

Carving a Totem Pole in Kabul Afghanistan

(Photo taken Jan 2004)



During the last year I had the privilege of representing Canada in Afghanistan during Rotation 0 from July 2003 – Feb 2004 as the Explosive Ordinance Disposal Advisor to the Canadian lead brigade group in Kabul, Afghanistan.

I found myself extremely busy during the first 6 months working from 0700 hours to 1000 hours, seven days a week with a light at the end of the tunnel. Around month 6, I decided it was time to give myself a bit of a break and relax a bit. So I started to stop working at 2000 hours or 0800 PM and spent some time designing new furniture plans. This lasted about a week and I was fresh out of ideas, so it's back to work again. At that time I found an individual that could scrounge me up a log or beam that I could use for carving. I made an order for one 18ft long 10 inch x 10-inch timber. When my timber arrived I was told it had survived a lengthy trip through the Kiber Pass from Pakistan. The vehicle that was delivering it was stopped and inspected three times

by local authorities and was in a group of vehicles that was hit by a roadside bomb. After all that, it made it to Kabul in one piece with just a small amount of shrapnel stuck in the side of it.

Now I had my first chunk of wood and it only cost me \$110.00 US. I could live with that. Then I spent 2 hours a night for a week making my plan on just what I was going to carve and how I was going to finish my work of art. Knowing the Afghanistan weather, the pole would have to survive wind, sands storms and wet winters so I would have to find something on the local economy to preserve it. I would think about that as I got near to completion.

(Photo of me carving the Pole)



Me standing with me Totem Pole
Kabul Afghanistan Feb 2004

Once I had my plan, I started to carve 3 hours a night after work including weekends, which really did not exist. I started at the bottom and moved up the pole removing the general stock so I could see the pole taking shape. I placed an eagle at the top with its wings spread to represent the Air Force and our trip into Afghanistan through the mountain canyons 'flying map of the earth'. For those who don't know what that means it's 'really close to the ground and very fast'. The next carving down the pole was a Native North American, which is a big part of being Canadian, so it was next in line. After that I placed a Viking because of the friends we made with the Swedes and other European countries. Next was a wild man from North America, you know the typical mountain man look with wild hair. Now, last on the pole and holding everything else up was a Black Bear, the symbol of 2 Brigade and the HQ leading the multinational Brigade. The carving would take me about two weeks, and a week more to finish it off with oil and shellac.

When I departed Kabul in Feb of 2004 the Totem Pole was standing at the entrance of the Canadian camp at KMNB in Kabul. Where is it now that the Canadians no longer run the Brigade? It's probably firewood or left behind by the Canadians as they pulled out of the HQ.