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## An Afghan veteran's rage

Pte. Matthew Charles Keddy sits in the prisoner's box, his second court appearance in as many weeks.

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Since returning, Pte. Matthew Keddy, shown in Afghanistan a month before killing an enemy combatant at close range, has been convicted of assault.

By: David Bruser STAFF REPORTER, Published on Sat Jun 13 2009

Pte. Matthew Charles Keddy sits in the prisoner's box, his second court appearance in as many weeks.

Already charged with beating up his girlfriend, he's in court this time following his arrest on the Reversing Falls Bridge in Saint John, N.B., for violating a restraining order.

In recent days, Keddy has seen the inside of a jail and a psychiatric ward. And in the weeks to come he will be brought before two other judges, plead guilty to assault, listen to his girlfriend's tear-soaked impact statement, and spend five more days in the psychiatric ward.

This is a lonely moment for the 26-year-old infantryman and veteran of the Afghanistan War. On this day, no one from the military shows up on Keddy's behalf, which riles Judge William McCarroll as he tries to set the terms of Keddy's pre-trial house arrest.

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**Judge McCarroll:** "There should be somebody here from the military, right? To take responsibility. And I don't understand why there isn't. I mean, he went to Afghanistan. He did his part. He's back here now. So what is he, cut loose?"

**Prosecutor:** "They are aware he's got psychological issues. There were programs set up for him that he has not been attending. And their position is ... they're not in the business of 24-hour-a-day babysitting, because they perceive that he is a soldier and has responsibilities himself."

**Judge McCarroll:** "The word 'babysit' certainly doesn't apply to this young man. He's certainly not a baby when they send him overseas, that's for sure."

**Prosecutor:** "They were aware of the alleged assault of the girlfriend. They were aware of the no-contact order with the girlfriend ..."

**Judge McCarroll** (agitated, his voice rising): "Were they aware that he was on the Reversing Falls Bridge, going to jump off it?"

**LIKE AN ANGRY BRUISE** coming to the surface, the cost of the war to Canadian soldiers is starting to show in jails, courtrooms and homes broken by booze and rage.

After serving their country in the heat, grit and unpredictability of the Afghanistan zone, where hundreds of Canadians have been killed or seriously hurt by unseen roadside bombs, the troops are bringing the violence home.

Spousal abuse. Suicide attempts. Barroom assaults. Drunk driving.

A *Toronto Star* investigation shows the problem is escalating, presenting police, lawyers, judges and psychologists with a new and dangerous class of offender.

"Your training that the taxpayers of this country paid for should not be used against them under any circumstances," a judge told a soldier convicted of assault. "You need help. You need counselling to get over whatever trauma you experienced when you were in Afghanistan. You're not the same man you were when you left Canada, and that is a sad reality of war."

The *Star* reviewed court documents and interviewed scores of soldiers – from privates to warrant officers, light-armoured-vehicle drivers to snipers, those with physical injuries and those without – as well as lawyers, law enforcement officials, psychologists and others connected to military communities from Vancouver Island to CFB Galetown in New Brunswick.

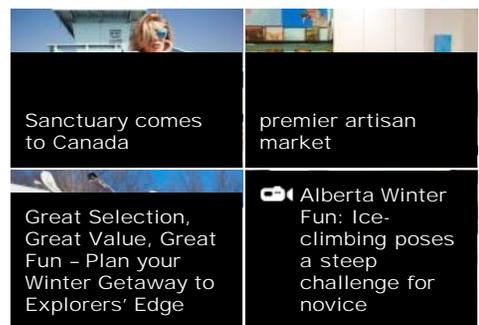
Some examples of post-Afghanistan crime:

In a Winnipeg police station, a soldier-turned-child abuser repeatedly smashes his head against the wall after a detective places him under arrest. He later pleads guilty to assaults that caused a total of 19 broken bones in his triplet sons, and is serving a three-year jail sentence.

