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## Scattering Chaff: Canadian Air Power and Censorship during the Kosovo War

Bergen, Bob

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## SCATTERING CHAFF: Canadian Air Power and Censorship during the Kosovo War by Bob Bergen

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## Afterword

Much has changed in the world since the 1999 Kosovo air war. The war ended when Serb president Slobodan Milosevic allowed United Nations peacekeepers into Kosovo and the United Nations to govern it. Kosovo eventually declared independence in 2008, which the Serbian government doesn't recognize but which a large majority of the international community does. Canada's strategic goal of seeing an independent Kosovo within Yugoslavia was sheer folly, but its use of military force alongside its NATO allies contributed to bringing a cessation to the brutal and bloody ethnic cleansing.

Also, since then, Canadian soldiers fought in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2011 after the terrorist incidents in the United States on 11 September 2001. Hundreds of Canadian journalists were embedded with them over the years, most for short periods of time. One hundred and fifty-eight Canadian soldiers along with seven civilians died, including *Calgary Herald* journalist Michelle Lang on 30 December 2009. Lang died with four Canadian soldiers when the armoured vehicle they were travelling in was struck by an improvised explosive device or bomb. In the context of her death, the notion that journalists travel to war zones and use military members merely to provide entertainment for their readers or audiences is appalling. Thousands of news stories were published and broadcast about Afghanistan, but the most authoritative source of information about that war comes from books written by journalists and academics, not the news.<sup>1</sup>

As a society, Canada in the late twentieth century and in the early twenty-first century will be judged by how it supported civil liberties and

the democratic guarantees enshrined in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, including freedom of the press and other media of communication, subject only to such reasonable limits as prescribed by law. In the case of Kosovo, the Canadian Forces failed to meet those *Charter* guarantees. Afghanistan was a much different war because it was a ground war, and journalists could go on patrol with the troops if their editors would let them leave the relative safety of the Kandahar Airfield so as not to miss the next Canadian soldier body bag story. There is, however, one parallel that can be made with Afghanistan: Kosovo. Canada had a squadron of Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) tanks in Afghanistan continuously since the fall of 2006 until 2010, when they were withdrawn. They were making history because it was the first time since the Korean War that Canadian tanks were sent to fight in an active war zone. There was nothing reported about them. Much as with the CF-18s, there is no room for journalists to ride along in tanks. The tanks in Afghanistan were even less visible in the media to Canadians than were the CF-18s in Kosovo. The Canadian air force participated in the Libya bombing campaign 2011 in Operation Mobile and in Operation Impact against the Islamic State (also known variously as Daesh, ISIL, and ISIS) in Iraq and Syria from October 2014 to February 2016. The stories of Operation Mobile and of Operation Impact have yet to be told.

Two shocking and tragic events involving Canadian soldiers provide ample reason to think there will be even greater media restrictions than those imposed by the Canadian military to date. On 20 October 2014, two Canadian soldiers were injured in a hit-and-run accident in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec, that was thought to be a terrorist attack. There was a vehicle chase by police, and the driver was shot dead after his car crashed and he emerged brandishing a knife. One of the soldiers, Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent, died of his injuries. That terrorist-attack speculation was cemented in Parliamentary history by the prime minister later that day in the House of Commons when Member of Parliament Randy Hoback, of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, rose in the House and asked a planted question. He said: "Mr. Speaker, there are unconfirmed reports of a possible terror attack against two members of the Canadian Armed Forces near Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. Can the Prime Minister please update the House on this matter?"<sup>2</sup> Prime Minister Stephen Harper replied:

Mr. Speaker, we are aware of these reports and they are obviously extremely troubling. First and foremost, our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families. We are closely monitoring the situation, and we will make available all of the resources of the federal government.<sup>3</sup>

