THE MODERN DAY SOMME
The war of attrition rekindled in the dust of Afghanistan

THIS WAY TO THE SUCK!
Photos and experiences of serving in “The Ghan”

“What’s in a Soldier?”
A poem
Cover: Op RAWA TANDER (Constant Thunder), Don Clark, CMIC, in contact, Pashmul, Zhari, Kandak 1, TF 1-08 OMLT, 28 May 2008

Photo courtesy PPCLI Archives

The Gault Press is created by the PPCLI Museum & Archives, located at The Military Museums in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. If you are looking to find out more about PPCLI and its history, please don’t hesitate to contact us directly at ppcli.museumgm@gmail.com.

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Published Resources
Afghanistan

When I was 13-years-old, I began saving articles about the Mission in Afghanistan. Learning of dangers faced by soldiers, violence and poverty, and restrictions imposed upon women widened my worldview from a small-town life in Canada to life circumstances I couldn’t properly imagine. At the same time, I began reading more about the Great War, taking note of Canada’s role on the global stage and how modern conflict differed from engagements in the past. Though unaware at the time, this casual interest in Canada’s military history would become an entrenched passion.

Thus, by high school, the War on Terror was as familiar a topic to me as it could be for a civilian with no military ties. I knew that Canadians were serving to fight the Taliban and to help rebuild Afghanistan through reconstruction and training. I tracked the elections of Hamid Karzai and was one of the few students to know not only that Osama Bin Laden had been killed by US special operations forces in Pakistan, but where, when, and why he had been there. I even knew more about challenges faced by women in Afghanistan than women in Canada. I was in no way an expert, nor could I ever be, for to truly understand a subject one must experience it. Thanks to the bravery of Canadian service personnel, danger and pain of a warzone is something that I have never had to live through.

It was only later, after hearing first-hand accounts and reading unflinching memoirs, that I realized just how little I really knew.

Most poignantly, I read of the sacrifices made by Canadian soldiers and correspondents, tracking articles
about the death of Calgary news reporter Michelle Lang, remembrance ceremonies marking past and present engagements, and the 2008 ambush where a Cochraneite rescued two of his comrades and was subsequently awarded the Medal of Military Valour. In a coincidence that still baffles me, I now work with another Patricia who experienced that same ambush. A news report of this engagement was one of the first articles I saved with regards to the Mission in Afghanistan. Canada’s role in this mission lasted from 2002-2014 (with the exception of a JTF2 unit deploying late 2001). My entire primary school career, Canadians younger than my father—and at times, barely older than myself—lived and patrolled in the heat and mental-exhaustion of Afghanistan; a country with IED wires for frontlines, ghosts firing RPGs from the surrounding fields, and a populace hopeful for renewed stability.

In this issue of The Gault Press, we hope to convey the conditions faced by soldiers in Afghanistan, the impact this mission had on Afghan civilians, and the sacrifices made by Canadians.

Sincerely,
The Editor

Last Edition’s Question: What does OMLT stand for?

b) Operational Mentor and Liaison Team

Museum News

COVID-19: The Military Museums closed on 13 March in light of health precautions against spreading COVID-19. Museum staff are still monitoring emails but working in a limited capacity for the foreseeable future. Due to this and external factors, the release of The Gault Press has been delayed. Consequently, there will only be two editions this year: the next is scheduled for September. We appreciate your patience as we do our part in minimizing the impact of this pandemic.

Contributions Requested: In light of the pandemic, The Gault Press is planning an edition to encourage morale. So being, we are looking for submissions about perseverance, courage, hope, and humour. Photos, articles, and original work (artwork, creative writing, memes etc) are welcome, but will be subjected to review for appropriateness. Any submissions are due no later than 1 August. For submissions and questions, please contact The Gault Press editor at ppcli.gaultpress@gmail.com


Exhibit Developments: The Museum is planning a development project of the Para Company display in the PPCLI gallery. A three-phase project, the plan includes installing a larger physical display as well as a virtual reality component, where visitors can experience jumping from a CC130 Hercules. The Museum is also continuing an ongoing project to restore the medals display.
Modern Day Somme
By: J. Neven-Pugh

In the First World War, Canadians fought regimented armies which wore standardized uniforms and used similar large-scale fighting tactics such as artillery shelling, raids, and hand-to-hand combat. There was a frontline established and a demographic based on age and gender, although lying youth and desperate conscription practices allowed for exceptions. On foot, soldiers faced undetonated artillery, drowning in mud and craters, snipers, poison gas, and barbed wire.

