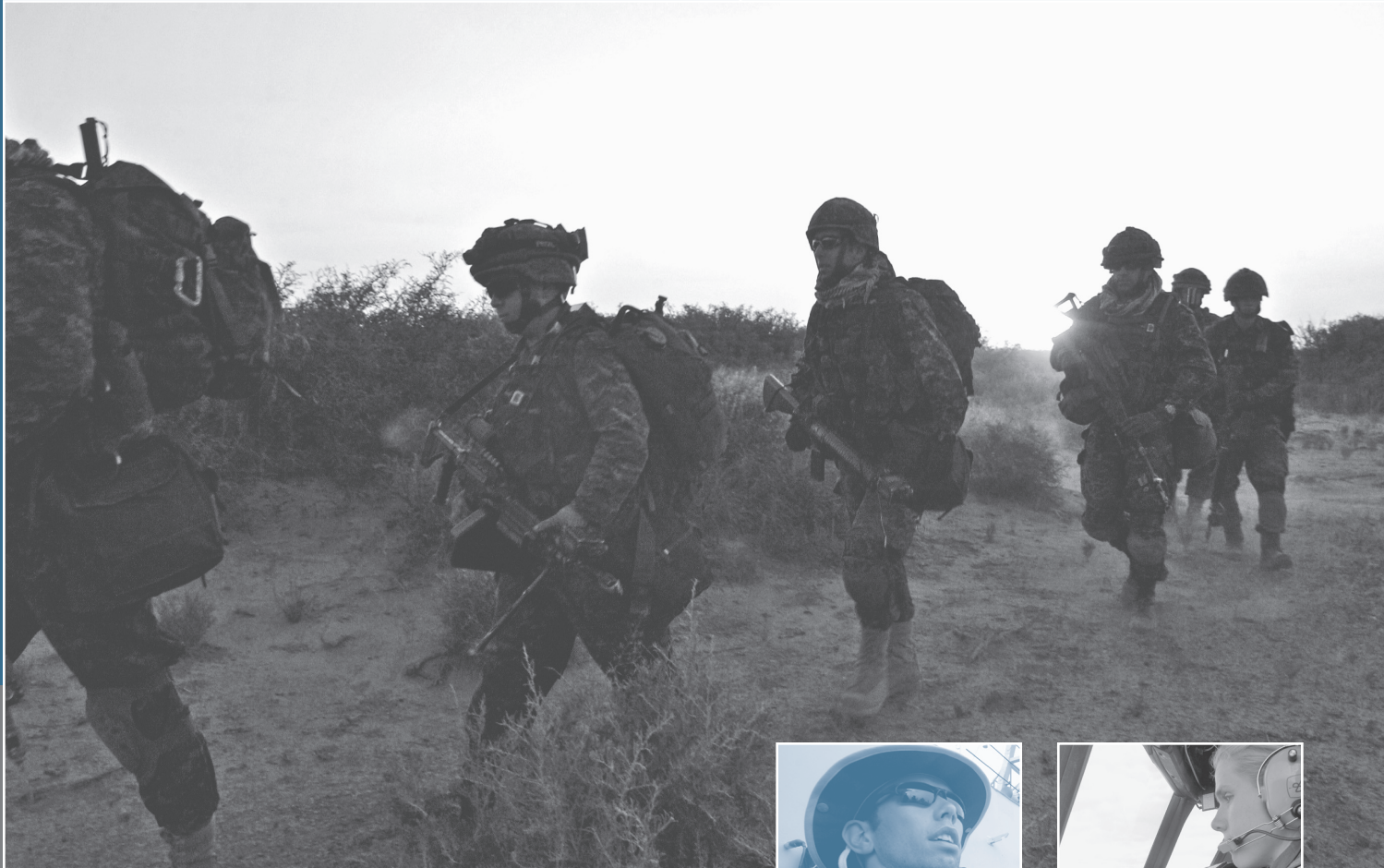


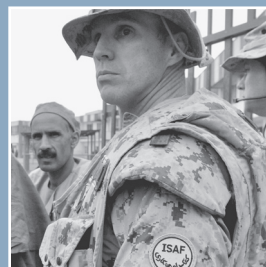
A Sniper's Battle: A Father's Concern

Special Report
to the Minister of
National Defence

April 2007



An Investigation into the
Treatment of a Canadian
Forces Sniper Deployed
to Afghanistan in 2002



Yves Côté, Q.C.

Ombudsman

National Defence
and Canadian Forces



Défense nationale
et Forces canadiennes

Canada

CS06-0560

A Sniper's Battle – A Father's Concern

**An Investigation into the Treatment of a Canadian Forces
Sniper Deployed to Afghanistan in 2002**

**Special Report to the Minister of National Defence
and the Chief of the Defence Staff**

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**Yves Côté, Q.C.
Ombudsman**

Investigative Team:

David Ballinger
Krista Hummell
Aviva Farbstein
Brian Finn
Sheila Foy
Gary Furrie
Leo McCloskey
Bruce Potts

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Executive Summary

1 ***Background***

2 This special investigation arises from a complaint by Mr. Patrick Ragsdale concerning the treatment of his son, Master Corporal Graham Ragsdale, who was a sniper with the Third Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (3 PPCLI), deployed to Afghanistan between February and July 2002, on the first rotation of *Operation Apollo* (*Op Apollo*).

3 *Operation Apollo* was Canada's military contribution to the international campaign against terrorism from October 2001 to October 2003. During this operation, and, more specifically, in March 2002, Canadian Forces snipers attached to the 3 PPCLI Battle Group participated in two operations: *Operation Anaconda* (*Op Anaconda*), a United States-led coalition search of the Afghanistan mountains for Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters, and *Operation Harpoon* (*Op Harpoon*), a Canadian-led sweep of the Shah-I-Kot Valley to clear it of Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters.

4 ***The Complaint***

5 **Treatment of the Snipers**

6 In his complaint, Mr. Ragsdale alleged that his son, and the other snipers in his son's group, were ostracized by their unit and treated unfairly by their chain of command in a number of ways, including: being denied access to stress debriefings; being ignored; not being taken seriously; being denied recognition by their chain of command; and being subjected to unfounded criminal and other investigations. He believed that this treatment led to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in his son and in other snipers in his son's group.

7 **Treatment of Mr. Ragsdale**

8 Mr. Ragsdale further alleged that the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces (DND/CF) were not providing him with adequate or timely information in response to his inquiries. Mr. Ragsdale raised his complaints in extensive correspondence with government officials and high-ranking officers in the Canadian Forces.

9 On September 20, 2004, the Chief of the Defence Staff referred the complaint to the Office of the Ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces.

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10 ***Scope***

11 The investigation covered both aspects of Mr. Ragsdale's allegations: namely, how the snipers were treated before, during and after their deployment to Afghanistan; and how DND/CF responded to Mr. Ragsdale's concerns.

12 As part of the investigation, Ombudsman investigators reviewed all directives and publications relevant to the deployment of troops, obtained and examined the operational mission reports specifically related to the snipers' missions, and analyzed correspondence and interactions that took place between Mr. Ragsdale and DND/CF.

13 A total of 147 interviews were conducted by Ombudsman investigators. The list of those interviewed include Mr. Patrick Ragsdale, members of the sniper team, and a number of Canadian Forces members who deployed on the first rotation of *Op Apollo*. Opinions and concerns expressed by caregivers and family members of the snipers were also considered in the formulation of our recommendations.

14 During the course of the investigation, the investigative team faced considerable resistance in obtaining complete documents in a timely manner from DND/CF, a problem the Office of the Ombudsman had not encountered previously in an investigation. Although, in the end, investigators were able to access and review all relevant documentation, the ability of the office to treat this complaint in a timely and effective manner was hindered.

15 It is clear that the only appropriate and acceptable way in which to ensure that this type of situation does not occur again in the future is for the Office of the Ombudsman to be provided with the same powers as other federally and provincially appointed Ombudsmen. Therefore, it is recommended in our report that:

16 **The Office of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces Ombudsman be given full investigative powers under legislation.**

17 ***Summary of Findings***

18 **Treatment of the Snipers Pre-Deployment**

19 After the announcement of the decision to deploy 3 PPCLI to Afghanistan, preparations were made to include a sniper detachment within the Battle Group.

20 Given the desire to build an effective sniper team, and despite financial constraints, approximately ten percent of the unit's pre-deployment budget was spent on special training for the snipers, including training to sharpen their

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specific skills. All of the snipers were screened through the Departure Assistance Group, which confirmed their readiness for deployment through a battery of physical, mental and social evaluations.

- 21 Following our investigation, we have found that the sniper team was properly resourced and trained. With regard to their pre-deployment phase, the evidence does not support allegations of unfair treatment of the snipers.

22 **Treatment of the Snipers During Deployment**

23 *Request for a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing*

- 24 After arriving in Afghanistan, the snipers first assisted with airfield security in Kandahar along with the rest of the 3 PPCLI Battle Group. Thereafter, they participated in two separate missions, *Op Anaconda* and *Op Harpoon*, taking place approximately 24 to 36 hours apart. The snipers from the 3 PPCLI Battle Group participated in *Op Anaconda* from March 2 to 11, 2002. Shortly after returning from *Op Anaconda*, the entire Battle Group, including the snipers, deployed on *Op Harpoon*, which took place from March 13 to 19, 2002.

- 25 When the snipers returned from *Op Anaconda*, they were not provided with a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, a structured intervention designed to allow individuals who witness a critical incident to discuss their experiences, with the aim of reducing negative psychological effects. Critical Incident Stress Debriefings normally take place within 24 to 72 hours after a critical incident, although allowances can be made for operational reasons.

- 26 As the snipers' team leader, Master Corporal Ragsdale expected such a debriefing and indicated to Ombudsman investigators that he had written a request for a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing in an administrative post-operation (*Op Anaconda*) report. Notwithstanding the efforts of the investigative team, this request could not be located.

- 27 The investigation found that a debriefing was not provided between *Op Anaconda* and *Op Harpoon* because of the shortness of time between the two operations, the fact that the snipers exhibited no open signs of negative stress, and given that the snipers had indicated they were "good to go." However, the evidence indicates that a qualified person acceptable to the sniper group – an American chaplain – did provide a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing to the snipers after *Op Harpoon*.

- 28 Overall, given the operational requirements that prevailed immediately after *Op Anaconda*, the evidence suggests that the snipers' needs for Critical Incident Stress Debriefing and other psychological support were satisfactorily addressed.

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29 The evidence gathered during the investigation indicates that medical thinking on the value of Critical Incident Stress Debriefing interventions continues to evolve. Some research now shows that single-incident Critical Incident Stress Debriefing does not prevent PTSD, and may indeed have harmful effects. Consequently, our report recommends that:

30 **Current policy related to the issue of critical incident stress, Canadian Forces Administrative Order 34-55, be reviewed with the view of harmonizing the policy to reflect the current and more comprehensive approach to the issue.**

31 The evidence also indicates that senior Canadian Forces medical personnel increasingly prefer a more comprehensive approach that emphasizes the shared responsibilities of leaders, health-care professionals and Canadian Forces members. The training of members able to provide peer-to-peer stress counselling is one element of such a comprehensive approach.

32 Concerning peer-to-peer stress counselling, 3 PPCLI championed the concept and took steps to ensure that a significant portion of unit members received appropriate training. From all accounts, this was seen to be a successful initiative. However, due to the small size of the sniper team, none of its members received the training. Consequently, on this issue, our report recommends that:

33 **The Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces ensure that every deployed unit provide adequate training in peer support counselling to its members; and that**

34 **The Commanding Officer of a deploying unit ensure that, where possible, every sub-unit and every operational sub-grouping contain at least one member with peer support counselling training.**

35 *Effect of the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service Investigation of the Snipers*

36 At the end of *Op Harpoon*, one of the snipers made a formal allegation that fellow snipers had desecrated an enemy body. The Canadian Forces National Investigation Service (CFNIS) was notified of this serious accusation and an investigation was initiated. The snipers reported experiencing serious morale issues following the launch of this investigation.

37 Given that the desecration of a corpse is a criminal matter under Canadian law, the allegation was appropriately brought to the attention of the CFNIS, the body responsible for investigating serious allegations of this nature.

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38 While the subsequent investigation may very well have had a negative impact on the team's morale, the referral of the allegations to the CFNIS cannot be considered unfair treatment toward the snipers.

39 As some of those interviewed expressed specific concerns about the CFNIS' investigation, they were informed that this type of complaint falls within the jurisdiction of the Military Police Complaints Commission – an independent oversight body – and they were told how to access that mechanism. After receiving complaints in relation to this matter, the Military Police Complaints Commission initiated an investigation. This investigation was still ongoing at the time that this report was written.

40 *Purpose of Rest and Relaxation Period*

41 Following the events that occurred after *Op Harpoon*, which affected the morale of the sniper team, the snipers were sent out of Afghanistan on a rest and relaxation period between April 1 and April 6, 2002. The snipers did not believe that the rest and relaxation had been designed to help them rebuild their cohesion and morale. Rather, they suspected that they were sent on rest and relaxation for three reasons: to get them out of the theatre of operations while the former second-in-command of the sniper team was sent back to Canada, to prevent them from being awarded Bronze Stars by the United States military, and to keep them away from the Minister of National Defence during his visit to Afghanistan.

42 The investigation revealed no evidence supporting the snipers' contentions on this issue. The evidence shows that the Commanding Officer was genuinely and legitimately concerned with the health and welfare of the snipers. Evidence gathered during the investigation indicates that the morale of the snipers improved following the rest and relaxation period. Overall, in light of the prevailing circumstances, the decision to send the snipers out of theatre on rest and relaxation was fair and reasonable.

43 *Treatment After Rest and Relaxation Until the End of Deployment*

44 Several snipers expressed the opinion that they were under-utilized and ostracized during the remainder of the deployment.

45 After *Op Harpoon*, the intensity and operational tempo in Afghanistan decreased for the entire 3 PPCLI Battle Group. None of those interviewed during the investigation indicated that they treated the snipers differently; in fact, many said that they held them in high regard. Our investigators could not find any evidence that the members of the Battle Group had ostracized the snipers or that the chain of command encouraged or prompted this reaction.

