

## LAST LETTERS FROM KANDAHAR:



**'If you are  
reading this,  
I'm sorry, but  
I will not be  
coming back  
home.'**

## A Remembrance Day Tribute: What our troops sent home, before they died in Afghanistan BY MICHAEL FRISCOLANTI

**D**arcia Arndt met Raymond, her husband-to-be, at a regimental association dinner in 2003. She was supposed to be his friend's date. "But then I saw Ray from across the room and I thought: 'Oh, I'd like to get to know him,'" she says, smiling at the memory. "And at the same instant, he saw me." They were married on Nov. 19, 2005.

When Ray, a master corporal, deployed to Afghanistan last year, he messaged his wife nearly every day on MSN mail. He also phoned their Edmonton home as often as he could. "I'm a constant worrier—I worry about everything," Darcia says. "But Ray was very calm, very cool, very collected. Every time I talked to him, he always tried to make it sound like everything was okay. He never wanted me to worry." On June 24, 2006, six weeks before he died, Arndt sent this email to his wife: "I am looking forward to being home again so we can get on with our lives. I think about us together and starting our own family all the time, and I can't wait for it to happen."

Arndt left another note for Darcia, this one on a compact disc. He gave the CD to a friend before he left Canada. *If something ever happens*, he said, *give this to my wife*. The day Darcia heard the horrible news—that her husband was dead, killed when his LAV III collided with a truck—that friend knocked on the door, CD in hand. "I sleep with it by my bed every night," she says of her goodbye letter. "But I haven't looked at it in probably a year. It sits there on the nightstand. I know it's there. I see it every night before I turn the light off. But I haven't looked at it."

Raymond's farewell note appears on these pages, alongside other letters and emails written by Canadian soldiers who would later die in Afghanistan. So much has been said about this mission, about the politics and posturing. And so much has been said about the 71 (and counting) casualties carried home in flag-draped coffins. But these letters—poignant, personal and free of political rhetoric—are a lasting tribute to not only the individual authors, but to all men and women who serve in uniform. *Maclean's* is honoured to publish their words, and is grateful to those families who agreed to share them with the country. We hope these letters will help remind Canadians of just how much there is to remember this November 11.

### PRIVATE WILLIAM CUSHLEY, 21



*Born in Port Lambton, Ont., Cushley was a member of the 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment. The morning he deployed to Afghanistan, his mother, Elaine, dropped him off at the bus. She promised not to cry—going so far as to bet her only son \$50 that her eyes would stay dry. Moments after Cushley climbed on board, his mom lost the wager. He got off the bus, gave her one last hug, then left for Kandahar. On Sept. 3, 2006, Cushley was killed in a chaotic battle with the Taliban. Below is a copy of the handwritten note he left for his mother.*

If you are reading this, I'm sorry, but I will not be coming back home. Thank you for everything you have ever done for me. I really do appreciate it.

You were always there for me even when I didn't want you to be. I have one last favour to ask you. In this envelope is two more letters, one for Tasha, one for Brandy. If you could please deliver them to them I would really appreciate it.

I just want you to know that I love you and that I fought bravely and did everything I could to come home.

Do not weep too much, I will always be with you in heart & spirit!

*Love always & forever,  
Will*

P.S.—you can keep the \$50! LOL.

### CORPORAL GLEN ARNOLD, 32



*The night before he left Canada, Cpl. Arnold sent an email to his entire family—his parents, his wife, his four children, his sister and his three brothers. The Arnold family was dealing with another tragedy at the time: Glen's nine-year-old nephew, Jackson, was in hospital with severe burns. A 14-year veteran of the Forces, Arnold was a medical*

*technician who had served in war-torn Sri Lanka and Bosnia-Herzegovina. But the sight of his wounded nephew hit him like nothing before. On Sept. 18, 2006, five weeks after he sent the email below, Arnold was killed by a suicide bomber during a foot patrol in the Panjwai district of Afghanistan.*

Subject: I'm on my way

Date: Fri, 11 Aug 2006 23:49:24-0400

It's been a long time in coming but to many including myself, not long enough. I have only hours before it is time to leave.

During my time away I have a few short words for some.