Less than 90 years later, the Canadian Forces deployed to Afghanistan as part of NATO’s mission to reinstate security in the Middle East following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Canada’s role in this mission would span 12 years in an attempt to bring security and stability to a country occupied by insurgents promoting extreme doctrines that negatively impacted and restricted citizen life. There were many commonalities and differences between serving in the Middle East and on the Western Front, including advances in technology and changes in the physicality of the battleground.

In Afghanistan, insurgents supported by the Taliban did not wear a standard uniform. Taliban fighters used guerilla warfare tactics, martyrdom/suicide bombers, and even fought remotely by planting and setting off IEDs; in essence, they established a frontline wherever they could count frontage. For NATO soldiers, every step outside the wire was potentially lethal — hypersensitivity to one’s surroundings, knowing that a threat could come from anywhere and in any form, became SOP for survival.

One thing that is arguably the same between these two, multi-year conflicts is the idea of attrition.

Attrition is the wearing down of an opponent through gradual and consistent action, often resulting in a seesawing of gains and losses between sides without tangible advancement (football is a game of attrition). The Somme was a battle of attrition in 1916, forces winning, losing, and retaking ground that resulted in massive casualties and little physical advancement over a 4½ month period. With this definition, it can be argued that the “War on Terror” was a similar conflict.

Afghanistan is a nation that has faced conflict for centuries. More “recent” conflicts include the Soviet invasion of 1979–89, civil war in the ’80s and ’90s, and the occupation of the Taliban (beginning in the ’90s). Under Taliban rule, the country’s economic standards and human rights recognition diminished. Despite the ousting of the Taliban regime from Kabul in 2001, the country was designated “the most dangerous country” for a woman to live in 2011.

Contrary to popular belief, the country’s reputation for injustice against women was due to developments beginning in the 1970s. Prior to this, many cities, including Kabul, were
similar to Western cities, during which time women went to university, could go out unescorted, and wear mini skirts. This reality is largely forgotten in the Western public eye, with the strict enforcement of Sharia Law and other restrictions by the Taliban impacting women in Afghanistan. It is important to note that groups like the Taliban and Al-Qaeda propagate a corrupted version of Islam, which gives false interpretations of the Muslim faith.

Canadian soldiers attempted to address the physical, social, and economic stability of the country from 2002-2014. This was done by engaging with locals—largely through meetings known as “Shuras”—to build needed infrastructure, provide employment to civilians, and training the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP). Soldiers performed presence patrols and worked positive interactions with the locals.

And, from 2002 – 2012, Canadians served in combative operations.

It is difficult to track the level of success in fighting an “unseen” opponent. Regardless of the name of the extremist group, insurgency is still a prevalent threat in the world today, and in theatre soldiers were often fighting insurgents who either disappeared quickly or were never seen at all. Unlike the battles of the First and Second World Wars, counting enemy losses is of limited value when the total size of the opposing army is unknown. With the continuance of terrorist attacks today, it isn’t a stretch to say that the “War on Terror” is a war of attrition.

However, like the soldiers of the Somme, this does not undermine nor discount the impact and sacrifices made by participants in the Mission in Afghanistan. On the contrary, it highlights the perseverance, dedication, and courage of Canadian soldiers. For over a decade in this theatre, Canadians helped in restoration projects, education, and reducing threats in various regions; thus, they discontinued attrition with regards to public health and stability.

Canadians should be proud of their contributions to Afghanistan, where units, including the PPCLI, served to protect not only our freedoms, but in an attempt secure these freedoms for others.
Where’s the Line?

Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry is renowned for holding the line despite overwhelming odds, but how do you stand your ground when there isn’t a line to stand on?

In Afghanistan, the Taliban enacted guerilla warfare, using hit-and-run, ambush, and even remote strategies (ex: detonating or planting self-detonating explosives). This meant that every step “outside the wire” was potentially dangerous. Canadian troops, whether patrolling in LAVs or on foot, maintained a protective distance between one another in an attempt to minimize collateral damage in the event of an attack. Troops also conducted a 5-and-20 check when leaving their vehicles, inspecting the immediate 5 meters then scanning the next 20 before venturing forward.

Not all threats can be spotted in this way, however. One soldier recollected a youth riding a bicycle back and forth past his unit before an ambush. It was hypothesized that the cyclist was measuring frontage prior to a mortar strike from across the valley. Civilians holding cellphones was another reason to hesitate: were they talking to a friend or to the Taliban?

