

Dying in French in Afghanistan

J.P. April

WE WERE a typical sort of convoy. So-called armoured vehicles were escorting trucks loaded with supplies, medicine and munitions as well as a few candies for the children. We were moving full speed ahead towards the base in the most heavily protected sector of Kabul and we were scared stiff. We didn't have time to notice the hatred and the misery lurking behind all the veils and the beards. All of a sudden we came upon a truck upside down in the street beside what had been a horse-drawn cart; the animal had its belly ripped open, and was whinnying to death. It was a dangerous gathering. We had no choice but to slow down. It was the vehicle in front of ours that had been blown up.

When I arrived at the scene of the attack, I saw that the vehicle wasn't armour-plated at all; it was as if it had been put through a blender. Sergeant Eric Belanger was lying there in his blood. But he was still alive; he was looking me right in the eye and he was mumbling something:

— Écoute-moé ben, maille frenne: dis à Julie que je meurs en emportant mon plus beau souvenir: elle, dans sa petite robe bleue, que je lui retire. Ah! Dis à notre petite Érika que je l'embrasse en lui faisant plein de gros pets sur la bedaine. Dis à mes amis...

I think he was delirious, or rather, he was speaking *en français*. I implored him to speak right, in English, but he continued to ramble on:

— Dis-toé ben mon G.I. Joe que pour un Ti-Cul de Saguenay, y a pas grand plaisir à mourir en anglais pour Bush ou Harper en envahissant des gens qu'on comprend même pas. Et moé qui croyais qu'on était des soldats de la paix!

— Sergeant Belanger! Sergeant Belanger! I shouted non-stop to keep him conscious, because that's what they had taught us in our survival courses. But I think he was off in another world.