

HSTR 426A: Final Paper

Afghanistan: Behind the scenes of Canada's Mission: 2009-2011

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Literature regarding Canada's mission in Afghanistan concentrates on the overall success of the mission, the larger operations at work: such as TFK, PRT, and OMLT, or the politics of the war in Ottawa: such as the Manley Report. While these resources offer important insights into the larger roles and operations of the Canadian mission, little literature refers to Headquarters. These interviews are first of value because they review an event that deserves to be memorized: Canada spent an entire decade in Afghanistan and it became Canada's longest war in which lives were lost. Their efforts can not be in vain. More notably, the interviews of HQ<sup>1</sup> Afghanistan veterans document the past by preserving insights not found in already existing sources and recorded factual evidence that can be used to create primary documents from which historians can reconstruct the role of HQ and the mission. HQ has been a topic neglected by historians or journalists writing about the Afghanistan mission. These interviews begin to fill the gaps on the missing information about the mission.

The interviews of Major Scott Osborne, Commander Mike Mangin, and Lieutenant Colonel Scott Long describe various responsibilities in HQ. These recollections generated detailed reports of various job duties and responsibilities in HQ, which give you a 'peek' into what actually happens at headquarters. One of the greatest, undeniable strengths of these interviews is that they are personal testimonies of a specific military topic that has been neglected. The Afghanistan veterans' descriptions were detailed, especially when talking about memories. When asked if they remembered arriving and what it was like, every veteran described the flight over, though the experiences varied, the flight over was a memorable event to the start of their rotation. The accounts support that headquarters isn't just the place that

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<sup>1</sup> Head quarters

decisions are made; its so much more than that, and each job is essential to the effectiveness of HQ.

Everyone has a specific role, and you are chosen specifically for this role. Lieutenant Colonel Scott Long was the current operations chief at CJOC<sup>2</sup> in RC S<sup>3</sup> and his account demonstrates that HQ is a place where operations are planned, executed, coordinated, and support is given to those current operations. The majority of day to day operations were largely the coordination of the large scale operations, which are normally 1 week-3/4months in length. He and his team, of up to 60 people, would join the operations planning staff for the last part of the planning process, take the plan, and would implement the plan (put it into motion). The plan gets the departure, but LCol Long notes there are changes that can happen that affect the operations (weather, bad guys, good guys) and that requires coordination to accommodate the plan to the changes. LCol Long and his current operations team took plans and implement them, but they would also have to do a lot of contingency planning along the way to make sure the end state of the plan is achieved. To make sure his team was effective as they were in very high pressured roles, he broke up of tasks and jobs within his team by utilizing people's skills and placed them in positions where those skills were utilized. All team members were also given extensive training package that ensured a consistent equal training within the team.<sup>4</sup>

Commander Mike Mangin's account demonstrates the various responsibilities of a Liaison Officer between RC S and ISAF<sup>5</sup>. Mangin was responsible for various duties in HQ such as: briefing operations, getting permission for Operations and Rules of Engagement, and

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<sup>2</sup>Canadian Joint Operations Command

<sup>3</sup> Regional Command South

<sup>4</sup>Lieutenant Colonel Scott Long, interview by Caisa Heyes, 12 March 2018, in Victoria, British Columbia. Audio recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

<sup>5</sup>International Security Assistance Force

especially supporting his commander's views in meetings. In meetings, his responsibility was to make sure that his commander's views were being represented. Commander Mangin reported that when supporting his commander's views, most of the times there was not a dichotomy of views, it was much more nuanced. But there were situations where he did have to respectfully disagree with Generals, in support of his commander's views<sup>6</sup>. For example:

British Commander Nick Carter was who Cdr. Mangin represented, and the Commander wanted to ban the importation of fertilizer, as it was being used in homemade IED's. RC S wanted to seize the high explosive fertilizer and replace it with fertilizer that can't be used for IED's: they would buy it with their money but ISAF didn't necessarily agree with that. Cdr. Mangin got called into a meeting with General McChrystal (four star), and other three star generals who were discussing Carter's view on the ban of fertilizer. Cdr. Mangin sat there and let the conversation carry on but he knew his commander believed otherwise. When opportunity struck, he respectfully disagreed with the generals. But on top of disagreeing, he had stories and facts to support his commander's view, and General McChrystal liked it when people call it "BS" but wants facts to support this<sup>7</sup>.

