

Public generally supportive: Osborne

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only thing I wanted to do."

Osborne was blunt and matter-of-fact about the danger he'll likely face as a member of the infantry — a ground soldier — on the front lines.

"We're basically the tip of the spear," he said.

What does he fear the most?

"The unknown," he replied. "Anything over there could be a bomb. Any second could be the end."

The most important thing to remember when the fear threatens to take over, he said, is he has trained and prepared for what he's about to do.

His desire to serve his country hasn't wavered, he said, despite having attended several funerals of soldiers as part of the honour guard.

"It's hard to see their families and friends and what they go through," he said.

Although Osborne knew for a few months he'd be going to Afghanistan, it wasn't until two weeks ago that he received his orders and was told to pack his bags.

"It wasn't something that was hard for me to decide, because I believe in what's going on and I believe we should be there helping others who need to be helped out," he said.

Obviously, his family — parents Cindy and Mike, and sister Amanda, 17 — are reluctant to see him go.

For Amanda, who described Matt as every bit the older, protective brother, it's been a little scary. But, she said, it's no surprise he's going.

"This is definitely something I could always see him doing because he's going off and helping people and protecting his country," she said.

Matt's expected to return home in February.

"It's a tough thing, but we're really proud," his mom said. "We just hope he stays safe and comes home."

The family has had good days and bad days preparing for Matt's departure, Cindy said.

"There have been a few tears here

and there. But I try to minimize them — I don't want him to worry about us over there. I just want him to worry about staying safe."

She said she knew saying good-bye would be particularly difficult, since she didn't know when she'd talk to Matt next.

She added it'll be tough watching news reports of soldiers being hurt or killed, and not knowing if it's Matt.

"There's so much unknown, for him and us," she said.

The fact he won't be home for his 20th birthday or Christmas makes his leaving all the more emotional, Cindy said, as well as his young age.

She knew they'd be waving good-bye to a teenager; when they see him next, he'll most definitely be a man.

"That's what's hardest on the whole family — that he's so young," she said.

Ironically, Cindy said Matt found out he was being sent overseas just as he was flying home from a soldier's funeral.

"He called me and said, 'I have some news'. There were tears that night," she admitted.

Osborne's first few days in Kandahar will be spent becoming climatized to the country's higher elevation and resulting lower levels of oxygen.

Leaving the luxury of soft beds and Tim Hortons behind him, he'll be sleeping on a cot in a tent.

Fortunately, he'll have access to MSN and e-mail to stay in touch with people back home, he said.

Osborne was 14 when he joined the army cadets in Milton for two years. In high school, he did a co-op stint with



Matt Osborne is ready for combat.

the army reserves based out of Hamilton, where he trained and received basic and soldier qualifications. When most teens his age were working at part-time jobs, Osborne spent a summer at an air base, attending infantry school.

And then, from the ages of 16 to 18, he joined the reserves, the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry.

Just this past January, after graduating from E.C. Drury High School, Osborne joined the military full time and became a full-fledged member of the Royal Canadian Regiment, living at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Petawawa.

Osborne, who looks not a day over his 20 years, is now qualified to drive an EPC, which is a light armoured vehicle that looks like a tank, and handle a C7 or C9 rifle.

Attempting to disband the Taliban and keep members guessing about his troops' whereabouts will be among his duties.

"Our main goal is to stabilize the country so they can re-build, and help out the Afghan people," he explained.

Overall, Osborne said he has received a lot of encouragement from the general public — he particularly appreciates seeing the yellow 'Support Our Troops' ribbons — although there have been a few people who've expressed negative views about Canada's involvement.

"A few people asked why I'm doing this and said we're not needed over there. That's people's opinion and I can't change that."

Regardless of public opinion, it's clear Osborne's family will always be among his staunchest supporters.

"I've got my yellow ribbon, my flag, and a light in the window to help him find his way home," Cindy said, adding, "He's an amazing kid. He really is. If anyone in the world is lucky enough to have a kid like him, they're blessed."

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