The attacker, Martin Couture-Rouleau, was identified as a Canadian-born radicalized Muslim convert. Couture-Rouleau had been stripped of his passport by Canadian authorities to prevent him from travelling abroad to join Islamic State fighters. Two days later, Canadian Forces Cpl. Nathan Cirillo was shot dead on 22 October 2014, while he stood on ceremonial guard at the National War Memorial in Ottawa. His killer, Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, who stormed into Parliament's Centre Block after he shot Cpl. Cirillo, was also a Canadian-born radicalized Muslim convert. After a fierce gunfight in the Centre Block's hallways, he was shot and killed by House of Commons security and the Parliamentary Sergeant-at-Arms, Kevin Vickers. Some ninety-three radicalized Canadians were said to be known to the RCMP as high-risk travellers, but Zehaf-Bibeau was not thought to be one of them. The son of a Libyan immigrant, he had attempted to renew his Libyan passport on 2 October 2014 but was turned down by Libyan embassy officials wary of his demeanour. Canadian officials were in the midst of processing his Canadian passport application, but it became delayed when the application was forwarded to the RCMP for a background check.<sup>4</sup> Following Zehaf-Bibeau's death, Prime Minister Harper spoke in a nationally televised address from his home at 24 Sussex Drive, calling the shooting a terrorist act. "In the days to come, we will learn more about the terrorist and any accomplices he may have had, but this week's events are a grim reminder that Canada is not immune to the types of terrorist attacks we have seen elsewhere around the world."<sup>5</sup>

It didn't take long for the Canadian Armed Forces to react. Within hours of the Ottawa shooting, military bases and armouries were locked down. Military members were told not to wear their uniforms in public unless they were driving to work. They were told to not gas up in uniform. A military police officer in Saint-Hubert asked the media not to publish pictures of soldiers' faces. The wife of a Montreal soldier feared military families could be targeted.<sup>6</sup> Military members feared their spouses were

targets in their own country. Permission to wear their uniforms was restored a day later, and the honour guard resumed at the National War Memorial in Ottawa on October 25.<sup>7</sup> In the weeks following, Canadian Armed Forces members were advised to be vigilant and not to wear their uniforms when not on duty.

On 7 December 2014, Canadian television news ran a vitriolic video of Canadian John Maguire, a reported Islam convert. Maguire urged Canadian Muslims to either pack their bags and join ISIL or prepare explosive devices and carry out independent attacks on Canadian soil like those that killed Warrant Officer Vincent and Cpl. Cirillo.<sup>8</sup> Some in the Arab world dismissed the video as trumped-up Western propaganda aimed at bolstering public opinion for Prime Minister Harper's war agenda in the Middle East. It doesn't really matter. History is a teacher here. On 2 October 1924, the Canadian representative to the League of Nations, Raoul Dandurand, famously said of Canadians: "We live in a fire-proof house, far from inflammable materials."<sup>9</sup> The killings of Warrant Officer Vincent and Cpl. Cirillo on Canadian soil amply demonstrate that Canadians no longer live in a fire-proof house far from inflammable materials. The flames set and fanned by Muslim extremists threaten the houses of not just Canadian military families but potentially any Canadian. The events in the United States on 11 September 2001 showed how domestic airplanes hijacked by Muslim extremists could be turned into weapons of mass destruction. Couture-Rouleau showed how easily a car could be weaponized when he killed Warrant Officer Vincent. The problem is that there are far more cars in Canada than there are airplanes and people who know how to fly them. In other words, there are far more potential weapons readily available to those determined to use them.

