



X CLOSE ARTICLE

The ChronicleHerald.ca

Published: 2008-06-14

In night's tearless quietude, another name joins the dead

Kandahar memorial makes war personal, says soldier who tends granite panels

By MURRAY BREWSTER The Canadian Press

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — It happens in the stillness of night when no one is around. The granite plates just appear, seemingly out of nowhere.

There is no ceremony, no sounding of the bugle, no tears, no further eulogies; just silence.

Master Warrant Officer Albert Boucher likes it that way.

It is a quiet, respectful ritual.

As the camp sergeant-major at Kandahar Airfield, one of Boucher's duties is watch over the marble monument to Canadians who have died in Afghanistan.

Every time a soldier is killed, a black granite plate — laser etched with their photograph, their name, their rank, their unit and age — is created.

It is brought over from home and Boucher makes sure it is placed beside the others. "Usually I wait until after nightfall," said Boucher, 42, a reservist from Saskatoon, Sask.

"It's shipped over to me," he said.

"Sometimes, I'll have their friends and they put the plates in themselves, (but) I like the plates to just sort of appear there; the next day, it's there."

Before each plate is set, Boucher fusses over the details.

Is all of the information correct? He painstakingly researches to make sure it is.

On this day there are 84 names on the monument, including diplomat Glyn Berry.

Two more plates, representing the latest casualties, have yet to arrive.

Set atop a square block of black slate are two marble pillars with a rock in between. The rock had been the original bearer of the plates until there became too many.

The monument is located behind the Canadian headquarters at Kandahar Airfield.

It is technically called a saluting memorial, which mandates a sign of respect from soldiers as they pass.

All of them do.

But its layout beckons you to walk to view the plates.

Some just walk in and stare.

Others press a reassuring hand against the plate.

Some have even left flowers, the plastic kind that don't dry up and blow away in the punishing desert sun.

"A lot of the guys who are out there don't get a lot of chance to say goodbye, so they come in at the end of their tour looking for their friends," Boucher said.

Unlike monuments to past wars in Canada or even on the battlefields of Europe, this marker is more than just names and ages carved into stone.

Here you can see their faces, a ghostly grey against the hard, black surface. You quickly get a clearer sense of what has been lost with the deaths of these husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, uncles and even a daughter and wife.

It humbles you to be met by their granite stare.

"The Canadian army is a small community and if you've been in for any length of time you'll know people, friends, acquaintances. And when you walk in here you see their faces again; it is much more personal," said Boucher.

He lapsed for a moment into a thoughtful silence.

"Most war memorials back home are for all wars, (but) this is our war."

X CLOSE ARTICLE

© 2008 The Halifax Herald Limited