HANSARD

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STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Thursday, February 12, 2009

Committee Room 1

Jim Davis and Cpl. Shaun Fevens

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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[Wayne Gaudet was replaced by Leo Glavine.]

In Attendance:

. Kim Leadley
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WITNESSES

Jim Davis
Cpl. Shaun Fevens

House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2009

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR
Harold Theriault

THE CHAIR: Maybe I could call this meeting to order. Thank you very much. I am very pleased to have Jim and Shaun here this morning to do a presentation for us. After the presentation we could maybe ask some questions to you. Usually these meetings are very good meetings, I love them.

Jim, I would just like to comment on the courage that you have that you came out on CBC Radio not long ago and told the story of your son and the letters that you wrote back and forth so I just want to publicly commend you for that. It's not very often that I listen to CBC and a tear will come to my eye but that day it did and I think it was great that you could come out and speak about that.

So with that, maybe we could start with a round of introductions and start with Leo.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Jim, you can go ahead and start your presentation.

JIM DAVIS: Okay, thank you, Junior. I am very pleased to be here with you this morning. I made up some notes and I think I'll just go into the notes and I'd be pleased to answer your questions afterwards.

My way of life changed forever on the morning of March 2, 2006. That was the day my son Paul was killed in Afghanistan. It has been almost three years now and what I've discovered is that the pain never goes away. Time does not do the healing alone, it is what you do with time that determines how you cope. Coming here to speak to you today and answering any questions that you may have is an example of what I mean by that.

I have been helped in so many ways and by so many people who are involved with Canada's military that I have the desire to speak in support of their efforts. It is a way for me to thank them, and your committee is giving me the opportunity to do that and I want to thank you for that.

It is my understanding that you have invited me here today to speak to you about how I have been helped, how I became a volunteer in a bereavement group and my role as a volunteer within that group.

Now there is a program known as OSISS. The term OSISS was completely foreign to me, I had never heard of the term until shortly after my son's death. The acronym, Operational Stress Injury Social Support, clearly states what it is all about. Canadian Forces personnel can suffer from operational stress injury like anxiety, depression or PTSD. The program provides confidential peer support and social support to Canadian Forces personnel, veterans and their families.

The key here is peer support. Trained peer support coordinators, who themselves have been injured by operational stress, offer support by listening to those who are suffering, drawing on similar experiences and providing guidance on resources available in DND, Veterans Affairs and their own community. Peer support coordinators respect individual situations and privacy. They can be trusted to keep conversations confidential.

Family support coordinators offer support to families affected by an operational stress injury by listening, providing information, engaging in discussion groups and making connections to community services.

The seeds of this program were planted by Lieutenant Colonel Stephane Grenier. In 1994, he was deployed to Rwanda as the spokesman for the United Nations in Rwanda. In 1997, he was diagnosed with PTSD but not told of his diagnosis. In 1999, he was diagnosed for a second time with PTSD and has been in therapy ever since.

He took a personal interest in the way the Canadian Forces was dealing with operational stress injuries. He researched the issue and developed concepts to help soldiers deal with what they had experienced while on operations abroad. As a result of his own experiences, his research and consultation with veterans and clinicians, he created the OSISS program.

In May 2001, the project was launched and in October of that year it received endorsement of the Armed Forces Council and was given the mandate to: create a national peer support network for members, veterans and their families; validate the development of education and pre-deployment training modules in partnership with health care professionals; and take a leading role in developing the methodology required to effect an institutional cultural change pertaining to the stigma associated with operational stress.

Veterans Affairs Canada agreed to assist the Department of National Defence with the implementation of the project and it has now become an interdepartmental initiative. At one of the workshops I attended, Lt. Col. Stephane Grenier used the term "seamless boundary" when referring to how this interdepartmental initiative was to work. You can appreciate the anticipated problems that would arise from having two separate departments co-managing the same program but because of the ongoing co-operation between the two separate departments, the OSISS program has developed into a highly successful program that has received international as well as national recognition for its innovative approach to supporting clients on the road to recovery. As a matter of fact, OSISS is so well thought of internationally that Lt. Col. Grenier was recently invited to Washington to update the United States Pentagon on the program and Canada has become a model for the rest of the NATO countries.

Now comes my story. How does OSISS, you ask, help me? I am not an active service member, nor am I a veteran. I am not suffering from PTSD so what is my role in all this? My story begins on March 2, 2006. Of all the phone calls Sharon and I received that day, there is one in particular that I will never forget. I will never forget the voice and the words from the other end: Mr. Davis, this is Dan Woodfield. I want you to know that you are now where I was three months ago.

I remembered when Dan's son, Braun, was killed and the thought that went through my mind at that particular moment was, here was a father who had just recently lost his son and yet he was able to still find the strength to reach out and extend a helping hand. So when I got the invitation to attend a one-day conference in Edmonton to discuss the possibility of forming a peer bereavement group, I jumped at the chance. I have attended a lot of meetings and a lot of workshops and conferences over the years but never have I attended one so powerful and emotional as this one was.

The meeting took place in one of the board rooms of our hotel, not on a military base, and any service member who happened to be in the room at any time during the day did not wear a uniform. I do not recall seeing anything that would remind me that this was a meeting sponsored by the Armed Forces. In attendance there were nine widows, me, and one other father of a fallen soldier.

The nine of us became the focus of the meeting. It became obvious very quickly that this was our meeting and it was here where I first met Lt. Col. Grenier. His initiative is what brought us together. It was obvious that he was the driving force behind what was about to unfold. After his introduction and his brief overview of the OSISS program and how it worked, he then told us why we were brought together. One of our widows, Marley Leger, whose husband Marc Leger was one of the four Canadian soldiers killed by the friendly fire incident in Afghanistan in 2002, approached him demanding that something be done to help those who are left behind. Then he proceeded to tell us that the success of this undertaking rests in our hands. We were to take ownership of it, we were to be involved in its development and we were to tell the military what needs to be done. At the end of the day we were to make a decision whether to go forward with it.

On the flight home I reflected back on the events of that day. I was overwhelmed by what we had accomplished as a group. I was rejuvenated, I felt alive and probably the most important thing of all, I came away from that meeting knowing that eight complete strangers are now a very important part of my life and will affect me on how I deal with my own grief. They taught me one very important lesson and that is that I was not alone.

Each one of us had told our story and each one had a different story to tell, but we all shared a common theme, we all suffered the pain of losing a loved one to military service and it was this pain that bonded us.

That bond is what enables us to find the strength to move forward and accept the challenge of forming a program that reaches out to help others. This bond is simply the knowledge that we understand each other's pain and with this knowledge we can reach out to help others who suffer the same pain.

We all agreed to become volunteers and are currently supervised by Sophie Richard, who is a social worker and administrative assistant working out of DND Headquarters in Ottawa. Our role as volunteers is to provide peer support service as a non-clinical intervention through active listening and empathy to those who have lost a loved one.

[9:15 a.m.]

Before we began to offer our services we were brought together in Ottawa in September 2006, for one week's training and to provide input into the development of the program. We were a very diversified group. Of the widows there was: Belinda, wife of Captain Kevin Naismith, who died in May 2003, after his CF-18 crashed in northeastern Alberta; Deanne, wife of Captain Derek Nichols, who was killed when his plane crashed on landing after returning from U.S. exercises; Julie, wife of Captain Miles Selby, a member of Canada's famous Snowbirds, who was killed in December 2004, when his plane collided with another jet; Marley Leger widow of Marc Leger; Heather Dillan, whose husband, Fergus, died of cancer after receiving a medical discharge; Tina Beerenfenger, a widow of Corporal Robbie Beerenfenger, killed in Afghanistan in 2003; and finally, Gwen, widow of Lieutenant Chris Saunders, who we all remember that terrible day in October 2004, when he lost his life aboard the HMCS Chicoutimi.

