

THE VAN DOOS HEAD FOR AFGHANISTAN

Introduction

Focus

In the summer of 2007, Quebec's Royal 22nd Regiment—nicknamed the Van Doos—took over frontline duties in Afghanistan. This *News in Review* story examines the renewed debate over the Afghan mission as the deployment of the Van Doos puts the war effort to the top of the political agenda in the province of Quebec and the rest of Canada.

The War Debate

Sergeant Steve Dufour was making his way into Molson Stadium in Montreal to see a CFL pre-season game between the Alouettes and their arch rivals, the Toronto Argonauts. The game was part of a publicity campaign designed to drum up public support for the Canadian Forces (CF), with 1 700 troops invited to the game. With the deployment of the famed Van Doos—the francophone Royal 22nd Regiment—just months away, efforts were underway to galvanize public support in Quebec behind the Afghan mission. Dufour, a veteran CF soldier who served in Bosnia, was approaching the stadium when he noticed the protesters. As he got closer, a young woman, a university student from McGill, suddenly let loose an angry rant aimed directly at him. The soldier maintained his composure and let the student voice her protest. Then he responded to the woman's concerns calmly and directly before ending the debate, saying, "Can you go to school if you want? Well, a little girl [in Afghanistan] will be found [dead] if she says she wants to go to school" (*The Globe and Mail*, August 4, 2007). For Dufour, it was as simple as that: he was fighting for the right of a little girl to go to school.

The confrontation between Dufour and the university student is a microcosm of the dissonance present in Quebec over Canada's participation in the war in Afghanistan. More than two thirds of Quebecers disapprove of Canada's involvement in the Afghan conflict—a fact that took on added prominence as the Van Doos took over frontline combat duties in the summer of 2007.

Winter of Discontent

The mission in Afghanistan was a source of debate for much of 2007. The casualty count of summer 2006, which drove the death total to almost 50, left Canadians feeling numb. So when the pollsters started calling shortly after Christmas, it was no surprise that, at times, the majority of Canadians voiced their opposition to the mission in some shape or form. Couple the public opinion issue with a series of newspaper articles that suggested that Canadian forces in Afghanistan were handing prisoners over to Afghan authorities even though they suspected that the prisoners were going to be tortured, and it soon became clear that the news was working against the war effort.

Meanwhile, the opposition parties started circling the wagons. Jack Layton and the NDP hammered Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Defence Minister Dennis O'Connor over their handling of the prisoner-abuse allegations. Liberal leader Stéphane Dion tried to force Harper to come up with a firm commitment to not extend the mission beyond 2009. Eventually Harper had to provide answers on both fronts. First he put a rigorous prisoner-exchange policy in place with Afghan authorities and then he agreed to not extend the mission beyond 2009 unless all parties agreed to an extension. In an effort to bring even more clarity to the war message, Harper shuffled his cabinet in August. He placed Peter MacKay into the defence portfolio. Political pundits claimed this move was part of a government plan designed to help sell the war to Canadians.

Opposition in Quebec

While the problem of national public opinion was weighing on Harper's

mind, he knew he had an even bigger problem looming in the summer of 2007. Quebec's famed Royal 22nd Regiment, the Van Doos, was slated to take on frontline duties in Kandahar. While the Van Doos had seen action in Afghanistan when Canada was stationed in Kabul, the Kandahar mission was much more dangerous. With the death count at over 40 going into the spring fighting season, Harper had to work with the military to drum up support in Quebec—no easy task in a province that has traditionally opposed Canadian wars on foreign soil. Nonetheless, the federal government worked with the CF in Quebec to raise awareness of the war effort. First, 1 700 CF personnel were invited to a CFL game. Then the army held a send-off parade in Quebec City. Both events were met with counter-protests by opponents of the Afghan conflict. Around the same time, CF personnel visited the National Assembly in Quebec City. Most of the Quebec National Assembly greeted them with a standing ovation—except for a number of members of the Parti Québécois. The PQ snub brought the war debate into renewed focus as Quebecers prepared to deal with the dangers the Van Doos would face in Kandahar.

Early Casualties

It didn't take long for the war to try the patience of Quebecers. Just weeks after

the arrival of the Van Doos, Private Simon Longtin was killed by a roadside bomb while travelling with a Canadian convoy in Kandahar. The death of Longtin occurred in the same week that seven soldiers were injured in two separate roadside bombing incidents and on the same road where five Canadian soldiers from the Royal Canadian Regiment were killed in the previous month. Before the dust could settle on the Longtin incident another group of Van Doos hit an IED (improvised explosive device) that killed two more soldiers along with their Afghan translator and seriously injured a Radio Canada cameraman. This raised the total of Canadian dead to 71 by the end of September 2007.

