CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW CONTROL NUMBER: 31D 7MULKINS

INTERVIEWEE: Marta Mulkins

INTERVIEWER: Angus Brown

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 26 February, 2007

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Ottawa, Ontario

TRANSCRIBED BY: M. Assaff

Transcription of Interview Number 31D 7 MULKINS

Marta Mulkins

Interviewed 26 February, 2007

By Angus Brown

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum Oral History Program Interview with Lieutenant Commander Marta Mulkins on 26 February, 2007 at Ottawa, Ontario. Interviewed by Angus Brown. Tape 1, Side 1.

MULKINS: My name is Marta Mulkins. M-A-R-T-A M-U-L-K-I-N-S.

INTERVIEWER: We'll skip your normal biography because we have it already on a previous interview. I wonder if you can tell me about the events leading up to your selection to go to Afghanistan?

MULKINS: Yes, of course. I was working at the Chief of Maritime Staff, as you know. I'm a member of the Naval Reserve and the other interview that you have with me is descriptive of the job that I'd actually had previous to the posting that I was in at the CMS where I was working at strategic communications. And I think I had been there for a couple of months when I received an e-mail from a former colleague of mine who was working in the J-3 International Staffing Cell. And she was also a member of the Naval Reserve and informed me that there was this particular operation that was now soliciting for positions called operation ARGUS. And did I know anybody who would perhaps be available for it? And as a Naval Reserve, I guess, and in her duties for staffing, she tried to really make sure that everybody had as direct an opportunity to be able – to be part of operations like this. So she had, I guess, along with soliciting the other, the Militia and air force reserve, had also sent out the message to a few people in the Navy Reserve. And I think I was one of them. And I promised her that I would think about it. She explained a little bit about it. I told her I would think about it and if there were anybody I could think of I would be happy to pass it on. Didn't think of myself at all, initially. But over the course of that week, in fact, I had been looking at the web site on the DIN about the military's activities in Afghanistan. So, in fact, just that week I'd started to learn a little bit about it. And over the course of the following week decided that maybe – you know, it's sort of like a light bulb – maybe I should think about doing it. So I did return to her and ask her more information about it.

It was normally – it was a group for a year to be working out of Kabul. And part of the team would be there for the full year and part of the team would be there for six month positions. And the training was starting then, in fact. The team – by the time I heard about it – the team had already partly been formed but they were still looking to fill up the extra billets. And so it actually was quite a short fuse request at that time. They were down in Kingston finishing the Peace Support Training Centre training and would be in

Ottawa the following week. So I had a very quick interview with the staffing boss. I think his name, if I recall correctly, was Lieutenant Colonel Peverly [sp?]. At the time, he thought that I would be a good candidate. And this, of course – I had spoken to my own boss in the CMS first to let him know that I was considering it. And he referred me for a quick interview with the head of the team, Colonel Mike Capstick, an artillery officer, just now retired, actually. And so I was allowed to join the training on spec if a position were to open up. And in the meantime, my boss at the naval strategic communications cell that I was working in thought that it was a great idea. But he would, of course, pursue it from his end with the Chief of Staff of the – the Chief of Maritime Staff – to see if I would actually be allowed to take it. So it all happened so quickly that events sort of overstepped each other but the end result was that the interview with Colonel Capstick was successful. I joined the training in Ottawa, which I think we'll go into in a little more depth later on in the interview. The Chief of Staff decided that I could not go for the first six months but he promised me that if a billet was still required for the second six months, which was the ROTO starting in February, the half ROTO actually, then I would be allowed to go.

INTERVIEWER: So your initial indication of the job was in late summer of 2005?

MULKINS: That's – 2005, that's correct yes.

INTERVIEWER: And you eventually were slated to go in February of 2006?

MULKINS: That is how it worked out in the end, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Can you describe for me Operation ARGUS?

MULKINS: Yes, Operation ARGUS was a completely separate operation from the other engagement that we have in Afghanistan at the time and now. And it was designed as a small strategic advisory team to render strategic planning assistance to the government of Afghanistan. And it is an unconventional military operation. And the genesis of it lay in the very particular personal relationship that our Chief of Defence Staff, General Hillier, has with the President of Afghanistan, President Karzai, which was a result of the period of time that General Hillier was the head of ISAF-5. And at the time they had recognized that they – really, in this small fragile government for Afghanistan which was influx at that time – they lacked strategic planning capability. And I think, on different occasions perhaps, the General had implied that he had that capability and, I think, as the story's told anyway, finally President Karzai said, "Look, you know, I'm still not seeing strategic advisory assistance." So the General said, "Fine. I'll take it back to my government and we'll see what we could put together for you." And Colonel Capstick was chosen to lead the team.

The intent is – and it is often called the Strategic Advisory Team, hyphen, Afghanistan, the SAT-A. The intent was that it would be as much a relatively small team that would render exactly that, strategic planning assistance, in the sense that we were not to be subject matter experts in economic development or infrastructure or policy development.

But that instead what we would – the skills we would bring to the table were in being able to understand what the government wanted, and be able to, with them, develop plans that would accomplish those goals. So providing, basically, mentorship to their planners in how to develop theses goal and paths. Basically, the OPP translated into policy development or whatever field was required.

INTERVIEWER: The OPP is?

MULKINS: The Operational Planning Process that the military uses.

INTERVIEWER: So, was this team all Canadian Forces, or was it only Canadians, or were there other nationalities or other departments involved?

