

The Royal Canadian Dental Corps:

THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

Canada's military dental services have looked after the oral health needs of Canada's troops in both World Wars, Korea, Afghanistan, and served on many other peacemaking, peacekeeping, humanitarian and forensic operations. In the lead-up to the 100th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Dental Corps (RCDC) in 2015, this article is the seventh in a series that will bring to light the history of the RCDC over the last century, celebrating the heritage, accomplishments and dedication of the dental services personnel of the Canadian Armed Forces.



CDAessentials is honoured to publish a regular series of articles, leading up to the celebration of RCDC's 100th anniversary.



Operation APOLLO, 2002

In 2002, Canada entered the longest sustained conflict in its history. Operation APOLLO was Canada's contribution to the US-led operation against terrorist elements in Afghanistan—a campaign that included sea, land and air forces. RCDC teams (or Canadian Forces Dental Services as the Dental Corps was then known) were deployed with HMCS Preserver and HMCS Protecteur. The land-based mission deployed a dental team with 1 Canadian Field Hospital in the Kandahar region of southern Afghanistan, where the harsh climate—temperatures in the 40–50°C range, dry and dusty conditions, and frequent high winds—challenged NATO personnel.

The dental team was also called upon to assist the medical teams with mass casualties. When a friendly fire incident took four lives and wounded eight others, the dental team provided paramedical care and supported the victim identification process.

Operation ATHENA, 2003

In 2003, Canada contributed to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force

based in Kabul. Two thousand Canadian troops, including a dental team, deployed to the capital city in August, with the contingent reduced to 600 troops for Rotation 2. The Canadians were housed in a camp along with American, Belgian, Hungarian, Slovenian and Norwegian troops. The Canadian dental team was in high demand: they treated patients from every nation in the camp, civilian employees, Afghan interpreters, civilians from the Canadian, British and American embassies, and British troops flown in from Mazar-e-Sharif for treatment.

In late 2005, the Canadian contingent moved back to Kandahar and became the lead nation for a multinational field hospital that included British and Dutch forces. The number of patients had grown to many thousands and the dental team spent long hours providing emergency care until other dental resources arrived. The hospital's two military dental teams were led by an oral and maxillofacial surgeon and a comprehensive dentist or general dentist from RCDC, with assistance provided by dental technicians.

Dental technicians were also deployed to Kandahar to work in the patient administration department. They coordinated the movement of patients within theatre, medical evacuations to the American military hospital in Germany, and one served as crew of a Bison armoured ambulance.

Major Mike Kaiser, who was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal, and Major Annick Gingras both served as Deputy Commanding Officers of the Canadian Health Services Unit. Colonel Kevin Goheen deployed to the multinational Role 3 hospital at Kandahar Airfield as the Deputy Commanding Officer of the then US-led field hospital.

Operation ATTENTION, 2011–13

Operation ATTENTION was Canada's capacity building response to the NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan, which delivered training and professional development support to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). At that time, the ANSF Dental Corps suffered from diminished capabilities in the realms of training, education and patient care.

Over the three years of Canada's participation in the NATO mission, the RCDC Dental Advisory Teams met many challenges and contributed to significant improvements in Afghan military dentistry. With support from Health Canada, RCDC dental advisory teams adapted and oversaw the implementation of a mid-level provider program designed to increase the oral health care capacity within the ANSF Dental Corps.

The RCDC also facilitated the relationship between CDA and the newly formed Afghan Dental Association. CDA staff worked with RCDC personnel on the ground to help that Association develop its preliminary constitution, leading to its approval and formal recognition by the Afghan Ministry of Justice. The CDA then facilitated a relationship between

the Afghan Dental Association and the dental publishing and supply industries, to help sustain Afghan dentistry through the provision of current textbooks and dental materials.

In a further measure of support, CDA sponsored the Afghan Dental Association's membership in the FDI World Dental Federation and funded its participation in the 2013 FDI Congress held in Istanbul, Turkey. The meeting was attended by Drs. Farzana Nawabi and Hasamuddin Alamyar—the president and vice-president of the new Association. The FDI General Assembly approved Afghanistan's membership and welcomed it into the global dental family as a member of the FDI World Dental Parliament. Concurrently, the Afghan National Army Chief of Dental Services, Colonel Abdul Latif Sultani, was sponsored by NATO to attend the 2013 FDI meeting along with the Afghan delegation, and participated in the FDI's military section meeting. ♦

CDA is playing a central role in commemorating the 100th anniversary of the RCDC in May 2015, reflecting CDA's role in establishing a military dental service in Canada and the close partnership between CDA and RCDC since that time.



- ❶ LCol Teodora Russu mentors her Afghan military and civilian colleagues in Kabul.
- ❷ Maj Sandeep Dhesi (l.) leads an OMFS team in the operating room in Kandahar, assisted by Maj Frederick Ferron (r.) while Col Kevin Goheen (c.) looks on.
- ❸ The CDA and Afghan Dental Association delegations at the 2013 FDI Congress. (l. to r.): Dr. Gary MacDonald, Col James Taylor, Dr. Peter Doig, Dr. Farzana Nawabi, Col Abdul Latif Sultani, Dr. Hasamuddin Alamyar, Maj Ashley Mark.