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## **Military standing on guard over Christmas holidays**

By Tim Dunne



Royal Canadian Navy ships are moored at Halifax Dockyard in this 2010 file photo. Today, on both coasts, most vessels are home for the holidays, but their crews are still on duty. (PETER PARSONS / Staff) The song I'll Be Home For Christmas has become hugely significant for anyone away from home during the holiday season, but there are many who won't be joining their families for gift-opening around the tree and the family Christmas dinner.

Canadian Forces members travel extensively to exotic areas of the world, but seldom to tourist destinations. The duties and responsibilities of our military personnel are often physically dangerous and emotionally challenging. Fortunately for many of us, these situations can be crowded out of our thoughts at this time of year as we are surrounded by family and friends.

- While combat operations are over in Afghanistan, 920 military members are participating in the NATO training mission in Kabul, code-named Operation Attention.
- Seven are assigned to Canada's liaison team at the headquarters of U.S. Central Command in Tampa, Fla. — Operation Foundation.
- Five are with Operation Hamlet in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.
- Nine are with Operation Sculpture, serving with the British-led military advisory and training mission in Sierra Leone.
- Six are serving with Operation Saturn, in support of the United Nations-African Union mission in Darfur.
- Nine are assigned to Operation Crocodile, the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

As we begin our Christmas celebrations, there are almost 1,300 fellow Canadians on military operations and peacekeeping missions far away, where Christmas traditions are often unknown and unwelcome.

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- Fourteen are with Operation Soprano in the Republic of South Sudan.
- HMCS Vancouver and her 250 crewmembers are serving with Operation Active Endeavour, NATO's fight against terrorism, to detect, deter and protect against terrorist activity in the Mediterranean Sea and the Strait of Gibraltar.
- Twenty-eight are with Operation Calument, Canada's contribution to the Multinational Force and Observers at El Gorah, in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.
- Three are with Operation Gladius, Canada's contribution to the UN Disengagement Observer Force on the Israeli-Syrian border.
- Eighteen, in Operation Proteus, are working with the office of the U.S. Security Co-ordinator to build security capacity in the Palestinian Authority.
- Eight, with Operation Jade, are Canadian military observers with the Truce Supervisory Organization in the Middle East, the UN's oldest peace support mission.
- One is with Operation Snowgoose, Canada's contribution to the UN force in Cyprus.
- And five are assigned to Operation Kobold, the NATO force in Kosovo.

Even among those serving within Canada, many hundreds do not have the opportunity to join their families for Christmas dinner.

While almost all ships of the Royal Canadian Navy are moored to their jetties during the holiday season, none can be left unattended. Mandatory duty watches can consist of up to 10 per cent of the ships' crews, and these duty watches rotate daily. Each of our 12 frigates has a crew of about 250 men and women.

Because Canada's military must be available to respond to any emergency and crisis when called upon, there is a network of duty watches at army, navy and air force operations centres throughout Canada: at National Defence Headquarters; at the two RCN headquarters in Halifax and Victoria, B.C.; at the four Canadian Army headquarters in Edmonton, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax; and the Royal Canadian Air Force Combined Air Operations Centre in Winnipeg.

The Joint Rescue Co-ordination Centres in Victoria, B.C., Trenton, Ont., and Halifax, with their Canadian Forces and Canadian Coast Guard staff members, are other agencies that must maintain continuing vigilance.

These operations centres work around the clock each and every day to ensure that the Canadian Forces maintain a situational awareness of everything that is happening within Canada, in our airspace and near our shorelines that might affect the nation's security or require emergency services best provided by the military.

As well, each Canadian Forces base and station has a duty officer who is required to remain on base for the full 24-hour period during which she or he is assigned these responsibilities. The duty officer is the commanding officer's representative and this assignment is in addition to the officer's normal duties.

Like hospitals, police and fire services, Canada's military must be alert to threats and emergencies which might affect the security of the nation or put human life in jeopardy — all day, every day.

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