



# 'SAY HELLO TO HER FOR ME'

**Sgt. Chris Karigiannis became famous for a letter he wrote to Maclean's about our university cover girl. He died last week in Afghanistan.**

**BY MICHAEL FRISCOLANTI, MARTIN PATRIQUIN & NICHOLAS KÖHLER**

**T**hree days before he died, Christos Karigiannis checked his email. It was Father's Day, and the 31-year-old sergeant had just returned to Kandahar Airfield after a lengthy stint outside the wire. Not surprisingly, his inbox was loaded. Loved ones back home had not heard from him in a while, and they were anxious for an update. They asked the usual stuff. *How is the mission going? Did you receive*

*my care package? How hot is it?* But one friend had a much more urgent question: *Do you know you're famous?*

Staring at the screen, Karigiannis could only laugh. He barely remembered sending that letter to *Maclean's*—the one that thanked the magazine for featuring such an “extremely attractive young lady” on the front of our annual University Student Issue. And yet there were his words, repeated all over the



Internet. “Looking at *Playboy* or some other such magazine just does not excite anymore seeing as how it is all rather superficial and very overdone,” he wrote. “The very refreshing image on your cover, given this girl’s natural beauty and incredible sexiness, had most of us in agreement that she is the best pin-up in our collection. Who would have thought that our most impressive female photo would come from *Maclean's*?”

The anonymous cover girl—Kinga Ilyes, a 24-year-old Torontonian—was equally surprised. And flattered. She even talked about travelling to Afghanistan to thank the troops in person. “It would be absolutely the coolest thing I’ve ever done,” she said.

**CHRIS KARIGIANNIS holds up the flag before parachuting; Kinga Ilyes was on the cover of *Maclean's* University Student Issue**

Another email was waiting for Karigiannis that Father's Day morning. It was from *Maclean's*. We wanted to talk to him some more about his letter, his job overseas, and his newfound fame. And of course, we wanted to ask him if he hoped to one day meet his favourite pin-up girl. His response was typical Karigiannis: polite, sincere and a little earnest. He told *Maclean's* that the last thing he wanted to do was say something that made the army look bad. Or worse, something that offended Kinga. "I know she has had quite a bit of attention and I hope this has not caused a problem for her," he said. "The letter I wrote was well-intentioned, honest and simply a thank-you note."

But Karigiannis—renowned for his deadpan wit—knew a funny story when he saw one. So he humoured us. In a series of emails—including a message written the day before he was killed—the soft-spoken sergeant told *Maclean's* all about himself. His childhood in Montreal. His passion for sky-diving. His love of writing (during his tour of duty, Karigiannis personally responded to every single letter of support sent by strangers). "Here in Afghanistan there are some very exciting moments, some tense ones, and even some boring ones," he wrote on Monday, June 18. "Much of what we have done over here all seems to blend together given the pace sometimes." When asked to recall a memorable moment, he offered this answer: "The most memorable is likely yet to come I think."

That night, Karigiannis was supposed to fly to New Zealand for a few days of rest and relaxation before finishing his summer in Afghanistan and returning to Canada at the end of August. But at the last minute, his trip was postponed until later in the week. The next day—Tuesday, June 19—he sent one last note to *Maclean's* before heading back outside the wire. "Good luck with the story and with trying to arrange a visit for Kinga," he wrote. "I will likely be back home if she does visit, but she will have an awesome time I am sure."

The following morning, Karigiannis and two soldiers under his command—Cpl. Stephen Bouzane, 26, and Pte. Joel Wiebe, 22—were transporting supplies between coalition checkpoints near Sperwan Ghar, a remote Forward Operating Base southwest of Kandahar city. Shortly after sunrise, their vehicle—a convertible M-Gator with no protective armour—drove over an improvised explosive device (IED) planted by insurgents. The blast killed all three men.

Since 2002, 60 Canadian soldiers have

travelled home from Afghanistan in flag-draped caskets. Some, like Karigiannis, fell victim to a roadside bomb. Others clashed with the Taliban. Five were killed by U.S. fighter pilots, and at least one was accidentally shot by a fellow soldier. But regardless of the circumstances, no casualty deserves—or would want—more praise than another. Karigiannis's life was no more valuable than anyone else's, nor was his love for Canada any greater. Each one of those dead soldiers wore the same red Maple Leaf on their shoulders, and each one was willing to die for it.