Then there was Brian, the other father. Brian was the dad to Mark Isfeld, who was killed in Croatia in 1994, trying to clear mine fields. Brian and I were to become very close and over the next two years he and I would spend countless hours on the phone, he living on the West Coast and I on the East Coast. In a way, I considered Brian to be my peer support buddy. Unfortunately, this past year Brian died of cancer, so now I miss him.

To give us an identity, we called ourselves HOPE, Helping Others by Providing Empathy. To give us structure and to get the support needed we were brought under the

umbrella of the OSISS program. We are now a new component of the OSISS program, focusing on providing bereavement and peer support to both the next of kin and families of the military members who die in service and to the next of kin of families of veterans who die.

Today our group has expanded to 20 volunteers and we service, it was over 100, but I was told last night in a conference call that we're now serving 120.

I wish I could share with you the wonderful warm stories that I have heard about our fallen Canadian soldiers by talking to their parents, but I can't because of confidentiality reasons. What I can tell you is, as strange as it may seem, if it wasn't for my own son making the supreme sacrifice, I would never have met such wonderful and caring people. The irony of all of this is my life has been made richer because of his sacrifice. I don't expect anybody to understand that statement, but that's the way I look at the positive of it. If it wasn't for his death I would never have met the gentleman sitting here to my left, Corporal Shaun Fevens.

Shaun, I will never forget the day you and I were at centre ice in Yarmouth and I told the audience that standing next to Shaun, I was proud to be a Canadian. Shaun, I want you to know I meant that, you are a true example of a Canadian hero.

That is my quick statement, ladies and gentlemen. It was very brief, but if you have any questions, I would be willing to try to answer them.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Jim. Maybe we'll let Shaun go next with his presentation and after we can ask each of you questions if that's all right, Shaun?

CPL. SHAUN FEVENS: Sure. As Mr. Davis was speaking, he was speaking on a different aspect, one that I can't completely understand, but can relate to as I had the privilege of serving next to six young men who did lose their lives over there. So I'm very proud to be sitting next to you and to have met you and to have served with gentlemen like your son who were 100 per cent for the military and were willing to lay it down.

To continue, much like Mr. Davis, my life changed on April 8, 2007. My platoon, 5 Platoon, I was attached to 2RCR from Gagetown, though I am a reservist here in Halifax with the Princess Louise Fusiliers. I attached posted to Gagetown in June 2006 and we did our buildup until January 2007 at which time we deployed to Afghanistan.

On this particular day, 5 Platoon was tasked for a comms relay for one of our sister platoons in the company who was escorting a British convoy through Helmand province, which we had done the two previous days before, so this was considered our day off. We were put on 15 minutes notice to move and naturally, when you're least expecting it or when you're all settled in and you've got your mail open, that's when you get your notice to go. So that's exactly what happened.

This day we ramped up, it was just like any other day, another day, another dollar, right? So we got in the back of the LAV and we started rolling and I had been through a fair share of terrain with the LAV and in this particular area, I didn't even think it was passable, though they're incredible vehicles and they proved me wrong that it was definitely passable. We had a great crew, our section, in my opinion - and, of course, I'm a little bit biased, but - it was definitely the best in our platoon.

As we were rolling we came across an area that would be considered an obstacle, it's called a karez system and the locals would say it's a well system, but the Afghans used it to fight the Russians for the last however many years, it's all tunnelled so they can go between each area. We came across this area and it stretched for kilometres and, of course, also being the comms relay made us a quick reaction force, so if our platoon was getting attacked, we were on standby to go in and support them. We can't risk going a kilometre out of the way and possibly putting them in harm's way when it's not necessary, so we had to find the quickest route possible to cross, which we did. There was enough space for the LAV to go through and naturally, also, a very perfect place to put an IED.

We had never been through there before, so there was no reason or cause that there should have been an IED there because no one had driven there, but there was. We drove through, it was a pressure-plate IED, so when our front tire hit the pressure plate it detonated and it ejected me from the vehicle and it killed the other six who were in the rear compartment.

When I opened my eyes I knew what had happened, I could tell that I was the only survivor in the rear compartment and the gunner came back to check to make sure, to try to get a response. At that time I got his attention on me and got him down from the top of the vehicle, after following all of our procedures to make sure that everything was clear, that he wasn't going to jump down and land on a mine or we weren't going to get a counter attack or an ambush while we were down. After that he jumped down.

I had the combat first aid, which is called the tactical combat casualty care, so once he got down he was unsure of what to do with my injuries, which I had already assessed myself and knew what to do, I just couldn't reach my injuries. I instructed him how to dress all my injuries and by the time we had all of this done and my platoon commander was cleared to come up, we had the engineers clear the road. A 9 Liner, which is a medevac - so the Blackhawks were called in to come pick me up and the six bodies of our fallen comrades, to fly us back to Role 3 in Kandahar Airfield, which is the hospital there.

It was about 45 minutes which is pretty good because it's a 45-minute flight to get the Blackhawks on the ground for us, so it was about an hour and a half to an hour and three-quarters by the time I got into Kandahar Airfield. There they performed the stabilization of my left ankle, of which I had a complex talar fracture, a bimalleolar and a

dislocation. Basically, it broke the weight-bearing bone in my ankle, well, shattered it really, and dislocated.

Also, on my right leg I had an open fracture, so the bones penetrated my skin. My tibia basically became shrapnel from so much pressure and exploded out of my leg, so I lost an inch of bone and had a big hole in my leg. I took a piece of shrapnel to my right thigh, it didn't stick in, but it punctured and caused swelling. My leg was almost the size of my body by the time I got to the Kandahar Airfield, so they had to release that. I had shrapnel in my right wrist, burns clear up to my armpit on my right arm, I took shrapnel to my face, my forehead, and my ear.

Role 3 was pretty fast. A lot of civilian doctors go over there and luckily, a lot of things went my way that day. The surgeon who was there was from Ontario, they do three month spurts because, as you can imagine, during the hot seasons they get pretty busy over there, so it's a lot of stress. It's not like you just go into the emergency room for 12 hours or 24 hours and go home, this is 24 hours a day for three months, this guy's on standby.

He is one of the leading orthopaedic surgeons in Canada, so I had him stabilize my ankle, my leg and my wrist and this surgeon was also a colleague of my surgeon here in Halifax, so before he had even medically released, they had already conversed on basically what was going to happen. Having that was also a benefit because the way they work together, it's just like any other team, the guy who started it prepped me so that when I got to Halifax, they wouldn't have to undo what he did to fix something else, so it was a great team effort.

Twenty-four hours after the IED in Afghanistan, probably a little bit beyond my approval, I left Afghanistan to go to Landsthul, Germany. The reason I say beyond my approval was because I would have liked to stay and watch my six fallen comrades take their final flight home, but obviously, it's not my decision to make, nor was I medically stable to stay there.

I flew to Germany on a C17, an American aircraft at the time and landing there, of course, I was kind of nervous, as weird as it was with as much as I had going on, here's the lone Canadian in this massive American hospital and four Canadians in our tempered weather, which is our normal green combats met me at the door, so it was a sigh of relief. I instructed them on how weird they looked because I had been looking at desert combats for the last three months, so we had a good laugh. Also that same day - which is on kind of a funny note - on our deployment the army news had put my family and me in the army newspaper and they had received it that day in Germany and so they were reading about my deployment on the day I was coming into Landsthul for my injuries.

It is an amazing hospital, I'm not sure what the rest of the hospitals look like in Canada, but it's definitely, completely brand new, it's a war hospital and there's not a thing missing in there. They kept me there to ensure that I was stable enough to continue

the rest of my flight home as it took seven hours from Afghanistan to Germany, because of different airways and they have to divert different ways, they can't just fly through different air spaces and so blood clots are a high risk when you're injured as bad as I was.