Conclusion

Despite concerns that the deployment of the Van Doos could be a public-relations disaster for the Harper government, the summer ended with Quebecers demonstrating a deeper understanding of the Afghan mission. Even the public opinion polls shifted—albeit marginally and not on a par with the rest of Canada—away from the 70 per cent opposition mark. Meanwhile, a world away, on the dusty roads of Kandahar, the Van Doos continue to fulfill their mandate, leaving the squabbling over the mission to the pundits and politicians.

Questions

1. Do you think Steve Dufour handled his confrontation with the protester effectively? Explain.
2. What challenges did the Harper government face as the deployment of the Van Doos approached?
3. How did some Quebecers show their opposition to the war in Afghanistan?
4. Did the opposition to the war grow or fade with the deployment of the Van Doos? Explain.
5. Outline your general view on the Canadian mission to Afghanistan.

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Video Review

Watch the video and answer the questions below.

1. What percentage of Quebecers are against the war in Afghanistan?

2. What is the correct name of the Van Doos regiment?

3. Identify one example of how Quebecers have shown their opposition to the war.

4. Why did the head of NATO travel to Quebec prior to the deployment of the Van Doos?

5. Describe Quebec's attitude to Canadian involvement in foreign wars.

6. (a) How did the first of the Van Doos die in Afghanistan?

- (b) What effect did the deaths of the soldiers have on the debate in Quebec over Afghanistan?

7. Describe Patrice Roy's experience the day the convoy he was travelling in hit an improvised explosive device (IED).

8. What political move did Prime Minister Harper make to ensure Quebecers were receiving a clear message from the government regarding the war in Afghanistan?

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Statistical Analysis

Review the following statistical information and complete the activities that follow.

Chart #1: International Troops in Afghanistan		
Country	Deaths	Troops Committed
United States	442	17 000
United Kingdom	81	6700
Canada	71 [^]	2500
Germany	25	3000
Spain	23	650
France	12	1000
Netherlands	11	2200
Italy	9	1950
Romania	5	750
Denmark	4	400
Sweden	2	260
Estonia	2	130
Australia	1	500
Norway	1	500
Czech Republic	1	150
Portugal	1	150
Finland	1	70
Poland	1	60
Total	694	37 970

Source: icasualties.org (as of September 26, 2007)

[^] Does not include the death of diplomat Glyn Berry

Activity #1

- Review the data regarding the five nations at the top of the list. Take the total number of deaths for each country and divide that number by the total number of soldiers serving in Afghanistan.

United States _____ United Kingdom _____

Canada _____ Germany _____

Spain _____

- Next multiply that number by 100 to calculate the percentage of troops killed in the war for each country.

United States _____% United Kingdom _____%

Canada _____% Germany _____%

Spain _____%

- Which nation has sustained the highest percentage of deaths in relation to the number of troops serving in Afghanistan?
-
- Is this type of calculation a fair one to make? Explain your answer.

Chart #2: Canadian Deaths in Afghanistan							
How they died	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
Improvised Explosive Device		2			8	22	32
Combat					13	2	15
Suicide Attack			1		11		12
Friendly Fire	4				2		6
Accident				1	3	1	5
Self-inflicted						1	1
Under Investigation						1	1
Total Deaths	4	2	1	1	37*	27	72*

*Includes the death of diplomat Glyn Berry
 Source: CBC News In Depth: "In the Line of Duty – Canada's Casualties," cbc.ca

Activity #2

- Review the data in Chart #2 and explain how the war has changed for Canadian troops since 2002.

- In what type of situations have Canadians been most vulnerable?

- What is the deadliest form of attack used by insurgents?

- If you were the Canadian military commander, what measures would you take to best protect Canadian troops? Be specific and explain your decision.

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The Fighting Van Doos

Archives

For an audio-visual history of this famed Canadian unit, visit the CBC Archives at www.cbc.ca/archives and review the file "Canada's Fighting Van Doos." If you can understand French, you might wish to extend your visit and go to Radio-Canada at http://archives.radio-canada.ca/IDD-0-9-534/guerres_conflits/22e_regiment/ and explore the file "Les militaires du Royal 22e Régiment."

Further Research

To learn more about the pivotal Battle at Ortona, visit www.cbc.ca/news/background/ortona/newsreels.html.

