# Fifteen Days. Stories of Bravery. Friendship, Life and Death from Inside the New Canadian Army.

Blatchford,Christie. Fifteen Days. Stories of Bravery. Friendship, Life and Death from Inside the New Canadian Army.

Canada: Anchor Canada, division of Random House of Canada Ltd., 2008.

self image vs public opinion

 How they see themselves

How they tell their stories

How the author portrays them.

Not Murderers:

 The Soldiers are fighting for the hearts and minds of the public. Showing that Canadian Soldiers are not murderers, or other soldiers that have poorer reputations.

The author shows their humanity, their bravery, their fierce loyalty to each other and their dedication to the mission they are tasked with and their intense desire to be soldiers.

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The Canadian Soldier:

does his job

has no opinion on mission

sees himself as better than the enemy

has close relationships with fellow soldiers

cries, laughs

has intense pride

loyal

will overcome adversity

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***“…soldiers answer to a higher calling…..they do not place the pursuit of happiness above duty….They are even willing to sacrifice family life to a certain extent”***

Two soldiers faced career guarantees or deployment. Deployment would delay their careers. When asked what they would do…

***“ Neither hesitated… They would deploy”(****pg 132****)***

* We are here- reality
* We do our mission- we have no opinions on the validity or not of the mission- not our concern
* We protect where we can and fight where we have to.
* Showing sensitivity and compassion
* We try not to get killed
* We take care of our own first, over and above the mission
* We take pride in what we have done - we are not Americans or Soviets
* We despise cowards, liars and hypocrites.
* We do our duty and expect to be respected for it.

**We are here: the Reality and Finding a Balance**

***“*** *…you have to give them the chance to look after themselves….We got it good here. That’s what they want the chance to have. If we can give it to them,* ***I just want to make a difference.”***

**( pg 244)**

Soldiers are facing having to win the hearts and minds of the public in a challenging landscape where the execution of a presence patrol could result in death. They have to balance the need to connect with the public and their own safety.

Soldiers come in enthusiastic and ready to do their jobs, they then face their first few times outside the wire and the reality can hit them hard.

**This is What We Trained For**

“They were actually, for the first time in.... their adult careers; **they were given the opportunity to do what they had trained for years** and years on end.” (pg 81)

*“It was a wake-up call for me…****All of this training*** *I had done before was becoming a reality.”* (pg 295)

**Changes**

 If they are not injured, they face having to harden themselves and eventually become conditioned to what they are facing. The reporter notices a stark contrast from the soldiers she returns to after three months.

*“I’d last seen the soldiers in early April.* ***When I caught up with them just three months later, I barely recognized them.*** *They were exhausted and skinny…most of them had obviously been through the wringer. But while the long period of IE- wrought helplessness, the enemy as a ghost, had had them looking a little hunted, now they more resembled hunters.”* ( pg 13)

The Difference Experience Makes

 The contrast between the soldiers first engaged in live fire and those who’ve survived it. The latter having a “guarded optimism” (pg 81)

“While to troops of A Company were **eager for the experience**, embracing their first time in combat, among the soldiers of Bravo…who had been in too many fights already, the mood was sombre….you could see it in their faces…sort of guarded optimism. We knew it could go one of two ways, a cakewalk …or we were gonna have to fight for every inch...” (pg 81)

**Not So Simple**

There are multiple levels and angles that have to be taken into consideration when making battle decisions. Non- traditional decisions now replace old thoughts and ideas. They recognize that there are many factors at play and it is not a simple mission they are on. They recognize that they are facing not only being viewed as liberators but others see them as no different than any other oppressors they have seen.

***“They fear us****. We roll up in a LAV kilted up like Star Wars Troopers, we inspire fear. We need discipline and we need to keep up our professionalism- that’s what distinguishes you from every other guy with a gun in this country.”* ( pg 102)

They must constantly place themselves on a moral high ground both in their own heads and in public. They have to be better than the enemy (and in some cases, the domestic afghan fighters and police...a moral high ground)

**The Difference** : We are not American or Soviet or Taliban..we are Canadian:

“***We’re not the Soviets, we’re not the Americans....***we’re pissing in our corners.” ( pg 3)

A soldier confronts an insurgent about what he would do if the roles were reversed and the insurgent found him bleeding in a bush. The insurgent claimed he would take him “ back to his compound and heal him”. ( pg 7)

“That’s bullshit. Because I am better than you , **because we’re better than you,** I will heal you up and patch you up and take you back.” ( pg 7)

“They were a killing machine. ‘ We were.... I keep telling officers...you need to encourage and push a moral sense of force. **Morally, you have to feel superior**.’”. (pg 13)

They have to recognize what others did and not do it themselves. Having to balance the output with the gains.

 “ He fought his emotions, his desire for retribution...whatever gains they might make, any victory would be too costly.” ( pg 33)