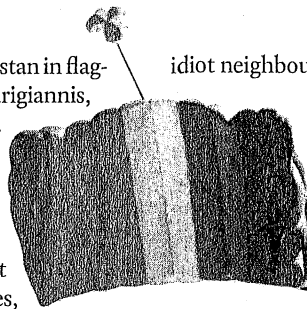
But Karigiannis's untimely death has resonated with the public in a way that few of the other fatalities have. For once, Canadians had the opportunity to meet a soldier *before* he died. People read his letter to *Maclean's*. They followed his story in the newspapers. And since last Wednesday night, when DND released his name, countless readers have contacted the magazine to mourn the loss of a man they felt they knew. "It broke my heart," wrote one woman.

All because of a spontaneous letter—penned on a scorching afternoon in late April, just to pass the time. Karigiannis had no way of knowing it, but his words will be remembered as so much more than a gushing tribute to a beautiful woman. He reminded us all, if only for a moment, who our soldiers really are: exceptional human beings with passion and tact and a genuine sense of purpose. We got to know him because of the letter. But like every Canadian soldier killed in Afghanistan, Sgt. Karigiannis was worthy of recognition long before that.

**A**t the age of 15, Karigiannis grabbed his brother's pellet gun and climbed up the tree in the family's front yard, determined to stand guard against a neighbourhood bully who had earlier promised to break the windows of his parent's house. No one thought it was a great idea—least of all the next-door neighbour, who stared at young Chris as he sat in the top branches. When the bully didn't return, both his brothers forgot he was still in the tree until well after the summer sun had set, when they heard a voice from the leaves.

"Peter," came the forced whisper. "Is that

idiot neighbour still there?"



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For his brothers, Peter and Spiros, and the many others who knew him well, this was Chris Karigiannis: forever compelled by his sense of obligation, a love of heights that brought him to the tops of trees and beyond, and a habit of saying exactly what he thought.

He was born Sept. 20, 1976, at Montreal's Jewish General Hospital to Niki and Anastios Karigiannis, both immigrants from the Messinia region of Greece. When Niki was seven months pregnant with Chris, Spiros fell very ill with what his parents feared was meningitis. So she made a pact with God: save my second-born son, and I'll name my third after Jesus Christ. Spiros recovered, and her newborn baby was baptized "Christos"—a name the boy himself came to dislike. From a very early age he made it known that he wanted be called "Chris," pact with God be damned.

Like his father, Chris was a youngest son, and the family quickly realized he also shared his father's restlessness. He was a barely

suppressed ball of energy, and one of his earliest habits was taking running dives into the family swimming pool from the kitchen.

The family moved from the Park Extension neighbourhood to the suburb of Chomedey, part of the 1970s wave of Greek families leaving the island of Montreal in search of larger homes and backyards. He'd climb anything, a talent Spiros used more than once to get at the Coca-Cola his mother stashed in the cupboard above the fridge. If she caught him, Chris would own up on the spot. "What I did wasn't good," he'd say. "If I were you I'd hit me."

Anastios ran his office-cleaning business, Poseidon Maintenance, out of their basement, and rather than getting a babysitter the boys would go along with him to the various jobs. Spurred by their father's commands to make themselves useful, the three of them would empty garbage cans and clean ashtrays until they were old enough to learn how to shampoo carpets. (When Chris was 14, his father died of stomach cancer.)

Chris attended Chomedey Polyvalent High School, which was more or less bothersome until that day in Grade 7 when an air cadet

recruiter came around. "He liked the fact that there was a guy in charge, and that you could become that guy if you moved up in the ranks," says Peter, an account manager at a Montreal software company. "If you messed up or were lazy you had to do extra duties. Chris liked that." Spiros, today a Berkeley-trained mathematician, adds: "There was no way we could have afforded to send Chris to flight school, and he saw it as an opportunity. 'I'm going to get that scholarship, I'm going to be the best cadet there is.' And from day one he did it."

