

Monuments commémoratifs en pierre de la base opérationnelle avancée de Ma'sum Ghar

Les monuments commémoratifs en pierre situés sous le drapeau canadien à la base opérationnelle avancée de Ma'sum Ghar étaient des vestiges importants de ceux qui ont donné leur vie en Afghanistan. Tous les efforts ont été déployés pour les faire rapatrier au Canada, mais en raison de l'état de nombreuses pierres et des règles régissant l'importation de pierres et de terre de l'extérieur du Canada, on a décidé de les laisser in situ. Cette décision n'a pas été prise à la légère puisque le sergent-major de la Force opérationnelle, après consultation de

ses hommes et des officiers, a recommandé que les pierres et autres souvenirs associés au site soient enterrés sous la croix celtique dans le coin inférieur gauche du drapeau. L'enterrement solennel serait un défilé et aurait lieu avec un aumônier présent pour bénir le site; en effet, les pierres seraient placées dans le sol dans lequel les morts se sont battus et sont morts.

Voici une sélection d'articles de journaux et de photographies montrant le site et le service funéraire.

AFGHAN MEMORIES Soldiers create special tribute for fallen comrades



BAZ RATNER, REUTERS

Canadian soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 22nd Royal Regiment, carry a stone bearing the name of a fallen comrade during a ceremony in FOB Masum Gar, Panjwaili district, in Kandahar. Canada will bring home the last of its combat troops by the end of July, after nearly 10 years in Afghanistan. Read the full story on page A8.

Canada's War Winds Down: Development effort is an uncertain legacy that is hard to track, **Opinion, A13**

Sacrifices set in stone

Remembering the war dead

BY MATTHEW FISHER

MASUM GAR, Afghanistan • Most of the Canadian soldiers who attended a memorial Wednesday for their comrades killed on the front lines west of Kandahar City knew at least one of the names painted on the weather-beaten stones that together stood as a symbol of Canada's sacrifice.

But for Cpl. Dan Graham, of Hamilton, the emotional sunset ceremony, during which the stones that made up the Maple Leaf rock mural were solemnly buried, hit even closer to home.

The 26-year-old Griffon helicopter door-gunner from Lord Strathcona's Horse (the Royal Canadians) flew out to this rugged forward operating base to remember his brother, Mark, a sprinter for Canada at the Barcelona Olympics who was killed in September 2006 when troops from 1 Royal Canadian Regiment were inadvertently strafed by two U.S. air force A-10 Warthogs.

"It was tough," Graham said of the service commem-

orating 72 of the 156 soldiers who have died in Afghanistan since 2002.

"The whole thing since my brother died has been tough" said Graham. "It is a long road.

"Being here where it happened, it is 40 C today, and you don't think it is possible to get the shivers. But like the next-of-kin visit my parents made to Kandahar a couple of years ago, it is good for the grieving process.

"As they were carrying the stones for burial, I had a combination of all the emotions. I was thinking of the day my brother died. Of what it was like three weeks after it happened. Of what it is like now."

Graham's parents were understandably unhappy when he insisted on serving in Kandahar on what is Canada's last combat tour here.

"But it was something I wanted to do," he said. "It is a bit easier for them knowing that I am flying in helicopters and not out on the roads. They didn't know that I was coming here today, but I'll let them know, for sure."

The stone memorial was

the brainchild of a group of Americans and South Africans based at Masum Gar who volunteered their free time to build a tribute to the Canadians who have been responsible for security in the Taliban heartland of Panjwai since 2006.

"It may be that only about 70 of our soldiers are remembered in these stones but they represent all that we have left here," said Capt. Richard Bernatchez, who personally knew several of the men whose names were on the stones.

During his years in the armed forces, Brig.-Gen. Dean Milner said he had crossed paths with about 20 of the men and women remembered in Masum Gar's memorial.

"It is a big moment," the Canadian contingent commander said of Wednesday's ceremony, one of many this summer marking the end of Canada's 65-month combat mission in the south.

"This is a great little monument that symbolizes a lot of sacrifices. It is an important opportunity to remember those great soldiers from all the brigades and bases."

POSTMEDIA NEWS



Canadian Brig.-Gen. Dean Milner, right, watches as soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 22nd Royal Regiment carry a stone bearing the name of a fallen comrade during a ceremony at Forward Operating Base Masum Ghar, in Kandahar province, Wednesday. Canada will bring home the last of its combat troops by the end of July, after nearly 10 years fighting in Afghanistan.