Liaison officers are also responsible for the relationships between staff. Cdr. Mangin recalls that RC S commander would want his officers to come back regularly so they were familiar with the staff there. His Commander saw it important for the face to face interactions. So, every 3 weeks Mangin would travel to RC S Kandahar for 2-3 days. Here he would ask fellow staff about friction between peoples, if there are troubles between peoples in ISAF HQ and RC S. This demonstrates that the various agencies and HQs in Afghanistan were concerned

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<sup>6</sup> Commander Mike Mangin, interview by Caisa Heyes, 02 March 2018 in Victoria, British Columbia, Audio Recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

<sup>7</sup> Commander Mike Mangin, interview by Caisa Heyes, 02 March 2018 in Victoria, British Columbia, Audio Recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

about effective relationships between staff of the HQ and fellow HQs. Strong relationships prove essential in stressful situations that many staff were forced to be in.<sup>8</sup>

Major Scott Osborne's account demonstrates the importance of keeping everyone in the various HQ by liaison to be informed on what was going on. His main job was creating briefings: one at 7am (start of shift), one at lunch, and then lastly 7pm. He was given the freedom to write about the issues he saw fit that HQ Kandahar Airfield needed to know about. His account generates a report of the efforts soldiers go through to make sure everyone is informed. He spent all of his time reading to gather his information to put into his briefings: battle group ops orders, company ops order, cyops reports, General Petraeus in HQ Kabul, got stuff from Americans, talking to Intel, and watch stuff. Major Osborne was so efficient with his briefings that when ISAF British Commander Nick Carter expected a briefing from HQ Kandahar Airfield, Scott was thrown off guard but improvised an efficient briefing to have Carter compliment him on the quality of that briefing. As a LO<sup>9</sup> he was responsible that both TFK and CJOC knew what was going on. He would share information, questions (find out stories agencies wanted to know about), coordinating, intelligence communication, logistics), and was also responsible for the confirmation of drones for assignments<sup>10</sup>. Major Osborne's account of drones was extremely informative and notes the importance of drones for the creation of route Hyena. Armed drones provided air support and protection for construction groups, as well an armed drone could fire at Taliban who would watch the construction of the road<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup>Commander Mike Mangin, interview by Caisa Heyes, 02 March 2018 in Victoria, British Columbia, Audio Recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

<sup>9</sup> Liaison Officer

<sup>10</sup>Major Scott Osborne, interview by Caisa Heyes, 28 February 2018, in Victoria, British Columbia, Audio Recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

<sup>11</sup>Major Scott Osborne, interview by Caisa Heyes, 28 February 2018, in Victoria, British Columbia, Audio Recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

LCol. Scott Long and Maj. Scott Osborne's accounts demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of working in the international environment that is HQ. Maj. Osborne and LCol. Scott Long both brought up the challenges of working with International organizations. Maj. Scott Osborne recalled a time as the senior LO for RC S, that ISAF would ask for his slides or briefings. But for whatever reasons, they would misinterpret the information. He mentioned this to demonstrate that even though you are working with people who speak the same language as you, information can be misunderstood. He highlights how the culture of armies differ from countries, and the further and further you get away from culture, the easier it is to get confused/misconstrued. But notes this is why his job as an LO was so important; it removes the need to ask chief of staff questions you can ask liaison officer and can understand the personalities and why that order is going that way etc., they hopefully and usually have nuanced understanding. He used this example to think about how hard it must be to communicate with people where English isn't in their first language<sup>12</sup>.

