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COMMEMORATION IN THE 21st CENTURY

Report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

**Greg Kerr, M.P.
Chair**

**DECEMBER 2011
41st PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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SECOND REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the Committee on Thursday, September 29, 2011, the Committee has studied commemorative celebrations in the twenty-first century and has agreed to report the following:

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Commemoration is an appreciation of the past, an understanding of how past actions in wars, missions, conflicts, and peacetime will impact future generations. We recall our moments of triumph, and of course of tragedy, of excitement and despair. It is this understanding and appreciation that enables us to remember and honour our veterans.

Brad White (Dominion Secretary, Dominion Command, Royal Canadian Legion),
Evidence, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs,
October 6, 2011, 0850

INTRODUCTION

The members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (hereinafter “the Committee”) view their duty to honour those who gave or risked their lives to defend freedom in Canada’s name as a daily commitment. Commemoration is a serious concern which they share with a growing number of Canadians. Remembrance demands quiet, private contemplation most of the time, but public expression of remembrance freshens our appreciation of its deep and solemn meaning. We want to join together in remembering those who sacrificed themselves for the freedom we all enjoy.

Commemorative events have lately taken on a new dimension for three reasons. First, the at times tragic heroism of a brand new generation of Canadians who answered the call to military service is once again at the forefront of public debate as a result of the end of combat operations in Afghanistan. Second, we have become more sensitive to the unique nature of the experiences of different generations of veterans who, from UN peacekeeping missions to NATO operations in former Yugoslavia to Afghanistan and Libya make us aware of the historical distance that is beginning to separate us from veterans of World War II and the Korean War. Canada’s last veteran of the First World War passed away two years ago, and we are losing more and more Second World War and Korean War veterans. Finally, a number of major anniversaries are coming up in the next few years, among them the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 and the centenary of the First World War, two of the conflicts that had the greatest impact on Canada’s destiny.

The members of the Committee wanted to take advantage of the combination of these factors to initiate discussion of the future of our collective duty to remember. During the meeting on September 29, 2011, it was agreed “[t]hat the Committee do study the Commemorative Celebrations in the twenty-first century.” In October and November, the Committee met six times to consider the matter. This report is a summary of the Committee’s main conclusions.

Because the goal is to recommend to the Government of Canada actions it might take and discussions it might have in the future, this report is structured in accordance with the current government program configuration. The existing programs administered by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) are briefly introduced in the first part, titled “Canada Remembers.” The second part focuses on remembrance outreach. Special emphasis is placed on the participation of young people in commemorative activities, the use of new technologies to encourage youth to become involved, and veterans’ groups and events that have not received the attention they deserve. The third part is devoted to the duty to

commemorate by holding ceremonies, erecting monuments and carrying out other symbolic activities to convey Canadians' gratitude toward veterans. The Funerals and Burial Program, which is part of the duty to commemorate, is discussed separately in the fourth part. These matters were considered from two perspectives: what the Government of Canada can do on its own, and what other organizations and individuals can do with government support.

1. Canada Remembers

Consolidated under the name "Canada Remembers," VAC's commemorative programs "[keep] alive the achievements and sacrifices made by those who served Canada in times of war, military conflict and peace and promotes an understanding of the significance of these efforts in Canadian life as we know it today."¹

In 2010-2011, \$40.6 million — 1.2% of the department's budget — was spent on these programs. Following a reorganization of resources, the number of employees delivering the programs dropped from just over 150 full-time equivalents in 2008-2009 to 101 in 2010-2011.

Canada Remembers is divided into two main activities: national and international memorials (\$25.1 million), and remembrance outreach activities (\$15.5 million).

In 2010-2011, the main items related to national and international memorials were:

- \$9.3 million to the Last Post Fund;
- \$8.7 million in contributions to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's maintenance program;
- \$7.1 million to maintain national monuments and war graves in Canada and abroad for which VAC is responsible.

The main items related to outreach activities were:

- \$13.7 million for activities organized directly by VAC:
 - public ceremonies and activities;
 - information products (books, brochures, websites, DVDs, etc.) on Canadians' involvement in military operations; and
 - support for learning activities (schools, museums, etc.).

1 Veterans Affairs Canada, Report on Plans and Priorities 2011-2012, p. 4.

- \$1.8 million to the Partnerships Program, which supports community partnerships and initiatives; the biggest program contributions were:
 - \$448,260 to the Juno Beach Centre;
 - \$260,000 to the Historica-Dominion Institute; and
 - \$1.1 million to 195 other recipients.

A number of noteworthy initiatives have been taken recently in connection with national and international memorials. In the fall of 2010, VAC launched the Community War Memorial Program. In its first year of operation, the program incurred expenditures of \$100,304, but approximately \$1.25 million in new funding was authorized in the *Supplementary Estimates (B)* for 2011-2012.

On the outreach side, the learning material produced by VAC for students of all ages is made available to schools, teachers and interested organizations. The level of activity increases, of course, in the weeks leading up to Veterans Week. Last year, almost 4 million learning kits were distributed in schools. That represents an increase of 70% in two years, a sign that teachers and students are taking more and more interest in veterans. In fact, the satisfaction rate among teachers was 98%.

