

Forward Operating Base Ma'sum Ghar Stone Memorials

The stone memorials located under the Canadian flag at Forward Operating Base Ma'sum Ghar where important reminders of those who had given their lives in Afghanistan. Every effort had been made to have them repatriated back to Canada but due to the condition of many of the stones and the rules around importing stones and soil from outside of Canada the decision was made to leave them in-situ. This decision was not made lightly as the Task Force Sergeant Major, following consultation with both his men and the Officers, recommended

that the stones and other various mementoes associated with the site be buried under the Celtic cross at the bottom left corner of the flag. The solemn burial would be a parade and would take place with a padre present to bless the site, in effect the stones would be placed in the ground in which the fallen had fought on and died.

The following is a selection of newspaper articles and photographs showing the site and the burial service.

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, Panjwaii 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.