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46 **Treatment of the Snipers Post-Deployment**

47 Upon completing its mission in Afghanistan in July 2002, the Battle Group moved, over a period of time, to a United States military base in Guam for a series of decompression sessions that featured mandatory education, debriefing and counselling sessions with professionals. Members then returned home to Edmonton, where they were given block leave. Following that period of leave, all personnel completed post-deployment surveys and were interviewed by health-care professionals. Follow-up care was available for any member who identified a need, and further psychological interventions were provided in cases where this combination of questionnaires and interviews indicated a possible adjustment issue. Medical professionals were particularly concerned with the prevention, early identification, and treatment of PTSD. As Master Corporal Ragsdale was identified as requiring psychological support as a result of the post-deployment screening process, he was referred for PTSD treatment.

48 Our investigation found that, after the Battle Group's completion of its tour in July 2002, the Canadian Forces took reasonable measures and provided adequate care to the snipers, including Master Corporal Ragsdale. The evidence does not support the attribution of the snipers' mental injuries to unfair or inequitable treatment by the Canadian Forces.

49 ***Department of National Defence and Canadian Forces Response to Mr. Ragsdale***

50 Mr. Ragsdale identified himself as the father of a Canadian Forces member who was suffering from PTSD as a result of his experiences in Afghanistan. Like any other parent concerned about the welfare of their children, he wrote to senior officials within DND/CF, including the Minister of National Defence. Mr. Ragsdale's correspondence to DND/CF reflects the anxiety of a father facing his son's crippling illness, over which the parent has no control.

51 While his concerns called for a prompt and thoughtful response, his letters were only politely acknowledged. From a technical perspective, it could be argued that Mr. Ragsdale's letters were answered adequately. However, from a human perspective, a close family member, going through what Mr. Ragsdale was going through, deserved to be treated in a much better way. DND/CF did not treat Mr. Ragsdale in an appropriate manner or in a way in which any other concerned family member of a soldier injured in operations would legitimately expect to be treated.

52 Mr. Ragsdale's letter to the Minister should have triggered a telephone call from DND/CF, in which an understanding person listened to his concerns, and then followed up with more contextual information that might have helped

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him and other family members cope with the lack of information, uncertainty and stress of their situation. As a result, our report recommends that:

53 **The Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces ensure that family members, who express significant concerns over the health or well-being of a Canadian Forces member or Department of National Defence employee, be formally recognized and diverted, through an established and robust mechanism, to immediate, supportive, personal and timely intervention.**

54 ***Mr. Ragsdale's Four Specific Concerns***

55 Mr. Ragsdale was of the understanding that all of the 3 PPCLI snipers who participated in *Op Anaconda* were removed from active duty because of PTSD caused by the way in which they were treated. Mr. Ragsdale also questioned whether the Canadian Forces made a sincere effort to keep Master Corporal Ragsdale and the other snipers on active duty to pass on their combat experience to other soldiers.

56 Of the six snipers in the sniper team, three, including Master Corporal Ragsdale, were placed on medical leave, transferred to the Service Personnel Holding List while undergoing medical treatment for PTSD, and eventually medically released from the Canadian Forces.

57 While being treated for PTSD, Master Corporal Ragsdale remained with the 3 PPCLI Reconnaissance Platoon until July 2003. During this period, he shared his experience and expertise with the Infantry School in Gagetown, New Brunswick, and as an instructor during a reconnaissance course held in Edmonton. Other members of the original sniper group also briefed and taught in Canadian Forces courses.

58 The principle of universality of service requires every Canadian Forces member to be fit as “a soldier first.” As a result of their medical employment limitations, Master Corporal Ragsdale and two other snipers could no longer perform the spectrum of duties associated with being a soldier. As a result, they could no longer be retained and were medically released from the Canadian Forces. The evidence indicates that reasonable efforts were made to keep Master Corporal Ragsdale on active duty, within the construct of the universality of service principle. Evidence also indicates that Master Corporal Ragsdale and his fellow snipers were treated fairly by the Canadian Forces.

59 Mr. Ragsdale was of the view that his son was subjected to unfounded criminal charges and investigations instead of being given the treatment and recognition he deserved.

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60 Both Master Corporal Ragsdale and the second-in-command of the sniper team were removed from their positions, pending the investigation concerning the desecration of an enemy corpse. In the end, the police investigation was closed without Master Corporal Ragsdale being charged with a criminal offence with respect to the allegation specifically directed against him. As previously indicated, referring this matter to the CFNIS was entirely appropriate.

61 Master Corporal Ragsdale was also interviewed concerning other investigations, which occurred during and after the deployment. He was not a suspect in those investigations. Our investigation did not reveal any evidence that Master Corporal Ragsdale suffered any career-limiting effects as a result of those investigations.

62 Mr. Ragsdale questioned how the Canadian Forces and the federal government would make amends to the snipers.

63 Our investigation found that the snipers were recognized for their outstanding performance. Specifically, they received two distinctions over and above most of the members of the Battle Group: a Mention in Dispatches and a Bronze Star from the United States.

64 However, there were significant delays in the presentation of the Commander-in-Chief Unit Commendation, the Mention in Dispatches and the Bronze Star. Twenty-one months elapsed between the actions for which they were recognized and the presentation of these awards. Such a delay is too long.

65 Proper recognition involves more than medals and awards: it is the timely and responsive recognition of achievements or services, particularly those implying valour. It also includes timely and appropriate words of praise, both publicly and privately delivered by the chain of command and others. The current military process for recommending, approving and bestowing awards is neither timely nor responsive. Therefore, our report recommends that:

66 **The Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces review their awards and honours policies and practices in order to ensure that Canadian awards and recognitions be diligently submitted to the chain of command by Commanding Officers for consideration and that, where approved, they be bestowed within six months of the recommendations being submitted.**

67 ***Media Exposure***

68 Protection of identities was an important issue to the snipers who felt that they, and possibly their families, could be put at risk if their names and faces were revealed. While concerned with the protection of their identity, several of the snipers did media interviews and permitted photographs. They agreed to this

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on the verbal understanding with the journalists that their identities would be protected and because the snipers' chain of command deemed the reporters to be trustworthy. However, when some of the snipers' faces, names and ranks were publicly revealed, this caused concern among the sniper group. As the reporters who were involved declined to be interviewed, the investigation was unable to ascertain the journalists' own interpretation of the understanding that existed with the snipers.

69 There was considerable media interest in the Afghanistan deployment and journalists were embedded in the mission. *Op Apollo* was a new experience for the Canadian Forces and embedding journalists was a new concept. Journalists embedded with the Canadian Forces were required to agree to follow certain rules drawn up by the Canadian Forces based on the "Ground Rules Agreement" used by the United States Army. While the Ground Rules provided a general framework for embedded journalists, the Canadian Forces had little control over them.

70 Without appropriate and formal training concerning the challenges associated with being interviewed by a journalist, whether formally or informally, military members are vulnerable to possible misunderstandings. This is an area where DND/CF can improve. Accordingly, our report recommends that:

71 **The Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces ensure that, at a minimum, every individual preparing for deployment receives, as part of their pre-deployment training, a briefing on the rights, responsibilities and limits to the protection provided for under the current Canadian Forces Ground Rules for Embedded Media, and on the risks that may be associated with the giving of media interviews.**

72 ***Follow-Up***

73 As always, I look forward to the response of the Minister of National Defence and the Chief of the Defence Staff to the recommendations in our report.

74 We will initiate a follow-up review of the progress made by DND/CF on the implementation of our recommendations approximately six months following the public release of this report.

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Introduction

75 ***Background***

76 This special investigation arises from a complaint by Mr. Patrick Ragsdale concerning treatment of his son, Master Corporal Graham Ragsdale, who was a sniper with 3 PPCLI, deployed to Afghanistan between February and July 2002.

77 This deployment was known as *Op Apollo*. *Op Apollo* was Canada's military contribution to the international campaign against terrorism from October 2001 to October 2003. During this operation, and, more specifically, in March 2002, Canadian Forces snipers attached to the 3 PPCLI Battle Group participated in two operations: *Op Anaconda*, a United States-led coalition effort to search the Afghanistan mountains for Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters, and *Op Harpoon*, a Canadian-led sweep of the Shah-I-Kot Valley to ensure it was clear of Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters. Based on all accounts, the Canadian sniper teams were noted for their extreme competence under incredibly stressful conditions and were credited with preventing or stopping attacks that could have taken the lives of many coalition soldiers. The key dates of the missions, and other events experienced by the snipers, are attached as Annex A to this report.

78 ***The Complaint***

79 Mr. Ragsdale alleged that his son and the other snipers in his team, upon return from this mission, were ostracized by their unit and treated unfairly by the chain of command in a number of ways, including: being denied access to stress debriefings; being ignored; not being taken seriously; being denied recognition by the chain of command; and being subjected to unfounded criminal and other investigations. He believed that this treatment led his son and other snipers in the team to develop PTSD. He also claimed that when they became ill, the snipers were ignored and not given the treatment they deserved, effectively being forced out of the Canadian Forces. He further complained that DND/CF was not providing him, in a timely manner, with adequate information in response to his inquiries. Mr. Ragsdale raised his complaints in extensive correspondence with government officials and high-ranking officers in the Canadian Forces. I have highlighted some of the main pieces of correspondence below. For a more thorough summary of the extensive correspondence between Mr. Ragsdale and government officials, please see Annex B.

80 Mr. Ragsdale initially submitted these complaints to the Minister of National Defence on April 25, 2002. Having received no response, he wrote again to the Minister, 11 months later, on March 19, 2003. There were a few exchanges

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of correspondence via e-mail between the Department of National Defence and Mr. Ragsdale; however, he was not satisfied with any of the responses. He wrote directly to the Chief of the Defence Staff on December 4, 2003. In a letter dated April 21, 2004, he specifically asked the Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources – Military) to initiate an investigation to determine:

- 81 • *Why my son and the other 3 PPCLI snipers were allowed to be treated so badly that they have all been removed from active duty because of PTSD issues;*
- 82 • *Why my son was subjected to unfounded criminal charges and investigations instead of being given the treatment and recognition he deserved from his own army;*
- 83 • *Why the Canadian Forces did not make a sincere effort to keep my son and the other snipers on active duty, and pass on their combat experiences so that other soldiers might benefit from them; and*
- 84 • *How the Canadian Forces and the Federal Government are going to make amends to these five Canadian heroes who have had their lives and careers destroyed because they served their country with honour.*

85 In May 2004, Mr. Ragsdale's concerns were addressed by Chief of Land Staff, Major-General Caron, and this was followed in June 2004 by a letter from Vice-Admiral Jarvis, Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources – Military). In August, Mr. Ragsdale again expressed dissatisfaction with these responses. In an attempt to provide Mr. Ragsdale with answers that he would find satisfactory, the Chief of the Defence Staff decided to refer his complaints to my office for an independent review. On September 20, 2004, the Chief of the Defence Staff wrote to my predecessor requesting an independent review of the case. Specifically, he stated:

86 *The Canadian Forces has corresponded extensively with MCpl Ragsdale's father, but has been unable to resolve his complaints to his satisfaction. ...*

...I would ask, therefore, that you review the material available and, from a fresh perspective, assess whether there are further actions we might take in this regard.

87 A copy of this letter is attached as Annex C to this report. On October 1, 2004, my predecessor accepted the case as a special investigation.

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Methodology

88 ***Scope***

89 Our investigators were asked to do two specific things during this investigation. First, they were to examine and investigate DND/CF's treatment of 3 PPCLI's sniper team before, during and after their deployment to Afghanistan. Secondly, they were asked to review and investigate DND/CF's response to Mr. Ragsdale's concerns, as set out above. In the end, they reviewed all of the facts and information gathered during the investigation to determine whether the snipers had been treated fairly by DND/CF.

90 ***Approach***

91 In conducting this investigation, our investigators interviewed the six members of the original 3 PPCLI sniper team, including Master Corporal Ragsdale. These six snipers were deployed on *Op Anaconda* in March 2002. As well, interviews were conducted with the other four snipers who were later added to the sniper team during the deployment. Further, they interviewed other members of 3 PPCLI, caregivers, family members and Canadian Forces professionals who either became involved in events connected with the snipers, or whose expertise was relevant to various issues as they arose. A total of 147 interviews were conducted during this investigation, and relevant documentation was identified and reviewed.

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Evidence

92 In this section, I summarize the information gathered during this investigation
and group it into three distinct time periods, namely:

- 93 • Preparation of the snipers for *Op Apollo* (September 2001 – March
2002);
- 94 • Treatment of the snipers in theatre (March – July 2002); and
- 95 • Treatment of the snipers post-deployment (July 2002 and on).

96 ***Preparation of the Snipers for Operation Apollo***

97 Throughout history, snipers have proven to be an effective and economical
force multiplier. During the First and Second World Wars, infantry snipers
were effectively employed within the Canadian Army, where they could be
found at full strength in any infantry battalion. During the Korean conflict, the
Canadian Army amalgamated the specialties of the sniper with those of the
reconnaissance patrolman. The sniper section, although highly effective as
scouts and battlefield observers, gradually started to lose some of their specific
skills and abilities. This deterioration resulted in the attrition of actively
employed and qualified snipers. It appears that the sniper capability was
allowed to lapse for a significant amount of time, and that current employment
doctrine was unavailable prior to *Op Apollo*.

98 After the announcement of the decision to deploy 3 PPCLI to Afghanistan, the
Commanding Officer made preparations to include a sniper detachment by re-
activating this elite group of outstanding marksmen within the Battle Group.

99 Five 3 PPCLI snipers, including Master Corporal Ragsdale, completed all pre-
deployment preparation and screening provided for the Battle Group, as well as
specialized sniper training. An augmentee from Second Battalion, Princess
Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (2 PPCLI) joined the sniper team during the
pre-deployment period.

100 As a rule, snipers are crack marksmen and excellent soldiers normally led by a
Master Sniper. Canadian Forces snipers receive rigorous training. It is upon
successful completion of this training that graduates are qualified as snipers.
Most candidates do not graduate. All six of the original snipers deployed on
Op Apollo had completed either the Canadian Forces or British sniper course.

101 The augmentee sniper recruited from 2 PPCLI to accompany the five 3 PPCLI
snipers was a qualified Master Sniper with considerable experience. Prior to
the deployment, he suggested to the Platoon Warrant that he should be in

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command of the sniper team. After considering the available options, the Commanding Officer decided to leave the leadership of the group with Master Corporal Ragsdale, who had already been designated the sniper leader. Although not a qualified Master Sniper, Master Corporal Ragsdale had been the leader of the snipers for over a year.