The members of the Committee were also pleased by VAC's efforts to take advantage of new technologies. The department has posted on its Canadian Virtual War Memorial website the official registry of all Canadians who died serving their country. The Heroes Remember site features hundreds of interviews with veterans from all eras.

VAC created Facebook pages two years ago and now has 500,000 friends. An iPhone application informing Canadians of remembrance events taking place where they live was recently launched.

Having heard the testimony given by the witnesses representing VAC and other witnesses' comments on VAC activities, the Committee is of the opinion that the department is doing an excellent job.

2. Remembrance outreach activities

2.1 Increasing youth involvement

Youth involvement was a constant theme during the hearings. Young people are perceived as being detached from traditional political institutions and do not vote as much as they did in the past, but they do seem to be much more involved in remembrance activities.² One sign of this change is the rising number of high school students who travel

2 For an overview of recent trends in voter turnout by age group, see Elections Canada, *Estimation of Voter Turnout by Age Group at the 2008 Federal General Election*, http://www.elections.ca/res/rec/part/estim/estimation40_e.pdf.

to commemorative sites in Europe. In April of 2012, more than 4,000 of these students will travel to Vimy at their own expense to attend the ceremonies organized by VAC:

That's a very, very encouraging trend, to see young Canadians travelling overseas to pay tribute to Canadians where they lie. In fact the groups organizing for Vimy have many other events they're working on as well. Most notably, for the 100th anniversary of Vimy in 2017, we are expecting between 20,000 and 25,000 Canadian high school students. Some schools and organizations have already started planning for the 100th anniversary.³

The witnesses representing one of the companies that organize trips of this kind explained how students benefit from such activities:

I know that the personal experience of the students on these tours is second to none. We truly believe in having students become global citizens. Through these types of tours, they accomplish a number of things.

First, they remember the sacrifices of those who came before us, and they learn from our past.

Second, their textbooks really come to life. They get the understanding of how people, places, and events fit together in a way that only experiencing them first-hand can accomplish.

They also get a chance to celebrate Canada. They learn about our role in the world, and they come home with a new commitment to the future of our country and their communities.⁴

The members of the Committee are of the opinion that every effort must be made to sustain this enthusiasm and encourage young people to perpetuate remembrance of Canada's military history. One of the most promising approaches is, of course, to use new technologies. The success of the Facebook pages VAC created two years ago is an example:

It's encouraging Canadians or providing them a forum or a venue where they can say how they feel. One of the most remarkable times of the year is when we put nothing new on Facebook, we don't post, but on Canada Day we receive thousands of posts of Canadians expressing their thanks to veterans for the freedom they're celebrating on Canada Day. That's really remarkable. The first Canada Day after that Facebook program existed, in 2010, we had in two days 12,000 new friends. We had done nothing; Canadians had done it themselves. That's successful.⁵

3 Derek Sullivan (Director General, Canada Remembers Branch, Department of Veterans Affairs, *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 4, 2011, 1020. See also Greg Owen (Vice-President, Public Events and Event Tours, EF Educational Tours Canada), *idem*, November 15, 2011, 0850.

4 Greg Owen (Vice-President, Public Events and Event Tours, EF Educational Tours Canada), *idem*, November 15, 2011, 0900.

5 Derek Sullivan (Director General, Canada Remembers Branch, Department of Veterans Affairs, *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 4, 2011, 0955.

The VAC representatives themselves acknowledged that there is still much work to be done and that the department has to be more proactive on Facebook: promoting embedded links, advertising the Facebook pages in other places, etc. It is important, however, to maintain control over the way these means are used and to ensure that increasing the number of external references does not dilute the core message.

The representative from the British High Commission cautioned against overestimating the real impact of new technologies on the degree of interest young people take in the material that is presented to them.⁶ Participation will usually increase if there is already some interest. In other words, technology can channel an existing interest and provide a forum in which that interest can be shared with others. Perhaps surprisingly, young people's enthusiasm has been growing since before Canada became involved in Afghanistan:

We do know from estimates that have been done by the [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] as well as veterans organizations that participation at Remembrance Day ceremonies across the country has increased dramatically from the early nineties to today. This predates the work we have on Facebook and other social media. The CBC tracks this because they want to know both the in-person attendance here in Ottawa as well as the television viewership. They found that between 1993 and 2003-04, both the in-person attendance and television audience had tripled.⁷

The Royal Canada Legion is also pleased with the steady growth in participation in entirely traditional activities, such as its national poster and essay contests:

In the mid-20th century, in 1950, the Legion instituted an important remembrance program aimed toward youth: poster, essay, and poetry contests. Students from kindergarten to grade 12 are asked to show what remembrance means to them through their artistic and literary compositions. This has been a tremendously successful program, with over 100,000 students participating on an annual basis. [...] With over 100,000 students taking part in our annual remembrance contests and with audiences of up to 55,000 in attendance at the national Remembrance Day ceremony and over four million television viewers of the ceremony, are we really witnessing a resurgence of remembrance in the country?⁸

The poppy campaign does not target young people specifically, but it is probably the most traditional remembrance activity, and its popularity grows every year. In 1922, disabled veterans began producing and selling the lapel poppy in workshops sponsored by the Canadian Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment, and the national campaign has been run by the Canadian Legion runs since its incorporation in 1926 :

6 Brigadier Barry Le Grys (Defence Adviser, British High Commission), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, November 3, 2011, 0900.

