

## Rangers campaign comes full circle



**By Brock Weir**

Bruce Moncur, a veteran of Operation Medusa, counts himself as lucky that in his 10 years serving in the military he didn't miss one Christmas.

Labour Day was what his family was all about, throwing huge parties that had become legendary in their community and it was a holiday which almost had the same gravitas as December 25.

As his family back in Canada threw their traditional bash in September 2006, Moncur was about to embark on one of the most significant experiences of his life, fighting in the Battle of Panjwai, part of Operation Medusa. Their objective was to take a Taliban stronghold, but being caught in "friendly fire", his platoon was decimated, becoming the first battalion since the Korean War to be deemed combat ineffective.

"My life changed," he told a packed house at the Royal Canadian Legion on Thursday evening, marking "Home for the Holidays", a traditional mess-style dinner held by the Queen's York Rangers Appreciation Committee. It was the final event in their year-long fundraising campaign "A Year in the Life of a Soldier."

"I was hit by exploding shrapnel, flung into the air and down the side of a mountain. I crawled, dragging my body and scraping my face across the rocks, back to my platoon, trying to seek medical assistance, all the while my thoughts were going to my family back home celebrating Labour Day.

"I stand before you as a man who appreciates his family and friends at this time of reflection. For the men who were not as lucky as me, I ask you to remember them, the families who will never truly enjoy a Christmas morning, or the little ones who don't understand that even though daddy is home, the PTSD has taken their loved one from them. Living in the snow is an experience I hope none of you have to experience. When you are inside your home, warm, and about to turn up the heat, remember a soldier is trying to warm himself up in any way he can in the field."

It was an evocative note to an evening which also gave members of the public an opportunity to say "thanks" to their local regiment, with plenty of opportunity to speak to veterans mingling among the crowd, to hands-on demonstrations with serving Rangers.

"It's far too easy to get caught up in everyday life and forget that all we enjoy today is because someone, somewhere has given their life to service," said event organizer Kim Kerr, noting opportunities not just to send cards, but also sponsor care packages for individual soldiers. "We hope when you leave tonight, you will feel what the community had felt for an entire year that the Queen's

York Rangers are indeed a treasure in our community.?

Thursday's ?mess? raised \$15,000.

The year technically began in March with a breakfast at Cardinal Golf Course in King Township. There, ticket holders were treated to a moving speech by Julia Walkley-Sherman, an Aurora teacher and mother of a serving Ranger.

While she shared her experiences of being a mom on the home front, it was up to her son, Corporal Graeme Sherman, to return the favour at the closing event last week.

?It was far away from the normalcy of my hometown of Aurora,? said Cpl. Sherman. ?Although training prepared me quite well for the deployment, the very real occurrences of day-to-day challenges of a war zone are very difficult to get used to. We train to fight a faceless enemy. The enemy would inflict as much damage as they could before once again mixing into the population.?

He shared the ?gut wrenching? feeling of the unknown when it came to buried weapons, fighting back tears on the tarmac when the bodies of soldiers they had been playing cards with just hours before were placed into coffins and loaded onto planes for repatriation, and being swiftly ?brought back to reality.?

?Emailing and calling friends and family back home was the easiest way to cope and deal with stresses,? he said. ?Personally, I loved hearing about everyday events back home. They made me feel connected and grounded. Every so often, mail call would bring around care packages that would brighten my tour?and letters of support from people across Canada that I did not know.

?People went out of their way to show support for the troops in a meaningful way, just as you have all been here tonight. I returned home in December 2010, following eight months of deployment. I was greeted by my wonderful family and many amazing people, including members of my regiment, at the airport. I see myself as a regular soldier who did not do anything to warrant such a big show of support, but in the long run it was very much appreciated.?