Confronted by martyrdom/suicide bombers using vehicles and themselves, insurgents wearing burkas (identified by their combat boots), IEDs, and the constant threat of ambush, a “hypersensitive” or “hyperaware” mentality developed among soldiers.

*Photo: Patrol during Op SOHIL LAREM III, Hutal, Maiwand, 3 Para, Kandak 1, TF 1-08 OMLT, March, 2008. Photo courtesy PPCLI Archives*
The Operational Mentor and Liaison Team was a collaborative force assisting in the training of the Afghan National Army (ANA). Companies consisting of 4-6 Canadian soldiers and 1 medic would mentor an Afghan Battalion (or “Kandak”) of the ANA in proper procedures, conducting patrols, and on combat operations. These Battalions would typically have 4 teams and an HQ element to support the Afghan BHQ. This task was often assigned to members of 3PPCLI. The ANA were valuable allies in their firsthand knowledge of the culture and land of Afghanistan.

(Above background photo): FOB Ma’sum Ghar, Kandak 1, TF 1-08 OMLT, March 2008
(Above): Sign from FOB Ma’sum Ghar, Kandak 1, TF 1-08 OMLT, 2008.
(Below): COP Mushan, Canadians and ANA soldiers patrol through the Village of Mushan, TF 1-08 OMLT, Jul-Aug 2008. Photos courtesy PPCLI Archives
Moondust

Dirt in Afghanistan was nicknamed “moondust” due to its fine, lightweight qualities causing it to billow up underfoot. Soldiers in this theatre were subject to poor air quality (haze, pollution, etc) and sandstorms – sometimes known as “brownouts”. Rural buildings in Afghanistan have very small windows in an attempt to minimize the dirt blown indoors during one of these storms.

Today, museum staff come across “moondust” when transporting artefacts of the Mission in Afghanistan or using them for educational lectures. This has been observed when handling items which have been out of theatre and on display in Canada for ten or more years.


(Below): “Brownout” by J. Neven-Pugh, 2019
Hearts and Minds

One mandate of the Mission in Afghanistan was to bring stability to the citizens of the country. This was done by employing locals, helping in restoration projects such as rebuilding schools, and in everyday interactions with civilians.

Afghans worked for the Canadian Forces in multiple civilian positions, including as supply drivers and interpreters. All employees were in danger of identification by the Taliban while working for NATO forces. For their protection, it was and still is prohibited to publish photos of employed Afghan personnel.

(Above): Homes in a river valley, May 2002. Photo courtesy PPCLI Archives

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<td>Pte S. Greenfield ~ R22ER ~ 31 Jan</td>
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For those I love,
I will sacrifice
Hand-drawn picture of Pte Chad Horn (right/top), Cpl Mike Seggie (left/middle), and Cpl Andrew Grenon (middle/bottom) by MCpl Adam Cyr, as copied from a photograph taken while these men were deployed in Afghanistan from February to September 2008. On 3 September, 8 Platoon, C Coy was caught in an ambush; Pte Horn, Cpl Seggie, and Cpl Grenon lost their lives as a result of this engagement. MCpl Cyr lost his leg below the knee. The platoon was one week from the end of their tour.

_Courtesy PPCLI Collections: Accession No. 2015.50.06_
What’s In A Soldier
(Do You Hear the Pipes Calling?)
A Poem by J. Neven-Pugh

They don’t ask “What’s in a soldier?”
They only ask: “Will you return?”
“Will you take up the Colours —
“again?” “How do you discern

“between friend or foe in the distance?”
“Or when patrolling, close at hand?”
“How does it feel to see sequence
“of movies ’bout Afghanistan?”

They don’t ask “what’s in a soldier?”
Only: “Did it feel right, over there?”
“Do you think it was worth it?” (As
they check for the 1,000 yard stare).

“I read that it was just peacekeeping. — ”
“I’ve heard it wasn’t that bad. — ”
Or “I’ve heard you soldiers are rougher
“than the soldiers who fought for my dad.”

They never ask “what’s in a soldier?”
Wishing only to know of the fray,
But I hear this answered by every soldier,
For their very selves have so much to say.

For the stance of a good soldier,
is straight and though left at ease,
bears the weight of rucksacks and scarring
of which they only tease.