7 Derek Sullivan (Director General, Canada Remembers Branch, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 4, 2011, 1015.

8 Brad White (Dominion Secretary, Dominion Command, Royal Canadian Legion), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 6, 2011, 0850.

By wearing a poppy, the international symbol of remembrance, Canadians will ensure that the memory and sacrifices of our veterans are never forgotten. It is so encouraging that every year approximately 18 million lapel poppies are distributed to Canadians during the two-week remembrance period.⁹

In other words, new technologies are another tool that must be used constructively in order to grab the interest of those who want to share their respect for our veterans:

I think people need to have that contact. They need to visit actual memorials and cenotaphs to the fallen so that they can see them, touch them, and experience them in that way — a sensation that they won't get if they're doing something via electronic or social media. It is another option, another way, but I don't think it will replace the current way to commemorate.¹⁰

The same tempered wisdom was evident in the comments made by the witness representing the Army Cadet League:

You have to develop programs that can flow out on all media. There is no one media. We use Facebook, but we also realize that teenagers use it as a social entity; it's more of a gossip column than anything else. Twitter is not bad. Websites are old stuff. But there are different types of kids and adults who monitor each of these different types of media, so you have to hit them all.¹¹

Sometimes it is altogether traditional activities that continue to have the most positive impact on young people:

When we embark on remembrance, we need to be aware that many of today's youth may probably have missed the background message. Remembrance has to be presented in a way that ensures young people get the point. The Army Cadet League has found that the best way to do that is to highlight individual Canadians within the framework of larger events they helped form.

In other words, we paint a picture around an ordinary Canadian who rose to meet terrific challenges, some of whom paid with their lives, and some of whom silently faded back into the background of home and family. It is these people we need to remember, and it is people who teenagers most readily relate to, not events. Events are boring; people are interesting.¹²

Remembrance has to be personal. What can we do for our veterans? We can listen. Just be there. Show up at an event, buy a veteran a Pepsi, and just stand there.

9 Steven Clark (Director of Administration, Director of the National Remembrance Day Celebration, Royal Canadian Legion), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 6, 2011, 0850.

10 Steven Clark (Director of Administration, Director of the National Remembrance Day Celebration, Royal Canadian Legion), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 6, 2011, 0925.

11 Terence Whitty (Executive Director, Army Cadet League of Canada), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, November 3, 2011, 1010.

12 Terence Whitty (Executive Director, Army Cadet League of Canada), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, November 3, 2011, 1000.

Just listen to what they want to say. Everyone here at this table is considered a VIP by a veteran. Many of the veterans will be tongue-tied. But just wait and it will come out.¹³

What is needed, therefore, is the right combination of traditional elements that reinforce the solemn and quiet respect which must be shown to veterans, as well as more innovative elements which make it possible to share the message of veterans' unique experiences with a generation of Canadians for whom the sacrifices made in the major wars are part of a more distant past. That balance is achieved in the calm, yet vibrant environment of the Juno Beach Centre, where youth-oriented activities are diverse and perfectly tailored to different age groups:

As education programs, the Juno Beach Centre offers both elementary and secondary school programs. Our elementary school program is titled "The D-Day Soldier" and "A Canadian Nurse During the Battle of Normandy". This is a storytelling session with a young Canadian guide, and includes artifacts for children aged eight to eleven to touch and interact with. Dressed as a soldier or nurse, the guide tells a first-person story of a Canadian in Normandy in 1944

Based on the memoirs and testimonies of real Canadian soldiers and nurses, children relate to the realities of war in a much more personal way. This program is unique and now in its fifth year of operation. Complex notions — like that of the Allies crossing the Atlantic Ocean, being far away from home, experiencing fear and fatigue, and returning to Canada as a changed person — become easily understood by the young ones, thanks to this innovative program.¹⁴

The Juno Beach Centre offers an array of activities of that kind, such as programs for high school students and permanent exhibits — with games built in — for younger students, and has worked an education component into its fundraising campaign. The centre also awards scholarships to enable teachers to take part in an advanced professional development tour that in turn broadens the centre's network of contacts all over the country through a quarterly newsletter.

Finally, the Committee had the pleasure of hearing the co-producer of the documentary series *The Veterans*, the 60 or so episodes of which can be viewed on the Power Worker's Union website. The series comprises interviews that describe Canadian military history through the eyes of people who lived it, not only military personnel, but also their families and the civilians who supported them, and from the perspective of Canadians and immigrants alike.¹⁵ The series was produced with the support of VAC and is another example of the strong collaborative relationship the government, the community sector and the private sector form when veterans' contribution to the development of Canada is being celebrated.

13 Terence Whitty (Executive Director, Army Cadet League of Canada), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, November 3, 2011, 1020.

14 Susan Mousseau (Director, Juno Beach Centre Association), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, November 15, 2011, 0900.

