

# DISPATCHES

LESSONS LEARNED FOR SOLDIERS

## The Royal Canadian Infantry Corps in Afghanistan



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LESSONS LEARNED FOR SOLDIERS

# **The Royal Canadian Infantry Corps**



## **in Afghanistan**

LEE WINDSOR, PHD, DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
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## **DIRECTOR ROYAL CANADIAN INFANTRY CORPS**

Through ten rotations, over 9,000 members of the Royal Canadian Infantry Corps deployed to southern Afghanistan. Almost 2,000 of these soldiers came from the Reserve Force. On average, the Royal Canadian Infantry Corps represented 33 percent of each rotation. They served primarily, although not exclusively, as formed units, sub-units or sub sub-units in the Battle Group, the Provincial Reconstruction Team, the Operational Mentor and Liaison Team, and force protection elements. There is certainly much to be gained from our collective Afghanistan effort. What follows is the result of collaboration between the Infantry School and Dr. Lee Windsor from The Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society at the University of New Brunswick. It is not a complete history of the Corps in Kandahar, but it does pose a preliminary set of historical questions about our operations there. The Royal Canadian Infantry Corps cannot afford to rest on our hard-won success. As we look back on our recent Afghanistan experience, the Corps must also prepare itself for the challenges of the next battlefield.

*Ducimus*

I.R. Creighton  
Colonel  
Director



## **DIRECTOR ARMY LESSONS LEARNED CENTRE**

The Commander of the Army and Commander LFDTS (now CADTC) recognized the important requirement to capture the main lessons identified and lessons learned from the Army's experience participating in full spectrum operations in Afghanistan, before our collective memory fades. As such, they directed that a series of *Dispatches* be dedicated to capturing the major lessons from our Kandahar operations by Corps and Capability. The Royal Canadian Artillery Corps published the first of the series of *Dispatches* in 2011.

This edition of *Dispatches* is the second in the series and is dedicated to capturing the main lessons of the Royal Canadian Infantry Corps while operating in Southern Afghanistan. Infantry Corps operations in Afghanistan spanned the full spectrum of conflict, challenging Infantry Battle Groups to continuously adapt to achieve success in a variety of missions. The insights offered in this review capture some of that experience and are crucial to ensure that the Army moves forward with purpose based on the lessons we have learned from operations.

R.A. Puddister  
Lieutenant-Colonel  
Director

Phase II of Operation ATHENA in Kandahar ended in July 2011, bringing to a close the longest sustained military campaign in Canadian history, more than six years after its controversial launch in July 2005.<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing in 2013, the struggle for Kandahar and the rest of Afghanistan continues between the NATO-backed Afghan Government and the Taliban and other anti-government forces. So too does Canada's South Asian commitment in the form of military training assistance, aid and development tentatively slated to conclude in 2014 when the international community plans to transfer responsibility "for security and governance to Afghanistan."<sup>2</sup> In the midst of ongoing low-intensity war characterized by political turmoil and highly classified special operations, it will take decades before the full story of Canada's six-year long military campaign in southern Afghanistan comes to light. The Canadian Army cannot wait that long to openly consider its South Asian experience, especially given that stability operations in failed states remain high on the list of likely future assignments. Such missions will invariably include specialist units from every service and branch in the Canadian Armed Forces but will probably rely primarily on infantry soldiers to exert influence over landscape and people. What follows here is a preliminary study of the Royal Canadian Infantry Corps' experience during what CBC journalist Brian Stewart branded as "the Kandahar campaign."<sup>3</sup> It is meant to be a short primer on ATHENA II from an infantry perspective—to introduce readers to key problems, lessons and open questions that emerged during operations in Kandahar and southern Afghanistan during the most difficult and costly portion of Canada's commitment in that country. Between 2005 and 2011, Canadian infantry soldiers served at once as fighting soldiers, nation builders and diplomats, all while bullets and rockets whistled overhead and improvised explosive devices blew holes in their ranks. Canadian infantrymen met their opponents in southern Afghanistan with every weapon in their inventory and directed supporting fires of every type, including the latest technologies. Preparing for what lies ahead means understanding what the Infantry Corps just endured. A study like this raises more questions than it answers but might encourage newly trained Canadian infantry soldiers and Afghan veterans to think critically about what Canada's longest war means for their profession. The study does not include the Canadian Army's first foray into Kandahar in 2002 during Operation APOLLO or the quieter, if still deadly, Operation ATHENA Phase I in Kabul from 2003–2005, nor the ongoing training mission in northern Afghanistan. Those parts of the Canadian Army story must also be captured and digested.

This study is concerned with questions of continuity and change in infantry practice going into and coming out of Kandahar. Perhaps the most important finding is that many 20th century infantry principles were found to still be relevant in southern Afghanistan after being first proven and refined at Vimy, Amiens, Ortona and Normandy. The Kandahar campaign demonstrated the value of physically fit infantry soldiers, skilled in the use of personal and light support weapons, who could navigate across country by day or night, taught to carefully observe their surroundings, decentralized under junior leaders trained to operate independently on small patrols or as part of a larger all-arms team on deliberately planned operations. But ATHENA II was also an extraordinary mission of firsts in Canadian military history. The idea of the "strategic corporal" as warrior, builder diplomat fighting the "three block war" existed at least since the 1990s,

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1. Combat operations ceased in July 2011 with the departure of the 1 Battalion, Royal 22e Régiment Battle Group. The Canadian Mission Transition Task Force continued handover and close-out activities in Kandahar until December 2011, officially concluding Operation ATHENA II.
  2. "Canada's Role: 2011–2014, Building a Better Future for Afghans," Government of Canada Fact Sheet, viewed on 29 April 2013, <<http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca>>.
  3. Brian Stewart. "Canada in Kandahar, some allies weren't impressed." *CBC News* 10 July 2012, viewed on 30 April 2013, <<http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2012/07/10/f-vp-stewart-kandahar.html>>.

but this was Canada's first protracted war which tested the theory<sup>4</sup> From 1941 to the 1990s, the Canadian Infantry evolved from motorization and to full mechanization, but the Kandahar campaign was the nation's first to employ infantry fighting with and from their own armoured vehicles. In a similar vein, Afghanistan was Canada's first war making extensive use of helicopters to carry infantry to the fight, to sustain them there, to evacuate casualties when necessary and provide close combat attack support. ATHENA II was certainly Canada's first information age war in which both sides employed cellular phones, laptops and the Internet as tools and weapons.



Source: Canada Camera AP0036-0000-01 by MCFJ Kennedy

Cpl Mark Button of the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team's (KPRT) Force Protection Company (and a member of the Rocky Mountain Rangers) provides force protection to KPRT members as they liaise with the Kandahar Attorney General at his office in Kandahar City.

