

Canada mourns two slain soldiers

By Nate Smelle

Only two days after warrant officer Patrice Vincent was run down and killed in St. Jean-Sur-Richelieu, Quebec by Martin Couture-Rouleau, another member of the Canadian Armed Forces was murdered while on guard at the National War Memorial in downtown Ottawa. The attack took place on the morning of Wednesday, Oct. 22 at 9:50 a.m. when Michael Zehaf-Bibeau approached Cpl. Nathan Cirillo from behind and fired twice, fatally wounding the 24-year-old father and husband. Firing another shot at the second reservist on guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier while fleeing the scene, Zehaf-Bibeau next hijacked a car and swiftly made his way over to the Parliament buildings.

Member of Parliament for Prince Edward-Hastings, Daryl Kramp had just arrived to a caucus meeting when the gunman entered the building. The last week has been a challenging one, he said as he has been coming to terms with all that had happened.

"This has reached the general consciousness of the everyday citizen," Kramp said.

"You can talk about things across the pond, you can talk about terrorism, you can talk about whatever, but until it takes place in your backyard that all of a sudden the reality of the threat really kicks in. There is no such thing as a constant here; we are in a steady state of flux. Terrorism takes place in many different ways. It's almost like a hydra with the many heads kicking around. In this particular case we were very fortunate that it was just one [assailant], because had it not have been we could have been in a much more serious situation. There is going to be a lot of lessons learned from this."

Armed with a hunting rifle, Zehaf-Bibeau ran across the lawn and entered the Centre Block at Parliament Hill, where he shot and wounded another Parliamentary guard. As shown in a video by a Globe and Mail reporter, chaos erupted in the Hall of Honour inside Parliament after an exchange in gunfire between the shooter and police. According to the numerous eyewitness accounts of the MPs present during the shootings, the assailant was eventually shot and killed by the House of Commons Sergeant-at-Arms Kevin Vickers.

"The House security, the RCMP and obviously the actions of the Sergeant-at-Arms Kevin Vickers were absolutely astounding," said Kramp.

"The actions of the first security guard who had the courage to grab the rifle barrel and ended up getting shot in the foot. That basically alarmed us. Had he not grabbed the barrel maybe that person [Zehaf-Bibeau] would have been further down the hall." Kramp had just stepped into the caucus room when he heard this first gunshot. Owning a similar hunting rifle to the one used by Zehaf-Bibeau in the slaying of Cirillo, Kramp recognized the sound of the gun and knew something was wrong. The situation could have been much worse if it wasn't for the cooperation exemplified by his colleagues and the security team.

"As soon as that happened, I started to barricade doors and instruct them, as did a number of my other colleagues because a few of us knew right off the bat that this was a very serious situation."

Very shortly after the initial weapon was fired the gunman ran down the hall and fired towards the Conservative caucus room, and then fired towards the opposition's room.

"Of course he wasn't able to stand and try to get in because he was being pursued by other security while running down the hall firing his weapon," he said.

"With all of the shots going on we were inside and the doors were closed so we didn't really understand what was out there. Was there one assailant or was there 15? We had no idea. Our concern was with the number of shots that were fired."

Even after Zehaf-Bibeau lay dead in a pool of blood on the floor of the Hall of Honour the Parliament buildings remained under lockdown well into the night, while authorities probed every nook and cranny of the building to make sure the threat was over.

Kramp described the whole experience as very unsettling, yet still somehow encouraging.

"What has taken place here has shaken the sensibilities of every Canadian," he said.

"The outpouring we have seen across the country has been encouraging. It tells me that our values and principles as a nation and our courage to move on, is literally unshakable."

The challenge for government now lies in how to prevent such an attack from happening again.

"Our first responsibility as a Parliamentarian is to the health, safety and protection of our citizens," said Kramp.

"We will do whatever is necessary to make that happen, however, we also have to be mindful of our values and principles as Canadians. Our freedoms are tremendously important to us, so in setting the balance and we need to be mindful of our liberties and find a level of protection that is commensurate with the threat."

According to Kramp, public security will be tightened, and anti-terror legislation is currently on the table.

?It's a really delicate balance and I think that obviously with the changes in the world we have let the pendulum get a little out of balance, so I think we have to swing it back a little bit,? he said.

?Once again if we were to go too far towards an authoritarian state at that point in my mind then the terrorists win, and we can't go there. For our values, our principles, the things that we stand for, and for the freedoms that we do have there has been a horrible price paid for that. We cannot just forego those gains with an overreaction either.?

Although both Zehaf-Bibeau and Couture-Rouleau have been reported to have ties to Islamic extremist group, neither attack has been determined to be part of any broader coordinated effort. Before his attack on Vincent Couture-Rouleau had actually been placed on a list of radicalized Canadians by the government, and was even arrested earlier this year.

?Islam is not the problem,? he said.

?It is no different than Buddhism or Christianity or whatever. It is a set of beliefs about the rapture and how life should be lived, but when people abuse that and take it to an utter extreme; that's where there is a problem.?