MULKINS: The team was a team that was supposed to express Canada's then-3D approach to international engagement to the government at the time. That meant that development; i.e. CIDA, Diplomacy and Defence, would be working together and, as such, the team did ask that both CIDA and Foreign Affairs – the Canadian International Development Agency, and Foreign Affairs – to provide a team member if they so desired. And CIDA did provide an expert in development, basically. And developed how you train – and I'm sure I won't put his position correctly, actually, but basically an expert in mentoring new governments and how to develop plans. Foreign Affairs did not send a team to work with us directly, but the activities that we did while in Afghanistan were through close communications with Foreign Affairs, through the Embassy in Kabul.

INTERVIEWER: So you were in close contact with Canadians in the country?

MULKINS: That's correct, yes. And, in fact, we were physically located very close to the Canadian Embassy residences as well. So we did have fairly close interaction with the Canadian representatives in Kabul.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about your job.

MULKINS: My job specifically was as one of the members of one of the two teams that were sent to work in the different government departments. The overall structure of the team was that there were essentially two major groupings, two teams that could be deployed. And I was part of one of them. And then the third group were, basically, the support cell, not just in the sense of the day to day support of the mission, managing the house and the accounts and that sort of thing. But also there was a defence scientist whose job was to provide all sorts of analysis depending on what was required at what time. And there was also a communication specialist who was actually a navy public affairs officer who oversaw, contributed, to everything that we did in the sense that he built networks, liaised with a lot of the NGOs, the foreign missions, the other military's allied military folks in Kabul as well. And really built bridges for us so that we could see bigger pictures always of where we were engaging, not only in the Afghan government but then also to what the multiplier was and the benefit to all. So I initially was a part of the team that was sent to work in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy

working group, which was a team of people who were helping to develop the oversight document – essentially the Afghanistan National Development Strategy – which was meant to coordinate all aid and development activities in the country.

INTERVIEWER: How big was your team?

MULKINS: The team that I was on was, in fact, three people. Each team was three people. There would be a commander or lieutenant colonel-rank leader and two lieutenant commander major-level employees, essentially workers. And that was the structure of my team.

INTERVIEWER: So two teams of three. And how big was the support team?

MULKINS: The support team was one, two, three, four, five, essentially.

INTERVIEWER: So a very small group?

MULKINS: A small group, yes.

INTERVIEWER: And this was all under Colonel Capstick, is that correct?

MULKINS: That's correct, yeah. And then he also had a chief of staff which I don't think is included in those numbers. Chief of staff, a driver, part way through there was a clerk introduced at the sergeant level. We also had a sergeant who was basically in charge of the vehicles and, basically, the oversight of the tasks of running the household, that sort of thing.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about your specific responsibilities.

MULKINS: While working in the ANDS group, the responsibilities, essentially, were to do whatever was required – actually, to assist the working group in developing the ANDS document. And what I mean by that was that the framework of the ANDS had been developed, laid out, but it now was necessary to develop the actual goals and target levels that would allow any given ministry to measure development in their areas of responsibility. And that was a pretty challenging process because it required a lot of consultation with the ministries to find out, you know, what their goals were and how to set their targets and what would be the measurable – how we would measure that success. So there was that large consultation component but there was also really the writing of it.

There was liaising with all the various NGOs and, well, I'll summarize by saying all the eight donors who do not move as a single body, of course. All come with different interests and different perspectives and wanting to control their aid in different ways. So it was quite an interesting challenge and we worked on different things, really, the group while we were. Some of it was, in fact, the scheduling. Some of it was in production of the various interim reports. Lots of meetings. And one of the – actually the things that I focused on, that was assigned to me, was trying to develop – how to develop – a software

system that would be able to be the tool to marshal all this information. And it had to be a system that could read all the different data bases that were already – had already been developed by the UN or by different agencies, different aid agencies. So it's not as though I had technical oversight by any stretch. But it was just trying to figure out a strategy on how this could be accomplished, given the resources that were available to the government – that were being offered by different aid agencies and what not at the time, as well.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of pre-deployment training or briefing did you get to help you accomplish these tasks?

MULKINS: I think that – well, certainly the training that I joined the team for in Ottawa. It was two days of, basically, briefings by different – well, we certainly had briefings from DFAIT, for example, and CIDA who gave the overview of the situation in the country. Some of the most important and most interesting of the briefing material that we received was a briefing from Lieutenant Colonel Ian Hope who was about to head back to Afghanistan himself at the time. And, of course, as we all know, was down in Kandahar for the same six month rotation that I was there for, with all the challenges that they had.

INTERVIEWER: He was the Battalion Commander at the time?

MULKINS: Exactly. And he had been in Afghanistan before and had worked in ISAF and had, as my understanding, and he had lot of good information and perspective to pass on to us. So that was a particularly motivating period of the training. Beyond that there – the PSCT, the Pearson – excuse me, the Peace Support Training Centre in Kingston – provided the generic pre-deployment training. So we would be in the same group as people going to Bosnia, for example.

INTERVIEWER: How long did that last?

MULKINS: That was, as I recall, it was a two week course. Actually, I could be wrong, it might have been a one week course. The timings changed immediately afterwards. And that was a lot of the, you know, mine detection and how to clear any kind of a weapon, a lot of the basic survival skills: health, medical risks, stress of deployments and the whole social components of deployments. And a little bit of cultural awareness as well when we were broken out into teams specifically to our destination. And then we learned a little bit about basic greetings in the language of the nation, that sort of thing.

INTERVIEWER: How did you get to Afghanistan?

MULKINS: The route was flying military and we departed from Trenton in the Airbus flight. And there were two other people in the same flight who were destined for the strategic advisory team as well. And the routing was from Trenton to Zagreb with a fuelling stop in Zagreb and then onto Camp Mirage. In Camp Mirage we had a few hours, depending on when the next Herc flights were coming in. I think we were there for about eighteen hours. And then it was Herc flight on to Kabul.

INTERVIEWER: So you went right to Kabul, not to Kandahar?