Most importantly, the Kandahar campaign marked Canada's first full blown counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency war fought against an enemy employing simple guerilla attrition tactics to maintain constant insecurity. In short, the enemy sought to win the fight against Canadian troops "by not losing it."<sup>5</sup> The campaign occurred within the United Nations mission to rebuild Afghanistan as a viable state and elevate its status as one of the poorest nations in the world.<sup>6</sup> One cannot be divorced from the other. Canadian Infantry actions from 2006 to 2011 supported Afghanistan's recovery by thwarting Taliban and other anti-government groups' efforts to de-stabilize and ultimately re-conquer the strategic cornerstone of Kandahar City and Province. In that assignment, Canada's Task Force Kandahar scored some tactical and operational success, but in the end Operation ATHENA II stands as Canada's first overseas combat operation terminated before the outcome was certain. At the time of writing, responsibility for security is being transferred to Afghanistan's own military and police forces, assisted by Canada and other

4. See Gen Charles Krulak. "Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War." *Marines Magazine*, Jan 1999.

5. See Itai Brun, "While You're Busy Making Other Plans – The Other RMA," *Journal of Strategic Studies*. (2010), Vol 33, 4, 535.

6. Briefing to the Security Council by Jan Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary General for Afghanistan, 19 December 2012, viewed 15 April 2013, <<http://unama.unmissions.org>>.

NATO member nations and partners. It will take some time before the final verdict on Afghanistan's future is clear and events in Kandahar truly pass into history.

This article cannot be a comprehensive history of the Infantry Corps during ATHENA II but does employ an historian's approach to gathering evidence. The findings here are based on unclassified end-tour briefings, Army Lessons Learned Centre Reports and interviews with veterans from every rotation through Op ATHENA II. The interviewees were all senior NCOs and officers from lieutenant to lieutenant-colonel serving in and around the Infantry School during the fall of 2012. Almost all served multiple tours in Kandahar, most in different functions giving them comparatively broad insight on the mission and place.<sup>7</sup> This Infantry School project is not meant to be an end in itself but an exercise in encouraging veterans to come forward and be heard.

The first overarching observation about the Kandahar campaign is that no two six-month tours of duty there were alike. Operation ATHENA II changed tremendously between 2005 and 2011. Veterans from the first years noticed dramatic changes to the place, ISAF's mission and enemy behavior when they returned for their second tours later in the campaign.<sup>8</sup> Each rotation experience varied enormously as the enemy threat adapted, as Canadian and NATO policy evolved in response and as the size of NATO and Afghan National Security Forces increased. During the campaign, infanteers served in one or more of four distinct types of tasks. A majority served in infantry-based all-arms battle



Source: Canadian Forces AF2011-0004 by Cpl Tim Gille

Lt Loic Baumans, a Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) Operator, and Cpl Jean Francois Belzil of "Lucky 13" Platoon, A Company, 1 R22eR, are on patrol during Operation OMID ATAL 09 (Hope and Victory).

7. Interview candidates included LCol K.A. Gallinger, WO R. Dolson, WO D.A. Thompson, Sgt G. White, and Maj S. Gallagher from Kandahar PRT – 05-06 and TF 1-06; Capt B.M. Worrall, Sgt M.F.G. Turple, Capt J.A. Hiltz, Sgt Saunders, Capt D.C. Jenkins, Capt N.Whitman, Sgt S.C. Du Mesnil, from TFs 3-06 and 1-07; Maj S.J.F.V. Caron, Sgt Y. Roy, Sgt A.L.L. Sicard, TF-3-07, LCol S.D. Joudrey, WO D.A. Thompson, Maj D.W. Garvin, Capt Ross Bonnell, TF 3-08; LCol M. Patrick, Capt J.F. Lamarche, Capt J.Y.S. Guay, Capt J.D. Hagemeyer, CWO T.R.S.J. Garand, Maj J.S.R. Morin, TF 1-09; Maj S.S.G. Leblanc, MWO R.C. Barker, WO J.H. Miller, Sgt J.A. Deas, TF 3-09; Capt G.L. Hallman, Sgt M.F.G. Turple, Capt B.M. Worrall, Capt J.A. Hiltz, Maj N.M. Gallagher, Sgt. S.C. Du Mesnil, TF 1-10; Capt J.Y.S. Guay, Sgt Y. Roy, TF 3-10, Capt J.M.G. Watson, Sgt A.L.L. Sicard, Mission Transition Task Force.
8. Interviews with members of TFs 3-09–3-10 returned for second tour.

groups charged with maintaining security in Kandahar Province. Others served in Force Protection Companies with Canada's Provincial Reconstruction Team, which evolved into Stability Companies in 2009. Still more served in Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams assigned to support Afghan National Army Kandaks (battalions). Beyond these four functions, individual Canadian infanteers could also be found in a myriad of command and staff or force protection details throughout ISAF's Regional Command (South). Each tour and task included substantial numbers of reservists. Nearly every reserve infantry regiment in Canada contributed soldiers to operations in Kandahar. The percentage of reserve infanteers present varied from tour to tour but averaged at 7 percent of the total Canadian force, not including reservists from other branches. The figure is substantial given that the infantry component on Operation ATHENA II averaged at 33 percent of the total contingent<sup>9</sup>. To put that figure in perspective, 3 Canadian Infantry Division landed in Normandy in June 1944 with 15 percent of its total strength found in its infantry battalions<sup>10</sup>.



Source: Content Camera #5207/2013/20 by GJ/Simon Dumas

Afghan police officers practise their shooting skills and check their weapons under the supervision of Cpl Frank Charly (left) and WO Guevens Guimont (right) from Police OMLT (Operational Mentor and Liaison Team) near the Pulchakan police sub-station in Afghanistan.

Not surprisingly, there was wide variation in what each interviewee understood they were supposed to accomplish and whether they succeeded, depending on their tasking and when they deployed. In spite of a constantly evolving Kandahar campaign, interview findings, the survey of Army Lessons Learned Centre reports and other unclassified publications echo similar observations on a number of issues. Four particular areas stand out as constant for the Canadian Infantry Corps through ATHENA II. Firstly, infantry fundamental skills and functions remained timeless and adapted well to the evolving mission—for the most part. There is anecdotal evidence of exceptions, but, as a rule, core infantry skills and drills worked well, especially when applied by junior leaders who could think critically and apply them with imagination to the problem of the day or of the hour. Secondly, since the very beginning of the campaign, the fighting infantry, and indeed all combat arms soldiers, were taught that they alone could not repair a deeply

9. Average percentages estimated based on Infantry School survey of Army Lessons Learned Roll-ups and search of Canadian Forces Taskings, Plans, and Operations software.