Dean, Jackson and Bailey... I know that the three of you have started on the long road of healing. A tragic accident has occurred and you have found yourselves to be closer than you thought. Dean you find that your kids love you more than you thought possible and

**'Jessica, you made me proud to call you my daughter. Connor, I hope you never forget me.'**

—CPL. GLEN ARNOLD

Bailey and Jackson you see that Dad will do anything it takes for you. Dean worry about your family not me. That is my wish. I love you and am proud of the way you have handled everything so far. You are a man I admire.

Mom and Dad... I find myself in a position that is tearing at your soul. You have a son and grandchildren who need you while you have to see your other son separated from his family to go on a mission many don't understand or support. I can only imagine the agony this causes. You have made the right choice though in staying at Dean's side.

Wayne, Lynn and Lance... you find yourselves seeing a brother depart on a mission that has more than its share of tragedy this is widely public in the media. You question will this happen to your family, a tragic spotlight is no place for anyone to find themselves

in. Since it is me leaving I can't even imagine the position you find yourselves in or the feelings that come with it. Support Dean he needs your help.

All other family and friends... I know that you will be wondering how I am doing. I will try to send emails out to let you all know every now and again.

Pray for my family and hold proud. Mostly pray for Dean, Jackson and Bailey.

Kerry... My wife. I keep you for last not because that is your lot in life but because that is how important you are to me. You mean the world to me and I will never be able to express the appreciation I have for the love and support you have shown me. You have made it possible for me to be with injured family when you could have been selfish and you have never once asked me to push my career aside although I know at times it hurts you. I pray for the strength to emulate your courage and strength.

Finally my daughters, and son

Jessica... You have made me proud to call you my daughter, I have faith in you and I know that you will succeed in anything you do. You are a talented, bright and a beautiful young lady. Please help your mother while I'm gone and have patience with her emotions in my absence.

Katie... I know that you will miss me and I will miss you too. I love you Katie. I don't know how this email will reach you because I don't have your email address that works.

Sam... I will miss you, I love you and I will be back.

Connor... I hope that you never forget me and that you will always be proud of what I do.

*Till next time  
I Love you all  
Glen*



**CORPORAL SHANE KEATING, 30**

*The son of a police officer, Keating was raised in Dalmeny, Sask., a tight-knit town of 1,500. Loyal, dedicated and humble, Keating deployed to*

*Afghanistan with the 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. He kept in touch with his family via email. In one note, Keating wrote of being "impressed with my ability to deal with" the deaths of fellow soldiers. "I am doing fine," he wrote. "Things here are going alright." He died in the same suicide bombing that killed Cpl. Glen Arnold. Three weeks earlier, Keating wrote this email to family and friends, including his mom, Judith, his sisters*

*Erin and Meghan and his brother, Ken.*

Hello everybody,

Just a note to say I am fine and hope the same for all of you. I will be away from the computer for an indefinite period of time so I will not be able to write anybody, but please feel free to write me and I will return the mail when I get back... Happy birthday megs, I was planning on buying you something Afghany for a present but have not had the opportunity to go to a market and find something yet. Hopefully I can make up for my tardiness and get a chance to get you something. I was wondering how you would look in a burka. Come to think of it, you would probably look like everyone else in a burka. I understand that's the point, maybe something else then. Unfortunately the locals here have even worse fashion sense than me.

Thank you Mom and Megs and Erin and Tracey. I have received all your parcels today, and gained the envy of all my comrades cause thanks to you I received the most mail. I just said to them, "it must be hard to finally find out that nobody loves you." Really rubbed it in. It was priceless. Have you ever seen 30 grown men cry?

*Seriously, I am safe and I love everybody.  
Shane*



**CORPORAL STEPHEN BOUZANE, 26**

*When Bouzane was three years old, his family moved from Newfoundland to the east end of Toronto. He was a quiet kid, but he had lots of friends, especially in the hockey rinks of Scarborough. Bouzane always knew exactly what he wanted to do when he grew up: play in the NHL or join the army. He enlisted at age 22. Earlier this year—June 20, 2007—Bouzane was killed by an improvised explosive device (IED) in southern Afghanistan. The following is a portion of a note he wrote to a friend days before deploying to Kandahar.*

I am an infantry soldier in the 3rd Battalion of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Regiment. I'm currently getting ready to go over to Afghanistan. It's something I've always wanted to do. Not exactly Afghanistan but to put myself in a similar situation. I didn't join the army for the schooling, I didn't join the army for the money. I joined the army because I've always wanted to be a soldier. Playing guns as a little kid, watching movies and wishing I could do that. It's been a life long fantasy that I fulfilled on my own.