The Royal 22nd Regiment is one of the most recognized fighting units in the Canadian Forces. Formed in 1914 shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, the francophone regiment based in Valcartier, Quebec, has earned a reputation for discipline, reliability, and courage that makes it the envy of many army regiments around the world.

The Beginning

The Van Doos started as the 22nd Battalion, a battle group of French Canadian men that came into existence after 50 prominent francophones in Quebec City and Montreal lobbied the federal government for an exclusively French-speaking unit in the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the First World War. Brought together in the fall of 1914, the 22nd soon became known as the Van Doos, an anglicized mispronunciation of the number 22, which is *vingt-deux* in French. By spring 1915, the Van Doos were shipped to England for further training; later that year they saw action in the Somme offensive at Courcellette in France. While the Van Doos sustained over 200 casualties at Courcellette, they reached their objective and, along with two other battalions, managed to kill 1 200 Germans and take close to 800 prisoners. Their success in the Somme offensive led to other assignments at Vimy Ridge, Hill 70, Lens, Amiens, Passchendaele, and Arras. Over 6 000 men served with the 22nd Battalion in the First World War. Of that number, close to 1 000 were killed, and over half were wounded.

Georges Vanier

One of the most famous Van Doos of the First World War era was Major Georges Vanier, who led a beleaguered

22nd into battle east of Arras. Vanier put himself in the front lines with his men—something virtually unheard of in the First World War. He was shot in the chest during this engagement and nearly died when a mortar shell exploded near his stretcher as he was being carried off the battlefield. Vanier survived and later went on to earn the Military Cross, a promotion to the rank of Major-General, and, from 1959 to 1967, served as the first French-Canadian Governor General of Canada.

In the post-war era, the 22nd Battalion disbanded and was re-organized into the 22nd Regiment. Eventually they became the Royal 22nd Regiment. Officially the correct rendering of the unit's name is the French version, Royal 22e Regiment.

The Second World War

The Van Doos' next major military engagement did not take place until the Second World War. Originally sent to England in December 1939, the Royal 22nd Regiment did not see combat action until 1943 (although they did have the honour of guarding Buckingham Palace, home of King George—the first time a foreign army had been given the opportunity). At that point they were shipped to the Mediterranean to help open the Italian front. The Van Doos fought fiercely at Santa Maria and Ortona in some of the most dramatic Canadian engagements in the Second World War. By the end of the Italian campaign, almost 2 000 Van Doos had become casualties of war, with nearly 400 dying and over 1 500 wounded in action.

From Europe to Afghanistan

The Van Doos also served with distinction in Korea and have been deployed in a variety of peacekeeping

Further Research

To learn more about this most distinguished military unit, consider a visit to the official regimental Web site at www.r22er.com. Note that the site is in French only but does contain updates about the unit in Afghanistan.

operations around the world, including Cyprus, East Timor, and Bosnia.

Members of the Royal 22nd Regiment are currently serving in Afghanistan.

Close to 2 500 Van Doos were deployed in the summer of 2007 with the primary

goals being to provide safe working environments for Canada's provincial reconstruction teams, to push the Taliban out of Kandahar province, and to train the Afghanistan National Army to take over frontline combat duties.

Interesting Facts

- The Van Doos motto is *je me souviens*, which means "I remember." It is also the official motto for the province of Quebec.
- The Van Doos mascot is a Tibetan goat named Batisse.
- "Vive la Canadienne" is a folk song that is the official quick march song of the Van Doos.
- The nickname Van Doos comes from an English mispronunciation of the French number 22.
- La Citadelle in Quebec City is the official regimental headquarters of the Van Doos.

Source: CBC Archives: "Canada's Fighting Van Doos," cbc.ca

Analysis

1. How and when were the Van Doos founded?

2. Who was Georges Vanier? Why was he so highly regarded?

3. Where did the Van Doos serve during the Second World War?

4. Where are the Van Doos currently serving?

5. What are their goals in their current mission?

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War Update: 2007

Did you know . . .

One of the toughest problems for Canadian forces is helping Afghan police forces hold a territory after it has been cleared of the Taliban. Poorly equipped and modestly trained, these police are easy targets for the Taliban. Often Canadian units have to be re-sent into areas that have been previously cleared of Taliban. The Afghan police are paying a terrible price in trying to bring order to their nation. In 2007, it was noted that the previous 18 months had seen the deaths of 1 150 police officers. In July 2007, 71 were killed in the zone that Canada was trying to pacify.

