

MAJOR GENERAL ANDREW LESLIE

— KABUL & ISAF

When MGen Leslie was appointed Deputy Commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul, Afghanistan in August 2003, Canada had put one of its best field Generals in a tough spot.

Since his return from the field in February 2004, MGen Leslie served as the Acting Assistant Chief of the Land Staff until September 2004, when he became a PhD candidate in War Studies at the Royal Military College of Canada.

MGen Leslie remains convinced of the need for more soldiers and more modern equipment – just what Army transformation plans call for. Also, he says, the Army pace of activity has not slackened, even given the much publicized “operational pause” of the Canadian forces, in which the level of troops deployed on operations has been somewhat reduced. Just because more troops remain at home is not to say that the Army is any less active. It is an

Army axiom that when one is not fighting, one trains to fight. There is much to do.

In an exclusive *FrontLine* interview, our National Security and Intelligence Editor, James Cox, recently talked with him about his experiences in Afghanistan.

For six months you led the security forces in Afghanistan, what was your position and role?

I had two positions. First, my national role was as the Commander Task Force Kabul, commanding all Canadian Forces elements in Afghanistan and other CF elements in the Middle East who supported our operation. In this position, I reported to the Chief of Defence Staff through the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff in NDHQ.

My second appointment was Deputy Commander International Security Assistance Force. My boss was German Army Lieutenant General Götz Gliemerth. He devoted his attention to



SGT FRANK HUDEC

the higher matters of state, working with the Afghan government leaders. I was responsible for the day-to-day running of the Force and the operations it conducted, particularly those that would have an impact across the country, such as heavy weapons cantonment, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of Afghani troops, support to elections, security for the Loyal Jurga and the constitutional results of the Loyal Jurga. Tactical level operations were undertaken by the Kabul Multinational Brigade, brilliantly commanded by Brigadier General Peter Devlin, a Canadian officer.

Can you describe the relationship between ISAF, the US Coalition and other headquarters operating in Afghanistan?

The ISAF area of operations (AO) included Kabul and its environs, a box about 65km north to south and about 40km east to west. The 5500 ISAF troops were located in the Afghani capital city of Kabul which has a population, we thought, of somewhere around 3 million of the probably 28 million people in the country, with more arriving every month as they sought what ISAF and Canada had to offer, namely a relatively secure environment. In accordance with the military-technical agreement signed in St. Petersburg by Afghani Marshal Fahim Kahn (the Afghani Minister of Defence at the time), and the Commander ISAF, we



In Kabul to meet with Afghan officials to talk about combating terrorism, the Hon Bill Graham (then Minister of Foreign Affairs) was greeted by Major General Andrew Leslie, upon his arrival at the Kabul airport in September 2003.

PHOTO: MCPL BRIAN WALSH - 3 REG BATTALION GROUP

operated only within this AO. The US Coalition worked in the rest of the country.

The US Coalition had about 12,000 troops when I was there. ISAF had somewhere in the neighbourhood of 5500. Our relations were excellent. We would meet with our coalition counterparts at various levels at least daily, sometimes more often depending on what issue or crisis had erupted.

The Canadian-American military link was particularly good. After all, we have spent most of our professional lives working on it.

ISAF reported to Headquarters Allied Forces North (AFNORTH – since re-designated Joint Force Command Brunsum). The Commander of AFNORTH was General Jack Deverell of the British Army. He is a superb soldier, commander and gentleman. General Deverell and I “connected” very well and so General Gliemeroth allowed me to continue dealing with AFNORTH and with General Deverell, who was essentially his boss.

I also got on particularly well with Major General (now Lieutenant General) Karimi, who was, in practice, the Afghanis’ J3 or Chief Operations Officer of their army. We would meet five or six times a week, depending on the issue or crisis at hand. After awhile, we began to meet socially, if one can ever really do that in Afghanistan.

I had a lot of interaction with the local Kabul garrison, under Afghanis General Sulange.

Why is Canada in Afghanistan?

As soldiers, we don’t decide where we go. Nor is it a soldier’s job to explain to the people of Canada why we have been sent somewhere.