15 Colonel (Retired) Andrew Nellestyn (Co-producer of the documentary series *The Veterans*, Power Workers' Union), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, November 17, 2011, 1015.

The Committee looked at this abundance of initiatives — each yielding positive results — but did not find any specific weak areas where measures could be taken to get more young people involved in remembrance activities. Participation is on the rise; new media are being used more and more but the expectations are realistic; and traditional activities are growing in popularity. All we can do is encourage the Government of Canada to continue developing innovative ways of holding young Canadians' interest and to continue providing support to community and private organizations that help meet that goal.

2.2 Noteworthy anniversaries

There are many anniversaries coming up in the next few years:

We have the 95th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge on April 9, 2012. On August 19, 2012, we have the 70th anniversary of the Dieppe Raid, which is a truly Canadian commemoration. In 2013, in late July, we have the 60th anniversary of the Korean War armistice. The big one that is coming up is quite a series of anniversaries during the entire 100th anniversary of the World War I period, beginning in August 2014 and going right through to November 11, 2018.¹⁶

World War I has had such deep consequences on world history in general, and therefore on Canadian history, that the Committee wants to support the efforts already made by the government of Canada to ensure that a wide network of organizations and experts will contribute to the success of this succession of commemorative events that will begin in August 2014. The Committee therefore recommends:

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada publicly recognize the important role World War One played in shaping the Canadian identity, and that the government consider establishing an advisory committee to ensure the suitable commemoration of the centennial anniversary.

Also on the list, of course, are celebrations marking the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812. That commemoration is not being overseen by VAC directly because the war preceded Confederation, and although it did play a determining role in the sequence of events that ultimately led to the creation of Canada, its importance is not as widely acknowledged as it should, especially in Quebec:

The War of 1812 is one of the first battles in which francophones, anglophones and first peoples came together to defend what we now call Canada. Quebec played a pivotal role. [...] The exhibit will show reproductions of Quebec's fortifications at the time. This may be an excellent chance for Quebecers to learn something new about an event they may not be familiar with. We have found

16 Derek Sullivan (Director General, Canada Remembers Branch, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 4, 2011, 1015.

that there is a genuine need to educate people around the country when it comes to this war, and that is what we plan to do.¹⁷

Other events, however, have perhaps not been given the attention they deserve: the Boer War, also known as the South African War, and the Battle of Hong Kong.

The Boer War (1899-1902) was the first conflict during which Canada sent troops overseas. "Boers" (the Dutch word for "farmers") are inhabitants of South Africa descended from Dutch Protestant farmers. Fighting alongside a British force roughly 450,000 strong were 7,368 Canadian volunteers. Of those, 4,474 were awarded the Queen's South Africa Medal in recognition of their combat role, and a large proportion of the remaining volunteers performed garrison duty in Halifax so that the British soldiers could go to the front. 277 Canadians died in the war, and four were awarded the Victoria Cross.¹⁸

The war is recounted in a variety of publications, but there has apparently been no official public recognition of the conflict in recent years. The witnesses representing VAC acknowledged that these events are somewhat forgotten:

We think it's important that Canadians, particularly young Canadians in this instance, are made aware of what happened, because for most Canadians it is entirely forgotten. We're trying to correct that in terms of a special commemoration for next year, which, as you say, is the 110th anniversary of the end of the South African War. We don't have a particular event planned, but I am going to look into something we might be able to do here at the National War Memorial that would raise awareness further on that.¹⁹

To assist in making the efforts promised by the VAC representatives a reality, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada consider holding an official public commemoration of the 110th anniversary of the end of the Boer War.

The Battle of Hong Kong of December 1941 is similarly forgotten. Hong Kong was the first battle in which Canadians took part during the Second World War. 2,000 men were sent to support the British in their efforts to defend the colony against a Japanese invasion. On Christmas Day, the forces under British command laid down their weapons after 17 days of such fierce combat as had never been seen before. Of the 2,000 Canadians sent to the front, 550 did not return; 244 died in battle, and 306 succumbed to the mistreatment they suffered while held captive.

17 Yasmine Mingay (Manager, Communications, Canadian War Museum), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 6, 2011, 1020.

18 For an overview of the conflict, visit the Canadian War Museum site: http://www.museedelaguerre.ca/cwm/exhibitions/boer/boerwarhistory_f.shtml

19 Derek Sullivan (Director General, Canada Remembers Branch, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 4, 2011, 1020.

There are very few veterans of the battle alive today to tell the tragic tales, and because of their advanced age, it is difficult for them to visit the three sites in Hong Kong where headstones and cenotaphs stand as reminders of the Canadians' sacrifices.

The Committee therefore wishes to commend the government of Canada in publicly acknowledging the sacrifice made by the Canadian veterans of the Battle of Hong Kong, and for sending an official delegation to the island for the 70th anniversary of the event.

2.3 The forgotten ones

2.3.1. Military contribution of Black Canadians

The role of blacks in Canadian military history is acknowledged in archives available on a number of Government of Canada websites and is noted many times in online publications and resources. However, that information is not readily accessible unless it is being searched for specifically, and there is not always official public recognition that extends beyond archives and makes the public aware of the extraordinary contributions of these military personnel. Nor have many monuments been erected to honour that contribution, although there is a memorial in Pictou, Nova Scotia, which pays homage to the members of the No. 2 Construction Battalion.

