

## SOLDIERS FOR PEACE

Since the end of World War II, Canadians have earned an international reputation for their efforts to mediate conflicts and maintain peace in the world. The first formal United Nations peacekeeping force was created by former Canadian prime minister and diplomat Lester B. Pearson. Pearson earned the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 for his efforts to resolve the Suez Crisis. As a result of his work in that crisis, the United Nations began to send peacekeepers into various parts of the world. In November 1992, the magazine *Canadian Geographic* paid tribute to Canadian peacekeepers for their efforts around the world in a feature article entitled "Keeping the Peace." The letter that follows was written by Ian Darragh, editor of *Canadian Geographic*. As you read the letter, reflect on what role you feel Canadians should play in foreign conflicts. Also, consider what makes Canadians unique in the world. Do you agree that as Canadians we all belong to "the same family"?

It is one thing to put your life on the line defending your country. It is quite another to face death from a sniper's bullet or mutilation from a land mine while trying to mediate between combatants in a vicious civil war of the sort that has torn apart the former Yugoslav republic. Yet this is what we ask our soldiers to do when they serve with United Nations peacekeeping forces. We can take great pride in our soldiers for the contribution they are making to lessening tensions in the world's hot-spots and delivering aid to the innocent victims of war.

Canadians are currently involved in 12 peacekeeping operations around the world... It was a Canadian, Lester B. Pearson, who helped invent the concept of neutral UN peacekeepers. When he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 for his role in sending a large UN force to defuse the Suez Crisis, he observed in his acceptance speech: "If there is to be peace, there must be compromise, tolerance, agreement." Since then Canadian peacekeepers

have used their training and courage to advance the cause of peace, and they have won an international reputation for their professionalism and their ability to cool tempers and encourage compromises....

To truly appreciate what we have here in Canada and how much Canadians from different backgrounds have in common, I had to travel to the centre of Africa, to the tiny landlocked country of Rwanda. I had been invited to a wedding of a Belgian friend who was teaching there, so the purpose of my visit was ostensibly a happy occasion. But the country I visited in 1971 was ruled by a dictator and reeked of fear. Everywhere I travelled, there were roadblocks every few miles, where nervous soldiers with machine guns checked my identity papers before allowing me to proceed.

At the reception after the wedding, I was introduced to a Canadian who was teaching at the same school as my friend. He eagerly shook my hand and told me I was the first Canadian he had spoken to in months. His hometown, it turned out, was a village near Quebec City. Even though my French was halting and his English equally fractured, we discovered we spoke a common language. Soon we found ourselves talking like long-lost buddies about white-water canoeing, cross-country skiing and the strangeness of celebrating Christmas in a land without snow.

Eventually another teacher joined us and introduced himself as a Belgian. He had read about Canada's constitutional debate, and asked with a mischievous smile if we were federalists or separatists. There was an awkward silence. Then my new friend put his arm around my shoulders and said, "That is a family matter we don't discuss in front of strangers." Seven thousand miles from home, in a strange country surrounded by foreigners, we both realized the things we had in common as Canadians far outweighed our differences. We belonged to the same family.

Source: Ian Darragh, "Soldiers for Peace,"  
*Canadian Geographic*, November/December 1992, p. 6.

# Canada's Peacekeeping Legacy

## *Shake Hands with the Devil*

1. Describe the situation in Rwanda at the end of 1993.
2. What was the mandate for the UN mission in Rwanda?
3. Why was it problematic that the Belgians made up most of the UN troops as part of the UN mission?
4. Why was the UN mission in Rwanda a failure?
5. Describe the efforts of Gen. Romeo Dallaire during the genocide in Rwanda.