MULKINS: Correct. We were lucky enough to be there at a time when they had some flights to Kandahar and some flights direct to Kabul. I don't think that's case now. I think most actually go through Kandahar first, now.

INTERVIEWER: When you arrived, did the locale meet your expectations or did you receive any surprises?

MULKINS: I – we had been told what the basic set up was. But the city is pretty breath-taking. I mean, nothing really prepares you for landing on the tarmac at Kabul International airport and seeing the mountains and the sky and the character of the landscape. Our own residence was – I mean, everything was new and interesting obviously. It's hard to say if it met expectations or – I mean, it was all just exciting, really.

INTERVIEWER: Can you elaborate a bit on your ANDS job, the first one you did?

MULKINS: Yes. I think one of your questions was the actual physical location and the, sort of, the day-to-day routine. The ANDS working group is located in a building called the Prime Minister's Compound actually, and it is exactly that. It's a compound of buildings that were sort of old palaces, I guess. Very beautiful stone work. Very interesting architecture, wood work; all, sort of, with a very shabby [laughs] shabby look now since they haven't really been able to be maintained for a while.

The office, essentially, was one large room that was probably about fifty feet by twenty feet with a lovely high ceiling and ringed with – all the desks were along the walls with a table in the middle for conferences and larger meetings. And that was the work space, and we worked with our Afghan colleagues, men and women. And our colleagues, I would say some of them had had some western education but, really, for the most part they were young, thirty-something highly motivated, forward thinking Afghans. Used English a lot but I would say Dari was their first language of choice in terms of an Afghan language for business in the office.

And the actual head of the ANDS is the senior economic advisor to the president, a professor emeritus, actually, of NYU by the name of Dr. Ishok Naderi, who would split his time between New York and Kabul and oversee the development of the ANDS and oversee the reporting procedures to the higher levels of government and to the higher levels of international governments as well. So he was really the one with whom we would consult from time to time on specific items and he would give us direction. And by us, I mean the entire working group, not just the Canadian SAT members in there. And that was basically the structure.

INTERVIEWER: How many other nations were represented in this area?

MULKINS: Well, there were no other foreign assistance, per se, on a full time basis the way we were. There was certainly no foreign military. Occasionally, a representative from ISAF or from CJTF-76 would come in on a liaison basis, which is obviously a very positive thing because what we were doing should essentially be the framework for the activities of provincial re-construction teams as well. And, in fact, some members of my team did deploy and – well, I shouldn't say deploy –but they would travel out and brief PRTs – PRT conferences – on ANDS to give them an idea of how they might do exactly that. How they might shape their development activities in whatever their region was.

INTERVIEWER: The PRT was the Provincial Reconstruction Team?

MULKINS: That's correct, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me a little bit, in more detail, about the working relationships that you had?

MULKINS: Well, the specific one I guess that I can speak about is the one I was involved in that – the software strategy – or the data of management system strategy, I guess is a little bit more accurate. As I said, I certainly have no expertise in that area. It was really, I guess, the requirement to develop some kind of plan within the ANDS to be able to then go out and have either – have a system designed or to request collaboration between different groups. The ANDS did have, I guess, what they called it was their information technology expert, who as a young lad who definitely had some knowledge and capability but perhaps not the knowledge about how to plan a system and how to think slightly from a broader perspective, I guess, on how to accomplish the needs of ANDS. So my task really was to sit with him and discuss what he knew of the capabilities that already existed and how those could be leveraged or developed or what our possible avenues of how to develop the system, what those avenues were. And then we would consult with a lot of the non-governmental organizations more directly, as they were either the service provider or the data provider, and whatever service was given had to be able to take into account all the data that these various groups had. So it was rather interesting.

INTERVIEWER: So, would it be fair to say that your job was to organize their thinking?

MULKINS: I think that maybe – yeah – in the sense that it was to help develop a plan, exactly what our role was. It was never, sort of, to impose a system or anything like that. But it was really to develop an approach that we could follow and then have plans that we can fall back on if that approach didn't work.

INTERVIEWER: Could you just clarify for me the position within the Afghan government of the ANDS?

MULKINS: The ANDS is basically a stand-alone group, right now. Because it has such a special function and really has to liaise with all the ministries, all the components and also liaise with the international presence in the country as well. So it's almost like a

separate commission. It's almost – well, I would say it's almost like a ministry in that sense.

INTERVIEWER: To whom does it answer?

MULKINS: Well, it answers to – Professor Naderi is the head of the ANDS and he, in turn, reports to the president as a Senior Economic Advisor. There is discussion, I think, that in future it would be – the ANDS would be – incorporated into the Ministry of Finance which might be the logical place for it given that it's a tool for dispensing or for controlling aid money, where it goes, as well as measuring the benefits of that money.

INTERVIEWER: Did you feel well prepared to take on this job? Your background is as a naval reservist having commanded a small vessel, and in civilian life I believe you're a landscape architect?

MULKINS: That's correct, yes. Well, I would say that officially no, nothing would prepare you for specifically those types of activities. Except that, obviously in the military and also in my job as an architect, everything is running projects, essentially, planning a project and executing that plan. So there is, you know, the parallel there, certainly in the ability to identify goals, identify how you're going to achieve those goals and then in turn to execute that plan.

INTERVIEWER: How long did you stay in that ANDS job?

MULKINS: I was in the ANDS, I think for about two and half months. And there is a little bit of a blurry stage – grey area – where I was still working in ANDS but then starting to work in a new project that Colonel Capstick had assigned me to which was exploring whatever assistance we could render to the Chief of Staff to the President, a man by the name of Javed Ludin who wanted to restructure the office of the president in order to improve their basic functioning but also specifically to improve their policy analysis capability. And, so initially we had meetings with Mr. Ludin to, sort of, explore what role we might possibly play. And then, as things developed, we made a proposal to him which was accepted. And then I was dedicated full time to working toward that goal, to the restructuring the office of the president.