Senator Don Meredith argued eloquently in favour of commemorating the military contribution of black Canadians with a national ceremony and a monument to the African Canadians who served in the Canadian Forces. The ceremony, which could be held on a new national day, would have great educational value because it would show that African Canadians were involved in all stages of the building of Canada and that young people can, in their own way, contribute fully to the future of Canadian society.

The Committee shares Senator Meredith's view that "[i]t is crucial that our government commit to educating Canadians and the world about the rich history of African Canadians in the Canadian military."²⁰ The members thought that the appropriate way to recognize that contribution would be to commemorate William Hall, the first black naval veteran, and the third Canadian to be awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions during the Indian Rebellion of 1857. We therefore recommend:

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada consider erecting a bust of William Hall at the Valiants' Memorial in Ottawa to commemorate the military contribution of Black Canadians.

20 Hon. Don Meredith, Senator, *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 4, 2011, 0850.

2.3.2 Veterans of peacekeeping missions

Canada's strong commitment in Afghanistan has perhaps superseded the contribution made by thousands of Canadian veterans to more than 50 UN and NATO peacekeeping missions. Peacekeepers' work may be viewed as less important, caught as it is between remembrance of the Second World War, the Korean War and now Afghanistan. The sometimes thankless nature of their mission should not make us forget that they went into operations with a spirit of sacrifice no less intense than that of veterans of higher-profile conflicts. The witnesses representing the Royal Canadian Legion reminded us of that duty:

We don't pay a lot of homage to peacekeeping at this stage in the game. Some of the areas they got into were combat in themselves. Of course, we were sending people in as unarmed observers who had no way to influence the outcome, and they saw a lot of different things. There have been a number of peacekeeping operations that, as we go down the road, I think we need to celebrate.

Our activities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Croatia, were also key activities. As we transitioned from peacekeeping into the coalition types of operations, we went forward with our allies. There are all sorts of commemorative activities that need to be done to look at that.²¹

The witness representing the Army Cadet League echoed that view:

Some of our folks went to these peacekeeping operations and were forced to stand by and do nothing and observe horrendous things that went on, so there is an element of remembrance for them that is hard to enunciate. It's hard to enunciate, but again, in greeting people like that, if you ask where they served they'll tell you a little story.²²

The members of the Committee would like to mention once again the risk of forgetting and will continue working to ensure that the contributions made by veterans of peacekeeping missions are recognized for their true worth.

2.4 Contribution of the private sector

One of the priorities identified in VAC's *Report on Plans and Priorities 2011-2012* is to "increase the participation of the private sector in commemoration."²³

There are limits to the Government of Canada's ability to influence the actions of private companies. For example, VAC does not make financial contributions to private companies that wish to carry out commemorative activities:

21 Brad White (Dominion Secretary, Dominion Command, Royal Canadian Legion), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 6, 2011, 0920.

22 Terence Whitty (Executive Director, Army Cadet League of Canada), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, November 3, 2011, 1025.

23 Veterans Affairs Canada, *Report on Plans and Priorities 2011-2012*, p. 23.

Our funding programs are exclusively directed to the not-for-profit sector and community groups. However, we encourage the private sector to use their own resources to take on a leadership role in remembrance.

A number of companies are quite interested in doing that. This is a more recent area that we've begun working in. They're interested in looking at their existing activities, and perhaps even advertising campaigns, to see how they can achieve their objectives while also honouring those who serve Canada.

Our role in this is to make them aware that there's an opportunity for them to do this, and encourage them to take on that leadership role themselves. Sometimes you only need to make them aware of an opportunity, and if they see that it's the right thing to do they'll take advantage of it themselves.²⁴

The Government of Canada is therefore a catalyst for the desire of some companies to take part in commemoration. However, there is nothing standing in the way of the government forming partnerships with private companies, such as sports companies.

Yes. Last year we did something that we had never done before. In Montreal we projected a virtual poppy field on the side of the Bell Centre, home of the Montreal Canadiens, my team and we invited Canadians to text a particular number. When they did that, a poppy grew in the virtual poppy field in this massive projection on the side of the building.²⁵

The Canadian War Museum has undertaken similar projects:

Not only do we work with the curriculum in order to match up and work with teachers, but we're partnering with the Ottawa 67s in a few short weeks. On November 7, they're presenting a game day based on remembrance for 10,000 school kids in the region. They're working with the Ottawa school boards in order to bring these kids out for a game, and the entire theme of everything they're doing is remembrance.

For that, we actually created a cartoon of the Valour Road story, which obviously highlights the Victoria Crosses given out to those three individuals on Valour Road.²⁶

Like the use of new technologies, these are initiatives that reach Canadians in their daily lives rather than urge them to make the effort to go to a particular commemorative site. These two types of initiatives need each other if they are to remain popular.

24 Derek Sullivan (Director General, Canada Remembers Branch, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, 4 October 2011, 1005.