So arrangements were made to get me back to Canada. I had the privilege of meeting our former CDS General Hillier and naturally we talked about the maple leaves so there the surgeons got their heads-up. They sent a Challenger aircraft to pick me up so I had a private flight home. Also they have Byrony House there which was made available to my family to come over and see me but I chose - not to refuse the offer - but I chose not to take advantage of it as my injuries weren't that serious, I was coherent. I was also the one to notify my family that I had been injured. While I was still in Afghanistan, I had made those phone calls.

The irony of it would have been if they had come to see me in Germany, I would have seen them maybe for a day or two and then I would fly privately to Canada and they would have to fly commercial, so I'd be back home before they could see me and I could have had my surgery before they even got back to Canada. So I chose to let them stay here and meet me on my arrival in Halifax, so that's what took place here in the QE II.

[9:30 a.m.]

I was flown back to Canada on April 14th and I met the surgeons here in Halifax. On April 17th I had my reconstruction, which put my leg back together and reinforced my ankle and amazingly saved it. Anyway, the nursing staff here were all very careful on walking around and making sure not to drop things, in case I would react or whatever but I reassured them I would be okay if I watched them drop the tray, that I wasn't going to get scared. They also thought I was a little bit nuts because I was the only one in the hospital to like the hospital food but after three months of rations, it was just like a home-cooked meal.

From there I was in a wheelchair, I was double-casted so the apartment we had been living in was not, by any means, wheelchair accessible so the military put me in a very nice facility, Juneau Towers on Stadacona, which for an Army person, anyway, is a Hilton. Everyone there kept their eyes on me. I was over with the RCRs and there are quite a few floating around in Halifax so they all kept their eye on me. Visitors were not lacking, I'd always get the phone call while lying in bed that somebody was downstairs to come and see me. I've definitely met a lot of great people because of it.

On May 1st or May 3rd, around there, my physio started and I had been bugging since before I had even left Germany that it was time to start working to get better. So it has been my whole goal, the whole way through, just to get back to what I was. Now I may never get back 100 per cent to what I was but I've definitely surpassed every surgeon's expectations, which is fine with me.

I went through all the milestones, of course. From a wheelchair I just wanted to

get and stand on my feet. So from a wheelchair I went to a walker, and a little bit too fast I tried to go to crutches and landed on my butt, but, lesson learned. I did eventually get to crutches and from my crutches I went to a brace which really drove me crazy but I did have the advantage of knowing or the ability to know that I was going to come out of this brace. Basically this brace was almost like a prosthetic leg; I couldn't stand without it, I couldn't put any weight on my left ankle without it. But again, to their surprise, the gentleman who makes these braces have never seen someone come out of it. I told him from day one that it would be coming off and within that year I had it off and then progressed to walking six and a half kilometres a day.

Then in October, the Army Run, which took place in Ottawa - there was a 5K and also a half marathon. I took the 5K and did a walk-run interval of 100 metres each and I beat more than 100 people by coming in in 34 minutes. Today I'm running five kilometres in 27 minutes and showing no signs of slowing down. The one thing that will slow me down next week is I have my final surgery, which is the last stage of my recovery, which I am very excited to get through so I can put my transfer through to the Air Force - or, as I call it, the Chair Force. I joke with them a lot and they come back at me, especially the pilots, and say you know the hardest thing we have to do is figure out what we're going to have for breakfast in the morning. We only sleep under five stars and you sleep under a million, and by that he meant his hotel. So it's always a good poke in fun and I'll be glad to join that very soon.

In conclusion, the next six months are going to determine where I will be for the closing state of my injuries. I hope the doctors set a high goal so I can prove them wrong, which has been my motivation to get through most of this, and to continue supporting our troops here and abroad, not just in combat but also in deployment and also when they return home, to know that they are cared for, medically taken care of. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Shaun, that was a very well-detailed presentation, thank you. Ready for some questions? Anybody have any questions? Mr. Muir.

JAMES MUIR: Thank you very much. I do have a couple and I really appreciate having the opportunity to sit in this committee. I'm kind of new at the committee so this has been a real bonus just for the committee. The last time I saw Mr. Davis was at a school in Bible Hill on Red Friday, and the corporal I hadn't met before until this morning.

But anyway, Corporal, you're quite an amazing recovery. I hadn't realized that they would transport you back to Halifax to do all that surgery but they did. You're married?

SHAUN FEVENS: Yes, I just got married this past summer.

JAMES MUIR: How did your wife adjust to this? Is there a support group - Jim was talking about a support group - that she joined? I'm not trying to be personal but is

there one for families of people who have been injured like you have?

SHAUN FEVENS: Yes, there is. I mean for us, for my tour it was kind of a learning experience and I've kind of been, in a good way, a crash test dummy, if you will, in what goes wrong with me will get fixed for the next fellow to be injured.

As far as I know, I've been the most seriously injured to come back to Atlantic Canada, so it has been a whole learning process for the entire brigade and the entire Land Force Atlantic area. The disadvantage to where I'm at is I'm a reservist. They do take care of me and I am classified as a full-time member so I'm on the same pay scale and on the same medical charts and everything as a reg force member but being away from a reg force unit poses different problems administratively, and getting help for different things and she hasn't really been involved too much with groups and whatnot.

For the most part, I've had an easy transition to what is coming back, so she hasn't had the need for it. But it is there. Really, honestly, I can't say 100 per cent that I know how to access it. I could get that information very easily. Obviously the Military Family Resource Centre is in Windsor Park, so she knows those resources as well. I would say that the big disadvantage - and I've had it actually pretty easy - there are fellows who have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress and have had it a little bit harder because we're away from the reg. force unit now. Some people get under the wire because when we come back, a month after our end deployment date and our leave is over and our transition period is done, we're no longer full-time members, we're back to our reserve class bay and people get forgotten - it's kind of a hard thing.

Ultimately, in saying that, as much as it is the military's responsibility to have responsibility over these people, it's as much my responsibility as it is theirs to know that you need help. It's the same with your peers, your spouses, they're going to notice the changes. I've talked about this with a few different fellows, which is kind of a hard thing with post-traumatic stress - it's like being an alcoholic. You tell an alcoholic that he's an alcoholic and he says, no, I'm not, so you kind of need somebody to push you into it.

JIM DAVIS: Mr. Chairman, if I may add a little bit to that. It's fascinating listening to you, Shaun, because I know from the workshops that I've attended with the OSISS program, I'm just in the bereavement component, but when I sit at an OSISS meeting - and I was at one recently where all the coordinators there and Dave McArdle, for example, is the coordinator for the OSISS program in Nova Scotia and he deals with post-traumatic stress syndrome because he suffers from it, and that was my point when I was talking about peer support, he has to be a sufferer. There are so many that do fall through the cracks like you're describing and that's an ongoing problem they have.

I do know that they are serving, across the country, probably close to 3,000 clients. They have to go out and actually find them because not everybody who suffers from PTSD, if I understand it right, will come forward seeking help. They have to be able to come out and search and find you. There are a lot of people who fall through the cracks

and it's a struggle for the program.

I wanted to ask you, Shaun, if I'm permitted, Mr. Chairman, to ask a question, you commented that because you're reservists, you're falling through the cracks. I hadn't heard that before and that's fascinating to find out more about.

SHAUN FEVENS: I've had it pretty well because I've been kept on what we call a C-Class contract, which is the reg force contract, so I've had eyes on me quite a bit. But for everybody else who wasn't injured, a month after our deployment they were off C-Class and most of them have just gone back to their reserve unit. If I suspected that there was a post-traumatic stress problem and I brought it to my reserve chain of command, technically, because they're not on a full-time contract, they don't even have to go to work, they could take a leave of absence for a year or they could just not show up. There are administrative actions for not showing up, but because of that the chain of command can't force somebody to go get help.