To me going to Afghanistan and getting myself involved in that conflict is like taking the ultimate test. Pass/Fail. You pass, you survived hell. You put yourself through the most stressful, most intense, most emotionally, mentally and physically draining experience that exists in this universe. You fail, you die. Now there is the chance of passing with poor grades if you will. Coming home with a body part missing or being mentally and emotionally injured. That and that alone is what I fear. I do not fear death, because my belief is when I die

**'I expect all of you to party it up. Shake the heavens for one last good bash for me.'**

—CPL. RAYMOND ARNDT

I die. I won't know that I'm dead, I will just be dead. Who knows if I'm right, who knows if I'm wrong. That's just a thought like a million other thoughts floating around the world.

Getting back to why I want to take the test. The way I look at it is like this. I come back with all my body parts where they belong, I come back with my head in the same place that it is now with a new experience and an acceptable change of personality. I will be able to accomplish anything that this world has to put in front of me. I will have gained strength and endurance through hell. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger right. Well six months of facing death and not ending up dead makes you a superman. That's if that saying holds any truth. I do believe it does.

**MASTER CORPORAL RAYMOND ARNDT, 31**



*Arndt wanted a tour of duty under his belt—any tour. A reservist with the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, he was supposed to deploy to Bosnia in 2002, but injured his knee weeks before he was scheduled to leave. Four years later, he jumped at the chance to serve in Afghanistan. Calm, funny and forever positive, Arndt wrote two letters before he left for Kandahar: one to his wife, Darcia, and one to everyone else he loved. When Arndt died in his light armoured vehicle on Aug. 5, 2006, a friend delivered the notes to his wife. She agreed to share an excerpt from both messages.*

Darce,

I know that the next little while will be hard on you but I need you to be strong. Know that you have made me very happy in the time that we spent together. Though we had our hard times, we always came through stronger than ever, and that's how I see you after this as well. Life goes on, and I do not want you to stop living even though I have. Always remember that no matter what I love you, and I want you to be happy. I wish things could have been different, but I don't make the rules. I am trying to think of something smart to say right now but writing this is harder than I thought it would have been. Take care my love, I will always be with you in your thoughts and dreams, whenever you need me.

Love Ray

*(This letter was written for friends and family.)*

Should this disk be read then the worst has happened and I have died. I ask only that people try to understand what I was trying to do, and to not be mad or hate the army for something that has happened to me. As much as I may complain about the army at times I truly love being a part of something bigger. All my life I bugged my parents about when I could have a brother, and here I have all the brothers I could want. This is the life I chose, and it suited me well.

I am not going to rant on about all of the great people in my life because that would simply take too long. It is in writing this that I began to realize that there must be a higher power out there because I am truly blessed. I have the best family a guy could ask for, life-long friends, and a loving wife. Dad, you have always been my hero, I always looked up to you and cherish how close we became. I am always proud to say that you are one of my best friends. Juanita, Amanda and Runt (okay Patricia), we've had our good and bad times all, but it never ceased to amaze me how supportive everyone always was for each other, even if we didn't get to see each other as much as we wanted. And of course my wife Darcia, I'm sure whose sole life purpose was to try and drive me crazy, and you're right, I loved every minute of it. The rest of my truly close friends, Dave, Chuck, Bruce, Rick, Kris, Grant, Bucky, Ash, Vince and so many others, I expect all of you to party it up Ray style, public nudity optional, and shake the heavens for one last good bash for me. Grieving is necessary, but as everyone knows I loved to laugh, and I'd rather hear that than crying. It's time for me to sign off, have a good one, I'll keep the beer cold till we meet again.