10. Terry Copp, *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 2003), 15.

troubled Afghanistan. They were briefed in pre-deployment training that the application of military power alone would not bring lasting peace and stability in a counter-insurgency campaign. Instead, they were to hold the enemy at bay and buy time for other government departments, aid agencies and international development organizations to assist Afghans in rebuilding the political, social and economic fabric of their nation. Canadian Infanteers were aware long before the issue became prominent in the international media that at a certain point Afghans themselves would take responsibility for their own security. However, not long into the campaign it was clear to most that preventing enemy interference with the rebuilding of Kandahar Province was nearly impossible with a single Canadian battlegroup, especially in an area so vital to the Taliban.<sup>11</sup> Canada's Task Force Kandahar was too small to "deliver Kandahar" as ordered. However, the reality was that Canadian infantry faces and behavior were seen by more Kandaharis more often than any other type of foreign aid worker or diplomat. As the most visible and numerous ISAF presence "outside the wire," Canadian infanteers were keenly aware of their potential to influence perceptions among the local population, positively and negatively.

The third constant flows from the second. While the Canadian infantry had not the numbers or capacity to deliver Kandahar, those agencies and Afghan forces that could win, could only do so with Canadian infanteers. Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) detachments, the Provincial Reconstruction Team, Foreign Service Officers, Aid and Development workers, Special Forces targeting enemy leaders, police forces, the Afghan government, army and police all depended on infantry, not just for security and mobility, but to gather and transmit information in what amounted to an armed election campaign to determine who would form the future government of Afghanistan. Lastly, this study reinforces the 20th century adage that infanteers alone have limited options. The infantry only delivers its full potential as part of an all-arms team, including artillery, engineers and armour, air forces, intelligence staff, CIMIC teams, electronic warfare units, influence operations teams, special operations forces, medical services and on stability building



Source: Combat Camera BC2010-300327 by Cpl Shino Adamson

A convoy of vehicles, including a LAV III and a Leopard 2A6M Main Battle Tank from the 1 RCR Battle Group, during operations in the volatile Panjwayi and Zhari Districts of Kandahar Province.

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11. Carl Forsberg, *The Taliban's Campaign for Kandahar, Afghanistan Report 3* (Washington, Institute for the Study of War, 2009), 9–22.

missions, civilian law enforcement officers, diplomats and development officials. This lesson re-learned or reinforced applied to the gamut of infantry tasks performed during the long Kandahar campaign, from the first conventional battles of Pashmul in 2006, to stability building tasks at model villages in Dand District in 2009, right through to Canada's return to the long-standing Taliban eastern Panjwayi stronghold at Nakhoney in 2010. What changed markedly during the six year campaign was the level at which supporting arms were integrated into infantry units. From 2006 to 2008 supporting assets were directed mainly by battle group and task force level headquarters with tactical control residing at the company combat team level. From 2009 to 2011, supporting capabilities were increasingly placed at the disposal of platoon and even section commanders. The reasons for this shift are evident below.

Students of the Kandahar campaign should wield the tool of hindsight with caution, for the mission there looked very different in 2010 than it did when the first Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team set up shop in 2005. In those early days, few anticipated just how violent, resilient and at times cohesive the Taliban adversary would become. In early 2006 Canada's first battle group, based on 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, deployed to Kandahar expecting some trouble from small Taliban cells, but for the most part they understood that their main mission was to protect the stability building and assistance efforts in Kandahar City. The violent and large scale Taliban response to Canada's new military presence and the intensity of combat actions took most by surprise.<sup>12</sup> By the time the next tour based on 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment rotated into Kandahar at the end of summer in 2006, the stage was set for near conventional warfare. The Canadian-led Operation MEDUSA offensive in eastern Panjwayi and Zharey Districts was characterized by deliberate attacks against dug-in Taliban defensive positions in September. In 2007 many hoped that Operation MEDUSA set the Taliban back and the time had come to re-start stability building and nation-building efforts. Indeed, during the intervening winter, Canadian manoeuvre units moved freely through most of the province. Reconstruction became the focus and veterans of battlegroups based on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions of the Royal Canadian Regiment took some satisfaction in seeing Kandahar City begin to thrive economically. These hopes faded when the summer fighting season opened in 2007, setting a stark pattern. It quickly became apparent that the Canadian Task Force had nowhere near enough soldiers to protect the population.<sup>13</sup> The solution in those early years was to "clear" the Taliban out of threatened areas with Canadian and Afghan National Army Troops and then deploy Afghan National Police units in place to "hold" the ground and pave the way for CIMIC detachments and other agencies to "build." Only in eastern Panjwayi, under the watch of commanding Canadian-built Forward Operating Bases, was it possible to protect the population from Taliban intimidation and violence.<sup>14</sup>

In late 2007 the Canadian Task Force broke up one of the infantry companies belonging to 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Royal 22<sup>e</sup> Régiment to create more personnel to establish Police Operational Mentoring and Liaison Unit. These POMLTs garrisoned new police substations with their ANP charges in western Zharey and Panjwayi. Their posts became battlefields as the Taliban regenerated and operated as classic guerillas and insurgents in 2007 and into 2008. Isolated outposts stood dispersed and unable to support one another

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12. TF Orion/TF 3-06 interviews.

13. Interviews, 1-07; see also Lee Windsor, David Charters and Brent Wilson, *Kandahar Tour: Turning Point in Canada's Afghan Mission*. (Toronto: Wiley, 2008).

14. Carl Forsberg, *Counter-Insurgency in Kandahar: Evaluating the 2010 Hamkari Campaign*, Afghanistan Report #7. (Washington, Institute for the Study of War, 2010), 31–32.

and each too small to dominate the area around it.<sup>15</sup> A good portion of the manoeuvre force was either tied to the embattled outposts or to fighting combat logistics patrols through to sustain them, thereby limiting the capacity to mass Canadian power.<sup>16</sup> The two Canadian rotations to Kandahar in 2008, like those before them, described their efforts as counter-insurgency, but they operated at a time when Taliban strength in southern Afghanistan grew. The 2008 Taliban summer offensive pressed in on Zharey and Panjwayi while new threats materialized in Arghandab District and within Kandahar City itself. The fundamental problem was that Canada's Task Force Kandahar had insufficient resources to hold on to what it cleared. It was the time when it became clear to all that there were not enough NATO and Afghan "troops to task". It was also the year IED and counter-IED fight reached new heights of intensity.<sup>17</sup> Partly in response to mounting Canadian casualties that year, the so-called Manley commission visited Kandahar and acknowledged that, while some progress had been made, Canada's task force needed help.<sup>18</sup> Their recommendations and the surrounding public debate in Canada started a process that led to a dramatic influx of American and Afghan troops and police into Kandahar. Much Canadian blood was spilled and many dollars spent



Source: Combat Camera AF2008-2132-04 by Cpl Steven Ducharme

Afghan National Police (ANP) members (centre), Canadian soldiers (left and right) and an RCMP officer (third from right) from the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT) on a foot patrol in Kandahar City. Their goal was to speak with residents about their needs and living conditions.

before the view took hold that four Canadian rifle companies and an Afghan brigade were not enough to protect the population in Kandahar numbering over one million from the growing Taliban insurgency. This is not to say the first three years of the Kandahar campaign were wasted. The consensus view among senior veterans of those years is that Canada's task force may have been too small to completely isolate the population from

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15. Interviews, 3-07

16. Interview with LCol K.A. Gallinger, May 2013.

17. Interviews, 1-08, 3-08.

18. "Report of the Independent Panel on Canada's Future in Afghanistan" (Ottawa: 2008), 37–38.