Whereas the reg force, if my sergeant, my section commander, or my platoon warrant notices that I'm struggling at work and things aren't going right, he can send me to a counsellor. On the reserve side, if we see each other once a week, as an A-Class reservist, just Thursday night and weekends, they can't say you need help, so it's kind of a hard thing that way. That's how they slip through.

JAMES MUIR: I just wanted to follow up on the reserve regular force, and you mentioned it. Now, you're a reservist, but right now you're classified as regular forces?

SHAUN FEVENS: Yes.

JAMES MUIR: I thought I heard you say during your presentation that you might want to join the Air Force?

SHAUN FEVENS: That's right.

JAMES MUIR: Can you just transfer to the Air Force? Would you be going there as a reservist or would you want to become a regular force member?

SHAUN FEVENS: I'm going to go as a reg force member. I finished my degree, so I plan on taking my commission as an officer. I will have to retrain in different areas, obviously, going from an infanteer, and I would like to go to air traffic control - one has nothing to do with the other, so I will have to be retrained.

Basically I've put my - it's called a component transfer, which will go through, in theory, and that kind of has been the frustrating part, I can't actually make this transfer until I'm medically fit to do so. Ideally it would be nice to get all this paperwork done, the approval stamped upon my medical, but I can't actually complete even the paperwork process until the medical is stamped clear. So by the end of this I'll say my goal is

September to get medically fit, so it could be two to three months before I'm actually cleared to go into the Air Force because of the paperwork and bureaucracy.

JAMES MUIR: If you were not going to the regular service, the military, as reservists once your term is up and having been injured, they would follow you for the rest of your life and provide regular benefits and all of those things? There's a regular scheme that you would report in or they would have somebody checking on you?

SHAUN FEVENS: Yes.

JAMES MUIR: And you'd be entitled to go to Camp Hill and all of those things?

SHAUN FEVENS: Yes. I don't know all of the details, but as it stands, if I'm medically released, because I was injured overseas, one obviously is that Veterans Affairs will cover the whole medical side. There is a payout also with SISIP because I'm insured with them, they have a payout as well, but the military will cover so much re-education - I think it's two years of your salary and two years of re-education - to equip you to go and do a job outside of the military, so they would cover us with that aspect.

[9:45 a.m.]

JAMES MUIR: Would you be entitled to a pension from Veterans Affairs in light of your service and because you were injured?

SHAUN FEVENS: I'm not 100 per cent on that, but as my pension goes entitled to my injuries - and again, this is only to my knowledge - I think I am the first member to be on the new Act of the Veterans Affairs policy. Before it would be on a month-to-month, they would determine your injuries and give you a percentage, we'll say. They basically rate your body on a percentage, so my ankle would be worth, we'll say, 25 per cent. Whatever they gauge that at, that 25 per cent could have been $1,000 a month for the rest of my life. Now it's rated on a $250,000 payout, so the maximum I would get for that would be, if I had 10 per cent I'd get $25,000 for my ankle. It's good and bad in its own way.

Obviously, when you give somebody a payout, especially as a lot of younger soldiers are getting injured, that's $25,000 in the pocket and that gets someone a new car, or whatever the case may be. Maybe they need the car, but naturally it's gone. It can be gone quicker than $1,000 a month for the rest of your life.

Also, the other disadvantage to that is I'm 26, so $1,000 a month until whenever, when I'm 85, is a lot more than $25,000 that I would get as a payout. That would be vice versa too. If somebody was 45 and injured, they would be better off on the payout. Eight months ago we had a quadrapelegic and he got $250,000 - it's not much to get you through when you're 21 years old, and that's the reality for the rest of his life. To get the $250,000, well, he's a quadrapelegic, so he more than qualified, but you need to lose two

limbs, so it's a pretty heavy scale.

THE CHAIR: Order, your time is up. We can come back for another round. Mr. Wilson.

DAVID WILSON: Thank you both for coming here, Jim and Shaun, for sharing your injuries with us and being very open and candid about just what you were talking about, benefits and that. This committee, which I've sat on for a number of years, has seen the changes through Veterans Affairs, some good and some bad, and I think it's still out to decide if the changes that were made a couple of years ago will benefit individuals. When you see someone like yourself who is so young, who was injured in Afghanistan, we see where there's a need to look at what Veterans Affairs provides service personnel.

I just want to say, representing an area that Paul grew up in for a short period of time, that it was a serious loss to the community and they still mourn his passing a couple of years ago. I think the community still tries to do everything they can to remember his sacrifice: they renamed the gym at Cavalier Drive School that he attended, in honour of him, and I think every year since, a hockey tournament that Paul played hockey in every year with Sackville Minor Hockey, they dedicate a tournament in his honour, which I think is coming up in March break again this year. There's a lot of support not only from the community, but from the Forces and other businesses throughout the province that donate so the kids can remember his sacrifice.

I know Shaun answered one of my questions about what concerns you might have and where we can look, hopefully, as a committee, for support in ensuring that some changes are made. I'd like to ask Jim, with the aspect that you deal with, bereavement, I know there are always good things in it but there can be room for improvement. So is there somewhere that a committee like ourselves or other Canadians can advocate, to say we need to do this better?

JIM DAVIS: Absolutely, and I wish I was more knowledgeable with the program. As I say, it's all new to me but it is a work in process. I do know, as we speak, there's a transition taking place with the OSISS program right now, partnering with Canadian mental health. But the military, under the OSISS program, seems to be taking the lead because they're so far ahead of everybody else in that field. When I'm talking about mental health, of course I'm talking about PTSD.

There's another component out there which Shaun represents - you actually represent two - the PTSD, from being in theatre, and the injuries you suffered. I do know that the next major step the OSISS program wants to look at is how to deal with the families and the soldiers that have been seriously injured from theatre. So that will come, they're looking at that.

As far as the financial support, I am certainly not qualified to speak about that, I'm not familiar with all the - you probably are more than I am, Shaun, as you were

speaking. But within the OSISS program itself, because it is partnering with DND and it is partnering with Veterans Affairs, that is the perfect avenue to go to, I think, when you raise your concerns. For example, if I were you, I would start with approaching the OSISS coordinator from Nova Scotia. What really concerned me is when you were talking about because of being reservists, you don't think you're coming in under the same protection.

I know the OSISS program doesn't look at it that way, at least they're trying not to. A veteran is a veteran and you can be retired from military service and suffer 10, 15 years later down the road, whether it's injury or PTSD, or what have you, the OSISS program is designed to - so with the financial concerns, I certainly think it would be very important for this committee to raise those concerns. So you're looking at two Cabinet Ministers here - you're looking at the Minister of Defence and you're looking at Veterans Affairs, Mr. Thompson.

DAVID WILSON: Well, thank you and we usually judge what other groups or individuals will come forward to our committee for updates. We always try to ensure that we're well-informed. Definitely your concern around the reservists, and knowing in my area we have the regular and reserve force that, combined with the military police, are in Sackville and I know, for example, that many of the reservists have spent some time in Afghanistan, so I'm concerned. I understand fully what you mean about maybe they're not injured when they come home and after a month they could just kind of slide away and quietly go their own way. I think it's important that the military ensure that those individuals have some kind of checkup or checklist to ensure - even if it's on a three-month, six-month or one-year basis, where they come in and maybe be evaluated - that if they need some support, it's there.

JIM DAVIS: There's one other point. I was talking to a couple OSISS coordinators when I was at a meeting in Ottawa and what stuck out in my mind, they said since the program has been formed in 2001, veterans who are very senior, from the Second World War and Korea, they're coming forward now, so the OSISS program is stepping up to the plate to help them.

DAVID WILSON: I think just by talking about it - I come from a profession, just like the member for Hants West, that there is a lot of stress. As a paramedic, we've seen a lot of stuff - not compared to what you've experienced in combat but I think over the years, especially the last several years, people recognize that you got to talk about stuff. It's not something that you just push aside and ignore and say that because you're a tough person, you can deal with it. So it's so important to have an individual like yourself come forward with your story so that other reservists, other military personnel, other veterans might hear part of it and say, you know what? I need to have something done about this and maybe seek some help. So with that, I appreciate you coming forward and ensuring that we recognize what you've gone through and also you, Jim, so thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr. Glavine.