Indeed, Chris received the Lord Strathcona Medal and went through flight training school at St. Hubert Airport on Montreal's South Shore. He eventually achieved the rank of second lieutenant, but instead went into the army's regular forces when he learned his less-than-perfect vision would keep him from becoming a fighter pilot. He went through training at the College militaire de Saint-Jean and went on to the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in Edmonton. "He was very neat, very orderly and his uniforms were perfect," remembers one close friend. His mother tells the story of the first time Karigiannis set about achieving a brilliant military sheen to his boots: he spent a whole day polishing.

Though fastidious about his own appearance, Karigiannis's commitment to guiding the less experienced didn't allow him to be harsh. One friend recalls a Remembrance Day ceremony in St. Albert, Alta., in 2003 when, in a parking lot just prior to the parade, a young, chubby and dishevelled private approached him: "Master Cpl. Karigiannis," he cried, "I can't get my buttons right." Chris's hands moved across the young private's uniform, straightening here, rebuttoning there. "It was just very kind and gentle," remembers the friend.

Karigiannis drove a motorcycle, a black Yamaha R-1. He kept his hair military short but much of it was prematurely grey. An urban creature—he retained his love for cosmopolitan Montreal despite his Alberta sojourn—he lived in a small, immaculately kept high-rise condo in Edmonton's Westmount area, not far from the city centre. The largest hanging on his walls was a huge Canadian flag in his bedroom. At six foot three,

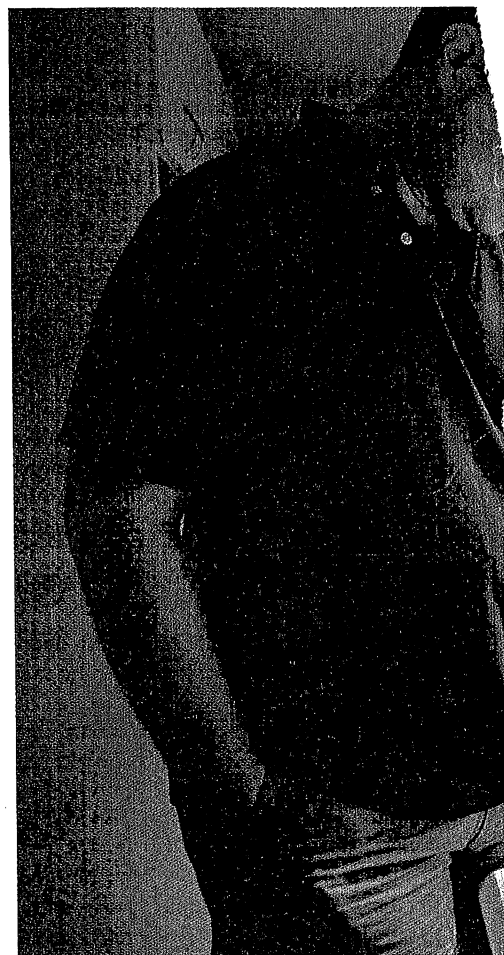
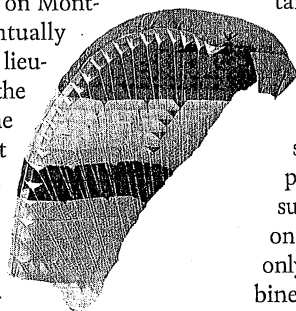
he was lean and enjoyed working out, keeping a chin-up bar at home. He ate simply, boiling up a pot of spaghetti and throwing in meat balls or putting away three mint ice cream sandwiches in one sitting. "He liked to go for ice cream, the movies, the Mongolie Grill," says a former girlfriend. "He wasn't a needy person."

When he first moved west to Edmonton 10 years ago, Karigiannis discovered Eden North, a skydiving club 45 km west of the city popular with military men and renowned for its high-level training. Soon, Karigiannis had become a devotee of the free fall, of plummeting at 120 mph from 3,000 feet, of sustaining terminal velocity for a chuteless 55-second descent above Alberta farmlands. Such speeds rip contact lenses from eyes and, on cold days, blast a skydiver's face with stinging particles of ice. It is an all-consuming passion. "Generally," says one man, "when we're here, the only thing you listen to is the turbines—the thwack of the canvas." Karigiannis loved it and spent most weekends at Eden North, jumping half a dozen times a day.