102 Because of the special nature of their work and the Commanding Officer's interest in them, the sniper team's command lines were somewhat different from that of other troops. Administratively, the snipers belonged to the Reconnaissance (or "Recce") Platoon, which was part of 3 PPCLI Combat Support Company. However, for sniper operations, they received their orders either directly from the Commanding Officer or from the Operations Officer, without intermediaries.

103 The Commanding Officer told my investigators that, given his desire to build an effective sniper team and despite financial constraints, he spent approximately 10 percent of his pre-deployment budget on special training for the team.

104 ***Treatment of the Snipers during Operation Apollo***

105 Upon arriving in Afghanistan, the snipers first assisted with airfield security in Kandahar along with the rest of the Battle Group. Thereafter, and as indicated above, they participated in two separate missions, taking place approximately 24 to 36 hours apart.

106 Only the snipers from the 3 PPCLI Battle Group participated in the United States-led *Op Anaconda* from March 2 to 11, 2002. They were attached to an American regiment whose task was clearing the Shah-I-Kot Valley of enemy fighters. The performance of the snipers as part of *Op Anaconda* was outstanding and they were widely recognized by American troops for their achievements in battle, and were credited by the United States Army with saving the lives of many Americans. One team member achieved the longest confirmed lethal shot in history. They were fêted as heroes ("like rock stars," according to one witness) by the Americans on their return to camp.

107 When the snipers returned to Bagram Airfield, a staging area for the next operation, few Canadians from their Battle Group were immediately present to welcome them and recognize their achievements.

108 Master Corporal Ragsdale told my investigators that he was expecting to provide an official account of the mission to the Commanding Officer and Intelligence Officer when the snipers returned from *Op Anaconda*, for intelligence purposes. He expressed disappointment that this did not occur. My investigators found that, while there was no formal intelligence debriefing

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- of the snipers between *Op Anaconda* and the next mission, *Op Harpoon*, they did meet with the relevant individuals in the chain of command, and Master Corporal Ragsdale, as leader of the group, did submit a written patrol report. Master Corporal Ragsdale told investigators that he met separately with the Commanding Officer, the Operations Officer, an Intelligence Officer and the Regimental Sergeant Major after *Op Anaconda*. He advised my investigators that, after those meetings, he clearly felt that senior officers were not interested in the snipers' intelligence. To quote him: "*They said... 'I heard you guys did a really good job' and all that.... They didn't want to hear an intelligence brief or anything like that. All they wanted to know was how cold it was up there, and that was pretty much it.*"
- 109 In an interview, the Operations Officer confirmed that he met with the snipers; indeed, he said that he and the Commanding Officer were among the first Canadians to meet them. He said that he had made inquiries about the technical aspects of their employment during *Op Anaconda*, such as quantities of ammunition consumed, etc. The Commanding Officer also stated that he met with them to congratulate them on their outstanding performance and to receive a first-hand synopsis of their experience. According to an internal army document, the meeting between the Commanding Officer, the Regimental Sergeant Major and the snipers took place on March 11, 2002. Of note at this point is the fact that the Commanding Officer advised my investigators that he made his own informal assessment of their state of mind, and determined that they were capable of participating in the next mission. In addition, the Commanding Officer indicated that the sniper team second-in-command confirmed to him, during that meeting, that they "*were good to go, sir.*"
- 110 The snipers of 3 PPCLI also complained that they were not provided with a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, a structured intervention designed to allow individuals who had witnessed a critical incident to discuss their experiences, in the hopes of reducing negative psychological effects. All of our interviews confirm that there was no Critical Incident Stress Debriefing in the interval between *Op Anaconda* and *Op Harpoon*. It is the responsibility of the commander of the group that experiences the traumatic event to arrange for such an intervention.
- 111 Master Corporal Ragsdale told my investigators that, as the team leader, he expected a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, and that he had written a request for a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing within an administrative post-operation report. However, we were unable to locate this report.
- 112 In addition, during the course of their investigation, my investigators could find no evidence that any of the snipers, at that time, identified their *Op Anaconda* experiences as traumatic in any way.

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- 113 Within 24 to 36 hours after returning to camp at Bagram, the entire Battle Group deployed on *Op Harpoon*, which took place from March 13 to 19, 2002. Before departing on *Op Harpoon*, one member of the group of six snipers was replaced for operational reasons unrelated to this investigation. As a result, five members of the original group returned to the Shah-I-Kot Valley in support of *Op Harpoon*, along with one new sniper.
- 114 *Op Harpoon* involved ensuring that all enemy combatants had left the area, by sweeping the caves and structures used as enemy positions. The mission was highly dangerous since pockets of enemy fighters could well have remained.
- 115 As it turned out, enemy fighters had largely deserted the valley and the mission was relatively uneventful. Our interviews revealed that this was a source of disappointment to many members of the Battle Group, and that this was a significant contrast to the snipers' experience during *Op Anaconda*.
- 116 Early in *Op Harpoon*, a 3 PPCLI reconnaissance team detected an enemy mortar position at the mouth of a cave on Tergul Ghar – the 'Whale'. A United States company attached under 3 PPCLI Battle Group command attacked the position and destroyed it. After this action, three corpses were found in the rubble – one inside the cave, and two outside. A United States forensic team examined the bodies, and determined that one of those outside the cave had been dead for some time (and partially buried) but the other was a recent casualty, likely the result of the shelling. The United States soldiers blew up the entrance to the cave, effectively sealing it off with the body inside – but the other two bodies remained in view along with a dead donkey.
- 117 Two three-man sniper sub-units took positions on either side of the two dead bodies, as the 'Whale' provided an excellent observation post on the whole valley. Information provided to my investigators indicated that a number of people, including soldiers and journalists, came by to look at the bodies and photograph them. One of the photographs revealed one decapitated body and an intact body with a cigarette in its mouth, and a sign bearing an obscenity on its chest.
- 118 Some of the snipers joked about the bodies and gave one a nickname. They later explained to my investigators that this was a way of coping with the fact that they had to live in close proximity to them. According to one sniper interviewed, Master Corporal Ragsdale and the second-in-command talked and joked about taking a 'trophy', in the form of an ear or a finger, from one body. On March 17, 2002, as they prepared to leave the valley to return to base camp, the two snipers were observed going up the hill to the observation point, and returning with a plastic bag, carried by the second-in-command, that contained a brown object which they said, jokingly, was a finger.

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- 119 The Canadian snipers were among the last to leave the 'Whale', returning to base camp in Kandahar on March 19, 2002. At the end of this second mission, one of the snipers from the team made a formal report alleging that fellow snipers, Master Corporal Ragsdale and his second-in-command, had desecrated one of the enemy bodies. As this was a serious accusation, the Commanding Officer, after consulting with the Assistant Judge Advocate General, notified the CFNIS on March 18, 2002. The CFNIS began an investigation into two allegations: improper interference with a dead body (contrary to paragraph 182 (b) of the *Criminal Code of Canada*) and conduct to the prejudice of good order and discipline (contrary to section 129 of the *National Defence Act*).
- 120 On or about March 19, 2002, very shortly after the unit returned to Kandahar after *Op Harpoon*, Master Corporal Ragsdale was removed from his command. While he was allowed to remain with the sniper team, Master Corporal Ragsdale did so in a second-in-command capacity. According to his replacement, this was meant to be a temporary change pending the outcome of the investigation by the CFNIS. Master Corporal Ragsdale was replaced in his command by the sniper who had made the allegations being investigated by the CFNIS.
- 121 CFNIS operates independently of the chain of command – so from that point onward, the Commanding Officer had no control over this matter. The CFNIS is commanded by the Canadian Forces Provost Marshal, and is mandated to investigate serious or sensitive service and criminal offences against property and persons. It has authority and jurisdiction over persons subject to the *Code of Service Discipline* without regard to rank and status throughout the world, wherever the Canadian Forces are established or deployed.
- 122 The sniper who made the allegations told my investigators that he called the snipers together and informed them that he was the source of the complaint and he encouraged openness and honesty. Master Corporal Ragsdale told my investigators that he does not recall this taking place.
- 123 According to the military police reports provided to our investigators, when the CFNIS interviewed the sniper who had come forward with the allegations, he told the investigators that the only event that he had actually witnessed was Master Corporal Ragsdale and the second-in-command placing the cigarette in the corpse's mouth. On March 21, 2002, CFNIS investigators visited the scene briefly by helicopter, found the body, and verified that the cigarette was in place. They also found a sign bearing an obscenity, and found that one finger was missing from the corpse. A photograph taken on March 16, 2002, confirmed that the hand had been intact at that time.
- 124 On March 25 and March 27, 2002, respectively, CFNIS investigators cautioned Master Corporal Ragsdale and the second-in-command that they were the

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subjects of a criminal investigation regarding the alleged desecration. The second-in-command declined to be interviewed, while Master Corporal Ragsdale agreed and was interviewed. Master Corporal Ragsdale apparently told the CFNIS investigators that he did not know what was in the bag. According to military police reports, the other snipers interviewed indicated to CFNIS investigators that they had not observed the contents of the bag closely enough to identify with certainty what it contained.

- 125 Pursuant to a search warrant, the second-in-command's tent was searched on the day he declined to be interviewed. Investigators gathered items for forensic testing, but no evidence linking him to the desecration was found. None of the tents of the other snipers were searched.
- 126 On March 28, 2002, after Master Corporal Ragsdale had been removed from his command of the sniper detachment, the Commanding Officer met with all of the snipers. He attempted to explain the CFNIS investigation and to discuss their situation and morale. The new sniper team leader advised my investigators that the meeting did not go well, as none of the other snipers were willing to speak up. He explained that, as the leader, he felt it was his duty to advise the Commanding Officer that the team was no longer functioning due to divisions within the group and low morale. According to him, the former second-in-command was extremely angry with him after they left the meeting. He told my investigators that the former second-in-command *"kind of lost his temper, threw something down, spun around, got right in my face and started yelling at me, 'don't you ever speak for me again. Don't you ever put words in my mouth.'"* The former second-in-command confirmed with my investigators that he was extremely angry and that he was "venting" his frustrations.
- 127 This scene took place in the common area outside the snipers' tents. At that time, a Canadian Forces chaplain was passing by and was drawn by the voices. He looked under the camouflage netting that protected the area, just as the former second-in-command uttered and then repeated an obscenity. The chaplain told my investigators that the former second-in-command said *"fuck him!"* and *"he pointed at me, and he looked me in the eyes."* The chaplain said he had a genuine concern for his own safety. He also told my investigators that the former second-in-command told him during pre-deployment screening that he hated padres. The following day, March 29, 2002, the chaplain decided to make a formal complaint, and the Military Police Detachment began an investigation. At that point in time, it was clear that the cohesiveness and morale of the group had collapsed.
- 128 On March 29, 2002, five of the snipers (including Master Corporal Ragsdale and the former second-in-command) who had deployed on *Op Anaconda* received a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing at their own request from an American padre who was with them on that operation, and whom they trusted.

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While this debrief was underway, Military Police determined that the Canadian Forces chaplain's allegation was sufficiently serious to warrant the arrest of the former second-in-command. In their evaluation, the chaplain had a realistic fear that his safety was threatened. Accordingly, they sought an arrest warrant from the Commanding Officer, and tracked the former second-in-command to the tent where the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing was taking place. On completion of the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, they arrested and detained him. He was charged under section 129 of the *National Defence Act* for conduct to the prejudice of good order and discipline.

- 129 Later that day, the Commanding Officer told the remaining snipers that he was sending them out of theatre for a few days of rest and relaxation and team building under the supervision of an officer with combat experience who was also a qualified sniper. The Commanding Officer thought that this rest and relaxation together with an officer who had shared similar experiences might enable the snipers to regroup and become functional again. The snipers departed on April 1, 2002, and returned on April 6, 2002.
- 130 While the other snipers were away, the former second-in-command, in accordance with the *National Defence Act*, was given the option of an immediate summary trial, over which the Commanding Officer in the normal course of events would preside, or a trial by court martial, which would occur in Canada and be presided over by a military judge. On April 3, 2002, he elected to return to Canada to face court martial and left Afghanistan on April 4, 2002, while the other snipers were still on rest and relaxation.
- 131 When the snipers returned to camp on April 6, 2002, the former second-in-command was gone. Earlier that same day, before their return, the United States Army had held an awards ceremony in which the snipers' American comrades from *Op Anaconda* were presented with Bronze Star Medals, a United States award for bravery, heroism or meritorious service.
- 132 The snipers had been informed earlier by their United States counterparts that this important award would also be given to them. However, the Government of Canada's approval for this award had not yet been received when the snipers left for the rest and relaxation period away from theatre. The officer supervising the rest and relaxation informed my investigators that he had hoped that their absence would spare their feelings for not receiving the Bronze Star with the American snipers.
- 133 This was not the case. Some members of the group, including Master Corporal Ragsdale, told our investigators that they believed the trip was merely intended to get them out of the way while United States troops received the Bronze Stars, and while the former second-in-command was returned to Canada to face his court martial.

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134 Others believed that that their rest and relaxation period was planned to coincide with a visit by the Minister of National Defence. The Minister of National Defence visited the troops in Afghanistan on April 4, 2002, and the snipers heard of his visit when they returned from rest and relaxation. Some of the snipers felt that they were being ostracized by the unit; therefore, there was some speculation that the rest and relaxation period also served to get them out of the way during the Minister's visit.

135 From the moment the snipers returned from their rest and relaxation period, opinions differed concerning their morale and utilization.

136 On or about March 29, 2002, another sniper from 3 PPCLI was added to the team to replace the former second-in-command upon his repatriation to Canada. Also, later in the rotation, the newly appointed team leader returned home for family reasons, and was replaced by a Master Sniper from 2 PPCLI.

137 The remainder of the deployment was uneventful. The officer who supervised the snipers' rest and relaxation informed my investigators that they functioned effectively as a group after the rest and relaxation period and the removal of the second-in-command. However, Master Corporal Ragsdale and other snipers interviewed during this investigation expressed feeling isolated from the rest of the Battle Group, and feeling under-utilized.

138 The Commanding Officer denied setting the snipers aside, telling my investigators: *"MCpl Ragsdale or any other sniper was certainly never marginalized or ignored. During Op Harpoon it became clear that 3 PPCLI required a mature, experienced Master Sniper to lead the sniper section and advise me as the Battle Group Commander. A sergeant was brought in from 2 PPCLI to serve that purpose which detracted from the personal interaction that I had with the snipers until then."*

139 ***Treatment of the Snipers after Operation Apollo***

140 A series of post-deployment procedures had been developed for all members serving on *Op Apollo*. This process was intended to support the reintegration of members into normal life and reflected Canadian Forces experience and lessons learned over the previous decade in managing the often difficult transition from theatre to home following the Gulf War (1991) and the United Nations' mission in Bosnia (2002).

