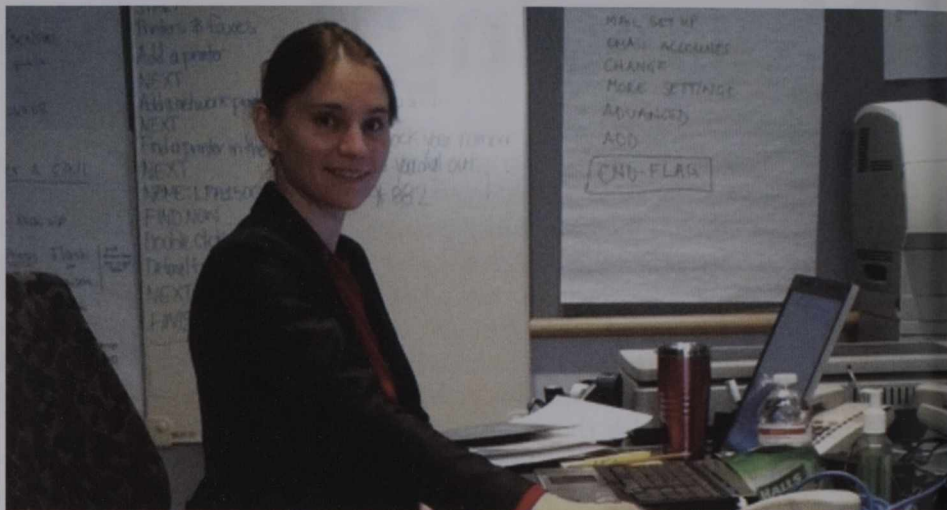


psychology. “It gives them some control over what is a tragic and overwhelming situation.”

Working long hours in a crisis environment is stressful and exhausting for the team. “There are days when it’s hard to separate yourself from all the grief you’re dealing with,” says van de Hoef. “These families have lost so much.”

Some stay in touch, send photos and invite FLAG members to memorial services, she adds. “We definitely have an impact on people’s lives, and that’s gratifying.”



Sherri van de Hoef sits at a telephone console at work in the FLAG “war room.”

From Head of Mission to Evacuee

Sandra McCardell knows well how distressing international evacuations can be. She’s lived through one herself.

On February 19, 2011, McCardell, Canada’s ambassador to Libya, and her husband, Edis Zagorac, were sitting at a pizza restaurant on the beach in Tripoli watching their three children play in the sand. A week later, she packed a single suitcase with possessions, abandoned her home, said goodbye to her husband and kids, who were to leave Libya by boat, oversaw the departure of up to 350 Canadians from Libya, then left the country herself.

It was an eye-opening experience for McCardell, who was on both sides of the equation as she shut down Canada’s mission.

“I faced what many people do with my own family, but at the same time I had a professional obligation to evacuate Canadians and to take care of their needs and their worries,” she says.

McCardell, who’s been posted to Cairo, Tel Aviv, Sarajevo and Beirut, and who worked in the Human Resources Branch during the 2004 Asian tsunami and the 2006 evacuation from Lebanon, says that it’s difficult to plan for all eventualities in an emergency.

“We didn’t realize how quickly the situation in Libya would deteriorate,” she explains. “In a crisis, the kind of triggers that Canadian embassies have

to prompt response and action are, not surprisingly, the same triggers that all other embassies—and major businesses—have. Consequently, communications are limited and resources disappear remarkably quickly.”

The airport in Tripoli was especially chaotic, McCardell says, crowded with people who were desperate to leave while trying to cope with unspeakable conditions. DFAIT worked well with the Department of National Defence, she says, in bringing the Canadian evacuees to Malta. “It was an experience that will serve us well in the future, as we will, regrettably, face more of these situations.”



photo: Cpl Jax Kennedy, Canadian Forces Combat Camera

Ambassador Sandra McCardell greets people evacuated from Libya on a Canadian Forces Hercules at Malta International Airport.