INTERVIEWER: Do you mean that you were dealing in policy, or were you dealing more in procedural matters?

MULKINS: In fact, it was dealing purely in the structure of his staff. It was identifying what he wanted to accomplish and what were potential structures of his office that would allow him to accomplish that. And then, it would be ultimately looking at the staffing to fill in those positions, to develop – to make that structure happen. And, as I mentioned, his major goal was to be able to have an internal policy capability. For whatever reason, he felt that the president wasn't being well served in that aspect. But he also, as the Chief of Staff trying to run the day to day business of the palace, was finding it immensely frustrating to try to control the president's schedule, to actually – and I shouldn't say

control in the negative sense. But it was simply to be able to make the best possible time, the best value of the president's time. And I guess from what we understand, in the president's view, was that of a tribal chief – basically, everybody gets a turn. And because of that, meetings tended to be not as efficient or as directed by goals that were to be achieved, much more ad-hoc, I guess, and therefore achieved little of the present – and took up the president's valuable time. So that was his other desire, was to improve that situation as well.

INTERVIEWER: So you must have been working against some of the cultural norms that were in the country at the time?

MULKINS: Well, I think, really, that was Ludin's entire challenge. He had worked in the western world and had a slightly different perspective on how the office of the president had to function in order to be successful. And, yes, he definitely ran up against a lot of resistance from palace staffers who'd perhaps been around for years and years and saw that the current system was to their advantage and felt threatened by change and by Ludin in particular. And it was a pretty exciting thing to be part of, on the one hand, but on the other hand it was obviously risky. And my status, of course, as a foreign military officer obviously had to be very, very carefully handled. Because, of course, that could be deemed as a very objectionable thing, not only to Afghans working in the palace but also to foreign governments wondering why Canada had this type of engagement in – so close to the president. So it was – it had to be very carefully handled. And, as I say, the key was to keep a very low profile and really to make it clear that the engagement was purely as a planning tool. There was no policy agenda. Certainly, you know, it was really always within the boundaries of technical assistance.

INTERVIEWER: Did you wear a uniform, and was the fact that you were female of any consequence?

MULKINS: When I worked at the palace I always worked in civilian dress, for exactly those reasons, best not to raise attention. And I think that as a woman there I certainly – I never felt – the people with whom I dealt most directly were, you know, of modern outlook, I would say. And even in the ANDS office, we all had initially worked in combat, in our uniforms, in our combats – the arid combats. Part way through we had been very politely asked if we could perhaps wear civilian dress because some of the foreign embassies were starting to ask questions. And it was checked with Ottawa and, yes, we were allowed to wear our civilian dress to work. And so we did switch, even at the ANDS. So there were some advantages to it. But I never had a problem, actually, either in the ANDS or in the palace as a woman, perhaps because I was a foreigner. But there's always, you know – one behaves in way that is polite and respectful, too, of course. You know, you don't want to push the envelope either, too much.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about personal security in Kabul.

MULKINS: There obviously is risk in Kabul. It's not like going out on patrol in Kandahar when you're the only guy out there and you are the target. In Kabul it's very,

very different. It's much more random. But there were, you know – we would frequently, in fact very frequently, be warned about the vehicle-borne improvised explosive device threats in the city, the VBIEDs. There was all sorts of risk, really. Rockets would occasionally be lobbed into the city still, although it was much less frequent than it had been a few years before, from what I understand.

INTERVIEWER: Well, where did you live and how did you get to your place of work?

MULKINS: We lived in the Wazir Akhbar Khan neighbourhood which is the, I guess it's known as the neighbourhood of the foreigners in Kabul. I think it probably was really developed in the fifties and sixties, judging by the style of architecture that I saw anyway. And it really is the location where most of the embassies are, most of the embassy residents. The wealthier Kabulis live in that neighbourhood as well. And it's pretty well controlled, actually, because of that. A lot of the streets are controlled with barriers at the front and back, with guards who will let you in only if they know you belong there, sort of thing. There's a lot of police presence in area as well, just because there are so many targets in the area. The Camp Eggers, the American base, was located down the street from where we lived. And the NATO base was not too far from us, either.

INTERVIEWER: How did you move back and forth?

MULKINS: We had four armour-plated Toyota Land Cruisers. That was our fleet of vehicles with dark windows and pretty robust vehicles. You sort of need it because Kabul is still a city that is half in ruin, so driving around can be a challenge. We would drive almost always – almost always – two to a vehicle, though I admit it wasn't always two to a vehicle. When we would drive to work, because the places – government offices – where we worked would not allow fire arms, we would either not bring fire arms or we would leave them in the vehicle, locked up. But that wasn't really a very – that wasn't a preferred solution either. But that was the nature of our work. Same with body armour. Body armour would be in the vehicle, depending on where we were driving. That was just when we were driving to work. If we were driving across the city, specifically on the routes that were known to be the high threat routes, i.e. where most of the suicide bombers would target military convoys or even SUVs that were clearly driven by foreigners, then obviously we would armour up and be prepared for anything.

INTERVIEWER: Was that stressful?

MULKINS: I think the best way to put it is that it was constantly at a slightly higher level of stress. And driving – actually, I think that if you were out driving every day all the time would probably become very, very difficult. I think probably it's very tough on the drivers. The Colonel had a driver, for example. Not only is traffic mayhem, I mean, there really are no rules in traffic, people driving the wrong way, across traffic, that sort of thing. But then there is that additional risk and there are locations where you know that, you know, you just want to get through there as quickly as you can. And, you know, incidents did happen while we were there. As much as we felt that we had established really very positive personal relationships with our Afghan colleagues and felt good

about the work that we might be doing on any given day with them, you never knew what people out on the streets where thinking. So, yeah, there was an extra level of stress in everything we did, I think, from that perspective alone.

