at the G8 meeting was killed and the state investigation learned the police had planted agitators among the non-violent to encourage violence.

I am not pleased with the world created since 1945. Therefore, I support non-violent protestors to the status quo as one who came home in 1946 to the promise of a non-violent world.

Canada is world famous for inventing United Nations peacekeeping; why do we support the superpower which resists paying its United Nations dues and prefers to invest in NATO which supports nuclear weapons?

A Hiroshima peace vigil is planned Aug. 6, 8:30 PM at the peace pole across from Christ Church Cathedral at 168 Church Street. I hope to be there with non-violent people supporting those who made the United Nations possible.

R.H. Young

Fredericton

NB Power chooses certainty

NB Power's fuel purchase and foreign exchange programs were put in place after discussions with the provincial government in 2000 and have been reviewed by the Public Utilities Board.

Under our program, each month we purchase for our requirements 18 months later. In this way, we know our costs over that time period. So, today's favourable foreign exchange rates will be used by us for fuel purchases 18 months from now.

The ups and downs of the market place are simply pushed forward for this period to ensure stability for our power rates. Nothing is gained and nothing is lost.

This approach is taken by many utilities across North America. Those companies that engage in speculative transactions guessing the future prices of fuel and foreign exchange will win some of the time and lose some of the time. But there is no sure win.

NB Power, in conjunction with its stakeholders, has chosen not to speculate but rather to follow a system based on certainty and predictability.

David Hay,

President and CEO

NB Power

Drop in child mortality goal

Tuesday, at UN headquarters in New York, British Prime–Minister Gordon Brown called for a UN conference on the millennium development goals, to be held in 2008.

Many of these goals are far from being reached, including the goal of reducing child mortality by two–thirds. At the current rate, we will not meet our goal until 2115.

Gordon Brown's suggestion reminded me of a boy I met last year, when I was living in rural Swaziland.

I was working in Swaziland for a partnership between AIDS Saint John, SIDA/ AIDS Moncton and a Swazi organization named TASC.

On the day I met Kona, I was visiting homes with a local women's group. He was eight years old and barely had the strength to stand up.

Kona's aunt told me both the boy's parents had died of HIV/AIDS. It seems he contracted the disease during childbirth or breast feeding.

Kona went to the hospital two days later and was diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. He died before beginning treatment.

Most of us don't have the chance to meet children such as Kona, and we forget that we can prevent the deaths of children like him.

Mother–to–child transmission of HIV is one of several unnecessary causes of childhood mortality. Intervention programs generally costs less than \$40 per death prevented.

Both Minister of International Cooperation Josee Verner and Minister of Foreign Affairs Peter MacKay voiced support for Gordon Brown's proposal.

However, Canada's record in foreign aid does not bode well. Our estimated level of foreign aid went from

0.34 per cent of Gross Domestic Product in 2005–06 to 0.33 per cent in 2006–07.

We have pledged time and again to increase our foreign aid to 0.7 per cent of GDP, but still our government breaks this promise.

We need a real commitment to foreign aid, with childhood survival as a main pillar. This month, citizens across the country are calling on the Stephen Harper government to invest \$100 million a year in child survival over the next five years. They estimate this investment alone could save more than one million lives.

Today, I hope that we each think of just one of these children.

Steve Baird

Native New Brunswicker

McGill University

Bike helmet law questioned

I just happened upon your editorial about mandatory bicycle helmets for adults. To use your own words: foolish, foolish, foolish.

At a time when the existence of human life on the planet is threatened by global warming, much of it caused by emissions from automobiles, anyone riding a bike rather than driving a motor vehicle should be given a medal, not a fine.

The fact is a lot of people I've talked to use their cars instead of biking because they don't want to wear a helmet. They say they're uncomfortable, inconvenient, obstruct vision and balance, are incompatible with hairdos and are an example of over-protective laws that treat adults like children.

Many of them have been riding bikes for decades and believe they can look out for themselves just as they do when they cross the street on foot, a truly hazardous undertaking.

You may disagree with some of their opinions, but that's not the point. What matters is because of a nearsighted law and editorials such as this one which supports mandatory bike helmets, many are discouraged from cycling and encouraged to travel by car.

Travelling by car, by the way, is not so safe either. Of all road fatalities due to head injuries, 92 per cent are incurred by people riding in automobiles not on bikes. If anyone should be wearing helmets, it's drivers and passengers of cars. And yet I've seen no editorials demanding that they wear helmets or face fines.

Raymond Fraser

Fredericton

Welcome home; In our view: Troops are back and families now begin the adjustment to every day life

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SECTION: Opinion
PAGE: B7
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 The Daily Gleaner
(Fredericton)
WORD COUNT: 391

Tears were streaming fast and furious at CFB Gagetown Thursday at the return of the first Canadian soldiers to this area from Afghanistan.

But we suspect all across this region -- no doubt, this country, too -- there were lumps in throats and silent prayers going up, grateful for the safe return of our soldiers.

The returning troops couldn't wait to hug loved ones, eat "a decent donair" and grab a beer with missed pals. New dads couldn't wait to change a diaper or two.

They've come back from a hot, dirty, dangerous place. For many, there were short leaves during this tour of duty. Returning to the heat, dirt and danger, leaving loved ones behind again, couldn't have been easy. But a soldier's life is not easy, and these men and women knew that when they signed up.

This time, they are home to stay.

And that will present challenges of its own. Settling back into old routines is never easy for soldiers and their families, but it will be especially challenging after what some of these troops have experienced in Afghanistan. This was a tough tour. Many lost friends as so many Canadian soldiers were killed on this assignment. That will take some recovery time.

And for all the happiness at the soldiers' return, they and their loved ones will take some time and effort to fit comfortably back into their old lives. They now begin another difficult phase for military families. When a soldier leaves, family must fill in and carry the whole load. Children grow and change. Life goes on. Homework must be done. Meals cooked. Houses maintained. And when the family is reunited, it can be stressful as everyone adjusts.

There are other changes to which soldiers will need to adjust. Many Canadians want to have a discussion about whether our country should be fighting in Afghanistan. Yellow ribbons all over Oromocto say, we support the troops. But many people want to talk about what that means, if they can support the individual troops but not support the mission.

And some will enter into a debate over the significance of the effect of fatalities among Quebec's VanDoos and how that might effect Prime Minister Stephen Harper's election chances.

But a freshly returned soldier, in all likelihood, will not be in the mood for such a debate.

These are men and women who will be too busy reuniting with family and recovering from the traumas of this mission to have such discussions.

And we understand some of them will be busy mastering the art of changing a diaper.

Anti-war sentiment astounds soldiers

PUBLICATION: Kingston Whig-Standard (ON)

DATE: 2007.08.04

SECTION: National/World

PAGE: B4

SOURCE: CP

DATELINE: SHAWALI KOT, Afghanistan

WORD COUNT: 294

Pte. Francis Archambault says he couldn't believe what he was hearing during a conversation he had before he left Quebec for Afghanistan.

"Somebody who's educated, who has diplomas galore, told me there would be no war in the world if people like me didn't exist," Archambault, 23, said in an interview with The Canadian Press.

"It really shocked me to hear that from someone who should know better."

Archambault and other Quebec-based soldiers in Afghanistan expressed frustration and exasperation with the widespread opposition in their home province to Canada's military mission in the country.

One poll suggested 70 per cent of Quebecers were opposed to the continued presence of Canadian soldiers in the war-torn land, while some members of the national assembly refused to stand up when several soldiers visited the legislature earlier this year.

Archambault said people who are against the mission are misguided when they accuse Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives of wanting to endorse U.S. foreign policy just to stay in the good books of the Bush administration.

"That has nothing to do with it," he said. "Canada is not getting a lot out of its presence here. It costs lives and it costs money but we're trying to give a chance to people who need help. It's probably the biggest thing I'll do in my life."

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Canada is slated to leave Afghanistan in February 2009 and Harper has said extending the mission would require the consensus of Parliament.

Sgt. Steve Dufour said people are entitled to their opinion but believes the Canadian mission is not understood and is often misinterpreted.

"I spoke to one student who was against the mission," he said. "I told her 'In Canada, does anyone prevent you from going to school and getting an education?' Well, that's what it's like here [in Afghanistan]."

Mother: 'I just wish I had seen it first'; Article about Stellarton soldier's final few minutes upsets family

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle–Herald

DATE: 2007.08.04

SECTION: Metro

PAGE: B1

BYLINE: Chris Lambie Staff Reporter

ILLUSTRATION:

A recent article in Mother Jones magazine graphically details the last moments of Cpl. Kevin Megeney's life. (CP); Karen Megeney after her son's funeral. (Tim Krochak / Staff); Pallbearers from the Nova Scotia Highlanders take the casket carrying the remains of Cpl. Kevin Megeney out of Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Church, following funeral services for the fallen soldier in Stellarton on March 16. (Tim Krochak / Staff); A recent article in Mother Jones magazine graphically details the last moments of Cpl. Kevin Megeney's life. (CP); Karen Megeney after her son's funeral. (Tim Krochak / Staff); Pallbearers from the Nova Scotia Highlanders take the casket carrying the remains of Cpl. Kevin Megeney out of Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Church, following funeral services for the fallen soldier in Stellarton on March 16. (Tim Krochak / Staff)

WORD COUNT: 1210

THE CANADIAN doctor who treated a Nova Scotia soldier killed in Afghanistan has come under fire for writing a magazine article detailing the final few minutes of Cpl. Kevin Megeney's life.

A story in the recent edition of Mother Jones provides explicit details of the 25-year-old Stellarton reservist's death.

"I just wish I had seen it first," Karen Megeney, the dead soldier's mother, said Friday.

Her family was away on vacation when the magazine sent them an advance copy of the article.

"It was on the stands before we even knew about it," Ms. Megeney said.

Five months after Cpl. Megeney's death, military police are still investigating. Sources have said he was shot in the chest in his own tent by a member of his own platoon.

"I know this may seem simple, based on the facts that were disclosed in the media, but doing an investigation in a combat zone is always a little trickier, especially overseas," said Lt.-Cmdr. Pierre Babinsky, a spokesman for the military's justice system.

Ms. Megeney is not faulting the military police for their lengthy investigation.

"I know that they wouldn't be taking this long if it wasn't necessary," she said. "I fully trust them. They're going to do the best job they can and that takes time. So if it takes a year, it wouldn't put me out a bit."

In the Mother Jones story, Dr. Kevin Patterson describes the evening of March 6, when the soldier was brought into the hospital at Kandahar Air Field. He writes at length and in excruciating detail about his and other medical staff's desperate and ultimately doomed attempt to save Cpl. Megeney's life.

"Cpl. Kevin Megeney's uniform is soaked with blood where the bullet has entered his right chest, just below his armpit. His eyes are wide open and his pupils fixed and dilated; there is no pulse. One of the men who brought him in says, 'We were just walking by his tent and heard the shot. Sounded like a 9–mm. No idea what happened.'

" 'We need a surgeon here right now!' I holler. . . . Lt.–Col. Dennis Filipis appears. . . . He takes a scalpel and runs it between the soldier's ribs from his sternum around to his back. . . . Filipis saws through the sternum and extends the incision around to the right chest; this is called a 'clamshell' incision and is done only in emergencies. It exposes the contents of the chest completely; surgical residents trying to sound hardened call it 'opening the hood.' Filipis tries to find a bleeding vessel to repair, while I attempt to get my needle into his femoral veins, which are collapsed flat. One of the nurses finally gets an IV started in his arm; 10 units each of blood and plasma are ordered from the lab. Filipis finds the bullet hole in Megeney's inferior vena cava and aorta – the great vessels leading directly in and out of the heart. There is no cardiac activity at all. The lab tech arrives with armloads of packed red blood cells at the same time I manage to get a line into Megeney's femoral vein. Filipis says, 'He's been pulseless now for 20 minutes. We should stop.' The room freezes as we all realize he is right.

"Megeney has red hair and blue eyes and looks cheerful even in death. We step back as one of the medics begins sewing up the enormous incision stretching around his chest. Someone says, 'It wasn't a pistol. It was a roommate's rifle.' . . . The military police begin swarming; everyone in the facility sags as the story comes out. An accident. Ten thousand soldiers who have to carry weapons in order to be served breakfast, and it is bound to happen sooner or later."

Readers posted several comments on the Mother Jones website, praising and condemning the text.

"Beautifully told account of a war that is hardly covered in what our U.S. media calls 'the news' and is mostly the latest breathless goings–on of celebrities," Anne McGravie said in a July 28 posting. Another person who identified as being from Nova Scotia said in a posting the article should be struck from the site for the sake of the Megeney family.

"It's horrible enough to loss a son over there. They do not need the details of the operating room."

Another person who was identified as a physician said the soldier's name and the "graphic details" of his death should be removed from the website.

"This is a flagrant violation of patient confidentiality and medical ethics," R. Brisebois said in a July 30 posting.

A person who identified herself as a "Pictou County girl" wanted the entire article removed from the Mother Jones site.

"Those details of his death (do) not help our grieving process," she said in a July 31 posting.

Ed MacIntosh said in a posting no one from the soldier's family knew about the story before it was published.

"How irresponsible of you as a 'news organization' to do such a thing," he said in an Aug. 2 posting. "Do you not investigate such things before you publish?"

That same day, the magazine's co–editor, Clara Jeffery, defended the story in a posting.

"First, we sent a letter to Cpl. Megeney's parents, uncle and sisters, ahead of publication, informing them that this 7,000–word diary of a doctor's month of service at Kandahar Air Field did contain a scene involving the

Mother: "I just wish I had seen it first"; Article about Stellarton soldier's final few minutes upsets family

tragic death of their son; that it was written by a doctor present when Cpl. Megeney was brought in for emergency surgery; and that it would likely be disturbing to those close to him.

"We offered to send it to them or any intermediary they would like if they thought it would be too disturbing to read it themselves. I then spoke with Mrs. Megeney by phone at length. She assured me that the family would like to see the article and that she was a nurse and would read it before any other members of her family; she said it would help to have closure to know more about what happened. We heard from other members of the family who also wanted to read it. (One of them) after they did expressed the desire to write to Dr. Patterson 'to express my appreciation to him for exhausting every effort to save (him).'

There was no way to write about the incident without identifying the soldier, the editor said.

"Doctors can and do publicly talk about how patients die when the story is already in the news – consider press conferences following tragic accidents. And there was certainly nothing in this account that disparaged Cpl. Megeney, who served his country admirably and died in a tragic accident.

"This was an extremely emotional story to work on. The account of Cpl. Megeney's death was particularly poignant, but there were many other stories in there of death and injury to soldiers and civilians that are hard to read. But in our opinion, for the greater public to live in denial about what happens in a war does a disservice to those soldiers who serve and the civilians who are affected."

Another Nova Scotian said in a posting it was difficult to imagine that the Megeney family would be anything but grateful to Dr. Patterson for fighting to save their son's life and writing such a poignant account of the horror of his death.

"Hard to read? Yes. Although the real tragedy is that these soldiers deaths are so easy to ignore. It isn't pleasant, but we all need to open our eyes and see what is going on in Afghanistan and not forget the sacrifices these young men and women make."

()

U.S. kills 3 Taliban leaders; Boy, civilians among wounded in air strike, officials say

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle–Herald

DATE: 2007.08.04

SECTION: World

PAGE: A9

SOURCE: The Associated Press

BYLINE: Noor Khan

ILLUSTRATION: A wounded boy's father stands near his son's bed at a hospital in Kandahar, Afghanistan, on Friday. (Allah Iddin / AP)

WORD COUNT: 509

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – U.S.–led air strikes hit a Taliban gathering in volatile southern Afghanistan and killed at least three senior figures of the militant group, government officials said Friday.

Local officials and doctors said dozens of wounded were brought to hospitals, one of them an eight-year-old boy.

The attacks in Helmand province's Baghran district struck militants who had gathered to watch the hanging of two men accused by the Taliban of spying for the government, said Gen. Mohammad Zahir Azimi, the Defence Ministry spokesman.

The ministry said its intelligence reports indicated three militant leaders, including Taliban commander for Helmand province Mullah Rahim, were among those killed Thursday. The Taliban commander for all of southern Afghanistan, Dadullah Mansoor, was at the scene but his fate was not immediately known, Azimi said.

A purported Taliban spokesman, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, denied Rahim was killed.

The U.S.–led coalition would not confirm Azimi's account. But a coalition statement said it carried out a "precision air strike against two notorious Taliban commanders conducting a leadership meeting in a remote area of the Baghran district."

"During a sizable meeting of senior Taliban commanders, coalition forces employed precision-guided munitions on their location after ensuring there were no innocent Afghans in the surrounding area," the statement said. The coalition gave few other details and no word of casualties.

In apparent reference to the same incident, Mohammad Hussein, the provincial police chief, said several Taliban and civilians were killed Thursday in an air strike in the Shah Ibrahim area of Baghran district.

Villagers had come out from their homes to watch the hanging organized by the Taliban when the bombs fell, he said.

He said 20 wounded people were brought to the hospital in Helmand's capital of Lashkar Gah.

Enayatullah Ghafari, head of the health department for Helmand province, said the youngest victim was an eight-year-old boy and the oldest was a 50-year-old man.

Twelve wounded men were brought to a hospital in the main southern city of Kandahar, said Sharifullah Khan, a doctor there.

Nasibullah, one of the wounded men in Kandahar hospital, said the bombs hit a market. He claimed there were no Taliban there at the time of the attack.

Afghan and foreign troops in the country have repeatedly tried to kill senior militant leadership, while trying to co-opt the low level fighters in their drive to expand government control in the country's south and east.

Dadullah Mansoor succeeded his brother, Mullah Dadullah, as commander of militant operations in southern Afghanistan after Mullah Dadullah was killed in a U.S.-led operation in May.

Mullah Dadullah orchestrated Taliban suicide attacks and beheadings in the region, and Dadullah Mansoor told Al-Jazeera in June he had received a personal message of condolence from al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden for the death of his brother.