Taliban influence, but it did disrupt and delay the Taliban's own campaign to take control of Kandahar City until help arrived in 2008–2009. Major-General Jonathan Vance commented that in between 2006 and 2009 “all we could do was not lose.”<sup>19</sup> The period then was characterized by high-intensity mechanized all-arms combat team disruption and clearing operations in Taliban strongholds across the province as well as a kind of ongoing counter-insurgency defensive in eastern Zharey and Panjwayi.

By 2009, Canada's Kandahar campaign took a noticeable shift as US Army and more Afghan National Army units arrived in the province. It was the same year ISAF Commanding General Stanley McChrystal released his now famous report which turned the Kandahar campaign into an ISAF and an American priority. The 2009 flow of US troops became the surge of 2010. In that context, Canada's Task Force Kandahar could concentrate troops, equipment, new technologies, and development dollars to saturate key areas south of Kandahar City and in eastern Panjwayi. Finally there were enough “troops to task” to mount a population-centric counter-insurgency campaign to undermine Taliban influence among Kandaharis. It marked a shift to platoon houses established amid key villages.<sup>20</sup> All around the small island of comparative Canadian stability, newly arrived US units launched major offensive operations to dominate Taliban-controlled districts.<sup>21</sup> Canadian troops felt the effects. Many were involved in blocking operations while US units cleared Arghandab and western Zharey Districts. Canadian OMLT personnel with ANA units assigned to support the US push back into western Panjwayi also saw plenty of action in the last year of Canada's Kandahar campaign.<sup>22</sup> But a majority of Canadian infantry soldiers spent the last months of the campaign practicing counter-insurgency in accordance with the latest Canadian and American doctrine,



Source: Canada's Army, 2008, 714-0919, © Simon Dunne

Maj Bob Ritchie of the OMLT (Operational Mentor and Liaison Team, right), Col Sheerin Shaw of the Afghan National Army (second from left) and LCol Daniel Drew, OMLT Deputy Commander (left), cross the Arghandab River during an operation in the Panjwayi District, Afghanistan.

19. J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace, 2nd Edition*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 447; Forsberg, Rpt 3, 8–9.

20. Interviews, 1-09, 3-09, 1-10.

21. Forsberg, Rpt 3, 50–51.

22. Interviews, 1-10

isolating the population southwest of Kandahar City from Taliban control and threats. During the last Canadian tour of the campaign, the battle group based on 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Royal 22<sup>e</sup> Régiment held to the motto “*Combattre, Convaincre, Construire*” (Fight, Convince, Build). It means fighting the lack of security, convincing the local people that they can take charge and have a better future, and building lasting stability and local capabilities.”<sup>23</sup>



Source: Combat Camera #R00049251 by Cpl David Orlin

WO Dubé and MCpl Thomsen, Force Protection members, help a local Afghan worker haul his wheelbarrow up a sheer rock face during construction of a new bridge near the Dahla Dam.

## INFANTRY FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS

Despite this wide variety of tour experiences between 2005 and 2011, veterans interviewed for this study shared a number of common observations, some echoed in Army Lessons Learned Centre reports and others not. All of their observations and experience in one way or another form part of the new Infantry Corps Intellectual Framework signed off on by then Commander of the Canadian Army, Lieutenant-General Peter Devlin, in July 2012.<sup>24</sup> First and foremost, all interviewees agreed that fundamental infantry skills were applicable at every stage of the campaign. These included terrain analysis, distance estimation, navigation and weapons handling, but among the most important skills identified was mastery of the battle procedure process. This simple infantry approach to planning worked well for carrying out any task, from running meetings with village elders about road paving to hunting down IED cells. The process worked when troops were tired and ensured everyone understood their role in the task, especially if things went wrong. During the Kandahar campaign, a “new” step was institutionalized. Ever since the First World War, honest post-operation conferences or reviews have enabled the Canadian Infantry Corps

23. “1 R22eR BG begins its tour overseas.” Army News, 30 Jan 2010. Viewed 16 April 2013, <[www.forces.gc.ca](http://www.forces.gc.ca)>.

24. “Infantry Corps Intellectual Framework,” Canadian Infantry Corps internal publication, 18 July 2012.

to react to rapidly evolving battlefield circumstances. Early in the Kandahar campaign, many units added a sixteenth step to their battle procedure process in the form of after-action reviews at the lowest levels. The Army made this universal in early 2009.<sup>25</sup>

Of course Kandahar is a place where the unexpected came to be expected. In those cases, time honoured infantry advance-to-contact and ambush drills applied. Infanteers on every tour had need to employ those drills on a greater or lesser scale while in contact with insurgents attempting to defend ground or to mount complex ambushes. The scale of insurgent combat action varied tremendously depending on the year and the district, but the potential for a gunfight never left. Most infantry veterans commented that their units were very well prepared to apply core offensive drills. What surprised most of them was how often they fell back on fundamentals of the defence. Indeed this was one area noted by veterans of every tour that should not be forgotten during individual and collective training. Defensive skills were identified as applicable to all the unique periods of the Kandahar campaign, whether for defending strong points on Route Summit in 2006 and combat outposts in western Panjwayi in 2008 to sentry duty in observation posts in the 2009 model villages.<sup>26</sup>

Interviewees also had much to say about the infantry role in gathering information and acting as sensors for the Task Force. Throughout history, the Canadian Infantry Corps has been central to army information gathering, but the Kandahar campaign saw the Infantry sense function elevated to a new level of complexity. During ATHENA II, new tactics and procedures were developed to employ infanteers to assist with identifying suspects, establishing patterns of routine, and observing hostile network behaviors. As the campaign evolved, a more systematic process was developed for maintaining situational awareness (SA) about the ground, the enemy, friendly units from dozens of nations,



Source: Combat Camera J82035-4426-0729/J-01 Robin Mayrle

Capt Kevin Schamuhn and MCpl Jeff Peart, both from 1 PPCLI, A Company, conduct a *shura* (meeting) with local elders while Cpl Steve Zreick, a medic from the HSS Role 3 Hospital, stands guard. The *shura* is being conducted in the Shah Wali Kot region just outside of Forward Operating Base (FOB) Martello.