LCol. Scott Long noticed the challenges associated with people when English wasn't their first or great second language in the coordination of operations. He and his staff worked to combat this challenge by creating effective training packages that new members would be given. From that training package, they were assigned appropriate jobs. He notes that the members of his teams were dealing with real top stuff, and if their English was not sufficient, they weren't going to do certain roles<sup>13</sup>. By running people through when they arrived, they made sure people were in positions in CJOC that best suited peoples skill sets. As a result, you have people who are happy doing their job because they could do their job and were assigned it effectively. But

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<sup>12</sup> Major Scott Osborne, interview by Caisa Heyes, 28 February 2018, in Victoria, British Columbia, Audio Recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

<sup>13</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Scott Long, interview by Caisa Heyes, 12 March 2018, in Victoria, British Columbia, Audio recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

LCol Long also acknowledged the strengths of an international environment. For instance, he recalls a Romanian Lieutenant Colonel who was a really good planner and knew a lot about electronic warfare and a major part of his planning regarding that. One of the ops they did plan was the planning for the elections September 2010 in the CJOC.

When asked about their job duties, individual veteran's recollection provided solid, valuable nuggets of information regarding their specific responsibilities in HQ. These interviews are valuable to military history because they are part of the decision-making officers or teams and these personal accounts are important resources for military and organizational history<sup>14</sup>. Specifically, because interviewees were coordinators and planners. While personal testaments are inherently limited in their scope in that they present only one viewpoint, it was only by comparing them with other recollections and resources do you get an accurate picture of HQ and the Canadian mission. In most instances, the memories complemented each other, each providing unique details that, when taken as a whole, provided a fairly compelling picture of what is 'behind the scenes'.

HQ Afghanistan is a topic that military historians, and journalists and other writers in general have neglected to write about. The few secondary sources that remark on HQ are lacking in detail, they give you very broad responsibilities, and to be summed up are uninformative. One of the few sources that referenced the HQ responsibilities was the Canadian Forces website that stated Kandahar Air Field revolved around TFK and were "responsible for the delivery of logistics and administrative support to the units and personnel of Joint Task Force

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen J. Lofgren, "The Status of Oral History in the Army: Expanding a Tradition," *Oral History Review* 30, no. 2 (Summer-Autumn 2003): 86/87

Afghanistan”<sup>15</sup>. Because of their focus on the subjective, interviews on headquarters Afghanistan can provide insights not normally found in more traditional reviews or summaries. These interviews begin to fill the gaps of neglected aspects of the mission from scholarly sources.

The account of LCol Scott Long compliments the research that reviews how the Canadian Forces were reacting to the changes that were occurring from influxes of soldiers, as well as the changes the Canadian government were asking of the mission. 2008 saw newly elected President Obama U.S. declare a plan to deploy more troops to Kandahar<sup>16</sup> and the publication of the Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan, chaired by the former Liberal cabinet minister John Manley. The Manley Report emphasized that Canada's role must place greater emphasis on diplomacy and reconstruction, and the Canadian military focus must shift gradually from combat to training Afghan national security forces<sup>17</sup>.

LCol Scott Long notes that the influx new troops allowed CF to prioritize a lot better because they had a lot more resources, could expand their priority list, and were able to do a lot more than previous regimes had been able to do. Because they now had force density, they were able to blanket a much larger area of the south, had more enablers and artillery (indirect support, aviation support, close air support), and were able to do high level operations thanks to the strategic support; as well they were able to tackle border control issues<sup>18</sup>. This flow of American troops also demonstrated a change in power and a shift in the focus of the war: power was now shifting south, toward the deserts and river valleys where the Taliban were born and a majority

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<sup>15</sup>Canadian Forces. “ARCHIVED - Joint Task Force Afghanistan”. National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-abroad-past/op-athena-jtf-afghanistan.page>. Accessed 15 February 2018.