INTERVIEWER: I take it from your remarks that you didn't have much interaction with the common Afghan, if I can use that term?

MULKINS: Well, I suppose, no. I mean, it's not like a city where we could go and walk around on the streets and meet our – well, if our neighbours were Afghan anyway. Mostly they weren't, of course. But, I mean, it really was wherever we went we were in the vehicles, not getting out walking around in streets. It's just not the kind of city where you could do that right now.

INTERVIEWER: So you didn't go shopping, for instance?

MULKINS: We didn't go shopping in the markets, or at least if we did it was very rarely and it was with people who spoke the language, basically, or Afghan or could speak Dari fluently and comfortably and you – so there was this kind of security factor there in itself. But we had the house staff, the house manager and his team. I would describe them as regular Afghans, you know. They were fairly well educated, usually in some kind of computer science, and they were good guys just, you know, looking to, you know, make enough of a living and pleasant. But I think that outside of that, everybody we met was through work and so they weren't really, you know, the people running the little shops in the streets or anything like that, no.

INTERVIEWER: You've mentioned the neighbourhood. Can you tell me a little bit about the house in which you lived?

MULKINS: Yeah, it was a compound, essentially, of two houses which were in the backyard, essentially, of the Canadian Embassy residences. There were two small houses and our team was basically split between the big house which also had the dinning room and the main TV, living room and the kitchen, and also a little work-out room in the basement. For that matter, we had some sports equipment in there. And the little house, which was basically just used as the bedrooms for some of the team members, and I was in the little house rooming with Major Elizabeth DeChamplain, an air force AERE [officer: ed].

INTERVIEWER: What about meals?

MULKINS: The meals were provided by the service that gave us a cook, essentially, and our food services and our laundry. So that was part of the house management. It was a contract with SODEXHO [sp?]. And so our cook basically cooked breakfast, lunch and dinner. We would usually go out one night a week to give the cook the evening off. He was an Indian who, I think, went home once every three months or so. And he was a pretty good cook. It was different. I mean, the food was different. It was his interpretation of western food for the most part. I think we probably all preferred it when

he cooked Indian food because, of course, that was kind of a treat for us and he was pretty good at it, so.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you go out for dinner?

MULKINS: There were a few restaurants that were, for a lack of a better word, were vetted safe for us to eat in. And they were usually an international style restaurant which had a parking area that was enclosed and therefore secure. We, as a general rule, would never leave our vehicles parked out on the streets for obvious reasons. So there was a German restaurant, for example. There was a Croatian restaurant which had, sort of, the best pizza in town, I guess was why we always went there, anyway. There are a couple of other restaurants, a French restaurant believe it or not. So we would circulate to these different places from week to week and get as much of the team out together as possible. And it was almost like a family dinner, really, because otherwise we would never sit together and eat all at once. So this was – this, sort of, served that function, I guess, for our large family.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me a little bit more about the amenities you had. You said you had a work-out room and television?

MULKINS: Yes, we were pretty lucky I would say. And actually it was quite different from any other military folks in Kabul who were living on a base or a camp of some sort. We did – we had satellite television service with a provider from South Africa, no less. And we also had the Canadian – the broadcast designed specially for the forces deployed which was quite interesting, too. And we had, as I say, we had a small work-out room in the basement of the big house where we had a few pieces of sports equipment. We had a treadmill and a bike and an elliptical machine and some weights and a ghetto blaster, a radio. And that was where a lot of stress was worked out, I think, actually.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go on leave?

MULKINS: Yes. Everybody who is on the deployment is entitled to eighteen days, plus travel time. And my leave, which I took in May, was a trip to Turkey where I met my fiancé at the time. And we met in Istanbul and then flew south to a sea coast town and took a little cruise. Visited Istanbul as well for a few more days, and basically it was a great escape. It was a great, relaxing, lovely time. I know some of my other colleagues – some went to Italy, many went home too, to their families in Canada. But those who could pick a third location had lots of great stories to tell as well.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find that the home leave travel assistance plan was of use to you to get away? Did it work well? Did the travel coordinator have everything organized well for you?

MULKINS: Yeah, it was actually a really good service where they have the staff, actually, who came up from Kandahar, to give the "Kabul 100", as they called us – the one hundred Canadian troops of various descriptions who were based in Kabul – to

organize all our travel. And they had great ideas. I mean, they were essentially travel agents deployed who helped coordinate all of these things. And it was – I think there might have been some issues but for the most part – actually, I had a visa problem. They told me I didn't need a visa, but they assumed I was travelling on a blue passport. And in the end I was travelling on a green passport and I didn't have diplomatic clearance. So it ended up being a little bit of an issue for me, but took a couple of days to sort out while I stayed in the United Air beemerits [?] So my trip actually started a couple of days late, but I'm not really complaining because it was all interesting and all contributed to a good leave.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me a little bit about the Kabul 100. Who else was in Kabul at the same time? What other Canadians were in Kabul?

MULKINS: The other Canadians. Well, there were sort of Canadians dispersed in lots of places. There was the National Support Element representatives, the clerks and whatnot, who were located, which were the bulk of them, who were living in Camp Souter, which was the British base. They also had vehicle technicians. They sort of run the gambit of trades there. But there were also representatives in ISAF, in the headquarters, serving headquarters' functions. And there were also liaison positions with the Americans, with CJTF-76, as well, who served different functions. And, in fact, my boss and the Chief of Maritime Staff, Commander Geoff Agnew, Public Affairs Officer, who was my boss in Strategic Communications, was deployed to Kabul at the same time that I was. But he was working in an exchange – or not in an exchange – I guess in a position with the Americans just up the street in their camp which is called Camp Eggers. So every now and again he would come and visit us at our house just to have a little escape from camp life.

