

**Rough Transcript**  
**Sgt Drew Adkins, 41 Signal Regiment (27 July 2016)**

**Deployment(s):** Golan, Afghanistan 2011

**Interviewer/Transcriber:** LCol M.C. Vernon

***Note: Quotations are not 100% verbatim***

<b>Timecode</b>	<b>Content</b>
0:23	Joined military in grade 11, June 2001. Did basic and trades training. Finished high school and two years at Red Deer College. "The whole reason I joined the military was to deploy overseas." Six months to prepare for deployment.
1:25	Mission? Disputed territory between Israel and Syria. Mission started after 1973 Yom Kippur War when Egypt and Syria attacked Israel. UN Disengagement Observer Force started in 1974. Been there ever since, monitoring Syria and Israel's forces in the area.
2:30	Reaction? Some apprehension from both parents. They knew he liked military and encouraged him to join, but were a little leery of actual deployment. They eventually came on board. He reassured them about the quality of training he'd receive.
3:40	Expectations? A little unsure about the region and people. Didn't know much about it. Stationed on Israeli side initially. Then spent time on Syrian side at headquarters camp. Got to interact with civilian workers, to see Damascus. Had a positive impact on him.
4:50	Knowledge prior? Didn't know a whole lot. A bit of a military history amateur. Took History in college. Started reading more before the mission. Given length of conflict, he was curious to learn why, who's right and wrong. [audio hum]
6:10	Training? Augmentees from all over Canada. Did 2-3 weeks at Peace Support Training Centre in Kingston: mine awareness, UN rules of engagement. Short, compressed, effective. Mission-specific: rules of engagement, ethics of neutrality (which he found really important), mine awareness due to proliferation of minefields on Golan.
8:15	First impressions? Commercial flight, then military flight from Borden to Croatia to Israel (Tel Aviv). "Then I knew I was somewhere way far from home—hot and humid. Long trip to Golan, arriving at midnight. Could hear tanks firing in the distance, a late night Israeli drill. A little apprehensive at first."
9:40	Camp Zouani (sp?) on Israeli side is where half the mission is located. Trailers with two people per room. A few hundred metres square, covered in gravel with old bunkers dating to the 1970s. Views of Golan and mountains to the north. Very green. Crops. Not the desert like you might think. Lusher, greener than expected.
11:00	On Israeli side, not much war debris left, but electrical fence that is

	heavily patrolled by Humvees. No man's land, demilitarized zone, and Syrian side has blown up tanks, trucks. Roads have dragons' teeth to prevent tank movement. Three sets of border crossings. "A pretty hostile area." When he got there, mission was 30 years old. "Thinking: So is this mission working or not? They haven't been fighting, but they still seem just as angry at each other as they were 30 years ago."
13:15	Job? Signal operator, keeping track of everybody, units patrolling border. First month, he was on callsign 3, the Canadian logistics battalion. Then moved to Camp Fouar (sp?) working for headquarters, callsign 0. Would keep track of daily activities, shift work, such as monitoring destruction of unexploded ordnance.
14:50	Time off? Able to have a little time off. Take a vehicle and drive into Damascus for dinner, or a smaller town near base to do some shopping. Same for Israeli side. Also got two 96-hour passes, one on each side. Several guided tour options to choose from. On bus with tour guide. "Really terrific. Good chance to learn about countries out of uniform."
16:30	First leave was in Syria. Rich, Roman and Greek history with Crusader castles. People very friendly, but not fully modernized country like Israel. Israelis friendly too. More modern, more like home. Both had great ruins, geography, history, tour guides.
17:45	Contact with other military? Interacted with Syrians a little, but Israelis were a bit more serious, about their business and less inclined to talk. Syrians would offer food, but he'd politely decline due to "hand hygiene" concerns. Drank tea. "Not supposed to pick a side and it was easy not to pick a side because both were pleasant."
19:10	Memorable incident? His first and only Christmas away from home was significant, tough for a 20-year old. But nice in Holy Land with fellow soldiers. But spent New Year's with the Polish battalion, beautiful feast, new friends in a new place.
20:20	Uneventful? Did a training exercise in which Hezbollah was "supposed to infiltrate". In fact, Hezbollah did fire some rockets into Israel during the exercise, so they had to distinguish between exercise fiction and reality on the ground. Then Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri (sp?) was assassinated, "which got tensions up." There were always minor incidents, like Syrian shepherds approaching too close to the border with their herds. Israeli would snatch shepherds or "bird-watchers" who approached too close to their fence. The Iraq War was still on then, so they did Chemical, Biological and Radiation drills to practice. Sometimes they were ordered to load their magazines, which wasn't ordinary for the mission.
23:25	How satisfying? Extremely, mostly due to interactions with other nationalities: Poles, Slovaks, Austrians, Japanese. Mission commander was Nepalese. This was before Facebook and he has some of these soldiers on his Facebook account now. It was a good way for a 20 year-old to ease himself into the world of overseas deployments.

