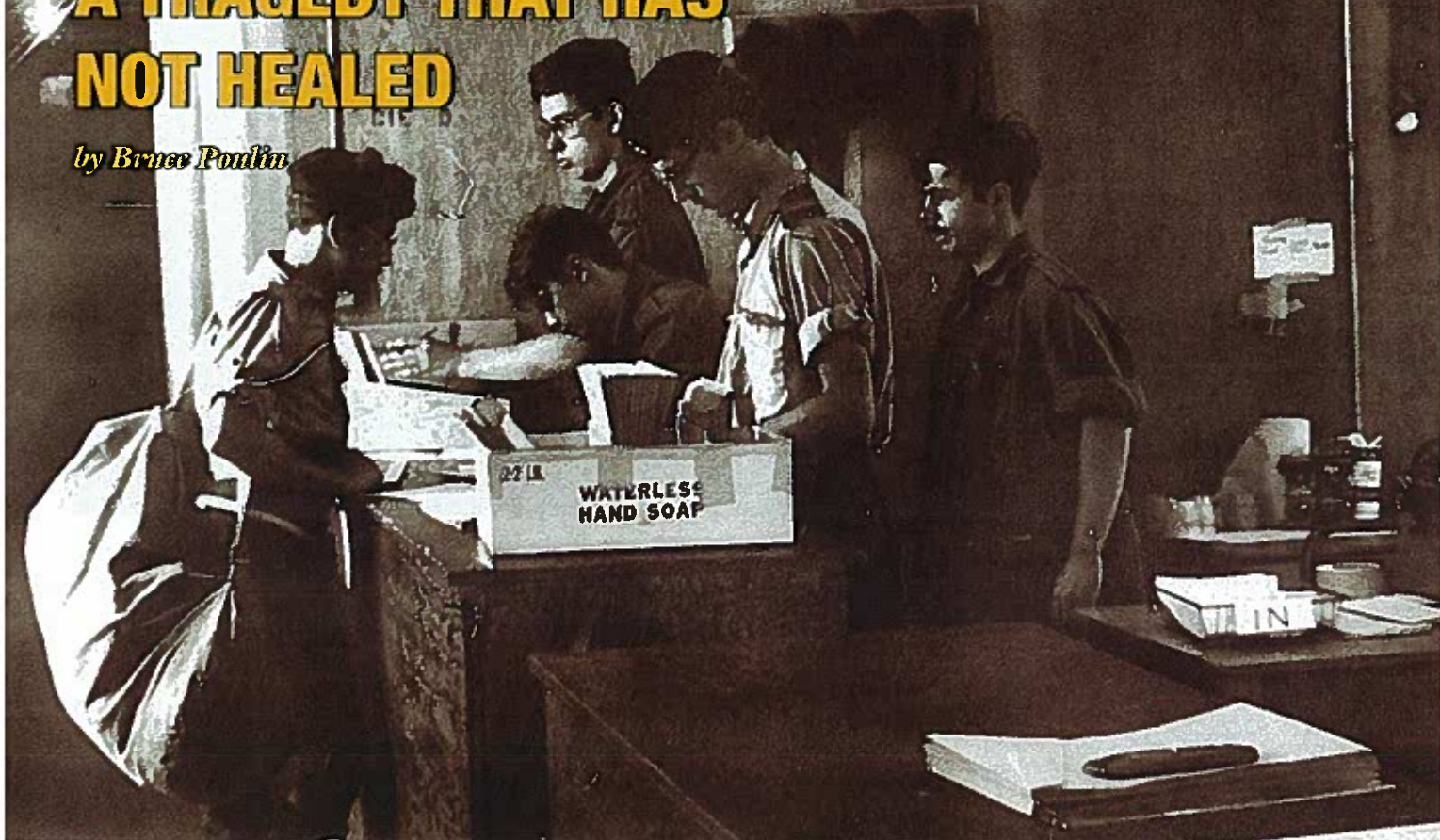


PERSPECTIVES

A TRAGEDY THAT HAS NOT HEALED

by Bruce Poulin



Every year, on or around the 30th of July, there is a memorial parade at the Canadian Army Cadet Training Centre in Valcartier, Quebec. The parade is held on that day to commemorate the six cadets who lost their lives and another 54 who were wounded while undergoing training with the M-61 hand grenade 38 years ago. This is a brief account of the events that transpired on that day and reveals how a series of mistakes contributed to such a huge tragedy.

According to the Royal Canadian Army Cadet training calendar, the cadets of "D" Company were to receive a class on explosives safety on that Tuesday afternoon, July 30, 1974. This would be followed by the padre's hour. On that fateful day, it was decided to hold the lesson in 12 Platoon's barracks. The decision to move indoors and use the barracks as a classroom was made because weather reports had called for overcast skies with a possibility of rain.