Interview with Lieutenant Commander Mulkins, 26 February, 2007. End of side 1.

END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1

INTERVIEWER: Interview with Lieutenant Commander Marta Mulkins on 26 February 2007. Tape 1, side 2.

Can you elaborate a little bit more on the day to day routine and what you did in the second job that you had there, working with Mr. Ludin in the Chief of Staff's office for President Karzai?

MULKINS: Yes, well, I gave you sort of the overview of what my responsibilities were there. I was basically the lead person but I did have the benefit of the assistance of the defence scientist, Dr. Elizabeth Speed, who was part of the team. And she was a great resource in terms of political, organizational, structure, governance issues and what not. Which sort of led – gave the background start point – for looking at how the president's office might be organized, you know, depending on which goals they wanted to accomplish at this stage of their development in history. And Albert Wong also,

Lieutenant Commander Navy, Public Affairs Officer, the strategic communicator that I mentioned earlier, he would occasionally also come to the meetings that I had with Mr. Ludin, with Javed Ludin, from his perspective as well. And he more so from the – once again – the linking and the "who can help" sort of perspective. But overall, it was really me working on it with their assistance. And we tended, even relative to the rest of the team, because it was really such a sensitive thing, it was really the three of us speaking together about it. And I would brief the Colonel directly. It wasn't something that we discussed in the group as a whole for the most part. Just because, you know, we knew that it was rather a sensitive position. And until we knew how to – had a better idea of where we stood within – well, I guess if we were getting in above our heads, to put it most succinctly, then we didn't really talk about too much at all.

INTERVIEWER: This is – what you've described sounds a very politically charged atmosphere. How did you operate, other than carefully?

MULKINS: Well, you definitely identified the major risks. It was, if not – yeah, it was definitely politically charged in the sense that Ludin was a reformer. Ludin was a forward-thinking guy with western influence. And some of the staff at the palace, who had been there for years, obviously perceived this as a substantial threat. And there, you know, there was resistance to what he was trying to accomplish. And all this was very much on our minds when we were even discussing at the beginning whether it was an appropriate place for us to engage. And the sensitivities of, you know, us western Canadian, so may things can go wrong. But as it proceeded we decided that it was worth while because it was an opportunity to really assist a man who was very, very sincere in what he wanted to accomplish for good. So I think that was the premise that we engaged in. But in, as you say, in addressing the rivalries that were there, there came a time when it was definitely to our advantage to be seen as little as possible by some of his rivals in the palace. And I think in the end they made it really untenable for him. And he eventually was actually awarded the position of Ambassador to Norway which he will be taking up in the next few months. But I think it was quite a challenge for him and I think in the end he realized that maybe he wanted change a little bit too quickly.

INTERVIEWER: So what were some of the personal challenges you had, as opposed to the political or organizational challenges?

MULKINS: Well, it was, you know, you talked about stress a little earlier. [laughs] This was – this wasn't necessarily physical stress of, you know, driving in the city or the, you know, that type of risk. But it was certainly, it was stressful from that perspective of, "Are we wading in above our heads and could this backfire?" I think at the end of the day, really, I just focused on trying to deliver him a good product. It was up to him to do whatever he could to implement it. That wasn't my job. But it was a little bit stressful to know that we were assisting in something that could be quite controversial within the palace as a whole.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever receive any indication that you were personally resented by any faction there?

MULKINS: Never, no. Never any direct sense with the exception that – and this is indirectly – at one point my pass for access into the palace no longer functioned. So effectively I wasn't able to really work inside of the palace any longer. It didn't really affect the work that we did and, as I say, enabled me to keep an even lower profile, if I can put it as a joke. It didn't stop the work but it certainly reminded us that, you know, it wasn't anything personal against me. It was the rivalries that Ludin was encountering within the – his fellow staffers in the palace.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever meet President Karzai personally?

MULKINS: I never met President Karzai, unfortunately. It would have been quite a pleasure, but no. My timing never coincided with his timing in Ludin's office.

INTERVIEWER: The jobs that you described seem to be rather unprecedented for Canadian military officers. I'm curious as to why, other than the Karzai-CDS relationship, the Department of National Defence took on this task. Do you have any idea?

MULKINS: Well, you're quite right, it is unprecedented. And I'm sure we could have a great discussion about why the military would expand beyond – because this wasn't a CIMIC operation – a civil military cooperation – which normally would be the expression of a military coordination with civilian bodies with government. So this is not even that. And, I suppose, it also raises the question that is brought up frequently, especially in Afghanistan, of the controversy of military engaging in the delivery of aid. Which, if you ask NGOs for the most part, the non governmental organizations who normally would be engaged in those activities, it is very controversial. They don't like it because they see that it puts them at risk from being now associated with a military and therefore a side – picking a side – in a conflict.

I would say that part of the reason for it is maybe the risk that's involved in this particular case. And maybe it's not possible to engage people in a long term fashion to develop a relationship, to render this technical assistance. Maybe it's not possible right now, in Kabul otherwise. I can tell you that it's a city of full of high price consultants who are charging lots and lots of money for their technical services in precisely this type of thing. But there's a – what we encountered is a great weariness in Afghanistan about those – the drive-by consultants. They appear, they write a report, six weeks later they're gone. They haven't really learned the context in the Afghans' view. They don't really understand. They provide them with a boiler plate solution which may or may not apply. The report goes on the shelf and they receive an enormous bill.