Having said that, we are in Afghanistan for three reasons. First and foremost, it is in our national security interests to be there. The epicenter of international terrorism is within a thousand kilometres of Kabul. This most virulent form of international terrorism is centred on the Afghanistan/Pakistan border area. Remember too that we lost a good number of Canadians in the attack on the World Trade Centre and the ensuing economic disruption had significant adverse impact on the Canadian economy. So it is in our interest to collaborate with our allies and the legitimate authorities in Afghanistan to stop terrorists from operat-

ing and training in this area and neutralize their ability to recruit new, young terrorists who could harm us.

The second reason has to do with geopolitics. Given the four major ethnicities (of about 18 in total) in Afghanistan, each of which can be broken down further into perhaps as many as 50 sub-groups, each of which can be further divided into subordinate tribes, each with their own distinctive

culture, it remains an international concern that any one of the major groups could gain control and permit the resurgence of Islamic extremists, such as the Taliban. Such a resurgence could very well lead to a destabilized Pakistan and thoughts of a destabilized Pakistan bring questions about the security of Pakistani nuclear weapons. Should Islamic extremists come to control Pakistani nuclear weapons, any reaction by



PHOTO: MCPL BRIAN WALSH

In the back of a LAV, MGen Leslie prepares to head out on patrol with soldiers of 3 RCR.

From a family with a long history of distinguished military service to Canada, Major General Andrew Leslie has, nonetheless, succeeded in making his own mark as one of the few serving Canadian Generals who have found themselves in situations of real conflict and combat.

Educated in Canada, the USA, France, Cyprus, and Switzerland, MGen Leslie joined the Canadian Army Reserve in 1977 while attending the University of Ottawa, where he graduated with an Economics degree, and went on to complete a graduate diploma in military history at the London School of Economics before transferring into the Regular Force in 1981. MGen Leslie has also completed Executive studies at Harvard University and holds a Master’s degree in War Studies from Royal Military College of Canada. He is a graduate of the Canadian Land Force Command and Staff College, the Canadian Forces Staff College, the Advanced Military Studies Course and the National Security Studies Course.

MGen Leslie’s early career covered junior command and staff positions with Canadian mechanized forces in Germany and airborne forces in Canada. Upon promotion to Colonel in 1995, he deployed to UNPROFOR in Croatia as Chief of Staff Sector South, where he was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal for his actions under fire, during the Croatian offensive to restore its borders and eject Serbian forces. From 1997-99 he commanded 1 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group in Edmonton, focusing on live-fire combined arms training.

Promotion to Brigadier General in 1999 brought further advanced military studies before being appointed Director General Information Management Operations in National Defence Headquarters. He then served as Commander Land Forces Central Area from August 2002. Upon promotion to Major General in August 2003, Leslie was appointed Deputy Commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul, Afghanistan in August 2003. He returned to Canada in February 2004.

India, or China or Russia, or the US will have notable consequences for the world. So it is important we “keep a lid on” this geo-political fault-line.

The third reason Canada is in Afghanistan is because the Afghans need us. We are a blessed nation, with a high standard of living. Further, we are very good at this mélange of peacekeeping, peace support, limited war-fighting, night work, humanitarian support. So we should do all we can to help them.

What is your impression of the ability of the Canadian Contingent to do what it was sent to do?

When I was there, there were 33 national members of ISAF. We are the best of the lot, in doing what we do. I don’t deny that I am a very proud Canadian, but I think I can be ruthlessly objective if need be and as Deputy Commander of ISAF, I dealt with all the national contingents. I visited all of them and watched them work. We really are very good at this sort of operation. Why? Something in our character makes us try to understand another point of view, but when necessary we can be very firm, fair and friendly in such a way that people know it is unwise to screw around with us. It was a significant plus that Canada had the single largest contingent in ISAF, which allowed the Canadian Contingent to set the “tone” for the entire mission.

With the help of an interpreter (right), LGen Leslie discusses tactics with LCol Karim, Commander of 1st battalion, Afghan National Army (the battalion that Canada/3 RCR trained).



DND PHOTO

“Our niche may well become this evolving and unique blend of peacekeeping, peace support, humanitarian support, warfighting and carefully selected direct action, all of which is predicated on boots on the ground... We need more boots on the ground.”

We also had some new, effective technologies that assisted us in making some tough, hard-nosed decisions when helping the local authorities, which in turn brought us added credibility.

The logistic support was superb. Wearing my Canadian hat, if a problem reached my level, I could get on the phone to the DCDS with my request and within a matter of days, it would happen. It was never a question of whether we needed what was asked for, the only question asked was, “when do you need it by?”