25 Ibid., 0955.

26 Yasmine Mingay (Manager, Communications, Canadian War Museum), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 6, 2011, 1000.

2.5 Knowing Canada's military history

The witnesses stated many times that there is a gap in the teaching of Canadian military history. "As you may be aware, there are only three provinces in Canada where it's mandatory that you study Canadian history²⁷." This makes it hard for the federal government to get involved in any way other than to provide teaching material to be used in delivering provincial programs.

The witness representing the Royal Canadian Legion spoke eloquently on the subject:

I would always say that the largest gap in anything is the awareness of Canadians of our military history. If Canadians were aware of our military history, they would be aware of the sacrifices that were made on their behalf. In Ontario, Canadian history takes up half a semester, or whatever, in grade 11. That's really not a lot of Canadian history. The knowledge of Canadians of military history and of the sacrifices made on their behalf is a big gap, I'd say.²⁸

The witness representing the Vimy Foundation shared similar thoughts:

About five years ago, Historica-Dominion did a poll of Canadians, and it was discouraging how few had any knowledge of Vimy or any other engagement or war Canada has been involved in. The recognition level was approximately 30% nationally and as low as 6% in Quebec. [...] Groups like us are filling that gap.²⁹

The activities organized or funded by the Vimy Foundation are similar to those put together by the Juno Beach Centre, but there is one small difference: the Foundation does not have a museum or physical interpretation site in which to carry out its educational work. In section 3 below, it is recommended that the Vimy Foundation's expertise be used to give visitors to Canadian sites devoted to the First World War a better educational experience.

With its 450,000 visitors annually and its extensive research and preservation work, the Canadian War Museum plays a vital role in this area that must be supported and expanded. The exhibitions on the War of 1812 and the centenary of the First World War are two examples. The witness representing the museum stated that "[T]wo exhibitions will be produced to travel to venues across Canada, bringing the war museum's exhibition to Canadians from coast to coast. We will also be publishing a book to both support the exhibition and commemorate this major event in Canadian history."³⁰

27 David Robinson, (National Student Tour Coordinator, EF Educational Tours Canada), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, November 15, 2011, 0920.

28 Brad White (Dominion Secretary, Dominion Command, Royal Canadian Legion), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 6, 2011, 0900.

29 David Houghton (President, Vimy Foundation), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, November 15, 2011, 0910.

30 Yasmine Mingay (Manager, Communications, Canadian War Museum), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 6, 2011, 0945.

There are ambitious plans for the centenary of the First World War:

At least two travelling exhibitions on John McCrae and Sam Steele, accompanied by off-site and online activities, will be developed and presented across the country. Projects are also in development relating to courage, the Victoria Cross awarded to Canadians, as well as a First World War lecture series.

[...] The museum will conduct research and assist educators across Canada. Printed materials, collections research, object conservation and other initiatives will generate professional knowledge and public understanding across a variety of media.

The museum is also interested in strengthening its virtual offers and continues to explore national and multinational partnership opportunities. These include the possibility of hosting an international academic conference in 2018.³¹

The members of the Committee are of the opinion that the gaps in Canadians' knowledge of history are real, but the initiatives taken by the Government of Canada and government agencies like the Canadian War Museum, or by organizations which the government supports, such as the Juno Beach Centre and the Vimy Foundation, will go a long way toward filling those gaps. We therefore make a general recommendation:

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada continue to support the Canadian War Museum, the Juno Beach Centre, the Vimy Foundation and the Historica-Dominion Institute in their efforts to bring the riches of their exhibits, research and publications to all Canadians so that they have the opportunity to learn more about Canada's military history.

3. Memorials

A memorial is any structure, monument, cenotaph, cemetery, medal or other item which preserves a physical trace that is a clear reminder of the achievements and suffering of Canadian veterans. The Government of Canada bears primary responsibility for erecting these memorials through initiatives like the recently launched Community War Memorial Program. For their maintenance, the responsibility is often shared with multilateral organizations, the most important being the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

We have 13 First World War battlefield memorials in France and Belgium, and we have responsibility for the Canada Memorial in Green Park in London, England. In addition, at the two largest of those sites, we have a student guide program that offers Canadian university students an opportunity to provide interpretive services to the one million visitors we receive at those two sites each year. We also have some responsibility, with other departments, for the National War Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

31 James Whitham (Acting Director General and Vice-President, Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation, Canadian War Museum), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 6, 2011, 0950.

here in Ottawa and for the seven books of remembrance, which reside here in the Memorial Chamber in the Peace Tower.³²

It is difficult to fully appreciate the events commemorated by these structures without knowing their history. Knowledge of history gained from reading books or watching movies comes to life with great intensity when the sight of a majestic monument stimulates the memory.

Marking graves and maintaining cemeteries are two of the memorials' program's most solemn duties. Much of the responsibility for these tasks falls to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 10% of whose budget comes from Canada. Under its 1917 Charter, the Commission is responsible for the 110,000 Canadians who died in the two world wars and who are buried in some 6,500 cemeteries in 73 countries.

Our duties are to mark and maintain the graves of the members of the forces of the Commonwealth who died during the two world wars; to build and maintain memorials to the dead whose graves are unknown; and to keep records and registers. This cost is shared by the partner governments—Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and South Africa—in proportions based on the numbers of their graves.