The air strikes were about 320 kilometres away from the area in central Afghanistan where Taliban militants are believed to be holding 21 South Korean hostages. On Friday, the Taliban offered to meet South Korean officials for hostage talks in Afghan government-controlled territory if their safety is guaranteed.

The Taliban abducted 23 South Koreans on July 19 in Ghazni province as they travelled by bus from Kabul to Kandahar. They were part of a Christian church group doing volunteer health work in Afghanistan. The captors have shot and killed two men in the group.

In defence of Afghanistan; Quebec forces dismayed, disheartened by province's opposition to mission

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle-Herald

DATE: 2007.08.04

SECTION: World

PAGE: A9

SOURCE: The Canadian Press

BYLINE: Martin Ouellet

ILLUSTRATION: Sgt. Steve Dufour gives directions during a patrol in the area of Shawali Kot, Afghanistan, on Friday. (Martin Ouellet / CP)

WORD COUNT: 395

SHAWALI KOT, Afghanistan – Pte. Francis Archambault says he couldn't believe what he was hearing during a conversation he had before he left Quebec for Afghanistan.

"Somebody who's educated, who has diplomas galore, told me there would be no war in the world if people like me didn't exist," Archambault, 23, said in an interview with The Canadian Press.

"It really shocked me to hear that from someone who should know better."

Archambault and other Quebec-based soldiers in Afghanistan expressed frustration and exasperation with the widespread opposition in their home province to Canada's military mission in the country.

One poll suggested 70 per cent of Quebecers were opposed to the continued presence of Canadian soldiers in the war-torn land, while some members of the national assembly refused to stand up when several soldiers visited the legislature earlier this year.

Archambault said people who are against the mission are misguided when they accuse Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives of wanting to endorse U.S. foreign policy just to stay in the good books of the Bush administration.

"That has nothing to do with it," he said. "Canada is not getting a lot out of its presence here. It costs lives and it costs money but we're trying to give a chance to people who need help."

"It's probably the biggest thing I'll do in my life."

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Canada is slated to leave Afghanistan in February 2009 and Harper has said extending the mission would require the consensus of Parliament.

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"You come here because you believe in what you do," Martel said.

"You want to provide security and help people improve their lot, while back home people aren't very receptive to that. They say you're just off to kill people."

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"We wanted to meet the locals and speak to them," Girard said.

"But they (the Afghan police force) got there before us and scared them."

Quebec-based troops can't fathom antiwar sentiment

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.08.04

SECTION: World

PAGE: B10

SOURCE: CP

DATELINE: SHAWALI KOT, Afghanistan

WORD COUNT: 263

Pte. Francis Archambault says he couldn't believe what he was hearing during a conversation he had before he left Quebec for Afghanistan.

"Somebody who's educated, who has diplomas galore, told me there would be no war in the world if people like me didn't exist," Archambault, 23, said in an interview with The Canadian Press. "It really shocked me to hear that from someone who should know better." Archambault and other Quebec-based soldiers in Afghanistan expressed frustration and exasperation with the widespread opposition in their home province to Canada's military mission in the country.

One poll suggested 70 per cent of Quebecers were opposed to the continued presence of Canadian soldiers in the war-torn land, while some members of the national assembly refused to stand up when several soldiers visited the legislature earlier this year.

Archambault said people who are against the mission are misguided when they accuse Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives of wanting to endorse U.S. foreign policy just to stay in the good books of the Bush administration.

"That has nothing to do with it," he said. "Canada is not getting a lot out of its presence here. It costs lives and it costs money but we're trying to give a chance to people who need help. It's probably the biggest thing I'll do in my life."

Canada has about 2,500 troops in Afghanistan as part of the NATO force supporting the Afghan government. In the new rotation, most of them will be from CFB Valcartier, near Quebec City.

Canada is slated to leave Afghanistan in February 2009 and Harper has said extending the mission would require the consensus of Parliament.

Afghanistan is a mission of honour

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.08.04

SECTION: Editorial

PAGE: A6

COLUMN: Letter to the editor

WORD COUNT: 307

Editor:

Your reprint of the Edmonton Journal editorial on the topic of Afghanistan, General Hillier, Stephen Harper and Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor focused on Hillier's assertion that what Canadians are hearing about are "detainees and casualties" while, "many of the incredible things that are occurring" are not being seen in Canada. There is a large constituency in our society which abhors violence for any reason or purpose. Frequently these people are maligned and receive scorn such as "peace at any cost passivists". Their beliefs are frequently equated with weakness and to some extent dumb-headedness. What their detractors fail to see is that it is this constituency which keeps our society sane, and it is from them that nearly all social progress is made; the greater their number the faster the progress. Indeed, as potent and real as science is, it pales as a positive change agent when compared to human compassion.

What the peace-loving constituency may not sometimes appreciate is that as humans we have an obligation to challenge outright oppression. The great tragedy of humanity seems to be that as long as a few are willing to do great violence, and as long as that few subscribe to fundamentalism, theistic or otherwise, the remainder of us must resolve either to defeat them or join them in their twisted view of the world; should we join, however, we do so as subjects, not citizens.

Afghanistan is hard to accept on many levels but it's a mission of honour and Hillier is correct when he says we should be hearing regular updates on whatever good is happening over there; we're getting plenty of the other stuff.

Kevin O'Brien,

Cornwall

A positive presence in Afghanistan

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.08.04

SECTION: Editorial

PAGE: A6

COLUMN: Letter to the editor

WORD COUNT: 198

Editor:

If anyone has second thoughts about Canada's mission in Afghanistan, your article in The Guardian of July 26, 2007 ('Taliban gun down South Korean, release eight other hostages') should serve as a deafening reminder about the warped mentality of the so-called enemy force in this growing democracy.

The story refers to the large contingent of South Korean volunteers who were kidnapped and held for ransom by the Taliban. According to the report, one hostage was shot by the Taliban because he was sick and too weak to travel. I think that there had been about 10 bullets taken by his body. Can you imagine if someone was sick in our country, too weak to travel and his or her bullet-riddled body was found dumped on a barren ground? Authorities would be savagely chastised, human rights groups would be outraged and loud cries for justice would be ringing loudly from voices far and wide.

I hope that Canada can maintain its positive presence in Afghanistan and remain there until the country has grown into a completely democratic state with freedoms and rights for all of its citizens.

Ernest Trainor,

Stratford

Quebec-based troops despair antiwar sentiment

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.08.04

SECTION: World news

PAGE: A7

SOURCE: The Canadian Press

BYLINE: Martin Ouellet

DATELINE: Shawali Kot, Afghanistan

ILLUSTRATION: Members of the Van Doos patrolling a village in Shawali Kot district, Afghanistan Friday. Some members of the Quebec-based Royal 22nd Regiment who have begun their mission in Afghanistan are expressing their frustration with the massive antiwar sentiment in their home province. – Photo by The Canadian Press

WORD COUNT: 401

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U.S. air strikes hit Taliban gathering

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.08.04

SECTION: World news

PAGE: A7

SOURCE: The Associated Press

DATELINE: Kandahar, Afghanistan

WORD COUNT: 110

U.S.-led air strikes hit a Taliban gathering in volatile southern Afghanistan and killed at least three senior figures of the militant group, government officials said Friday.

Local officials and doctors said dozens of wounded were brought to hospitals, one of them an eight-year-old boy.

The attacks in Helmand province's Baghran district struck militants who had gathered to watch the hanging of two men accused by the Taliban of spying for the government, said Gen. Mohammad Zahir Azimi, the Defence Ministry spokesman. The ministry said its intelligence reports indicated three militant leaders, including Taliban commander for Helmand province Mullah Rahim, were among those killed Thursday.

Several dozen soldiers back home after six-month tour of Afghanistan

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.08.04

SECTION: National

PAGE: A1

COLUMN: Defence

SOURCE: The Canadian Press

BYLINE: Kevin Bissett

DATELINE: Fredericton

ILLUSTRATION: Stephanie Simms, 12, looks up at her father, Sgt. Michael Simms, after giving him a welcome home hug Thursday at CFB Gagetown. Simms was one of approximately 50 soldiers from the base who returned home Thursday after being deployed to Afghanistan for a six-month tour of duty. – Photo by The Canadian Press

WORD COUNT: 400

The latest Canadian soldiers returning from Afghanistan say the support of Canadians at home helped them deal with the loss of comrades during their six-month tour.

A lone bagpiper greeted about 60 Canadian soldiers as they arrived Thursday in Fredericton after serving six gruelling months in the Afghan desert.

As the troops from nearby Canadian Forces Base Gagetown emerged from an Air Transat chartered jet, they were met with stifling heat on the tarmac – not unlike the sticky conditions they left behind in central Asia.

With the humidity factored in, it was 36 C when the jet touched down just after 5 p.m.

This was the second group of soldiers to return home after wrapping up the rotation.

Tears, hugs and broad smiles greeted them once they were bused from the airport to the base.

They marched in formation through the doors of the headquarters of the Second Battalion, the Royal Canadian Regiment, and into the arms of anxious family and friends.

Many of the soldiers expressed mixed emotions – thrilled to see their loved ones, but feeling the sadness of knowing not everyone made it home.

Seven soldiers from CFB Gagetown were killed during the rotation.

"I knew the six RCR that died in the LAV accident," said Pte. Dallas Curran of Fredericton.

"It's pretty hard because a couple of them I knew before we went over and I got to know them pretty well."

Cpl. Brian Bannister from Newfoundland and Labrador described the six months in Afghanistan as difficult at times, especially because of the casualties, but he said support from home helped him cope.

"The support we got from people back here in Canada was unreal. It was great," said Bannister.

"We couldn't ask for any better and I just want to say thank you for supporting us while we were over there ... all the letters and e-mails, they were great."

Even before Master Cpl. Chris Lawrence of Fredericton marched through the doors at the base, his first duties had already been mapped out days before in conversation with his wife, Ashley White – he was going to hug and hold his three-week-old son, Aiden.

Lawrence had been home for the birth, but had to return to Afghanistan for the remainder of his tour.

"That was the most difficult thing," he said.

White said Lawrence had some diaper duty at home, but had expressed an eagerness to get involved.

"He gets the night off but I know he wants to be involved, and wants to jump right back into things," she said.

The transition from the battlefield back into family life can be difficult.

The soldiers were given two days of "decompression training" before returning, and spouses at home were offered help as well.

The base's Military Family Resource Centre has been conducting reunion briefings.

"That's educating spouses and partners and family members what it's like over in theatre and what has been going on in their life, and giving them tips about homecoming and avoiding some of the stresses about how to become a couple again and become a family again," said executive director Beth Corey.

Soldiers from the current tour will continue to return home over the next six weeks.

Of the nearly 2,500 Canadian troops in Afghanistan, over 650 were from CFB Gagetown.

'Disaster' in Afghan garden with cold beer; The importance of keeping visas current and devoid of exit stamps in place where bribes work 99.5% of the time

IDNUMBER 200708040031
PUBLICATION: Vancouver Sun
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A17
COLUMN: Don Martin

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: In a rally near the U.S. embassy in Seoul Friday, protesters hold pictures of the 21 South Korean hostages still being held in Afghanistan. They demanded that the U.S. government and the Taliban hold negotiations for the return of the hostages. In an attempt to set up direct talks with Taliban kidnappers and peacefully end the two-week ordeal, a South Korean delegation arrived on Thursday in the Afghan province where the hostages are being held. ;

KEYWORDS: ASTRONOMY; GEOLOGY
DATELINE: KABUL
BYLINE: Don Martin
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 806

KABUL — When confronted by administrative inertia in Afghanistan, the correct response is to unleash bribes.

With my Ariana jet sitting on the tarmac, luggage checked and seat assigned, all that kept me from the swim-up bar in a Dubai hotel was a passport stamp and a 90-minute flight aboard one of the world's most dangerous airlines where passengers actually applaud a safe landing.

But in what became a cruel climax to a seven-week jinx of an assignment here, the passport guy spotted two irregularities on my visa.

One, it had expired. I had paid the Afghanistan embassy in Ottawa for a multiple-entry visa, but they issued only a shorter single-trip visa. Happens all the time, I was told, and veteran Afghanistan travellers say a \$20 bill slipped into the correct hands would take care of that in a hurry.

But somehow the visa also had a stamp showing I had departed the country a month earlier, even though on that particular date I was sitting in a forward operating base sweating under a scorching sun with Canadian soldiers and drooling at the thought of an iced cappuccino.

Standing in passport control, a very suspicious officer wanted to know how I'd snuck back into his country without getting stamped, an ironic accusation given this is among the last countries on Earth I'd want to revisit.

Having no explanation for this mystery stamp was, I figured, a \$50 problem. No, said the senior police officer identified by a friendly (and bribed) baggage handler as the best problem–fixer in the airport, it was a \$150 problem.

After being guided to a corner away from passenger eyes, his palm was discreetly extended for the cash. It seemed a tad pricey given these guys earn \$70 a month and the cost of a visa in Ottawa was only \$100, but the plane was boarding with my luggage in the hold and that added considerable urgency to my predicament. So I paid the expedited "exit fee," got back into line and observed with confidence the cop giving the passport officer a beaming thumbs–up.

But something happened during those final steps to palm–greased freedom that, one supposes, could be good or bad news to a government internationally reviled as dishonest. The good news is that there's one honest passport control officer in Afghanistan. The bad news is that I discovered him at the precise moment I needed the common corrupted variety. And what could be worse? Well, the cop had mysteriously vanished with my failed bribe in his pocket.

So here I sit, down \$150 and stranded for a fifth unplanned day in a Kabul guest house with nasty explosions going off in the not–far–enough distance as I write this, waiting to be rescued by Canadian Ambassador Arif Lalani.

Now, Lalani is a uniquely charismatic and effective diplomat — and I would say this only slightly less emphatically if he wasn't my only hope of escape — but even his office says it could take a week to get a visa in the Afghanistan capital that can be issued in Ottawa within 24 hours.

At the risk of belabouring the point, this is but the grande finale to an alarming sequence of events for a columnist nicknamed Disaster Don by his embedded media colleagues.

After covering the suicide bombing in Kabul that killed 35 people as I was arriving in the capital, I reached the Kandahar base just five minutes before a news conference to announce three Canadian soldier casualties. Then a four–day outing with a reconstruction team was forced to withdraw from good–deed–doing by the unexpected re–emergence of Taliban in the district. An offhanded remark about how glad I was that we'd gone two weeks without Canadian casualties was barely out of my mouth before military officers arrived at the media tent to announce six more soldier deaths. Then came a three–day military operation that hit four improvised explosive devices en route to a 12–day wait for supplies in a particularly barren stretch of Taliban–infested desert.

After hearing my litany of woes as a convoy prepared to leave the base under his command, Lt.–Col. Bob Chamberlain made the obvious observation. "I don't want you anywhere near me." With that, he placed me in the last armoured car of the convoy while he took a position up front. Don't misconstrue all this poor–me stuff as the whining bleat of a journalist stranded in a dangerous amenity–free backwater. It's been an interesting adventure. And the guest house where I'm stranded has a nice garden and serves cold beer on demand.

It's just a triple warning to anyone preparing to visit this sad war–torn country.

Keep your visa current and devoid of exit stamps before you actually depart Afghanistan. Understand that bribes only work 99.5 per cent of the time. And if I'm still stranded here when you arrive, keep your distance just in case non–stop disaster afflictions are contagious.

Freedom tags mean home's days away

IDNUMBER 200708040048
PUBLICATION: The Leader-Post (Regina)
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: B5
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: Canwest News Service
WORD COUNT: 548

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — The troops call them "freedom tags."

In the realm of military procedure, the tags certify that a weapon is in the right hands before a new rotation of troops arrives.

To the individual soldier, they mean that home is only a few days away.

The members of Hotel Company, a battle-hardened platoon based in Gagetown, N.B., were proudly displaying the freedom tags dangling from their weapons on Friday.

They are among hundreds of soldiers that are gradually being replaced by members of the Royal 22nd Regiment, a Quebec-based regiment known as the Van Doo.

"I'm pretty excited to get back home, back to my mom and dad and my family," said Pte. John Tobin. "It's been really hard for everybody."

The handover is also giving Canadian troops a chance to reflect on a six-month rotation that saw a drop in head-on clashes with the Taliban, but also a rise in the frequency of Canadian deaths.

"Last year, the Taliban and the insurgents thought they could go toe to toe. (We) quickly taught them that they're not going to win that way," said Maj. Alex Ruff, commanding officer of Hotel Company.

However, he acknowledged that considerable work needs to be done until Kandahar province is secure.

In recent months, the Taliban have shifted tactics to focus on suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices set along roads. Of the 22 soldiers who died in the latest rotation, all but four were killed by suicide bombers or IEDs.

"This is a challenging piece of terrain. It's going to take a long time to crack the whole Afghanistan situation," said Ruff.

Of the roughly 2,500 Canadian soldiers deployed in Afghanistan, infantry units such as Hotel Company face the harshest conditions.

The platoon spent almost six months living out of a convoy of vehicles parked in the desert. Soldiers bathe using "combat shower" kits or water bottles and eat packaged rations.

Hotel Company only returned to Kandahar Airfield, the sprawling base that accommodates NATO coalition forces, a handful of times.

"It still feels like we're going back out any day now. It hasn't really sunk in that we're going home yet," said Capt. Dave Nixon, who is looking forward to seeing his wife and two young children.

His comrade, Cpl. Dallas Woodworth, plans to get married next month.

"My fiancée's a phenomenal cook and she's already been getting shrimps and scallops and everything. We're going to have a wonderful meal, a glass of wine and get to know each other again."

The platoon was often the first Canadian unit to visit volatile districts in the northwest of the province.

As such, they played a key role in preventing insurgents from filtering over the border with Helmand province, where some of the heaviest fighting is now taking place.

