

*Just back from Haiti*

# Military life suits Davidson just fine

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Military blood runs in Jill Davidson's family, so it is no surprise that the 33-year-old Mississauga native has been a Corporal in the Canadian Army for the past six years.

Jill's brother Randy is in the military, brother Steven is in the reserves and her grandparents were in the force, says Jill's proud mother Joan Kerel.

Kerel's father was also an enlisted man, wounded in the line of action overseas where he met his wife, a nurse, at a hospital in Scotland. Kerel's brother George also served in World War II and was a prisoner of war.

Kerel says at first, daughter Jill wasn't really interested in the military but soon after graduating from Cawthra Park Secondary School, and then working at a number of office jobs locally, she changed her mind.

"She took a liking to it and joined up herself," says Kerel, who admits to feeling some anxiety while her daughter was recently stationed in Haiti, on a United Nations peace keeping mission.

First stationed in Chilliwack, British Columbia, Davidson then transferred to Ottawa, where the single mom and her 8-year-old daughter Melissa now call home. And home is where Davidson is happy to be, since arriving back in Canada from Port au Prince, Haiti recently, after a six-month stint with the Canadian Contingent on a United Nations Mission.

Davidson said her 24-week stay in Haiti was "a long one" and that working in the relentless heat was difficult, but the mission was a rewarding experience.

The journey to Haiti itself was a long for Davidson, a supply technician out of Uplands, Canadian Forces Base in Ottawa.

It began in October 1994 when she traveled to St. Jean, Quebec for training. Members of the Canadian contingent conducted weapons training and re-acquainted them-



Corporal Jill Davidson catches up on some paperwork during her recent stint in Haiti.

selves with living in the field.

Davidson, who volunteered for the mission, says living in tents and enduring the constant hot and humid weather took its toll, but she adds, "You learned to live with it."

She and her colleagues were in Haiti to ensure the democratic process was upheld during the many pre-elections that were scheduled, prior to this November's election. Davidson said the peace keepers made sure people got to the polls safely in a country known for its political strife.

As a supply technician, Davidson's job meant long days.

Upon arrival in Haiti, the supply technician and her crew unloaded sea containers and supplied all the needs of the camp, including tools for the engineers, tires, parts for army trucks and kitchen supplies.

Davidson said the Haitians were friendly despite the fact that at first, they were not particularly glad to see the

peace keepers. They eventually warmed up, she says.

When not on duty, Davidson spent time at "some very nice beaches," and doing laundry by hand, because the Haitian laundry facilities are really hard on clothes.

What struck Davidson the most was the poverty in a country known for its poor social conditions. While a previous tour in the Middle East somewhat prepared her for the conditions, she says, it was seeing the Haitian children that hit the hardest.

"I felt for the children the most," says the mother adding the experience made her miss her own child more.

Her daughter Melissa stayed with her father while mom was away, but the little girl did her part to cheer Davidson up by sending frequent letters and drawings.

"She told me what she did at school, and in their summer recreation program or with her friends,"

says Davidson.

When she arrived home, Davidson says she never realized how much she missed porcelain flush toilets, a washer and dryer, and her own house.

Now back home, she is spending as much time as possible with her daughter and waiting to see where she may be stationed next.

Because the Ottawa base may soon close, she says she will be posted out again, this time to Edmonton.

As for anymore trips to other lands, Davidson says two is enough.

But that doesn't spell the end of her military career. Davidson says while it may "sound corny," her career choice was made because of the pride she feels for her country, and she recommends the military to other woman interested in a fulfilling life.