

Plain & Valley

Covering Southeast Saskatchewan and Southwest Manitoba

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Almost home: An end to duties in Afghanistan

BY CHRIS ISTACE

Kahkewistahaw First Nation resident and Canadian Infantry Captain Evan Taypotat is midway through a six-month tour of duty near Kandahar City, Afghanistan. He and the rest of the Canadian troops will permanently end their mission next month, leaving behind a positive legacy of nation building.

The chain of events following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States included an American invasion of Afghanistan less than a month later. At the time, the U.S.'s mission was to seek and destroy al-Qaeda, the Islamist terrorist organization claiming responsibility for what is now generally known as 9-11.

The Americans sought Osama Bin Laden, al-Qaeda's chief financier and leader, but also felt it was necessary to topple Afghanistan's Taliban government, who provided a base of operation for the organization.

Canada's military—one of more than 20 members of a coalition force—joined the Americans in the conflict in early 2002.

For a young teacher from Kahkewistahaw First Nation north of Broadview, 9-11 stirred the dreams of a military career he had as a child.

Evan Taypotat felt "too comfortable" with his life situation. He was a healthy, fit young man with no wife and kids. He didn't even have a girlfriend at the time.

"So I figured why the heck not (join the military)?" the 32-year-old infantry captain said from Kandahar Airfield, located about 10 kilometres from Kandahar City in southern Afghanistan.

"I used to stare at soldiers in awe when I was a kid and figured I could fulfill my dream by becoming one of them while serving a country that had given me decent odds at being a successful human being."

Four and a half years after entering the service—and a month short of a decade of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan—Taypotat is ending his first and only tour of duty there. All of Canada's military personnel will be out of the country by the end of next month, fulfilling the mandate set out by Prime Minis-



Captain Evan Taypotat recently flying his First Nations flag in Afghanistan near Kandahar City. "Despite all the negativity in the news about the my Reserve, to me it is still a great place to be from and I am proud to call Kahkewistahaw home. I wanted to fly the flag in appreciation of all the past veterans from my Reserve who served in the previous wars."

ter Stephen Harper in 2008.

Taypotat began his tour in July. He lives and works alongside 30,000 NATO troops from the U.S., Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Australia, Germany, France and Canada.

Taypotat's activities primarily involve the Canadian withdrawal from Afghanistan with the Mission Transition Task Force. He and his platoon are among the Canadian soldiers who travel through the Kandahar area to

pack and protect equipment used through the past 10 years—guns, tanks, uniforms, bedding, computers, tents and a multitude of other items—as it is transported to a staging zone. From there, it will be returned to Canada, sold to other armed forces or given away to local citizens.

"It is not exactly 'battle', but we are doing what is asked of us and doing it well," he said.

Taypotat's path to Afghanistan began in Quebec, where he went

through basic training. From there, he moved on to Infantry Officer Battle School in Gagetown, New Brunswick, and was finally posted with the 1st Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry at Canadian Forces Base Edmonton.

Through that time, he questioned whether entering the military was the right decision.

"There had been many tests during the battle school which made me wonder if it was all

worth it. Should I just quit and go home, back to my comfy life as a teacher? Or should I go on?" he said.

"The instructors always told us that, upon graduation, we would lead men, some of the finest Canadians we would ever meet. It was this thought that kept me going."

It was almost four years before he saw his first tour of duty. He was prepared for the adventure.

"I had many sleepless nights during training to just make myself be considered for the job over here," he said. "I like it to playing hockey. If you just practiced and practiced, never really played a game, then you would get a little antsy. Well, now I am finally playing the game."

For Taypotat, the experience so far has not been as bad as some may be led to believe. In fact, he is more concerned about what is happening in Kahkewistahaw. He recently lost a friend to suicide and sometimes wishes he was home so he could have been there for him.

He's also concerned about the political turmoil regarding the Kahkewistahaw chief and council currently brewing on the First Nation.

Taypotat's support system back in Canada is on his mind, too. It includes his mother, Iris Taypotat, and his grandparents, Albert and Marjorie Taypotat.

"My family has been well. My Kokum (grandma) misses me a lot and she sits up and prays for me," he said. "I tried telling her I was okay and all that, but she has likely seen a few soldiers in her day come back different. My mom and sisters are all fine as they know that I know how to handle myself in stressful situations."

