



# Webinar

Organized by Université du Québec en Outaouais

Host: Dr. Dave Blackburn

Speakers:

Dr. Martin Laberge

Marc & Christine Dauphin

Joane Simard

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## These veterans among us: 10 years after the end of the combat mission in Afghanistan. Historical perspective and testimonies.

The conference focuses on the realities of veterans and their families who participated in Canada's combat mission in Afghanistan, which this year marks the 10th anniversary of its end.

For more information: <https://uqo.ca/nouvelles/44989>

The year 2021 marks the 10th anniversary of the end of the mission in Afghanistan (2001-2011). More than 40,000 members of the Canadian Armed Forces were deployed, and 158 soldiers lost their lives in the defence of peace and freedom in Afghanistan. Not to mention the thousands of physical and psychological injuries resulting from this conflict, this war has changed the face of the veterans who, today aged 30 to 60, have marked Dr. Blackburn's experience in the health services because of their youth at the time of their deployment.

### A historical review by Dr. Laberge

The mission in Afghanistan appeared in a post-conflict context (end of the Cold War) that hoped to see an end to the use of force. Unfortunately, the attacks of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 transformed this view and led the Canadian ambassador to call for solidarity with the United States as members of international alliances. Although the situation in Afghanistan raises common objectives such as political stabilization, securing the territory and building local infrastructure, a historical look allows us to identify three distinct periods in Canada's involvement.

2001 to 2002: Canada sends ships, Special Forces, and a combat group - the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. This is the first combat mission for the CAF since the Korean War. The mission was impressive, demonstrating the capabilities of the CAF despite its lack of resources.

2003 to 2005: Against all odds, the Canadian government decides to redeploy troops (almost 2,000) to Kabul. The nature of the conflict is changing: partners are multiplying and raising challenges in joint collaboration. The objective is to secure Kabul and its periphery and increasing attacks leads to counter-insurgency operations.

2005 to 2011: Deployment of Canadian troops to Kandahar to replace American troops. More tense context, the objective is to protect the region and prevent Taliban action. Combat missions that lead to an increase in military casualties.

Between 2011 and 2014, Canadian soldiers remain in Afghanistan to train Afghan military and police forces. On March 15, 2014, the last Canadian soldiers left Afghanistan. Despite a different modus operandi, the mission in Afghanistan is in line with other Canadian missions. The major difference is the use of force to achieve political ends. This should remind us of the human consequences of political choices: individuals are being sent into a combat zone, which implies "death as a working hypothesis" (Goya 2019).

### "I didn't find the same guy I left," by Marc and Christine Dauphin

Marc Dauphin (retired military doctor) and his wife talk about their experience with his commitment in Afghanistan.

## 10 years after: An historical perspective and testimonies

After a 4-year commitment in the Regular Force, Marc joined the Reserves to concentrate on his family life. His interest in action and critical care led him to volunteer for a mission in Afghanistan in 2006. After an initial deployment that lasted months and months until it reached one year, he arrived in Kandahar in 2009. At that time, the trauma was so numerous that the hospital in Kandahar became the busiest in the world. The experience was difficult and the fatigue extreme.

Upon his return to Quebec, Marc saw some worrying symptoms appear, including a panic attack that made him think of suicide.

But this testimony also highlights the experience of military spouses who, during their absence, live in anticipation of their return, which will prove to be much more difficult than imagined. Acknowledging symptoms of post-traumatic stress, Christine remains in denial, but agrees to say: " I didn't find the same guy I left ". The return of the military is far from solving the problems and it is after years of stress that Christine also develops depression.

Today, Marc and Christine are living day to day with the consequences of Afghanistan.

### The collateral impacts of military service on families, by Joane Simard

Joane Simard, former military nurse, shares with us three stories, realities, illustrating different collateral impacts of military service on families.

**Military children.** Military life has a hard impact on children who, while building their psycho-social development, must deal with the numerous moves and absences of their military parents. Although this allows them to acquire resilience and openness in the face of the many journeys they have experienced, the prolonged absences leave a deep impression on the children who often illustrate their malaise by dropping out of school.

**Military orphans.** Some children or adolescents must also face the ultimate sacrifice of their military parent. This often leads to a great deal of anger and incomprehension about the reasons for the military commitment. But pride remains, and medals are worn proudly. The memory of the parent is then built with the help of testimonies from relatives who are very important in the construction of these war orphans.

**The spouses of the soldiers.** Finally, Joanne returns to the reality of the spouses who, often behind the scenes, remain invisible despite all the work they do to support the commitment of the soldier. The numerous relocation, the end of a professional career, taking care of children, the months are long when they are alone at the head of the household. They are then the lighthouse, the stability that allows the soldier to serve the nation.