

By MICHAEL MASTROMATTEO

PEO's September 2007 Council meeting became an impromptu debriefing session, thanks to a special presentation by East Central Region Councillor Corneliu Chisu, P.Eng., a captain and construction engineer officer with the Canadian Armed Forces.

The September meeting coincided with Chisu's return to Canada after a six-month tour of duty in Kandahar province, Afghanistan, where the military engineer was involved with building accommodation and support facilities for the 2500 Canadian troops deployed there in the struggle against rag-tag Taliban forces.

Chisu's tour ran from February 5 to August 12, 2007. It was known as "Roto-3," Canadian military shorthand for the third six-month rotation of service expected of active members of the armed forces.

Canadian Task Force Afghanistan is part of the International Security Assistance Force of NATO, which in the wake of the September 2001 attack on the World Trade Center has stepped up the struggle against groups sponsoring or abetting terrorism.

Rugged terrain, unseen enemies

Equally passionate about the military and the engineering profession, Chisu was more than pleased to give other Council members an overview of a soldier's life in Kandahar.

Chisu's presentation focused on the layout of the Canadian main base at Kandahar, with emphasis on the living conditions and his personal responsibility

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Captain Corneliu Chisu, P.Eng., (right), a construction engineering officer and PEO East Central Region Councillor, receives commendation from Lt-Col. Paul Hurley of the Joint Task Force in Kandahar province, Afghanistan. As a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, Chisu spent six months in Kandahar, and now offers presentations to engineering groups outlining his experiences there.

A soldier's life in Kandahar

As a member of Canada's military, PEO Councillor Corneliu Chisu, P.Eng., has an on-the-ground perspective on current peacekeeping missions around the world. Since returning from a tour of duty in Afghanistan, Chisu has shared his experience with PEO Council, chapters and engineers throughout Ontario.



for construction engineering work. As requirement officer and second in command of the Canadian Engineering Support Unit, Chisu tended to what little creature comforts could be extended a soldier in the field.

Replete with stirring visual images, Chisu's Council presentation captured something of the hardship and sacrifice of Canada's military personnel. In addition to the oppressive heat, sometimes reaching 49 C, soldiers serving in Kandahar must cope with temporary, Spartan accommodations, a rugged, unforgiving terrain and, above all, the presence of Taliban supporters bent on defending their strongholds, Chisu said.

The Taliban, he says, is a largely unseen enemy clad in traditional villager's garb, with an advantage of stealth and an intimate knowledge of where to hide. And the hazards of small, unseen roadside bombs—or improvised explosive devices in military terminology—add a lingering menace to soldiers' lives.

Communication was also a problem, Chisu says, and none of the four languages he speaks fluently could aid him with the obscure regional languages of

the people in and around Kandahar. For the Canadian military on duty there, he says, communicating support and immediate assistance to the locals was by way of actions rather than words. At the same time, security forces in Afghanistan temper fraternization with a sense of wariness in response to the Taliban's lingering, amorphous presence.

Building for a long-term presence

As a military engineer, Chisu was involved in preparing for the construction of more permanent buildings and living quarters for soldiers and officers. Some images in Chisu's presentation show the fatigue-wear-

ing captain supervising what appear to be paving and construction efforts, all against the backdrop of a white Afghan sun.

While the addition of a Tim Horton's coffee outlet and gift and novelty shops brought some comfort to soldiers serving in Kandahar, Chisu says they also underlined their separation from the familiar, a sense service people feel acutely in the field.

Each soldier also understands only too well, he told Council, the potential for sudden disaster, loss and death. Twenty-two Canadian soldiers were killed during Chisu's six-month tour of duty, a total of 78 since the Canadian mission began.

“Assuring real-time protection for our troops and assisting them with construction engineering advice and assistance generated great satisfaction in successfully combining two professions—the profession of arms and the profession of engineering.”



A regulation-size ball hockey rink adds a homey touch for the 2500 Canadian armed forces personnel serving in Kandahar province, Afghanistan. Soldiers, sometimes joined by retired NHL players, played hockey in 49 C heat. The emblem on the opposite page was presented to Chisu and others on the "Roto-3" tour of duty.

Corneliu Chisu at a glance:

Education: Graduate of the Polytechnic University of Bucharest; obtained a master of engineering in engineering physics from the University of Toronto. Also working towards a doctorate in photovoltaic devices

Licensure by PEO: 1989

Military career: Joined the Canadian Armed Forces as a military engineer in 1990. Prior to Afghanistan, served in 2004 as a member of the peacekeeping forces in Banja Luka, Bosnia

Other experience: Served from 1982 to 1994 as a senior trade analyst at the Italian Trade Commission in Toronto. Also served as honorary consul to the Republic of Moldova in Toronto from 1995 to 2004

Interests: fencing, chess, diplomacy

Languages spoken: fluent in English, Romanian, Italian and Hungarian

In May 2007, Chisu was buttonholed by a *Toronto Star* reporter covering Prime Minister Stephen Harper's second visit to the Canadian troops. Chisu told the reporter the Harper visit was especially inspirational to the service people, adding that the prime minister represented "the soul of Canada." Whether his words were designed to provide a reporter with a quotable quote, they underscore his belief in the importance of showing appreciation to the military at a time when many in Canada question the need for a Canadian presence in Afghanistan.

Two professions combined

Since presenting to PEO Council, Chisu has also described his Kandahar life at

chapter meetings in Scarborough and North Toronto, made presentations to associations of Romanian and Hungarian engineers, and was scheduled to speak March 1 to PEO's Willowdale-Thornhill Chapter.

Each presentation concludes with images of repatriation ceremonies for fallen soldiers and of a cenotaph to those killed on duty in Afghanistan. To Chisu, the images capture the sacrifice of military personnel, and are a reminder that efforts to bring safety and security—no matter how remote—do not succeed without a good measure of danger and risk.

"The Afghanistan mission meant a lot for me as both a member of the military and a professional engineer," Chisu said. "Assuring real-time protection for our troops and assisting them with construction engineering advice and assistance generated great satisfaction in successfully combining two professions—the profession of arms and the profession of engineering.

"Creating a unique engineering team with military and civilian professional engineers from Defence Construction Canada (DCC) and Canadian Contractor Augmentation Program (CANCAP), we achieved high professionalism in the theatre of operations."

Chisu says one of the most significant achievements during his tour was the construction of facilities for the new "16-slice" CT scanner for the multi-national hospital in Kandahar. "The installation of this new medical device allowed better medical support for Canadian and NATO soldiers requiring quick and accurate assistance in this extremely harsh environment," he said. "I am honoured that I was able to bring my contribution to Canada in support of our democratic values and to the road of rebuilding Afghanistan." ❖



Are military "engineers" P.Engs?

Although Corneliu Chisu is an Ontario-licensed engineer whose duties clearly involve the practice of engineering, not all military "engineers" are similarly licensed.

The federal government's traditional position has been that the provincial engineering licensing statutes are not binding on federal employees. And, in fact, some provincial engineering acts do specifically exempt armed forces personnel practising engineering in that province from the requirement to be licensed. The Ontario *Professional Engineers Act*, however, includes no such exemption, and it is PEO's position that federally employed "engineers," like those in Canada's military, should be licensed professional engineers if practising in Ontario or using the title "engineer" within the province.

Chisu believes there is no significant conflict between military engineering and provincial engineering acts.

"The federal government doesn't impose any regulation on military engineers who are professional engineers, because a professional engineering licence is a provincial matter," Chisu says. "Of course, the army is encouraging military engineering officers to be licensed. The military engineering branch is encouraging people to have licensure in the provinces in which they are deployed."