

# CANADA REMEMBERS

## THE CANADIAN FORCES IN HAITI

DND Photo HS048103d04, July 27, 2004/Gonçalves, Haiti. Photo by Corporal Matthew McGregor.

Our country's international peace efforts take Canadians in uniform to many far-off corners of the world. Canadians served in peace efforts in Haiti in the mid-1990s and returned again in 2004 in an attempt to bring stability to a country battered by strife and upheaval.

### HAITI

Haiti is a mountainous, French-speaking country located in the West Indies. The small, densely-populated country (with a population of approximately 8,000,000 people occupying an area about half the size of Nova Scotia) has had a tumultuous history.

The island where Haiti is located was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1492, and was home to the first European colony in the Americas. Centuries later, Haiti became the first black-ruled republic in the world and just the second republic in the Western Hemisphere following a slave revolt. A country born in revolution, Haiti's politics continued to be tumultuous and the land went from being the richest colony in the world to one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere.

From the 1950s to the mid-1980s, Haiti was controlled by the dictatorship of François "Papa Doc" Duvalier and, following his death, that of his son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier. During this period of upheaval and corruption, thousands of Haitians fled their country, many of them emigrating to Quebec to make new lives for themselves.

After the Duvalier era finally came to a close, a new constitution was eventually proclaimed and free elections were held. In November 1990, Jean Bertrand Aristide was elected as President of Haiti. However, in September

1991, he was ousted from power by a military coup d'état and forced into exile. The international community was disturbed by this turn of events and called for the restoration of democratic leadership and an end to the human rights violations in the country.

### THE WORLD RESPONDS

In June 1993, the United Nations Security Council imposed an oil and arms embargo against Haiti in an effort to force Haiti's military dictatorship to step aside and allow Aristide to return to power. After a deal with the Haitian military leaders fell through, the embargo continued and Canadian warships, under a United States-led effort, plied the waters off the country to enforce the trade restrictions.

In September 1994, UN forces were finally able to land in Haiti and enforce the deal to return Aristide to power. This UN mission was intended to create a stable environment in the country, reform Haiti's military and create an independent police force. Beginning in March 1995, 500 Canadian Forces personnel deployed to Haiti to contribute to this international effort. The Canadian contingent included aviation, engineering, transportation and administrative support personnel from across the country. They also provided logistical support and construction engineer services to the UN operations. In March 1996, the Canadian contingent expanded to 750 and their duties shifted to providing infantry personnel for security patrols, a helicopter detachment, engineers and a logistical support group as the UN mandate changed.

Canadians remained in the country as new UN missions continued, with up to 650 military personnel helping maintain stability in the country as the Haitian national police were trained (in part by Canadian civilian police



officers) so they would be able to eventually do this themselves. As well, the Canadians also made important contributions to the people of the country by helping rebuild bridges, schools and water supply systems, operating medical clinics and delivering humanitarian aid. During their times in Haiti, the Canadian Forces members were often greeted as protectors and friends as they travelled the chaotic streets of the capital, Port-au-Prince.

The international contingents continued their peacekeeping and humanitarian work in the country until the main military mission ended in 1997 (although Canadian police remained in the country until 2000). Unfortunately, Haiti has largely remained an impoverished country battered by violence and unrest. In early 2004, President Bertrand Aristide was again ousted from power and went into exile. With the nation descending into chaos again, a new multinational peace mission has been undertaken. Again, Canada has been there for the people of Haiti as approximately 500 Canadian Forces personnel, including an infantry company, a helicopter detachment and support personnel, went to the country to restore order until a new UN stabilization mission could be well established. While this larger Canadian effort came to a close in August 2004, some Canadian Forces officers continue to serve in key positions in the headquarters of the current UN mission.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

The maximum size of the UN missions in Haiti has been approximately 7,500 military members and civilian police

drawn from dozens of nations. At times, more than 750 Canadian Forces members and 100 Canadian civilian police officers have served there.

Canadian Forces engineers brought their expertise in road maintenance, mine disposal, water supply and power generation to the peace support efforts. Logistical personnel provided vehicle maintenance, transport, administrative and medical capabilities while Canadian Hercules aircraft and military helicopters have provided air transport, patrol and medical evacuation capabilities to the international forces on occasion.

Canada has taken a leading role in the UN-led efforts in Haiti in the past, in large part due to the linguistic and cultural ties our two countries have shared over the years – we both have French as an official language, there is a large Haitian-Canadian community in Quebec and Canadian missionaries and foreign aid workers have long been active in Haiti.

## HEROES AND BRAVERY

Haiti has been a gruelling environment in which to work, with extremely hot and humid conditions being common. The Canadian Forces members serving in the country have had to carry out their demanding duties against this constantly challenging backdrop.

Canadians serving in Haiti often donated their spare time to humanitarian efforts. For example, they often visited orphanages and unofficially adopted 30 homeless



children who were in a nearby relief mission. Medical personnel helped the sick and elderly and also delivered babies. Canadian engineers also constructed a school in the country.

Master Corporal Joseph Lavallée was awarded a Meritorious Service Medal for his great courage and determination in maintaining security at the Haitian National Palace during a tense demonstration. He ensured his section prevented an angry group of 1,000 people from storming the building.

## SACRIFICE

The challenges faced by Canadians serving in peace support efforts are very different than those faced by most people. Not many careers see its professionals called on to spend months at a time away from home, serving in hot, dirty, dangerous conditions in which the constant threat of violence simmers around them. However, this is indeed the situation that has been faced by many Canadian Forces members trying to establish and nurture peace in Haiti. A total of 15 UN personnel from around the world have lost their lives in the various peace missions there.

Cultivating peace is often a long process and one that often does not pay full dividends for many years. The Canadian Forces members on missions like these usually do not get to see the ultimate results of their peace efforts because they are only there for a relatively short time, a situation that can be frustrating for them. Working in places like Haiti where the problems are

complex and deeply rooted mean that the results of peace efforts are simply not always going to be dramatic – but the spirit of striving and sacrificing to help continues.

## CANADA REMEMBERS PROGRAM

The Canada Remembers Program of Veterans Affairs Canada encourages all Canadians to learn about the sacrifices and achievements made by Canada's Veterans during times of war, military conflict and peace, and to become involved in remembrance activities that will help to preserve their legacy for future generations. Knowing about our country's values and history helps us understand the Canada we live in today and how we can build our future together.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Veterans Affairs Canada:  
[www.vac-acc.gc.ca](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca)
- Canadian Military History Gateway:  
[www.cmhg.gc.ca](http://www.cmhg.gc.ca)
- Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association:  
[www.cpva.ca](http://www.cpva.ca)
- Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping: [www.cavunp.org](http://www.cavunp.org)
- The Royal Canadian Legion: [www.legion.ca](http://www.legion.ca)
- United Nations Peacekeeping:  
[www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/index.asp](http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/index.asp)

