



PEACEKEEPING AND PEACEMAKING MINUTES

Major Thomas A. Nguyen, Deputy Commanding Officer 25th Field Ambulance Reserve Medical Unit, Toronto



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“Operation Hamlet” Canada’s contribution to MINUSTAH, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, January-July, 2007.

Thomas Nguyen, born in Vietnam and raised in Canada, deployed to Port au Prince in Haiti as Assistant to the Chief of Staff Colonel Normand

Lalonde. The mandate of the four Canadian staff officers with “Operation Hamlet” was to support the constitutional process in Haiti, help maintain a secure and stable environment, support Haiti’s constitutional and political process and protect human rights.

Their first order of business was to assist MINUSTAH and the Haitian National Police (HNP) in pacifying one of the most violent neighbourhoods of Port au Prince, called Cité Soleil. A UN military contingent of over 7,200 people from 16 countries was working with the HNP to root out gang leaders and notorious criminals, a first step towards being able to provide humanitarian aid in the troubled area. Between January and July 2007, thanks to the team efforts, the rat-a-tat-tat sound of 600 gun shots a day declined to almost silence.

The cooperative HNP-UN sweep through Cité Soleil demonstrated an effective way to run a large-scale anti-criminal operation, one that would serve as a model for future pacification efforts. According to Major Nguyen,
« La PNH n’est pas encore prête à travailler de façon autonome, mais sa participation à une opération d’importance comme celle-ci permettra aux policiers haïtiens d’acquérir de l’expérience essentielle dans leur quête d’autonomie. Dans certaines parties de Cité Soleil, la PNH peut effectuer des patrouilles seule, ce qui est une grande amélioration comparativement à la situation qui prévalait il y a quelques mois à peine. »



Major Nguyen's stay in Haiti included the April 29, 2007 elections. « Dans le cas des élections du 29 avril 2007, le commandement de la MINUSTAH avait établi que les forces onusiennes serviraient essentiellement à soutenir la PNH. Nous avons déployé un nombre considérable de militaires, prêts à intervenir en cas de besoin. Mais c'est la PNH qui a agi en tant que premier répondant quand cela a été nécessaire. Dans l'ensemble, heureusement, le tout s'est très bien déroulé et nos soldats n'ont été appelés à s'interposer que très sporadiquement. »

Thomas Nguyen came to Canada as a seven-year-old. He joined the Armed Forces to express his gratitude to Canada for taking in his family and providing them with a safe place to live. His 17-year military career has been with a Canadian Forces Reserve Medical Unit in Toronto that fields a medical company, a services support company and an HQ element. They parade out of the Moss Park Armoury and are tasked with providing medical support to the 32nd Canadian Brigade Group.

During his education at the University of Toronto Thomas devoted himself to fencing. As the Varsity Blues head coach, the former U of T fencing champion, was awarded the Christian Virdosa trophy as fencing's coach of the year in 2009. Both U of T's men and women's fencing teams captured the Ontario University Athletics title that year. "I'm glad to see that all the hard work paid off; I am simply ecstatic that they brought the banner back to U of T," said Nguyen. As of June 12, 2011 Thomas A. Nguyen sits on the Canadian Fencing Federation Board of Directors and has also been involved with military fencing through the Conseil International des Sports Militaires (CISM).

Major Nguyen was a UN Detachment Commander in Bosnia and a UN military observer in the Sudan. "Giving to your country and to the world is a path filled with pride. There are many roads that lead to positive contributions for others. Choose one!"