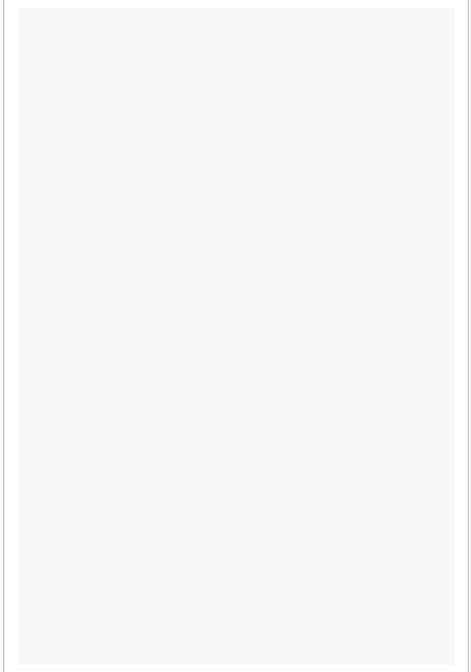
On the side of a road in Gatineau, Que., at 6:30 a.m., a young veteran of the Afghanistan war named Yuri Miljevic-LaRoche, his eyes red and breath stinking of alcohol, tries to give first aid to the bicyclist he struck with his car.

In a New Brunswick courthouse, Richard Donald Malley is found guilty of assault after he hit a man in a Miramichi bar hard and often. It happened just days after he returned from Afghanistan. The court hears Malley, 21, may be suffering from a psychological injury.

All the soldiers interviewed by the *Star* describe an incredible journey that takes them to the Afghanistan moonscape 10,000 kilometres away, where they live in what they call a state of "hypervigilance." Many return looking for a powerful distraction from the memory of what happened there. Others come home feeling empty. There's a void that



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needs filling. They fill it with booze or drugs or both. These men want to reclaim that feeling of living at the centre of the action. They want back out on that edge. Instead, many of the soldiers in this story end up in the back of a police cruiser or in jail for the first time in their lives. Without criminal records before the war, they now report to a probation officer or child services worker, or both.

"It was after the Breathalyzer they put me in cuffs," recalls Travis Schouten, now living in Sarnia and fighting a see-saw battle with his psychological injury, known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). "When they did that, I was empty. I had been to Afghanistan, lost friends, done something good, and here I am in the back of a police car, like a common criminal."

Schouten awaits trial after an incident in Whitewater Township, Ont., in which he says he rolled his car into a ditch, injuring one of the passengers.

Retired colonel Pat Stogran, who led the first group of Canadians in Afghanistan in 2002, seemed visibly agitated when presented with the *Star's* findings, including details of how some of his former soldiers are abusing drugs and alcohol and getting into trouble with the law.

"These guys who are walking wounded, these are the guys who might as well be bleeding out on the Kandahar desert right now," says Stogran, now the Veterans Ombudsman in Ottawa. "I am devastated to hear that.

"What (the *Star* has) done here validates a lot of the stuff that's been nagging at the back of my brain. You send anybody away to a shit hole for six months and they'll come back changed."

He argues the military must better prepare soldiers for the stress of war, including subjecting them to virtual-reality representations of warlike conditions before they go on tour.

"I don't think the military is doing enough. It's not all about learning how to pull the trigger and strip and assemble your weapon. It's also about seeing the blood and gore and really being able to relate to somebody who's badly mutilated and you have to put tourniquets on. We tried to set up a program of stress inoculation. I brought it to the powers that be."

But Stogran says his ideas were ignored. "I've been ranting and raving. It's fallen upon deaf ears."

Stogran also wants the military to make soldiers prepare "life plans" to get them thinking about how to live a life of purpose after leaving a war zone and the military.

In the meantime, he pledges to ask the military to consult with corrections officials to get a handle on exactly how many veterans are landing in jail. He fears that what the *Star* found may only be the "tip of the iceberg."

"A lot of the troops are still serving, doing multiple tours, and perhaps still haven't had time for their pot to boil over."

**SINCE STROGAN** took the first group of troops into Afghanistan seven years ago, 26,800 Canadians have been deployed and 119 have died, the most of any Canadian combat mission since the Korean War. More than 400 have been injured by improvised explosive devices (IEDs), mines, rocket attacks and direct combat. At least 1,000 have suffered severe psychological trauma.

In the past few years, as the military has stepped up recruiting to try to keep pace with its costly commitment (roughly \$7.5 billion to date), the damage has escalated.

The number of soldiers killed in action jumped from single digits in 2002 through 2005 to about 30 in each of the following three years. And more than one in five Canadian soldiers and police officers deployed to Afghanistan leave the force with psychiatric problems, a number that has rapidly risen in the past 12 months. The closer a soldier is to combat, the more likely he or she will develop PTSD, which can affect

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someone who has suffered a critical injury or witnessed death, or who has been threatened with death or critical injury.

Symptoms include reliving the traumatic experience through nightmares, flashbacks or even smells; hyper-arousal that can lead to sleeplessness, irritability and anger; and avoiding conversations, places and people reminiscent of the traumatic event.