Taypotat adds that his girlfriend has also fared well, although it's been a drastic change in the relationship.

"She went from seeing me every day to not seeing me at all and having to listen to my stories of the conditions and endless rocket attacks over here," he said.

He doesn't seem to be as worried about himself as they are, though.

Continued on page 3 ESP

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Taypotat on a road movement in Kandahar City in a photo dated July 2011.



On a hot day in July, the locals all jump in the local river—not the cleanest river however.

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Taypotat proud of his role

Continued from front
“While I am here, I just go about my business. Our training is so good that most hairy events are over before we even know it,” he said. “We just react and the training takes over. The things that are usually on my mind are the people back home.”
Taypotat says the reception the foreign troops by Afghans is split; on the one hand, those found be-friending visiting soldiers may be punished by Taliban factions still lurking in the area. This is why locals tend to show disdain for

the soldiers.
Meanwhile, the foreign armed forces are the first place the citizens turn to when they require help.
“If a child breaks his leg, the same guy who yelled at you yesterday is now at the front gates of the base telling us how much he appreciates us and wants his kid to be helped,” Taypotat said. “In my experience, the Afghan people have been respectful toward me, as I have been respectful of their ways and traditions.”
Regardless of how Canadians have been received, Taypotat says their presence there has had a positive impact on the country. Besides helping to free the

country’s residents of the Taliban regime, which imposed a harsh system of Islamic law on Afghans once it took power in 1996, Canadians will leave behind new schools and hospitals; wells with clean water; various pieces of equipment; and a fully-trained Afghan military.
“In a time of need, our army, navy and air force have stepped up and shown it can be counted on when needed,” he said, adding that these benefits for the people of Afghanistan have come at a cost.
A total of 158 Canadian military personnel and four Canadian civilians have died during Canada’s

commitment there. Almost 2,000 others have been injured. More than a quarter of these men and women were wounded in action.
Taypotat says this should never be forgotten. They’ve fought the good fight.
“I believe it was the right decision to be here. Once your boots are on the ground here, you realize how much help the Afghan people need,” he said.
“They don’t have schools. They don’t have a health care system, let alone a hospital. There’s no sewage system, no minimum wage, no clean rivers, nothing. I now treasure what we have in Canada a little more.”

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Wind farm offers green option

BY CHARLES TWEED

It was February of this year that the Red Lily Wind Farm officially came onto the SaskPower energy grid. Jim Duff, who oversaw the construction of the \$60 million project is happy with how things have been going.

"It's been going well since we got up and running," said Jim Duff, senior business manager with Algonquin Power. "The units are performing as expected and we haven't really run into any issues. A couple of minor growing pains with SaskPower dumping us off but it's been good."

The wind farm, which is owned by Concorde Pacific and developed by Algonquin Power, signed a 25-year power purchase agreement that really allowed the project to move forward.

"We have a power purchase agreement with SaskPower," explained Duff. "They buy all of the energy we produce and they've been a great utility to deal with."

But just how much energy do those large windmills produce?

"Each unit is capable of producing 1.65 megawatts, and there are 16 units, which works out to 26.4 megawatts," said Duff. "At full wind and at full power we produce 26.4 megawatts."

Duff said over the course of a year the units will run at full capacity 35 per cent of the time. The other 65 per cent the units are running anywhere from zero capacity, if there is no wind at all, to 99 per cent capacity.

Wind power has been embraced around the world, as people, businesses and countries elect to those renewable resources as opposed to the more conventional non renewable resources like oil and coal.

Duff said wind energy shares a lot of similarities with hydro electricity.

"The two energies are very similar in that they are a green energy, they are a renewable energy," said Duff. "The difference is that wind is highly variable, where water isn't. The direction of wind is highly variable, where water isn't. So they are a different beast

but when it comes to the fact it doesn't use fuel that is very much a similarity."

He did add that wind energy is not as dependable as hydro electricity, at least not yet. Due to the fact there are only a small number of wind farms the turbines couldn't be depended on to supply the province's power but if there were many turbines scattered throughout the province then the probability that there isn't wind at some of them diminishes and the wind energy resource becomes more dependable.

