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Honouring peacekeepers

By Jennifer Taplin
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COLE HARBOUR - A bugler blasts a lonely *Last Post* as those in uniform stand at attention, and a mom leading kids away in the recreation centre's parking lot casts an inquisitive eye.

Military and police officers marched in a Parade of Remembrance to salute Canada's peacekeepers, and remember 122 Canadians who have died on UN missions.

It was held for the first time in front of the cenotaph at Cole Harbour Place yesterday morning, by the new local chapter of the peacekeepers' association. Aug. 9 is Peacekeepers Day in Nova Scotia since the greatest single loss of Canadian peacekeepers happened on that day in 1974: An aircraft was shot down by Syrian missiles while preparing to land in Damascus, and nine peacekeepers were killed.

The most recent peacekeeper to die was Maj. Paeta Hess-von Kruedener, who was killed by an Israeli bomb at a UN outpost in South Lebanon on July 25.

James Parrell's son might have made that number 123. The retired Cole Harbour peacekeeper was watching TV with his wife in 1992 when an image of his son with shrapnel embedded in the back of his head flashed across his screen.

His son, Master Cpl. Tim Parrell, was serving in Bosnia. He recovered from his wounds and went back to Bosnia for another mission several years later. Now he's preparing to report for duty at Norad in Colorado.

"I definitely empathize with families in similar situations," said Parrell. "Especially people who are losing sons and daughters in that ultimate sacrifice. It's difficult to deal with."

On behalf of 12 Wing Shearwater, Lt.-Col. Jeff Boucher told the gathering peacekeeping is a mission that's not done, nor will it be for some time.

"Maybe it's the harmless image that is conjured up with the word peacekeeping, but many of the missions have been anything but peaceful," he said.

The good done by peacekeeping mission outweighs the cost in human life and the money spent, he said. Boucher also added a thanks from a grateful military.

Retired peacekeeper Herb Thiessen said sometimes the hardest part about these missions was being away from home.

"But I think going over there and being with a group of people that you worked with everyday, that was your secondary family," said Thiessen, who served twice in Egypt and once in Cyprus.

He said having a day of remembrance is special to "us peacekeepers" who have lost friends on duty.

"So this is very heart-warming for us."

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