Keddy, a foot soldier during his tour in 2007, told the *Star* he shot an enemy combatant at close range and was never the same. "I went and served my country with honour and dignity and I came back and my life went straight to hell," says Keddy, now 27. His mother, Brenda Love, added: "It was war he went into and somebody else came back. His eyes are dead. You start talking to him about the war, you can see that blackness come over him. It's going to take a long time to get that little boy back."

Meanwhile, the military justice system is seeing a steady increase in disciplinary and criminal matters coming before military courts.

In the court-martial system, where more serious cases are typically dealt with, the number of cases has increased each year since the beginning of the war, with a 16 per cent jump in 2007-08 from the year before.

Records of court-martial proceedings offer a window into a military struggling to cope with stressed troops. In February 2007, in Kandahar province, a sergeant "severely injured" a corporal, dislocating his jaw during an "unauthorized" training session on the use of flexi-cuffs and the handling of detainees.

Also in Kandahar, in the wee hours of Christmas Day 2005, a drunk master corporal ratcheted up an ongoing dispute with a corporal by pointing a loaded rifle at him from less than two metres away. The master corporal cocked the rifle. The corporal, fearing for his life, took the rifle, grabbed his superior by the throat and kned him in the ribs, released the magazine from the weapon, cleared the chamber and returned the ejected round to the magazine. The court reported that the corporal has nightmares about the incident.

The military says it does not keep data on military members who are arrested off base, charged with a crime or convicted of a crime by civilian authorities.

Repeatedly asked to comment on the *Star's* findings, the military did not respond.

The mounting cost of the Afghanistan war on the soldiers, their families and communities is troubling a number of judges from Winnipeg to Saint John.

In the summer of 2008, when faced with Sgt. Ronald Anderson, a veteran of two Afghanistan tours and sufferer of PTSD, sitting in the prisoner's box charged with uttering a death threat, New Brunswick Judge Patricia Cumming signalled a new problem facing the criminal justice system.

"More and more the courts are being asked to venture into areas with which they are not particularly well-equipped to deal," she said. "What we're dealing with is a situation everybody talks about – post-traumatic stress disorder. Yet no one here has an understanding of what that actually entails, what risks that puts to the defendant or to others in his proximity or with whom he has a close relationship.

"It is daily life that he's been dropped back into after going through all of these horrific experiences – the loss of friends and comrades in such violent and horrific ways, seeing children die ... I will say that in dealing with these matters in the future, and I expect there will be many more, that counsel may have to consider perhaps more detailed hearings ... upon which the court can actually rely when making these types of decisions."

**ON NOV. 24, 2008**, in a monotone recitation of the facts, the prosecutor detailed for the court what police had found on Tweedsmuir Court in Oromocto, N.B., four months earlier.

Shonda Lynn Burgess said she and Matthew Keddy had a fight. That Keddy threw a

remote control at her before pushing her. The constable reported Keddy had pushed Burgess with both hands, lifting her clear off the ground and onto her butt. The constable saw bloodstains on her jeans and a swollen left arm, and that she had trouble walking.

**Prosecutor:** "What she has is a cracked vertebrae."

Keddy has pleaded guilty to assault and will be sentenced to three months' house arrest and 12 months' probation.

The prosecutor's summary done, Burgess steps to a microphone in the courtroom.

**Burgess:** "As I sit here thinking about what to write for my victim impact statement ... I can't do it. I'm going to cry all the way through it."

Burgess pauses, then reads on.

"Being attacked by the man one loves pulls at every part of that person. Matthew attacked me and ended up cracking my tailbone and ending our relationship and in turn making it very untrusting.

"I am not certain as to why this happened on that day. I am not sure that I ever will. I didn't deserve to be attacked."

She cries all the way through the rest of her statement.

**IN PETAWAWA** and nearby Pembroke, communities heavily populated by military families, where storefronts seem to compete for the highest number of "Support Our Troops" posters, the suffering is not on display.

But it is not far from view.

At the Phoenix Centre for Children and Families, where clients can discreetly enter from a back alley, the military family caseload has rocketed from 12 in 2005 to 85 today, with 20 on the waiting list.

Director Greg Lubimiv says the families are "grappling with issues ranging from anxiety-driven child behaviours like bedwetting and aggression, to domestic violence, depression and marital breakdown."

"More deployments actually compound the stress on many of our soldiers," Lubimiv adds.

Since 2006, the proportion of military family clients at Phoenix who have experienced the stress of multiple deployments has risen from 33 per cent to higher than 60 per cent.