It doesn't matter if Couture-Rouleau or Zehaf-Bibeau were acting as jihadi-wannabees; lone-wolf terrorists; micro-terrorists; were acting in concert with others in Canada or with terrorists abroad; were following a commander's intent; or, rather, were just deranged, heartless killers who just happened to be Muslim converts. What matters is that Canadian soldiers were deliberately killed on Canadian soil by homegrown radicalized Muslims. The Canadian Armed Forces themselves inextricably linked the fight against ISIL's Islamic extremists to Warrant Officer Vincent and Cpl. Cirillo by naming their Task Force Iraq facilities in Kuwait Camp Patrice

Vincent and Patrol Base Cirillo. The military public affairs specialists at National Defence Headquarters, this author argues, will surely conflate the tragic killings of Warrant Officer Vincent and Cpl. Cirillo and potential acts of retribution by those opposed to Canada's contribution to the war against ISIL, egged on by the likes of John Maguire. Out of an abundance of caution, they will build contingencies for direct and indirect terrorist threats to Canada, Canadians, and the Canadian Armed Forces and their families into their communications strategies. It is inconceivable to think they won't.

Clearly there was tension between the democratic need for open public discussion about the military's activities over Iraq and the secrecy and censorship needed to conduct dangerous operations. But within the discussion is a Russian nesting doll of moral equivalents and dilemmas. Writing comfortably in Canada, it is easy to call for more openness in military-media relations in keeping with *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. For example, US president Barack Obama said Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc. let down Americans when it censored itself and decided against releasing the movie *The Interview* on 25 December 2014. There had been threats of grave consequences regarding its release from North Korean leaders, which included terrorist attacks against movie theatres. Sony had been an earlier target of cyber-attacks by North Koreans upset with the comedy based on the mock assassination of North Korea's leader. The president said in part:

We cannot have a society where some dictator someplace can start imposing censorship here in the United States. That's not what America's about. Again, I'm sympathetic that Sony, as a private company, was worried about liabilities and this and that and the other. I wish they'd spoken to me first. I would have told them, "Do not get into a pattern in which you're intimidated by these kinds of criminal attacks."<sup>10</sup>

The president also drew a parallel to the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013 in which two radical Muslim brothers set off two pressure cooker bombs that killed three and injured hundreds of others. But that didn't stop Boston from running the marathon the next year. Even worse,

the president said, would be a situation in which others began self-censoring themselves to ward off possible retribution. Yet the threats of ISIL against Canadians present precisely that self-censorship dilemma. ISIL is not North Korea, but it is a new enemy the likes of which Canadians have never faced. ISIL's threats have caused self-censorship and military censorship in Canada. This book on the Kosovo air war will surely offend many military sensibilities with its provocative censorship criticisms. Those who disagree will have their say and that is their right. But which author, journalist, or news organization is going to identify a Canadian pilot who dropped bombs on ISIL targets in Iraq and run the risk of potentially being personally responsible for a relative's or relatives' death at the hand of a radicalized Muslim extremist in Canada?

In the history of Canadian journalism, the Canadian government has only invoked military censorship twice, during the First and Second World Wars. Voluntary press censorship was set up early during the First World War under the Department of Militia and Defence with a deputy chief censor. Canada's communications facilities were meshed with a nationwide cable, radio-telegraph, telegraph, and telephone censorship. That network was tied in with Empire Cable and wireless censorship headed by the chief censor in London, England. A 12 September 1914 directive set out information useful to the enemy, and dealt with prevention of espionage, security of the armed forces, and the welfare of the Canadian people. In June 1915, regulations made press censorship mandatory, set out what matter was acceptable or unacceptable, and authorized censors who had the power to enter printing and press establishments.<sup>11</sup> This is how it worked: Far removed from the European theatres of war, Canadians were largely informed of the overseas events of the First World War by news reports from the front, which were heavily censored by British military authorities. Most of the news reports received were not about the more than 15,600 Canadians dying horribly in less than a month in the mud of Passchendaele, but of ridiculously upbeat versions of battle.<sup>12</sup> From the news media's perspective, apart from socialist, anti-imperialist, rural, and certain French-Canadian publications, partisanship was the norm among the nation's major daily newspapers. Typically, the *Manitoba Free Press* proclaimed upon the news that 6,000 Canadians had died at the second battle of Ypres: "above the tears . . . there rose steady and clear the voice of



thankfulness to God . . . that they were permitted in their death to make so splendid a sacrifice.”<sup>13</sup>