141 When the 3 PPCLI Battle Group's tour ended in July 2002, the Battle Group moved over a period of time to a United States Base in Guam, in the Philippines, for a series of decompression sessions that featured mandatory educational, debriefing and counselling sessions with professionals. Members then returned home to Edmonton, where they were given block leave. Follow-

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ing that period of leave, all personnel completed post-deployment surveys and were interviewed by health-care professionals. Follow-up care was available for any member who identified a need – and further psychological interventions were provided in cases where this combination of questionnaires and interviews indicated a possible adjustment issue. In particular, medical professionals were concerned with prevention, early identification, and treatment of PTSD, which is recognized as an injury.

- 142 According to the Personnel Selection Officer¹ – a trained social worker who had deployed with the Battle Group – this decompression and reintegration process appeared to have been largely successful in helping members make the transition from active military operations to normal life. He expressed to my investigators that, in his experience, this was one of the first deployments where there were no incidents of drunkenness, rowdiness, family abuse or fighting after troops returned home.
- 143 All of the snipers who completed their tour in Afghanistan were treated in the same manner as the other members of the Battle Group. They participated in the decompression sessions in Guam, took block leave, and then completed questionnaires and received interviews to both encourage them to identify any adjustment issues, and to identify possible psychological problems.
- 144 Master Corporal Ragsdale went through the same post-deployment processes as other members of the Battle Group. Along with the rest of the Battle Group, on August 9, 2002, he participated in the Welcome Home Parade, organized by the City of Edmonton to recognize the troops' contribution to *Op Apollo*.
- 145 By his own account, Master Corporal Ragsdale ignored symptoms of PTSD for some time after his return from Afghanistan, and did not seek help from the Canadian Forces for PTSD. He was seeing a private social worker, arranged for by the Canadian Forces, to deal with some personal issues he had been experiencing prior to deploying to Afghanistan. Master Corporal Ragsdale was identified as requiring some psychological support as a result of the post-deployment screening process. The Canadian Forces referred him for PTSD treatment to the social worker he was already seeing.
- 146 While being treated for PTSD, Master Corporal Ragsdale remained with 3 PPCLI Recce Platoon until July 2003. During this period, he had the opportunity to share his experience and expertise as a sniper during *Op Apollo* with the Infantry School in Gagetown, New Brunswick, in September 2002,

¹ Personnel Selection Officers provide behavioural science services to assist Canadian Forces members in their careers, provide educational and career counselling, and advise the chain of command regarding human resource matters. The Personnel Selection Officer deployed on *Op Apollo* was a social worker and therefore part of the mental health-care resources available to members of the Battle Group.

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and as an instructor during a Recce course held in Edmonton from October 28 to December 10, 2002.

- 147 According to Master Corporal Ragsdale's social worker, in November 2002, he started to become agitated at work. The social worker told my investigators that Master Corporal Ragsdale felt ostracized and isolated, and that his anger level was increasing. At the time, he was living on base in one of the barracks and his social worker reports that one day he remained in his barracks, failing to return to work. Master Corporal Ragsdale's social worker told my investigators that, as she saw it, no one even bothered to check on him. The social worker told my investigators that Master Corporal Ragsdale became socially withdrawn and, just before Christmas, he could not bring himself to leave the barracks to go to the mess to eat. Shortly thereafter, he moved off base to share accommodations with friends.
- 148 After his Christmas leave in 2002, Master Corporal Ragsdale consulted with his social worker who recommended a medical leave. He was placed on medical leave in January 2003, as he was unfit to work, but remained part of the unit for some months. He was subsequently transferred to the Service Personnel Holding List on July 22, 2003. The Service Personnel Holding List is an administrative tool used to facilitate support to a Regular Force member who becomes ill or is injured. The Service Personnel Holding List is intended to provide Canadian Forces members the best opportunity to adequately prepare for return to work or for release from military service. Once a Canadian Forces member is placed on the Service Personnel Holding List, the member's position within the unit is vacated, allowing the unit to backfill the position with another Canadian Forces member. This process allows the Canadian Forces to have a more accurate picture of deployable personnel.
- 149 Master Corporal Ragsdale was medically released from the Canadian Forces in January 2005. To date, he continues to receive treatment and support through Veterans Affairs Canada. In August 2005, he told my investigators that he is satisfied with the medical treatment he received and is receiving.
- 150 The former second-in-command, because he had been sent home early, was not involved in post-deployment medical and psychological questionnaires. However, he did receive psychological assessment and treatment upon his return to Canada in April 2002. He was placed on restricted duties on May 9, 2002, due to the pending charges. On July 29, 2002, the former second-in-command was informed that the charges against him with respect to the allegations made by the chaplain, which had been laid on March 29, 2002, would not be preferred due to a lack of evidence.
- 151 The CFNIS investigation regarding the desecration incident lasted nine months and concluded in December 2002. In the end, no charges were laid due to

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insufficient evidence. The former second-in-command was ordered to return to duty on February 7, 2003. On that same day, after consultation with his physician, he was placed on medical leave.

152 Between March 17 and April 16, 2003, Land Forces Western Area held a Board of Inquiry (BOI) to examine the former second-in-command's suitability to remain a member of the Canadian Forces, and his appropriate occupation if he remained. The BOI heard 31 witnesses (including all six original snipers). The BOI report was presented to the Chief of the Land Staff, but on examination, none of the recommendations were accepted. In fact, in July 2004, the Chief of the Land Staff determined that *"the BOI was flawed and that the findings and recommendations of the Board of Inquiry were unreliable for the purposes for which it was convened."*

153 The Chief of the Land Staff did not approve the BOI and recommended the following options to the convening authority:

- 154 • Reconvene the BOI with new terms of reference;
- 155 • Order an administrative review; or
- 156 • Given that the former second-in-command had been served with notice of an impending medical release from the Canadian Forces, take no further action.

157 Based on the fact that the former second-in-command was in the process of being medically released from the Canadian Forces, no further action was taken. After being placed on the Service Personnel Holding List on June 23, 2003, the second-in-command was medically released from the Canadian Forces on April 19, 2005.

158 With respect to the remaining four of the original six snipers, three returned to normal duties and suffered no apparent ill effects from their experiences in Afghanistan. Of these three, two remain in the Canadian Forces and one left the military to seek a career outside the Canadian Forces. The fourth initially applied for a voluntary release, but was subsequently released under medical category 3 (b) in July 2003.²

² Under Chapter 15 of the *Queen's Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Forces*, this is a release on medical grounds, when a member is "disabled and unfit to perform his duties in his present trade or employment, and not otherwise advantageously employable under existing service policy."

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Analysis

159 I analyzed the information gathered during the investigation in order to determine whether, at any time before, during, or after *Op Apollo*, the snipers, and in particular Master Corporal Ragsdale, had been treated unfairly or improperly by DND/CF. I also examined whether the concerns expressed by Mr. Ragsdale were appropriately dealt with by DND/CF.

160 ***Treatment of the Snipers Pre-Deployment***

161 The sniper team was fully resourced and trained. This included special training in Saskatchewan to sharpen their specific sniper skills. All of the snipers were screened through the Departure Assistance Group, which confirmed their readiness for deployment through a battery of physical, mental and social evaluations.

162 Two potential problem areas were identified in our investigation with respect to the pre-deployment phase: the decision not to appoint a Master Sniper to oversee the sniper team and the fact that no member of the sniper team had training as a peer counsellor.

163 **Lack of a Master Sniper**

164 The Commanding Officer decided not to appoint a Master Sniper to oversee the sniper team. Instead, the sniper team leader, Master Corporal Ragsdale, performed some of the duties normally assumed by a Master Sniper. The Commanding Officer was of the view that Master Corporal Ragsdale was the best individual to be in charge of the sniper team. While of the same rank as the other snipers, he was extremely experienced, and had taught the basic sniper course in Wainwright in 2001. He had graduated from junior non-commissioned officer training, and had the confidence of his superiors.

165 A unit Master Sniper plays a significant role in a commander's ability to employ snipers on the battlefield. The Master Sniper is an advisor and should be well versed in tactics at the Battle Group level and should understand the commander's concept of operations. He must be allowed the opportunity and is expected to be pro-active in planning the snipers' role in all operations. The decision not to appoint a Master Sniper to be responsible for the snipers was based on operational priorities.

166 The 'lessons learned' from *Op Apollo* included a recommendation that snipers should have their own cell, separate from the Recce Platoon, led by a Master Sniper. I note that the Canadian Forces has implemented these changes.

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167 **Peer Counsellor**

168 With regard to peer counsellor training, approximately 20% of the Battle Group had received such training, which was aimed at enabling unit members to assist each other in managing deployment-related stress through peer-to-peer support. A number of people interviewed by my investigators expressed the opinion that this was beneficial. None of the snipers had received peer counsellor training.

169 When interviewed, the snipers told my investigators that they did not feel restrained by the fact that none of them had such formal training since it was common practice to conduct such debriefings among themselves and to support each other informally through discussion about their operations. They also indicated that they had access to trained peer counsellors in the Battle Group and, in particular, in the Recce Platoon.

170 I believe that peer counselling is beneficial and, for that reason, I will discuss it further during my examination of Critical Incident Stress Debriefing.

171 **Conclusion**

172 Overall, I come to the conclusion that the Commanding Officer's decisions about the composition, structure and preparations of the sniper team appear to have been reasonable, based on an assessment of the information and resources available to him at the time. I find that, during the pre-deployment preparations, the snipers were treated fairly and properly, both with respect to each other and compared to the other members of 3 PPCLI.

173 ***Treatment of the Snipers During Deployment***

174 Four particular issues were identified during the investigation as being problematic and of concern:

- 175 1. The snipers' leader, Master Corporal Ragsdale, requested but did not receive a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing immediately after *Op Anaconda*.
- 176 2. The CFNIS investigation caused morale problems within the sniper team.
- 177 3. The snipers felt that the rest and relaxation period was not done to help them, but because the chain of command wanted them 'out of sight'.
- 178 4. The snipers felt they were treated differently after their return from rest and relaxation until their return to Canada at the end of *Op Apollo* in July 2002.

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179 Each of these issues will be addressed in turn.

180 **Request for a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing**

181 As is indicated above, the snipers initially served under the command of United States forces on *Op Anaconda*. Upon their return, they gave verbal debriefs to concerned officers, and Master Corporal Ragsdale filed the proper administrative reports, including a written request for Critical Incident Stress Debriefing. While the request could not be located during our investigation, there is no reason to doubt the credibility of Master Corporal Ragsdale's testimony to the effect that such a written request was made.

182 According to Canadian Forces Administrative Order 34-55, Critical Incident Stress Debriefings are supposed to take place within 24 to 72 hours after a critical incident, although allowance is made for operational situations. A critical incident is described as an event outside the range of normal experience that disrupts one's sense of control and involves the perception of a life threat. It is usually unexpected and may include elements of physical or emotional loss in peacetime or in combat.³

183 In this case, there was very little time for a formal intervention between *Op Anaconda* and *Op Harpoon*. The Commanding Officer spoke with the snipers and determined that they could deploy on *Op Harpoon* without a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing. Other than Master Corporal Ragsdale, the remaining snipers do not appear to have identified their experiences on *Op Anaconda* as requiring intervention. They also indicated that they were eager to redeploy on *Op Harpoon*. As well, Master Corporal Ragsdale advised my investigators that, given the shortness of time between the two missions, he knew a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing could not occur between operations and would have to wait until the end of *Op Harpoon*.

184 While a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing was not provided to the snipers between *Op Anaconda* and *Op Harpoon*, several different sources indicated to my investigators that the snipers did require a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing after *Op Harpoon*:

- 185 • According to two members of the snipers' chain of command, a sniper expressed to them his verbal concern that the group needed a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing intervention after *Op Harpoon*;
- 186 • The Commanding Officer told my investigators that the Recce Platoon Warrant Officer also suggested a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing to

³ Examples of critical incidents include: involvement in a natural or transport disaster, being the victim of an assault, witnessing a suicide and experiencing the duty-related death or serious injury of a co-worker.

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the snipers, but that he understood the response from the second-in-command had been, “Unless you’ve been there with us, you are not worthy of debriefing us”; and

- 187 • The Personnel Selection Officer became aware that a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing would be beneficial to the snipers shortly after the snipers returned from *Op Harpoon*.

188 When consulted, the snipers indicated their preference for an American chaplain who had been with them on *Op Anaconda*. Therefore, the Personnel Selection Officer arranged the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, which was given on March 29, 2002, 10 days after the snipers had returned from *Op Harpoon*.

189 A qualified person acceptable to the sniper group provided a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing to the snipers after *Op Harpoon*. It was not provided between *Op Anaconda* and *Op Harpoon* because the short time between the two operations precluded a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing and, according to the Commanding Officer, they exhibited no open signs of negative stress. Again, Master Corporal Ragsdale appreciated that no Critical Incident Stress Debriefing could be provided between operations. Therefore, given the circumstances that prevailed immediately after *Op Anaconda*, and the resources available to them after *Op Harpoon*, I find that the snipers’ needs for Critical Incident Stress Debriefing and other psychological support were properly addressed considering the operational requirements, which were then prevailing. While the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing was not provided within the required 24 to 72 hours period, I am satisfied that the 10-day delay was reasonable in the circumstances, given the fact that the snipers had requested that their Critical Incident Stress Debriefing be provided by a specific American chaplain.

190 **Effect of the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service Investigation on the Snipers**

191 It was not until after *Op Harpoon* and the commencement of the CFNIS investigation that the snipers reported experiencing serious morale issues. The morale problems were also apparent to others observing the snipers at the time. For this reason, I will look specifically at the decision to refer the allegations of desecration to the CFNIS in order to determine if that decision was unfair to the snipers.