<sup>16</sup>Graeme Smith and Steven Chase, “Canada poised to cede command in Kandahar,” *The Globe and Mail*; Toronto, 12 Dec 2008: A.1.

<sup>17</sup>J. Manley, D.H. Burney, J. Epp, P. Tellier, and P. Wallin, “Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan: Final Report,” Ottawa, 22

<sup>18</sup>Lieutenant Colonel Scott Long, interview by Caisa Heyes, 12 March 2018, in Victoria, British Columbia, Audio recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria



of the insurgents were local tribesmen<sup>19</sup>. The flow of new troops from the USA allowed Canadians to focus on issues that the Canadian government reported were central concerns to the Canadian mission. As well, the flow of new troops also meant that they were able to focus on a huge component of the Manley report that demanded focus on training the Afghan National Security Forces<sup>20</sup>.

The 2008 Manley Report explicitly calls that the Canadian military mission must shift its emphasis from combat to training operations<sup>21</sup>. LCol Long found this was an issue too as part of his visits to Afghanistan when he was the chief observer controller trainer at CMTC in Wainwright Alberta from 2007-2008. In this position, he had the opportunity to travel to Afghanistan up to 6 times as part of a training assistance team. They would go over and would talk to the battle group that they had trained previously and find out how they were doing, how effective the training they received was, and if there were any gaps in their training and areas they needed to improve on. They would then bring the lessons back and would incorporate those identified changes or areas of success and would incorporate that into the training of their replacements. He took the advice that Canadian troops needed to be better trained at training the ANP, so he took that advice and applied it to the CMTC. Better training of Canadian troops and more troops meant Canada could focus on the training of Afghan forces, specifically, increasing significantly the number of ANS and make them a more professional force<sup>22</sup>. Increasing the security footprint comforted the local population that the government was working with the

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<sup>19</sup>Graeme Smith, "Kandahar base braces for wave of U.S. troops," *The Globe and Mail*; Toronto, 09 Dec 2008: A.15

<sup>20</sup>Lieutenant Colonel Scott Long, interview by Caisa Heyes, 12 March 2018, in Victoria, British Columbia. Audio recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

<sup>21</sup>J. Manley, D.H. Burney, J. Epp, P. Tellier, and P. Wallin, "Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan: Final Report," Ottawa, 22

<sup>22</sup>Lieutenant Colonel Scott Long, interview by Caisa Heyes, 12 March 2018, in Victoria, British Columbia. Audio recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

coalition to make the security issue better<sup>23</sup>. The findings that LCol found with his visits to Afghanistan and the need to strengthen ANP are concurrent with the Manley Report conducted by Canada. Whether the Manley Report influenced the decisions is not known, but it does support that those on the ground and at home were seeing the same issues.

AN influx of 80,000 troops meant structural and leadership changes. Rapid construction at Kandahar Air Field commenced and demonstrated that the United States was planning to add thousands more soldiers<sup>24</sup>. Adding 80,000 troops, the logistical piece of the command and the control, the infrastructure, have to be improved. LCol Scott Long stated that he and his troops were ready, aware, and trained 10 months ahead of time of this influx. He describes his team, those above and below him, spent 10 months prior to getting to Afghanistan working a lot of the key pieces. So, when they hit the ground, they knew what they had to do and what was coming, had good understandings of what General Carter's intent was for the south, knowing they were going to get a significant increase number in troops in the south, which would allow the south to do some high level divisional ops<sup>25</sup>. While LCol Long agrees that it was a good thing to have the influx, he reminded that it came with its own challenges. He admits that the Americans led the way for the logistical support with air transport and their naval CB's (specialized folks) but reminds that they weren't the only ones involved, Canadians, British, Australians were involved as well, and other NATO countries<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup>Lieutenant Colonel Scott Long, interview by Caisa Heyes, 12 March 2018, in Victoria, British Columbia. Audio recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

<sup>24</sup>Graeme Smith and Steven Chase, "Canada poised to cede command in Kandahar," *The Globe and Mail*; Toronto, 12 Dec 2008: A.1.