24:45	One more thing... he actually did peel potatoes (like the military stereotype)
25:15	Coming home? Not intense mission, so no Third Location Decompression leave, but did do some briefings. Flew to Borden, then Edmonton. They got moved up to first class because they were in uniform. Girlfriend (now his wife) picked him up in Edmonton.
26:25	[Record audio hum]
26:40	Transition? It was a little tough. Overseas routine, with a lot of things done for you like meals. Only had to worry about going to gym and doing your job. "Definitely difficult worrying about getting groceries, cleaning house, in-between careers, a bit of a challenge, to get the motivations."
28:10	Afghanistan battle group to Kandahar was announced as he returned from Golan. Really felt the need to participate in a theatre of operations. Volunteered for Roto 11. Had just gotten a full time job with Lacombe Ambulance and could get a leave of absence.
29:50	Reactions? "I knew it would be tough breaking the news to them. Wife was reluctant but knew I wanted to do it and might regret not doing it. Told my parents not to be worried or scared and to support me." New employer was supportive and he nominated them for an employer support award. Attended dinner with Governor General. Fifteen months leave of absence. They gave him a send-off party, including mayor of Lacombe. That's why he's still with them.
31:35	This would be mission transition task force, a composite of people from across Canada. He was in headquarters. Their job was to send everything back home from Afghanistan, something "our generation had never done. Had to go back to Korean War or Second World War... except for Bosnia, Germany on a smaller scale." Information knowledge management task, to help commander track their progress using an existing system(s)...to get a common operating picture. Used Microsoft Sharepoint to get systems to talk to each other.
34:15	Did two big training exercises in Kingston—Defence Land Synthetic Training Environment? Worked through scenarios involving cancelled flights, responding to changes. "I worked harder on those exercises than I did overseas, where it's a marathon not a sprint." It was go-go-go on the exercises. He could see their system taking shape, so it was ready for its use overseas.
36:15	Expectations? Knew security would be significantly tighter than his previous tour and base would be a lot bigger. Expected segregated compounds with a lot of gates and guards.
37:00	Looking for personally? Looking for that experience of knowing what it's like to be in a part of the world that's on the news, war, conflict, how it's happening, and "how I would be able to react." Hopefully have a good perspective on his job and the conflict we're involved in.
38:10	Training concerns? No. Military did as good a job as it could to prepare

	him. Knew he wouldn't be going outside the wire, so didn't do a whole lot of combat preparedness training. Felt really prepared going in.
39:00	Flew from Edmonton to Germany, at the time Will and Kate were getting married. Then to Cyprus and a tactical flight to Kandahar, arriving at 0600 when it was already bright and 30 Celsius, just desert. Bus ride to accommodations. Exhausted, hot, bright, a lot miserable for the first while.
40:20	Took several days to get into sleep cycle, used to heat. Briefings for a few days. Got his bearings.
41:00	Stayed at Canada 5, a long series of Weatherhavens, 10-12 people in each. Sectioned off personal space using groundsheets, with enough room for a bed, desk and locker. Bathrooms were a bit of a hike away, "so we learned not to drink at night". Concrete barriers to protect them from rocket attacks.
42:20	Threats? Rocket attacks were a frequent occurrence. Base was large and rockets weren't that accurate, "but they let us know last Christmas a rocket hit one of the dining facilities and killed two people" You didn't want to get complacent with your rocket drills. Kandahar is close to a good-sized mountain where insurgents could sneak up at night, lay a rocket against a rock with a timing device and whenever it went off it would launch into the base. A couple a week. At end of fighting season, there were daily rocket attacks. "Every once in a while one lands fairly close. So keep doing your drills. Because one could get lucky. So rocket attacks were a significant security threat to me." No significant breaches of security, though ammo stashes were found on the base once in a while, or reports of confirmed insurgents inside the wire. One other big security breach is the linkage to the international airport co-located at the base, Juliet Ramp. Highway runs through the base. Insurgents packed a truck full of explosives and blew a giant hole in the perimeter wall, but no follow-up. It made him think that he was still in the middle of a war zone "and anything could happen."
46:45	Information knowledge management job—"was pretty important" based on British redeployment from Iraq, where they didn't pay close attention and lost a huge amount of files that resulted in a lawsuit from soldiers. Needed to get files/materials gathered, organized and packed in triwall boxes, tracked and retrievable back in Canada. Also dealt with backing up and packing up electronic data, like hard drives from laptops at the forward operating bases and other computers.
49:50	Canada's pulling out, but others remain? "Big American war machine is moving all around you, and you're checking out the casualties online, but you don't have a dog in the fight, but emphasis to us was that Canadians had done a good job and our role was to maintain that legacy. Took a lot of pride in leaving the base in better shape than when we arrived. A lasting, positive impression. So people appreciated what we'd done in past 10 years."

