

A full-page photograph of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan. In the foreground, two soldiers are prominently featured. The soldier on the left is wearing a desert camouflage uniform, a helmet with goggles, and is holding an M4-style rifle. He has a red cross medical patch on his left thigh. The soldier on the right is also in camouflage, wearing a helmet and orange-tinted goggles, and is holding a rifle. In the background, several other soldiers are visible, some in similar gear and others in different uniforms, standing in a dry, dusty environment. A yellow military vehicle is partially visible on the far left.

# 'We are Fighting Evil':

## Canadians in Afghanistan

Canada has been America's ally in Afghanistan from the very beginning. During 2006, Canadian troops engaged in the country's most intense combat since the Korean War (1950-53).

BY RICHARD K. KOLB





**Canada** had ample reason for sending troops to al Qaeda's haven in Central

Asia. On Sept. 11, 2001, 24 Canadians were among those murdered in the World Trade Center terrorist attack.

As *Maclean's*, Canada's top news-magazine, proclaimed in a 2006 editorial: "We are now in the front line in a global struggle against radical Islamic terrorism. We are, for all intents and purposes, at war. ... Any relaxation of Canada's position in this conflict would be a victory for violent *ihadis* everywhere."

On those same pages, Royal Military College instructor Sean M. Maloney further cemented the case for Canada's involvement in this conflict. "The global al Qaeda movement is at war with Canada," he wrote.

"We are mentioned by their prime leader as an enemy; our people were murdered by al Qaeda in the 9/11 attacks; al Qaeda cells plot the murder of our democratically elected officials; and they murder our soldiers in Afghanistan through their proxies."

Belying Canada's self-image as the "peaceful kingdom," Canadian Chief of Defense Staff Gen. Rick Hillier declared: "These are detestable murderers and scumbags who detest our freedoms and want to break our society."

## Top-Notch Troops

These are fighting words if ever there were some spoken. But backing them up is not an easy task for a nation of 33 million people with regular armed forces of only 64,057 and reservists numbering a mere 23,032. Worse yet, perhaps just 5,000 are actually deployable at any given time. Moreover, reservists must volunteer to be sent overseas—13% have done so.

Things are looking up, though. A new Canadian Special Operations Regiment is now active. It is the first Canadian

**Left:** Soldiers of A Co., 2nd Bn., Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, conduct operations in the Panjwaji district as part of *Operation Medusa* on Sept. 14, 2006. The "Patricias" are one of Canada's most highly decorated units.



**Above:** Canadian soldiers of the 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI), search the hills for al Qaeda and Taliban fighters near Qualat, Afghanistan on July 1, 2002, during *Operation Cherokee Sky*.

**Below:** A member of the PPCLI applies cammo before boarding a CH-47 Chinook for the Tora Bora region to search for Taliban fighters during *Operation Tor II* on May 4, 2002.

army regiment created since 1968.

Despite the problem of quantity, there is no disputing the quality of Canadian units. Some 2,300 Canadians currently serve in Afghanistan—a total of 13,500 have served to date—and they are the cream of the crop. Units that have seen action so far include the 2nd Canadian Mechanized Brigade, as well as several regiments—1st Royal Canadian Artillery, 2nd Combat Engineer and The Royal Canadian Dragoons.

Most prominent on the line are the three regular infantry regiments—the French-speaking Royal 22nd, The Royal Canadian (RCR) and Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI). Virtually unknown is Joint Task Force 2, Canada's top-secret commandos.

All three battalions of the "The Royals" have been to Afghanistan. During WWII in Italy, its original 756 members sustained 73% losses. Companies of this regiment have served alongside Americans in the Persian Gulf War (1991), the Sinai Peninsula, Bosnia and Kosovo.

Likewise, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd battalions of "The Pats" have served time in the war zone. One of the most decorated units in the Canadian army, the PPCLI suffered 50% casualties in the Battle of Frezenberg alone during WWI.



Until recently, its 2nd Battalion had the unique distinction of being the only Canadian unit awarded the U.S. Presidential Unit Citation. This was for its distinguished actions at Kapyong in Korea in April 1951.

The 2nd Battalion also is the outfit that engaged in Canada's only real combat between Korea and Afghanistan. It fought Croats in the Medak Pocket in the Balkans in September 1993.

## Into the War Zone

In *Operation Apollo*, Canada dispatched 850 troops of the PPCLI to Afghanistan in February 2002. They arrived with "I Love NY" stickers on their Coyote reconnaissance vehicles.