And they're very, very cynical about that way of doing business now. And they understand that they're weak, they need assistance but – I think there's a lot of truth in what they're saying. They're not getting the assistance they need, necessarily, through that mechanism. That's not to say that the strategic advisory team is the only real other way to deliver it, but I think that there was a vacuum that we helped to fill. And as long

as its approach – our activities, our engagement – are approached within a pretty firm set of principles about what we will try to assist in and what we absolutely have no business in, then I think we'll be able to retain that objectivity and retain the really – the aim – of providing that technical assistance. Because as soon as there's even the whiff of some kind of a partisan or agenda based involvement, then there's no – we can't be there, you know. It's completely compromised. And I think these are – that's the foundation that our engagement rests on. And if that were removed, then obviously we couldn't engage any more. That's the reason why you see other countries could never be able to do what we're doing right now. I won't name any per se, but. I suppose you see it in other spheres as well where Canada can exercise leadership in ways that other countries can't because our leadership can be accepted in some spheres where it would be controversial if it were coming from another country.

INTERVIEWER: You spoke earlier about the three Ds: Defence, Diplomacy and Development. I guess I'm concerned because I'm not sure why Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade was not doing the kind of work that you and the military seem to be doing.

MULKINS: Well, I think they probably – well, I don't know, actually. I do know that CIDA – they're engaged in the south – they're constantly criticized in the Press for having so few numbers there. Well, partly it's the way they operate. It's one agent, I guess, who controls a lot of projects. So they are project managers. They're not project implementers themselves. So once you understand that, it goes a long way to explaining why there seem to be so few of them there. But from what I understand, they do find it very difficult to find employees or contractors who are willing to go to these locations which we all see in the media, you know, are really reported as being extremely hazardous. And, of course, there's a lot of truth in that. So yeah, that's CIDA's challenge.

I can't really speak for Foreign Affairs. I know that we – we worked – we certainly did work with the embassy in Kabul. And, in fact, our mission statement – one of the lines is, "In consultation with the Canadian Embassy in Kabul". So we necessarily had to have a close relationship. I don't know that they would be interested in doing the type of work that we were engaged in. I think it's nice for them to know what we're doing, but I don't know that it's really their main thrust of activity either.

INTERVIEWER: Did you, or did you know of the team ever receiving any direction from the Embassy?

MULKINS: That would really – the Colonel would be the one to explain that. My understanding was that they were certainly a consultative – you know, it was a consultation relationship. And the wording of that mission statement, I think, was negotiated pretty carefully between DND and Foreign Affairs because, of course, Foreign Affairs is the lead department in Afghanistan. But, of course, the military really has been doing the bulk of the work. So obviously there's a little give and take there, I think.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know if there was periodic or frequent consultation between your team and the embassy?

MULKINS: My understanding is that the Colonel was obviously frequently liaising with the Ambassador. I can't really tell you the substance of that. Obviously, that was his business [laughs].

INTERVIEWER: Although you were not part of it, can you comment upon how the other three person team worked?

MULKINS: Yeah, the other team was engaged in the Civil Service Commission which had the very, very challenging remit of basically re-organizing, re-developing, in some cases developing, the civil service of Afghanistan. Which, well, I won't even go into all the factors there, obviously extremely complex. And the Civil Service Commission was a group of people who had to, sort of, develop among other things, fair hiring practices and human resources rules and regulations and all sorts of things like that. Pretty tough, pretty challenging and, in fact, part way through, near the end, actually, I would say in the last two months of our rotation, the Colonel decided that they could do no more. Our assistance in the Civil Service Commission was really – it wasn't going to be able to succeed any more than it had at that point. And I guess the best way to put it is, they'd helped, they'd mentored and the group as a whole, not just us again but the Afghan workers, had advanced to a degree where all they required, really, to continue on the work, to continue to execute the plan, was some very strong decision-making from the chairman of the civil service commission. And, unfortunately, that wasn't forthcoming. And they went back around the axle several times and, I guess, finally the team leader, in consultation with the Colonel – the Colonel made the decision that that was it. They did all they could.

And the team was, in fact, moved to the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development in the last month of our ROTO. And this was a ministry known to be quite – relatively, quite – strong, had the very important task of really liaising with all the regions, all the provinces. Few ministries could claim to have the type of reach that this ministry had. And it was led by a particularly strong minister known also as one of the reformers in the government and therefore may be risky, may be a target, just as Ludin was. But the decision was made after some close negotiation with them to move the team into that group to reinforce success, essentially.

And of interest, one of the Deputy Ministers – there were two – but one of the Deputy Ministers lived in Ottawa for a while. And, in fact, he has two children at university in Ottawa right now as we speak. So I had a little bit of a Canadian connection there which might have made it an easier agreement. But I think, well, certainly in ROTO 1, they chose to engage as well and to replace our guys in the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. And, from what I understand, things have been continuing quite well there. So that's some good progress, I think.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about your redeployment home?

MULKINS: Redeployment, yes. We, actually, as a group we went home in, I guess, over a course of a month in, sort of, separate little groups. And I was actually in the last group. There were three others and I have to say it was awfully weird in the last few days when we were the last four and all the new team was in and the new Chief of Staff was asking if we could move out our room early so he could move in, and all sorts of… Anyway, I felt very, very odd. I mean, just the way it goes, as you can expect when a new team who's: A, they don't know each other yet so they're feeling each other out; B, they've been watching media back home making Afghanistan look like, you know, you're going to be shot at dawn every day. They were very wary, very – it was hard to… Our goal in those last few days was, "Just relax, you know. It's a great city to live in, actually, once you understand that you don't have to – I mean you're going to live here for a year, so just, you know…" Anyway, I'm sure they've settled in very well by now, but those first few days are a bit odd.