Hotel Company was also frequently the first point of contact with local police and tribal leaders. Building such relations is viewed by the military as crucial to stamping out Taliban sympathies among the local population.

"People started to feel secure, and ... therefore a lot of families that had moved out have moved back, and businesses are starting to pick up," said Nixon.

Such progress carried a price. Six members of the platoon were killed by an IED on Easter Sunday.

"When we got back outside the wire, we had a job to do and we kept our heads down," said Tobin.

"When we actually had a chance to have time to ourselves, then we would think about them. I'm sure a lot of people will be grieving more when we get back home."

The military has established procedures to help soldiers cope with such trauma.

Instead of returning home directly, soldiers will spend four days decompressing in Cyprus. There they will be briefed by mental health officials on how to manage conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

"It's probably not a good idea the first day he comes home to have a family barbecue with 50 people," said Rakesh Jetly, a Canadian psychiatrist who works at Kandahar Airfield. "It's usually better to slowly reintegrate."

The military also offers mental-health and counselling services once they return home, he said.

"A lot of times, members will describe being a stranger in their own home. We prepare them for that," said Jetly.

U.S. air strike targets Taliban public execution gathering

IDNUMBER 200708040013
PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A4
KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM; FOREIGN AID; BOMBINGS; AFGHANISTAN
DATELINE: KABUL, Afghanistan
SOURCE: New York Times
WORD COUNT: 275

KABUL, Afghanistan – The U.S. military said Friday it had carried out an air strike on two Taliban commanders during "a sizable meeting" of insurgents in a remote region of Helmand Province in southern Afghanistan, but that it could not be sure the men had been killed.

Local officials said at least 18 Afghans were wounded in the attack.

A large number of the Taliban had gathered for a public execution near a shrine in the Baghran district and members of the public were also present at the time of the bombing, 4 p.m. Thursday, the officials said.

"The people say there were many people there," the provincial police chief, Muhammad Hussain Andiwai, said in a telephone interview. "The Taliban were also in great numbers; some 16 to 17 vehicles belonging to the Taliban were present at the scene. There must be heavy casualties to the Taliban."

"We have information from the wounded people who were brought to Bost Hospital in Lashkar Gah that the Taliban brought two men accused of spying and they were going to execute them publicly, and they forced the people to come and watch them," the police chief said.

The doctor on duty at the hospital in the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah, said at least 18 wounded civilians were being treated there, including an eight-year-old boy.

The U.S. military released a statement from Bagram Air Base, north of Kabul, saying it had information that two "notorious" Taliban commanders were at the gathering, and that it had monitored their movements in the village of Qaleh Chah, in the Baghran district.

Baghran, one of the most remote and mountainous parts of Helmand, is a known Taliban stronghold where U.S. and NATO ground troops have not ventured recently.

Amnesty International tells Taliban to free South Korean hostages

DATE: 2007.08.03

KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE JUSTICE POLITICS

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 356

GHAZNI, Afghanistan (AP) _ Amnesty International said it has directly appealed to the Taliban to free 21 South Korean hostages, warning the militant movement that holding and killing captives is a war crime.

The human rights group said it made the appeal in a phone call to a purported Taliban spokesman Qari Yousef Ahmadi on Thursday.

“Hostage taking and the killing of hostages are war crimes and their perpetrators must be brought to justice,” Irene Khan, secretary-general of the London-based group, said in a statement.

Ahmadi told Amnesty that “we are trying to resolve this issue ... acceptably,” but did not agree to protect the hostages from harm and release them immediately, the statement said.

The call for freeing the captives, who include 16 women and five men, came as South Korean legislators went to Washington to urge the United States to help end the hostage crisis.

The Taliban have already shot and killed two men in the group, which was doing voluntary health work in Afghanistan. They were abducted on July 19 in Ghazni province as they travelled by bus from Kabul to Kandahar.

Richard Boucher, assistant U.S. secretary of state for South and Central Asia, said Thursday the use of military force to free the hostages had not been ruled out.

“All pressures need to be applied to the Taliban to get them to release these hostages,” said Boucher. “There are things that we say, things that others say, things that are done and said within Afghan society, as well as potential military pressures.”

Afghan officials said Taliban captors agreed to meet with South Korea's ambassador to Afghanistan, but they had not yet agreed on a venue.

“If the Taliban want to come to the area where we are for the sake of these hostages, 100 per cent, they will be safe,” Ghazni Gov. Marajudin Pathan told a news conference Thursday.

But both sides have proposed places that could put them at risk _ including the office of the provincial reconstruction team, which is run by international troops.

“The Koreans told the Taliban to come to the PRT, and the Taliban told the Koreans to come to their base,” Pathan told The Associated Press after the news conference.

Taliban's Ahmadi said the remaining 21 hostages were still alive, but that two of the women were very sick and could die.

A group of local doctors, meanwhile, travelled from Kabul to Ghazni in a hope of being able to reach the hostages, and treat those in a need of medical care.

Canadian doctor under fire for writing about N.S. soldier's death

DATE: 2007.08.03
KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL
PUBLICATION: cpw
WORD COUNT: 977

HALIFAX (CP) _ The Canadian doctor who treated a Nova Scotia soldier killed in Afghanistan has come under fire for writing a magazine article detailing the final few minutes of Cpl. Kevin Megeney's life.

A story in the recent edition of Mother Jones provides explicit details of the 25-year-old Stellarton, N.S., reservist's death.

"I just wish I had seen it first," Karen Megeney, the dead soldier's mother, said Friday.

Her family was away on vacation when the magazine sent them an advance copy of the article.

"It was on the stands before we even knew about it," she said.

Five months after Megeney's death, military police are still investigating. Sources have said he was shot in the chest in his own tent by a member of his own platoon.

"I know this may seem simple, based on the facts that were disclosed in the media, but doing an investigation in a combat zone is always a little trickier, especially overseas," said Lt.-Cmdr. Pierre Babinsky, a spokesman for the military's justice system.

Megeney's mother is not faulting the military police for their lengthy investigation.

"I know that they wouldn't be taking this long if it wasn't necessary," she said. "I fully trust them. They're going to do the best job they can and that takes time. So if it takes a year, it wouldn't put me out a bit."

In the Mother Jones story, Dr. Kevin Patterson describes the evening of March 6, when the soldier was brought into the hospital at Kandahar Air Field. He writes at length and in excruciating detail about his and other medical staff's desperate and ultimately doomed attempt to save Megeney's life.

"Cpl. Kevin Megeney's uniform is soaked with blood where the bullet has entered his right chest, just below his armpit. His eyes are wide open and his pupils fixed and dilated; there is no pulse. One of the men who brought him in says, 'We were just walking by his tent and heard the shot. Sounded like a 9-mm. No idea what happened.'

"'We need a surgeon here right now!' I holler. . . . Lt.-Col. Dennis Filips appears. . . . He takes a scalpel and runs it between the soldier's ribs from his sternum around to his back. . . . Filips saws through the sternum and extends the incision around to the right chest; this is called a 'clamshell' incision and is done only in emergencies. It exposes the contents of the chest completely; surgical residents trying to sound hardened call it 'opening the hood.'

"Filips tries to find a bleeding vessel to repair, while I attempt to get my needle into his femoral veins, which are collapsed flat. One of the nurses finally gets an IV started in his arm; 10 units each of blood and plasma are ordered from the lab. Filips finds the bullet hole in Megeney's inferior vena cava and aorta _ the great

vessels leading directly in and out of the heart. There is no cardiac activity at all. The lab tech arrives with armloads of packed red blood cells at the same time I manage to get a line into Megeney's femoral vein. Filipis says, 'He's been pulseless now for 20 minutes. We should stop.' The room freezes as we all realize he is right.

“....We step back as one of the medics begins sewing up the enormous incision stretching around his chest.”

Readers posted several comments on the Mother Jones website, praising and condemning the text.

“Beautifully told account of a war that is hardly covered in what our U.S. media calls 'the news' and is mostly the latest breathless goings-on of celebrities,” Anne McGravie said in a July 28 posting.

Another person who's identified as being from Nova Scotia said in a posting the article should be struck from the site for the sake of the Megeney family.

“It's horrible enough to loss a son over there. They do not need the details of the operating room.”

Another person who was identified as a physician said the soldier's name and the “graphic details” of his death should be removed from the website.

“This is a flagrant violation of patient confidentiality and medical ethics,” R. Brisebois said in a July 30 posting.

A person who identified herself as a “Pictou County girl” from Nova Scotia wanted the entire article removed from the Mother Jones site.

“Those details of his death (do) not help our grieving process,” she said in a July 31 posting.

Ed MacIntosh said in a posting no one from the soldier's family knew about the story before it was published.

“How irresponsible of you as a 'news organization' to do such a thing,” he said in an Aug. 2 posting. “Do you not investigate such things before you publish?”

That same day, the magazine's co-editor, Clara Jeffery, defended the story in a posting.

“First, we sent a letter to Cpl. Megeney's parents, uncle and sisters, ahead of publication, informing them that this 7,000-word diary of a doctor's month of service at Kandahar Air Field did contain a scene involving the tragic death of their son; that it was written by a doctor present when Cpl. Megeney was brought in for emergency surgery; and that it would likely be disturbing to those close to him.

“We offered to send it to them or any intermediary they would like if they thought it would be too disturbing to read it themselves. I then spoke with Mrs. Megeney by phone at length. She assured me that the family would like to see the article and that she was a nurse and would read it before any other members of her family; she said it would help to have closure to know more about what happened. We heard from other members of the family who also wanted to read it. (One of them) after they did expressed the desire to write to Dr. Patterson to express my appreciation to him for exhausting every effort to save (him).”

There was no way to write about the incident without identifying the soldier, the editor said.

“Doctors can and do publicly talk about how patients die when the story is already in the news _ consider press conferences following tragic accidents. And there was certainly nothing in this account that disparaged Cpl. Megeney, who served his country admirably and died in a tragic accident.”

(Halifax Chronicle Herald)

Afghan-Cda-Soldiers

DATE: 2007.08.03

KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

PUBLICATION: bnw

WORD COUNT: 123

SHAWALI KOT, Afghanistan — Quebec-based soldiers serving in Afghanistan are expressing frustration with widespread opposition back home to their mission.

Private Francis Archambault says he couldn't believe a conversation he had before he left Quebec for Afghanistan.

He says someone told him there would be no war in the world if people like him didn't exist.

Archambault says the comment shocked him.

One poll suggested 70 per cent of Quebecers were opposed to the continued presence of Canadian soldiers in the war-torn land.

And some members of the national assembly refused to stand up when several soldiers visited the legislature earlier this year.

The 23-year-old Archambault says people who are against the mission are misguided when they accuse the government of cozying up to the U-S.

He says that has nothing to do with it.

Archambault says Canada's presence in Afghanistan is costing lives and money, but they're trying to give a chance to people who need help.

(BN)

alj

Afghan–Attack

DATE: 2007.08.03
KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE POLITICS
PUBLICATION: bnw
WORD COUNT: 106

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — Afghan government officials say U–S–led air strikes have hit a Taliban gathering and killed at least three senior figures.

Local officials and doctors say dozens of wounded — including an eight–year–old boy — were brought to hospitals.

According to a defence ministry spokesman, the attacks occurred yesterday in the volatile Helmand province and struck the militants as they gathered to watch a hanging.

The ministry says its intelligence reports indicate three militant leaders, including the Taliban commander for Helmand province (Mullah Rahim), are among those killed.

But a purported Taliban spokesman has denied Rahim was killed.

The U–S–led coalition would not confirm the government's account.

But a coalition statement said it carried out a precision air strike against notorious Taliban commanders holding a leadership meeting.

(AP)

alj

INDEX:Defence, International, Politics

DATE: 2007.08.03

KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

PUBLICATION: bnw

WORD COUNT: 130

FREDERICTON (CP) _ The latest Canadian soldiers returning from Afghanistan say the support of Canadians at home helped them deal with the loss of comrades during their six month tour.

Tears, hugs and broad smiles greeted about 60 soldiers at Canadian Forces Base Gaagetown near Fredericton last night.

They marched in formation through the doors of the headquarters of the Second Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment and into the arms of anxious family and friends.

Many of the soldiers expressed mixed emotions _ thrilled to see their loved ones, but feeling the sadness of knowing seven soldiers from the base were killed during the tour.

Corporal Brian Bannister from Newfoundland and Labrador says the support of Canadians in the form of letters and e-mails meant a lot in the wake of the tragedies.

The rotation of troops in and out of Afghanistan will continue over the next six weeks.

Officials check reports of civilian bombing deaths

IDNUMBER 200708040057
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A14
DATELINE: LASHKAR GAH, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Abdul Qodous
SOURCE: Reuters
WORD COUNT: 148

LASHKAR GAH, Afghanistan — Afghan authorities were checking yesterday on reported heavy civilian casualties after air strikes by Western forces in the southern province of Helmand.

At least 20 wounded civilians were brought to a main hospital in Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital, Helmand's police chief, Mohammad Hussein Andiwal, said.

"I can confirm there were heavy bombardments," Andiwal told Reuters by phone. "We have heard of heavy casualties, too, and have sent a team to investigate this."

A provincial lawmaker in Kabul, Mohammad Anwar, also received reports of high civilian casualties.

In the Lashkar Gah hospital, Shokhi Khan, a relative of one of the wounded, said several hundred civilians were killed or wounded in the strikes.

He said people had gathered for picnics and to go to a shrine in Baghran district north of Lashkar Gah on Thursday when the raids started.

Both NATO and the U.S.-led coalition forces operate in Helmand, a long-time bastion for Taliban guerrillas.

The U.S. military said in a statement late Thursday that coalition forces conducted a precision air strike against two "notorious Taliban commanders" conducting a leadership meeting.

'Freedom tags' say tour of duty ending; Their rotation finished, Canadians are excited about coming home

IDNUMBER 200708040056
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A14
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Joint Task Force official photo / Lt.-Gen. Michel Gauthier, left, commander of the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, promotes Brig.-Gen. Tim Grant to major-general shortly after a ceremony Thursday in which Brig.-Gen. Guy Laroche succeeded Grant as commander of the Joint Task Force Afghanistan. The ceremony took place at the Kandahar Air Field. ;
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 417

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — The troops call them "freedom tags."

In the realm of military procedure, the tags certify that a weapon is in the right hands before a new rotation of troops arrives.

To the individual soldier, they mean that home is only a few days away.

The members of Hotel Company, a battle-hardened platoon based in Gagetown, N.B., were proudly displaying the freedom tags dangling from their weapons yesterday.

They are among hundreds of soldiers who are gradually being replaced by members of the Royal 22nd Regiment, a Quebec-based regiment known as the Van Doo.

"I'm pretty excited to get back home, back to my mom and dad and my family," said Pte. John Tobin. "It's been really hard for everybody."

The handover is also giving Canadian troops a chance to reflect on a six-month rotation that saw a drop in head-on clashes with the Taliban but also a rise in the frequency of Canadian deaths.

"Last year, the Taliban and the insurgents thought they could go toe to toe. (We) quickly taught them that they're not going to win that way," said Maj. Alex Ruff, commanding officer of Hotel Company.

However, he acknowledged that considerable work needs to be done until Kandahar province is secure.

In recent months, the Taliban have shifted tactics to focus on suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices set along roads. Of the 22 soldiers who died in the latest rotation, all but four were killed by suicide bombers or IEDs.

"This is a challenging piece of terrain. It's going to take a long time to crack the whole Afghanistan situation," said Ruff.

Of the roughly 2,500 Canadian soldiers deployed in Afghanistan, infantry units such as Hotel Company face the harshest conditions.

The platoon spent almost six months living out of a convoy of vehicles parked in the desert. Soldiers bathe using "combat shower" kits or water bottles and eat packaged rations.

Hotel Company returned to Kandahar Airfield, the sprawling base that accommodates NATO coalition forces, only a handful of times.

"It still feels like we're going back out any day now. It hasn't really sunk in that we're going home yet," said Capt. Dave Nixon, who is looking forward to seeing his wife and two young children.

The platoon was often the first Canadian unit to visit volatile districts in the northwest of the province.

As such, it played a key role in preventing insurgents from filtering over the border with Helmand province, where some of the heaviest fighting is now taking place.

Hotel Company was also frequently the first point of contact with local police and tribal leaders.

Instead of returning home directly, soldiers will spend four days decompressing in Cyprus. There they will be briefed by mental health officials on how to manage conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

"It's probably not a good idea the first day he comes home to have a family barbecue with 50 people," said Rakesh Jetly, a Canadian psychiatrist who works at Kandahar Airfield. "It's usually better to slowly reintegrate."

The military also offers mental-health and counselling services once they return home, he said.

"A lot of times, members will describe being a stranger in their own home. We prepare them for that," said Jetly.

Army sings a different tune

IDNUMBER 200708040040
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Comment
PAGE: A12
SOURCE: Edmonton Journal
WORD COUNT: 226

Like a music traditionalist, our prime minister is not fond of disharmony. It probably wasn't fun being the aide who bore the news to Stephen Harper that Gen. Rick Hillier had disagreed with Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor's claim that Afghan troops would soon be able to direct the battle against the Taliban.

But Harper's a smart man. It probably didn't take him long to see the positive in Hillier's frankness, even if it made his short-term political troubles with the over-matched O'Connor and the Afghanistan mission worse.

If Canada's chief of the defence staff speaks his mind American-style when this prime minister wouldn't like it, then it is much harder for Canadians to dismiss Hillier's assessments as the party line when they sound like the sort of thing the Conservatives would like to hear.

In the same interview, for example, the general talked of the progress that is being made, even if training of the local army isn't likely to be finished by the time Canada's current commitment ends in 2009.

"We have a little frustration that perhaps Canadians don't see and understand many of the incredible things that are occurring ... All they've seen back here are detainees, casualties and that kind of thing, and all the great things that have been occurring just don't seem to be seen back here in this country."