With its large and heterogeneous cast of regulars—doctors, welders, truck drivers, stockbrokers and Edmonton garrison men alike—Eden North is, for many jumpers, a ragtag family. "It doesn't matter what you do outside of here—it matters what you do here," says Aidan Walters, a provincial, national and world skydiving medallist. "It's a tight community where people are accepted readily." Karigiannis, far from his mother and brothers in Montreal, embraced the relaxed familiarity he found among his fellow skydivers. "If somebody were to say, 'Where is he from?', I would say Eden North," says fellow skydiver Merlin "Nic" Cormier.

Karigiannis deployed to Kosovo in 1999 and Bosnia in 2001 as part of Canada's peacekeeping contingent, where he learned how ordinary situations could turn ugly in an instant—like the time in Kosovo when his section entered an abandoned apartment building and smelled rotting flesh, and was convinced they had stumbled upon a mass grave. Chris was never so relieved to see a dead cow in his life. "War is 90 per cent boredom, 10

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A MEDAL.**



per cent chaos," he reflected to Peter. "A lot of the job they did, it was boring, but when it was boring it meant it was successful, that it was safe and secure," Spiros says.

His vacations were no less hair-raising. "I am still making some last-minute additions to my New Zealand trip," he wrote to Spiros in what would be one of his last emails. "Currently I am working on jumping from a hot-air balloon over Queenstown (not sure if it will fly... the balloon guy was kind of hot and cold about allowing it)."

"Even when he went on vacation he would worry me," Peter says now.

And, of course, there were women. Last Christmas, Chris visited his mother for 11 days at her part-time apartment in Greece. By the second day, mysterious girls were calling, with one in particular leaving a note under the windshield of Niki's car. "Can you call me, because I'm crazy about your eyes," it read.

In 2001, while still a private, Karigiannis applied—and was accepted—as a member of the SkyHawks demo team, an elite group of army skydivers that performs across Canada. He was most proud of one particular jump: on a drizzly wet day, the SkyHawks made a precision landing in Ottawa's Confederation Park. In the audience that day was Karigiannis's mother. "I couldn't watch, I couldn't look up," she later told a friend. The grass





LAVAL, QUE., JUNE 25: Spiros (left) and Peter Karigiannis talk about their brother Chris at Peter's home. Their father urged his sons to make themselves useful—and they have.

was wet and slippery, and each of Karigiannis's teammates slipped and fell upon landing. He was the only one who landed on his feet—and kept upright.

**O**n his milestone 500th jump, while in Arizona, Karigiannis decided to celebrate by exiting a DeHavilland Twin Otter with a large inflatable killer whale, which he was intent on riding down during free fall, bucking bronco-style. "It went south pretty quick out of the door—Shamu didn't want to fly right," recalls teammate Robert Harris. On a video of the episode, Karigiannis can be seen astride the whale upside down—refusing to dismount.

Antics aside, Karigiannis was serious, careful and always prepared. As a coach and jump master, he had a knack for putting rookie jumpers at ease. "He took me to places that I didn't think I could go, because either I was too scared or unsure of myself," says Jean de la Bourdonnaye, a former army medic who met Karigiannis at the drop zone. "But the one thing about Chris, he always believed in you. Even when I said: 'Oh Chris, I can't do this,' he always brought you to where you needed to go. He always believed in you."

Although he had been jumping out of planes for years (at last count, he tallied more

than 750 jumps), Karigiannis wanted something more: the maroon beret of the 3rd Battalion's parachuting company. "His dream was to come to the 3rd to jump," says de la Bourdonnaye. "The day that he was able to put that maroon beret on his head"—the colour of airborne elites the world over—"was a really happy day."

When he joined the Para Company in 2003, one of the first people he met was Master Cpl. Pete Filis. Greek by birth, they would often speak to one another in their mother tongue. "He was what we called a 'grey man,'" Filis says. "He was really, really quiet and extremely professional. He would always do exactly what was asked of him and he really cared about his guys." Filis and Karigiannis went out together all the time, usually to the bar. But Karigiannis didn't drink. "He was basically like my chauffeur," Filis laughs. "And he wasn't very shy, I'll put it that way. I was more shy than he was. He was always telling me: 'F--k Pete, just go up and talk to that girl. Just get up there and say something.'" If Pete didn't, Chris would. "He took everything like the way the wind blows," Filis says. "If it happens, it happens. If not, whatever."