"There is a dramatic increase in marital conflict," says Lubimiv. "And when you have people who are feeling depressed, moving into substance abuse is common. And there is a fair tie-in between substance abuse and violence ..."

A defence attorney who represents many military clients based at CFB Petawawa says that shortly after a tour returns from Afghanistan, he sees a spike in the number of domestic assault charges, some involving a weapon, along with impaired driving and "confinement," which he describes this way:

"It usually takes the form of a complete loss of control, where all hell's breaking loose and a spouse is trying to call the police ... and you're blocking the door, you're ripping the phone out of the wall. That's a classic. The phone rip out of the wall. Happens a lot. Can't tell you how many times guys have had restitution orders to replace the phone. And the phone is often the weapon."

A young corporal, interviewed by the *Star* on CFB Petawawa, pushed his wife down the stairs.

"We were arguing. I remember I was at the top of the stairs. I blacked out. From what she tells me, I put my hand on her face and pushed. When I snapped out of it, she was

at the bottom, screaming and bleeding. I took her to the hospital in (nearby) Pembroke."

On a recent afternoon in the backyard of his small house on base, the corporal sat on the edge of a lawn chair, pumping his knees. Being seen talking to a reporter likely would not promote career advancement. But he figures nosy neighbours will assume a man with a notepad to be his probation officer or child services worker, both of whom make regular appearances.

Chain-smoking, a bucket full of stubbed-out butts within reach, the corporal recalled his tour in 2006 – the snap of bullets, the smell of an exploded IED, a medic screaming, dust everywhere.

"I can remember everything. It's like we were VHS players before the war. Now we're Blu-ray players.

"When I came home, that first day, got home early in the morning, I couldn't be here. I had to get back.

"When you're overseas, your life's on the line. Hypervigilance. You get home, there's nothing."

Not even the thrill of meeting his newborn son for the first time.

"You need to find that adrenaline rush."

The corporal pleaded guilty to assault. He says the judge gave him 18 months' probation and allowed supervised visits with his son. The corporal was only recently allowed back in the home. He visits a psychologist on base every two weeks, is on Cymbalta, an antidepressant, and wears a mouthguard at night. He grinds his teeth in his sleep. The corporal says he needs a new mouthguard because the one he has is badly chewed.

**IN HIS FAST FALL** from soldier to suspect, Pte. Matthew Charles Keddy, without a criminal record before the war, has shared the same courtroom as drunk drivers and an armed robber sentenced to six years in a federal penitentiary.

**Prosecutor:** "According to the information the (military is) getting, he's not cooperating with the program."

**Judge McCarroll:** "Well, if he's mentally ill, maybe that's the problem. Maybe he can't comply. Maybe it's not his fault. Maybe it's as a result of the fact that he went overseas, saw some terrible things and is back here, suffering from some kind of a stress type of situation that he needs help for."

Keddy violated a court order to stay out of Saint John when he went to the bridge. (The order stemmed from the assault charge involving his girlfriend.) On this day, Oct. 20, 2008, Judge McCarroll tells Keddy he must stay on the base, CFB Gagetown, unless accompanied by his parents, and undergo a psychological assessment.

**Judge McCarroll:** "How about it, Matthew? Are you willing to go through the program that they have up there (on the base)?"

**Keddy:** "I just want to go home."

**Judge McCarroll:** "Home with your parents, you mean?"

**Keddy:** "Yeah. You send me up there, I'm going to go nuts."

The microphone picks up Keddy's sniffles. His voice shakes.

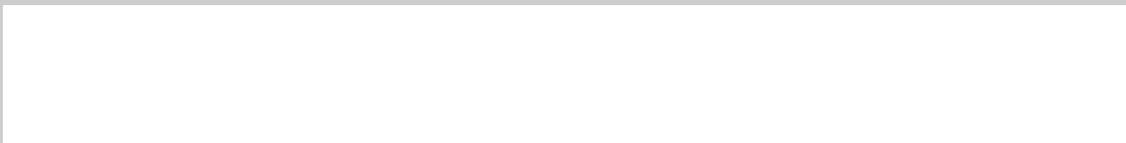
**Keddy:** "They say they're going to help me, but they don't help me. They don't care ... (sniffing) ... They don't care."

**Judge McCarroll** (addressing Keddy's stepfather in the courtroom gallery): "How was everything before he went overseas?"

**Stepfather:** "Oh it was good. He was happy. He was excited about life. He loved Canada."

**Keddy:** "I was normal."

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