25. Nearly all interviewees praised the battle procedure as a process; ALLC Roll-up Jan–Jul 09.

26. Interviews, 1-06–3-10 & MTTF.

Afghan partners and especially the local Kandaharis they were assigned to protect, known respectively as brown, red, blue, green and white SA.<sup>27</sup> Tracking the comings and goings of people requires patient observation skills. The veteran junior leaders interviewed understood these were vital to the mission. However, many of the older senior NCOs noted that patient observation duty had to be “encouraged” and monitored in younger infants, used to constant stimulation from iPods and hand held games.<sup>28</sup>

Hand in hand with defensive routine and information gathering went dismounted patrolling. Officers and NCOs from units that emphasized patrolling skills during pre-deployment training reported positive results when it came time to understand local patterns of activity in the patrol area. That information gathering paid dividends, whether it was seeking out enemy forces gathering to strike at 2006 strongpoints or building trust within a village cohabited with a 2010 platoon house. Veterans from both periods of the campaign noted that the core patrolling skill was the same and could adapt to suit the security situation of the day. Veterans from platoons confident in patrolling skills seemed more comfortable with the warrior-builder-diplomat role expected of them on counter-insurgency and stability operations.<sup>29</sup> Of course, if defensive routine and patrolling tasks are to be successfully adapted to stability building missions, then they must be tied to diplomatic and cultural awareness skills, especially among infantry junior leaders interacting with locals at the most basic level. Here the interviewees offered unique insights. Even though veterans of the first half of the campaign were seldom able to hold the ground they cleared, they still spent a great deal of time meeting with village and tribal elders as well as with local power-brokers and police commanders.



A soldier of the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT) gives hand shakes to Afghan kids during a foot patrol in Panjwayi District, Afghanistan. The goal of the patrol was to determine the needs and living conditions of the local population.

27. Conference Summation and Key Lessons, “Ground Truths: Intelligence, Information and Situational Awareness on Stability Operations.” Annual Gregg Centre, Combat Training Centre Conference, Oct 2009; Interview with LCol Gallinger, May 2013.

28. Interviews 1-09, 3-09.

29. Interviews, 1-06–3-10.

Some interviewees commented that the Canadian Army reflects the multi-cultural respect and values found more broadly in Canadian society, which means that many if not all Canadian infantry junior leaders come with a diplomatic skill-set learned not in the army but at home and in high school classrooms. During early tours, it helped that many units included veterans from service in the former Yugoslavia, where negotiation skills were elevated to an art, however frustrating.<sup>30</sup> At least two interviewees suggested that the best warrior-builder-diplomats came from stable homes and families and who therefore seemed more emotionally confident, although this sample is too small to be definitive. Veterans from later tours, who served with increasingly younger rifle platoons and sections still found natural diplomatic and cultural sensitivity talent in some soldiers, but some believed that the new “Facebook” generation had a tougher time with interpersonal relationships. Of course, these observations are not backed here by any systematic statistical sampling. Perhaps what is most important is that all those who commented on diplomatic capability among the “strategic corporals” believe that such training begins in Canadian homes and schools. Indeed, many felt that infanteers reflected the values in general Canadian society. Infantry veterans commented that social ability and sensitivity mattered during some or all parts of every tour, but especially after the 2009 concentration on eastern Panjwayi and southwestern Kandahar City. After that there was no escaping that every soldier in a platoon house must be a negotiator.<sup>31</sup>

In a counter-insurgency campaign, diplomatic skill goes hand in hand with fire discipline and the measured application of violence. Ironically, veteran infantry leaders who served on the first two tours in 2006 commented on the need to promote a killer edge in infantry in that year of the so called “unexpected war.” Every tour after that struggled to dial it back. Heavy fighting in 2006 may have created a distorted public image of high-intensity Operation MEDUSA—style warfare that stuck in the public minds and in the minds of some, if not all soldiers.<sup>32</sup> Interviewees from 2007 to 2011 all referred to the constant training struggle to ensure infanteers applied violence with care. That leadership struggle seems to have usually been won, but not without griping, especially true of later tours after the 2009 shift to concentrated stability operations closer to Kandahar City. Veteran officers and NCOs suggested that this problem was especially challenging in the last two years of the campaign when infantry platoons co-located in villages, often partnered with Afghan Army units. The challenge was amplified by the increased youth in typical rifle sections. However, interviewees from the latter half of the campaign commented that, compared to other countries’ units, maintaining discipline over the application of fire in a Canadian platoon seems to be far less difficult. Most also felt that the challenge of leading young Canadian infanteers eager to get into gunfights was addressed easily enough with plenty of training on rules of engagement and the rationale behind the rules along with finding other meaningful and rewarding work to keep soldiers occupied during long periods of inactive observation duty.<sup>33</sup> The question of youth and maturity in the Infantry Corps came up in almost every group of interviewees after Task Force 1-07. Their reflections appear tied to a demographic shift in the Canadian Army as a whole. A large cohort of experienced mid-grade officers and senior NCOs approached retirement age or retired earlier after wartime service during the first decade of the new millennium. The army recruited heavily to fill the ranks, resulting in a large influx of new infantry soldiers entering the training system. Veterans from Task Force 3-07 were among the first to notice the difference of operating with a younger force.<sup>34</sup>

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30. Interviews, 1-06–1-07.

31. Interviews, 3-09–3-10.

32. See Granatstein, 437–440.

33. Interviews, 3-09, 1-10, 3-10.

34. Interviews, 1-06–3-10; Granatstein, 444.

While many interviewees reflected on the challenges of an increasingly youthful Infantry Corps, many also saw value when it came to waging war in the modern age of information. Their overwhelming message, confirmed in ALLC reports, is that every infanteer must be a signaller in this new age. In that sense, young recruits enter the army with an information technology awareness that proved most valuable in a conflict where platoons operate alone and the enemy employs cell phones and Motorola hand radios and electronic warfare effects and products demand rapid infantry responses. While young, new infanteers have a leg up, the Corps as a whole, many felt, must train harder to master and exploit new information technologies.<sup>35</sup>