Duff said one of the minor challenges was finding service technicians in the area. He credited the economy in the area being so good right now that it has created a lot of competition for the same qualified people.

"It has been slightly difficult finding people," said Duff. "The potash mine and oil has made it a little more difficult to be able to hire good people but I wouldn't say it's a massive issue."

The windmill unit stands 80 metres in height with the blades measuring 41 metres from centre to outside tip.

"It's basically a football

field from tip to tip on the blades," said Duff.

He said for the most part people have been very happy with the turbines. There is a 24-foot setback from the base of the turbine that cannot be farmed and Duff said farmers are as industrious as they've always been.

"Farmers farm right up to that 24 feet or they'll shave about six inches off," said Duff. "And that's the way it should be."

When the farm was under construction there were talks about the possibility of continuing the project, adding more turbines in the area. Duff said the potential of more development is up to SaskPower.

"It depends 100 per cent on SaskPower," explained Duff. "If we can come to some sort of an agreement then our expectation would be to go ahead but it depends if they are interested in that happening."

"SaskPower doesn't have a tremendous amount of renewable energy (in their portfolio, they have a lot of thermal," said Duff. "There are a lot of negative aspects associated with that generation portfolio so the more you can put in renewable or green the better."

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BY KEVIN WEEDMARK
 Amber Holland's Canadian championship curling team will be visiting both Maryfield and Moosomin in December.

The Saskatchewan Curling Association announced the winners of its Tour of Champions contest Thursday. The Tour of Champions will see Saskatchewan's three 2011 Canadian Championship teams—Team Holland, Team Moskowy and Team Paulsen tour to a total of nine communities around the province.

Team Holland, the women's Saskatchewan and



Amber Holland's rink will be in Maryfield on Dec. 10 and in Moosomin on Dec. 16.

Canadian champions and world silver medalists, will be touring three Saskatchewan towns—Maryfield, Moosomin, and Melfort. The Holland team will

be Maryfield Dec. 10 and in Moosomin Dec. 16.

The Maryfield and Moosomin curling clubs are among 27 that applied to host the Tour of Champions last summer. Both found out only a week ago that they were selected.

Both curling clubs are working on plans for Team Holland's visit.

Maryfield is a curling-crazy town that has produced a lot of notable curlers. Lemon says that having some of Canada's top curlers come to town is always a big thing for the village of 400 people.

"Having elite curlers come to Maryfield is a fantastic experience for our young curlers because they are able to witness curling athletes who can serve as role mod-

els and who are attaining their curling dreams," says Maryfield's Janet Lemon.

"It is a super opportunity for us and we're really excited," said Deanna MacDonald, president of the Moosomin Curling Club.

"It's going to be great for the kids to get exposure," said MacDonald. "It should help increase our junior base so that we can ensure the longevity of the club. It starts from the ground up and we want to make sure we give kids that opportunity to get excited about the sport."

"We're hoping to have a banquet in the evening with a bonspiel of some sort around it," explained MacDonald. "We've got a couple of ideas that we're discussing."

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Tim Hortons nearing completion

Construction crews work on the roof of the new Tim Hortons in Moosomin. Exterior work on the building, which sits on the Trans-Canada Highway on the east side of Moosomin, is nearly finished. The restaurant is slated to open in December.

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Coyote in an apple tree

Leonie Hooper took these photos of a coyote in an apple tree in her yard in the country north of Rocanville recently. A pair of coyotes were in her yard, and they climbed the tree to get at the apples. Moosomin conservation officer Luc Syrenne says he has seen coyotes climb into berry trees as well.

Leonie Hooper photos



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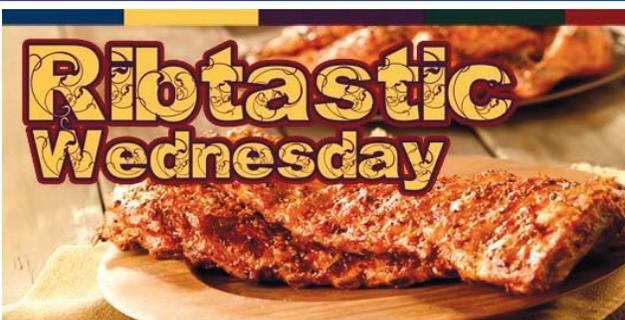
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Joseph play coming together

Rehearsals for the musical theatre performance "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" have been in full swing in order to move the large theatre production closer to reality. Shown here are some rehearsal moments taken at the United Church in Moosomin. The musical will be performed Nov. 25-27 at the Moosomin Convention Centre.