Censorship of the news media was set up during the Second World War under the *Defence of Canada Regulations*, which derived their authority from the *War Measures Act* as set out in Chapter 206 of the 1927 *Revised Statutes of Canada*. The censors were advisors only and could not prohibit the publication of articles. Newspapers’ guilt or non-guilt for violations could only be decided upon by the court. The sole power possessed by the chief censor was to say that information was in non-violation, meaning that a newspaper could not be prosecuted if it had obtained censorship clearance. Possible penalties included fines, imprisonment, and suspension.<sup>14</sup> Legendary Canadian Press war correspondent Ross Munro’s coverage of the Dieppe Raid illustrates how Canadian journalists who witnessed the carnage on 19 August 1942 reported the news under such censorship. Nearly 5,000 Canadian soldiers made up the vast majority of 6,000 Allied troops who stormed the heavily defended beach at Dieppe that day in a raid on the German-held French coast. By historical accounts, the action was a tactical disaster that some suggest should never have taken place. Of 4,963 Canadians embarking on their first live action in Europe, only 2,210 returned. Of them, 807 were killed in action, 100 died of wounds, 586 were wounded, and 1,874 were taken prisoner.<sup>15</sup>

Munro was among four Canadian journalists who accompanied the Canadian troops as they powered toward the beaches at Dieppe. From his vantage point on the landing craft, Munro could see sandbagged German positions from the top of the cliff at Puys, in houses, and in the cliffs’ clefts raining machine gun fire down on the hapless Canadians. To his horror, he had to look no farther than his own craft to see its bottom covered with dead troops who had been machine-gunned. Later, from an escaping vessel, he watched a furious air battle overhead as landing craft after Allied landing craft was blown out of the water.<sup>16</sup> After the war, he wrote in retrospect that “on no other front have I witnessed such carnage. It was brutal and terrible and shocked you almost to insensibility to see the piles of dead and feel the hopelessness of the attack at this point.”<sup>17</sup> But what did he write after his story cleared military censorship in England?

There was heroism at sea and in the skies in those hours, but the hottest spot was ashore, where the Canadians fought at close quarters with the Nazis. They fought to the end, where they had to, and showed courage and daring. They attacked the Dieppe arsenal of coastal defence. They left Dieppe silent and afire, its ruins and its dead under a shroud of smoke.<sup>18</sup>

Munro knew that was malarkey, but he wrote it anyway. He wrote after the war: "I watched those boats in the warm sunshine going back to England empty when they should have been filled with the thousands of soldiers they'd taken to France."<sup>19</sup>

One might ask: What is worse, the war correspondents' drivel during the First and Second World Wars under government censorship or nothing at all during the Kosovo air war under military censorship? In reality, that is an entirely immoral choice and an insult to the concept of Canada's democracy and democratic institutions. This is not an abstract problem. If there is to be censorship in future wars, the censorship and operational security issues raised in this book on the Kosovo air war should be debated in the House of Commons by parliamentarians. They could, in their wisdom, exercise leadership in legislating censorship if they find it necessary. They should not leave it to the military to impose its own restrictions, which this work has shown it is more than ready, willing, and able to do in policy and in practice. If legislated, that parliamentary leadership could amount to a reasonable limit on press freedom and other media of communication by law, as envisioned by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Canadian democracy deserves that debate at the very least.