Following on the theme of training and discipline, interviewees were unanimous that the current Road to High Readiness training model worked in preparing their platoons, companies and battalions for the Kandahar campaign. Of course there were specific complaints about certain elements of the program at specific times. Nevertheless, most agreed with the model of focussing new recruits on infantry fundamental skills during individual and core leadership training before tackling the complexities of counter-insurgency, cultural sensitivity and new technologies during mission specific workshops. They felt collective training exercises at the Canadian Manoeuvre Training Centre in Wainwright, Alberta, and at locations in the southwestern United States provided opportunities for sub-units to develop cohesion and hone small-task confidence and flexibility. Senior veterans who recalled pre-deployment training for missions in the 1990s were especially positive about the system, including the opportunity to work through the unique rules of engagement that evolved through the campaign.<sup>36</sup> It is worth remembering that almost all interviewees consulted for this study served as instructor staff at the Infantry School at CFB Gagetown. However, their views were also reflected in Army Lessons Learned Centre reports. Among other things, the centralized CMTC collective training system served as a vehicle for disseminating the latest lessons learned coming out of the theatre. Arguably it was always a tool for transmitting the most recent experience, but by 2009 the process became more systematic. In particular, by 2009, CMTC collective training included the latest air-land tactics, the importance of gathering “White situational awareness” or information about the local population, and the latest methods of conducting influence and information operations.<sup>37</sup>

That said, there was much for an infantry soldier to absorb and master during collective training, from the basics of fighting alongside armoured, engineer and artillery units to the subtlety of influence activities and information operations. The resounding message coming from interviewees was that the value of those last two new concepts is well appreciated in the Infantry Corps. Here all interviewees, lessons learned reviews and end tour reports concur that infanteers must be made part of the effort to communicate the important messages to Afghans. Interviewees from all tours recognized how their platoons and OMLTs were in closer contact with Kandaharis than most other forces in Kandahar and utilizing that connection was essential for successful influence activities. Some veterans, especially from earlier tours, expressed frustration at their lack of inclusion or awareness of influence activity planning and execution. However, as the Kandahar campaign progressed, particularly from 2009 onward, influence activity resources expanded and the doctrine for employing them was refined and infantry sub-units became much more involved in the process.<sup>38</sup>

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35. Interviews, 1-06-3-10.

36. Interviews 1-06-3-10.

37. ALLC Rpt Jul-Dec 09.

38. Interviews 1-06-3-10.



Mounted and dismounted Canadian troops from 3 RCR Battle Group move into position in the Zhari District during Operation JANUBI TAPU 2.

Discussions about influence activities raises the question of how best to balance time spent in collective training on cutting-edge counter-insurgency methods against mastering critical infantry combined-arms team skills. Interviewees identified this less as a problem and more as a conundrum they had no answers for. One critical skill set identified by most that falls astride this problem is that associated with mechanized infantry operations now that Canada fields a fleet of LAV III infantry fighting vehicles. Ever since two members of the Royal Canadian Regiment were killed in an unarmoured Iltis in 2003 during ATHENA I outside of Kabul, debate has simmered over whether Canada's Light Armoured Vehicle was appropriate for infantry use on stability operations. Some critics asked how it was possible to interact with and win the confidence of Kandaharis from inside such a machine. The overwhelming consensus from interviewees in this study suggests that they could not have connected with Afghans without it. During the 2005–2009 portion of the campaign, the LAV enabled infantry companies to move with reasonable safety and confidence to the widely dispersed areas they were ordered out to across Kandahar and neighbouring Helmund and Uruzgan. When assigned to operate in the countryside, the LAV provided dispersed companies a firm base to operate from, including communications, sensors, a point of resupply, a place and means of casualty evacuation and, most importantly, a base of fire when in enemy contact. Interviewees felt all of these advantages were worth the trade-off of platoons only being able to dismount twenty-one soldiers as a maximum. What mattered, they said, was that the LAV was employed as part of a system with the dismounted platoon. They cautioned how that did not always mean the LAV turret crew blazing away with the 25 mm supporting cannon fire. The LAV crew could perform any number of supporting tasks described above, all considered equally essential for non-kinetic actions.<sup>39</sup> The trade-off that many interviewees commented on was that this armoured vehicle capability within the infantry meant that battalions must train, live and think more like armoured units. That required more people carrying out more work attending to vehicles. More infanteers in the

39. Interviews, 1-06–3-10.

Battalion spent more time on vehicle related courses. But the general consensus is that the value of the vehicles is worth the commitment of people and time.<sup>40</sup>

Interviewees were equally unanimous in their qualification that, while the LAV and mechanized infantry have a place on counter-insurgency operations, they were not a substitute for dismounted action. Certainly the Kandahar experience did not resolve the debate over the relative merits of mechanized and light infantry. The vehicles provided a tool for supporting the main activity which all agreed worked best when platoons dismounted, whether to patrol, meet with local leaders or establish platoon houses after 2009. Even veterans of the last two years of the Kandahar campaign who spent much of their time focused on a small area of operations agreed that the LAV III was an essential tool. That said, they appreciated how vehicles often confined units to predictable routes, making them easier to target, especially in later years when Taliban IED cells concentrated on obvious choke points. In the end, the Kandahar campaign called upon infantry sub-units to operate in mechanized, dismounted, light and airmobile tasks. The value of each was demonstrated. Infantry units that employed all means of mobility, especially making use of multiple means in the same action, kept the enemy guessing and achieved surprise.<sup>41</sup> Interviewees reported less satisfaction with a number of other tools made available during the Kandahar campaign. Most agreed there is room for improvement when it came to enabling infantry units to reap the full benefits of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and other newly acquired surveillance gear. Their frustration was reflected in ALLC reports, which identified the need for more knowledge of Intelligence, Surveillance Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) technological capabilities and limits—know what to ask for and how to make the most efficient use of the information that comes from it. There were certainly anecdotal examples of infantry units making ingenious use of technology in specific operations and circumstances. But the message from all directions was that the Canadian Army has yet to find the perfect recipe for getting the most from those assets. Interestingly, this was one area where the army's youth was identified by many as part of the solution. Older NCOs see the new generation of soldiers as the look-up generation, empowered and confident in technology. In them, some felt, lays the answer.<sup>42</sup>

Naturally, infantry veterans closely associated ISTAR capability with intelligence processing units and products. Nearly all understood how infanteers were key sensors for gathering information and that they ought to be prime consumers of intelligence products. Despite the constant evolution and improvement in the Task Force and ISAF ability to produce intelligence products, Canadian infantry operating at the company level, either hunting the Taliban or interacting with Kandaharis at the coal face, always wanted more. Veterans from earlier tours perceived that the information they gathered, often with great effort, was consumed entirely by Special Operations Forces. From 2006 to early 2009, infantry companies often established their own intelligence cells to keep track of the people in their neighbourhood. These cells were invariably ad hoc and delivered mixed results. Ultimately, small infantry sub-units felt they were not well enough connected or equipped to be sensitive to complex cultural and tribal dynamics in Kandahar from 2006 to 2009.<sup>43</sup> This perception at the sub-unit level may reflect unrealistic expectations about the nature of Intelligence. Intelligence specialists and senior members of the Infantry Corps insist that all information and intelligence products are developed so that commanders may make sound decisions and issue timely orders

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40. Many of these issues were also raised by Major V. Sattler and Captain M. O'Leary in "Organizing Modern Infantry: An Analysis of Section Fighting Power," *Canadian Army Journal* Vol 13.3 (Autumn 2010), 23–53.