Above: Trevor Poole singing a solo with cast in the background.
Top right: The orchestra accompanying the choir.
Right: The cast clapping during one of the songs.
Below: Sandra Poole directing the choir.

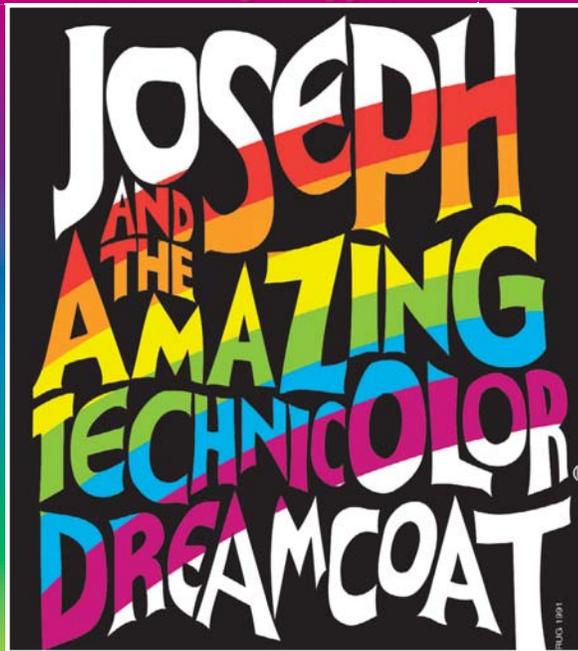


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PCS Expansion completion date Nov. 2013

BY CHARLES TWEED

When PotashCorp's mine in Rocanville is finished its expansion in 2013, it will have cost \$2.8 billion and taken the mine's production from three million tonnes of ore to 5.7 million tonnes per year. The problem is—and it's a good problem to have—they might want to start thinking about further expansion already.

"The world demand for potash is about 50 million tonnes per year," said Steve Fortney, general manager of PotashCorp Rocanville. "If you look at two per cent growth, you need another million tonnes per year. When you think we started this project four years ago and won't finish until 2013, that is only going to satisfy three years of growth—you can't finish it fast enough to keep up with the growth."

The mine expects to be running at full capacity in about two years time.

"Our startup date is scheduled for November, 2013," said Fortney.

"Our shaft sinking is going well," explained Fortney. "We're at 440 metres and the freezing is working good. They are currently digging through the Blairmore right now."

The Blairmore formation is the most challenging formation the crews will encounter during the drilling process. The formation is close to 100

metres deep and consists of sand and water. In order to prevent the sand and water from breaking through and flooding the shaft, the layer is frozen until the shaft can be reinforced with concrete and steel tubing.

"You can't just pump down grout or cement to seal it because it's too porous," said Fortney.

"Our shaft goes through three underground lakes and what we do is we freeze it out—freezing the lakes—then we drill and blast our way through the frozen material," said Fortney. "When we're done we'll make sure to seal it all off and then you let the lakes thaw out with our shaft in place."

The water-saturated formation is frozen by pumping calcium chloride, to act as a freeze conditioning agent, down a series of drilled holes around the shaft.

"We drill a pattern around the shaft plus monitoring holes so we can tell how far out it is freezing," said Fortney. "We started freezing about a year and half ago with calcium chloride. Before the freezing technique it was always the formation that really caused a lot of problems."

"It's salt water so you have to seal it down to about -30 degrees Celsius," explained Fortney.

The mine is currently shut down for the month of Octo-



Steve Fortney, general manager of PotashCorp Rocanville, stands in front of the of the current service shaft that will be transformed into a second service shaft after the Scissors Creek shaft is completed.

ber to allow for an opportunity for maintenance to areas that require extensive time to repair or replace. The mine was going to shut down during the month of July but it became clear the shutdown would work better with the

expansion if it was pushed back to October.