# Notes

## INTRODUCTION

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- 3 Robert W. Bergen, "Balkan Rats and Balkan Bats" (PhD diss., University of Calgary, 2005), 396–99.
- 4 Canada, *Royal Commission on Newspapers* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1981), 30.
- 5 Bergen, "Balkan Rats and Balkan Bats," 48–50.
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- 7 Murray Edelman, *Politics as Symbolic Action: Mass Arousal and Quiescence* (Chicago: Markham, 1971), 10.
- 8 Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 102.
- 9 Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle*, 103–4.
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- 42 Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, trans. Dino Ferrari (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 23.
- 43 Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, 51. Like Jomini's principle of command, Douhet's major principle of inflicting the greatest damage in the shortest time possible would be abandoned during the Kosovo air war.
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## CHAPTER 1

- 1 Maj. Alain Pelletier, telephone interview by author, 16 July 2003.
- 2 Pelletier, telephone interview.
- 3 Lt. Col. Sylvain Faucher, interview by author, Ottawa, Ontario, 29 October 2003.
- 4 Faucher, interview.
- 5 Faucher, interview.
- 6 Confidential interview by author. In accordance with an ethical agreement, names were withheld by mutual agreement if requested, Canadian Forces Base Bagotville, Quebec, 22 October 2003.
- 7 Maj. Mike Barker, interview with author, Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake, Alberta, 16 April 2003.
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- 21 Pelletier, telephone interview.
- 22 Pelletier, telephone interview.
- 23 Faucher, interview.
- 24 Faucher, interview.
- 25 Faucher, interview.
- 26 Confidential interview.

- 27 Confidential interview.
- 28 Confidential interview. Chaff is a countermeasure to distract radar-guided missiles from their targets. It can be strips of aluminum foil or aluminum-coated glass fibres scattered by pilots to form an electromagnetic cloud that temporarily hides aircraft from missiles' radars. See online: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/aircraft/systems/chaff.htm>.
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- 41 Capt. Brett Glaeser, interview by author, Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake, Alberta, 15 April 2003.
- 42 Glaeser, interview.
- 43 Capt. Travis Brassington, interview with author, Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake, Alberta, 15 April 2003.
- 44 Brassington, interview.
- 45 Glaeser, interview.
- 46 Capt. Kirk Soroka, telephone interview by author, 10 October 2003.
- 47 Soroka, telephone interview, 10 October 2003.
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- 49 Soroka, telephone interview, 10 October 2003.
- 50 Soroka, telephone interview, 10 October 2003.
- 51 Soroka, telephone interview, 10 October 2003. The original manufacturer of the PRC-112 was Motorola, but General Dynamics has taken over as contractor. Online: <http://www.pacificsites.com/~brooke/Survival.s/html> (accessed 18 March 2004).
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- 53 Soroka, telephone interview, 10 October 2003.
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- 55 Confidential interview by author, Canadian Force Base Bagotville, Quebec, 21 October 2003.
- 56 Confidential interview by author, Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake, Alberta, 14 April 2003.

## CHAPTER 2

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- 9 The auditor general uses the term "strategic" in the same manner as the *Access to Information Act* guidelines, which involves intercontinental war plans, as opposed to the Clausewitzian purist Colin S. Gray, who would argue that terms like "strategic airlift" and "strategic tankers" are misnomers. Gray says such terms confuse capabilities with results, that is to say the achievement of policy goals. *Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 17. Similarly, Clausewitz might argue that the heavy lift function of an air-to-air refuelling tanker is the modern-day air force equivalent of the march, which, even though it is linked to the engagement, is only a means to carry out a strategic plan. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 29. Nonetheless, for the sake of consistency in terms of the Canadian government's phraseology, the Canadian terms when used in such fashion have been left intact.
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- 20 Col. (ret.) Benoît Marcotte, telephone interview by author, 9 January 2004.
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- 24 Savoie, interview.
- 25 Operation Echo – Lessons Learned Staff Action Directive, Annex A.
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- 27 Marcotte, email message.
- 28 Col. (ret.) J. M. Donihee, interview by author, Calgary, Alberta, 22 April 2003.
- 29 Savoie, interview.
- 30 Savoie, interview.
- 31 Savoie, interview.
- 32 Savoie, interview.
- 33 Savoie, interview.
- 34 Jurkowski, interview.
- 35 Donihee, interview. This was Donihee’s recollection and argument, which won the day. The author’s personal experience in Bosnia in 1994 was that the soldiers were allowed two beers in the mess per day maximum. This doesn’t obviate Donihee’s recollection and argument. Also, from the author’s personal experience, they weren’t allowed to