*And when he gets to the pearly gates,  
To saint peter he will tell,  
One more soldier reporting sir,  
I've served my time in hell.*

**CAPTAIN NICHOLA GODDARD, 26**



*Goddard was a rarity in the Canadian army: a female infantry officer in command of an all-male platoon. Her friends called her "Care Bear." Her subordinates called her "Ma'am." Once a week, the ever-smiling animal-lover (she called her two dogs, Sam and Bill, her "boys") sat in front of her laptop and wrote a detailed update to everyone on her email list, including her parents, Tim and Sally, and her husband, Jason Beam. The following note was written on March 4, 2006, 10 weeks before the captain was killed in a clash with Taliban insurgents. That day—May 17, 2006—Goddard became the first Canadian woman in uniform to die in combat since the Second World War.*

Hello All,

I am afraid that this week's letter will be neither long nor particularly cheerful. There is a lot to say, but most of it is pretty serious and depressing. But, you are all in with me for good or for bad, so I'll launch into this week.

This week started off quite slow. My crew and I went out for a couple of routine patrols around the area. They were uneventful. We got to fire off some mortar rounds at one of the ranges and generally had a good time being gunners.

Early this week, I attended my second American Ramp ceremony. The service was virtually identical to the first one, except that it was emotionally much harder because the feeling that this wasn't going to be the last one was unavoidable. I'm not sure exactly how many American soldiers have been killed in theatre (between here and Iraq), but I know that it is in the mid 2,500s... it was difficult to accept how matter-of-fact they were about the whole thing. It was also harder because this time it dealt with a normal soldier, just like us. The time before it had been for American special forces guys—it is easy to think of them as different from "us." But this soldier was just like any one of us, and it was horrible. I was in the first row behind the American troops that were lining the route, and I could hear a couple of them crying. That was really tough.

Two days later, we attended the first Canadian Ramp ceremony held in theatre. This time, it was a soldier that I had lived near and worked with in Shilo. This time, I knew the pallbearers, and I was one of the soldiers lining the route. Our service was longer than the American one, but I found it very moving. The casket was driven onto the parade, and soldiers from his section acted as pall-

bearers. The four Canadian Padres serving in theatre said a brief blessing and short prayer, and the procession moved onto the plane. I ask that your thoughts and prayers go with the young man's family. He is survived by his wife and two young daughters.

This week was also notable in the several IED strikes and confirmed rocket attacks against coalition vehicles/convoys. Overall, it was a very emotional and high-stress week.

Fortunately, the other personnel injured in both the vehicle rollover and attacks seem to be recovering well and we finished off the week without any other serious injuries. On a more personal note, I received my posting message to Wainwright, Alta. Jay and I will be going on a house-hunting trip on my leave in June, looking at moving sometime in August. I will start work as the Operations Officer in the Canadian Manoeuvre Training Centre in mid-September. Jay and I knew that it might happen, but it is now official. We are very excited, as are our "boys" at the thought of owning our own house.

I don't want you to feel that I am depressed or defeated. Far from it. The longer that we are in theatre and the more that we actually interact with the Afghan people, the more I feel that we are serving a purpose here. I think that these people, through the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police, are trying to achieve something that we in Canada have long since taken for granted. They lay down their lives daily to try to seize something that is so idealistic it is almost impossible to define. It goes beyond women wearing burkas and children being taught to read and write. The Afghan people have chosen who will lead them. Their new government is striving to

**'The more we interact with the people, the more I think we are serving a purpose'**

—CAPT. NICHOLA GODDARD

make Afghanistan a better place. I had never truly appreciated the awesome power of a democratic government before. We are here to assist that legitimate and democratically elected government. It is easy to poke holes in that statement and say that the system is corrupt and that violence and poverty make people easy targets for our own agendas. Those statements are true; however, we have to start somewhere. With the best of intentions, we have started in Afghanistan. There is nowhere else that I'd rather be right now.

**'Remember that I love you. Dad misses you. Give Mom my love and be good for her.'**

—WARRANT OFFICER FRANK MELLISH

*It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how strong a man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly... who sends himself in a worthy cause; who at best knows in end the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring so greatly so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who have never known neither victory or defeat.*

—Theodore Roosevelt

Nichola

**CORPORAL ANDREW EYKELENBOOM, 23**



Eykelenboom (everyone called him "Boomer") was a medic with 1 Field Ambulance, based in Edmonton. His tour was supposed to end on Aug. 9, 2006, but he volunteered to participate in one last supply run to an isolated Forward Operating Base (FOB). On Aug. 11, a suicide bomber attacked his convoy. Eykelenboom's family in British Columbia has since launched "Boomer's Legacy," a charitable foundation that raises money for Afghan people. "He definitely believed that Canada needs to be there," says his mother, Maureen. "And that's why, as a family, we said we have to continue to do something." Boomer sent the following email to his parents on May 7, 2006, three months before he died.