S. Korea tells Taliban it has limited influence

IDNUMBER 200708040069
PUBLICATION: The StarPhoenix (Saskatoon)
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: World
PAGE: C14
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Reuters / Protesters hold pictures of the remaining 21 South Korean hostages in Afghanistan during a rally Friday near the U.S. Embassy in Seoul ;
DATELINE: SEOUL
SOURCE: Reuters
WORD COUNT: 437

SEOUL (Reuters) — The South Korean government has told Taliban insurgents holding 21 Koreans there is a limit to what it can do to resolve the hostage standoff that has stretched into a third week, an official said Friday.

There has been some contact with the Taliban, and a South Korean delegation arrived on Thursday in the Afghan province where the Koreans are held hostage to try to hold direct talks with the kidnappers.

"Through our contacts, our foremost goal is to make it clear that there is a limit as to what our government can do to meet their demands of releasing the prisoners," presidential spokesperson Chun Ho-sun said.

In Afghanistan, a Taliban official said the group had another contact on Friday with the Koreans by phone and indicated readiness to hold talks in or outside the country.

But the spokesperson, Qari Mohammad Yousuf, said the insurgents needed United Nations security guarantees should the Koreans want negotiations to be held outside Taliban-controlled areas.

Speaking to Reuters by phone from an undisclosed location, Yousuf said he did not know the Korean team's response.

Earlier, he had said the Taliban preferred to hold the negotiations in an area they control, and vouched for the safety of the Korean delegates.

He also said the group would deliberate over an offer by a team of private Afghan doctors who have volunteered to treat the remaining hostages, two of whom are reported to be seriously ill.

The Taliban have killed two of their male hostages, accusing the Afghan government of not negotiating in good faith and ignoring their demand to release rebel prisoners. The remaining hostages include 18 women.

The Taliban have repeatedly threatened to kill the rest if their demands are not met.

Civilian deaths reported

Meanwhile, Afghan authorities were checking on Friday reported heavy civilian casualties after air strikes by western forces in the southern province of Helmand.

At least 20 wounded civilians were brought to a main hospital in Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital, Helmand's police chief Mohammad Hussein Andiwal said.

"I can confirm there were heavy bombardments," Andiwal told Reuters by phone. "We have heard of heavy casualties too and have sent a team to investigate this."

A provincial lawmaker in Kabul, Mohammad Anwar, also received reports of high civilian casualties.

In the Lashkar Gah hospital, Shokhi Khan, a relative of one of the wounded, said several hundred civilians were killed or wounded in the strikes.

He said people had gathered for picnics and to go to a shrine in Baghran district north of Lashkar Gah on Thursday when the raids started.

A group of wounded civilians were also brought to a hospital in neighbouring Kandahar. Journalists were barred from filming or talking to them inside the wards.

But several family members of victims talked to journalists and gave accounts similar to Khan's.

Both NATO and the U.S.-led coalition forces operate in Helmand, a long-time bastion for Taliban guerrillas.

The U.S. military said in a statement late on Thursday that coalition forces conducted a precision air strike against two "notorious Taliban commanders" conducting a leadership meeting in a remote area of the Baghran district on Thursday.

The statement said the fate of the pair was unknown.

Home only days away for Afghan vets

IDNUMBER 200708040068
PUBLICATION: The StarPhoenix (Saskatoon)
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: World
PAGE: C14
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: Canwest News Service
WORD COUNT: 549

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — The troops call them "freedom tags."

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They are among hundreds of soldiers that are gradually being replaced by members of the Royal 22nd Regiment, a Quebec-based regiment known as the Van Doo.

"I'm pretty excited to get back home, back to my mom and dad and my family," said Pte. John Tobin. "It's been really hard for everybody."

The handover is also giving Canadian troops a chance to reflect on a six-month rotation that saw a drop in head-on clashes with the Taliban, but also a rise in the frequency of Canadian deaths.

"Last year, the Taliban and the insurgents thought they could go toe to toe. (We) quickly taught them that they're not going to win that way," said Maj. Alex Ruff, commanding officer of Hotel Company.

However, he acknowledged that considerable work needs to be done until Kandahar province is secure.

In recent months, the Taliban have shifted tactics to focus on suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices set along roads. Of the 22 soldiers who died in the latest rotation, all but four were killed by suicide bombers or IEDs.

"This is a challenging piece of terrain. It's going to take a long time to crack the whole Afghanistan situation," said Ruff.

Of the roughly 2,500 Canadian soldiers deployed in Afghanistan, infantry units such as Hotel Company face the harshest conditions.

The platoon spent almost six months living out of a convoy of vehicles parked in the desert. Soldiers bathe using "combat shower" kits or water bottles and eat packaged rations.

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His comrade, Cpl. Dallas Woodworth, plans to get married next month.

"My fiancée's a phenomenal cook and she's already been getting shrimps and scallops and everything. We're going to have a wonderful meal, a glass of wine and get to know each other again."

The platoon was often the first Canadian unit to visit volatile districts in the northwest of the province.

As such, they played a key role in preventing insurgents from filtering over the border with Helmand province, where some of the heaviest fighting is now taking place.

Hotel Company was also frequently the first point of contact with local police and tribal leaders. Building such relations is viewed by the military as crucial to stamping out Taliban sympathies among the local population.

"People started to feel secure, and . . . therefore a lot of families that had moved out have moved back, and businesses are starting to pick up," said Nixon.

Such progress carried a price. Six members of the platoon were killed by an IED on Easter Sunday.

"When we got back outside the wire, we had a job to do and we kept our heads down," said Tobin.

"When we actually had a chance to have time to ourselves, then we would think about them. I'm sure a lot of people will be grieving more when we get back home."

The military has established procedures to help soldiers cope with such trauma.

Instead of returning home directly, soldiers will spend four days decompressing in Cyprus. There they will be briefed by mental health officials on how to manage conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

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"A lot of times, members will describe being a stranger in their own home. We prepare them for that," said Jetly.

S. Korea, Taliban fail to agree on site for talks; Afghan doctors refused access to surviving hostages

IDNUMBER 200708040035
PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A14
COLUMN: Asia Report: News from the region
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Han Jae-Ho, Reuters / Protesters hold pictures of the remaining 21 South Korean hostages during a rally in Afghanistan on Friday demanding negotiations between the U.S. government and the Taliban for the safe return of the hostages. ;
KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM; HOSTAGES; FOREIGN AID; AFGHANISTAN
DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Mohammad Yaqob
SOURCE: Agence France-Presse
WORD COUNT: 304

GHAZNI, Afghanistan – South Korean officials and the Taliban struggled Friday to agree on a venue for talks to save the lives of 21 hostages, as the rebels refused to allow Afghan doctors access to the group.

The hardliners said after the latest deadline expired Wednesday they had not killed any more hostages, after already shooting dead two as they waited for direct talks with a South Korean delegation.

Taliban spokesman Yousuf Ahmadi told AFP there had been new telephone contact Friday with South Korean ambassador Kang Sung-Zu.

"They told us that they are in negotiations with the Afghan and American governments to convince them to free Taliban prisoners in exchange for the South Korean hostages," Ahmadi said.

The release of Taliban prisoners has been the key demand of the terrorists, who kidnapped the group of Christian aid workers, most of whom are women, on July 19 as they travelled in the country's insurgency-hit south.

Seoul has, however, made it clear it cannot guarantee anything.

"The Korean government is not in a position to give a direct answer to the Taliban's demand that its prisoners be swapped for Korean hostages," presidential spokesman Cheon Ho-Seon said.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency meanwhile cited "informed sources" saying direct talks between South Korean officials and the Taliban were likely to be held later Friday.

But Ahmadi said there had been no agreement on a venue, with the Taliban rejecting a meeting in government-controlled territory. They would, however, immediately agree to talks in its areas, in another country or under a UN guarantee of a "safe return" for its negotiators, he said.

The hardliners, meanwhile, refused to allow an Afghan medical team access to the hostages, most of whom are said to be ill -- two of them seriously.

"Of course we cannot trust them. But we can offer a very simple solution: the government can release two of our prisoners in exchange for the two Koreans who are very sick and we can see for the rest later," Ahmadi said.

The Afghan government has refused to release Taliban fighters for fear of encouraging kidnapping.

Homeward bound; Soldiers of Hotel Company can hardly believe they will soon see loved ones

IDNUMBER 200708040033
PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A13
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Hotel Company soldier Rich Dunbar engages in the obligatory every-three-day shave in Afghanistan. ; Colour Photo: Photo, Don Martin, CanWest News Services / Terry (Doc) Allen of Hotel Company rides in the back of an armoured personnel carrier in war-torn Afghanistan. ;
KEYWORDS: WAR
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 548

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Even bribe goes awry for jinxed scribe

IDNUMBER 200708040032
PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A13
COLUMN: Don Martin in Afghanistan
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Herald Archive, Getty Images / Arianapassengers applaud safe landings by the airline. ;
KEYWORDS: ASTRONOMY; GEOLOGY
DATELINE: KABUL
BYLINE: Don Martin
SOURCE: The Edmonton Journal
WORD COUNT: 800

KABUL – When confronted by administrative inertia in Afghanistan, the correct response is to unleash bribes.

With my Ariana jet sitting on the tarmac, luggage checked and seat assigned, all that kept me from the swim-up bar in a Dubai hotel was a passport stamp and a 90-minute flight aboard one of the world's most dangerous airlines where passengers actually applaud a safe landing.

But in what became a cruel climax to a seven-week jinx of an assignment here, the passport guy spotted two irregularities on my visa.

One, it had expired. I had paid the Afghanistan Embassy in Ottawa for a multiple-entry visa, but they only issued a shorter single-trip visa. Happens all the time, I was told, and veteran Afghanistan travellers say a \$20 bill slipped into the correct hands would take care of that in a hurry.

But somehow the visa also had a stamp showing I had departed the country a month earlier, even though on that particular date I was sitting in a forward operating base sweating under a scorching sun with Canadian soldiers and drooling at the thought of an iced cappuccino.

Standing in passport control, a very suspicious officer wanted to know how I'd snuck back into his country without getting stamped, an ironic accusation given this is among the last countries on Earth I'd want to revisit.

Having no explanation for this mystery stamp was, I figured, a \$50 problem. No, said the senior police officer identified by a friendly (and bribed) baggage handler as the best problem-fixer in the airport, it was a \$150 problem.

After being guided to a corner away from passenger eyes, his palm was discreetly extended for the cash. It seemed a tad pricey given these guys earn \$70 a MONTH and the cost of a visa in Ottawa was only a hundred dollars, but the plane was boarding with my luggage in the hold and that added considerable urgency to my predicament. So I paid the expedited 'exit fee,' got back into line and observed with confidence the cop giving the passport officer a beaming thumbs-up.

But something happened during those final steps to palm-greased freedom that, one supposes, could be good news or bad news to a government internationally reviled as dishonest. The good news is there's one honest passport control officer in Afghanistan. The bad news is I discovered him at the precise moment I needed the common corrupted variety. And what could be worse? Well, the cop had mysteriously vanished with my failed bribe in his pocket.

So here I sit, down \$150 and stranded for a fifth unplanned day in a Kabul guest house with nasty explosions going off in the not-far-enough distance as I write this, waiting to be rescued by Canadian Ambassador Arif Lalani.

Now Lalani is a uniquely charismatic and effective diplomat — and I would say this only slightly less emphatically if he wasn't my only hope of escape — but even his office says it could take a WEEK to get a visa in the Afghanistan capital that can be issued in Ottawa within 24 HOURS.

At the risk of belabouring the point, this is but the grande finale to an alarming sequence of events for a columnist nicknamed Disaster Don by his embedded media colleagues.

After covering the suicide bombing in Kabul that killed 35 people as I was arriving in the capital, I reached the Kandahar base just five minutes before a news conference to announce three Canadian soldier casualties. Then a four-day outing with a reconstruction team was forced to withdraw from good-deed-doing by the unexpected re-emergence of Taliban in the district.

An offhanded remark about how glad I was that we'd gone two weeks without Canadian casualties was barely out of my mouth before military officers arrived at the media tent to announce six more soldier deaths. Then came a three-day military operation that hit four improvised explosive devices en route to a 12-day wait for supplies in a particularly barren stretch of Taliban-infested desert.

After hearing my litany of woes as a convoy prepared to leave the base under his command, Lt.-Col. Bob Chamberlain made the obvious observation. "I don't want YOU anywhere near ME." With that, he placed me in the last armoured car of the convoy while he took a position up front. Don't misconstrue all this poor-me stuff as the whining bleat of a journalist stranded in a dangerous amenity-free backwater. It's been an interesting adventure. And the guest house where I'm stranded has a nice garden and serves cold beer on demand.

It's just a triple warning to anyone preparing to visit this sad war-torn country.

Keep your visa current and devoid of exit stamps before you actually depart Afghanistan. Understand that bribes only work 99.5 per cent of the time. And if I'm still stranded here when you arrive, keep your distance just in case non-stop disaster afflictions are contagious.

dmartin@canwest.com

'Should know better' Van Doos irked by anti-war sentiment

SOURCETAG 0708040409
PUBLICATION: The Winnipeg Sun
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 12
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: SHAWALI KOT, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 244

Pte. Francis Archambault says he couldn't believe what he was hearing during a conversation he had before he left Quebec for Afghanistan.

"Somebody who's educated, who has diplomas galore, told me there would be no war in the world if people like me didn't exist," Archambault, 23, said in an interview with The Canadian Press.

"It really shocked me to hear that from someone who should know better."

Archambault and other Quebec-based soldiers in Afghanistan expressed frustration and exasperation with the widespread opposition in their home province to Canada's military mission in the country.

One poll suggested 70% of Quebecers were opposed to the continued presence of Canadian soldiers in the war-torn land, while some members of the national assembly refused to stand up when several soldiers visited the legislature earlier this year.

'NOTHING TO DO WITH IT'

Archambault said people who are against the mission are misguided when they accuse Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives of wanting to endorse U.S. foreign policy just to stay in the good books of the Bush administration.

"That has nothing to do with it," he said. "Canada is not getting a lot out of its presence here. It costs lives and it costs money but we're trying to give a chance to people who need help.

"It's probably the biggest thing I'll do in my life."

Canada has about 2,500 troops in Afghanistan as part of the NATO force supporting the Afghan government.

Canada is slated to leave Afghanistan in February 2009 and Harper has said extending the mission would require the consensus of Parliament.

Master Cpl. David Martel, one of the Van Doos patrolling the Shawali Kot district in southeastern Afghanistan, said the attitude of some people is disheartening.

"You come here because you believe in what you do," Martel said.

"You want to provide security and help people improve their lot, while back home people aren't very receptive to that. They say you're just off to kill people." KEYWORDS=WORLD

U.S. waiting may lead to new al-Qaida attack Trouble is brewing for the U.S. in Pakistan.

SOURCETAG 0708040192

PUBLICATION: The London Free Press

DATE: 2007.08.04

EDITION: Final

SECTION: Editorial/Opinion

PAGE: A10

ILLUSTRATION: photo by Reuters PREVENTIVE MEASURES: U.S. special forces patrol the Afghan city of Kandahar in 2001 shortly after the invasion to overthrow the Taliban government and deprive al-Qaida of its safe haven. Columnist David Ignatius says it's soldiers like these who would be needed to take action against al-Qaida in its new hiding place in Pakistan.

BYLINE: DAVID IGNATIUS, WASHINGTON POST WRITERS GROUP

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

WORD COUNT: 695

The National Intelligence Estimate released July 17 put the problem plainly enough: Al-Qaida has "regenerated key elements of its (U.S.) Homeland attack capability" using a new safe haven in the lawless frontier area of northwest Pakistan known as Waziristan.

The question is: What is the United States going to do about it?

For those who might have forgotten in the six years since Sept. 11, 2001, what a reconstituted al-Qaida could do, the intelligence analysts explained the terrorist group has "the goal of producing mass casualties, visually dramatic destruction, significant economic aftershocks and/or fear among the U.S. population."

The analysts noted that al-Qaida continues to seek biological, radiological and nuclear weapons "and would not hesitate to use them."

Perhaps it's human nature not to see threats clearly until a disaster actually happens — even if it's the second time around. How else to explain the limited public response to this clear and emphatic warning?

Maybe the Bush administration has cried wolf about terrorism so often that people have stopped believing anything the government says. Or the whole subject is now obscured by the choking fog of Iraq, as in the president's mind-numbing formulation of the threat: "They are al-Qaida . . . in . . . Iraq."

But the question remains: What should the United States do about al-Qaida's new safe haven in Pakistan, from which it may already be plotting attacks that could kill thousands of Americans?

It is Sept. 10, metaphorically, with a little increment of time still remaining. We can see "the looming tower," to borrow the title of Lawrence Wright's fine book. But how does the U.S. stop the airplanes?

The Bush administration will attack "actionable targets anywhere in the world, putting aside whether it was Pakistan or anyplace else," warned Frances Fragos Townsend, the White House homeland security adviser. That drew the predictably indignant response from the Pakistani government, which doesn't want to go after the al-Qaida cells in Waziristan, but doesn't want anyone else to do it, either.

So again, what should the United States do? The lesson of 9/11 is that it's necessary to act decisively. But the lesson of Iraq is that unwise actions can make the terrorism problem worse. Which course is right?

The best answer I've heard comes from Henry Crumpton, a former CIA officer who was one of the heroes of the agency's campaign to destroy al-Qaida's safe haven in Afghanistan in late 2001. After retiring from the CIA in 2005, he served as the State Department's co-ordinator for counterterrorism. He resigned from there in April and is now a fellow at the EastWest Institute and a private consultant.

Crumpton argues that the United States must take preventive action, but it should do so carefully, through proxies wherever possible.