"We typically shut down for one month of the year," said Fortney. "We normally shut down 10 hours a week but there are a bunch of jobs you can't get done in 10

hours so we save them and schedule them for this time of the year. It's all of our bigger jobs—steel that needs to be replaced and you don't want to change that when you're running, those sort of things."

"While we're down we've taken out our rail lines and we're running power lines underneath them to get ready for the main power up next year," said Fortney. "We're erecting the main mill steel and at this stage we're bringing on the first half of our load out, for loading rail cars. By the end of October we'll be loading with the new system and using half of the new load out building."

PotashCorp Rocanville is mining west of where the original service and production shafts were built. The Scissors Creek shaft is 16 kilometres west of the old shafts and will act as the new service shaft when it is complete, carrying workers considerably closer to where mining activities are taking place underground.

After the Scissors Creek shaft is completed and operational, PotashCorp will begin transforming the current service shaft into a second production shaft.

PotashCorp has signed 40-year agreements that secured more land west of Scissors Creek. The land was secured from oil companies, the government and some private ownership. Fortney said all three entities receive the same amount of compensation during the 40-year lease agreement which translates into about \$2.8 million per quarter section.

"The new shaft should be up and running by July of 2013," said Fortney. "But we can't touch the current service shaft until the other shaft is going. Once the Scissors Creek shaft is going that's when we'll disassemble (the current service shaft) and make the final conversion. That'll take us another four or five months to do."

The Rocanville mine has provided a huge economic boost for Rocanville and surrounding communities that have benefited in a variety of ways.

"We have no plans of hiring outside of the immediate area," said Fortney. "As a matter of fact we find it very beneficial to hire within the immediate area. We try to participate heavily in the community. Our municipal and school taxes that we

paid this year is \$4.1 million and we expect that to increase after the expansion. That money is all spent within a 60 mile radius of the mine site."

The mine also continues to give back to the surrounding area, recognizing it's important to strengthen the area and make it more attractive for prospective employees.

"We do about \$130,000 to \$150,000 worth of donations in the local area every year," explained Fortney.

The average T-4 slip filed from PotashCorp Rocanville last year was \$94,500. The mine currently employs 470 permanent employees and another 1,200 contract workers for the expansion. Fortney said the number of permanent employees will only increase.

"We plan to be up to full man power by November 2013 which will be 670 employees," said Fortney. "We still have 180 permanent employees left to hire."

"A lot of people that left for other opportunities want to come and they've found it's a pretty good job for this area," said Fortney. "It's not always easy to find the right people but we pay a pretty good wage so it's a good job. We've probably have more problems filling the trades and professionals."

"We find people that don't have a tie to the area aren't usually a good fit but people that do have that tie are very comfortable staying here," said Fortney.

The mining industry is subject to peaks and valleys depending on prices on the global market, and PotashCorp Rocanville is no different.

"In 2009, we were shut down for 31 weeks," said Fortney. "We managed to keep everyone working on different jobs except for 30 of our youngest employees, who were laid off for 13 weeks."

"We try hard in the slow times to eliminate contract workers."

Fortney said PotashCorp only sells about five per cent of its potash within Canada.

"The company sells about 45 per cent in the (United) States and the other 50 per cent internationally," he explained. "It's really the international market that has been growing. That being said, because we're so close to the American border we probably sell 70 per cent of our potash here to the States."



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Economic boom evident in Wawota

BY CHARLES TWEED
Wawota, Sask's commercial sector is booming, with four new buildings sprouting up in the southwest corner of the community.

From an abattoir to an equipment rental shop, a construction company to an oilfield supply store, Wawota is feeling the effects of a healthy Saskatchewan economy.

"The buildings and companies are going to be a great asset to the community," said Tim Lincoln, who developed the land. The buildings are in the RM of Wawken, which should help broaden the tax base and provide some relief for rural residents in the area.

Lincoln said the size of Wawota was a big reason the community is doing so well. He believes the town is small enough that people still really need to work together to make sure the town succeeds.

The buildings may be in the RM but there is no doubt the companies will have a positive influence on the entire community.

"It's nice to see it being used for commercial development and there is quite a bit of interest there," said Wawota Mayor Norm Oliver. "It creates traffic and interest which in turn brings people. It creates jobs and the spinoff is there."

