



## **NOMINAL ROLLS: LESSONS LEARNED FROM DEVELOPING THE “MUSTARD GAS LIST” Executive Summary**

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A nominal roll is a list of names. Traditionally, nominal rolls are developed to list all military personnel who served in a war, action or unit. Military Veteran nominal rolls have been used for a variety of purposes, including promoting comradeship and Veteran identity, recognition and commemoration, genealogy, research, and to administer Veterans' benefits.

Bound by oaths of secrecy, Canadian and American Veterans generally did not reveal their experience in chemical warfare agent testing until some began approaching their governments for compensation through the 1970s and 80s (Laforce 2006). In 2004,

DND initiated an ex-gratia payment to compensate former test subjects who had volunteered for trials at Suffield (Alberta) and Ottawa. Administration of DND and VAC compensation programs was hampered by lack of a comprehensive list of Veterans who participated in chemical warfare agent testing.

During 2002-9, the Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) Research Directorate developed a computerized list of Canadian military Veterans who had participated in chemical warfare testing during the 1940s-70s. This was called “the mustard gas list”, although other chemical warfare agents had been tested. The list developed by the VAC Research Directorate complemented a list being developed by DND, to support both the process of tracking Veterans and proactive efforts to reach former test subjects or their survivors to inform them about compensation benefits.

The master list grew to 8,812 from 2,575 names initially supplied by DND, augmented by additional names supplied to VAC by: DND (5,142); various VAC sources (829);

the United Kingdom (Porton Down research facility, 242 names); family members and Veterans (18); media articles (5); and the Veterans Review and Appeal Board (1). Not all the persons in the list had participated in chemical warfare agent testing. Some had participated only in chemical weapons training, and some may have not had any exposure to chemical warfare agent testing. VAC was able to confirm that 1,539 of the 8,812 had participated in chemical warfare agent testing, either because the Veteran had been accepted by DND for the ex gratia payment, or been given a favourable decision for entitlement to disability benefits attributed to chemical warfare agent testing.

Since the list was compiled retrospectively about half a century after the majority of the testing, it is unlikely that this is a complete nominal roll of Canadian Veterans exposed to chemical warfare agent testing during the 1940s-70s. This is in keeping with the experience of VAC and other agencies who have developed retrospective lists for other purposes. It is unlikely that a retrospective list can be expected to be perfect.

The work of finding, cross referencing and verifying names was very time-consuming, intricate and involved a variety of sources. Although some prospective lists had been archived from the time of various individual test trials, it was difficult or impossible to find other lists after so many years, or to verify the identities of individuals whose names were provided. In many cases, it was impossible to cross reference names between databases owing to lack of linkable identifying data. Many participants had remained loyal to their oaths of secrecy until the ends of their lives, which meant that even family survivors were not aware they had participated. Details on the precise nature and amount of exposures were often absent or lacking.

The “mustard gas list” proved useful to the Department of National Defence when it administered the ex gratia payments, and to VAC when adjudicating claims for disability benefit compensation by Veterans. It was used by VAC proactively to reach out to Veterans and survivors who may have been eligible for the ex gratia payment or disability benefit entitlement but not aware of the programs. The list continues to be useful in adjudicating claims by Veterans and survivors for entitlement to VAC disability benefits.

Experience has shown that military Veterans will continue to come forward throughout their lives with concerns that past exposures in military service caused their health problems. Prospective nominal rolls may prevent many of the difficulties encountered by Veterans and Veterans’ administrations when they need lists of Veterans who participated in various types of military service. Though costly to establish and maintain, prospective nominal rolls are likely to better identify military personnel who participated on various deployments, and may be cost effective compared to periodically compiling lists retrospectively.

Problems with retrospective nominal rolls could be obviated by prospectively developing a comprehensive, validated database showing who served when and where. Such records would assist in documenting the health effects of military service later in life, and could be more cost-effective than building nominal roles retrospectively.