LEO GLAVINE: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Jim and Shaun, for coming in today and sharing your story, your personal account - and, Jim, you as a father. Jim, I know you've been somewhat of a pioneer among the parents who have lost children, in making sure that families are looked after and in that regard, I'm wondering, are parents seen in the same way as, let's say, a spouse and children? You know, the trauma here is very deep for everybody and I'm just wondering if that same regard is there.

JIM DAVIS: Yes, I'm glad you raise that, because that is an ongoing discussion in the groups that I attend. Like I said, there are 20 volunteers in our group. It started out, as I said earlier, there was myself and another father and seven widows. Now we've added on a lot of parents, so there are 20 of us, so it's almost 50-50 now. There is a different approach, we discovered. I know from personal experience that a parent grieves differently than a widow would grieve. I'm not saying that one is more grief than the other, they're different types of grief.

Unfortunately, a widow may have children they have to raise without the spouse, so there are different problems. Then, of course, there are the siblings, as you mentioned the siblings. There are the grandparents, there are the cousins. Families can be very complex, as we all know. So our program is in its infancy and right now we're dealing with parents and widows. So we know there's a need out there, we're very conscious of it and aware of it. So I know that from personal experience, if I'm helping a parent, sometimes the sibling will answer the telephone. When I say sibling, I could be talking about a 30-year-old man, a 20-year-old man or a 15-year-old teenager. They'll end up - I can tell they're reaching out, so there is a need for it.

LEO GLAVINE: Thank you, and in that regard, it's been an interesting period of time over the last seven or eight years, since Canada became involved in Afghanistan. I'm actually trying to think back to the first deployment out of 14 Wing Greenwood. I was amazed at how it changed the whole culture of the community because as a school, we had to respond to children whose behaviour became different, that we had never seen or experienced before. We've seen a real growth, of course, in the family resource centres and the way they respond, so we've been going through this.

I was just wondering how you feel we, as a province, have responded to those who have made the supreme sacrifice, as well as those who come back in the midst of our communities and are not the same person that went off to the war in Afghanistan. I'm just wondering, as you collect thoughts and feelings in that regard - maybe we could hear from Shaun, as well, who was on the ground.

JIM DAVIS: For me, I deal with the bereavement aspect of it and I think the province has been front and centre in its moral support and it's very comforting, especially this caucus, that Nova Scotia - all Parties, it has been very nice. As far as stepping up to help veterans or families in need - and I'm talking about programs that

would cost money - I don't know, I can't answer that question because that is done through the military. Shaun, you would be in a much better position than I am to answer that.

SHAUN FEVENS: I think there has been a lot of support, even just community support, as much as somebody saying thank you - I mean it's weird, it's almost bittersweet. I was at the airport shortly after I was injured. My wife - fiancée at the time - her parents were going to Holland, and just out of nowhere a teenager - he was probably 17, 18 - walked up to me and said, you're Corporal Fevens, and I said, yes. He shook my hand and said thank you. Just that goes a long way. Also, just meeting with the older vets, the Korean vets, the World War II vets, and they're saying welcome to the club - it really seems weird.

You grew up going to school, and you learned about the World Wars, and for them to be accepting you as a veteran stills sounds weird to me, because I'm 26 and when I hear veteran I'm thinking of the World War II vets, who are anywhere from 80 to 100 now. I think in that way, just the community support has gone a long way. I think the military picks up on the rest as far as the different programs that we have and whatnot, so I think it has been great.

[10:00 a.m.]

LEO GLAVINE: One of the areas I just wanted to bring to our attention, I guess, as MLAs, is that some of our schools do a phenomenal job with Remembrance Day. I happened to be in attendance at West Kings District High School, who do perhaps one of the top three programs, maybe in the country, and it's all put together by students. Jim was the guest speaker this year and I feel that if this committee could do something in terms of having a parent like yourself - Jim, I know not every parent can get up and speak about the horrendous event that your family became traumatized by, but it was one of the first times, I think, I had ever seen 800 students just spellbound, you could hear a pin drop in that gymnasium. It brings home a really profound message.

I'm wondering if that's something that we should have developed a little more, perhaps, in our schools, so that the coming generation can deal with sacrifice and commitment and what happens in war. I think it needs to be as real as you presented it that day in the gym at West Kings. I'm just wondering what your thoughts are on that.

JIM DAVIS: I couldn't agree more, Leo. From what I understand, the schools were not doing programs like that, basically, until our involvement with Afghanistan and our casualties are more public. When I spoke to the student body there, the feedback I got from them was amazing. I just found it so astonishing that 16-, 17- and 18-year olds understood and portrayed the knowledge that they had that this world is not a safe world we're living in and we take our country for granted here in Canada because of our security and standard of living. To see the reactions of those students was heartwarming because it brought home to me that my son's death, his sacrifice was for a good cause and

I could see that in the student body. It's an awareness program and they took ownership of it.

There was one other school that did something very nice, Maple Grove school in Yarmouth. They presented Tom Reid and myself - Tom being Chris Reid's dad - the students made a silver cross to honour the fathers of the fallen. It was amazing that these students would do this on their own and that's just one thing they do. What they also do is go to Halifax to meet with the veterans and they do that every year. They fundraise to do the trip, they have to do the fundraising on their own to do that trip, maybe this is where the Nova Scotia Government could perhaps help out with some of the high schools that are willing to do projects like that.

LEO GLAVINE: Thank you very much, Jim.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Paris.

PERCY PARIS: I'm not quite sure where to start because when you're down in the batting order a lot of the questions have already been asked, but I'm going to start off by making a general comment. Shaun, somebody used the term, you could hear a pin drop and when you were explaining about your experience when you were in combat, I'm sure you could hear a pin drop. I couldn't help but think, I was amazed, I'm twice your age and I'm amazed that you as a young man can sit there and I admire you - I can't imagine myself going through what you and the many thousands of Canadians have gone through when it comes to overseas combat.

Jim mentioned about you being a hero and how privileged he was to stand beside you at centre ice. I'm privileged and honoured to have been here today to hear your story. I know you are young and your story has a long way to go yet. I want to wish you every success and I want you to know that, as we talk about heroes, you are a hero to millions of people. Jim alluded to you being a hero and I just want to say to you, Jim, I don't want you to think for one minute that you're not a hero either. You have affected and impacted the lives of so many Nova Scotians and Canadians. You spoke about the irony of it all and I know you are a hero, the same as your son was. I personally, and I never profess to speak for anyone except those who put me in the office, but certainly on behalf of those folks I want to say thanks to you both.

Having said that, I was fascinated with the OSISS and when you talked about the HOPE program that you're part of, my understanding is that HOPE has been a fallout of the OSISS program, is that correct?

JIM DAVIS: No, OSISS started on its own but the gentleman, Lieutenant Colonel Stephane Grenier, who started OSISS, was the one who helped get the HOPE program started. Then to give it structure so it can actually get funding and be able to work, it comes under the OSISS umbrella.

PERCY PARIS: So it doesn't have it's own separate funding but it gets its funding from the OSISS program.

JIM DAVIS: I am not 100 per cent qualified here because we're talking budget between the Department of National Defence and the Department of Veterans Affairs, very complex. I answer to a Department of National Defence employee, Sophie Richard, who works out of DND headquarters but I also work with the Veterans Department out of Prince Edward Island, but the immediate person I answer to is a DND employee. If I travel, some of the funds might come from Veterans Affairs.

PERCY PARIS: For the HOPE initiative, is it at the point now where you are satisfied? Are there things that have to be amended? Is the program a process of evolution? Just where is it, what is the status of it?