For the words of a good soldier,
(though rough at times to soft ears),
must navigate a world uninviting
to pain softened by jeers.
For in the minds of every soldier,
are memories once lived and passed down;
that travelling in shadowed footsteps
are the Taliban through local towns.

For in the eyes of every soldier,
are worlds far more complex,
that we as privileged Canadians
are privileged enough to forget.

And in the hands of every soldier,
are tendons and muscles trained,
to hold a rifle or rip chord,
or a casket, memory-stained.

Yet these hands and eyes of a soldier,
this posture, words, and mind,
Speak of what lie ’neath the surface,
founded the day the contract was signed.

Something deep and unwritten…
Something lost to the civvies we are.
Something driven right down to the centre,
whether forged at home or afar.

Something compelling them onward,
though weary from the worst life can bear,
even as the darkness pursues them
and clings to the morning air.

And like the dawns of the Arctic,
some mornings seem hardly to rise;
yet there’s something within that soldier
and it’s spoken of within his eyes...
So when asked *what’s in a soldier?* by every question under the sun: past words and stance and conduct, embodied in each daughter and son, is the courage that every good soldier, shows for his comrade beside; for the men and women still serving, for those retired, and those who have died.

So remember, in every good soldier, is the devotion to country and friend; whether they train in peace in their homeland, or the world’s problems, try to amend.

So when the pipes are calling, and soldiers march on the field, see them as courage embodied—as the ones who will never yield.

And when the trumpets are calling, remember more than the fray; for to answer “*what’s in a soldier?”* is more than any will say.
Afghanistan War
Documented in Photographs

By Jim Bowman, PPCLI Archivist

On 25 March 2019, the director of the PPCLI Museum & Archives, Maj Slade Lerch, donated approximately 1,151 digital images, 66 digital video clips, and approximately 931 hard-copy photographs to the Archives.

Most of the material documents Maj Lerch’s experiences as a Captain in 3PPCLI in Afghanistan during 2005-2006, 2008, and 2011, through photos taken by him and his comrades. The photos show the stark beauty of the country, the resilience of its people, the disarray of battlefront conditions, and the determination of the soldiers.

Many of the photos were taken in and around the village of Mushan, Panjwayi District, Kandahar Province. The area is arid and relies on irrigation, and the population is poorly educated due to a shortage of schools. It remains one of the major strongholds of the Taliban.

During Operation Athena, Capt Lerch was part of Task Force 1-08, Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT). The objective of the OMLT was to work in cooperation with the Afghan National Army (ANA) to assist it in developing the skills to be in control of the war against the Taliban. His team was based at COP (Combat Outpost) Mushan, a fortified compound not far from the village of Mushan.

(Above) Captain Lerch during a dust storm, OP SOHIL LAREM III, Maiwand, 3 Para, Kandak 1, TF 1-08 OMLT, Mar 2008
(Below) Convoy to Mushan along the Arghandab River, ANA vehicles, 5 July 2008. Photo by Sgt (Ret’d) J. Prior
(Above) COP Mushan, burning after insurgent mortar attack, 9 July 2008.
(Below) Cpl J. Prior gives gifts to children, east of COP Mushan, July/August 2008.
Photos courtesy PPCLI Archives
Did you serve in Afghanistan?

PPCLI Museum & Archives is interested in your story!

Get Involved With The PPCLI Museum & Archives Today!

**Have anything to share?**

The PPCLI Museum & Archives is always interested in donations, loans, and oral histories from the Regiment’s founding to the present day. This includes artefacts and documents related to:

- The Great War
- The Interwar Period
- The Second World War
- The Cold War Era
- Peacekeeping
- Afghanistan
- Latvia/Poland
- Iraq
- Domestic Operations
- UN & NATO Deployments

**At this time, we are keen to preserve artefacts from recent deployments, such as Afghanistan, Poland, Latvia, Ukraine, and Iraq**

Please contact the Collections Manager, Corporal Andrew Mullett, at ppcli.museum@gmail.com for details
Have a story of **perseverance**?  
A message of **hope** or **encouragement**?  
A **funny** photo, joke, or cartoon?

*The Gault Press* is looking for submissions to help boost morale during these trying times in its Fall publication. Submissions can include writing, photos, or original work, but must be appropriate for multiple audiences (PG-13). Submissions are due no later than **1 August 2020**.

Please contact *The Gault Press* editor at [ppcli.gaultpress@gmail.com](mailto:ppcli.gaultpress@gmail.com) for details.