The right model for a Waziristan campaign is the CIA-led operation in Afghanistan, not the U.S. military invasion of Iraq. Teams of CIA officers and special forces soldiers are best suited to work with tribal leaders, providing them weapons and money to fight an al-Qaida network that has implanted itself brutally in Waziristan through the assassination of more than 100 tribal leaders during the past six years.

It would be better to conduct such operations jointly with Pakistan, but if the government of President Gen. Pervez Musharraf can't or won't co-operate, then the U.S. should be prepared to go it alone, Crumpton argues.

"The United States has an obligation to defend itself and its citizens," says Crumpton. "We either do it now or we do it after the next attack."

Crumpton proposed a detailed plan last year for rolling up these sanctuaries, which he called the "regional strategic initiative." It would combine economic assistance and paramilitary operations in a broad counter-insurgency campaign.

In Waziristan, U.S. and Pakistani operatives would give tribal warlords guns and money, to be sure, but they would co-ordinate this covert action with economic aid to help tribal leaders operate their local stone quarries more efficiently, say, or install windmills and solar panels to generate electric power for their remote mountain villages.

Intervening in another Muslim country is risky, to put it mildly. That's why a successful counter-insurgency program would need Pakistani support, and why its economic and social development components would be critical.

The concept should be President John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress to counter radicalism in Latin America, rather than President George W. Bush's Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The United States can begin to take action now against al-Qaida's new safe haven. Or the U.S. can wait, and hope that it doesn't get hit again.

The biggest danger of waiting is that if retaliation proves necessary later, it could be ill-planned and heavy-handed — precisely what got the U.S. in trouble in Iraq.

Quebec troops can't fathom antiwar feelings

SOURCETAG 0708040191
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A5
BYLINE: MARTIN OUELLET, CP
DATELINE: SHAWALI KOT
WORD COUNT: 257

Pte. Francis Archambault says he couldn't believe what he was hearing during a conversation he had before he left Quebec for Afghanistan.

"Somebody who's educated, . . . diplomas galore, told me there would be no war in the world if people like me didn't exist," said Archambault, 23, said. "It really shocked me to hear that from someone who should know better."

Archambault and other Quebec-based soldiers in Afghanistan expressed frustration and exasperation with the widespread opposition in their home province to Canada's military mission.

One poll suggested 70 per cent of Quebecers are opposed to the presence of Canadian soldiers in the war-torn land, while members of the national assembly refused to stand up when several soldiers visited the legislature this year.

Archambault said people who are against the mission are misguided when they accuse Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives of wanting to endorse U.S. foreign policy just to stay in the good books of the Bush administration.

"That has nothing to do with it," he said. "Canada is not getting a lot out of its presence here. It costs lives and it costs money but we're trying to give a chance to people who need help.

"It's probably the biggest thing I'll do in my life."

Canada has about 2,500 troops in Afghanistan as part of the NATO force supporting the Afghan government. In the new rotation, most of them will be from CFB Valcartier, near Quebec City.

Canada is slated to leave Afghanistan in February 2009 and Harper has said extending the mission would require the consensus of Parliament.

Master Cpl. David Martel, one of the Van Doos charged with patrolling the Shawali Kot district in southeastern Afghanistan, said the attitude of some people is disheartening.

"You come here because you believe in what you do," Martel said.

"You want to provide security and help people improve their lot, while back home people aren't very receptive to that. They say you're just off to kill people." **KEYWORDS=CANADA**

Afghanistan Incidents

SOURCETAG 0708040190
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A5
BYLINE: SUN MEDIA NEWS SERVICES
WORD COUNT: 339

– The Taliban sought guarantees of safety from the UN mission in Afghanistan should their delegation hold talks with South Korean officials in government-controlled territory over the hostage crisis, a purported militant spokesperson said. The offer came as Amnesty International said it directly appealed to the Taliban to free 21 South Korean hostages, warning the militant movement that holding and killing captives is a war crime. Qari Yousef Ahmadi, a purported spokesperson who claims to speak for the Taliban, said that the militants are ready to negotiate about the freedom of the captives with South Korea's ambassador to Afghanistan anywhere if the UN mission guarantees the militant delegation's safety. "The Taliban are ready to meet them in Kabul, other cities or another country, but only under one condition and that is that the UN guarantees their safety," Ahmadi said. Officials from the UN mission in Afghanistan were not immediately available to comment on Ahmadi's offer.

– U.S.-led air strikes hit a Taliban gathering in volatile southern Afghanistan and killed at least three senior figures of the militant group, government officials said. Local officials and doctors said dozens of wounded were brought to hospitals, one of them an eight-year-old boy. The attacks in Helmand province's Baghran district struck militants who had gathered to watch the hanging of two men accused by the Taliban of spying for the government, said Gen. Mohammad Zahir Azimi, the Defence Ministry spokesperson. The ministry said its intelligence reports indicated three militant leaders, including Taliban commander for Helmand province Mullah Rahim, were among those killed Thursday. The Taliban commander for all of southern Afghanistan, Dadullah Mansoor, was at the scene but his fate was not immediately known, Azimi said. A purported Taliban spokesperson, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, denied Rahim was killed. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Van Doos sound off on critics of mission

SOURCETAG 0708040627
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 38
BYLINE: MARTIN OUELLET, CP
DATELINE: SHAWALI KOT, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 260

Canadian soldier Francis Archambault says he couldn't believe what he was hearing in a conversation he had before he left Quebec for Afghanistan.

"Somebody who's educated, who has diplomas galore, told me there would be no war in the world if people like me didn't exist," Archambault, 23, said in an interview with The Canadian Press.

"It really shocked me to hear that from someone who should know better."

Archambault and other Quebec-based soldiers in Afghanistan expressed frustration and exasperation with the widespread opposition in their home province to Canada's military mission here.

One poll suggested 70% of Quebecers were opposed to the continued presence of Canadian soldiers in the war-torn land, while some members of the national assembly refused to stand up when several soldiers visited the legislature earlier this year.

Archambault said people who are against the mission are misguided when they accuse Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives of wanting to endorse U.S. foreign policy just to stay in the good books of the Bush administration.

"That has nothing to do with it," he said. "Canada is not getting a lot out of its presence here. It costs lives and it costs money, but we're trying to give a chance to people who need help.

"It's probably the biggest thing I'll do in my life."

Canada has about 2,500 troops in Afghanistan as part of the NATO force supporting the Afghan government. In the new rotation, most of them will be from CFB Valcartier, near Quebec City.

Master Cpl. David Martel, one of the Van Doos patrolling here, said the attitude of some people is disheartening.

"You come here because you believe in what you do," Martel said. "You want to provide security and help people improve their lot, while back home, people aren't very receptive to that. They say you're just off to kill people."

Sgt. Steve Dufour said people are entitled to their opinion but believes the Canadian mission is not understood and is often misinterpreted. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Air strikes target Taliban But locals claim civilians hit

SOURCETAG 0708040626

PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun

DATE: 2007.08.04

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 38

ILLUSTRATION: photo by Lee Jin-Man, AP South Korean protesters participate in a candlelight rally in front of the U.S. Embassy in Seoul yesterday, demanding the U.S. engage in negotiations for the safe return of 21 South Koreans held hostage in Afghanistan.

BYLINE: AP

DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan

WORD COUNT: 309

U.S.-led air strikes hit a Taliban gathering in volatile southern Afghanistan and killed at least three senior figures of the militant group, government officials said yesterday.

Local officials and doctors said dozens of wounded were brought to hospitals, one of them an eight-year-old boy.

The attacks in Helmand province's Baghran district struck militants who had gathered to watch the hanging of two men accused by the Taliban of spying for the government, said Gen. Mohammad Zahir Azimi, the Defence Ministry spokesman.

The ministry said its intelligence reports indicated three militant leaders, including Taliban commander for Helmand province Mullah Rahim, were among those killed Thursday. The Taliban commander for all of southern Afghanistan, Dadullah Mansoor, was at the scene but his fate was not immediately known, Azimi said.

A purported Taliban spokesman, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, denied Rahim was killed.

The U.S.-led coalition would not confirm Azimi's account. But a coalition statement said it carried out a "precision air strike against two notorious Taliban commanders conducting a leadership meeting in a remote area of the Baghran district."

"During a sizable meeting of senior Taliban commanders, coalition forces employed precision-guided munitions on their location after ensuring there were no innocent Afghans in the surrounding area," the statement said. The coalition gave few other details and no word of casualties.

In apparent reference to the same incident, Mohammad Hussein, the provincial police chief, said several Taliban and civilians were killed Thursday in an air strike in the Shah Ibrahim area of Baghran district.

Villagers had come out from their homes to watch the hanging organized by the Taliban when the bombs fell, he said. He said 20 wounded people were brought to the hospital in Helmand's capital of Lashkar Gah.

Enayatullah Ghafari, head of the health department for Helmand province, said the youngest victim was an eight-year-old boy and the oldest was a 50-year-old man.

The air strikes were about 320 km away from where Taliban militants are believed to be holding 21 South Korean hostages. Yesterday, the Taliban offered to meet South Korean officials for talks.

KEYWORDS=WORLD

Quebec regiment wants support

SOURCETAG 0708040515

PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun

DATE: 2007.08.04

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 28

ILLUSTRATION: photo by Martin Ouellet, CP Sergeant Steve Dufour gives directions in Afghanistan yesterday. Members of Quebec-based Royal 22nd Regiment are frustrated by the antiwar sentiment in their home province.

BYLINE: CP

DATELINE: SHAWALI KOT, Afghanistan

WORD COUNT: 208

Pte. Francis Archambault says he couldn't believe what he was hearing during a conversation he had before he left Quebec for Afghanistan.

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"It really shocked me to hear that from someone who should know better."

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"That has nothing to do with it," he said. "Canada is not getting a lot out of its presence here. It costs lives and it costs money, but we're trying to give a chance to people who need help."

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Canada is slated to leave Afghanistan in February 2009 and Harper has said extending the mission would require the consensus of Parliament.

Sgt. Steve Dufour said people are entitled to their opinion but believes the Canadian mission is not understood and is often misinterpreted. **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

U.S.-led air strikes kill three militants

SOURCETAG 0708040514
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 28
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 183

U.S.-led air strikes hit a Taliban gathering in volatile southern Afghanistan and killed at least three senior figures of the militant group, government officials said yesterday.

Local officials and doctors said dozens of wounded were brought to hospitals, one of them an eight-year-old boy.

The attacks in Helmand province's Baghran district struck militants who had gathered to watch the hanging of two men accused by the Taliban of spying for the government, said Gen. Mohammad Zahir Azimi, the Defence Ministry spokesman.

The ministry said its intelligence reports indicated three militant leaders, including Taliban commander for Helmand province Mullah Rahim, were among those killed Thursday.

The Taliban commander for all of southern Afghanistan, Dadullah Mansoor, was at the scene, but his fate was not immediately known, Azimi said.

A purported Taliban spokesman, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, denied Rahim was killed.

The U.S.-led coalition would not confirm Azimi's account. But a coalition statement said it carried out a "precision air strike against two notorious Taliban commanders conducting a leadership meeting in a remote area of the Baghran district."

"During a sizable meeting of senior Taliban commanders, coalition forces employed precision-guided munitions on their location after ensuring there were no innocent Afghans in the surrounding area," the statement said.

The coalition gave few other details and no word of casualties. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Taliban seeks UN safety

SOURCETAG 0708040513
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 28
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 118

The Taliban sought guarantees of safety from the UN mission in Afghanistan should their delegation hold talks with South Korean officials in government-controlled territory over the hostage crisis, a purported militant spokesman said yesterday.

The offer came as Amnesty International said it directly appealed to the Taliban to free 21 South Korean hostages, warning the militant movement that holding and killing captives is a war crime.

Qari Yousef Ahmadi, a purported spokesman who claims to speak for the Taliban, said the militants are ready to negotiate about the freedom of the captives with South Korea's ambassador to Afghanistan anywhere if the UN mission guarantees the militant delegation's safety.

Officials from the UN mission in Afghanistan were not available to comment on Ahmadi's offer.
KEYWORDS=WORLD

THE AFGHAN MISSION Doctor's gory tale angers soldier's family Military investigates published account of dying moments

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072160265

DATE: 2007.08.04

PAGE: A1 (ILLUS)

BYLINE: ALAN FREEMAN

SECTION: National News

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: Ottawa ONT

WORDS: 960

WORD COUNT: 923

ALAN FREEMAN With a report from Hayley Mick OTTAWA The military has launched two investigations into the actions of a Canadian doctor and author, whose graphic description of a Nova Scotia soldier's dying moments in Afghanistan has unleashed a torrent of criticism from family and friends who say the account is tasteless and violates medical ethics.

The Department of National Defence said it has initiated a military police investigation as well as a summary investigation into the conduct of Kevin Patterson, a physician and novelist who worked at the coalition medical facility in Kandahar this year.

In the July–August issue of Mother Jones magazine, Dr. Patterson describes in gruesome detail the death on the operating table of Corporal Kevin Megeney, a 25–year–old reservist from Stellarton, N.S., who was shot in the chest in his tent at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization base in Kandahar.

The death, which has been described as resulting from non–enemy action, is still being probed by the military's National Investigation Service.

Details of the efforts to save the soldier's life are recounted by Dr. Patterson in the narrative climax of a 7,000–word memoir detailing his six weeks as a doctor in Kandahar.

"Corporal Kevin Megeney's uniform is soaked with blood where the bullet has entered his right chest, just below the armpit," Dr.

Patterson writes, describing the moment when the soldier was brought to the coalition–run base hospital.

Dr. Patterson's description becomes more vivid, detailing the massive bleeding from the wound and the desperate and ultimately unsuccessful efforts made by the surgical team to save Cpl. Megeney's life through an emergency operation to open his chest.

The doctor's grisly depiction of the young soldier's final moments on the operating table has angered George Megeney, Cpl. Megeney's uncle. The family is also close to the family of Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay, who attended the soldier's funeral.

"Certainly the family are not happy, not at all," Mr. Megeney, a retired police officer, said in an interview from New Glasgow, N.S. "It was very graphic. That doctor was way out of line.

"In my opinion, he breached doctor-patient confidentiality," the uncle continued. "It was very unethical of him. He could've written it without naming him. . . . It was very self-promoting.

"This boy died less than six months ago. Put yourself in the parents' situation," he continued. "This guy betrayed the trust of the Megeney family." Friends of the dead soldier have also expressed their distress in a series of postings on Mother Jones's website.

"I think this article should be removed," wrote one reader, identified only as "a Nova Scotian." "How awful to read about the death of your son and what the doctor did to him on the operating table in detail." "When I read this article, I was completely shocked," wrote Donna from Pictou County, N.S. "I can't believe these graphic details are made public. Kevin's family is suffering enough. They don't need this." "Shame on you," wrote Ed MacIntosh, saying he was disgusted by the account. "I hope you get sued too." Responding to the onslaught of criticism, Mother Jones's co-editor, Clara Jeffery, said in a posting on the magazine's website that she had contacted the family prior to publication and that Cpl.

Megeney's mother had said that the article would help the family have closure.

Ms. Jeffery concluded that it would be a disservice to soldiers like Cpl. Megeney for the public to "live in denial about what happens in a war." Lieutenant-Commander Pierre Babinsky, a spokesman for DND, said the investigations will determine whether there have been any breaches of laws or regulations under the National Defence Act. The summary investigation will be undertaken by National Defence's health services group.

He said that civilian contractors like Dr. Patterson are subject to the National Defence Act and to the military code of service discipline.

Dr. Patterson, 42, who has written a memoir of sailing to Tahiti as well as a novel tracking the history of an Inuit family, defended his decision to identify Cpl. Megeney in the article.

"His death was well covered in the Canadian media and it was already in the news that he had been shot in the chest and brought to the hospital where he underwent emergency surgery," he said, adding that the corporal's identity would have been easily guessed by readers even if he had declined to name him.

In the past, when he has written about patients he has treated, Dr. Patterson said he had changed details of their identity to protect their privacy. But the case of Cpl. Megeney was different, because he had died and his name had been in the news.

"The fact is that writing about war is always charged," he said, adding that it is important for Canadians to understand what the war in Afghanistan entails.

Asked whether he had gone to Afghanistan with the intention of writing about his experience, Dr. Patterson responded that he had signed up as a doctor but conceded, "I had an idea that I might write about my time there." A version of the account will be included in *Outside The Wire*, an anthology of writing about Canada's Afghan military mission co-edited by Dr. Patterson, to be published this fall. He has also written freelance material for *The Globe and Mail*.

Dr. Patterson, a native of Selkirk, Man., who put himself through medical school by enlisting in the Canadian Army, said he understood that the military's "instinct tends to be protective of everything that happens out there," but said it was important that Canadians "understand what's going on there."

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan; Canada

SUBJECT TERM: medical profession; medial ethics; privacy; strife; deaths; magazines; statements

PERSONAL NAME: Kevin Patterson; Kevin Megeney

ORGANIZATION NAME: Mother Jones magazine; Armed Forces

THE AFGHAN MISSION: CANADIAN FORCES: 'THEY LOOK AT US LIKE DIMWITS' Vandoos puzzled by anti-war sentiment of fellow Quebecers

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072160264

DATE: 2007.08.04

PAGE: A13 (ILLUS)

BYLINE: ALEX DOBROTA

SECTION: International News

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: ARGHANDAB VALLEY, AFGHANISTAN

WORDS: 584

WORD COUNT: 558

ALEX DOBROTA ARGHANDAB VALLEY, AFGHANISTAN Private Francis Archambault takes a slow pull from his cigarette as he scans the lunar-like landscape of jagged cliffs and rugged hills before him.

He contemplates threats of possible Taliban fighters lying in wait in the valley down below without the slightest flinch. The scorching heat? An annoyance now; commonplace in time. And the countless little mounds of earth and rocks that line Afghanistan's dirt roads under which an improvised explosive device could lurk? "Destiny," the 23-year-old soldier answers with a smile.