Recently, Karigiannis began pursuing his commercial flying licence. "He's one of the only jumpers out there that enjoyed the flight

up as much as the flight down," says Robin Johnston, a pilot who met Karigiannis in 2002, and who flies jumpers to the Eden North drop zone. Johnston recalls how Karigiannis would always introduce him to his students during takeoff, and then, when all the novices had jumped, he would say goodbye. "Thanks dude," he'd say, according to Johnston. "Then he'd do a back flip out of the airplane."

Johnston saw Karigiannis right before he left for Afghanistan. His adieu was equally offhand: "See you later, dude."

**B**efore Karigiannis left for Kandahar in February, his close friend, Master Cpl. Pete Filis, filled him in on what to expect. "I told him it was going to be hot as hell, it was going to look like Mars, and just watch your ass," recalls Filis, who served a six-month tour in 2002. "That's really all I could say to him." Karigiannis couldn't wait to get there. "He was excited," says another army buddy. "He felt strongly about doing the job."

Ian Chisholm, a friend from Eden North, once told Karigiannis—a pilot, skydiver and scuba enthusiast—that he had missed his true calling. "You got to switch to SARTECH," he said, using the acronym for search and rescue technician. "You're perfect," he said, pumping up the adventure and high pay. But Karigiannis was quick to answer. "You know what?" he told him. "I love the infantry. I'm not done yet."

A section commander in Charlie Company, Karigiannis was directly responsible for the lives of seven other men, including Cpl. Bouzane and Pte. Wiebe. A few weeks in, the tour was largely uneventful. A lot of hurry up and wait. April 29 was a particularly slow day. Karigiannis and his section were manning a checkpoint outside Kandahar Airfield when he picked up a black pen and wrote a letter to a friend, a thank-you note for a care package that just arrived in the mail. When he finished, he started another letter. "Dear Editors," it began.

He thanked *Maclean's* for sending complimentary copies to the troops every week. "Thank you for keeping us informed in the effective way that you do and I look forward to another three months of reading," he wrote. Then he moved on to the real purpose of his letter: "The University Student Issue with the cover photo of an extremely attractive young lady whose name I wish I knew."

"This may sound shallow," he continued, "so allow me to qualify. Out here on operations in the desert, my soldiers and I have an assortment of reading material, including some with quite a collection of female flesh. Let's face it, we are mostly single with few to

no women out here to even look at." Yet it's not *Playboy* that has everyone talking, Karigiannis wrote. It is the anonymous woman on the cover of *Maclean's*. "Please thank your lovely cover girl for being who she is. You can add that some of the troops in Afghanistan think she is the hottest thing to look at here... And if she doesn't mind, any extra images of her can be sent to the address below... Remember, it's for the troops!"

Kinga Ilyes gladly posed for another photo. "I'd like to say hello to the troops and thank them for all their efforts," said the University of Western Ontario grad, who manages an Abercrombie & Fitch store in downtown Toronto. "We all appreciate your work over there. Your bravery and courage are more than most of us will ever do for our country in a lifetime." She passed along a personal message for Sgt. Karigiannis and his section: "I wish you safety and hope to see you home soon."

Days after the letter was published, Kinga was national news. The *Sun* newspapers in Ottawa and Toronto plastered her face on the front page, dubbing her the "Darling of Kandahar." The attention was a bit overwhelming, but Kinga was a good sport. "A lot of people called me about it," she said. "At work, every single person in here noticed it and commented on it."

But Karigiannis had no idea what he started. He was on the front lines, cut off from phones and the Internet and every other link to Canada. "I am astonished at the reaction," he wrote on June 17. "I was thinking more of an appearance in your 'mailbag' at best." He even apologized to us for not responding sooner. "Please relay my thanks to Kinga if you can for the very unexpected yet impressive response she contributed," he continued. "She definitely made my week to say the least! Her photos are incredible. I was not sure if she would be contacted at all and whether or not her reaction, if any, would be positive. She's awesome!"