During America's *Operation Anaconda* that March, a five-man sniper team from

DOD PHOTO

DOD PHOTO

the 3rd Battalion of the PPCLI joined the 101st Airborne Division in the Shahikot Valley. For 10 days, the snipers killed the enemy with amazing professional precision. "Thank God the Canadians were there," one GI said.

They set two new world records for the farthest combat kill with a rifle. Master Cpl. Arron Perry broke the then-existing record (set by Gunnery Sgt. Carlos Hathcock at 1.39 miles in Vietnam) by killing an al Qaeda terrorist at more than 1.43 miles. Sgt. Maj. Mark Nielsen of the 101st said of Perry: "His shots were incredible. One shot, one kill."

Days later, Cpl. Rob Furlong set the current world record with a kill at over 1.5 miles away. He used a .50-caliber McMillan Tac-50 sniper rifle.

The U.S. command recommended all five Canadian snipers for the Bronze Star for valor. Unfortunately, political correctness on the Canadian home front stalled the decorations. *Maclean's* summed up the situation succinctly—they were "lauded as heroes by the Americans but treated as criminals in Canada."

Finally, on Dec. 8, 2003—19 months after the medal nominations—U.S. Ambassador to Canada Paul Cellucci awarded the Bronze Stars to the five Canadian soldiers at their home base in Edmonton, Alberta.

Canada's counterpart to *Anaconda* was *Operation Harpoon*. Between March 13 and 17, 2002, three companies of the 3rd Battalion along with the 12th Field Squadron of the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment tackled the Whale's Back, a mountain near Gardez.

About 150 infantrymen from the U.S. 10th Mountain Division accompanied the mission. The Canadians ended up destroying 45 caves and mortar positions used by al Qaeda terrorists. Another operation in early May around Tora Bora involved the Canadians and U.S. Special Forces.

Approximately 1,900 Canadian soldiers went to Afghanistan as part of *Operation Athena* in August 2003. Some 90% of them were based at Camp Julien in Kabul. Two months later, on Oct. 2, Canada suffered its first hostile casualties when a landmine killed two of "The Royals" and wounded three others southwest of Kabul.

Over the next two years, Canada

Continued on page 26 ➤

## Canadians At War, 1914-2007

*Canadians have sustained some 114,000 deaths in two world wars, Korea and various overseas operations since 1914.*

WAR	YEARS	SERVED OVERSEAS <sup>1</sup>	KILLED <sup>2</sup>	WOUNDED IN ACTION
World War I	1914-1918	418,000	66,655	172,950
North Russia	1918-1919	600	7	N/A
Siberia	1918-1919	2,000	20	0
World War II	1939-1945	545,000	45,631	54,414
Korean War	1950-1953	26,791	516 <sup>3</sup>	1,558
Cold War	1951-1991	150,000	780 <sup>4</sup>	0
Vietnam War <sup>5</sup>	1965-1973	12,000 <sup>6</sup>	126	N/A
Persian Gulf War	1991	2,700 <sup>7</sup>	0	0
Yugoslavia (Former)	1992-2006	46,200	24	116
Somalia	1993	2,332 <sup>8</sup>	1	0
Kosovo	1999-2000	2,821 <sup>9</sup>	1	0
Afghanistan	2002-2007	13,500	45 <sup>10</sup>	181
Peacekeeping Missions	1947-2007	196,000	120 <sup>11</sup>	N/A

<sup>1</sup> The total number in uniform during WWI was 644,636; in WWII, 1,081,865.

<sup>2</sup> Killed includes deaths due to battle, disease and accident.

<sup>3</sup> 312 were killed in action.

<sup>4</sup> Accidental deaths in training in Germany, for example.

<sup>5</sup> Canada was not officially involved in Vietnam, except for peacekeeping-related duties through the International Commission of Control and Supervision: 7 Canadians total died there in 1957-58, 1965 and 1973. The last was in a helicopter shoot-down.

<sup>6</sup> The figures listed apply to volunteers who joined the U.S. armed forces and were killed. Among them was the son of Canada's former chief of defense staff Gen. Jacques Dextraze. As many as 40,000 Canadians may have served in the U.S. military during the entire Vietnam era worldwide.

<sup>7</sup> Number who actually served during active hostilities. Some 4,074 were stationed in the region, 1990-91.

<sup>8</sup> A battalion of the now-disbanded Canadian Airborne Regiment.

<sup>9</sup> Canadians were part of the British Armored Brigade in *Operation Kinetic*.

<sup>10</sup> 34 in hostile action, 5 from U.S. "friendly fire," 5 in accidents and 1 special operator.

<sup>11</sup> Includes 19 missions incurring fatalities beginning in 1950. Vast majority of deaths were non-hostile. Includes deaths in Somalia, Yugoslavia and Kosovo. The worst single loss, however, occurred Aug. 9, 1974, when the Syrians shot down a plane carrying 9 Canadians.