<sup>25</sup>Lieutenant Colonel Scott Long, interview by Caisa Heyes, 12 March 2018, in Victoria, British Columbia. Audio recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

<sup>26</sup>Lieutenant Colonel Scott Long, interview by Caisa Heyes, 12 March 2018, in Victoria, British Columbia. Audio recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

Part of the Manley Report pronounced Canada needs to extend aid to processes such as elections and contributing to Afghan-led political reconciliation efforts aimed at weakening the insurgency and fostering a sustainable peace<sup>27</sup>. Two veterans participated in the elections of Afghanistan in 2009 and 2010. Cdr. Mangin was present for the 2009 elections. On 20 August 2009, Afghanistan held elections to fill the national presidency and 420 provincial-council seats. Cdr. Mangin notes that this was an extremely tense atmosphere and no one knew what to expect<sup>28</sup>. When Afghans went to the polls in August 2009, they were doing so amid one of the most challenging environments that had ever faced a nationwide vote anywhere. For weeks, the Taliban had been threatening to attack polling sites and wreak reprisals on voters. Armed men can intimidate poll workers or even capture entire polling stations and commit fraud in favor of a particular candidate, which appears to have occurred in many districts around the country<sup>29</sup>. The day of the election, they anticipated violence but to everyone's surprise, it was a relatively quiet day<sup>30</sup>.

Unfortunately the voting suffered from serious failings; widespread and systematic fraud<sup>31</sup> and a new election was announced for 7 November. When asked how ISAF HQ responded to having to plan for another election, Cdr. Mangin reported ISAF was "pretty accepting of it... We were always planning something. If it wasn't the next election, it would have been something else", they took it as "[their] next mission. We had done it once.. the

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<sup>27</sup>Kenneth Holland, "The Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team: The Arm of Development in Kandahar Province." *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no. 2 (2010): 280-281

<sup>28</sup>Commander Mike Mangin, interview by Caisa Heyes, 02 March 2018 in Victoria, British Columbia, Audio Recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

<sup>29</sup>Scott Worden, "Afghanistan: An Election Gone Awry." *Journal of Democracy* 21 no. 3, (2010):19-20

<sup>30</sup>Commander Mike Mangin, interview by Caisa Heyes, 02 March 2018 in Victoria, British Columbia, Audio Recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

<sup>31</sup>Scott Worden, "Afghanistan: An Election Gone Awry," *Journal of Democracy* 21 no. 3, (2010)

planning was fresh”<sup>32</sup>. While the 2009 Afghan elections marked a peaceful transition of power in a country that has had few such successes in recent decades, this achievement was bought at great cost. The most direct causes of the 2009 fraud were a fundamentally flawed voter-registration process, corrupt polling staff, a politically compromised electoral commission, and a dearth of ways to hold dishonest candidates and election officials to account<sup>33</sup>.

In 2009 and 2010, unlike in previous years, election security was to be mainly the responsibility of Afghan forces, as opposed to international security forces. This worried many observers, given the reputation that the Afghan National Police have earned for embracing corruption while fumbling the fight against the insurgency<sup>34</sup>. To combat this concern, LCol Long noted that for the 2010 election, his team worked closely with ANSF LO in the Ops Centre and their planning team to make sure they were in close collaboration and cooperation. ANSF had the lead, but the conduct about how the voting stations were going to be set up were done by Afghan partners was done with recommendations from NATO; but they essentially advised them<sup>35</sup>. To stay away from the issues of the 2009 election, NATO forces made sure to support Afghan colleagues by making sure polling stations were secure and protected and making sure that when they were closed that the ballots were safely transported to the site that they were going to be counted on; but all that planning was led by Afghan colleagues and only supported by