But when the conversation shifts toward people back home in his native province of Quebec who oppose his participation in NATO's fight against the Taliban insurgency, Pte. Archambault's smile quickly fades.

"They look at us like dimwits," he said. "I don't want to be looked at like that. . . . I've once had a woman tell me, 'If there weren't people like you, there wouldn't be any wars.' That's angering." Behind him, soldiers of the B Company of the Royal 22nd Regiment, known as the Vandoos, slowly emerge from their light armoured vehicles stopped on a plateau overlooking the Arghandab River Valley.

Sweating profusely through heavy body armour, the Quebec-based troops march into Taliban territory for the first time since they landed in Kandahar two weeks ago.

Like Pte. Archambault, most of the soldiers interviewed seemed unfazed, and animated by the belief that their presence in Afghanistan will, in the end, improve the lives of its people.

And, like Pte. Archambault, they were all angered and puzzled at the anti-war sentiment of their fellow Quebecers.

"At the end of the day, we're here because we believe in the mission," Master Corporal David Martel asserted. "And if the fact that B Company was here would have helped 10 people, then it would have been worth it." Perhaps their anger is compounded by the fact that the Vandoos, with typical regimental pride, are already making a point of representing their culture among NATO's multinational force based at Kandahar.

Soldiers from Quebec started landing at Kandahar Airfield about two weeks ago, to replace troops with the Petawawa-based Royal Canadian Regiment and the Alberta-based Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. In two weeks, they have slowly started to transform the culture of the battlefield.

THE AFGHAN MISSION: CANADIAN FORCES: 'THEY LOOK AT US LIKE DIMWITS' Vandoos puzzled by

They've rechristened the iconic LAVs, or light armoured vehicles, as VBLs or vehicules blindes legers . They've started teaching rudimentary notions of French to their Afghan interpreters.

And they refer to each other as les boyz , an affectionate moniker that crackles across their radio system every time they rush out of the relative safety of their armoured vehicles and into the unknown of the south Afghanistan countryside.

"We really came here biting our bayonets, as they say," Pte. Archambault said. "We told them [the anglophone troops]: 'The French are here! We have arrived!' " But to their fellow Quebecers, the Vandoos' sense of purpose draws little sympathy for the mission. In fact, recent polls suggest as many as two-thirds of Quebecers would like Canada to pull its troops from Afghanistan.

Pte. Archambault was quick to dismiss the naysayers. "They're complaining and complaining," he said. "But they haven't seen anything." Then, he took another look at the Arghandab River Valley, an oasis of lush orchards in the middle of a desert landscape.

"This is freedom," he said. "People think we're getting boxed in, but to the contrary. It's unbelievable freedom."

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada; Quebec; Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM: strife; defence; statements

ORGANIZATION NAME: Taliban; Armed Forces

AFGHANISTAN Strikes kill Taliban officials, general says

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL
IDN: 072160263
DATE: 2007.08.04
PAGE: A14
BYLINE: NOOR KHAN
SECTION: International News
SOURCE: AP REUT
EDITION: Metro
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN
WORDS: 324
WORD COUNT: 297

NOOR KHAN Associated Press, Reuters KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN U.S.-led air strikes hit a Taliban gathering in volatile southern Afghanistan and killed at least three senior figures of the militant group, government officials said yesterday.

Local officials and doctors said dozens of wounded were brought to hospitals, one of them an eight-year-old boy.

The attacks in Helmand province's Baghran district struck militants who had gathered to watch the hanging of two men accused by the Taliban of spying for the government, said General Mohammad Zahir Azimi, the Defence Ministry spokesman.

The ministry said its intelligence reports indicated three militant leaders, including Taliban commander for Helmand province Mullah Rahim, were among those killed Thursday. The Taliban commander for all of southern Afghanistan, Dadullah Mansoor, was at the scene but his fate was not immediately known, Gen. Azimi said.

A purported Taliban spokesman, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, denied Mr.

Rahim was killed.

The U.S.-led coalition would not confirm Gen. Azimi's account.

But a coalition statement said it carried out a "precision air strike against two notorious Taliban commanders conducting a leadership meeting in a remote area of the Baghran district." In apparent reference to the same incident, Mohammad Hussein, the provincial police chief, said several Taliban and civilians were killed Thursday in an air strike in the Shah Ibrahim area of Baghran district.

The air strikes were about 320 kilometres away from the area in central Afghanistan where Taliban militants are believed to be holding 21 South Korean hostages.

The South Korean government has told the Taliban there is a limit to what it can do to resolve the hostage standoff that has stretched into a third week, an official said yesterday.

The Taliban abducted 23 South Koreans on July 19 in Ghazni province as they travelled by bus from Kabul to Kandahar. They were part of a Christian church group doing volunteer health work in Afghanistan.

The captors have shot and killed two men in the group.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan; Canada

SUBJECT TERM: strife; air strikes; deaths

PERSONAL NAME: Mullah Rahim

ORGANIZATION NAME: Taliban

THE AFGHAN MISSION: CANADIAN FORCES A tough trek begins for the Vandoos Paired with Afghan police officers, Quebec's historic regiment makes its first trip into hostile territory to take on the Taliban threat

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072160262

DATE: 2007.08.04

PAGE: A13 (ILLUS)

BYLINE: ALEX DOBROTA

SECTION: International News

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: ARGHANDAB VALLEY, AFGHANISTAN

WORDS: 593

WORD COUNT: 563

ALEX DOBROTA ARGHANDAB VALLEY, AFGHANISTAN The Vandoos made their first trip deep into Taliban territory yesterday, in a tense patrol of two villages north of Kandahar city where insurgents have recently staged a string of ambushes against Afghan government forces.

As the light armoured vehicles of the Royal 22nd Regiment and the pickup trucks of the Afghan National Police ground to a halt at the entrance of a hamlet of mud huts, a single gunshot broke the stillness of the scorching afternoon.

An officer with the Afghan National Police, the force harried and taxed by the recent Taliban ambushes and mortar attacks in the area, had accidentally discharged his Kalashnikov.

While no one was hurt, the incident made for a nerve-racking few hours as the Quebec-based soldiers, still acclimating to the sizzling heat, left the safety of their LAVs and ventured onto deserted lanes lined by mud walls.

Gusts of wind swept dried balls of thorns into their paths. And a few children ran across a nearby coppice, creating a brief moment of anxiety among the soldiers who kneeled and scanned the wooded area through the scopes of their C-7 rifles.

"We know they're there," Lieutenant Jocelyn Demetre said of Taliban fighters. He's the commander of 4 Platoon of the regiment's B Company, the first Vandoos unit to venture so far into such hostile territory.

"And now, they know we're here. And they'll start talking. Cellphones will start ringing." That was precisely the purpose of the patrol: to make the Vandoos' presence known in the Arghandab River Valley, an area lush with fig orchards, which have provided a key source of income for local Afghans for centuries. But years of warfare destroyed many of the irrigation networks.

In the years of Soviet occupation, mujahedeen used the channels and the orchards as cover for their attacks against the Red Army, who in retaliation bombed the orchards and irrigation structures.

THE AFGHAN MISSION: CANADIAN FORCES A tough trek begins for the Vandoos Paired with Afghan police officers, Quebec's historic regiment makes its first trip into hostile territory to take on the Taliban threat

Now, with money from the Canadian International Development Agency, the Afghan government is planning to upgrade an irrigation dam on the Arghandab River. And the Vandoos have been tasked with clearing the Taliban threat from the hills and the villages surrounding the dam.

"It's an area where they are very well organized," said Major Dave Abboud, the commander of the Vandoos B Company. "They use the hills as their base to stage attacks." Soldiers with the Royal Canadian Regiment have fought and killed several Taliban in the area as recently as three weeks ago. But one week later, the insurgents came back and attacked Afghan police officers in one of the villages, said Ahmad Shah Jan, the assistant chief of police in the area.

"They attacked us here 15 days ago," he said, pointing to an area crisscrossed by mud walls, high enough to provide cover for an ambush.

Mr. Shah Jan's troops led the way walking nonchalantly, their AK-47 rifles slung across their backs, and briefly frisking the few Afghan men who ventured outside their homes. The Vandoos followed several metres behind.

The joint patrol highlighted the sharp contrast between the highly trained Vandoos, and the fledgling Afghan police officers, who are meant to be ready to operate on their own after Canadians leave.

On one occasion, Vandoos Sergeant Danny Saleh had to ask an Afghan police officer, who goes by only one name, Najib, to stop inadvertently pointing his Soviet-made RPG-7 grenade launcher at the Vandoos.

Najib complied, but when Sgt. Saleh turned around, the mustachioed police officer raised his weapon, grinned and said: "Boom!"

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada; Quebec; Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM: strife; defence; statements

ORGANIZATION NAME: Taliban; Armed Forces

PAKISTAN: BENAZIR BHUTTO'S RETURN Wishing on a star It'll take more than the former civilian prime minister to ward off the country's extremists

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072160198

DATE: 2007.08.04

PAGE: A15 (ILLUS)

BYLINE: STEPHEN P. COHEN, MOEED YUSUF

SECTION: Comment

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE:

WORDS: 1047

WORD COUNT: 1022

STEPHEN P. COHEN, MOEED YUSUF Senior Fellow and Guest Scholar, respectively, in the Foreign Policy Studies Program of the Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C.

Pakistan's General-President, Pervez Musharraf, is now publicly talking with important civilian politicians, notably former prime minister Benazir Bhutto. Despite past allegations of corruption, Ms. Bhutto is widely seen in the West as the most secular, forward-looking Pakistani politician, who commands the loyalty of the country's largest political party, the Pakistan People's Party. Her opposition to extremism, and her commitment to civil liberties and a free press, raise hopes that a deal between the general and Ms. Bhutto, could help beat back Islamic extremism, move Pakistan to the column of fully democratic states, and establish a normal balance between civil and military authority.

This is wishful thinking. If Ms. Bhutto does return to office, she will not return to full power. A deal between her and Gen. Musharraf would be no more than the most pragmatic stop-gap arrangement available to the President at this time. Even if Ms. Bhutto were to manage to oust him from office, such a development would say little about Pakistan's return to democracy.

The Pakistan army's pre-eminent political role (the other services are irrelevant) derives from structural and attitudinal anomalies.

Gen. Musharraf, like many, but not all, of his colleagues, has contempt for all civilian politicians, even those, such as the Islamist MMA (the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal) or the prominent and corrupt Choudhury family, whom he has co-opted. This contempt stems from the belief (held by many military people around the world) that those who engage in politics are inherently untrustworthy. In this view, Pakistan's politicians are corruptible and self-seeking, and thus must be kept away from critical national security decisions for fear that they will sell out to India or neglect Pakistan's natural strategic role in Afghanistan.

Thus, Pakistan's domestic civil-military balance is, in large part, driven by the socialization of its officer corps and its foreign policy – factors that will not soon change.

A return to genuine democracy in Pakistan is a long-term process that will be achieved through sustained civil-military dialogue (as opposed to deals), which, while being frustrating, may bring the two enclaves to some rough consensus about their respective roles. In that regard, Ms. Bhutto's propensity to get out of the political alliance that was seeking to pose a united front to a sitting military ruler is actually a step backward.

An all-out push for the immediate return of liberal democracy through totally free elections should not be the foremost priority for now. More important in the short term is to ensure Pakistan's maximum co-operation in the battle on extremism, both within Pakistan and in Pakistan's neighbours (often abetted by forces based in Pakistan).

Ms. Bhutto's return could present a tricky situation in this regard.

That Ms. Bhutto would persist with a pro-Western tilt is a given.

However, the extent to which this will translate into active support on the ground would be determined by the behaviour of the military.

There are two quite disparate scenarios. On the one hand, the military establishment is already irked by the significant number of casualties it has had to take, and it understands that imposing a purely military solution is likely to increase the toll multifold.

Past attempts at brokering a peace deal with militants in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas adjacent to Afghanistan were a manifestation of the army's desire to reduce its losses. With a civilian government (with or without Gen. Musharraf's presence as president), the army might resist efforts to revive an aggressive military campaign.

This is not to say that Pakistan will not continue to co-operate with Washington, as the army knows that completely ignoring the U.S. agenda could have dire repercussions for Pakistan. However, it believes, correctly, that the army might reduce its effort on the ground, while doing only enough to appease the Americans.

However, another scenario (less likely, perhaps) could come out of a strategic shift in the military's thinking on the extremist threat. The recent Red Mosque incident and the attacks on army personnel may well have brought home the realization that the extremists are no longer manageable. If so, the military will find useful the presence of a civilian leader to take the heat for a ruthless campaign, blaming her (or him) for army casualties and civilian collateral damage.

While this is undoubtedly more attuned with the Western objectives, it is also the option that has much higher political and social costs for Pakistan itself.

Pakistan's apparent slide toward extremism must be accurately calibrated. The current wave of violence is due to extremist backlash in response to Gen. Musharraf's belated assault on the Red Mosque.

If there is a genuine and more far-ranging crackdown, then violence will increase.

While crude, tribal-based Talibanization is at best a distant prospect, Pakistan also faces a greater long-term threat. If secular political governments continue to fail to deliver economic reforms that affect the society at large (not just the booming urban enclaves), and if the socially reactionary policies introduced by past leaders are not rolled back, a growing population of disgruntled youth with little access to economic opportunities could then support a tunnelled, radical vision of Pakistan. They would provide the manpower for a new wave of Islamist political movements. Fortunately, there is as yet no sign of such a development, but it is inevitable should the liberal elements of Pakistan's tattered political and social fabric continue to fray.

Western policies toward Pakistan need to distinguish immediate objectives from long-term goals. In the short run, the United States will have to remain engaged with any leadership that takes over Pakistan.

Simultaneously, it should maintain active contacts with the top military brass in order to ensure support on the

tactical front.

The most effective means to pressure the Pakistanis to deliver more is to attach conditions to military aid. A credible threat of reducing such aid may produce greater co-operation.

The economic and social sector aid to Pakistan is a different matter, and affects Pakistan's long-term prospects. This should continue at enhanced levels, but must be monitored to ensure that it actually reaches the people of Pakistan.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Pakistan

SUBJECT TERM: government; political

PERSONAL NAME: Pervez Musharraf; Benazir Bhutto

HOSTAGES IN AFGHANISTAN Out of their minds for God

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072160197

DATE: 2007.08.04

PAGE: A15 (ILLUS)

BYLINE: LORNA DUECK

SECTION: Comment

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE:

WORDS: 873

WORD COUNT: 909

LORNA DUECK Executive producer of Listen Up TV Living by faith, not by sight, is an impossible task to explain when your choices have led to an international crisis. The fate of 23 young Koreans captured by the Taliban in southern Afghanistan will tax every lesson the Christian church has to teach about a profession that has always been a mystery.

I suspect even the Apostle Paul, the earliest missionary of the Christian gospel, would shrug and describe the Korean actions with a defence from his second epistle to the Corinthians: "If we are 'out of our mind,' as some say, it is for God." Exactly what Pastor Kwon Hyuk-su and his church of 5,000 members had in mind in exporting their enthusiasm to war-ravaged Afghanistan isn't known, but as waves of grief roll over families involved, cyber attacks launched from within and without Korea are crashing against Saemmul church and give an indication that our safety-zone lives are prone to confuse just who the bad guys are here.

More than a million children in Afghanistan have been killed, disabled or orphaned due to war. The country is staggering with 40-per-cent or more unemployment and suffers horrific maternal mortality rates, with a woman dying in childbirth every half hour. It is a country desperate for hope. When 23 young professionals chose to spend their summer holidays by stuffing their backpacks with medicine and schoolbooks rather than Prada and Gucci, it was because they felt the ancient missionary call. Their job is to spread the love of God and, to paraphrase St. Francis, to do that with or without words.

The worry that the Koreans may have been planning to use words (proselytizing) on their religiously motivated mission is only part of why this naive bunch have launched an international dilemma that will forever change the way Christian activity is conducted in Afghanistan.

The other reason this mission project is facing severe criticism is because public perceptions haven't kept pace with the evolution of what missionaries are involved in.

Adventures in teaching faith in God began a few thousand years ago, when Abraham was called by God to start a heritage (the Jewish nation) that would bless people everywhere, for all time. Jesus, a descendent of that line, adapted the family calling into a mission to bring peace to every geographic, socio-economic sphere of life, summing it all up in one of his favourite phrases, "the kingdom of God." Jesus intended that everything would be affected and ordered under the touch of God, which is why Koreans, 2,000 years later, are still taking the challenge seriously. To them, even southern Afghanistan is part of the horizon to be adapted to that Kingdom of God vision.

In essence, they want to move from being a bunch of blessed Koreans into being a blessing. It's why a missionary pastor such as bullet-riddled Bae Hyung-kyu would hope to place a kit of pencils into the hands of an illiterate child and consider his work worthwhile.

It really makes no international policy sense that a band of do-gooders can't live with the fact that innocent people suffer while they live in Korea in comfort.

But this is the face of the missionary in this century: They are a people equipped with unparalleled resources to stand up to evil, willing to be silent but not inactive. The problem with staying silent about the hope that motivates Christian mission is that there can be no understanding of why this religion is not, to borrow from the atheist apologist, poison.

If never examined for truth, how will we equip ourselves to face the power of ideas that can motivate activities that either love people and help them, or hurt people and oppress them? I followed news of the Korean crisis from Internet cafes as I was being hosted by missionaries in Latvia, and was eerily aware of the conquering history of Crusades on the ground I walked. My hosts encouraged me to climb the tower of the 13th-century St. Peters Cathedral in Riga, an imposing church built after soldiers had evangelized the region, forcing baptisms at the point of the sword. Bewildered by a church history obscenely drunk with power, I walked from the tower to the Internet cafe and clicked into the 21st-century conflict between evangelical and Taliban, descendents of the same streams of religious zeal that killed in the name of God, Islam and Christianity.

God has enormous problems with followers. I'd hoped, by now, He'd have forced us to behave, but such is not the character of God.

