

# Directorate of History and Heritage

## Boots on the Ground in Afghanistan

An Approach to the collection of Artifacts

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# Boots on the Ground

- Why Collect Artifacts
- Op Keepsake, Canada's Approach
- Lessons Learned



# Why Collect Artifacts?



- Seems like a simple question to the point of being rhetorical
- But the answer to this simple question defines the need and approach
- What is an Artifact?
  - an object made by a human being, typically an item of cultural or historical interest.



# Why Collect Artifacts?

- **Tools to tell the story**

- The importance is not in the object itself but to the story the object speaks to.
- Provide an interactive up close opportunity to relate to something one would only see in media, books or movies.
- Supporting veterans tell the story of their service.



# Op Keepsake Canada's Approach



- Recognized that Afghanistan has been a significant point in Canada's History
- Visualized the need to capture the history and understood the importance of Artifacts
- DND created an Operation call OP KEEPSAKE which had the role to collect and preserve items that were important to Canada's History
- Op Keepsake was staffed by available personnel from a headquarters section with historical interest but no museum experience



# Lessons learned

- **Op Tempo – Soldiers and Comd are fighting a war and do not prioritize history**
- **Civilians without any military experience are faced with obstacles – Lack of Trust**
- **Without the historical knowledge of the conflict and without an operational understanding of what is going on theatre there is a sense of not knowing what to collect or where to look**
- **Documenting the historical provenance is equally as important to collecting the artifact**



# Lessons Learned

- There were 4 opportunities to bring back artifacts from Afghanistan under OP Keepsake.
- First one had the best of intentions but without the museum experience or historical / operational context most artifacts were simply what was hung on walls at various headquarters
- Visit #2 and #3 had staff that had a museum background. An extremely useful amount of artifacts were brought back that tell the story. Equally as important were the number of contacts made for oral history purposes.
- Visit 4 was done through teleconference. Although personnel in theatre did their best to collect it was again a situation where the ones actually collecting had no idea what to look for. Many mysteries were brought back from Afghanistan.



# Conclusion

- **To insure that the best items are collected and persevered its is essential to have boots on the ground by museum staff**
  - Artifacts may be only as good as the provenance that is recorded
  - Knowing what to collect is critical
  - Being able to find quality artifacts that tell the story often comes with the experience of knowing what are the most interesting objects collected from previous wars.