- drink at all at the Kandahar Air Field or at Forward Operating Base Nathan Smith in Afghanistan in 2007.
- 36 Donihee, interview.
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- 38 Jurkowski, interview.
- 39 Military Analysis Network, Operation Deliberate Force, online: [http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/deliberate\\_force.htm](http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/deliberate_force.htm) (accessed 26 February 2004).
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- 41 Canada, Department of National Defence, National Defence Headquarters, Secret System High Generated/Mediated Message, Message ID: 199827000147, 27 September 1998, obtained by author under *Access to Information Act* request A-2002-01182/Team 3-2. The precise quantities of munitions were exempted from release on the grounds the information could be injurious to international affairs and on advice or recommendations developed by or for a government institution or a minister of the Crown.
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- 44 Benjamin Lambeth, *The Transformation of America Airpower* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 182.
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- 52 Marie-Janine Calic, "Kosovo in the Twentieth Century: A Historical Account," in *Kosovo and the Challenge of Humanitarian Intervention*, ed. Albrecht Schnabel and Ramesh Thakur (New York: United Nations University Press, 2000), 28.

- 53 Ibid., 29. For a personal account of the back and forth negotiations between NATO and Slobodan Milosevic, see Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 131–89.
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### CHAPTER 3

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- 4 “Cookie,” interview.
- 5 Maj. Mike Barker, interview by author, Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake, Alberta, 16 April 2003.
- 6 Interview by author, Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake, Alberta, 15 April 2003.
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- 8 Barker, interview.
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- 10 Interview by author, Canadian Force Base Cold Lake, Alberta, 14 April 2003.
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- 13 Capt. John Edelman, interview by author, Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake, Alberta, 15 April 2003.
- 14 Interview by author, Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake, Alberta, 16 April 2003.
- 15 Brig. Gen. (ret.) James Cox, interview by author, Ottawa, Ontario, 27 October 2003.
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- 15 “Canadian Contribution,” *World Air Power Journal* 38 (Autumn 1999): 26.
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- 21 Lt. Col. (ret.) William Allen Flynn, telephone interview by author, 9 April 2003.
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- 65 Benjamin Lambeth, "Lessons from the War in Kosovo," *Joint Force Quarterly* (Spring 2002): 12–19.
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## CHAPTER 7

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McGillivray, Ed, retired Brig. Gen., Calgary, Alberta.  
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*Scattering Chaff* is well crafted, deeply researched, and a superb read.

—DAVID TARAS, professor and Ralph Klein Chair  
in Media Studies, Mount Royal University

Most Canadians know little, if anything at all, about the role of the Canadian Forces in the 1999 Kosovo Air War. Some of Canada's most prominent journalists attempted to report on the war, but came away virtually empty handed. Daily briefings given at the National Defence Headquarters provided so little information most journalists simply stopped going. The decision of the military to choke Canada's news media was deliberate and based on a tactical and strategic rationale.

*Scattering Chaff* explores the role of the Canadian Air Force in the Kosovo Air War while examining the military's interference with the news media attempting to report to the Canadian public. It explores the ways in which the military has recognized and attempted to control the media's influence on mission security and public opinion. Drawing on interviews with the war's Canadian participants and a treasure-trove of unpublished documents and photographs, this book is an in-depth investigation of a little-known conflict and the forces that prevented it from being better known.

**BOB BERGEN** is an adjunct assistant professor at the Centre for Military, Security and Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary. He was a staff writer at *The Albertan* from 1976–1980 and the *Calgary Herald* from 1980–2000. He is the author of *Censorship, The Canadian News Media, and Afghanistan*.



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