So, whatever we are doing, we are doing it right, in terms of training and selecting our people. Overall, of the variety of missions I have been on, this one was the best equipped, best trained and most focused.

CF elements deployed to Afghanistan included JTF2 troops. What can you tell us about them?

I cannot discuss any details of their deployment or operations. I can tell you that our JTF2 ranks among the top national Special Forces in the world. They are every bit as good as the British SAS or the US Navy Seals. JTF2 troops are clearly the best we have in the CF. They tend to be more mature at each level and this is often a distinct advantage in operations. They are very effective.

Given your experience in Kabul, was there any one aspect of that operation that struck you as being particularly relevant to the development and enhancement of the Canadian Army?

During the Cold War years particularly, but still prevalent in recent years, armed forces focused on “big” weapons for “big” targets. We had weapons designed to destroy the waves of Soviet tanks expected in an invasion of Western Europe. Large Iraqi armoured formations were decimated from the air in the 1991 Gulf War. The contemporary threat however is largely asymmetric and to defeat the kind of threat one finds in Afghanistan, you need “boots on the ground.”

The terrorists thought nothing of killing innocent Afghani women and children to get at us, keeping in mind that terrorists’ eventual goal is to get us to leave, to run away, so that they can get on with dominating the population and creating conditions to turn back the clock to about 610 B.C.

Military forces still need to be engaged with the people to win their “hearts and minds.” In Kabul therefore, what we needed was the kind of presence provided by able and effective young Canadians in uniform. The fact that we had very sophisticated and sensitive intelligence systems ringing the city had no real relevance to the attitude, moral or confidence of the local population. In many cases perception is reality, so they wanted to see Canadian soldiers out on their feet, on patrol among them along the crowded and sweltering streets and alley-ways of downtown Kabul.

In the past we have talked about doing more with less, but I see a future Army where we need more of more – if we are to continue doing what we are doing. We need many more young men and women at the sharp (fighting) end. We need more infantry battalions, we need more infantry experts and we need more of those sup-

MCPL YVES PROTEAU



PHOTO: MCPL BRIAN WALSH

Heavy Weapons Cantonment Ceremony: ISAF and the Afghan Army succeeded in moving large numbers of heavy weapons from various warlords (tanks, rocket launchers, heavy artillery) out of Kabul. From left: Gen Bizmullah Kahn, the Chief of Defence; General Wardak, the Deputy Minister of Defence for Afghanistan; Canadian Ambassador Chris Alexander; LGen Andrew Leslie; and LGen Karimi, Chief Operations Officer, Afghani Forces.

porting elements that allow us to keep the 'boots on the ground.'

As our American allies continue to develop their impressive technology, our niche may well become this evolving and unique blend of peacekeeping, peace support, humanitarian support, warfighting and carefully selected direct action, all of which is predicated on boots on the ground. *We need more boots on the ground.*

If you had to do it over again, would you do anything differently?

Among some things I might do more of is to give further focus, during the preparatory phase, to the training of our soldiers

who will work with Afghani authorities in the complex of built up areas to assist the Afghanis in the apprehension and detainment of wanted suspects. We did some of that, but with the way our mission evolved, I think we should do more.

Secondly, given that success, particularly in the senior ranks, in missions such as these depends in large part on the quality of personal relationships and knowledge of the culture, I would have liked to have stayed for a year. I received very good pre-deployment training which included a barrage of excellent briefings from a variety of DND staffs and other government departments, but nothing is ever quite as

good as experience. So, had I the choice – and I didn't – I would have stayed for longer. The soldiers can make a difference in six months, but I think the senior command chain would be more effective if it remained in place for about a year.

Wrap up...

MGen Leslie is presently a PhD candidate in War Studies at the Royal Military College of Canada. He will return to active duty in the summer of 2005. It is unknown at this time what position he will be occupy, but it will undoubtedly be in Canada's national interest to put one of her best field commanders in an appointment of central operational significance. **FL**



BGen (ret) James Cox, FrontLine's National Security and Intelligence Editor, ran the intelligence staff under General Wesley Clark at SHAPE, in Mons, Belgium from 1998-2001.

He has since pursued advanced intelligence studies at the Royal Military College of Canada where he is currently a PhD candidate in War Studies. He also serves as the Executive Secretary of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.



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