51:30	Morale/motivation? "I'm not sure it negatively affected us. We knew why we were there. In order to honour the Fallen and those who came before us, it was our job to do it right, to keep that legacy."
52:15	Memorable time? Got to participate in the last Canada Day in Afghanistan. The last prime minister's visit to Kandahar. And last Remembrance Day at the memorial/cenotaph in Kandahar. On 2 December he was in the final parade as they lowered the flag on the base. "The sergeant major said, 'As the flag comes down, everyone salutes; everyone sings' and that's not something in my career I'll ever get to experience again. Saluting and singing O Canada for the last time. It was an honour to be there, a part of it." Every soldier—veterans or not—felt something. It's definitely changed our military.
54:20	Reg/Reserve relations? Initially, always maybe a little bit of apprehension. But a simple conversation, once they realize you have a real job and are doing this as well and don't just show up on weekends to play army—I'm an EMT—and they realize you're more confident. You learn quickly and grasp what's required...so I ended up having great relationships with Reg Force guys, including supervisors."
55:50	HLTA leave? Flew his wife to Europe for a cruise. Three days in Venice, seven days in Greek Islands, Venice again and Rome. Had been four months since they'd been together. About 12 days in all, then back to work.
56:40	Cyprus TLD? Had two or three mornings of briefings, much-appreciated and helpful when he got home. "Don't get home and start arguing about who had it worse. I was in a war zone. Oh, yeah, but I had to look after house and dog. Had to get used to family routine, can't just change it. Have to be like a guest, fit in where you can. That stuck with me, reintegrating."
58:29	Went to driving range, golfed 18 holes, hung out at hotel or in local pubs drinking with guys from his section. Savouring last moments before going home and going separate ways. "It was absolutely crucial, especially for guys on a combat tour with high levels of stress and awareness. You're wind up tight and have to de-stress and relax. Really effective. Grateful to Canadian military."
1:00:10	Flew into Trenton, a few hundred at once. Greeted in Edmonton by news media, others. Got a little nervous, anticipating reunion. Saw firetrucks and police cars blocking ramps along the highway, saluting them. "That really got to me, made all the worries melt away, made me proud to meet family and wife. Really appreciate city of Edmonton for doing this. It made a difference."
1:02:00	Reintegration went well. He fit in with wife, didn't impose. She'd been busy and told him what to do and how to do it. He agreed, which helped a lot. Minimal trouble.
1:03:00	He had a month of leave over Christmas. Didn't return to work until mid-January where he was greeted by coworkers, excited to see him

	back. After a bit of familiarization, he was back into his groove.
1:03:50	<p>Always the aspect of frustration with Canadian public's level of knowledge, attention. "My wife's coworkers would say 'I just saw the news, they pulled them out of Afghanistan'. That got frustrating." He noticed differences between Canadian/US deaths and their handling. Two Americans killed a day, so it's not even in the news at the time, whereas each Canadian death was national news back home. Two Canadians died on his tour. He mentions Byron Greff (sp?) from Lacombe (PPCLI and the last Canadian to die in Afghanistan), and honouring him and his plaque. He feels Canadians moved on as soon as they'd packed up, but he appreciates it can be hard for them to keep up. "I still bug my friends if they don't wake up and go to Remembrance Day ceremonies every November 11<sup>th</sup>. They sleep in and I bug them. It's light-hearted. I'd appreciate if they showed up. But I don't hold it against them. I don't think a day goes by that I'm not reminded of my deployments. They help me accomplish what I need to accomplish in a day."</p>
1:07:30	<p>Effect on him? As a person, pride. Always very proud to wear his medals. To do what he wanted to do from childhood, to serve his country, thinks he did a good job. Feels he's calmer in handling stressful situations in his EMS job, and attributes that to his deployments. To work through a problem. Militarily, there isn't much better training for a soldier. Headquarters job helped him understand how things work, and why.</p>
1:10:00	<p>Back to Reserve? "It is extremely difficult at first to work yourself back into the Reserve routine. It starts off because you get back and your unit is saying, 'OK, so when are you coming back?' And it's like, man, I was just gone for seven months, give me a break."</p> <p>"Absolutely, at first you feel like you're not accomplishing what you were just accomplishing. You were just over there, doing what you felt were some big things, and then you're back here, and it really takes a while to realize that you're now one of the experienced soldiers and you've got to be there to start training and encouraging these young guys so they can be the ones that are going to be deploying next. They've got to be trained up. They've got to be ready to go. And you want them to be able to represent your unit well when they go off."</p> <p>"So it does take a little bit to get out of that rut. And once you can wrap your head around that, you've got a bit of an obligation now to motivate these guys and train them up. And once you get your head around that, it makes it a lot easier."</p>
	<b>Additional visuals desired:</b> <b>--TV reports of final flag-lowering</b>

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	<b>--Kandahar cenotaph</b>
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