

Canada's military boasts of its role in bombardment of Yugoslavia

By Guy Leblanc
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Canada's military is boasting about its role in NATO's aerial bombardment of Yugoslavia. While the conflict lasted, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) were very secretive, divulging virtually no details of Canadian participation in bombing raids or other military operations. But in recent weeks the CAF has launched a propaganda offensive, extolling Canada's role in the "liberation" of Kosovo.

At a CAF press conference June 16th, Lieutenant-General and Deputy Chief of Defence Staff Ray Henault, termed the "contribution of our CF-18s, their pilots and our supporting team... absolutely remarkable." It "will always be a source of great pride for the Canadian people, as much as for the Canadian Armed Forces."

Canada contributed just 18 CF-18 jets to the 800-strong aerial armada NATO deployed against Yugoslavia. But the CAF boasts that Canadian pilots participated in fully ten percent of all bombing missions against Yugoslavia. In two-and-a-half months, Canadian pilots reportedly flew 678 sorties, including 558 bombing missions. Because of bad weather and Yugoslav ground-to-air attacks, Canadian planes actually dropped bombs in just 224 missions, but their targets were spread across the breadth of Serbia and Kosovo.

Canadian planes launched 361 laser-guided bombs and 171 regular, 220-kilogram bombs. According to Defence Minister Art Eggleton, so highly did NATO think of Canadian military expertise, that Canadian pilots were asked to lead more than half of the missions in which they took part.

Under questioning from the press, Henault admitted Canadian culpability in the destruction of Danube River bridges, oil refineries, oil storage facilities, radio transmitters, airports and government buildings, and in

the deaths of an unnamed number of Yugoslav soldiers. Canadian warplanes reportedly played an important part in the final days of the war in the extermination of a Yugoslav army battalion that was fighting the Kosovo Liberation Army on Mount Pastrok, near the Kosovo-Albania border.

Henault said Canadian-fired laser-guided bombs hit their targets 75 percent of the time, meaning that 25 percent of the time (if one accepts NATO's dubious claim that bridges, factories and power stations were "military" targets) Canadian bombs may have caused "collateral damage," i.e. rained down on civilians and civilian installations. The CAF leader denied Canadian involvement in any of the most notorious cases of NATO planes killing civilians, but, following a script prepared by a professional public relations team, avoided answering questions as to overall Canadian responsibility for civilian casualties.

It is impossible to quantify the exact amount of damage caused by Canadian bombs. But, if the CAF's claims are to be believed and Canadian planes participated in a tenth of all the bombing missions, the total must be in the billions. NATO has estimated the cost of rebuilding destroyed and damaged infrastructure and installations in Serbia and Kosovo at \$40 billion, while the Yugoslav government on May 20 charged NATO with inflicting more than \$100 billion dollars worth of damage.

The CAF estimates the total cost of its Kosovo campaign, including the maintenance of a contingent of 1,300 soldiers in Kosovo for the next 18 months, at \$700 million. In addition to deploying planes against Yugoslavia and sending soldiers to Kosovo, Canada is providing communications training at a Quebec military base for 800 soldiers from NATO and allied countries who are to join the Kosovo occupation force.

Finance Minister Paul Martin has already indicated that the \$700 million needed for the Kosovo operation will not be drawn from the Defense Department budget, but from the budget surplus that has resulted from the Liberals' savage cuts to social spending.

On his way back from the G-8 meeting in Cologne, Prime Minister Jean Chretien flew to Aviano, Italy to congratulate 300 CAF personnel there who participated in or provided technical support to the bombing campaign against Yugoslavia. Chretien declared: "It is the first time that we have entered a war for principle, for human values, for protection of minorities, for helping people living together. This is the Canadian model." As he spoke, Serbs in Kosovo were being forced to flee for their lives from the KLA.

The Canadian military and the Liberal government are using the Yugoslav campaign and the media images of CAF personnel rescuing defenseless Kosovar refugees to refurbish the CAF's badly tarnished image and lay the groundwork for a major increase in military spending. In the past five years the CAF has repeatedly been rocked by scandal. CAF personnel in Somalia were involved in various atrocities against the local population, including the torture and killing of a Somali youth, and Canadian "peacekeepers" in Bosnia sexually abused inmates of a mental health institution. There also have been exposures of chronic sexual harassment and abuse of female CAF recruits, endemic racism among army ranks and brutal hazing rituals.

The very day Henault was extolling the CAF's role in Yugoslavia, Defence Minister Eggleton drastically curtailed the powers of a new CAF ombudsman, whose position, when it was created in 1998, was presented by the government as the answer to the military's abuse of power and tolerance of illegality. Eggleton has removed all cases concerning events prior to June 15, 1998 from the ombudsman's jurisdiction, forcing him to abandon more than half of the 350 complaints thus far lodged with his office.

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