192 Once one of the snipers made the allegation, the Commanding Officer had a duty to deal with them. Given the nature and seriousness of the allegations, the matter was properly brought the attention of the CFNIS, the body responsible for investigating serious allegations of this nature. As indicated above, the

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desecration of a corpse is a criminal matter under Canadian law. The Commanding Officer would be rightly subject to criticism if he had failed to act upon receipt of such an allegation. Although the Commanding Officer's decision to inform the CFNIS cannot be considered unfair, there is no doubt that the investigation itself may very well have had a negative effect on the team's morale. Further, as the allegation was made by one sniper against two fellow snipers, it would be normal to expect that there would be repercussions on the interpersonal relationships in the group, which would also affect the morale of individuals who had to work closely together.

- 193 As mentioned previously, although part of the military, the CFNIS is independent of the chain of command. Thus, once it undertakes an investigation, it does so without interference, managing all aspects of the investigation itself, and reporting to and receiving direction from the Provost Marshal. With regard to the referral of the allegations to the CFNIS, I find there was no unfairness toward the snipers on the part of the chain of command.
- 194 At this point, I should note that my mandate prevents me from investigating any matters related to the laying of charges by the chain of command or the CFNIS, or the preferring of charges by the Director of Military Prosecutions. It also prevents me from investigating any matter related to the Military Police that has been dealt with under Part IV of the *National Defence Act* (Complaints About or by Military Police).
- 195 During the course of our investigation, certain persons who agreed to be interviewed expressed concerns about a number of issues, including some general allegations of unfairness related to Military Police investigations conducted during the time period in question. Under our mandate, we have a duty to act as a direct source of information, referral and education to assist individuals in accessing existing channels of assistance and redress within DND/CF. Therefore, where it appeared that individuals expressed concerns with the police investigation and they might wish to pursue complaints against the Military Police, they were informed that the Military Police Complaints Commission is the existing mechanism to handle complaints of this type. Those who wished to pursue these issues were put in contact with the Military Police Complaints Commission.
- 196 The Military Police Complaints Commission is created under the *National Defence Act* and has the mandate to examine complaints arising from either the conduct of Military Police members in the exercise of policing duties or functions or from interference in, or obstruction of, their police investigations. I understand that, at the time this report was published, the Military Police Complaints Commission had initiated an investigation in the public interest into complaints related to events described in this report.

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197 Even though I will not look at the CFNIS investigation itself, I can comment
on the fact that the commencement of the investigation triggered a complex set
of interconnected events between March 19 and April 4, 2002. During these
two weeks:

- 198 • The CFNIS investigation commenced;
- 199 • Master Corporal Ragsdale was removed from his command and
became the new second-in-command;
- 200 • Master Corporal Ragsdale was replaced in his command by the sniper
who had made the allegations being investigated by the CFNIS;
- 201 • The former second-in-command's tent was searched;
- 202 • The Commanding Officer attempted a debrief, at which only the newly-
appointed team leader spoke out;
- 203 • After this debrief, the former second-in-command expressed his anger,
which resulted in a formal complaint by a chaplain, culminating in a
Military Police investigation;
- 204 • The former second-in-command was arrested and retained in custody
and charged with conduct to the prejudice of good order and discipline;
- 205 • The group, minus the former second-in-command, went on rest and
relaxation out of theatre; and
- 206 • The former second-in-command elected to face court martial on the
charge in Canada, and was returned to Canada while the rest of the
snipers were on rest and relaxation.

207 The accumulation of these events shattered the cohesion and morale of the
sniper team. Generally, I find that the chain of command, once it became
aware of the group's problems, responded properly under the operational
circumstances that existed. For example, as mentioned above, the
Commanding Officer met with the group, explained the CFNIS investigation,
and attempted to get them to open up and discuss their morale issues. A
Critical Incident Stress Debriefing was also arranged for the snipers. I note
that the Commanding Officer took a personal interest in the snipers, and
ensured that these measures were taken to assist them, while commanding an
850-person Battle Group in operations.

208 In short, and keeping in mind the prevailing circumstances, I find that the chain
of command acted appropriately with regard to the referral of the allegation to
the CFNIS.

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209 There is, however, one other matter that needs to be addressed in which the actions of the chain of command were brought into question: the purpose of the rest and relaxation period.

210 **Purpose of Rest and Relaxation**

211 The Commanding Officer sent the snipers out of theatre on rest and relaxation between April 1 and April 6, 2002. The purpose, according to the Commanding Officer, was to allow them to team-build given the events that occurred after *Op Harpoon*, which affected the morale of the sniper detachment.

212 The snipers believed that they had been deceived about the real reasons they were being sent away on rest and relaxation. For example, Master Corporal Ragsdale expressed the belief that the rest and relaxation period had been designed to get them out of the country while the former second-in-command was sent back to Canada, to prevent them from being awarded Bronze Stars by the United States military, and to keep them out of the sight of the Minister of National Defence during his visit to Afghanistan. Other snipers interviewed by my investigators expressed similar views.

213 It is unclear what the snipers knew about the possibility that the former second-in-command could be returned to Canada. However, my investigators learned that the Commanding Officer explained the nature of the charge against the former second-in-command to the other snipers at their last meeting prior to their departure for rest and relaxation. On April 3, 2002, while the other snipers were out of theatre, the former second-in-command elected to be tried by court martial in Canada. Therefore, they could not have been informed of his election to return to Canada prior to their departure, as the former second-in-command had not yet made that decision.

214 With regard to the Bronze Stars, the officer who accompanied the snipers on rest and relaxation told my investigators that he had explained the protocol problems relating to foreign medals during that trip, and the resulting delay in their receiving these awards. Not all snipers appear to have understood this situation, and as a result, they felt badly treated. However, I find that the officer was aware of the snipers' confusion about the Bronze Star presentations, and attempted to explain the situation to the snipers. I believe that the accompanying officer did all that he could in the circumstances to clarify the issue for the snipers. Also, I do not think that any more action could have been taken by anyone in the snipers' chain of command with regard to the process for allowing them to receive the Bronze Stars. I will return to the issue of awards in a later section.

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- 215 Finally, I cannot find any evidence to support the contention that the snipers were sent on rest and relaxation to remove them from theatre during the Minister of National Defence's visit. I have also been unable to find any evidence that this belief of the snipers was brought to the attention of anyone in their chain of command.
- 216 Therefore, I find that the Commanding Officer's decision to send the snipers out of theatre on rest and relaxation was fair and reasonable. Following the events that occurred after *Op Harpoon*, which affected the morale of the sniper team, I am satisfied that the Commanding Officer was genuinely and legitimately concerned with the welfare and health of his snipers. Furthermore, my investigators heard evidence that the morale of the team had improved following the rest and relaxation trip, and the officer who had accompanied them felt that the snipers were once again deployable. Sending the snipers on rest and relaxation appears to have been a successful initiative.
- 217 **Treatment After Rest and Relaxation Until the End of Deployment**
- 218 Master Corporal Ragsdale expressed the opinion to my investigators that he and the other snipers were under-utilized during the remainder of the deployment. In addition, he and other snipers stated that they felt ostracized or treated differently by the rest of the Battle Group as a result of the CFNIS investigation. However, I note that, after *Op Harpoon*, the intensity and operational tempo decreased for the entire Battle Group.
- 219 With regard to the feelings expressed by the snipers that they were treated differently, my investigators interviewed a number of individuals who had contact with the snipers during the deployment, including personnel from the chain of command and members of the Recce Platoon. They were asked a range of questions in order to determine how various events affected their relationships with the snipers. None of those interviewed indicated that they treated the snipers differently; in fact, many said that they held them in high regard. My investigators could not find any evidence that the snipers had been ostracized by the members of the Battle Group or the chain of command.
- 220 Despite this, it is reasonable to believe that the snipers may have been treated differently by the rest of the Battle Group as a result of the rumours that circulated concerning the desecration of the bodies. It is possible that some people may have feared that these allegations would harm the image of the Canadian Forces. This, in turn, may have led those individuals to distance themselves from the snipers. However, I could find no evidence that the chain of command encouraged or prompted this reaction. In fact, during that time period, the snipers were being recommended for an eventual award, a Mention in Dispatches, with regard to their actions on *Op Anaconda*.

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221 ***Treatment of the Snipers Post-Deployment***

222 The four original snipers who remained in Afghanistan, including Master Corporal Ragsdale, were treated the same as the other members of the Battle Group at the end of the deployment. The treatment included decompression in Guam before their return to Canada, block leave, medical questionnaires, interviews and, where necessary, follow-up care.

223 As for recognition for their services during *Op Apollo*, the United States Ambassador presented five of the six original snipers with Bronze Stars on December 8, 2003, at a private ceremony in Edmonton. At the same time, they were presented with the Mention in Dispatches insignia and the Commander-in-Chief Unit Commendation by the Chief of the Defence Staff. The ceremony was private at the request of one of the snipers, to protect their identities. Thus, the extraordinary service of the snipers received formal recognition both from the United States and the Canadian Forces. On that same day, the other 3 PPCLI Battle Group members received their recognition in a public ceremony. The sixth sniper was not included at that time, but subsequently received the awards and recognition to which he was entitled, as a member of the Battle Group.

224 Given that they were recognized and that they received honours and awards according to their achievements, I am satisfied that the snipers were treated fairly. However, while their recognition may have been fair, I cannot come to the same conclusion concerning the process leading to this recognition – a process that took 21 months. A delay of this magnitude is both unreasonable and undesirable. I will return to this in a subsequent section.

225 With respect to Master Corporal Ragsdale specifically, as mentioned above, his post-deployment screening process revealed mental health issues, and he was referred back to his social worker who treated him for PTSD.

226 When his social worker recommended sick leave for him, it was granted. In July 2003, Master Corporal Ragsdale was transferred to the Service Personnel Holding List. When his medical condition worsened, he was admitted to a medical facility on November 27, 2003. After his release from that facility, he continued to be seen by his social worker, who determined that he was unable to tolerate contact with military personnel. His social worker told his unit not to have any contact with him. As indicated above, he was medically released from the Canadian Forces in January 2005. Since his release, he continues to receive treatment and support, co-ordinated by DND/CF and Veterans Affairs Canada.

227 While this story is extremely painful, it is difficult to see any unfairness to Master Corporal Ragsdale in the way in which he was treated by the Canadian

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Forces after the deployment. His experiences in theatre almost certainly resulted in, or contributed to, his psychological injury, but that injury was diagnosed and treated. It appears that reasonable efforts to reintegrate him into normal military life were made: his valour and achievements were recognized in public and private events; he was afforded medical leave and care; and the Canadian Forces supported him during a number of painful transitions.

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Mr. Ragsdale's Four Specific Concerns

228 I would like to specifically address the four specific concerns raised by Mr. Ragsdale in his letter to Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources – Military) of April 21, 2004.

229 **1. Why Master Corporal Ragsdale and the other 3 PPCLI snipers were allowed to be treated so badly that they were all removed from active duty because of PTSD issues.**

230 Mr. Ragsdale was of the understanding that all of the 3 PPCLI snipers who participated in *Op Anaconda* were removed from active duty because of PTSD, and that their PTSD was caused by the way in which they were treated.

231 Of the six snipers, two have been on continuous duty from their return from Afghanistan until today; another remained on active duty until he took a voluntary release from the Canadian Forces; the remaining three, including Master Corporal Ragsdale, who were diagnosed with PTSD received ongoing medical treatment and were eventually released.

232 The universality of service principle in the Canadian Forces requires every member to be fit to be 'a soldier first'. However, for various reasons, not just because of PTSD, members may not be capable of performing all of the duties required of them as Canadian Forces members. At the time,⁴ it was Canadian Forces policy to accommodate members who did not comply with the universality of service principle. In the case of the snipers diagnosed with PTSD, the Canadian Forces used available mechanisms – such as medical leave and the Service Personnel Holding List – to retain them for as long as possible in the hope that they would be able to return to duty. When it was concluded that they would not be able to return to duty, the two members were released with medical and financial benefits.

233 PTSD is a serious illness and remains, regrettably but unavoidably, a risk of active service for soldiers. Diagnosing PTSD is a complex process and it is sometimes difficult to pin-point the exact cause. In this instance, three of the six snipers were diagnosed with PTSD. However, I have found no evidence that the snipers' mental injury was related to unfair or inequitable treatment by the Canadian Forces.

234 **2. Why Master Corporal Ragsdale was subjected to unfounded criminal charges and investigations instead of being given the treatment and recognition he deserved from his own army.**

⁴ On May 8, 2006, the Accommodation Policy was replaced by DAOD 5023-1 (Minimum Operational Standards Related to Universality of Service).

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- 235 As documented in this report, allegations were made against Master Corporal Ragsdale and his second-in-command concerning the desecration of an enemy corpse. As described above, these allegations were investigated.
- 236 Both Master Corporal Ragsdale and the second-in-command were removed from their appointments pending the result of this investigation. Upon completing the investigation, charges were not laid for lack of evidence linking any particular persons to this offence. Although he was not charged with a criminal offence with respect to the allegation specifically directed against him, Master Corporal Ragsdale was replaced as the leader of the sniper detachment. Given the nature and seriousness of the allegation, I am satisfied that referring the matter to the CFNIS was the appropriate thing to do.
- 237 In addition, it is my understanding that there were other investigations, which occurred during the deployment and after, for which Master Corporal Ragsdale was interviewed. One of these concerned the Military Police investigation into the chaplain's complaint and another concerned loss of equipment. Master Corporal Ragsdale was not a suspect in those investigations and I have found no evidence that he suffered any career-limiting effects as a result of those investigations.
- 238 Finally, as already noted, it is my understanding that the Military Police Complaints Commission has agreed to look at this aspect of Master Corporal Ragsdale's complaint.
- 239 **3. Why the Canadian Forces did not make a sincere effort to keep Master Corporal Ragsdale and the other snipers on active duty, and pass on their combat experiences so that other soldiers might benefit from them.**
- 240 As stated in my response to Mr. Ragsdale's first question, every Canadian Forces member is required to be fit as a soldier first. Two of the snipers deployed on *Op Anaconda* were taken off active duty for medical reasons. While he was being treated, efforts were made to employ Master Corporal Ragsdale as much as operationally possible. He did participate in sniper training and, specifically, had the opportunity to pass on his combat experiences to others. Similarly, other members of the original sniper group also briefed and taught in Canadian Forces courses. Once Master Corporal Ragsdale and the other sniper could no longer be retained because of their medical conditions, they were released from the Canadian Forces.
- 241 On this issue, I find that a genuine and reasonable effort was made to keep Master Corporal Ragsdale on active duty, within the construct of the universality of service principle. I conclude that Master Corporal Ragsdale and his fellow sniper were treated fairly by the Canadian Forces.