We left, we actually flew home civilian airline. In the end, we tended to always fly by civilian air and that was because, really, it was incredibly difficult to sort of organize any military transport once the bulk of the Canadian operation was down in Kandahar. So to make life easy we just – and we were approved, obviously, to fly civilian air. So we all flew out on one of the Afghan airlines, on CAMAIR into Dubai where we all, sort of, got on …. One went to London, so went on a different flight. And the other three of us were on the same flights all the way home through Frankfurt, Toronto and then into Ottawa. And long, long flight but really very special. Actually, we had a few hours to kill in Dubai and so one of my colleagues from the ANDS team and I, we actually hit the town and had a, of all things, a sushi dinner before coming back to the airport and embarking on our long leg – two long flights, the rest of the way home.

INTERVIEWER: When you arrived home, in Canada, did you have to go through an arrival assistance group or did you, indeed, get any debriefing?

MULKINS: We really had nothing of the kind. We didn't even actually do the decompression trip home which is what everybody from Kandahar, who flew home through the military system, had the decompression leave in Cyprus before carrying on home. It really wasn't easy for us to engage it. It was offered to our team, but it was so logistically difficult. And I don't think – I think maybe one person accepted it and the rest of us just flew home commercial air.

No, we arrived home, went through customs, met our families in the airports and that was it. There was no debrief. We basically – and this really speaks to the fact that we were a very small team – didn't fit within the larger structure. The onesies and twosies, you know, we sort of would check in at the office just to let everybody know we were home and then we all proceeded on our post-deployment leave. And I, as a Reservist, at the conclusion of my post-deployment leave, I did go back to my former job at the Chief of Maritime Staff, basically to close out, just do the formalities of checking out. An out routine, essentially, because I had let them know that I was going to return to my civilian

job as an architect and so that was it. I spent the last week at the CMS, returned my kit, things like, did the paper work and then started back at Public Works the following week.

INTERVIEWER: So what about your personal reflections of this? Did you have any feelings of post-traumatic stress disorder and did you, indeed, have any difficulty at all readjusting?

MULKINS: I – no, I mean I didn't. We, I mean – I guess it's a huge difference when you're not driving around with vehicles blowing up in your convoy. No, I didn't. I did notice that everything was much more relaxing, of course. I mean, everything is easy here in comparison. Actually, just this weekend, I was walking with my husband near – in my neighbourhood – and there were two explosions. And, I guess, maybe because I was thinking about preparing for this interview, and so Afghanistan – well, believe me, it's still been very much on my mind ever since the tour, but maybe even that much more so. I did have the pause, because we did hear explosions, not infrequently in Kabul. Gunfire, rocket – one of the rockets exploded just two hundred meters from our compound one night. So, you know, there's the heightened awareness. I figured out pretty quickly that it was the guys clearing the ice in the river at the little power dam, but there was that one second I didn't – you know, I mean guys are coming back from Kandahar with serious stress. I mean, this is just a little tiny anecdote.

I think the biggest thing, not life-changing completely, I would certainly say that it has really changed my outlook on what – really, on how Canada engages in the world. Not to say that I had a completely different view before, but maybe it wasn't so well informed. And now I have some pretty – I think we have such opportunity and what we're doing is so important. It's not to say we shouldn't keep questioning and re-examining how we're doing it, but I'm really – I think it was very much worth while. And I think it's going to shape where I go in my life from now on. It's going to change my decision making maybe about how I proceed in my own career, either military or within the federal government for that matter. You know, I don't know right now what that means, but I do know that I've changed. I would go back to Afghanistan. Definitely I would if I were offered a position, maybe in ISAF headquarters, that sort of thing. I could definitely see myself being – it would be hard to say no. And I do care very much about what happens in that country. I know what hard working people they are and what a tough time they've had, where they've could have been by now if in the, you know, seventies things hadn't started to go the way they did. So I guess I'm saying I think they have hope, definitely.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have a personal opinion about where they will be going? Will that hope be fulfilled?

MULKINS: I think that – well, I mean we have such huge expectations as aid givers. You know, the many, many, many – the scores of countries that are donating aid. The thirty-some countries that have military presence there all have our ideas about what's right for Afghanistan. But, really, only Afghanistan can truly make it happen 'cause they'll either believe it themselves and make sure that it happens or not. And I think we

really have to temper our expectations. It's going to very, very tough to rebuild an economy, never mind anything else. But I think they have a chance.

One other, I guess, topic of note that gives a little bit more context to how we engaged as a SAT but also, I guess, as Canadians. Throughout our time there, I think – Christopher Alexander was the Ambassador when the team first arrived in, I guess, September of 05. And the elections were occurring then. The Colonel, Colonel Captstick, and he developed a pretty good relationship right off the bat. They, I think they were of like mind. And, of course, he has an invaluable resource for the Colonel in acclimatising in, sort of, figuring out the lay of the land and where the SAT could contribute and all those sorts of things. He was a good sounding board for the Colonel, at the outset. He subsequently finished his posting but instead of returning to Canada he became the, basically, the head of the political section of the United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan or UNAMA. Which was really wonderful all the way around, I guess I can say, because he ended up continuing to act as an unofficial sounding board. And in particular, I mean, when I was engaging in the Palace he was – not that I discussed in great detail anything that I was doing there for good reason – but he was very helpful in interpreting the tone, the nuance, implications of us becoming engaged there. Just as a good little reality check to make sure that we were engaging in the proper way. And it was immensely valuable to have that feedback from somebody who, well, obviously is a fellow Canadian but so charismatic, so well plugged in and so well regarded in Afghanistan. So that was – that's certainly something that your historians in the future will find interesting.

Interview with Lieutenant Commander Marta Mulkins. 26 February, 2007. Interview Ends.

TRANSCRIPT ENDS