JIM DAVIS: It is a process of evolution, it is a work in process. It is our program, so we're told, so any changes, we have to have the input and approve of it because we're the only ones who know whether it's going to be effective or not.

We're at the stage now where the program is expanding so, like I said, we're volunteers but we answer to this one person. That's a lot of work for one person to coordinate so we're at the stage now where we have approval to hire some positions.

The funding has not been approved yet and we're very confident that funding will be approved. So we're in a position now where we will be hiring full-time staff or part-time staff , it's got to be worked out. Those people who get hired have to be - it's a peer support system - family members who have lost a loved one. That's the stage we're at so it is an evolving program.

PERCY PARIS: It sounds like, and correct me if I'm wrong, but it's the networking, there's no central place where this is housed. It's a national initiative and you network either by computer, by telephone or by whatever means possible.

JIM DAVIS: We do come together, we have to come together for the workshops training, then we come together for meetings, for conferences and those take place in Ottawa. We work right out of DND's headquarters, the Department of National Defence.

It is complex because this is where, and I alluded to it in my opening, Lieutenant Colonel Grenier referred to the seamless boundary between Veterans Affairs and DND, how you make that all work, especially when you're coming under two different Cabinet Ministers. For our peer group, our little group, we're right out of DND headquarters, that's where we work from but that could change because as you say, it is an evolving program.

PERCY PARIS: Just one other note, maybe on a personal basis; you asked me about any reunions or anything and that suggests to me that you haven't registered with

the Alumni Association, which I encourage you to do.

JIM DAVIS: I will do that, I'm caught.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Paris. Mr. Bain.

KEITH BAIN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I thank you both, you're truly exceptional individuals. I, as Mr. Paris, had some questions ready but they have been covered so I just want to make a couple of statements if I could. I think everyone who is in this room can only imagine what both of you have gone through and certainly appreciate you sharing your stories with us. To do what you've done I guess requires an inner strength, in varying forms, and you're certainly demonstrating that inner strength that you have.

You both spoke of the support that you received, both military and community but in listening to what you've had to say this morning, that support has now gone around and you're offering the support to the community and to the military. So I guess it's closing the gap - they helped you and are continuing to help you and you're returning that as well.

Mr. Glavine mentioned presentations in our school system and I think one of the main reasons we see the reaction from students is that because of what's going on in today's world, there's that awareness that wasn't there prior to Afghanistan and everything else. I guess what I'd like to see is that we, as a committee, try to keep that awareness, that interest alive and I think it's by going out into our school system, talking of the things that have happened and how both of you, as an example, have gotten that help that you received, what's out there for other people and how you, in turn, can do it. So I just truly appreciate what you've been doing.

I guess I'm going to close with, we can only imagine, there's no way that, Mr. Davis, I can imagine what you have gone through and are continuing to go through but you're certainly helping us become more aware and I really thank you for that. So those are just statements and no questions at all.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Bain. Mr. Porter.

CHUCK PORTER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Once upon a time, and I think back when we talked about veterans, I think it has been mentioned maybe by Shaun and others and by Percy, that it was like the World War II thing and then, as life went on, it was Korea, that was accepted as veterans and so on and now we're hearing about our new veterans, of course. It wasn't quite as public maybe or the media did it a different way in those days, telegrams would come back telling about deaths of family members and so on. It has all been transformed into something more, like it should be, because of people like you, Mr. Davis, who are willing to carry our message, your message, your son's message and many others. I want to commend you for that, that's a great thing that not a

lot of people could do, including myself.

[10:15 a.m.]

Corporal, I don't think I can say too much more than what has been added, except thank you so much for what you've done and continue to do for this country.

Next week, I believe, the President of the United States will be in Ottawa to meet with the Prime Minister. They'll be talking about additional troops in Afghanistan and I wonder - and both of you can take a shot at answering, if you would - what your thoughts are on that and what your advice would be to the Prime Minister of this country for Mr. Obama.

JIM DAVIS: I support a position where we have to follow through with the mission. The United States of America is offering up 30,000 more troops to work in the area where the Canadian Forces are now. I may be speaking out of my expertise here, Shaun, but my understanding of it is that the work that Canada is doing over there, we have become experts in Afghanistan, we have become one of the leaders in what's happening over there. It's two prongs; we're doing restructuring and, at the same time, we're doing protection and when I say doing protection, the situations, Shaun, that you described here today, that our Canadian Military have to do to move the Taliban out of the way where we want to do some good work. So when 2011 comes around, what are we going to do?

I was listening to General Lewis MacKenzie speak the other day and he articulated very well when he says our military is small, it is stretched thin and it is tired, but the other side of that coin is that we've become experts. When I talk to soldiers who have gone back for a second and third tour, they're not expressing to me that they're tired. The first question I asked them when I talked to them, you've been there for a second time, have you seen a change? A tremendous change, that's the response I get from them. Yes, they see some improvements.

I think what we should be doing, as a government here in Canada, is we should be encouraging the general public to support the efforts that our military are doing. If that means encouraging more people to sign up, so be it. It is a wonderful career. Just because you're signing up with the military doesn't mean you're going to go to Afghanistan. It's a very diversified profession and Shaun, you're going over into the Air Force. I mean I don't know how many employers give you those kind of opportunities to move around. I know my wife just said the other day, if I was young and starting all over again - she's a nurse - she said, I would probably sign up to get my medical degree through the military. What a wonderful opportunity for a medical person.

So I think instead of concentrating on how do we get out of Afghanistan, we should be concentrating on how do we step up to the plate and improve in what we're doing and finish the job. That may take - that's definitely going to take a lot more than

2011.

So to answer your question, if we pull out in 2011, that will weaken NATO and I don't think it's right for us to sit here and expect the United States to carry the ball all the time, especially when we're so good at it ourselves.

I'll finish by saying there's a book I'm reading - I haven't finished reading it but I am reading it right now, it's an excellent book and it's *Contact Charlie*. It's called *Contact Charlie* because I guess Charlie Company used to joke about it, it seemed to be getting a lot of contact from the Taliban but Contact Charlie is Charlie Company, Bravo Company, Alpha Company. Shaun, you're the expert on that, not me.

The book, what it does for me, it is showing me when I read it why we are fighting the Taliban over there. There's one passage in there that really surprised me and that's where the Canadians were in the Panjwayi area - is that how you pronounce it - the Canadians were in there watching the Taliban grow there, they were confronting them day by day, they were telling the Americans about it. The Americans weren't listening, they said, no, no, that's not where the problem is, the problem is over here in the mountains. So they were trying to draw all the Americans over towards the mountains and it wasn't long before they realized that the Canadians were right. So you take us out of that component and I think it would do harm.

The other part of that argument, too, is you have to look at the results of what our soldiers are doing over there and when I say the results, I'm talking about the girls who do end up going to school, those are true stories.

CHUCK PORTER: And there are many thousands of them now going to school who never did.

JIM DAVIS: Absolutely. There's a father I was talking to the other night, he's from Calgary, his son was killed over there, he was talking to an engineer who spent four months over there, built a high school. He says Jim, there are 1,000 students, 500 of them are women. That's a Canadian initiative, that's what Canada is all about.

SHAUN FEVENS: Well, I guess the more help we can get over there, it's going to be better, obviously. I mean for Canada to come out, especially to withdraw before it's complete, I think will be a mistake, as far as I'm concerned right now. In my opinion, from what I've seen in 2007, we were definitely one of the - if not the - best equipped military in Afghanistan and quite repeatedly we were called upon to help out all of our NATO companions - the Americans, the Brits, and the favour is also returned in the other aspect.

With our ground support that we have put there and then with the Americans' air support that they provide us, we are a powerful force over there and having those extra American troops come in, I think is going to make a world of difference because, as has

been said, we're stretched thin and there's a lot of countryside over there, so it's not hard to sneak past and that's how things happen, really. Yes, it's definitely going to be a big welcoming force, I think, and I think it should definitely make some pretty big impacts.

