

Remembering the Unremembered

On this Remembrance Day, I am particularly remembering a Canadian peacekeeper the Harper government probably prefers to forget-- Major Paeta Hess von Kruedener who was killed (along with three other UN observers) by the Israelis in the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war. Then United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan characterized the attack as “deliberate targeting by Israeli Defence Forces.” The UN, from the senior executives in New York down to the UN forces on the ground, had warned the Israelis repeatedly that day (a dozen times, I was told by UN officials) that their artillery fire was endangering the UN officers. The Israelis ultimately dropped a bomb on the UN position, killing all four observers. On February 6 2008 following a Department of Defence Board of Inquiry (BOI), Cynthia, the wife of Major Hess von Kruedener issued a statement, excerpts of which follow:

...the Israeli Defence Force has clearly accepted responsibility for the incident that killed my husband and his colleagues.

Just so we're clear “the incident” refers to the 500 lb, precision guided bomb that was dropped on the UN bunker containing my husband and his fellow Peace Keepers, who were unarmed and serving the world community in the pursuit of peace.

The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have attributed the targeting and subsequent attack to an operational error; but offer no explanation of how that error occurred.

... the IDF acknowledges receiving multiple protests regarding their artillery rounds hitting the post. They even acknowledge communication from the UN Force Commander stating: “You are

killing my people” – and yet; the IDF fail to explain why the subsequent J-DAM Bomb was NOT halted.

...If 6 hours of artillery shelling was an operational error – and bombing a UN bunker was an operational error – what are the odds that two operational errors (land and air) occurred within an hour of each other and in the same place? Keep in mind, that the UN Patrol Base was a solitary structure; not surrounded by any other buildings; painted white; marked UN in big, black letters; flying a UN flag; well mapped; and located in exactly the same place for more than 30 years!

This, and many other questions, will never be answered unless, and until, the IDF reveals the complete findings of its own internal investigation.

The Israelis apparently never did reveal their full findings, and Prime Minister Harper blamed the UN. The full report of the Board of Inquiry was quietly removed from the Department of National Defence website. What is left there is a news release that quotes the Chief of the Defence Staff Rick Hillier as calling the incident “a tragic accident”, a description that Mrs. Hess von Kruedener’s statement flatly rejects, as do the politically inconvenient facts. She appealed to Parliament to “debate the findings of the Board of Inquiry, and through our Foreign Minister, take this issue to the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly”. She urged Members of Parliament to “make the safety of peacekeepers a priority. “ To our collective shame, nothing was done.

The Harper government seems content to let this particular sacrifice disappear in the mists of time. Lest we remember.