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<sup>32</sup>Commander Mike Mangin, interview by Caisa Heyes, 02 March 2018 in Victoria, British Columbia, Audio Recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

<sup>33</sup>Scott Worden, “Afghanistan: An Election Gone Awry.” *Journal of Democracy* 21 no. 3, (2010): 23

<sup>34</sup>Scott Worden, “Afghanistan: An Election Gone Awry.” *Journal of Democracy* 21 no. 3, (2010):21

<sup>35</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Scott Long, interview by Caisa Heyes, 12 March 2018, in Victoria, British Columbia. Audio recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

NATO forces<sup>36</sup>. Again, this comes back down to how training the ANS was becoming part of the Canadians mission.

Personal accounts are not exempt from biases. The 3 interviews were unique when asked about their opinions on whether the mission was a success. Each veteran had a different answer to the question of the success of the mission, that arguably represents the divided feelings of the Afghanistan war that was found throughout the nation. Major Scott Osborne insisted that the intervention was successful for what was asked of Canadian Forces, but recognizes one of the heavily criticized aspects of the mission being a lack of troops<sup>37</sup>, suggesting that if there were more on the ground they would have been able to do more<sup>38</sup>.

While Commander Mike Mangin was hopeful when he left that we'd achieve the hold, he admits "we needed to commit to stay there for a generation" to implement real change. Commander Mike Mangin reminded that the West was never able to give the Afghans the sense we were there for the long haul, due to NATO reassuring that they will eventually pull out. Commander Mangin suggested that when NATO does pull out, the Afghans are either: going to leave and they aren't in it for long term, do nothing, or side with insurgents<sup>39</sup>.

Lieutenant Colonel Scott did not waver when asked about the success of the mission. He had the benefit of seeing the Afghans in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 (as part of training visits for his job as the chief observer controller trainer at CMTC in Wainwright Alberta 2007-2008 and year long employment). In those visits throughout the years, he saw the impact of Canadian efforts on

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<sup>36</sup>Lieutenant Colonel Scott Long, interview by Caisa Heyes, 12 March 2018, in Victoria, British Columbia. Audio recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

<sup>37</sup>Michael K Carroll and Greg Donaghy, eds. *From Kinshasa to Kandahar: Canada and Fragile States in Historical Perspective* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2016), 171

<sup>38</sup>Major Scott Osborne, interview by Caisa Heyes, 28 February 2018, in Victoria, British Columbia, Audio Recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

<sup>39</sup>Commander Mike Mangin, interview by Caisa Heyes, 02 March 2018 in Victoria, British Columbia, Audio Recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

the ground: traffic on roads, schools/education and attendance there, water treatment plants, effective security forces equipped to do their job, were all noticeably changed, and when he left he took great satisfaction that they contributed to that. He suggests these changes had a lasting impact and are still seen today, and while there are the odd security issues today in Kabul, the presence and training of ANSF have allowed Afghan security forces to effectively deal with the threats. However, he recognizes a feeling of unfinished business towards the mission and does wish Canada could go back. He admits that Canada now has minimal influence in Afghanistan and that it is up to their security forces on what they will do democratically: “the Afghans will run their state the way they feel they need to run it and see fit” he argued “And if that includes discussions with Taliban, so be it”<sup>40</sup>. While no definitive answer can be given right now regarding the ‘success’ of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan, what can be said is that each veterans personal attitude of the mission represents the torn nation Canada became over the issue.

Additional strengths of these specific oral history interviews are in the proximity of the interviews to the ending of the Afghanistan mission. Unlike most military oral histories, decades can occur before someone is interviewed about their experience in the forces. Whereas these interviews are conducted approximately 7 years after the veterans were in Afghanistan. But the passage of time still allows memory to forget. There were moments where minor details would skip their mind. The details that were forgotten were not detrimental information, it was rather information that would make what they were talking about richer i.e.: such as countries of origin that a certain team member was from.

