

BOOKS

A surgeon's observations on deployed life in Kandahar

A Line in the Sand: Canadians at War in Kandahar

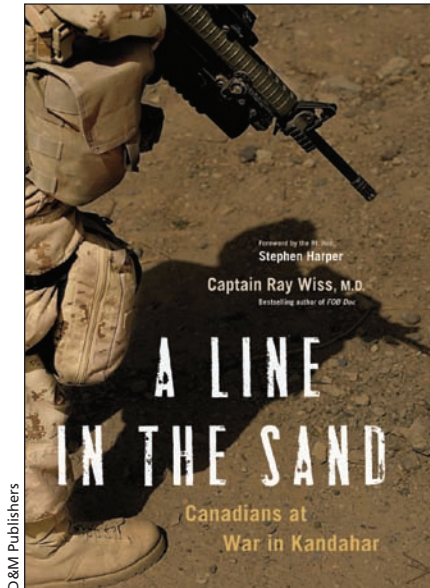
Captain Ray Wiss MD
D&M Publishers; 2010.

In 2007, Dr. Ray Wiss did something remarkable: he left a successful emergency medicine practice and volunteered to deploy with the Canadian Forces to Afghanistan. His email correspondence during that tour eventually became *FOB Doc* (CMAJ 2010;182[1]:E51), an accessible memoir and documentary of Canadian and Afghan culture in a land at war. In 2009, Wiss did something even more remarkable. He volunteered to deploy a second time, giving him the opportunity to write a sequel, *A Line in the Sand*.

Like its predecessor, *A Line in the Sand* reports Wiss's musings on deployed life, Afghan history and the life of Canadians in the field. Unlike *FOB Doc*, the current volume focuses less on his personal experiences, and more on the lives of the Canadians and Afghans he meets along the way.

A phenomenal encapsulation of the Afghan conflict.

This time, the reader gets a more extensive and leisurely introduction to the extraordinary people of the Canadian Forces. There is Master Warrant Officer Guy Lapierre, the senior enlisted soldier of the Sperwan Ghar Combat Team and a former parachute tester who returns from a broken back to lead troops in combat. There is Cor-



poral Alex Cloutier-Dupont, the good-humoured combat medic who uses his own money to purchase the modular vest he uses to store the life-saving equipment he takes on missions. There is also Bombardier Annick Vallières, mother of three, who returns to Afghanistan for a second tour to show

her children that their mother "had done something very difficult and done it well." And then there is Major Tim Arsenault, the 34-year-old commander of the FOB Wilson Combat Team who is responsible for the lives of several hundred people and carries his daughter's poem about a soldier's life everywhere he goes.

In addition to these Canadian profiles, Wiss shares with us his time among the Afghans. He tells the story of First Lieutenant Nooragha, second-in-command of an Afghan National Army (ANA) company who has successively served under the Russians, the Afghan communists, the mujahedeen, the Taliban and the coalition. He also tells the story of the three brothers who pool their coalition salaries to pay the middle brother's dowry. He speaks about ANA Mullah Faisal Hak, who describes how the Taliban refuse to follow the Quran's dictates and challenges Wiss's conceptions of healing.

In addition to these very human sketches, Wiss again treats us to the medical vignettes, social and cultural context, and political motivations that made *FOB Doc* such an illuminating read. Like its predecessor, *A Line in the Sand* is a phenomenal encapsulation of the Afghan conflict by a very observant medical recorder. As with the first volume, Wiss is donating all his proceeds from the book to the Military Families Fund.

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During 2007 and 2008 the author was chief and assistant chief of Primary Care with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Role 3 Multinational Medical Unit at Kandahar Air Field, where he worked with Dr. Ray Wiss.

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