IEDs

In 2007, the weapon of choice for the Taliban and other insurgent groups became the improvised explosive device (IED). The IEDs used in Afghanistan are usually made of explosive materials that are triggered either when a vehicle or person comes in contact with them (similar to a landmine) or by remote control. Of the 27 Canadians killed in 2007, IEDs accounted for all but five of the deaths. To some military analysts, the significant drop in actual combat deaths (down from 13 to just two in one year) and the movement by insurgents to tactics such as IEDs show that the approach used by U.S. and NATO troops may be working. Going into the fall of 2006, coalition armies were employing the “ink-spot theory” to combat insurgents. The ink-spot theory assumes that, if coalition troops can drive insurgents out of contested areas, and development aid can be infused into the community, then the local populace will rally around the foreign-backed Karzai government because of the aid they would be receiving. The “ink spot” of Panjwaii, one of the most dangerous districts in all of Afghanistan, was brought under Canadian and NATO control after Operation Medusa—a fierce, 15-day battle with the Taliban that saw Canadian troops suffer 15 deaths.

After Medusa

In the year after Operation Medusa, aid has been brought into the region, but the Panjwaii district is far from secure. Many analysts believe that this is because Canadian and NATO troops are spread too thin. With military successes in 2006, and the goal of opening new ink spots in 2007, Canadian troops are not

only trying to maintain law and order in Panjwaii but they are also trying to move deeper into Kandahar province to bring new areas under their control. As a result, insurgents have managed to infiltrate the Panjwaii ink spot to plant IEDs, the deadly weapon mentioned earlier.

More Ink Spots

Meanwhile, Canada and its NATO partners soldier on in their application of the ink-spot theory, hoping that more troops will be deployed by other NATO member nations. The most recent military successes include:

- December 2006 – Canada took part in Operation Baaz Tsuka near the village of Zangabad, driving Taliban insurgents out of the region and into the hinterland. Within a month, the main road leading into Zangabad was re-opened, and over 400 families returned to their homes and began farming. The Canadian International Development Agency (www.acdi-cida.gc.ca) and UNICEF (www.unicef.org) brought aid into the area shortly thereafter.
- March 2007 – Canada took part in the British-led Operation Achilles in Helmand province. Canadians positioned themselves along the Helmand provincial border, hoping to capture Taliban insurgents fleeing the province for safe haven in Kandahar. The operation was a major military success.

These successful operations were accompanied by good news in one other significant area. In May, NATO forces managed to kill Mullah Dadullah, the Taliban’s most powerful military leader and the architect of the suicide bombing campaign that had plagued the Afghan war landscape for much of 2006. From a

military standpoint, NATO commanders felt that the ink-spot theory was working and collateral successes like the death of Mullah Dadullah were evidence that the strategy was sound.

Training the ANA

With the deployment of the Van Doos in the summer of 2007, the military focus shifted from active engagement with insurgents to training the Afghan National Army (ANA) to assume more

frontline duties. With 1 400 soldiers combat ready, the Van Doos hope to drive that number up as high as they can (perhaps to 2 000) by the time their tour is over. While this plan is ambitious, Canadian military officials are hoping that a more active ANA, combined with the opening of even more ink spots, will create the stability needed for Canada's Provincial Reconstruction Team to bring more aid to the Afghan people.

Questions

1. What is an IED? How effective a weapon is it?

2. What is "the ink-spot theory"? Using evidence from the article, demonstrate whether or not the theory is working.

3. Describe two (2) of the military successes of the 2007 war in Afghanistan.

4. How has the focus of the military shifted with the deployment of the Van Doos?

5. Do you think that Canada will be able to achieve success in Afghanistan? Explain.

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Timeline 2007

Did you know . . .
Heroin from Afghanistan is a major threat to law and order on Canada's streets. It is estimated that 60 per cent of the heroin found in Canada is from Afghanistan.

Background Dates

September 11, 2001 Terrorists attack the United States, knocking down the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and striking the Pentagon.

October 10, 2001 The U.S. and Britain begin war with the Taliban in Afghanistan. Canadian soldiers join them in early 2002.

July 2003 Canada deploys close to 2 000 troops to Kabul.

May 17, 2005 Canada agrees to redeploy its soldiers to Kandahar province after the mission in Kabul ends.

August 2005 Canadian troops begin to shut down the Kabul base and begin the Kandahar mission.

May 17, 2006 Parliament votes to extend the mission in Afghanistan to February 2009.

September 2, 2006 Operation Medusa begins in Panjwahi.

October 2, 2006 The International Red Cross says Canada has not broken any rules in the taking of prisoners in Afghanistan.

2007

With 44 Canadian soldiers killed in Afghanistan since 2002, the Canadian government faced a fresh set of challenges in 2007.