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<sup>40</sup>Lieutenant Colonel Scott Long, interview by Caisa Heyes, 12 March 2018, in Victoria, British Columbia. Audio recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

There are many other influences which can affect memories besides the passage of time: passion, commitment, fear, interaction with others, and the media. One of the veterans had the experience to work with a very controversial figure in the American Media. Commander Mike Mangin worked with former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, or as he was known in Afghanistan, Lieutenant General Michael Flynn. Michael Flynn pleaded guilty in December 2017 to lying to the FBI about conversations with Russia's ambassador Sergey Kislyak<sup>41</sup>.

Flynn would sit at Cdr. Mangin's desk during meetings and Flynn personally made an effort to give Cdr. Mangin a written thanks for letting him use his desk, something Mangin notes as going out of his way to do. When asked about his impression of Flynn, Cdr. Mangin really liked Flynn, and described him as a "gentlemen, intelligent, personable" and being in shock and in disbelief when he heard about the ordeals of Russia unfolding<sup>42</sup>. Fortunately for Cdr. Mangin, the American media did not change his personal impression of Flynn, however, the media can still act as a powerful tool to persuade people accounts of events and impressions.

Lofgren suggests that one of the aims of Military History interviews are that they capture historical-dramatical events<sup>43</sup>. Not only do these interviews capture the major event of Canada in Afghanistan, they capture operations and other historical-dramatic events. As previously mentioned, the interviews cover the experience of planning and coordinating for the 2009 and 2010 Afghan elections. These were monumental events in Afghanistan, in terms of democracy but also the transfer and responsibility to the ANSF. These accounts also acknowledge many

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<sup>41</sup> Jeremy Herb, Katelyn Polantz, Evan Perez and Marshall Cohen, "Flynn pleads guilty to lying to FBI, is cooperating with Mueller," CNN, Fri December 1, 2017. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/12/01/politics/michael-flynn-charged/index.html>

<sup>42</sup> Commander Mike Mangin, interview by Caisa Heyes, 02 March 2018 in Victoria, British Columbia, Audio Recording, RUSI of Vancouver Island: Military Oral History Project at the University of Victoria

<sup>43</sup> Stephen J. Lofgren, "The Status of Oral History in the Army: Expanding a Tradition," Oral History Review 30, no. 2 (Summer-Autumn 2003)

operations in the Afghanistan mission such as: Operation Strike of The Sword, Operation Panther Claw, the creation of the Leatherneck Division by US Marines, and Route Hyena. These interviews also reflect on other events too. Commander Mike Mangin was present in HQ when American Soldier Bowe Bergdahl was captured. He noted HQ was captivated by him. He attributes this captivation to the legacy of Vietnam; soldier went MIA and were never found, and that strikes a cord to many Americans still.

Today, oral history is increasingly in the hands of trained historians and is becoming more important as well as more popular every year. Why many historians underestimate the importance of oral history is something of a mystery. The answer probably lies in the common background. We are simply not accustomed to thinking in terms of oral evidence. We are taught to rely primarily on the written record and to question the credibility of word-of-mouth evidence. For topics such as Afghanistan post 2001, historically, its not considered history. It is still a fresh wound to many, some unable to believe that 7 years have passed since Canada withdrew (2011). While these stories are just pieces of the whole picture, the more pieces historians find, the more clearly that picture becomes.

History never amounts to more than one person's interpretation of events; every historical relic, story, anecdote and memory is just individual bricks. When combined with other similar bricks, they form a solid foundation. No single person's experience can paint the complete picture, but each can add valuable pieces. When viewed from this perspective, oral history is one of the most important analytical tools available to researches today; and its importance is destined to grow as technology advances, which continues to transform the type of materials being sent to archives. Without such traditional sources as correspondence files, diaries, and



personal notes, oral history may become the only viable alternative left for those wanting to obtain the same type of insights these traditional sources provided.

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