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242 **4. How the Canadian Forces and the federal government are going to
make amends to these five Canadian heroes who have had their lives
and careers destroyed because they served their country with honour.**

243 I have no doubt that the snipers' skills and their contribution to *Op Apollo* was appreciated. Their contribution to *Op Apollo* has been widely noted and publicized. The snipers were recognized for their outstanding performance; specifically, they received two distinctions over and above most of the members of the Battle Group: the Mention in Dispatches and the Bronze Star from the United States. However, it is clear that their recognition was not timely. I will deal with that specific issue below.

244 As previously stated, I have concluded that the Canadian Forces took reasonable and appropriate measures to provide care and employ those snipers, including Master Corporal Ragsdale, who were diagnosed with PTSD, for as long as could operationally be allowed.

245 War and combat are extremely difficult and, very often, traumatizing. Unfortunately, and inevitably, there will be casualties of different kinds, including victims of PTSD, as happened here.

246 The key is that the Canadian Forces, Veteran Affairs Canada and the Government of Canada ensure that these victims – and their families, where appropriate – receive at all times high-quality treatment, care, and attention, together with proper benefits. Overall, my conclusion is that this has happened here for the snipers. However, such is not the case with respect to the complainant, Mr. Ragsdale, as will be seen in the following section of this report.

247 Could the Canadian Forces have done more for these soldiers? While I appreciate Mr. Ragsdale's unease as a father, I am satisfied that DND/CF and the Government of Canada properly recognized the snipers' contributions to *Op Apollo*. I am also satisfied that the Canadian Forces' effort to retain them was reasonable.

248 In addition, as I have already mentioned, once it was recognized that some of the snipers would be unable to continue to serve in the Canadian Forces due to PTSD incurred during operations, they were given benefits, such as medical pensions and access to medical care, which they continue to obtain from the Government of Canada.

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249 Of note, during our investigation, Master Corporal Ragsdale indicated that he was satisfied with the medical services he had received while as a Canadian Forces member and since his release.

Department of National Defence and Canadian Forces Response to Mr. Ragsdale's Concerns

- 250 While my investigation has concluded that the Canadian Forces has, for the most part, dealt with the snipers in a fair and equitable matter, I appreciate Mr. Ragsdale's concerns about his son. He addressed those concerns directly to the Minister of National Defence and later to the Chief of the Defence Staff. In this part of the investigation, the core question is whether the concerns of a close family member were appropriately handled.
- 251 Mr. Ragsdale, who lives in Ontario, experienced understandable concerns regarding his son, and was cut off from him by considerable geographical distance, both during the deployment in Afghanistan and on Master Corporal Ragsdale's return to Edmonton. He advised my investigators that, when he met his son at Christmas in 2002, he was shocked at his state of mind and the physical change he had undergone.
- 252 Like many other family members concerned about the welfare of their children, he wrote to the Minister of National Defence. A letter to a Minister normally sets off a bureaucratic process that results in a carefully focused and sometimes defensive response to the precise questions raised. Such correspondence is unlikely to foster a relationship of mutual trust – and is unlikely to generate the answers that the family member really needs.
- 253 Mr. Ragsdale's correspondence to DND/CF reflects the anxiety of a parent facing his son's crippling illness, over which the parent has no control. Those concerns called for a prompt and thoughtful response. Instead, his letters were politely and repeatedly acknowledged without being properly answered. On March 19, 2003, Mr. Ragsdale wrote urgently to the Minister to say that his previous letter of April 25, 2002, had not been acknowledged and that he had just received a disturbing e-mail from his son. The response, dated March 28, 2003, stated: *"On behalf of the Minister of National Defence, I would like to acknowledge receipt of your letter. Please be assured that your correspondence will be reviewed."*
- 254 This was the first of four similar letters sent on behalf of the Minister, which were the only responses to continued inquiries received until an e-mail from the Minister on July 28, 2003, stating: *"Thank you for your correspondence, received on March 24, April 4, June 11, and July 1, 2003, concerning the problems that your son, Master Corporal Graham Ragsdale, has encountered since his participation in Op Anaconda in Afghanistan. I apologize for the*

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delay in replying. I am sorry to learn that your son is experiencing health problems, but I have been assured that he is receiving the best medical care possible. The serious nature of the allegation made by one of the snipers who served in Afghanistan in 2002 necessitated the conduct of more than one investigative process, and not all the related investigations are complete. It would therefore be inappropriate for me to comment on the investigations. In accordance with the Privacy Act, the Department of National Defence does not disclose personal information to third parties, including family members, without the express written consent of the person concerned. I have therefore attached a consent form that must be filled out by Master Corporal Ragsdale. Once he has given his consent, I will be able to provide you with more details."

- 255 Despite his exhaustive correspondence with the Minister and senior officers at National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa, Mr. Ragsdale was never provided with information that might have given him confidence in the Canadian Forces – for example, information on Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, references to Canadian Forces experience with PTSD and advice on how family members may support soldiers struggling with this combat-related illness. None of this information required a consent form, or depended on the conclusion of specific investigations.
- 256 It appears that no one in a senior position ever called him or attempted to listen to him. On more than one occasion, Mr. Ragsdale referred dismissively to the allegations being investigated by the CFNIS. No one attempted to explain that the alleged offence – the desecration of a human body – was sufficiently serious to warrant an investigation.
- 257 It could be argued that, from a technical perspective, Mr. Ragsdale's letters were answered accurately. However, from a human perspective, a close family member, going through what Mr. Ragsdale was going through, deserved to be treated in a much better way.
- 258 His letter to the Minister should have triggered a direct, informal telephone call from DND/CF, in which a knowledgeable and understanding person listened to his concerns and then followed up with more contextual information that might have helped him and other family members cope with the lack of information, uncertainty and stress of their situation.
- 259 In matters such as this, which are so emotional and so critically important to people, there is a need to go beyond bureaucratic rules. I note that, as a result of inquiries he made with the local Edmonton base, Mr. Ragsdale responded positively to a telephone conversation he had on November 28, 2003, with a base medical officer in Edmonton, and later when he was put in contact with his son's caregiver. The same kind of one-on-one, informal but authoritative and, above all, timely response to his other concerns regarding issues of

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fairness might have resolved them as well, without the need for this investigation.

260 I find that Mr. Ragsdale was not treated by DND/CF in an appropriate manner and in a way that any other concerned family member of a soldier injured in operations would expect to be treated⁵. Accordingly,

261 **I recommend that the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces ensure that family members, who express significant concerns over the health or well-being of a Canadian Forces member or Department of National Defence employee, be formally recognized and diverted, through an established and robust mechanism, to immediate, supportive, personal and timely intervention.**

262 The Canadian Forces has expressed a commitment to caring for its members. I believe that this must include showing the proper regard for family members with serious concerns over the welfare of the service member. Our office has previously addressed some of these issues in the special report, *When A Soldier Falls*, where it was concluded that the family of a Canadian Forces member who died in a training accident was treated unfairly in its attempt to obtain information about the cause of the accident. That report recommended that family members seeking information be treated compassionately, and that every effort be made to apply access to information and privacy legislation in an open and helpful manner. It appears that the Canadian Forces still has work to do in this regard, as is demonstrated by the way in which Mr. Ragsdale's concerns were addressed, and by the fact that my office has recently received a complaint from the father of a soldier who died in Afghanistan concerning his serious difficulties in obtaining basic information about his son's death.

⁵ Since the Afghanistan deployment in 2002, I note that the support system for casualties sustained in operations has evolved. In 2005, the Canadian Forces established regional Family Peer Support Coordinators working within the Operational Stress Injuries Social Support structure.

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Four Special Issues

263 As a result of this investigation, and as a result of the experiences of the snipers during and after *Op Apollo*, there are four additional issues that should be discussed where the policies and practices of DND/CF could be improved in order to ensure that Canadian Forces members are better served in the future.

264 ***Awards and Recognition***

265 The practice of bestowing decorations is deeply embedded in history and is a vital part of military culture. Chapter 18 of the *Queen's Regulations and Orders* details Canadian Forces policy and practice in this area. It defines "honours" as all categories of national awards that emanate from the Queen, through the Governor General, that may be presented to members of the Canadian Forces. These honours recognize particular accomplishments and carry prestige.

266 In order to ensure that honours and awards are awarded in an equitable and credible fashion, the Canadian Forces has instituted a process for nominating awards and has created the Canadian Forces Decorations and Commendations Advisory Committee to provide oversight. The Committee reviews and recommends the bestowal of all awards. Once formulated by Canadian Forces Decorations and Commendations Advisory Committee, recommendations for national honours are forwarded by the Chief of the Defence Staff to the Chancellery of Honours for approval by the Governor General.

267 The Canadian Forces has also established a policy (Canadian Forces Administrative Order 18-6, *Commonwealth and Foreign Orders, Decorations and Medals*) prohibiting its members from accepting a foreign order, decoration or medal without prior approval from the Government of Canada. The process requires the foreign country to forward a request through the appropriate Canadian Embassy to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, which processes it through the Chancellery of Honours for the Governor General's approval. The final step after approval is publication in the *Canada Gazette*. The Canadian Forces subsequently presents the order, decoration or medal at an appropriate occasion.

268 Five members of the original group of snipers who served in *Op Anaconda* received the following four medals and awards:

- 269
- *The South West Asia Service Medal*, which recognizes the participation of Canadian Forces members deployed in, or in direct support of, the operations against terrorism in South West Asia;

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- 270 • *The Commander-in-Chief Unit Commendation*, which may be awarded to any unit or sub-unit of the Canadian Forces that has performed an extraordinary deed or activity of a rare high standard in extremely hazardous circumstances;
- 271 • *Mention in Dispatches*, which may be awarded to members of the Canadian Forces and other individuals working with, or in conjunction with, the Canadian Forces for valiant conduct, devotion to duty or other distinguished service; and
- 272 • *The Bronze Star Medal*, a United States Army decoration which may be awarded to any person who, while serving in any capacity in or with the United States Army, distinguishes himself or herself by heroic or meritorious achievement or service.
- 273 There were significant delays in the presentation of the Commander-in-Chief Unit Commendation, the Mention in Dispatches, and the Bronze Star. Twenty-one months elapsed between the actions for which they were recognized, and the presentation of these awards. It was not until April 16, 2003, that the Canadian Forces Decorations and Commendations Advisory Committee approved the nominations for the Canadian honours. Meanwhile, the nomination for the Bronze Star followed its own process, which involved approval by a board in United States Army Headquarters, ambassadorial concurrence at the United States Embassy in Ottawa, production of the citation and medal in the United States, return of the finished product to the United States Embassy in Canada, referral to Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, and consideration by the Governor General. Notice of both the Mention in Dispatches and the Bronze Stars did not appear in Part I of the *Canada Gazette* until November 8, 2003; as related above, they were awarded to the five snipers on December 8, 2003, at a private ceremony, as part of the Battle Group medals parade.
- 274 It is not unusual for the processes for honouring our soldiers to take this amount of time, and the same type of delay was experienced by all Canadian Forces members involved in *Op Apollo*, not only by the snipers.
- 275 However, I find that such a delay is too long. As well, I believe that recognition involves more than medals and awards.⁶ Important to the process is the recognition by the Government of Canada of achievements or services,

⁶ It also includes timely and appropriate words of praise, both publicly and privately delivered by the chain of command and others. Some snipers – particularly Master Corporal Ragsdale and the second-in-command – clearly believed that they did not receive such verbal recognition for their achievements on *Op Anaconda* from the Canadian Forces, in contrast to their United States comrades. While I understand that this may have been their feelings, our investigation found that the snipers did receive recognition

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particularly those implying valour, in a timely manner. The present Honours and Awards Program seems to be inconsistently applied and not well known. Many Commanding Officers are not aware that there is a special procedure that can be applied to expedite the process under operational circumstances. The result is a wide variety of approval times ranging from very fast to extremely slow with very few individuals receiving timely recognition. I am aware that the senior Canadian Forces leadership agrees that this is an area that requires improvement. I urge them to proceed expeditiously on this and to ensure that the process for recognizing Canadian Forces members' achievements is made timely and efficient.

276 In conclusion, I find that the snipers did eventually receive the recognition that was merited. However, I am not satisfied that the Canadian Forces process for recommending, approving and bestowing awards is a timely one. Accordingly,

277 **I recommend that the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces review their awards and honours policies and practices in order to ensure that Canadian awards and recognitions be diligently submitted to the chain of command by Commanding Officers for consideration, and that, where approved, they be bestowed within six months of the recommendations being submitted.**

278 *Media Exposure*

279 There was considerable media interest in the Afghanistan deployment, and journalists were embedded in the mission. The Canadian Forces policy regarding Canadian Forces members' contact with the media can be summarized as follows:

- 280 • Members are encouraged to respond to media questions, within their area of expertise;
- 281 • They are not required to agree to media interviews or requests; and
- 282 • They are not to comment or speculate on government policy.

283 Journalists embedded with the Canadian Forces were required to agree to follow certain rules drawn up by the Canadian Forces based on the "Ground Rules Agreement" used by the United States Army. Among other things, the

from their Commanding Officer and other officers immediately after *Op Anaconda*. I am of the view that it was the official recognition and awards process that let them down.

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agreement protected personnel from the release of information that might threaten their security or safety.

284 From the beginning, journalists were extremely interested in the snipers and they were featured in several stories. A Canadian Forces public affairs officer and some representatives of the chain of command met with some of the snipers early on to discuss how to handle media inquiries while protecting their identities. Protection of identities was an important issue to the group; snipers felt that they, and possibly their families, could be put at risk if their names and faces were revealed. However, Canadian Forces policy does not extend to the protection of the identities of members, unless there is an official security reason for doing so, as in the case of Canada's special forces, specifically Joint Task Force 2.

285 While concerned with the protection of their identity, several of the snipers did media interviews and permitted photographs. However, they advised my investigators that they agreed to this on the verbal understanding with the journalists that their identities would be protected. In one particular case, video footage was shot, in which the snipers' faces could be seen, apparently again on the understanding that their names would be withheld, faces would not be visible, and that they would have a chance to preview the material before it was broadcast.

286 According to some of the snipers, the Commanding Officer encouraged them to participate in this video. However, in a separate interview, the Commanding Officer expressed doubt that he would have explicitly provided such encouragement, but stated to my investigators that he may have indicated that the journalist in question was trustworthy. As the reporters who were involved declined to be interviewed, we were unable to ascertain their own interpretation of the understanding with the snipers.