The buildings will tap into Wawota's water and sewer lines to ensure a steady flow of good water and Oliver said the town



Charles Tweed photo

The new abattoir will be a welcome addition to the business community. Moose Mountain Meats will open as a community co-operative and hopes to be open early in the new year.

was more than willing to provide the services, knowing how valuable the businesses will be to the town.

"It's all business and although it's not direct taxation it brings a direct spinoff," said Oliver. "It's everything that comes with it. You are building houses for people that are moving into town."

The three businesses west of Wawota directly on Highway 48 are diverse in what each if them will bring to the community.

The most easterly building is owned by Alice Hughes will be occupied by A.L.A Resources and

Running Bear Rentals with the businesses offering carpentry and equipment for commercial or residential construction. It is a 2,400 square foot shop that will supply light towers, generators, excavators, scaffolding, pumps and other general construction equipment.

Greg Wilson owns the building furthest to the west. Wilson will use the new building as part of his construction business called W.G.G. Construction, and has rented a portion of the remaining building to Keystone Oilfield Services.

Clarence Lamontagne

owns the building in the middle of the three. Owner of C & M Homes, Lamontagne has built a building that has both office and shop space and plans to rent the building to the oil industry.

The new abattoir, which is a community co-operative called Moose Mountain Meats Co-operative, is located straight south of town on Highway 603.

RM of Wawken Reeve Hector Lamontagne said the new buildings and businesses will benefit the community of Wawota and said there is more than meets the eye as well.

"There is more than just

four businesses too," said Lamontagne. "I know Wilson has rented out some offices out to Keystone Oilfield so it's good for the community. It adds a lot to our community."

The abattoir, a 1,200 square foot building, will serve a need that the community has lacked since losing their abattoir.

"The abattoir will help the entire surrounding community and anybody with livestock," said Lamontagne.

"Things are really looking good here right now," added Oliver.

The RM provided some incentive to make Wawota

more attractive to the businesses and Lamontagne believes it's a small price to pay to bring good, stable jobs to Wawota.

"The businesses get a tax break for the first two years," explained Lamontagne.

The new buildings will widen the tax base and Lamontagne was excited about the prospect of new jobs coming to Wawota.

"It adds more taxes and more importantly brings jobs into the community," said Lamontagne. "It's quite a few jobs and it means more people in town, more spin off at the grocery store."

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Calder adds more books to war series

BY KARA KINNA
 Estevan, Sask. author Marie Calder has published two more books in her "Other Side" series revolving around the Second World War, and says she is now considering a total of 20 books in the series all together.

Books six and seven of the series have been published and Calder says book eight is already written, and will likely be out in the spring.

"I am getting more and more material all the time, but I am finding there are stories I need to incorporate," says Calder. "I am not writing a book about a person. I am weaving events in, plus there are the historical events that, as I do more and more research, I feel I need to address."

Inspired by her father's service in the Second World War, Calder began to write the Other Side series a number of years ago, telling the story in part fact, part fiction, of her father's actions in befriending and caring for a struggling Ger-

man family while he was stationed in Leer.

The story soon ballooned into a series of books that explored the effects of war, from her father's commitment and devotion to his new friends in Germany, to dealing with post traumatic stress disorder, and the effects of war on his family back home in Canada. Calder's books follow the German family, her father, and her family back home.

In "The Other Side of Capture," book six, and "The Other Side of Rebellion," Calder outlines the struggles of her father, still stationed overseas near the end of the war, while back and home her mother struggles with raising her children, and with family issues.

"It's not the from the front lines now, but from the aftereffects," says Calder about her latest books. "So the earthquake has already happened, but now we have the aftereffects. This is the other side. This is the side that no one addresses, the rebuilding overseas and back home.



Marie Calder has already written eight books in her "Other Side" series, and says the series may end up being 20 books long.

"I was pretty naive when I started this journey, thinking that there would only be eight book in total, but new

things are coming to light for me. They are just tidbits, but they are people stories I want to incorporate. Plus

there is the history, bits and pieces that you and I didn't learn about. It just seems to keep growing."

Calder says she has been doing about 20 speaking engagements a month, travelling to towns around Saskatchewan talking about her books. Many of those engagements are at schools.

Calder says her books not only teach people about the devastation left behind by war, but about how people can still do the right thing during dark times.