41. Interviews, 1-06–3-10.

42. ALLC Report Jul-Dec 09; Interviews 1-09, 1-10, 3-10.

43. Interviews, 3-06–3-10.

to sub-units.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, a need for more intelligence support at the sub-unit level was identified Army wide as the campaign went on. By 2009–2010, US and Canadian intelligence and ISTAR assets were available in sufficient quantity to push down to companies and platoons in the form of Intelligence Support Teams. Perhaps not surprisingly, interviewees from the last Canadian rotations into Kandahar reported a higher level of satisfaction with the intelligence gathering.<sup>45</sup> Ironically, a number of interviews representing every year of the campaign also commented on the problem of sheer information overload on a mission where infanteers had to master new cultures, technologies, and doctrines.<sup>46</sup> The balance between arming the infantry with what they need to know and overburdening their capacity to manage information flow is still being worked out. “Network enabled command” is the language used to describe the optimum system wherein the infantry is “capable of exchanging information laterally and vertically, between sensors, weapons, vehicles and command and control nodes, and enabling information accessibility by the right person at the right time.”<sup>47</sup>

Veterans from each distinct period of the Kandahar campaign as well as the Army Lessons Learn Centre agreed that dispersed infantry operations in which platoons frequently worked at great distances from neighbouring friendly units put a premium on small unit leadership, command and control. In such circumstances, more responsibility falls on sergeants and master-corporals at the section level than ever before in Canada’s military history. Throughout the Kandahar campaign, but especially after 2009, platoon and section commanders found themselves controlling enablers from aircraft and artillery through to Civil-Military Cooperation teams. Such circumstances demanded excellence from the most junior leaders and even from privates and corporals who found themselves acting in leadership roles due to casualties or leave.<sup>48</sup>

No study of infantry in action would be complete without a word on weapons. This section features later in this article quite deliberately. A number of interviewees commented that there was never a shortage of weapons systems and talent for employing them when it came to destroying the enemy. The greater challenge was always locating the enemy and bringing them to battle in conditions that avoided damage to civilian lives and property. Nevertheless, infantry close combat was part of the routine for at least some sub-units during every rotation. Operations in Kandahar fueled the still simmering debate over the relative merits of the Canadian C7A2 service rifle and the C8 assault carbine. Some veterans, particularly on earlier tours, felt the C7 too long for use with the LAVIII and in tight quarters. Advocates of the C8 assault carbine understood it had shorter range hitting power, but argued that most engagements in 2006 took place within 300 metres’ range anyway. However, from 2006 onwards, terrain and enemy tactics made it clear that, as often as not, fire fights took place at ranges beyond 300 metres. In such cases, the longer range C7 was vindicated. The need for more 7.62-mm rifles and machine guns among dismounted platoons to engage the enemy accurately well beyond 300 metres was also demonstrated.<sup>49</sup> In the earthen-walled network of Kandahar’s greenbelt, the M-72 light anti-armour rocket was well respected. All praised the LAV III’s 25-mm gun as much for its long range, all weather precision as its penetrating power. The M203 under slung

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44. Conference Summation, Annual Gregg Centre, Combat Training Centre Conference, Oct 2009; Comments from LCol Gallinger and Col I.R. Creighton, Director of Infantry, May 2013.

45. Interviews, 3-09–3-10.

46. Interviews, 1-06–3-10.

47. Infantry Corps Intellectual Framework: (2012), 6.

48. Interviews, 1-09, 3-09,

49. Canadian Army Lessons Learned Centre (ALLC) Annual Roll Up for 2006, 16–17.

grenade launcher demonstrated its worth with its ability to lob grenades behind adobe walls. The platoon 60-mm mortar was frequently employed in the same role. In most cases, Canadian infanteers bested their opponents when it came to infantry weapons. Interviewees agreed that platoons trained and confident in their full suite of weaponry were more likely to employ them both effectively and carefully in the context of the counter-insurgency campaign. Weapons training, they agreed, must never be pushed out of its first-priority status. As in Canada's past wars, infantry weapons represented only a portion of the Allied firepower employed to decide Canadian infantry actions in Kandahar. Fire from Canadian tanks and NATO fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters were often called upon to settle engagements. Equally important was the Royal Canadian Artillery. Rarely were infantry sub-units out of range of the battle group's M-777 155-mm howitzer battery, including its 81-mm mortar detachments. Whether they fired high explosive, smoke or illumination rounds, the guns could usually deliver fire on very short notice. Closely linked to artillery was the capacity to observe and deliver fires from UAVs, which became ever more prevalent in the campaign after 2008. Directing these supporting fires emphasized the importance of close liaison with the tank troop and effective integration of the artillery Forward Observation Officer/Joint-Terminal Attack Controller (FOO/JTAC) into the infantry team.<sup>50</sup>

While the Taliban often had difficulty matching Canadian infantry in firefights, their record in inflicting losses using improvised explosive devices made them a dangerous enough opponent. IEDs were deemed not just a threat to Canadian soldiers, but to political will back at home to continue the mission. On these matters, the veterans interviewed expressed a wider variety of experience and opinions. Certainly the battle against Taliban IED cells and the effort to protect Canada's Task Force Kandahar consumed ever increasing resources and effort as the campaign went on. Many felt that technological and tactical solutions delivered results in the counter-IED effort by 2008 and 2009.<sup>51</sup> However, a few interviewees and a key advisor to the Commander of ISAF during the 2010 US surge into Kandahar believe that the counter-IED struggle constituted a successful Taliban diversion that drew Canadian units and resources away from their core mission of protecting the people of Kandahar.<sup>52</sup> Given how important freedom of movement on Kandahar's major arterial roads was considered for all NATO units in Regional Command South, especially before the US surge, it is not entirely clear what alternatives the Canadians had. Answers to that controversial question will remain highly classified for some time. However, given that improvised explosive weapons and counter-mobility warfare are time-honoured tactics likely to be encountered on future operations, the Royal Canadian Infantry Corps cannot afford to wait to consider the problem.

Extensive Taliban use of IEDs was the main reason the Canadian Infantry Corps saw a range of new technologies, weapons, vehicles and other equipment introduced on the fly during the Kandahar campaign. In some cases, interviewees complained that new technologies came without doctrine, which had to be figured out in action. Overall, most saw these new technologies as positive. They helped infanteers travel safer, see further, communicate better, know more about the enemy and deliver fire to them with more precision. The down side to receiving so many types of new equipment months or weeks before deployment made it tough to balance training on fundamentals with learning to use new machines.<sup>53</sup> Rapid technological innovation in the midst of operations has been

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50. 1-06-3-10.