N/A - Not Available

**Editor's Note:** In WWI, Canada suffered horrendous casualties of 57% of those sent overseas. Its population was only 7.5 million in 1914. In WWII, by comparison, its casualty rate was 12%. An estimated 35,000 Americans enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force during WWI. The government of Canada dedicated a Cross of Sacrifice to their losses in Arlington National Cemetery in 1927. Approximately 29,000 Americans crossed the border to fight early in WWII. The Canadian Cross also honors those Americans killed, primarily 1939-1941. Many years later, two Michigan Vietnam veterans returned the sentiments and saw to it that the Canadian Vietnam Veterans Memorial was dedicated on July 2, 1995, in Assumption Park, Windsor, Ontario.

Interestingly, 40,000 Canadians joined 250 Union and 50 Confederate regiments during the Civil War (1861-1865). So many Nova Scotians enlisted in one Massachusetts regiment that it was nicknamed the "Highlanders." 30 Canadians earned the Medal of Honor and 14,000 died in the Civil War. See "Canadians Served Both Sides in the Civil War" by Norman Shannon in *America's Civil War*, January 2007, pp. 23-24.



remained casualty free with the exception of one KIA and three wounded in a suicide bombing near the capital city in 2004.

### Battle of Pashmul

All that changed in the summer and fall of 2006 when Canadians engaged in combat not seen since the Korean War. The men on the ground were ready. Earlier in the year, Sgt. John May told *Maclean's*: “I know about all this cultural sensitivity stuff. But I am here to fight. If those guys [Taliban] are going to set ambushes and IEDs, I am going to kill them. That’s my job.”

May and his mates soon had their opportunity. In July around Pashmul in the Zharey district, the Canadians waged a 60-hour firefight. Eight-wheeled armored vehicles firing 25mm guns entered the fray. Artillery was called in. When darkness fell, snipers employed their deadly trade with lethal effect.

“It’s the sort of action Canadians typically see only on the History Channel,” military historian Sean M. Maloney wrote in *Maclean's*. “This time Canada was able to take the fight to the enemy—and beat them at their own game.”

Maloney continued: “Acts of valor proliferated: medics shielded the wounded, the infantry conducted perilous, close-quarter battle, and gunners called in air strikes in ‘danger-close’ proximity. Transport drivers took vulnerable lumbering supply trucks through enemy-controlled areas.”

Incursions into the Pashmul area’s vineyards, orchards and marijuana fields persisted. On Aug. 3, elements of the PPCLI’s 1st Battalion got hit at an abandoned school. The day-long battle claimed four Canadian lives and wounded 10 in a rocket-propelled grenade strike and roadside bombing.

A two-week campaign in September, called *Operation Medusa*, was NATO’s drive to clear Taliban from an area near the Arghandab River about 10 miles west of Kandahar. A firefight on Sept. 3 in the Panjwaji district took four Canadian lives and wounded nine.



DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE / CANADIAN FORCES



**Above:** During a foot patrol in Kabul, Cpl. Robert Giguere of B Co., 3rd Bn., Royal 22nd Regiment Battle Group, marches past the old palace of the king of Afghanistan on March 29, 2004. Canadian troops had been operating in Kabul since August 2003 as part of *Operation Athena*.

**Left:** Canada’s current area of operations is around Kandahar, a Taliban stronghold. More aggressive missions have led to increased fighting.

“Truthfully, I was surprised by the resistance they put up,” said Maj. Geoff Abthorpe, commander of B Co., 1st Bn., RCR. “We came at them with what I perceived to be a pretty heavy fist.”

On Sept. 18, a suicide bomber on a bicycle in Char Kota killed four more soldiers. Near month’s end, a roadside bomb killed a Canadian. In the first half of October, ambushes and roadside bombs claimed five dragoons and infantrymen in three actions in the Panjwayi area.

One action, along the Panjwayi development road on Oct. 14, entailed a three-hour firefight. Before the year ended, a suicide bomber struck a convoy on Nov. 27, taking two more Canadian lives.

Striking deep inside Taliban territory and securing a front west of Kandahar City had proved costly for the Canadians. When 2006 ended, *Operation Falcon’s Summit* was under way to ensure those geographical gains.

Through 2006, Canada counted a total of 45 fatal casualties—34 from hostile action, five from American “friendly fire,” five in accidents and one special operator. Four hostile actions took multiple lives. By unit, PPCLI lost the most with 24 men killed; the RCR was second at 12 deaths. Total WIA was 181, all of whom were entitled to wound stripes.