Karigiannis passed the news to some of his men, and they all had a good laugh. "I will guess that most of the deployed troops are unaware of this emerging story with the limited [computer] access we have," he wrote the next day, June 18. "Chances are that the troops back home waiting to take our place know more about it than the ones currently deployed." As for Kinga visiting Kandahar, he wasn't all that optimistic. "Good luck with that but I need to be honest. Arranging a visit for her might be challenging at best... I believe if Kinga ever did visit here, her experience would certainly be positive but my only concern would be that she may not have the recognition that she is currently getting at home (I do not know how many troops read



CFB TRENTON, ONT., JUNE 24: Pallbearers carry the casket of Sgt. Chris Karigiannis during a repatriation ceremony for Karigiannis, Cpl. Stephen Bouzane and Pte. Joel Wiebe, killed June 20; Niki Psiharis (centre), mother of Karigiannis, at ceremony; Sgt. Karigiannis

the news and would agree with my tastes or opinions). All things being equal however, an intelligent, beautiful, and motivated former university student from Toronto would be enough for the troops to appreciate. What I mean is, you don't have to be famous... but sexy sure helps!

"You asked me if I would ever like to meet her in person... I need to be careful here," he continued. "I think she might have to contact me... The last thing I would want is to earn stalker status... People's personal lives are just that. I know you know this." He left it at this: "Feel free to offer my email to her if she's interested (with no expectations of any kind). Nevertheless, say hello to her for me if you get a chance."

That same day, Karigiannis wrote a note to his brother Spiros. He said he was back at Kandahar Airfield, but was heading outside the gate for four more days before leaving on his trip to New Zealand. "The situation here has heated up slightly but we are still very much in control and everyone is safe obviously," he wrote. "At least things are getting interesting and much hotter as well (average temp here is like 44 degrees).

"Have you been reading the papers lately about an emerging story that I apparently

started?" he asked. "It has to do with a girl who appeared on the cover of *Maclean's* magazine back in April. Nothing bad but check out the link below. As it turns out a simple letter I wrote the magazine about pin-up girls for soldiers in the field has pretty much made this girl famous. I think she might end up owing me her new modelling career! *Maclean's* did a follow-up story on her and they published my letter. Do me a favour though and don't tell too many people in case they get the wrong idea." He finished the email by saying he should be back in Canada "on or around the 26th of Aug."

**O**n the morning of Wednesday, June 20, Peter Karigiannis was getting ready for work on the second floor of his Laval townhouse when he heard the doorbell ring. "Peter, c'est les militaires," his wife Nancy said, and he thought: *Why are they coming here?* His head raced as he went down the stairs. Maybe Chris was hurt, he thought. Maybe he got a medal. The three officers introduced themselves and Peter and Nancy showed them to the kitchen.

"You're Peter Karigiannis?"

"Yes."

"You have a brother, Chris Karigiannis?"



"Yes."

"He's based out of Edmonton?"

"Yes."

"He was deployed in Afghanistan?"

"Yes."

"It is my sad, sad duty to inform you that your brother passed away in Afghanistan last night."

Niki, his mother, was in Greece, and would have to be told. But Peter first called his brother. Maybe he had some suggestions, or maybe he wanted to do it. But Peter couldn't get a hold of Spiros. "Listen, you have to do it now," Nancy said. So he did. Niki flew in the next day.

Last Sunday, a slate-grey military aircraft landed at CFB Trenton, Ont., carrying the bodies of Sgt. Karigiannis, Cpl. Bouzane and Pte. Wiebe. Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor was there, as were Governor General Michaëlle Jean and former governor general Adrienne Clarkson. Gen. Rick Hillier, chief of the defence staff, was also at the base, shaking hands with a throng of supporters gathered outside the fence. Many were holding Canadian flags.

Karigiannis, the highest-ranking of the three dead soldiers, was lifted off first, carried to a waiting hearse as a bag piper played. His mother and brothers each placed a single rose atop the silver casket, then stood back and watched as the other two coffins

made a similar journey. As the trio of hearses steered toward the coroner's office in Toronto, they passed crowds of people on bridges and overpasses, waving as the cars went by. The man behind the wheel of Karigiannis's hearse is a retired driver, but he always volunteers to work whenever a dead soldier comes home.