[...] The commission's work is based on a few fundamental principles. They are that each of the dead should be commemorated individually by name, either on the headstone over the grave or by an inscription on a memorial; that the headstones and memorials should be permanent; that the headstones should be uniform; and that there should be no distinction made on account of military or civil rank, race, or creed.³³

Under a separate agreement with Canada that is outside the responsibilities defined in its Charter, the Commission handles routine maintenance of the Vimy and Beaumont Hamel sites and the graves of Canadians who died in the Boer War and delivers an array of services on behalf of the Government of Canada. Because it has an intimate knowledge of the gravesites, the Commission regularly helps VAC and other organizations conduct specific historical research. It publishes many documents and posts information on its website.

The members of the Committee share without qualification the view expressed by the witnesses representing the Royal Canadian Legion that “memorials and observances at cenotaphs are an important facet of any commemorative program. They convey a sense of national unity and a manner of recognizing loss, and they stand as our visual pledge to never forget. They enable Canadians in every community to share our common history of sacrifice and commitment.”³⁴

32 Derek Sullivan (Director General, Canada Remembers Branch, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 4, 2011, 0935.

33 Bradley Hall (Secretary-General, Canadian Agency of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, November 3, 2011, 0915.

34 Brad White (Dominion Secretary, Dominion Command, Royal Canadian Legion), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 6, 2011, 0850.

Visible signs of commemoration help raise awareness; they are intended to preserve and maintain parts of our history. The members of the Committee believe that VAC and the organizations with which it collaborates have fulfilled their duty with admirable dedication.

Improving the experience of visitors to major sites in Europe, particularly sites devoted to the First World War, is the only area in which it appears new initiatives might be constructive. When relationships are formed between Canada and Europe, reference is often made to the fact that many Europeans are grateful to Canadians for their generosity in crossing the Atlantic to preserve freedom in a show of solidarity. Canadian memorials in Europe are a tangible expression of that common bond, and visitor services at those sites have been limited so that there is more space for quiet reflection. Representatives of VAC told the Committee that it is perhaps time to improve the visitor experience so that it can be adapted to new generations whose recollection of these events is more diffuse.

I guess if there were something we could do that would enhance some of the overseas work we do.... We have, as I mentioned, about a million visitors a year at the Canadian National Vimy Memorial and the Beaumont Hamel Newfoundland Memorial. That's a wonderful way to project Canada in Europe. If there were enhancements we could make to our program of operating both of those memorials, including the visitor experience there, that would be a tremendous enhancement we could take advantage of.³⁵

Recognizing the potential benefits and relatively low cost of such initiatives, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada study the best ways of improving the visitor experience and visitor services at major Canadian memorials in Europe, in collaboration with organizations such as the Vimy Foundation.

4. Funeral and Burial Program

This program is funded by VAC and administered by the Last Post Fund. In 2010-2011, VAC made a contribution of \$9.3 million under that arrangement. The administrative criteria are governed by the *Veterans Burial Regulations, 2005*. A veteran's family can obtain financial support to cover eligible expenses, details of which are set out in the Regulations.

The family of any veteran whose death is attributable to the veteran's service is entitled to these benefits irrespective of the value of its assets at the time of the veteran's death. In the case of Second World War and Korean veterans who die of causes not attributable to their service, benefits are paid if the family cannot afford to pay for appropriate services. Finally, in the case of veterans who were involved in operations after

35 Derek Sullivan (Director General, Canada Remembers Branch, Department of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 4, 2011, 0950.

the Korean War, the family must have insufficient assets and the veteran must have already received financial support from VAC for a service-related health problem.

If there are a surviving spouse and dependent children, the family must provide proof that the value of its net assets is less than \$12,015 plus \$700 for each dependent child. Not included in these assets are the family home and its contents and the family car. If the veteran has no surviving spouse or dependent children, the veteran's succession is entitled to the benefits if the value of the net assets, including the house and contents and the car, is less than zero.

Three problems with this program were identified: the eligibility criteria, the method used to calculate the value of assets, and the maximum amounts for eligible expenses.

With regard to the eligibility criteria, some members of the Committee wondered why the criteria were less restrictive for Second World War and Korean War veterans. The answer was that Canadians already help guarantee post-Korean War veterans a suitable income through the Canadian Forces superannuation plan. For veterans who did not stay in the Forces long enough to qualify for a pension (between eight and 10 years as the case may be), only those with a service-related disease or injury are eligible for benefits under the Funeral and Burial Program. Otherwise stated, the Government of Canada decided that the benefits paid under such a program are a privilege that should be granted only to veterans who have an injury or a disease or who remained in the military long enough to qualify for a pension. Based on these criteria, the number of post-Korean War veterans whose families will receive benefits under the program will obviously be very small.

The question of broadening the eligibility criteria is a difficult one that requires thorough consideration of the scope of the Government of Canada's obligations, both moral and financial, to those who, at some point in their life, donned the uniform. Should the mere fact that he or she wore the uniform entitle a person to the same benefits as a veteran who died in service? This, essentially, is the same question that underlies the frequent call to extend to all veterans the access to long-term care that is currently reserved for veterans of war. Should the fact they wore the uniform – be it for one year or twenty – entitle elderly veterans to long-term care that other Canadians cannot obtain?