Our PR for His cause doesn't often help explain divine intent, but neither does the silencing of religious learning, debate and mission activity. It is true that missionary stories range from bizarre to beautiful, but we have to keep examining them to find out what truth is behind all the controversy. On a good day, you'll find an evolution has been under way that allows an arthritic Afghan woman to receive a bottle of Tylenol from a Korean nurse, where they exchange only the warmth of their eyes, understanding that God is trying to love them both.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM: strife; kidnapping; hostages; religion; south koreans

... and in Afghanistan

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072160186

DATE: 2007.08.04

PAGE: A16

BYLINE: ARNIE ABERMAN

SECTION: Letter to the Edit

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: Toronto ONT

WORDS: 51

WORD COUNT: 65

Arnie Aberman Toronto According to Rick Salutin (Our Kandahar Operation Is Missing Opportunities, Aug. 3), the Taliban is part of the solution. While in power, the Taliban executed homosexuals, stoned adulterers, prevented schooling for girls and excluded women from hospitals.

Oh well – I guess when problems are solved, there are bound to be losers.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM: strife; human rights

ORGANIZATION NAME: Taliban

HOSTAGES IN AFGHANISTAN No Taliban 'flexibility'

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072160160

DATE: 2007.08.04

PAGE: A16

BYLINE:

SECTION: Editorial

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE:

WORDS: 443

WORD COUNT: 496

That the Taliban are, in the unforgettable words of General Rick Hillier, Canada's Chief of the Defence Staff, "detestable murderers and scumbags" there can be no doubt. The cowardly shooting of two Korean hostages is a reminder of what the Taliban are capable of.

There have been plenty of similar reminders. Dozens of unarmed aid workers have been killed in Afghanistan over the past few years.

Just before the Koreans were captured, a German aid worker was killed while on a project to assess newly built schools. Before that, four members of a mobile health team from ActionAid International were killed as they travelled to help women in isolated villages. Five staff members of Doctors Without Borders have been shot to death by the insurgents. Earlier, four workers with the Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees were ambushed in their car and killed.

On and on it goes. The victims, like the young Koreans, were all unarmed civilians, people motivated by the most noble of humanitarian ideals. And in no case did the Taliban demonstrate "flexibility" – except with respect to manner of death. Some were blown up. Some were riddled with bullets. Yet "flexibility" is what the South Korean government now wants from the Afghan and U.S. governments – flexibility when it comes to making concessions to the Taliban.

The Taliban are using the 21 remaining Korean hostages to try to negotiate an exchange for captured fighters, most held by Afghanistan but some in American custody. In this sense the Taliban are demonstrating that even they can be flexible. They will resist the temptation to use the Koreans – naive Christian missionaries, most of whom are female nurses and teachers – for target practice, and release them in a prisoner swap. If detestable murderers and scumbags can be flexible, then why not the Afghan and U.S. governments? The answer is that the result would be more Taliban fighters kidnapping and killing more people, including more aid workers. Such an outcome would only make an appalling situation worse. Afghan President Hamid Karzai made a terrible mistake by releasing a group of Taliban prisoners in March in exchange for the release of an Italian journalist (although not the journalist's local driver and translator, who were both summarily executed by the Taliban). That mistake only invited more kidnappings, and should not be repeated in the case of the Koreans or any other hostages. The only hope the captives have, then, are for a rescue by Afghan or coalition forces – a possibility the United States has not ruled out – or an uncharacteristic act of mercy by the Taliban, the latter being a slender hope indeed.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM:strife; kidnapping; hostages; south koreans; foreign aid workers; murder; human rights

ORGANIZATION NAME: Taliban

Foreign war threatens our domestic unity; Quebec and the Rest of Canada are deeply split over Canada's involvement in the war in Afghanistan

IDNUMBER 200708040096
PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial / Op-Ed
PAGE: B7
COLUMN: Don MacPherson
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: JOHN MAHONEY, THE GAZETTE / Quebec-based troops bound for Afghanistan salute during the national anthem at an Alouettes football game in Montreal last month. Most Quebecers are opposed to sending Canadian forces to fight the Taliban and Al-Qa'ida. ;
KEYWORDS: ANGLOPHONES; BILINGUALISM; FRANCOPHONES
BYLINE: DON MACPHERSON
SOURCE: The Gazette
WORD COUNT: 585

When soldiers destined to be shipped out for Afghanistan marched through the streets of Quebec City one evening in late June, there was a public demonstration with ominous implications for Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative government – and for national unity.

It wasn't the protest by a handful of placard-carriers that was worrying. Police prevented them from disrupting the parade. No, what should concern Harper was the applause from the middle-class patrons in café-terrasses along the Grande Allée who rose spontaneously to cheer the soldiers as they marched past.

For the applause was for the soldiers, based at nearby Valcartier and most of them French-speaking Quebecers, not for the Canadian mission in Afghanistan that they have since joined.

As are other opponents of the mission, Quebecers are capable of drawing a distinction between the two, of supporting the troops while opposing the mission in which they are risking their lives.

Even in conservative Quebec City, only 38 per cent of respondents in a mid-June poll by Léger Marketing for Le Journal de Montréal agreed with the deployment in Afghanistan of 2,000 "Quebec soldiers," as the poll question referred to them.

Province-wide, 26 per cent supported the deployment, while 70 per cent opposed it – 45 per cent strongly.

Other poll results suggest the unpopularity in Quebec of the Afghan mission is one reason the Conservatives would be denied a majority government in a federal election – and that Quebec is divided from English Canada over the issue.

Ipsos Reid reported this week to CanWest News Service and Global National that in a poll conducted last week, the Conservatives had less support in Quebec – 23 per cent – than in any other region of the country.

And in an earlier Ipsos Reid–CanWest–Global survey, 65 per cent of Quebecers opposed "the use of Canada's troops for security and combat efforts against the Taliban and Al–Qa'ida in Afghanistan," while in the rest of Canada, 56 per cent supported it.

The latter survey was conducted in mid–July, after the Quebec–based soldiers bound for Afghanistan were shown in television reports and newspaper photos exchanging tearful goodbyes with loved ones.

Some see a parallel between the current division in public opinion over the involvement of Canadian troops in a conflict abroad and the conscription crises that pitted Quebec against English Canada during both world wars.

La Presse's chief editorialist, André Pratte, referred to Quebecers' overwhelming opposition to conscription during the Second World War in an editorial in late June in which he criticized their modern–day descendants for an "isolationism" misrepresented as pacifism.

For several months before French–speaking soldiers from Quebec were sent to Afghanistan, there were predictions in the media that casualties among them would elicit a stronger response in this province than those among the English–speaking troops who preceded them.

Some French–speaking federalists have privately expressed fears such a perception in English Canada might result in a backlash against Quebec and new tensions between the two.

McGill University historian Desmond Morton, who specializes in both military and Quebec history, told me this week he thinks the troops and their families understand and accept the risks involved.

But among others, he said, he expects "indignation and outrage when casualties occur and are announced, and we both know who will try to exploit this sort of thing in both English and French Canada."

This week, the question was raised as to whether political considerations would result in soldiers from Quebec receiving preferential treatment and being exposed to less danger.

That suggestion was quickly dismissed by the Canadian command in Afghanistan as unfounded. But the mere fact it was made shows how polarizing the mission is already, even before the troops from Quebec begin to see action and incur casualties.

Air strike kills dozens of Taliban; Many civilians feared dead at execution gathering

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PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
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SECTION: News
PAGE: A18
KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM; BOMBINGS
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
SOURCE: AFP
WORD COUNT: 345

An air strike on a large Taliban gathering killed dozens of rebels, the defence ministry said yesterday, with at least 30 civilians wounded and unconfirmed reports of many more killed.

The U.S.-led coalition forces said they had conducted a "precision air strike" against two notorious Taliban commanders meeting in the rebel-controlled and remote area of Baghran district in the southern province of Helmand.

The Afghan defence ministry said the gathering was to execute four people on charges of co-operating with the government and had attracted several militant leaders, including top Taliban military commander Mansour Dadullah.

"In an aerial operation, tens of terrorists were killed. The bodies of Taliban leaders ... and tens of other terrorists are on the spot and have been identified," the spokesperson said.

He said officials were trying to confirm if Dadullah, who replaced his notorious brother – top commander Mullah Dadullah – after he was killed this year, was among the dead.

There were claims of about 200 civilians also were killed or wounded in the attack but the spokesperson said numbers in the area had been fewer.

Twenty wounded were admitted to a hospital in the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah, Helmand police chief Mohammad Hussain Andiwal said. "We fear many more casualties," he said.

An Agence France-Presse reporter said 12 wounded, many covered in blood and mud, were in a hospital in Kandahar. Two were children, he said.

Andiwal said some of the wounded had told him the strike had hit a large number of people gathered to watch the Taliban's hanging of people they had labelled criminals.

The U.S.-led coalition said there were no civilians in the targeted area and the force had "actionable intelligence" that two provincial-level Taliban commanders were there.

"During a sizable meeting of senior Taliban commanders, coalition forces employed precision guided munitions on their location after ensuring there were no innocent Afghans in the surrounding area," it said.

The Taliban were holding out today for a neutral venue for talks with South Korea over the fate of 21 hostages they are threatening to kill. The Al-Qa'ida-backed militants, who are demanding that some of their men are freed from jail in exchange for the captives, have agreed to talks with the South Koreans, but are refusing to meet them in government-controlled territory.

Chilling out in Cyprus; Soldiers decompress after Afghan tour

IDNUMBER 200708040047
PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A11
KEYWORDS: WAR
DATELINE: LARNACA, Cyprus
BYLINE: MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS
SOURCE: AFP
WORD COUNT: 402

Battle-hardened Canadian soldiers are being indulged in the five-star luxury of the holiday island of Cyprus to reacclimatize them to civilian life after enduring Afghanistan's war zones.

Most of Canada's 2,500 troops in Afghanistan will undergo "decompression" – military terminology for a program designed to ease the physical and mental rigours of life in the combat zone.

After completing their six-month tour on the Afghan battlefield, about 2,100 soldiers are under orders to enjoy five days of sun and sea in this eastern Mediterranean holiday playground before they rotate back home.

But it is not just gratuitous pampering. The program is also about mending the battle-scarred minds of those who may be grappling with the pain of loss.

"Some soldiers have experienced the loss of friends and colleagues, that's why we have mental health staff on hand to deal with such cases," said Major Michel Ouellet, the 47-year-old Montreal native in charge of a 40-person team overseeing the month-long decompression tour.

"A fair amount of soldiers will have been affected by such loss. This was expected and that's why we planned for it," he said.

Since the United States-led invasion of Afghanistan was launched in October 2001, 66 Canadian soldiers have been killed there – 22 of them so far this year.

The most recent fatalities were on July 4, when six Canadian soldiers were killed by a bomb southwest of Kandahar in Canada's highest single-day toll in the country since 2002.

The Cyprus decompression tour is the second within a year. Twelve months ago, about 1,700 Canadians were billeted in five hotels in the island's southern coastal town of Larnaca.

"It's just common sense," Ouellet said. "The weather and location of the island are perfect. It's not too far from Afghanistan ... it's an ideal place for the troops to relax."

Canada is not skimping on creature comforts meant to keep the pleasure quotient high, which helps soldiers shed battlefield stress and switch off from combat mode.

This time, they are enjoying the Azia Resort and Spa near Paphos, a five-star complex of spacious hotel rooms, private bungalows and ultra-exclusive suites commanding daily rates upward of \$2,400.

"The people here are very welcoming everywhere you go. It's a million-dollar view. You don't get this often. Everything is impressive," Ouellet said.

In Kandahar, Afghanistan, members of Hotel Company, a battle-hardened platoon based in Gagetown, N.B., were proudly displaying "freedom tags" dangling from their weapons yesterday.

In the realm of military procedure, the tags certify a weapon is in the right hands before a new rotation of troops arrives. To the individual soldier, they mean home is only a few days away.

They are among hundreds of troops that are gradually being replaced by members of the Royal 22nd Regiment, the Quebec-based regiment known as the Van Doos.

Andrew Mayeda of Canwest News Service contributed to this report

Opinion: War in Afghanistan threatens Canadian unity, Page B7

Perogy Cat ships out to Afghanistan; Comic created by Victoria artist. Book aims to entertain Canadian troops

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PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A11
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: BRUCE STOTESBURY, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE /Perogy Cat creator Gareth Gaudin at his comics and books shop. ;
KEYWORDS: CATS
DATELINE: VICTORIA
BYLINE: LEAH COLLINS
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 324

A Perogy Cat doesn't look much like Bob Hope. Or Marilyn Monroe, for that matter. But the doughy, wide-eyed cartoon kitten that resembles, well, a perogy, is embarking on his own USO-style tour. And he's got orders to ship out from his creator, Victoria artist Gareth Gaudin.

Gaudin has published a comic book especially for the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan called The Perogy Cat for the Troops. This week, he sent 2,000 copies to Afghanistan, where he hopes they'll "spread like gossip."

The character might not have the same cachet as other cartoon cats – you won't find one in your Happy Meal and it doesn't hate Mondays. But since appearing in Gaudin's self-published comic, Magic Teeth Dailies, the character has found a cult following. It has its own Facebook group, has appeared (indirectly) on national TV and at least 11 people (that Gaudin knows of) have its likeness tattooed on their bodies.

It's also easily spotted in downtown Victoria in Gaudin's comics and book shop, Legends.

Perogy Cat has certainly marked his territory throughout the shop. He peeps out from the picture window in paintings and sharpie sketches. There's even a stuffed doll prowling among the graphic novels on display.

One painting hangs over the till with the proud tag: "As seen on Letterman."

No joke. Ed Robertson of the Barenaked Ladies sported a Perogy Cat button on the show. He's been a fan since Gaudin traded some issues of Magic Teeth for tickets to BNL's Victoria show.

Gaudin credits his wife for suggesting the project. The two were reminiscing about re-runs of Bob Hope USO shows they had watched while growing up in the 1970s. A Perogy Cat comic, they figured, could be just as amusing as old Bob whacking golf balls in the dunes.

Gaudin will wait to find out how Perogy Cat is welcomed in Afghanistan. The comics should reach the country within four to six weeks, where they'll be taken to Canada House.

"I would like it distributed like a propaganda bomb," Gaudin. said. "Drop them here and there. As long as I entertain."

Victoria Times Colonist

Doctor's article too graphic

IDNUMBER 200708040140
PUBLICATION: The Hamilton Spectator
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Canada/World
PAGE: A3
DATELINE: HALIFAX
SOURCE: The Canadian Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 158

The Canadian doctor who treated a Nova Scotia soldier killed in Afghanistan has come under fire for writing a magazine article detailing the final few minutes of Corporal Kevin Megeney's life.

A story in Mother Jones provides explicit details of the reservist's death. Sources have said Megeney, 25, was shot in the chest in his own tent by a member of his own platoon. Military police are still investigating.

In the Mother Jones story, Dr. Kevin Patterson describes the evening of March 6, when the soldier was brought into the hospital at Kandahar Air Field.

Readers posted several comments on the Mother Jones website, praising and condemning the text.

A person who's identified as being from Nova Scotia said in a posting the article should be struck from the site for the sake of the Megeney family.

A person identified as a physician said the soldier's name and the "graphic details" of his death should be removed. "This is a flagrant violation of patient confidentiality and medical ethics," R. Brisebois wrote this week.

Antiwar sentiment in Quebec dogs soldiers in the field

IDNUMBER 200708040132
PUBLICATION: The Hamilton Spectator
DATE: 2007.08.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Canada/World
PAGE: A6
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Martin Ouellet, the Canadian Press / Members of the Van Doos patrol a village in Shawali Kot district in Afghanistan yesterday. ;
DATELINE: SHAWALI KOT, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Martin Ouellet
SOURCE: The Canadian Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 402

Private Francis Archambault says he couldn't believe what he was hearing in a conversation he had before he left Quebec for Afghanistan.

"Somebody who's educated, who has diplomas galore, told me there would be no war in the world if people like me didn't exist," Archambault, 23, said in an interview with The Canadian Press.

"It really shocked me to hear that from someone who should know better."

Archambault and other Quebec-based soldiers in Afghanistan expressed frustration and exasperation with the widespread opposition in their home province to Canada's military mission in the country.

One poll suggested 70 per cent of Quebecers were opposed to the continued presence of Canadian soldiers in the wartorn land, while some members of the National Assembly refused to stand up when several soldiers visited the legislature earlier this year.

Archambault said people against the mission are misguided when they accuse Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives of wanting to endorse U.S. foreign policy just to stay in the good books of the Bush administration.

"That has nothing to do with it. Canada is not getting a lot out of its presence here. It costs lives and it costs money, but we're trying to give a chance to people who need help. It's probably the biggest thing I'll do in my life," he said.

Canada has about 2,500 troops in Afghanistan as part of the NATO force supporting the Afghan government. In the new rotation, most of them will be from CFB Valcartier, near Quebec City.

Canada is slated to leave Afghanistan in February 2009 and Harper has said extending the mission would require the consensus of Parliament.

Master Corporal David Martel, one of the Van Doos charged with patrolling the Shawali Kot district in southeastern Afghanistan, said the attitude of some people is disheartening.

"You come here because you believe in what you do," Martel said.

"You want to provide security and help people improve their lot, while back home people aren't very receptive to that. They say you're just off to kill people."

Sergeant Steve Dufour said people are entitled to their opinion, but he believes the Canadian mission is not understood and is often misinterpreted.

"I spoke to one student who was against the mission," he said. "I told her, 'In Canada, does anyone prevent you from going to school and getting an education?' Well, that's what it's like here (in Afghanistan)."

Yesterday, some of the Van Doos went out on foot patrol with a contingent of Afghan police officers.

At one point, one of the policemen fired his weapon by mistake, leading the Canadians to believe they were being attacked. No other shots were fired and nobody was injured.