287 In the case of the video, some of the faces of the snipers were publicly revealed. There were also cases in the print media where their names and ranks were revealed, and in two other cases, a photograph of all of the snipers was published. This caused concern among the sniper group. To quote one: *"My parents were getting phone calls from people that I haven't seen in years. They saw me on the front page of the paper as a sniper. I personally do not want people to know specifically what I do. I'm exposed. That's a pretty big consequence – so me and my family got things to worry about because I was exposed."*

288 As previously indicated, certain snipers told my investigators that they understood that they would be given an opportunity to preview the documentary before it was made public. Contrary to what they believed the understanding to have been, the journalist producing a video documentary did

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not provide the snipers with the opportunity to preview the video. The video revealed some of their faces very clearly when it was televised in Canada, without their knowledge, as part of a three part series on the operations in Afghanistan.

- 289 I understand that, after the deployment, several of the snipers voluntarily gave interviews to media representatives, in which they agreed to have their identities made public. I note, however, that this was done after their identities had already become publicly known, despite their efforts to prevent that. Furthermore, the snipers had already retired from the Canadian Forces at that point.
- 290 Canadian Forces members, whether deployed internationally or in Canada, are vulnerable to such misunderstandings. In addition, when in a theatre of operation, they operate in close proximity to journalists, whom they often get to know. Some members may make comments in what they consider to be a casual context, while the journalists might consider them being in an interview context. Canadian Forces members are rightly proud of what they do, and it is natural to welcome the recognition that media attention brings. Under the circumstances, I believe Canadian Forces members would largely benefit from precise and explicit guidelines, clearly setting out the terms of the Canadian Forces' agreement with embedded journalists, and explaining the extent to which, if at all, material will be previewed prior to publication.
- 291 The desire for openness and transparency regarding the efforts of the Canadian Forces by embedding journalists in deployments is commendable. However, the snipers' experiences demonstrate a serious weakness in the system. Every individual has the right to refuse to be interviewed. That being said, when they agree to do so, they must be fully aware that anonymity is not guaranteed. In the context of an interview with embedded journalists, the protection of an individual Canadian Forces member's identity becomes even more complicated, as their name and rank are evident and known to the journalist. Moreover, once they are no longer embedded in the mission, DND/CF has no control over what the journalists release.
- 292 *Op Apollo* was a new experience for the Canadian Forces, and embedding journalists was a new concept. As previously indicated, the journalists were required to follow Canadian Forces rules drawn from the "Ground Rules Agreement" used by the United States Army. Since then, the Canadian Forces has created its own Ground Rules for Embedded Media (ADM (PA)/J5PA Instruction 0301 issued on November 12, 2003, revised in June 2006). The Ground Rules set out the kind of conduct expected from embedded journalists, and a separate sheet lists the type of information to be withheld or delayed for operational security reasons. Reporters embedded with the Canadian Forces sign a 'Media Embedding and Ground Rules Agreement', in which they agree

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to abide by the Ground Rules. The current List of Releasable and Non-Releasable Information states that the following is not releasable: information stills or video of special operations units, and any other information that may be restricted by the Task Force Commander for operational reasons. In addition to this agreement, reporters sign an 'Engagement with the Minister of National Defence', in which they agree to be subject to the Code of Service Discipline, and to comply with "all orders and instructions of the Commanding Officer" of the task force in which they are embedded.

293 While the Ground Rules for Embedded Media provide a general framework for embedded journalists, ultimately DND/CF has little control over them. That being said, given the potential consequences for members and their families, I believe that DND/CF still has a duty to ensure that every deployed individual receives appropriate and formal training concerning the risks associated with being interviewed, whether formally or informally, by a journalist. This is an area where I find DND/CF can improve. Accordingly,

294 **I recommend that the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces ensure that, at a minimum, every individual preparing for deployment receives, as part of their pre-deployment training, a briefing on the rights, responsibilities and limits to the protection provided for under the current Canadian Forces Ground Rules for Embedded Media, and on the risks that may be associated with the giving of interviews.**

295 ***Critical Incident Stress Debriefing***

296 The existing policy (Canadian Forces Administrative Order 34-55) calls for a structured intervention known as a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing when members encounter a 'critical incident'. As previously mentioned, the goal of a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing is to reduce the intensity and duration of physical and psychological reactions to the incident; examples of such incidents include experiencing a duty-related death in combat. The policy says that such Critical Incident Stress Debriefings may only be performed by qualified personnel – a social worker, a nursing or medical officer, a Personnel Selection Officer or a chaplain. It also says that, where possible, the intervention should take place within 24 to 72 hours after the incident – although allowance is made for operational situations.

297 Under normal circumstances, the snipers would have been candidates for a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing shortly after *Op Anaconda*. However, they redeployed almost immediately on *Op Harpoon*, and, as such, no Critical Incident Stress Debriefing was given. As noted above, 10 days after they returned from *Op Harpoon*, a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing was provided to the snipers.

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298 Medical thinking on the value of Critical Incident Stress Debriefing interventions continues to evolve. According to a medical doctor and epidemiologist with DND/CF, Critical Incident Stress Debriefings came into wide use in many agencies and crisis situations in the early 1990s, before the usefulness and effectiveness of the debriefings had been scientifically evaluated. Some research has now shown that single-incident Critical Incident Stress Debriefing does not prevent PTSD – and may indeed have harmful effects. What is increasingly preferred by senior Canadian Forces medical staff is a more comprehensive approach that emphasizes the shared responsibilities of leaders, health-care professionals and Canadian Forces members. The training of members able to provide peer-to-peer stress counselling is one element of such a comprehensive approach. The Canadian Forces medical community no longer supports or encourages the use of Critical Incident Stress Debriefings. However, I note that the policy directing members in its use – Canadian Forces Administrative Order 34-55 – remains in force. In my view, this reflects a disconnect between Canadian Forces policy and current medical thinking. Accordingly,

299 **I recommend that the current policy related to the issue of critical incident stress, Canadian Forces Administrative Order 34-55, be reviewed with the view of harmonizing the policy to reflect the current and more comprehensive approach to the issue.**

300 Concerning peer-to-peer stress counselling, we note that 3 PPCLI championed the concept and ensured that a significant proportion of the unit members received appropriate training. From all accounts, this was seen to be a successful initiative. However, due to the small size of the sniper team, none of its members received the training. The Canadian Forces Infantry School now recommends an 18-person sniper detachment as a model for future operations. Based on this new model, I would encourage the Canadian Forces to ensure that at least one member of the detachment receive peer support training. I would also encourage the same for other operational sub-groupings that are likely to experience critical incidents as part of operations. Accordingly,

301 **I recommend that the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces ensure that every deployed unit provide adequate training in peer support counselling to its members; and**

302 **I recommend that the Commanding Officer of a deploying unit ensure that, where possible, every sub-unit and every operational sub-grouping contain at least one member with peer support counselling training.**

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303 ***Challenges Encountered During the Investigation***

304 In the course of this investigation, my office faced considerable resistance in obtaining un-severed documents in a timely manner, a problem that we had not encountered previously during an investigation.

305 On September 20, 2004, the Chief of the Defence Staff requested that this office undertake this investigation. The documents attached to the Chief of the Defence Staff's letter made reference to a BOI that was conducted to examine the career of one of the snipers both prior to and after his involvement in *Op Apollo*. My investigators requested and received a copy of the BOI's terms of reference and its report. After reviewing those documents, investigators determined that much of the information introduced before the BOI was relevant to the investigation.

306 As a result, in October 2004, transcripts of the witnesses' testimony at the BOI were requested from the Chief of the Land Staff. Investigators were informed that the transcripts would have to be reviewed, and that personal information would be withheld. DND/CF took the position that the *Privacy Act* required it to review documents and remove personal information that it deemed was not relevant to our investigation before the documents could be released to this office for the purposes of our investigation.

307 The BOI transcripts were eventually released in February 2005, with significant severances. In some cases, pages were entirely blanked out. After review, investigators were concerned that the severed information was relevant to the investigation, and without it, we would not be able to completely and thoroughly investigate the matter, thus affecting the quality and credibility of our conclusions. Land Staff maintained that none of the information that was severed from the documents was relevant to our investigation. However, after much persuasion and discussion, eventually it was agreed in November 2005 to provide my investigators unfettered access to this information.

308 In addition, a request was made in November 2004 directly to 3 PPCLI for the Battle Group's War Diaries, which are records of a deployment maintained for historical purposes. Again, investigators were informed that all the documents requested would have to be reviewed by army personnel, in consultation with Director Access to Information and Privacy, for severances under the *Privacy Act* before the documents could be provided to this office. My investigators were not given unrestricted access to those documents until November 2005.

309 I respect DND/CF's dedication to protecting individuals' privacy. My office is subject to the *Privacy Act* as well and we operate and treat any personal information collected by our investigators in accordance with that *Act* and with the same dedication. However, given the function that this office is mandated

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to perform, this practice is not tenable. The organization that an Ombudsman is mandated to review should not have the power to determine what documents an Ombudsman requires or has a right to review during the course of an investigation. In order for our investigations to be thorough and credible, and be seen as thorough and credible, DND/CF cannot make that determination. This office must make that determination. In addition, this approach caused delays in our investigative process. Delays in obtaining information and documents can also affect the thoroughness and credibility of the investigative process.

- 310 The Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces Ombudsman is appointed under section 5 of the *National Defence Act*, as a delegate of the Minister of National Defence. The office operates under the *Ministerial Directives Respecting the Ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces* (the mandate). The mandate gives the Ombudsman the power to investigate complaints, and in conducting those investigations, the Ombudsman is required to “thoroughly investigate the complaint.” In order to complete those investigations in an objective, impartial and thorough manner, access is required to all information, including people and documents, which are considered necessary in order to complete the investigation. As well, as a delegate of the Minister, I must have access to the same documents and information as the Minister would have if he were carrying out those investigations himself. Any suggestion that DND/CF should have the discretion to determine what information was required for this office to complete an investigation is simply not reasonable. This was certainly not the intent when the Office of the Ombudsman was created. This practice restricts our independence and impartiality in the conduct of investigations.
- 311 In the end, in this particular case, my investigators were able to review all relevant documents. However, DND/CF’s approach delayed the investigation. Although I do not believe that the delay was deliberate, this approach limits the ability of this office to treat complaints in a timely and effective manner. As well, DND/CF’s approach is time-consuming to the officials tasked to carry out these reviews, and expends unnecessary resources for DND/CF that could be better utilized elsewhere.
- 312 I believe that the only appropriate and acceptable resolution to this matter will be to provide specific legislated powers of investigation to the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces Ombudsman in order to provide him or her with unfettered access to all documents. My office should have the power to summon any person to provide us with information and documents required for an investigation. There is no reason why this office should not have the same powers as other federally and provincially appointed Ombudsmen in order to carry out its functions. Accordingly,

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313

I recommend that the Office of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces Ombudsman be given full investigative powers under legislation.

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Conclusions and Recommendations

314 This investigation focused on two central questions:

- 315 • Were the snipers treated fairly by the chain of command?
- 316 • Were the specific concerns raised by Mr. Ragsdale properly addressed by DND/CF?

317 As a result of my investigation, I conclude that the snipers, as a group, were treated fairly by the Canadian Forces before, during and after their service in Afghanistan.

318 I reach a less favourable conclusion regarding the treatment of Mr. Ragsdale's very legitimate concerns over the welfare of his son. Family members deserve far more than a standard ministerial bureaucratic process. Serious concerns, like those expressed by Mr. Ragsdale, should receive immediate, personal and compassionate attention.

319 I also reach a less favourable conclusion regarding the current Honours and Awards Program. Specifically, I am not satisfied that the Canadian Forces process for recommending, approving and bestowing awards is a timely one.

320 Finally, I conclude that there is a significant disconnect between current medical thinking regarding the most appropriate response to critical incident stress and the existing Canadian Forces policy on the issue.

321 I therefore make the following formal recommendations:

- 322 1. I recommend that the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces ensure that family members, who express significant concerns over the health or well-being of a Canadian Forces member or Department of National Defence employee, be formally recognized and diverted, through an established and robust mechanism, to immediate, supportive, personal and timely intervention.
- 323 2. I recommend that the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces review their awards and honours policies and practices in order to ensure that Canadian awards and recognitions be diligently submitted to the chain of command by Commanding Officers for consideration and that, where approved, they be bestowed within six months of the recommendations being submitted.
- 324 3. I recommend that the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces ensure that, at a minimum, every individual preparing for

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deployment receives, as part of their pre-deployment training, a briefing on the rights, responsibilities and limits to the protection provided for under the current Canadian Forces Ground Rules for Embedded Media, and on the risks that may be associated with the giving of interviews.

- 325 4. I recommend that the current policy related to the issue of critical incident stress, Canadian Forces Administrative Order 34-55, be reviewed with the view of harmonizing the policy to reflect the current and more comprehensive approach to the issue.
- 326 5. I recommend that the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces ensure that every deployed unit provide adequate training in peer support counselling to its members.
- 327 6. I recommend that the Commanding Officer of a deploying unit ensure that, where possible, every sub-unit and every operational sub-grouping contain at least one member with peer support counselling training.
- 328 In addition, in order to increase efficiency during the evidence-gathering phase of future systemic investigations, I make the following recommendation:
- 329 7. I recommend that the Office of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces Ombudsman be given full investigative powers under legislation.

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Final Reflections

- 330 In referring this investigation to my office, the Chief of the Defence Staff requested a fresh and independent review of the case, since the Canadian Forces had been unable to resolve Mr. Ragsdale's concerns to his satisfaction. Thus, I wish to address my final comments to Mr. Ragsdale.
- 331 After our in-depth investigation, my findings are, for the most part, consistent with those of the Chief of the Defence Staff. I hope that this provides Mr. Ragsdale with some measure of reassurance that his son has indeed been treated with the fairness and respect that he deserves.
- 332 Master Corporal Ragsdale is a military hero and has been honoured as such by the country he has served. Indeed, as this report was about to go to print, my investigators were informed by Master Corporal Ragsdale that he was pleased to have recently received his 'wound stripe'⁷ and military farewell certificates (Regimental, Chief of the Land Staff and Chief of the Defence Staff) from Lady Patricia, Commander-in-Chief of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Regiment, on a parade with 3 PPCLI held on August 28, 2006, in Edmonton.
- 333 His illness is a casualty of his service. This is a fact that the Government of Canada has acknowledged, in supporting him throughout his diagnosis and treatment and according him a disability pension. PTSD is a psychological injury, less visible and in some ways more difficult to comprehend and accept than the loss of a limb or an eye. However, the Canadian Forces has provided him with appropriate medical and physical support throughout his long and painful ordeal. No one can fail to sympathize with the feelings of Mr. Ragsdale and, above all, with those of Master Corporal Ragsdale himself, as they come to terms with the painful reality of this situation.
- 334 However, at the end of this investigation, I am left without easy solutions because there are no easy solutions. I can only hope that the shortcomings highlighted in this report – in particular, the way in which the concerns of family members are handled by DND/CF – can serve as lessons for the future. While we cannot sanitize the effects of combat, we can certainly strive to be more open and understanding in our dealings with those suffering from its effects.