"I've learned that war hurts absolutely everyone involved, one way or the other," she says. "And I don't just mean the Second World War, but I'm talking about Iraq and Afghanistan. Whoever I meet (who has been involved in war) there is some sort of trauma. You don't have to be on the front lines to experience the trauma.

"War does very little good, however you can do good when you're in a bad situation. You can make the best of a bad situation, which is what my dad did."

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Ferrets released at Grasslands National Park

BY BROOKE PETRENY

On October 18, my family and I participated in the release of a group of rare black footed ferrets into the prairie dog towns located in Grasslands National Park.

My uncle Darin teaches Outdoor Education to Grade 11 and Grade 12 students at Wadena Composite High School.

His class, as well as students from Val Marie, Swift Current and the Saskatoon Outdoor School, were included in the release of 15 captive bred and raised ferrets, and he invited us along for the day's events.

We started the day with a hike up Seventy Mile Butte. Park staff and biologists gave us a very informative tour, teaching us about the history and ecology of the park, and the history of the black footed ferret.

These ferrets (a different species from the European ferret that you see in pet stores) were thought to be extinct until 1981, when, in Montana, a farmer's dog brought home a dead ferret.

A small colony of 18 ferrets was found nearby—these were the last black footed ferrets left in the world. The population had dropped so low because these ferrets eat only prairie dogs (which are about the same size as the ferret) and live in prairie dog burrows.

Prairie dogs were viewed as a pest because they ate farmers' crops and damaged fields, so they were exterminated in large numbers.



Right: Brooke Petreny and the view from the top of 70-mile Butte. Above: The release of the first ferret.

Without the prairie dogs to eat, the ferret population quickly declined, and for 70 years, they were thought to be extinct. Today, there are protected prairie dog towns and when these are able to maintain a population with sufficient numbers, they become potential ferret release locations.

The 18 ferrets in Montana were all removed from the wild, and though it took several years to breed them successfully in captivity, seven of these ferrets eventually started to reproduce.

The entire population is now based on these seven ferrets, and the Toronto Zoo and Calgary Zoo participate in the recovery program, as well as several facilities in the U.S. To survive in the wild, the young ferrets are taken to "ferret boot camps" where they are closely monitored in captive prairie dog

towns until they learn to fend for themselves.

Release sites are very carefully selected by biologists—ferrets eat about one prairie dog every three days and mothers with kits consume one per day, so the prairie dog sites must have large, healthy populations.

The plague has caused fatalities of both ferrets and prairie dogs in the last few years, and holes are now treated with insecticides at some sites to kill the fleas that transmit the plague.

Ferrets have been released three times over the last five years at Grasslands, and though there are some ferrets that cannot be located, there were also three litters with a total of seven kits born in the park last summer. Grasslands is the first and only reintroduction location in Canada.

There were 15 ferrets re-



leased on the day we were there. Our group was responsible for releasing two males.

We were divided up into teams of students—some were carriers of the kennels the ferrets were in, some used GPS to locate the exact hole selected by the biologists, some were spotlights (as we released them at dusk and in the dark), some recorded all observations about the ferret, and some were the releasers.

My sister Maya and I were lucky to be ferret carriers—we took turns with other students as it was a long walk to the release locations.

The ferrets were released into the prairie dog hole and given a small meal to help

them on their first day in the wild.

On the first release, it was still light out and the ferret was really loud. When we got to the release location, the ferret did not want to come out of the cage, so the biologist had to carefully remove the plastic tube that was in the kennel for the ferret to hide in, and place the tube in the hole.

Everyone was very cautious as the ferret's teeth can penetrate leather gloves and though the ferrets were born in captivity, they were not tame at all.

Eventually, he disappeared down the hole. The second ferret also took some coaxing, but he eventually went down his hole too. It

was very dark by then so everyone had flashlights.

When anyone got close to his hole to check on him, he would pop his head up and "yell" at the people.

All the other teams reported successful releases, and several biologists and local volunteers will go out to the park at night over the next several months to watch the ferrets with spotlights (their eyes reflect a bright green color).

It was an amazing experience to be able to carry one of the rarest animals in the world and see them released back into the wild where they belong.

Brooke Petreny is a Grade 8 student at McNaughton High School in Moosomin.



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