Hi Mom and Dad;

Everything here is still going fine, despite the massive increase in temperature. I just spent the last eight days in a FOB and will be going back very soon for another two weeks. It gets so hot out here now (50+) that I have to drink about 12 litres a day. The majority is turned into sweat that pours off

my body. But for the most part things have been easygoing. My platoon got into a TIC [troops in contact] a few days ago but forgot about me as I was on OP [observation post] duty. They did alright without me though, and since the TIC was only two kilometres away I got a great light show.

Well, I finally got the picture you have been waiting for. About two weeks ago a little girl brought her infant sister to the UMS [unit medical section] while I was on duty. She had second-degree burns on her hand from touching a kettle. I bandaged her hand and after gave a doll that your friend made to her. She instantly stopped crying and started sucking on the nose of the doll. A special thanks goes from her older sister to your friend for such a wonderful gift; and a thanks from me for being the one to accept her gratitude. Making the children happy is the most rewarding thing about this tour.

Love Andrew

**WARRANT OFFICER FRANK MELLISH, 38**



During a recent training course, Mellish was asked to write a brief autobiography. He summarized his life this way: "I have 'been there' and 'done that' over the years. Since 1988 I have deployed to Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan. In my time I have been around the world and lived its news headlines. I have been booed and applauded. I have seen death and despair. Seen birth and growth. Lived through horrors and held onto hope." A few days before he was killed during a ground offensive on Sept. 3, 2006, Mellish wrote this note to his two sons, Matthew and Koven.

Remember that I love you and that I'm over here because it's important. I don't want you to ever have to do it, and the little boys and girls here need protection too. Well, dad misses you. Give Mom my love and be good for her.

Love ya Dad



**OPPOSING PEACE AND CULTURE NOT A GOOD IDEA**

"I hope the entire world gets the message that attacking a 72-year-old pacifist Buddhist monk who advocates nothing more than cultural autonomy for his people is counterproductive."—Federal Secretary of State for Multiculturalism Jason Kenney on Chinese government criticism of Prime Minister Stephen Harper and opposition leaders meeting with Tibet's Dalai Lama this week in Ottawa.

**MASTER CORPORAL CHRISTOPHER STANNIX, 24**



Last Christmas, a month before Stannix left for Afghanistan, he and his girlfriend, Candice Ziolkowski, travelled to Colorado. When they returned home to Dartmouth, they were engaged. "He was nice to everyone,"

says Ziolkowski, an army medic who met her fiancé on the job. "The first time he talked to you, you were his best friend." Before he deployed, Ziolkowski bought Stannix a notebook with a map of the world on the cover. It would become his diary. On March 26, 2007, he wrote his final entry, printed below. Two weeks later—April 8—his LAV III drove over a massive roadside bomb. Stannix and five other soldiers perished.

Things have been picking up here a bit lately since I last wrote we got rocketed two more times. That's five attacks over four days. The last one scared the crap out of me. We were eating lunch in the leaguer outside the LAV when there was a huge explosion just outside the leaguer. Then there was a high pitch screaming noise as a rocket flew right over our heads and hit just outside the far side of the leaguer. It was crazy loud; we all threw our lunches on the ground and dove for cover beside the LAV. After it hit we had to kit up. I had placed my kit about 15 feet from the LAV and when I had to go retrieve it. I felt more exposed than ever before in my life. It was a good lesson though. Never again will I put my kit so far from the LAV.

If we get hit today that will make five days in a row. Every time there is a loud bang or noise the whole section's heads whip over to see what it is and your heart jumps a little.

Being in a war is strange. It goes from 0 to 60 in half a second and always when you're not ready. There are people trying to kill us right now, making plans and stockpiling weapons and I'm actually bored. War is strange. M

**ON THE WEB:** For more letters home from our fallen soldiers, visit the Remembrance Day section at [macleans.ca/lettershome](http://macleans.ca/lettershome)