Captain Stephane Girard said later he was angry that the Afghan police had told villagers not to venture outside during the visit by the Canadian soldiers.

"We wanted to meet the locals and speak to them," Girard said.

"But they (the Afghan police force) got there before us and scared them."

Troops glad to go home

IDNUMBER 200708040071
PUBLICATION: The Windsor Star
DATE: 2007.08.04
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SECTION: News
PAGE: A13
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: Canwest News Service
WORD COUNT: 188

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – The troops call them "freedom tags."

In the realm of military procedure, the tags certify that a weapon is in the right hands before a new rotation of troops arrives.

To the individual soldier, they mean that home is only a few days away.

The members of Hotel Company, a battle-hardened platoon based in Gagetown, N.B., were proudly displaying the freedom tags dangling from their weapons on Friday.

They are among hundreds of soldiers who are gradually being replaced by members of the Royal 22nd Regiment, a Quebec-based regiment known as the Van Doos.

"I'm pretty excited to get back home, back to my mom and dad and my family," said Pte. John Tobin.

The handover is also giving Canadian troops a chance to reflect on a six-month rotation that saw a drop in head-on clashes with the Taliban, but also a rise in the frequency of Canadian deaths.

"Last year, the Taliban and the insurgents thought they could go toe to toe. (We) quickly taught them that they're not going to win that way," said Maj. Alex Ruff, commanding officer of Hotel Company.

However, he acknowledged that considerable work needs to be done until Kandahar province is secure.

In recent months, the Taliban have shifted tactics to focus on suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices set along roads. Of the 22 soldiers who died in the latest rotation, all but four were killed by suicide bombers or IEDs.

Hostage negotiations can only go so far, S. Korea tells Taliban

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DATELINE: SEOUL
SOURCE: Reuters
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SEOUL – The South Korean government has told Taliban insurgents holding 21 South Koreans there is a limit to what it can do to resolve the hostage standoff that has stretched into a third week, an official said yesterday.

There has been some contact with the Taliban, and a South Korean delegation arrived on Thursday in the Afghan province where the hostages are being held to try to hold direct talks with the kidnappers.

"Our foremost goal is to make it clear that there is a limit as to what our government can do to meet their demands of releasing the prisoners," presidential spokesman Chun Ho-sun said.

In Afghanistan, a Taliban spokesman said the group made contact with the South Koreans yesterday by telephone and indicated readiness to hold talks in or outside the country.

But the spokesman, Qari Mohammad Yousuf, said the insurgents needed United Nations security guarantees should the South Koreans want negotiations to be held outside Taliban-controlled areas.

Speaking to Reuters by phone from an undisclosed location, Mr. Yousuf said he did not know the Korean team's response.

Earlier, he had said the Taliban preferred to hold the negotiations in an area they control, and vouched for the safety of the Korean delegates.

He also said the group would consider an offer by private Afghan doctors who have volunteered to treat the remaining hostages, two of whom are reported to be seriously ill.

Battle-hardened troops excited to head home; Members of the Hotel Company are being rotated out of Afghanistan after six months of increasing Canadian deaths, writes Andrew Mayeda.

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DATE: 2007.08.04

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PAGE: A5

ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Jonathan Fowlie, CanWest News Service /Soldiers from Hotel Company, 2nd Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment, unpack their LAV III Thursday night. Members of the company, based in Gagetown, N.B., are being replaced by the Royal 22nd Regiment from Quebec. Infantry units such as Hotel Company face some of the harshest conditions in Afghanistan. ; Colour Photo: Sgt. Craig Fiander, Department of National Defence / Troops from Hotel Company, 2nd Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment, are caught in a sudden dust storm when two helicopters passed low overhead. The company was often the first Canadian unit to visit volatile districts in Kandahar province, and played a key role preventing insurgents from filtering over from Helmand province. ;

DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan

BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda

SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen

WORD COUNT: 685

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To the individual soldier, the tags mean home is only a few days away.

The members of Hotel Company, a battle-hardened unit based in Gagetown, N.B., were proudly displaying the freedom tags dangling from their weapons yesterday.

They are among hundreds of soldiers gradually being replaced by members of the Royal 22nd Regiment, a Quebec-based regiment known as the Van Doo.

"I'm pretty excited to get back home, back to my Mom and Dad and my family," said Pte. John Tobin. "It's been really hard for everybody."

The handover is also giving Canadian troops a chance to reflect on a six-month rotation that saw a drop in head-on clashes with the Taliban, but also a rise in the frequency of Canadian deaths.

"Last year, the Taliban and the insurgents thought they could go toe to toe. (We) quickly taught them that they're not going to win that way," said Maj. Alex Ruff, commanding officer of Hotel Company.

Battle-hardened troops excited to head home; Members of the Hotel Company are being rotated out of Afghanistan after six months of increasing Canadian deaths, writes Andrew Mayeda.

However, he acknowledged that considerable work needs to be done until Kandahar province is secure.

In recent months, the Taliban have shifted their tactics to focus on suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices set along roads. Of the 22 soldiers who died in the latest rotation, all but four were killed by suicide bombers or IEDs.

"This is a challenging piece of terrain. It's going to take a long time to crack the whole Afghanistan situation," said Maj. Ruff.

Of the roughly 2,500 Canadian soldiers deployed in Afghanistan, infantry units such as Hotel Company face the harshest conditions. The platoon spent almost six months living out of a convoy of vehicles parked in the desert. Soldiers bathe using "combat shower" kits or water bottles, and eat packaged rations.

Hotel Company only returned to Kandahar Airfield, the sprawling base that accommodates NATO coalition forces, a handful of times.

"It still feels like we're going back out any day now. It hasn't really sunk in that we're going home yet," said Capt. Dave Nixon, who is looking forward to seeing his wife and two young children.

The platoon was often the first Canadian unit to visit volatile districts in the northwest of the province. As such, they played a key role in preventing insurgents from filtering over the border with Helmand province, where some of the heaviest fighting is now taking place.

Hotel Company was also frequently the first point of contact with local police and tribal leaders. Building such relations is viewed by the military as crucial to stamping out Taliban sympathies among the local population.

"People started to feel secure, and ... therefore a lot of families that had moved out have moved back, and businesses are starting to pick up," said Capt. Nixon.

Such progress carried a price. Six members of the platoon were killed by an IED on Easter Sunday.

"When we got back outside the wire, we had a job to do and we kept our heads down," said Pte. Tobin.

"When we actually had a chance to have time to ourselves, then we would think about them. I'm sure a lot of people will be grieving more when we get back home."

The military has established procedures to help soldiers cope with such trauma.

Instead of returning home directly, soldiers will spend four days decompressing in Cyprus. There, they will be briefed by mental health officials on how to manage conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

"It's probably not a good idea the first day he comes home to have a family barbecue with 50 people," said Rakesh Jetly, a Canadian psychiatrist who works at Kandahar Airfield. "It's usually better to slowly reintegrate."

The military also offers mental-health and counselling services once they return home, he said.

"A lot of times, members will describe being a stranger in their own home. We prepare them for that," Dr. Jetly said.

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Battle-hardened troops excited to head home; Members of the Hotel Company are being rotated out of Afg

Project Kandahar: 'We see a legless man in rags in the street'

For the next six weeks, Citizen reporter Andrew Mayeda will be blogging from Afghanistan while covering the war embedded with the Canadian military in Kandahar. We've also given him a video camera so he can capture the action.

His first impression of Kabul: "The poverty is jarring, even in Afghanistan's biggest city. We drive by a legless man in rags sitting in the middle of the street, trembling. Young children try to sell us gum or maps or just stick out their hand. 'Give them a little money, but whatever you do, don't open your wallet,' says Abdul, my fixer. When I ignore his advice, a mob of women and children suddenly appears. Abdul and his cousin have to pry them away from the car. I try not to look at their faces as we drive away ..."

Read more and see video footage at ottawacitizen.com

Still waiting to leave Kabul; Where's A Crooked Cop When You Need Him?

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COLUMN: Don Martin
BYLINE: Don Martin
SOURCE: National Post
WORD COUNT: 712

KABUL, Afghanistan –When confronted by administrative inertia in Afghanistan, the correct response is to unleash bribes.

With my Ariana jet sitting on the tarmac, luggage checked and seat assigned, all that kept me from the swim-up bar in a Dubai hotel was a passport stamp and a 90-minute flight aboard one of the world's most dangerous airlines, where passengers actually applaud a safe landing.

But in a cruel climax to a seven-week jinx of an assignment here — for a columnist nicknamed Disaster Don by his embedded media colleagues — the passport guy spotted two irregularities on my visa.

One, it had expired. I had paid the Afghanistan embassy in Ottawa

for a multiple-entry visa, but they only issued a shorter single-trip visa. Happens all the time, I was told, and veteran Afghanistan travellers say a \$20 bill slipped into the correct hands will take care of that in a hurry.

But somehow the visa had a stamp showing I had departed the country a month earlier, even though on that particular date I was sitting in a forward operating base sweating under a scorching sun with Canadian soldiers and drooling at the thought of an iced cappuccino.

Standing in passport control, a very suspicious officer wanted to know how I'd snuck back into his country without getting stamped, an ironic accusation given this is among the last countries on Earth I'd want to revisit.

Having no explanation for this mystery stamp was, I figured, a \$50 problem.

No, said the senior police officer identified by a friendly (and bribed) baggage handler as the best problem-fixer in the airport, it was a \$150 problem.

After being guided to a corner away from passenger eyes, his palm was discreetly extended for the cash.

It seemed a tad pricey given these guys earn \$70 a month and the cost of a visa in Ottawa was only a hundred dollars, but the plane was boarding with my luggage in the hold, adding considerable urgency to my predicament. So I paid the expedited "exit fee", got back into line and observed with confidence the cop giving the passport officer a beaming thumbs-up.

But something happened during those final steps to palm-greased freedom that, one supposes, could be good news or bad news to a government internationally reviled as dishonest. The good news is that there's one honest passport control officer in Afghanistan.

The bad news is that I discovered him at the precise moment I badly needed the common corrupted variety.

And what could be worse? Well, the cop had mysteriously vanished with my failed bribe in his pocket.

So here I sit, down \$150 and stranded for a fifth unplanned day in a Kabul guest house with nasty explosions going off in the not-far-enough distance as I write this, waiting to be rescued by Canadian ambassador Arif Lalani.

Now Lalani is a uniquely charismatic and effective diplomat — and I would say this only slightly less emphatically if he wasn't my only hope of escape — but even his office says it could take a week to get a visa in the Afghanistan capital that can be issued in Ottawa within 24 hours.

At the risk of belabouring the point, this is but the grande finale to an alarming sequence of events that began the day I arrived, when 35 police and civilians were killed by a suicide bomber a few blocks from where I was standing.

After covering the suicide bombing in Kabul, I arrived at the Kandahar base just five minutes before a news conference to announce three Canadian soldier casualties.

Then a four-day outing with a reconstruction team was forced to withdraw from good-deed-doing by the unexpected reemergence of Taliban in the district. An offhanded remark about how glad I was that we'd gone two weeks without Canadian casualties was barely out of my mouth before military officers arrived at the media tent to announce six more soldier deaths.

Then came a three-day military operation that hit four improved explosive devices en route to a 12-day wait for supplies in a particularly barren stretch of Taliban-infested desert.

After hearing my litany of woes as a convoy prepared to leave the base under his command, Lt.-Col. Bob Chamberlain made the obvious observation. "I don't want you anywhere near me."

With that, he placed me in the last armoured car of the convoy while he took a position up front.

Don't misconstrue all this poor-me stuff as the whining bleat of a journalist stranded in a dangerous amenity-free backwater. It's been an interesting adventure. And the guest house where I'm stranded has a nice garden and serves cold beer on demand.

It's just a triple warning to anyone preparing to visit this sad country.

Keep your visa current and devoid of exit stamps before you actually depart Afghanistan. Understand that bribes only work 99.5% of the time.

And if I'm still stranded here when you arrive, keep your distance just in case non-stop disaster afflictions are contagious.

dmartin@nationalpost.com

KEYWORDS: ASTRONOMY; GEOLOGY

S. KOREA: OUR HANDS ARE TIED; Hostage Crisis; 'A Limit' To What Government Can Do For 21 Captives

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DATELINE: SEOUL
BYLINE: Jon Herskovitz
SOURCE: Reuters, with files from Agence France–Presse
WORD COUNT: 544

SEOUL – The South Korean government has told Taliban insurgents holding 21 Koreans there is a limit to what it can do to resolve the hostage standoff that has stretched into a third week, an official said yesterday.

There has been some contact with the Taliban, and a South Korean delegation arrived on Thursday in the Afghan province of Ghazni where the Koreans are held hostage to try to hold direct talks with the kidnappers.

"Through our contacts, our foremost goal is to make it clear that there is a limit as to what our government can do to meet their demands of releasing the prisoners," presidential spokesman said.

In Afghanistan, a Taliban spokesman said the group had another contact yesterday with the Koreans by phone and indicated readiness to hold talks in or outside the country.

But the spokesman, Qari Mohammad Yousuf, said the insurgents needed United Nations security guarantees should the Koreans want negotiations to be held outside Taliban–controlled areas.

Earlier, he had said the Taliban preferred to hold the negotiations in an area they control, and vouched for the safety of the Korean delegates.

He said the group would deliberate over an offer by a team of private Afghan doctors who have volunteered to treat the remaining hostages, two of whom are reported to be seriously ill.

However, another spokesman said the Taliban would not allow a medical team access to the hostages.

"Of course we cannot trust them. But we can offer a very simple solution: the government can release two of our prisoners in exchange for the two Koreans who are very sick and we can see for the rest later," said the spokesman, identified as Yousuf Ahmadi.

The Taliban have killed two of their male hostages, accusing the Afghan government of not negotiating in good faith and ignoring their demand to release rebel prisoners. The remaining hostages include 18 women.

The Taliban have repeatedly threatened to kill the rest if their demands are not met.

Separately, eight South Korean legislators met State Department officials in Washington on Thursday to seek help.

"We have confirmed the complete support and sympathy for the Korean hostages who are going through great distress," politician Park Jin told reporters after the meeting.

The South Korean government has called for "flexibility," a comment analysts say is directed at the United States to sway the Afghan government to strike a deal with the kidnappers.

There have been calls among many left-leaning politicians for the United States to use its influence to resolve the issue but Washington has stood firm in its refusal to make concessions with groups, such as the Taliban, it considers terrorists.

Others in South Korea have warned such pressure could strain ties.

"We assess the United States is actively co-operating by all its means as best as it can. This is not a matter that should lead to anti-U.S. problems," the presidential spokesman said.

In Washington, State Department deputy spokesman Tom Casey reiterated the longstanding policy that the United States does "not make concessions to terrorists." But he said the United States does not oppose Seoul's contacts with the kidnappers.

"Conversations are not anything that anyone's ever objected to any more than we would object to a police negotiator talking to a hostage taker here domestically," he said.

In Seoul, two dozen Christian pastors and clergymen prayed outside the U.S. embassy, urging Washington to accept the Taliban's demands.

"The U.S., which massacred civilians in the name of a war against terrorism, must assume responsibility for the current situation," a statement signed by 96 clergymen said.

A 62-year-old German engineer is also being held, along with four Afghans, by separate militants who are said to have close links to the Taliban. He was seized with another German, who collapsed and was then shot dead.

KEYWORDS: WAR; HOSTAGES; FOREIGN AID; AFGHANISTAN

Ottawa bomb control firms merge; Security; \$650–Million Deal

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BYLINE: Bert Hill
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
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OTTAWA – Allen–Vanguard Corp. is buying Med–Eng Systems for \$650–million in a deal that brings together two big Ottawa–based players in the global bomb–control business.

Allen–Vanguard said yesterday it will finance the takeover with debt and cash financed by a \$300–million offering of shares.

The company shares rose 9.4% to a new 52–week high of \$8.55 on the news. The stock has quadrupled in the last year as investors flocked to companies with technology to deal with events in world trouble spots like Afghanistan and Iraq.

Allen–Vanguard chief executive David Luxton said the deal "creates a global powerhouse ... with the core set of tools required by bomb–control squads around the world." He said no other company can deliver to customers bomb–control, management and protective equipment.

The rich valuation of Allen–Vanguard stock allowed it to buy a company with four times the sales and almost twice the number of employees.

Just 18 months ago, the company was in trouble after an Iraqi police contract went off the rails. Mr. Luxton stepped back into active management to lead a painful restructuring and turnaround.

Allen–Vanguard makes bomb, chemical and radiation control gear and management tools like robots and mechanical hooks. But it is electronic counter–measure gear that can jam improvised bombs triggered by cellphones that has driven sales and stock prices.

Med–Eng is a global leader in control suits and helmets used by bomb control squads and increasingly by ordinary soldiers. It is also a growing competitor in the electronic counter–measure market.

Both companies have major U.S. defence contractor partners --Med–Eng with General Dynamics and Allen Vanguard with Lockheed Martin--

to drive sales to the U.S. military and other customers. The U.S. military is the biggest customer for both companies.

Allen–Vanguard is paying more than two times annual sales and six times operating profits to get Med–Eng,

a private company, following an auction led by private-equity investors.

Mr. Luxton said the deal took more than a month to complete with the competition likely coming from big defence contractors.

Med-Eng was founded by Richard L'Abbe in 1981. The Ottawa engineer was more than the face of the company; he wore the company's equipment in 20 explosion tests until his life insurance made him stop.

Med-Eng ran into financial problems about four years ago but rebounded. It had been controlled by private-equity investors for several years. Mr. L'Abbe stepped down last year. Danny Osadca, a director and former chief executive of Dy-4 Systems, took over as CEO last October.

Paul Echenberg, a spokesman for the largest shareholder, Schroders & Associates, said "compatibility with the organizational culture," as well as price, was a factor in the decision to go with Allen-Vanguard.