⁷ A wound stripe is awarded by the Canadian Forces in recognition of a physical or mental injury suffered in combat by a Canadian Forces member, who can wear it as a dress distinction.

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Annex A: Chronology of Key Events

- 335 October 7, 2001: Prime Minister Jean Chrétien announced that Canada would contribute air, land and sea forces to the international force being formed to conduct the campaign against terrorism.
- 336 October 2001-October 2003: *Op Apollo*.
- 337 Early February 2002: 3 PPCLI Battle Group was deployed to Kandahar, Afghanistan.
- 338 March 2-11, 2002: *Op Anaconda*.
- 339 March 13-19, 2002: *Op Harpoon*.
- 340 March 18, 2002: CFNIS investigation commences into allegation of desecration of a body.
- 341 March 28, 2002: Incident leading to second-in-command's charge of insubordination.
- 342 March 29, 2002: Military Police investigation into insubordination charge commences; second-in-command arrested and detained.
- 343 April 1-6, 2002: Snipers away on rest and relaxation.
- 344 April 3, 2002: Second-in-command elects to return to Canada to face court martial.
- 345 April 4, 2002: Second-in-command leaves Afghanistan to return to Canada.
- 346 June 21, 2002: Announcement of redeployment of 3 PPCLI Battle Group to Canada.
- 347 July 20-29, 2002: Decompression period in Guam.
- 348 July 28-30, 2002: Troops arrived back in Canada in two contingents.
- 349 July 29, 2002: Second-in-command informed that insubordination charges would not be preferred.
- 350 August 9, 2002: Welcome Home Parade, organized by the City of Edmonton, to recognize the troops' contribution to *Op Apollo*.
- 351 December 2002: CFNIS investigation concludes; no charges are laid due to lack of evidence.

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- 352 January 2003: Master Corporal Ragsdale placed on medical leave.
- 353 June 23, 2003: Second-in-command placed on Service Personnel Holding List.
- 354 July 22, 2003: Master Corporal Ragsdale placed on Service Personnel Holding List.
- 355 December 8, 2003: Snipers receive the South West Asia Service medal, the Mention in Dispatches, and the Bronze Star awards.
- 356 March 17-April 19, 2003: BOI into the career of the second-in-command.
- 357 July 2004: Chief of the Land Staff does not approve the BOI; returns it to convening authority.
- 358 January 9, 2005: Master Corporal Ragsdale releases from Canadian Forces.
- 359 April 19, 2005: Second-in-command releases from Canadian Forces.

Annex B: Correspondence Between Mr. Ragsdale and the Department of National Defence and Canadian Forces

- 360 On April 25, 2002, Mr. Ragsdale sent a letter to the Minister of National Defence, then the Honourable Arthur C. Eggleton, referring to the treatment of his son and fellow snipers. Mr. Ragsdale was particularly concerned about the way in which his son and fellow snipers were treated on their return from *Op Anaconda*.
- 361 There is no indication that the letter was either acknowledged for receipt or action from the Minister or the Ministerial Correspondence Unit (MCU) staff.
- 362 On March 19, 2003, a second letter is written to the Minister of National Defence, then the Honourable John McCallum. Mr. Ragsdale indicated he had not received a response to his first letter, and requested that the Minister conduct an investigation into the treatment received by his son and fellow snipers following *Op Anaconda*.
- 363 On March 28, 2003, a Special Assistant to the Minister of National Defence replied to Mr. Ragsdale, acknowledging receipt of his correspondence on March 24, 2003, and assuring him that his correspondence would be reviewed.
- 364 On April 3, 2003, Mr. Ragsdale sent an e-mail to the Minister of National Defence with a copy to his son, stating: *"I appreciate the prompt response but was hoping for something a bit more promising than "Please be assured that your correspondence will be reviewed."* Once again, Mr. Ragsdale requested an investigation.
- 365 On April 4, 2003, the manager of the MCU responded to Mr. Ragsdale's e-mail by writing: *"On behalf of the [Minister of National Defence], I would like to acknowledge receipt of your email. Please be assured that your correspondence will be reviewed."*
- 366 On June 10, 2003, Mr. Ragsdale sent a second e-mail to the Minister of National Defence, saying that he was still waiting for a response, reiterating his concern for his son, and asking for a reply by the end of the month.
- 367 On June 11, 2003, the manager of the MCU responded to Mr. Ragsdale by e-mail, stating: *"On behalf of the [Minister of National Defence], I would like to acknowledge receipt of your email. Please be assured that your correspondence will be reviewed."*

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- 368 On July 1, 2003, Mr. Ragsdale sent a third e-mail to the Minister of National Defence with copies to the Chief of the Defence Staff, his Member of Parliament and the Leader of the Opposition, stating: *“Regretfully, I have not received a personal response from you with regard to my March 19th 2003 letter. You, the Minister of National Defence, have failed to show common courtesy and advise me that my concerns are being addressed. Consequently, I intend to take my concerns to the media...and raise the profile, as it is obvious to me that you, an elected member of government, have no interest in what has happened to my son and his peers.”*
- 369 On July 2, 2003, the manager of the MCU once again responded to Mr. Ragsdale by e-mail, stating: *“On behalf of the [Minister of National Defence], I would like to acknowledge receipt of your email. Please be assured that your correspondence will be reviewed.”*
- 370 On July 28, 2003, Minister of National Defence John McCallum responded to Mr. Ragsdale by e-mail. He apologized for the delay, expressed concern for Master Corporal Ragsdale, and stated: *“I have been assured that he is receiving the best medical care possible. The serious nature of the allegation made by one of the snipers who served in Afghanistan in 2002 necessitated the conduct of more than one investigative process, and not all the related investigations are complete. It would therefore be inappropriate for me to comment on the investigations.”* He also provided Mr. Ragsdale with a consent form, stating that unless Master Corporal Ragsdale signed it, he could not discuss his personal information with his father.
- 371 On November 27, 2003, Mr. Ragsdale sent the Minister of National Defence a fourth e-mail requesting his assistance in having Master Corporal Ragsdale returned to his family in Ontario. He stated, *“My son was in no frame of mind to sign a consent form in order to allow release of information to me.”* He also wrote that he did not believe his son was *“receiving the best medical care possible. On the contrary, I think the military has tossed him aside, as he is now assigned to a “Service Personnel Holding Unit”. He is receiving no support.”*
- 372 On November 29, 2003, Mr. Ragsdale sent the Minister of National Defence a fifth e-mail, stating: *“Dear Sir, Please disregard the attached email [of November 27, 2003]. I spent most of Friday November 28th discussing the issues with the people in Edmonton who are dealing with my son's case, and I am satisfied that he is currently receiving appropriate attention.”*
- 373 On December 1, 2003, the manager of the MCU responded to Mr. Ragsdale by e-mail, stating: *“On behalf of the [Minister of National Defence], I would like to acknowledge receipt of your email. Please be assured that your correspondence will be reviewed.”*

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- 374 On December 4, 2003, Mr. Ragsdale wrote to the Chief of the Defence Staff requesting an investigation into the treatment of his son and fellow snipers.
- 375 On December 17, 2003, the Staff Officer to the Chief of the Defence Staff wrote a letter replying to Mr. Ragsdale, acknowledging *“receipt of your letter of 4 December 2003 regarding the care and treatment of your son”*. He stated that the Chief of the Defence Staff had referred the letter to the Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources – Military) for investigation, and that Mr. Ragsdale would have a reply when the review was completed.
- 376 On January 15, 2004, the Manager of the MCU wrote a letter to Mr. Ragsdale on behalf of Minister of National Defence, the Honourable David Pratt, stating: *“I would like to thank you for the copy of your letter addressed to General Raymond Henault, received on December 9, 2003. The Minister appreciates being kept informed of your concerns.”*
- 377 On April 6, 2004, the Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources – Military) wrote to Mr. Ragsdale (with copies to the Minister of National Defence and the Chief of the Defence Staff), stating: *“While we cannot comment on specific aspects of your son’s care without his consent...the Canadian Forces medical staff has been asked to review your son’s treatment and will ensure that he is receiving an optimal level of health care.”*
- 378 On April 21, 2004, Mr. Ragsdale wrote a letter to the Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources – Military) requesting an investigation into specific issues regarding the treatment of his son.
- 379 Also on April 21, 2004, Mr. Ragsdale wrote a letter to the Minister of National Defence, attaching the April 21, 2004, letter to the Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources – Military), asking the Minister to *“recognize the injustice that has been inflicted on his son and his fellow Snipers, and to ensure that his concerns get addressed by those accountable.”* Mr. Ragsdale’s second letter was copied to the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, and the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces Ombudsman.
- 380 On May 4, 2004, the manager of the MCU wrote a letter to Mr. Ragsdale on behalf of the Minister of National Defence, stating: *“I would like to acknowledge receipt of your correspondence on 29 April, 2004. Please be assured that your correspondence will be reviewed.”* Enclosed in the letter was a Third Party Consent Form.
- 381 On May 6, 2004, the Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources – Military) replied to Mr. Ragsdale’s letter of April 21, 2004, stating: *“Canadian Forces medical staff will continue to ensure that your son receives an optimal level of health care. In fact, I have again spoken to medical staff recently to confirm*

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that this is indeed the case. They have, again, reassured me that your son continues to receive the appropriate care and treatment that he needs.” He concluded, “With regards to your second concern, I have forwarded your letter to the Commander of the Army for his consideration. These allegations fall outside of my area of responsibility, jurisdiction and authority.” The Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources – Military) sent copies of his letter to the Minister of National Defence and the Chief of the Defence Staff.

- 382 On June 14, 2004, the Acting Chief of the Land Staff responded to Mr. Ragsdale by letter, informing him that he had been asked to address the second concern expressed in his April 21, 2004, letter, relating to the treatment of the snipers. He explained the deployment of the snipers during *Op Anaconda* and *Op Harpoon*, commenting on their admirable performance under trying conditions, and also mentioning the removal of one of the snipers during *Op Anaconda*. He agreed that Critical Incident Stress Debriefing was not done on their return from *Op Anaconda* but that they did meet with their then Commanding Officer in preparation for *Op Harpoon*, explaining that none of the snipers felt that their recent experiences had affected them. He also gave a brief explanation about Critical Incident Stress Debriefing and that this issue was currently under review, as there existed significant controversy about its utility and the potential for harm from its use. He went on to explain these events, *Op Harpoon*, the National Investigation Service investigation, the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing requested and conducted by the United States chaplain, the rest and relaxation, and the decompression and reintegration process in Guam. He said that, as these events were well documented, he did not believe that a further investigation in this matter would be warranted or beneficial.
- 383 On August 5, 2004, Mr. Ragsdale responded to the Acting Chief of the Land Staff, thanking him for responding to his letter sent to Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources – Military). Mr. Ragsdale commented that he was not pleased with the response, indicating that he had not been told anything that he did not already know. He went on to explain the various problems that the snipers had experienced both on the missions and on their return.
- 384 On September 20, 2004, the Chief of Defence Staff referred Mr. Ragsdale's complaint to the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces Ombudsman.

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Annex C: Chief of the Defence Staff Letter of September 2004

385 September 2004

386

387 Mr. Andre Marin, Ombudsman

388 100 Metcalfe Street, 12th Floor

389 Ottawa ON K1P 5M1

390

391 Dear Mr. Marin,

392 I am enclosing a package of documentation referring to several issues concerning a Canadian Forces member, MCpl Ragsdale. MCpl Ragsdale was deployed as part of the sniper section with 3 PPCLI to Kandahar, Afghanistan, in 2002. A number of complaints were raised to the Canadian Forces by his father, Mr. Patrick Ragsdale, as a result of his deployment. MCpl Ragsdale is currently employed with the Land Force in Edmonton.

393 The Canadian Forces has corresponded extensively with MCpl Ragsdale's father, but has been unable to resolve his complaints to his satisfaction. I subsequently directed the Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources – Military) to ensure that we provide the appropriate medical care to his son, as we indicated we would do. I have also asked the Chief of the Land Staff to ensure that we learn the lessons from this operation, and to ensure that they are incorporated into future operational deployments. I am, however, at a loss to identify what else, if anything, might be done to address Mr. Ragsdale's lingering concerns.

394 I am aware that you have been in contact with Mr. Ragsdale and have been copied on much of the correspondence that he has sent to the Canadian Forces. I would ask, therefore, that you review the material available and, from a fresh perspective, assess whether there are further actions we might take in this regard. I encourage you to contact Mr. Ragsdale or MCpl Ragsdale directly if required to address their concerns.

395 I look forward to your response.

396 R.R. Henault

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- 397 Enclosure: (Correspondence package)
- 398 cc: Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources – Military) Chief of the Land Staff

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Annex D: Acronyms and Abbreviations

399 Listed in alphabetical order.

400

| Acronyms and Abbreviations | Meaning |
|----------------------------|---|
| 2 PPCLI | Second Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry |
| 3 PPCLI | Third Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry |
| ADM (PA) | Assistant Deputy Minister (Public Affairs) |
| BOI | Board of Inquiry |
| CFNIS | Canadian Forces National Investigation Service |
| DAOD | Defence Administrative Orders and Directives |
| DND/CF | The Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces |
| MCpl | Master Corporal |
| MCU | Ministerial Correspondence Unit |
| <i>Op Anaconda</i> | <i>Operation Anaconda</i> |
| <i>Op Apollo</i> | <i>Operation Apollo</i> |
| <i>Op Harpoon</i> | <i>Operation Harpoon</i> |
| PTSD | Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder |
| Recce | Reconnaissance |