

INTERNATIONAL

Former UPEI Student Anxious To Serve Overseas

Josh Lewis
Sports Editor

A former UPEI student will soon be deployed to Afghanistan as part of the Canadian Forces mission in Kandahar.

Cpl. Ben Miller, a reservist from Elmwood, P.E.I., will head to the war-torn Middle East country in February, where he will be transporting combat troops in light-armoured (LAV-III) and mine-proof (Nyala) vehicles as part of the 4 Engineers Support Regiment (4ESR). While Miller is looking forward to the experience, he wasn't always so sure about putting his life on the line.

"At first I thought it'd be an adventure," Miller said from CFB Galetown recently. "But I sat down and thought about it and realized that I could get killed. So I took my name out (of consideration).

"Later on, I realized that I could just as easily die from being hit by a drunk driver. I decided that not very often does your country ask for volunteers to go overseas. I'd be going over with some of the best trained soldiers in the world, as well as some of the finest human beings this country has to offer. Sometimes you just have to take a chance. It doesn't matter how much they train you. There are thousands of possible situations and variables. You won't know how you react under pressure in different situations."

Miller, one of 17 PEI Regiment soldiers leaving in February, strongly



Photo: Master Corporal Lester Budden
Corporal Maxime Gaboriault is assigned to foot patrol in the remote village of Morghan Kechah located south east of Kandahar City, Afghanistan.

believes that Canada has an important role to play in the fight against terrorism.

"If we don't go there and stop the terrorists elsewhere, they're going come here. If we don't take the fight to them, they'll take the fight to us when we least expect it, and it'll be another September 11. Our other allies have taken casualties over various missions throughout the world. Now we can take the ball and

lead the way. It's our turn to provide needed support. We have to step up."

Miller, who followed his twin brother Brian into the Canadian Forces, says the decision wasn't taken easily by his parents Alan and Mary and sister Sarah.

"They weren't too impressed when I first told them, but in the end they realized it's my decision and they will support me. And that's all you

can ask for. As for my friends, they've been behind me from day one. I couldn't ask for better support."

He also said seeing Canadian casualties in Kandahar only strengthens his resolve.

"It makes me train harder and do even better, so when the time comes and we have to perform, we are going to perform to the best of our abilities... no matter how tough it is, you look at the guys beside you and they're grinning along with you. In the end, you signed the papers, you realize what you're getting yourself into. And that's the risk you take." Miller says his involvement in the military has definitely helped him personally.

"It's one of the best decisions I've ever made. I thought it would be a good challenge and it was the challenge I was looking for. It's instilled self-confidence, taught me discipline"

Regardless of their personal or political beliefs, Miller urges Canadians to stand behind his comrades.

"Every Canadian should support our soldiers, regardless of what they're doing. We are serving our country all across Canada and the world. It's one of the toughest jobs you can do, with long hours and long days, but you keep on going. You hold your own."

Nadya Bell
CUP Ottawa Bureau Chief

Universities Support Student Reserve Forces

OTTAWA (CUP) -- Students will be able to serve in Afghanistan without quitting their studies after universities across Canada sign a declaration in support of the reserve forces.

The universities agree to defer exams that conflict with the training schedules of student reservists, and re-admit students to their programs if they take a year off to participate in overseas operations.

Students make up 40 per cent of Canada's reserve forces, a larger percentage than in the United States or Australia.

Corporal Ivanka Koulik returned last

December from Afghanistan, where she spent four months driving a truck. She is also a full-time student at the University of Ottawa.

She said universities are usually fine with students taking time off, but that the formal declaration of support will be good. "After all, you're paying for the education."

Reservists are regularly asked to volunteer for Canada's overseas mission in Afghanistan, but the service is not mandatory. They are also called in cases of natural emergency, such as fires or floods.

Navy Lieutenant Ian Livermore said reservists have weekend training and other exercises, during which they

have very little time to devote to their studies. Summer training can also set students behind.

Livermore is asking universities and school boards across the country to sign the statement of support with the Canadian Forces Liaison Council.

So far 157 institutions have signed statements of support, said Livermore, adding he hopes the full list of 301 colleges, universities and school boards will sign on.

All institutions in Quebec, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland have signed, as have many in British Columbia. A quarter of Ontario universities have also signed in support.

Dan Hurley, director of university relations at the University of Winnipeg, said the agreement is about supporting the individual choices of the students.

Before, the University of Winnipeg and many others had informal agreements with students and staff in the reserves.

"With the students, notwithstanding what sort of mission they will be on, it's another opportunity for them to develop themselves and further their education," Hurley said.

Currently, 2,300 troops are serving in the NATO mission in Afghanistan, including 300 reservists.