

AFGHANISTAN: TRIBUTE TO JONATHAN DION

Wild youth tried many jobs until he 'found his calling' in armed forces

TU THANH HA

JANUARY 1, 2008

MONTREAL -- He had tough years, dropping out of junior college and drifting between odd jobs, until life in the military straightened him out.

Before Jonathan Dion left for Afghanistan last summer, the 27-year-old artillery gunner promised his family and friends that he would come back alive.

Gunner Dion died on Sunday, less than two weeks before his birthday on Jan. 10.

"It is never easy for parents to lose a child. We are devastated by the death of Jonathan who, with dignity, gave up his life serving his country with honour and pride," the Dion family said in a statement.

Print Edition - Section Front



[Enlarge Image](#)

More World Stories

- Election will bring stability, Zardari says
- Vonage, Nortel settle patent disputes
- Ferocity of conflict threatens Somalia
- Bhutto sought to tar security services
- Hamas and Fatah members clash in Gaza Strip
- Go to the World section



The family said he was passionate about serving in Afghanistan - his first overseas deployment - and had told them he wanted to go back for a second rotation.

Gunner Dion was born in the remote mining community of Val d'Or, Que., but by the time he was eight years old, his family relocated to Gatineau, across the river from Ottawa.

Gatineau resident Edwin Laguerre knew Gunner Dion since grade school and remembered how both talked about joining the military.

"He overcame a lot of challenges in his youth. It turned his life around," Mr. Laguerre said, adding that his late friend always wanted to be in a front-line assignment.

Similar recollections were echoed in a tribute on the Facebook website.

There, Gunner Dion's half-brother, Benoît, recalled that the slain soldier had assured his mother that he would return so he could complete the giant tattoo on his shoulders that said: "Dedicated to the world's greatest mom."

Said Benoît: "Coming from you, I know that you would have kept your promise but others made it happen differently."

Childhood friend Benoît Fournier described Gunner Dion on Facebook as a young man who had found in the military a measure of stability.

"You were pretty wild between 16 and 18," he wrote, recalling Gunner Dion having a fight with a teacher or hiding from his mother the holes he had punched in a wall.

"He was the life of the party. He wasn't shy," said Mr. Laguerre, who enlisted recently. After quitting CEGEP, Quebec's post-secondary college program, Gunner Dion tried various trades. "He didn't have stable jobs. After high school, he tried a lot of things before he found his calling," Mr. Laguerre said.

"Jonathan had found his rightful place in the Canadian Forces. He was maturing rapidly and showed that he was living life to the fullest and was developing his full potential," his family said in its statement.

Gunner Dion joined the Canadian Forces three years ago and was a member of the Valcartier-based 5e Régiment d'Artillerie légère du Canada.

He died after a roadside bomb struck the tracked light armoured vehicle that was carrying him back from a forward operating post to the main base at Kandahar Airfield.

© Copyright 2007 CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc. All Rights Reserved.

CTVglobemedia

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