51. ALLC Rollup – July–Dec 09.

52. Interviews, 1-06, 3-10; Forsberg, Rpt 3, 47–49.

53. Interviews, 1-06–1-10.

reality for all modern armies since the industrial revolution. Indeed, the Afghan experience reminded the Infantry branch to expect new equipment to arrive mid-campaign. War invariably breeds invention and encourages intelligent people to find technological solutions to tactical and operational problems. For the most part, the transition to new equipment fixes seems to have been quick within Canadian infantry units. Older veterans interviewed credit the corps' ability to transform to the old infantry principle of equipping the man, rather than manning the equipment.<sup>54</sup>



Source: Canada (Owen) (2008: 240) by Capt Adam Thornton

An RG-31 leads a combat logistics patrol that is preparing to depart a forward observation base in southern Afghanistan.

A few final observations are worthy of quick note here, however obvious they may be to most. The first full rotations into Kandahar in 2006 and 2007 recognized serious shortfalls in their ability to sustain infantry units and maintain vehicles when widely dispersed across the vastness of Kandahar Province. The best efforts of the centralized National Support Element at Kandahar Airfield could not meet the demand. The solution was a twofold return to basic Second World War and Cold War forward logistics practices. Firstly, each battle group from Task Force 1-08 onward deployed with its infantry battalion's administration company and all its capacity for forward supply and maintenance. Secondly, in 2009, administration companies could draw on supplies, parts and expertise from well-equipped Forward Support Groups deployed in the major Forward Operating Bases nearby to dispersed companies. The system went a long way to restoring agility in infantry companies and shortening response times to requests for vital stores.<sup>55</sup>

Another was the value of fitness. Regardless of the number of many vehicles and helicopters employed to transport soldiers during the Kandahar campaign, successful

54. Interviews, 1-06–1-10.

55. ALLC Rollup, Jul-Dec 09; Interviews 1-08–1-10.

infantry activity always involved dismounted actions with heavy loads, often in extreme temperatures. Winning surprise in a fight and physically withstanding the mission demands depended on fit soldiers. Most interviewees commented on the need to maintain the primacy of fitness training during pre-deployment preparations as the best prevention for unnecessary casualties due to injury and strain.<sup>56</sup> Their old warriors' message might seem obvious but is worth remembering in a busy training cycle in which competing demands to train to new technologies and competencies must be balanced.

Discussions about fitness connected closely to the question of medical care. Interviewees were resoundingly positive about the quality of medical services provided, even at the most forward and dispersed infantry sub-units. The practice of deploying field ambulance detachments with rifle companies, maintaining physician's assistances and medical technicians at Forward Operation Bases paid dividends in keeping soldiers fit and healthy during the physically demanding campaign. When it came to treating combat casualties and traumatic injuries, the integration of medics with each platoon and patrol made a life and death difference. Medics formed the expert core of a wider network of first responders trained through the Canadian Army's Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TCCC) program. The two-week battlefield first aid course, introduced in 2002, course empowered many infanteers to take immediate medical action and stabilize casualties that would not otherwise have survived. Platoon medics helped the TCCC-qualified infanteers maintain their life saving skills during their tours. In literally hundreds of cases, the combination of medics and TCCC-qualified soldiers stabilized badly wounded casualties long enough for the sophisticated helicopter evacuation system to move the casualties to the advanced Role 3 hospital at Kandahar Airfield.<sup>57</sup>

Casualties, injuries and illness were not the only personnel drains on infantry platoons. A surprising number of interviewees expressed frustration at the system of granting two weeks leave to all members during a six-month rotation. This system, known as HLTA in reference to the Home Leave Travel Assistance benefits program, routinely saps infantry platoons of 10–20 percent of their strength, especially during the middle of the tour. While interviewees recognized the value of a break from the mental strain of sustained operations, many did not feel it was worth the reduction in platoon fighting power. The debate over the value of mid-tour leave is beyond the scope of this study, but it is worth noting that later rotations addressed the overall problem of personnel shortages due to casualties and leave by increasing the size of rifle sections from ten soldiers to twelve.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps no other type of small Canadian infantry unit deployed during the Kandahar campaign faced more unique pressure to master core infantry skills, directing supporting arms, and cultural awareness more than Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams. OMLT veterans interviewed for this study universally took great pride in their service and felt it to be professionally and personally rewarding. They also understood it to be the most mission critical element of the Kandahar campaign. However, they were equally unanimous that unique pre-deployment training for OML Teams was lacking from the time the first ones were formed in 2006 right up to the summer of 2010 as the last teams prepared to deploy. In the end, their knowledge of fundamental infantry skills mattered most when teaching and operating with Afghan National Army soldiers and even police. Therefore, pre-deployment training, which reinforced collective infantry and all-arms

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56. Interviews 1-06–3-10.

57. LCol Erin Savage et al, "Tactical Combat Casualty Care in the Canadian Forces: Lessons Learned from the Afghan War," *Canadian Journal of Surgery*, (Dec 2011) (54) 6, 122–3.

58. Interviews 1-06–3-10.

principles, was not wasted.<sup>59</sup> Their experiences are worthy of far more focused study, as many already realize. The Directorate of Army Training has recommended that the Army must understand that OMLT is not an Afghanistan specific capability. Obviously mentoring and training support remains central to Canada's South Asian policy through its commitment to the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) Operation ATTENTION. Infanteers and their skill set were and are central to these types of missions. The Infantry Corps will likely draw similar assignments in future.

In conclusion, since the two World Wars, the Canadian Army developed a war fighting approach, blended first with British and then US doctrine, emphasizing firepower to defeat the enemy. During the Kandahar campaign, this doctrinal focus existed in a constant state of tension with the mission requirement to rebuild Afghanistan and therefore minimize violence and damage to civilian property. Many, if not all, Canadian Infantry leaders were well aware of this contradiction. Interviewees for this study described a constant search for the best way to carry out a successful counter-insurgency campaign that would allow Afghanistan to rebuild without Taliban interference. Sadly, most interviewees expressed deep frustration by what they perceived to be a lack of international cooperation or a clear plan for making that happen. It remains to be seen whether their effort and sacrifice will leave lasting results. In the end, the Royal Canadian Infantry Corps did what was asked of it during the Kandahar campaign. It is up to us who are left to remember their service and try to understand their accomplishment. This study is not meant to be the last word on infantry in Afghanistan. Veteran members are encouraged to submit their observations and personal accounts to the Infantry School as part of an ongoing effort to both capture best practices and record the Afghanistan experience for the purpose of preparing a more fulsome history of Canada's effort in South Asia. Submissions and the original interviews captured in this article will be shared with the Canadian Forces Directorate of History and Heritage.

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59. Interviews, 1-08-1-10.