



THE BLACK WATCH OF CANADA FOUNDATION

MASTER CORPORAL MICHAEL GEORGE, CD



MCpl George as a Black Watch soldier in Bosnia (2002), on patrol in Afghanistan (2009) and is now a successful businessman.

At sixteen, my world revolved around skateboarding and friends — the idea of a “career” wasn’t even on my radar. My father, who had previously served as RSM with the Sherbrooke Hussars, told me it was probably time to get a job. We started looking at the reserves, but to me it was all just the Army. I didn’t understand the difference between each unit, let alone different trades.

It felt like a turning point when we discovered the Black Watch — something clicked, even if I couldn’t have explained why at the time. I joined at sixteen, still in high school, with no real understanding of the impact it would end up having on my life. Although I enjoyed it at the time, I now realize it pushed me well outside my comfort zone and forced me to grow and develop character. On my very first Tuesday night training, standing outside those BIG imposing doors on Bluary Street, I had all the doubts in the world and a massive knot in my stomach. I almost didn’t walk in. But I did.

Very quickly, I found myself surrounded by grown men and women with real careers and real life experience. I was clearly the kid in the room. But that turned out to be the best part. Being held to the same standards as everyone else forces you to grow up fast, whether you feel ready or not.

Building resilience and perseverance takes repetition, and we got plenty of it. Patrolling wet and cold through a swamp, a rucksack digging into your shoulders, teaches you less about strength and more about where your limits actually are — and how often you can move past them.

After one of those weekend exercises, sitting in the mess over a few beers, an older corporal put words to what we

had just lived. He said that once you’re out there, quitting isn’t really an option. If you stop in the middle of a swamp, no one is coming to get you. You either dig deep and walk out, or your team does it with you — and you don’t want to be the reason they have to.

At the time, it barely registered. I didn’t recognize the wisdom in those words then, but they stuck. Perseverance isn’t dramatic. It’s quiet, stubborn, and usually uncomfortable.

Those experiences and lessons served me well long after my time in the Black Watch — through the reserves, Special Forces, and eventually into entrepreneurship. Running a brick-and-mortar business has its own versions of long days and bad terrain. Different setting, same principle: when things get messy, you don’t bail — you adapt and move forward.

The other thing that stuck was the friendships. Shared difficulty has a way of stripping things down quickly. The strongest friendships I still have today were formed when things weren’t easy, when everyone had to pull their weight. That kind of trust doesn’t disappear with time.

Looking back now, the through-line is pretty clear. The resilience, the confidence to operate under pressure, the ability to keep going when there’s no obvious solution — it all traces back to those early years. I was lucky to be part of an organization that expected a lot and quietly gave even more.

I didn’t see it at the time, but those years with the Black Watch quietly set the foundation. Everything that followed was built on top of it.

MCpl George left the Black Watch reserves in 2007 to join CSOR, and later served with JTF2, (two of Canada’s elite military units). He transitioned out of the military in 2018 and has been awarded Canada’s Medal of Bravery for an exceptional life-saving action. He founded Aurelius Fine Olive Oils and Balsamic Vinegars in Ottawa. With no formal business education, he built the company from the ground up, which now operates three locations. He lives in Ottawa with his wife and two children.