### Recognition & Remembrance

Canadian veterans of anti-terrorist operations wear the Southwest Asia Service Medal. The reverse side of the medal bears the Latin inscription meaning “We Are Fighting Evil.” Those who actually serve against the “armed enemy” in Afghanistan receive the General Campaign Star with Afghanistan bar.

The U.S. has awarded some 30 Bronze Stars to our allies. Two medals that Canada created 14 years ago to recognize heroism—Star of Military Valor and

Medal of Military Valor—were awarded for the first time to its soldiers in 2006.

The 3rd Battalion, PPCLI, received the Canadian Commander-in-Chief Unit Commendation. JTF-2 was jointly awarded the Presidential Unit Citation. And the U.S. Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany received the Canadian Forces' Unit Commendation.

Public symbols of remembrance are vital, too. Lowering the national flag over the main Parliament Building to mark soldiers' deaths became a controversial issue. Now that their nation's citizens are engaged in combat, many Canadians believe Remembrance Day (America's Veterans Day) needs to take on a whole new meaning.

"Canada has to show unwavering support for its troops serving in places like Afghanistan," columnist Kirk Squires wrote in a Canadian newspaper. "Whether you agree with Canada's role in Afghanistan or not, the troops still deserve our respect and support."

The spirit of that respect lives on in Canada in the form of the poppy, immortalized in the poem "In Flanders Fields" written by Canadian WWI hero John McCrae.

For the families of the dead, that sense of caring is recognized by the Memorial (or Silver) Cross, equivalent to America's Gold Star. Created after WWI, the Silver Cross for Mothers, as well as widows, is revered to this day during Remembrance Day ceremonies.

In a tradition taken from the British army, Canada's Books of Remembrance record the names of those killed in war. They lie in the Memorial Chamber in the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. The Seventh Book: "In Service to Canada," dedicated Nov. 11, 2005, will contain the names from Afghanistan.

One U.S. memorial also pays special tribute to some of those Canadians. On May 23, 2005, the first names of non-Americans were added to the 101st Airborne Division Memorial at Ft. Campbell, Ky. They belong to the four paratroopers of A Co. (Airborne), 3rd Bn., PPCLI, accidentally killed by a U.S. air strike in April 2002.

"When soldiers fight beside other soldiers, it doesn't matter what nationality they are," said Col. Michael Steele, then-commander of the 101st's 3rd Brigade.

DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE / CANADIAN FORCES



Canadian troops prepare to enter a room within a compound in the Zharey District, west of Kandahar, on July 9, 2006, searching for evidence of Taliban activity. The summer and fall of 2006 was a period of intense combat for Canadian infantrymen.

"As soon as they step onto that battlefield, they become family." GIs of the 101st's 187th Inf. Regt. (Airborne) served with the Canadians in 2002.

Perpetuating the memory of veterans sacrifices is the priority of several groups in Canada. The Dominion Institute's Veterans Awareness Project seeks to keep alive their service among schoolchildren.

The Royal Canadian Legion (RCL), Canada's largest vet organization, sponsors three troop-support efforts, one through a major Canadian restaurant chain. Besides including peacekeeping vets among its ranks, the RCL also opened its doors to Canadian Vietnam vets, extending eligibility to them in 1994.

The RCL had 2005 declared the "Year of the Veteran," particularly in honor of the 250,000 WWII and Korean War vets still living in Canada.

### Deflating a Myth

Many Canadians say the time has come for a public change in attitude toward the military. Desmond Morton, renowned military history author and professor at Montreal's McGill University, stated it most bluntly to the *Christian Science Monitor*:

"One of the great myths in Canada is that peacekeeping is lovely and sweet

and nonviolent. That's a civilian illusion. The illusion of our exceptional wonderfulness is, like most nationalist illusions, deeply held and stupid and immune to reason."

Cracking that facade is difficult. Canada's military mission in Afghanistan has been extended to February 2009, but barely with enough votes in Parliament. Even though, as Canadian Brig. Gen. David Fraser said, "We've got to be determined to see this through as long as it takes."

Like all soldiers in all wars, Canadian troops wonder if the public has the stomach for the long haul and fear that their sacrifices may be in vain.

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper addressed that fear when he said, "We honor those who take risks and make the ultimate sacrifice by making a commitment to staying the course."

For those Canadians willing to put their lives on the line in common cause with Americans, as they did in five previous wars, we owe a debt of gratitude. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice put it, "The Canadian contribution to helping build stability in Afghanistan is absolutely critical to the war on terror." ★

E-mail [rkolb@vfw.org](mailto:rkolb@vfw.org)