



CANADA REMEMBERS THE CANADIAN FORCES IN AFGHANISTAN



The chain of events that would bring Canadian soldiers into the desolate and dangerous terrain of Afghanistan began on September 11, 2001. On that day, four airliners were hijacked in the skies over the eastern United States; two were deliberately crashed into the World Trade Center towers and one into the Pentagon, resulting in the death of nearly 3,000 people. These horrific attacks shocked and galvanized the United States and much of the world. Canada would soon play a role in the ensuing international efforts to battle terrorism and help bring democracy to Afghanistan.

AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is a rugged country in Southwest Asia, located between Pakistan and Iran. This ancient, mountainous land is about the size of Saskatchewan and has a population of approximately 30 million people. The various ethnic groups and factions that have made the country home over the centuries have given Afghanistan a rich heritage and diversity, but have also helped make peace and stability difficult to achieve.

The civil war that broke out after the former Soviet Union withdrew from its military occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s would see the Taliban regime gain control of the country. This extreme fundamentalist regime severely limited civil rights and supported international terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda (the group which was behind

the attacks in the United States). In the wake of September 11, the United States and the world took action through the United Nations (UN) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

CANADA AND THE WORLD RESPOND

The first Canadian Forces contribution to the campaign against terrorism in Southwest Asia came at sea. Beginning in October 2001, Canadian ships would see ongoing duty in the waters off the region, supporting and defending the international fleet operating there as well as locating and searching unknown boats looking for illegal activity.

The Aurora patrol aircraft and Hercules and Polaris transport planes of the Canadian Forces Air Command would also be active in Afghanistan and the waters off Southwest Asia, filling important roles in marine surveillance, transporting supplies and personnel, and evacuating casualties. Canadian helicopters have also provided important service in identifying merchant vessels and offering valuable transport support over the years.

Canadian soldiers soon travelled to Afghanistan as well. The first were commandoes from the elite Joint Task Force 2 (JTF 2) in December 2001, followed by other Canadian soldiers in January 2002 who were initially based in Kandahar. There they joined American and British troops already fighting to topple the Taliban regime, eliminate terrorist

operations and establish the basis for lasting peace in the troubled country.

With the eventual fall from power of the Taliban, attention turned to stabilizing the country and helping establish a new Afghan government. The UN authorized a NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to take on this challenge. The initial Canadian contribution to the ISAF in the summer of 2003 consisted of more than 700 Canadian Forces members stationed in Kabul, the country's capital, with 200 more providing support from elsewhere in Southwest Asia. In Kabul, the Canadians patrolled the western sector of the city, helped operate the airport and assisted in rebuilding the Afghan National Army.

In 2005, the Canadian Forces' role evolved again when they began to shift back to the volatile Kandahar region. While the Taliban government had been toppled, the group remained a strong presence in some areas of the country. Indeed, Canada's return to Kandahar coincided with a resurgence in Taliban activity and our soldiers quickly found themselves the targets of attack.

The numbers of Canadian soldiers soon swelled to approximately 2,300 to help deal with the enemy and support the Provincial Reconstruction Team operating there. Canadian tanks, artillery and infantry soldiers have all taken part in many ground operations in Kandahar, including large-scale offensives against massed Taliban forces. This chapter of Canada's efforts in Afghanistan has been the most perilous. Anytime Canadian soldiers left the relative safety of their main camps to go "outside the wire," the danger was very real. Canada's combat role in the country is scheduled to end in 2011 when the focus shifts to training Afghanistan's army and police force. But Canada's efforts in the troubled country have been numerous. Reaching out in an attempt to build trust and win the hearts and minds of the people of Afghanistan has been an important goal. In addition to their military activities, Canadian Forces members have engaged in many humanitarian efforts like

digging wells, rebuilding schools and distributing medical and relief supplies, both as part of their official mission and on a volunteer basis.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- Canadian Forces members who have served in the theatre of operations since 2001 in support of the war on terror are eligible to receive the General Campaign Star-Southwest Asia. To date, approximately 30,000 personnel have received this medal.
- Afghanistan is a very poor country and its climate can be extreme. Summer temperatures of 50° C are common and huge dust storms can sweep across its arid deserts.
- Camp Nathan Smith was a base for Canadian operations in Kandahar for several years. It was named in honour of a soldier from Nova Scotia who was killed there in 2002.
- Operation *Medusa*, conducted in September 2006, involved more than 1,000 Canadian Forces members and was our country's largest combat operation since the Korean War.

HEROES AND BRAVERY

Canadians have demonstrated great bravery time and again in Afghanistan. Here are just some examples of that valour.



- Eight Canadians serving in Afghanistan have earned the Star of Military Valour, our country's second-highest decoration for courage. The first was Sergeant Patrick Tower in August 2006 when he braved enemy fire to lead the extraction of a platoon that had come under heavy attack.
- Flight Lieutenant Chris Hasler, a Canadian serving with Britain's Royal Air Force, received the Distinguished Flying Cross for piloting helicopter resupply missions under fire in July 2006. He was the first Canadian to be decorated for bravery in the air in more than 50 years.
- Captain Nichola Goddard became the first female Canadian Forces member to die in combat duty when the forward artillery observer was killed in a firefight on May 17, 2006.

SACRIFICE

Canada's efforts in Afghanistan have made a difference, but this has come at a great cost. The threat of suicide attacks and roadside bombs has been a constant risk. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have caused the most Canadian casualties. There have also been many other perils beyond ambushes and firefights with the enemy. Landmines and friendly fire incidents have taken the lives of our soldiers while vehicle accidents, illnesses and the psychological strain of serving in such a difficult

environment can also take a heavy and life-long toll. More than 155 Canadian Forces members have died in the cause of peace and freedom in Afghanistan.

CANADA REMEMBERS PROGRAM

The Canada Remembers Program of Veterans Affairs Canada encourages all Canadians to learn about the sacrifices and achievements made by those who have served—and continue to serve—during times of war and peace. As well, it invites Canadians to become involved in remembrance activities that will help preserve their legacy for future generations.

To learn more about Canada's role in peace efforts over the years, please visit the Veterans Affairs Canada Web site at veterans.gc.ca or call **1-866-522-2122** toll free.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Veterans Affairs Canada: veterans.gc.ca
- Canadian Military History Gateway: www.cmhg.gc.ca
- Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan: www.afghanistan.gc.ca
- Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association: www.cpva.ca

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