To make room for more than 130 cadets attending the lecture and the two Regular Force instructors, the bunk beds were all moved to the back of the large room. Moreover, in order to squeeze everyone in the makeshift classroom, the cadets were cramped together and asked to sit on the floor.

Captain Jean-Claude Giroux, the instructing officer, and his

assistant, Corporal Claude Pelletier, proceeded to speak about the dangers of unexploded ammunition and munitions. They also started pulling various dummy munitions out of a box, showing the cadets what these various munitions actually looked like. After they showed and spoke about each one, they passed it to the cadets who circulated them around the room.

In a statutory declaration to police, obtained recently under the Access to Information Act, Giroux, a regular force officer in charge of the explosives section at the base, recalled one cadet asking him if there was any danger of an explosion; he reassured him there was none. So the cadets proceeded to examine and tinker with the grenades they were given.

The irony of this lecture, according to the former Platoon Commander Lieutenant Gary Katzko, was that this lecture was intended to make cadets more aware of the danger of discarded explosives and ammunition they might stumble upon in the field during the camping phase of their training. But this field training had actually

An army cadet checks into the D Company orderly room on his first day. Facing the cadet (from left to right) are Paul Wheeler, George Fostaty, Gary Katzko and Yvan Fullum. (FROM AS YOU WERE, GOOSE LANE PRESS)

This is a group shot of some of the army cadets from 10 Platoon who took a break on an armoured personnel carrier a few days before the explosion. (FROM GEORGE FOSTATY'S BOOK *AS YOU WERE*, GOOSE LANE PRESS)



taken place the week before, so there was no need for the lecture.

Katzko later stated that, as Giroux's lesson on explosives was running a little late, he was thinking about stopping the lecture so that the cadets could attend the padre's hour. As he was debating as to whether or not he should stop the lecture, an explosion rocked the base. One of the supposed dummy grenades had exploded.

Investigations later revealed how live grenades had been unintentionally placed with dummy munitions. It was discovered that some 19 green-coloured M-61 live grenades had been left after a live-fire grenade range practice a few days earlier and placed in a too-small box. Because the cardboard box could not adequately hold all of the live grenades, two grenades inadvertently fell out of the small box in the back of the truck during the drive back from the firing range. One grenade was put back in the box with the rest of the live green-coloured grenades; the other was left in the truck, which also held a box containing blue-coloured dummy grenades.

Upon return to base at the end of the trip, no count was made to ensure that all 19 grenades were accounted for. As a result, nobody noticed or remarked that one of the live green-coloured grenades was missing or that a green grenade had been mixed in with the blue.

Eventually, this box of dummy munitions arrived at the cadet barracks. It appears as though both instructors assumed that the lone green-coloured grenade in the box was a dummy grenade like the blue ones. After all, all of these grenades were found in the same training ammunition box.

So it was that a live grenade came to be passed around to the cadets along with the dummy munitions. Each of the cadets took turns examining the artillery pieces before passing them on to the next cadet.

When Cadet Eric Lloyd received the green-coloured grenade he pulled the pin while holding the lever squeezed in the safe position. He replaced the pin and should have passed the grenade to another cadet. Instead, he decided to pull the pin once more. This time he placed the grenade between his legs with the lever pointing out and pulled the pin. The lever sprung and the fuse was struck. Some four seconds later, the grenade exploded killing Cadet Eric Lloyd and the five other cadets closest to him: Yves Langlois, Pierre Leroux, Othon Mangos, Mario Provencher, and Michel Voisard. Another 54 cadets seated around Cadet Eric Lloyd were injured in the blast.

A rainy day, a lesson plan that did not need to be given inside an overcrowded building, a misplaced live grenade that was unaccounted for, and a curious cadet all contributed to this unfortunate tragedy. But the tragedy continues.

A coroner's inquest into the incident revealed several startling facts which the coroner classified as: "... apathy or detestable routine seem to have fostered a climate of negligence and carelessness." The officer responsible for the lecture, Capt. Giroux, was deemed criminally responsible in the investigation. Surprisingly, the only people entitled to compensation for their suffering were the regular and reserve military personnel as the cadets were not covered by the pension regime because they were not serving members of the

Canadian Forces or part of the public service at the time.

The surviving cadets and families of those who lost their lives in this tragic incident are supposed to take solace in the fact that there now stands a memorial plaque affixed to a boulder at the former site of the barracks. Those visiting the area will also find a monument at the head of the parade square with the names of the cadets who had been killed that summer.

This article is dedicated to the memories of the six cadets who died on that fateful day: Yves Langlois, 15 years old, Pierre Leroux, 14 years old, Eric Lloyd, 14 years old, Othon Mangos, 14 years old, Mario Provencher, 15 years old, and Michel Voisard, 14 years old.

This article was written in conversation with Gerry Fostaty, the author of a book on this incident titled *As You Were*, and with Charles Gutta, the chair of "D" Company Cadet Camp in 1974. 🍁



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