January 30, 2007 The Canadian government announces that there is no plan to extend the mission in Afghanistan beyond 2009.

February 22, 2007 Liberals announce the mission will definitely end in 2009 if they are elected.

February 26, 2007 Prime Minister Harper promises Afghanistan \$200-million in aid.

April 8, 2007 Six Canadians are killed by an IED near Kandahar.

April 23, 2007 News reports put into question Canada's handling of prisoners in Afghanistan.

May 3, 2007 Canada signs a prisoner transfer agreement with Afghanistan to ensure prisoners would not be tortured by Afghan authorities.

May 13, 2007 Mullah Dadullah, a senior Taliban commander, is killed by NATO and Afghan troops.

May 22, 2007 Harper visits Afghanistan and hints that Canada may stay past 2009.

June 21, 2007 A handful of Parti Québécois MLAs refuse to stand and applaud when officers from the Royal 22nd Regiment attend a session in Quebec's National Assembly; 1 700 Canadian Forces personnel are invited to attend a CFL game in Montreal to bring more attention to Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan.

June 22, 2007 A sendoff parade is held for the Royal 22nd Regiment in Quebec City; Harper says Canada will not stay in Afghanistan beyond 2009 unless all parties agree to continue the mission.

June 24, 2007 News reports claim NATO and U.S. forces have killed over 200 Afghan civilians in the first six months of 2007.

July 3, 2007 Canada gives \$30-million to develop the legal system in Afghanistan; nine days later another \$8-million is added.

July 4, 2007 Six Canadians are killed by an IED in a roadside bombing.

July 15, 2007 The Van Doos begin their deployment to Afghanistan.

August 14, 2007 Harper moves Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay into the defence portfolio, Industry Minister Maxime Bernier moves into foreign affairs, and Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor moves to national revenue. MacKay becomes the new voice of the Afghan mission.

August 19, 2007 The Van Doos suffer their first death. Three days later two more soldiers die and a Radio-Canada cameraman is seriously injured.

August 24, 2007 The Ontario government endorses a public effort to rename the highway from CFB Trenton to Toronto the "Highway of Heroes."

September 24, 2007 A Canadian soldier is hit and killed by an enemy mortar shell while repairing an army vehicle near Kandahar.

Source: cbc.ca; ctv.ca

Activity

Use the information in the timeline to write a newspaper article about the war in Afghanistan.

Length of article: 250 words

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Activity: Debate

Quote

"The presence of Canada is needed till Afghanistan is able to defend itself. That day is not going to be in 2009." — Afghan President Hamid Karzai, (*Toronto Star*, September 19, 2007)

Form a group of three. Your teacher will assign one of the following six debate topics and which position you will be taking based on the statements listed below. You will debate another group of three students once the statements have been assigned and you've had a chance to prepare your arguments.

Review the material found in this *News in Review* story. Consult other *News in Review* material from previous stories if you need more background information. You may also want to consult cbc.ca (In Depth: "Afghanistan") for additional information.

Debate Statements

1. If Canadian troops are willing to continue the mission in Afghanistan, then the people of Canada should stand behind them, even if it means extending the mission beyond February 2009.
2. The war in Afghanistan is too costly, and Canada should withdraw its troops immediately.
3. Canada needs to participate in the war in Afghanistan if the Afghan people hope to achieve true independence.
4. If Canada leaves Afghanistan too soon, the Taliban will take over again and the Afghan people will return to oppression.
5. Canadian troops are making real progress both militarily and in terms of reconstruction. The troops should stay, even if it means extending the mission to beyond February 2009.
6. Afghanistan will never embrace democracy, and Canadians are kidding themselves if they think they can persuade the Afghan people to accept democratic governance.

You and your team will either be for the statement (the pro side) or against the statement (the con side) in this debate. Prepare your debate based on the structure listed below. Make sure everyone in your group gets a chance to speak.

Suggested Debate Format

Activity	Time
Opening statement – Pro	1 minute
Opening statement – Con	1 minute
Point #1- Pro	2 minutes
Rebuttal – Con	1 minute
Point #2 – Pro	2 minutes
Rebuttal – Con	1 minute
Point #3 – Pro	2 minutes
Rebuttal – Con	1 minute
Point #1- Con	2 minutes
Rebuttal – Pro	1 minute
Point #2 – Con	2 minutes
Rebuttal – Pro	1 minute
Point #3 – Con	2 minutes
Rebuttal – Pro	1 minute
Closing statement – Con	2 minutes
Closing statements – Pro	2 minutes
Total	24 minutes