CHUCK PORTER: Thank you. Mr. Davis, you talked about the diversity of the military. It's interesting, I've had many of my immediate family go through the military and my brother is currently in Greenwood, both brothers-in-law that I have are both military - one out of Petawawa now and one out of Shiloh, who just returned from his second tour in Afghanistan. He has told us some stories where they come back, the media follow them fairly closely in some areas and he believes we are making progress there. He believes we should be there and much like both of your comments, as well, does encourage at this point in time others. If we need to get more signed up, then continue that recruitment drive because what we are doing there is the right thing and we are making progress.

Just in closing, I would say that he also agrees, Shaun, with your comments - one of the best equipped on the ground there. A lot of Canadians may not believe that, actually, when they read the papers and they read the stories but it's interesting talking to members who have done numerous conflicts around the world, not just Afghanistan but others - Bosnia and so on, that we continue to be well-equipped for what we're doing, what you're doing.

Again, just in closing, I want to thank both of you for being here today and telling your stories. It's important that the message continues to get out. Mr. Davis, again thank you so much for the great work you continue to do and I know there's a lot more to come. Shaun, good luck as you proceed through your health and on to bigger and better things. So anything this committee can do, as Mr. Wilson has stated, and we have supported initiatives in this province and taken them to our federal counterparts, whether it be by a motion or letters or whatever that might be, we're more than happy to assist you in your efforts. So thank you again.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Porter. Mr. Gosse.

GORDON GOSSE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all I'd like to say thank you for coming today and giving us a perspective on issues that affected both of you gentlemen in life, which will affect you for the remainder of your life. A loss of one's loved one in war or in any time is a very stressful and emotional time but I'm glad to see that you're moving forward and helping others with their loss. That's an admirable thing to be doing and I commend you for that.

Shaun, your injuries while suffered on duty for your country is a great thing and an admirable thing to do and I'm glad to see that you're recovering and looking forward to a career in the Air Force. I wish you all the best in that and hopefully you'll get an answer soon enough and be in the regular Air Force.

I'm wondering if any of you guys have seen Scott Kesterson's movie that he's making right now. There were some previews on the television just recently about Afghanistan. He's an American reporter who travelled with the Canadians in Afghanistan. Right now he's putting a movie together about that. He calls it not peacekeeping, but a war. I'm just wondering your thoughts on that, between the difference - because he's putting this movie together as we speak and it's due out - his name is Scott Kesterson and I think he's putting this movie together as we speak, as an American journalist travelling with the Canadians in Afghanistan.

JIM DAVIS: I haven't seen or read any information on it, it would be fascinating to. If his theme is that this is not a peacekeeping role but it is an actual war, that's interesting because I think Canadians, in particular, have a misconception what peacekeeping is all about. I always assumed - I had my idea what peacekeeping was all about. There was a civil war in a country and the war came to a standstill so we were in there to make sure that the war didn't start up again.

I also now realize that Canada has never had a peacekeeping force in its history, never. In Cornwallis, we've got the base that is training for the United Nations peacekeeping forces. They're there to learn diplomacy, et cetera.

When I say we've never had a peacekeeping force, there are countries within NATO - I think Holland does, the Dutch have a peacekeeping force, but Canada has never had a peacekeeping force. What we have are soldiers. There's an old saying that peacekeeping is not the work for a soldier but only a soldier can do the job.

I learned this when I was in Calgary at a peacekeeping park memorial service on August 9th and the gentleman I talked to, Brian Isfeld, passed away to cancer. He was giving a speech to the veterans, he was ex-Air Force. These were his words, and he sent me his speech and asked me if I would review it to see how it sounded. When I read it I said Brian, are you crazy? You're going to stand up in front of veterans and read this? He says, but it's true.

It turned out that he was absolutely right, everybody I've talked to agrees with him. So if this gentleman is doing a movie in Afghanistan about it being more of a war than peacekeeping, I think what Afghanistan represents to me is that it is just maybe more active than some of the other peacekeeping missions that Canada has gone to. The problem, when we talk peacekeeping, is soldiers, when they are in theatre, are given - what's the expression - the rules for action (Interruption) Rules of engagement. So the rules of engagement in Afghanistan may be different than rules of engagement in some other parts around the world.

How frustrating it would be trying to keep the peace in a country we're not allowed to engage. So I'd be very fascinated to see what his message is going to be in that movie. I do know that *Empty Casing* is a book that I read - Shaun, have you heard of the book *Empty Casing*? The coordinator from New Brunswick for OSISS wrote the

book. He came back from Croatia and Bosnia with PTSD and I read his book. The reason why he has PTSD is because he was a Canadian UN observer in Sarajevo when it was being attacked and he said, that's the point of his title, *Empty Casing* - I have a weapon that I am not allowed to use.

He was in harm's way, unbelievable, every day snipers were trying to shoot him because he said they take sport at shooting the UN peacekeepers because they know you can't respond, so he went through pure hell. (Interruption) There's another example, that was PPCLI - I believe that was your unit - no, you're not PPCLI, Shaun, you are RCR. That's right, that was in Croatia, yes. That's a fascinating story. So, that's peacekeeping. Go ahead, Shaun, I'm sorry.

SHAUN FEVENS: No, it's okay, I completely agree with Mr. Davis. It's a pretty fine line between a war and peacekeeping and 100 per cent, we don't have peacekeeping soldiers, we don't train to peacekeep, we are soldiers and our job is to close with and destroy the enemy. That's the first sentence in our duties to do.

[10:30 a.m.]

Yes, we take peacekeeping roles and Afghanistan, I guess it's a peacekeeping mission if that's how the media wants to coin it, as much as it is a war. We are peacekeeping 90 per cent of the time and it only takes the one bullet that cracks past your face to turn it into a war. So I mean it's the same thing but the only difference in Afghanistan from Bosnia and our other peacekeeping missions is that they are choosing to engage us and not just engage their own people. Obviously you're not going to be a very effective peacekeeper if you can't engage those who are engaging you and harming everybody else. So it should be an interesting movie to see how we're portrayed.

GORDON GOSSE: Yes, there was just a short little clip on that just recently. One of the clips was in Afghanistan, they couldn't tell if he was a Taliban or a regular Afghani with a knife and they acted, the Canadian fellow shot him. He died in the scene that they showed and rules of engagement is what you say, rules, you know he wouldn't give up the knife so, and that was just a part of that little piece of that movie that I did see. That kind of woke me up right away, saying oh my, I mean it's not like . . .

JIM DAVIS: That's something very emotional that you raise that. I deal with - if I can get through this - my son was killed in a road accident. That's the way it is officially classified. Picture this, he's in the lead LAV 3 in a convoy and he's in an area, they're coming to a fork in the road and he's in an area where you can see, there's nothing obstructing your view. They see a dirt road perpendicular to theirs and they see a taxi coming down the road with the dust flying.

They're driving fast in their LAV and also so is this taxi cab. My son is the gunner, he's got the finger on the trigger and he's got his rifle pointed at that taxi cab driver and they're debating in the LAV, is this a suicide bomber? Do we fire a warning

shot? What do we do? They had lots of time to make their decision, they did not give the order to fire. That taxi driver t-boned my son's LAV and, of course, they swerved and when they swerved, it went down over an embankment and into a ditch and he was killed, along with Timmy Wilson, the commander of the LAV.

It turned out that the taxi driver survived and I saw him interviewed in the hospital the day Paul was killed. CBC has a flash of him, they were interviewing him in the hospital bed and I never saw him again. He was making the comment, oh, those Canadians drive too fast. I thought to myself, my first comment would be, did anybody get hurt? I mean you don't have lawsuits over in Afghanistan, they don't have speed limits, so I thought that was a funny comment - he was blaming the Canadians and he did not have dynamite in the car.