Karigiannis had a full itinerary planned for his New Zealand leave. Days earlier, he had emailed his buddy Katrina Sharko to boast about all the skiing, jumping, scuba diving and spelunking he was planning to do. "He told me he was counting down the days before he went to New Zealand," she says. He was almost as excited as he was in the weeks before leaving for Kandahar. "He believed that it was the right thing to do and that [Canadian soldiers] are making a difference," she says.

A few weeks ago, Karigiannis also sent an email to Johnston, his fellow pilot, inviting him to fly out to Winnipeg with him once his tour was up. Days later, out of the corner of his eye, Johnston glimpsed a photograph of Karigiannis on television. "Oh f-k," he thought. "Why does this happen to quality people?" he says now, rhetorically. "Because the quality people will put their lives into the line of fire. I trusted my life with him and I'm sure that the guys in Afghanistan did the same thing."

There has been much debate over *why* Karigiannis died. Almost immediately after the explosion, the Forces banned the use of open-topped M-Gators anywhere outside Kandahar Airfield. *Why not before?* Another close friend, who asked not to be named, said that sergeants don't typically perform such menial tasks as delivering supplies from one checkpoint to another. "But he was there because his guys were there," the friend says. "It's the same reason a fireman goes into a burning building—you go in because your buddies are going in. And you hope to God the roof's not going to cave in."

Spiros Karigiannis says the Taliban was simply lucky. "If anything was going to happen to Chris we knew it was going to be like this," he says. "Because if he could have looked the enemy in the eye, there is no way they were going to get him. This was the only way

they were going to get him."

A funeral for Chris Karigiannis is scheduled for Saturday, June 30, at Ste-Rose-de-Lima Church in Laval, Que., followed by a burial at the Ste. Dorothee cemetery near his mother's home.

Ron Hinkey, a retired warrant officer who served with Karigiannis in the 3rd Battalion, says he smiled when he read his friend's letter in *Maclean's*. "I thought it was just so typical Chris," he says. "He was always a cerebral-type guy. Always a thinker." Hinkey served in Afghanistan. So did his son, Sean. And they both know some of the people who didn't make it home. "But here you have some personal insight on what the guy is like, and then the next article you write is: 'He got killed.' That makes it more poignant for people, for sure." Hinkey only

hopes—at a time when the Afghanistan mission is on the top of the political agenda—that Karigiannis's letter will help remind Canadians that those are real people putting their lives on the line. "Things happen for a reason, and I really believe that," he says.

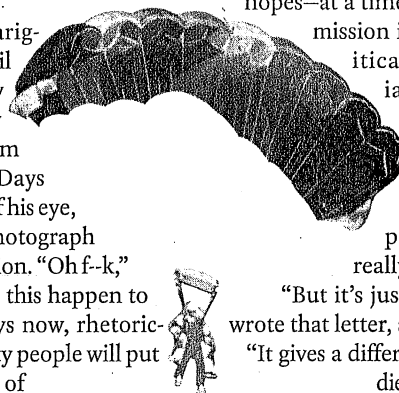
"But it's just eerie to think that he wrote that letter, and then this happens."

"It gives a different image of today's soldier—much more intelligent, much more educated," Peter Karigiannis says. "I don't think American soldiers in Iraq are looking at the university issue of *Time* magazine. But Chris's soldiers were a little different."

The woman they were looking at, Kinga Ilyes, was travelling in Europe the day her not-so-secret admirer died. When she read about the explosion, she emailed *Maclean's*. "It is terribly sad to hear the news," she wrote. "Please send my condolences to the family, it really is such a tragic loss."

In Edmonton, friends gathered for a weekend memorial ceremony at the Eden North drop zone. As one of Karigiannis's army colleagues read Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want") a team of his fellow jumpers fluttered down in a tower formation of connected parachutes—red, yellow, green—high up in the skies, like massive autumn leaves descending. "Airborne, Chris," one of his comrades said. M

With Kate Lunau



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