The very next morning the exact same thing, in another convoy, and it was a suicide bomber and our Canadian soldier almost lost his arm - they t-boned the LAV, it blew up.

Going back to my son's case, if my son had pulled that trigger, he would have killed an innocent Afghani. That's what you're faced with over there, that guy was not an innocent Afghani, he was Taliban or a Taliban sympathizer. That's where they were, in Taliban area.

SHAUN FEVENS: The line that we have to draw there sometimes in the same scenarios, because they do that quite often, and that incident could have probed the incident the next day because where there was no action taken on possibly this innocent Afghani, which he may not have been innocent, he could have been probing the Canadian Forces and by being able to drive his vehicle into the side of our vehicle, obviously it is showing that okay, you know they're a lot softer than we think. So the next guy goes and tries it, he might get away with it, he might not. They do that quite often, that's how they do a lot of things - they probe, they try and get in and get out, they see how close they can get. It is what we deal with over there, it's not just cut and dried, I mean the guy 10 feet from you could be the one with the bomb, you don't know.

JIM DAVIS: So I hope this movie producer portrays us in the right light.

GORDON GOSSE: Well, I hope so, too, but I think the light he is going to portray is that this is a war and decisions are being made on a daily basis by our troops in this theatre that caused some of the things that you were talking about, post-traumatic stress and coming back after that, some of the situations that the Canadians are put in. They are very top-notch, professional soldiers, doing their job for their country.

SHAUN FEVENS: I can see that being portrayed and I can understand why he would portray us in more of a war role, because we're in different sections, different contingents. As I was over there with the Second Battalion, we were - if you wanted to say we were in that war mode, yes, we went into villages and we did do our fair share of

trying to keep peace and trying to do the security measures and everything else but there's also a separate section, which is the Provincial Reconstruction Team, and they are really focusing on the peacekeeping and building schools and helping the communities and really our role is getting them in there and securing them. I mean they have their own security forces but it's really complex. So if he was attached to like, say my section, he may get that portrayed role that that is where we're coming from but obviously there's a lot more on the ground happening than what happens in this one platoon or one company.

GORDON GOSSE: Again I'd like to thank both of you for coming in today and telling us your stories and good luck in your future endeavours, thank you.

THE CHAIR; Thank you, Mr. Gosse. Any more questions? Mr. Muir.

JAMES MUIR: Just a couple of quick ones and it's just - the Canadian Forces personnel who go to Afghanistan, are they all volunteered to go to Afghanistan or could they, as regular person be assigned there?

SHAUN FEVENS: Well, I volunteered because I'm a reservist and, in theory, I can't be forced to go unless it was a national call; if we had world war, then I'd be compelled to go, but as a regular forces member, I mean you join, you signed the line, and especially as an infanteer, that is your main role, that's what the number one role is on the ground there.

They'd be compelled to go, unless they could show a compelling reason why they shouldn't go, anything from family reasons - you know your wife could have cancer or anything that is out of the extraordinary, or you're showing signs of post-traumatic stress. You're not going to endanger another military member just because you need that slot filled, especially, and which is great now, because there are a lot of reservists who want to get over there and there are other gentlemen like me - and women - who want to volunteer to go, that that slot could get filled.

JAMES MUIR: That, I think, is the question because inevitably when you get the news back quite often it's reservists or people who have volunteered to go over there. I know that there are a number of people who have gone back two and three times, I actually know a couple.

SHAUN FEVENS: I'd go back tomorrow, if they'd permit it.

JAMES MUIR: And that's the issue or the point. I know that people are lined up to go to Afghanistan so the meaning of that mission, over and above military service, must be very important.

SHAUN FEVENS: I've had a few debates with people who questioned the mission over there and, of course, there's lots going on in the media and there's always two sides to the story and it's okay, if you don't agree with the mission, it doesn't mean

you don't have to support the troops, right.

What I always say is they're saying there are too many being killed, pull them out. It's really unjust to pull them out because there's people getting killed. If we were getting killed for no reason, then yes, absolutely get us out of there, but if you look at a gentleman like Mr. Davis, you ask them if they feel the mission is unjust. I haven't met one family member of a fallen soldier who said yes, let's get them out of there. They're saying no, keep them in there, let's get it done and that's how I say if you want to know if it's just or not, ask the ones who have lost.

JAMES MUIR: I guess just one final comment from me. I come from Colchester County and Jim, as you would know, and Corporal, you would probably know, we have had the unfortunate situation of losing at least four young people. I don't know how to express my appreciation to the families of those young people, their wives and their brothers and their sisters and the mothers and fathers, of how well they responded to that circumstance and how supportive they've been of the comrades that their young people had. It's been truly inspiring, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Glavine.

LEO GLAVINE: I know we have to finish up here. Shaun, I know you have the physical scars, I can see right at the end of your shirt sleeve the beginning of what's there and many soldiers have come back with physical scars and life-debilitating injuries. We're hearing a lot now, however, about lives changed because of the emotional impact. You were there and happened to be treated by one of the best Canadian doctors and then similarly, when you came here to the QEII. Do you think the emotional scars and that area which is ongoing is getting enough support and enough help at the soldier level?

SHAUN FEVENS: I do and I don't. It's very hard to - it's very individual-based as much as it is group-based. I mean if a soldier denies they have post-traumatic stress or is having problems, it's like I said before, it's just as bad as an alcoholic who is in denial. I mean you'll continue down that path until - and it can get severe. I mean there are mild cases that can be resolved with minor counselling and then there are severe cases.

I think it's so diverse - I think we're better today than we were yesterday and I think we'll continue to get better but it is so diverse because everyone reacts in a different way. I've been very well, compared to how somebody else might react and you don't know that the person who was on the base who heard that the six had got killed might be more affected than I am and I was in the blast.

I think the support is there, but to get everybody to use it is almost impossible. I mean we always try to re-educate and make sure that the military and everybody is accepting of it, so that people will go but in the end, it's really up to the person who goes and then, by the same token, just like an alcoholic, if you want the treatment to work and you work for that treatment, then the treatment will work for you. So it's as much the

military's responsibility as it is yourself.

LEO GLAVINE: Thank you very much and thank you both for coming in today and keep up the great work of getting an important message out there.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Glavine. On behalf of this committee, Jim and Shaun - Jim, you have our deepest sympathy for your loss and on behalf of all the people of Nova Scotia, you have our deepest sympathy and for all the families who have lost loved ones in the war. Shaun, I commend you for what you've done, the service you've given this country.

You know I believe that Jim, you said earlier you've gained a little out of this and I think you've gained a pretty good friend there beside you. I also believe that a life is never lost unless they've been forgotten and I don't think you two are going to let Paul be forgotten.

So with that, I would like to give you a few minutes, if you would like to say a few things in closing. After they've closed, I'd just like to keep the committee here for just one minute, please. Thank you.

JIM DAVIS: I would like to thank you all for inviting us here. Like I said in my opening, one of the best things you can do for grieving - it's not time that heals, it's what you do with that time. I meant it when I said being invited here today to talk to you is helping me in my grieving process. You have no idea but it really does. To realize that you people are very serious and very sincere and very passionate in wanting to help with veterans, it is just overwhelming and very comforting. I thank you for the opportunity for allowing me to speak to you and bore you to death. If I did that, I apologize. Thank you.

CORPORAL FEVENS: I'm in the same boat as Mr. Davis. It really does help to come out and just share the story. There's nothing worse than being all bottled up and not sharing with anybody. It definitely opens a different light, I hope. It alludes, a little bit, to what's going on there and really I find it my privilege - and it's a weird one. The light has been on me since I've been injured but there are thousands of troops who have gone over and come back who have escaped harm, which - thank God. So really it has been my privilege to represent them and to tell people kind of what is going on, from my side. So it has really been an honour and to meet gentlemen like you and it's great. It's been a great experience and thank you for having us both here.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

We stand adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:47 a.m.]