The representative of the Last Post Fund thought so:

For more than a decade, the Last Post Fund has advocated that the program be extended to modern-day veterans in the same way it was offered to traditional veterans. Unfortunately, the governments of Canada during this period have declined to do so, despite the urging of all veterans organizations.³⁶

The witness representing the British government thought otherwise and stated very clearly that veterans had no privilege in terms of access to social services provided by the

36 Lieutenant-General (Retired) Louis Cuppens (Past National President, Last Post Fund), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, November 17, 2011, 0850.

state. After the Korean War, Canada opted to go up the middle and grant some privileges to some veterans in certain circumstances. This is therefore a fundamental issue that it very difficult to resolve. Most importantly, however, it goes far beyond the framework of reflection on commemorative activities.

The issue of the method used to calculate the value of assets appears to be a simpler one to resolve because it is tied in with the fact that the \$12,015 has not been indexed since 1995:

In 1995, the estate exemption was decreased from \$24,030 to \$12,015. This was done in an effort to return the program to its original intent; in other words, to provide burials for those who could not afford them. At that time, the revised estate exemption of \$12,015 was close to the Low Income Measure (of a single person before tax) of \$12,178.³⁷

Assuming that this amount set a minimum threshold of poverty below which assistance was in order, it seems right to adopt an automatic indexing mechanism that would reflect the relative value of that threshold over the years.

Finally, the issue of details of eligible expenses seems to highlight a needlessly complex element of inflexibility in a process that families already grappling with enormous problems are required to follow. Does every eligible expense need to be detailed, which is what the Regulations do? Is it necessary, for example, to specify that the eligible cost of a “decomposable grave liner” is \$200 and the eligible cost of a “non-decomposable grave liner” is \$570 because of the restrictions that may be imposed by municipal bylaws governing cemeteries?³⁸ The maximum amount of eligible expenses is \$4,955, plus an average of \$2,000 for the grave plot and its maintenance, and has not been indexed since 2005. Moreover, certain items are not included: “What is not allowed or budgeted for are obituaries notices, death notices, clergy, flowers, and the Canadian flag.”³⁹

Considering what seems to be a needless irritant in a program – Canada Remembers – that overall draws nothing but praise, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 6

That the Department of Veterans Affairs, in collaboration with the Last Post Fund, the Office of the Veterans’ Ombudsman and veterans’ organizations, consider amending the *Veterans Burial Regulations, 2005*:

- **To expand eligibility criteria;**

37 Veterans Affairs Canada, Evaluation of the Veterans’ Burial Program, January 2009, Section 5.1.3., <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/department/reports/deptaudrep/funeral-burial-09#s31>

38 Veterans Burial Regulations, 2005, paragraphs 3(2)(v) and (vi).

39 Lieutenant-General (Retired) Louis Cuppens (Past National President, Last Post Fund), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, 17 November 2011, 0855.

- to ensure that the deduction used in calculating the net value of assets is reasonably increased and annually indexed; and
- to replace the list of maximum amounts for eligible expenses by a reasonably increased lump sum that would be indexed annually.

CONCLUSION

If there is one area of Government of Canada operations that has seen its share of change in recent years, it is veterans affairs. However, the members of the Committee were relieved to see that what truly underlies the changes taking place in this portfolio, a portfolio that is both complex and charged with emotion, is the bond and the gratitude that unite Canadians in honouring veterans of all generations and the families who supported and continue to support them. The members of the Committee echo that unity, which cuts across party lines and regional differences.

The members of the Committee were especially pleased to learn from this study that growth in support for veterans is most robust among young Canadians, whose zeal goes beyond the kinship of their generation with veterans of more recent conflicts. Canadian youth are equally keen to commemorate the events of the First World War, as witnessed by the fact that thousands of high school students will be travelling to Vimy next April.

That said, the enthusiasm that exists among our youth has brought to light a number of lingering gaps in public recognition of certain events or certain groups of veterans. It is for that reason that we wish to recall the often-forgotten sacrifice made by veterans of the Boer War, the contribution of black Canadians to our country's military history and the contribution of veterans of UN and NATO peacekeeping missions.

It is possible that these oversights mask a deeper problem, namely Canadians' lack of knowledge of their history in general and their military history in particular. With that in mind, we would like to acknowledge the extraordinary dedication of the people behind organizations like the Vimy Foundation, the Canadian War Museum, the Juno Beach Centre and the Historica-Dominion Institute. These people work day in and day out to raise awareness among Canadians.

Finally, only one in the array of commemorative activities carried out by VAC needs to be reviewed, and that is the Funeral and Burial Program. The eligibility criteria are too restrictive, the value of assets used to determine eligibility has not been indexed since 1995, and the caps on eligible expenses do not reflect actual costs and give the families who have to make the decisions little leeway. The members of the Committee are confident that the Government of Canada will come up with a reasonable way of eliminating these irritants that cast a shadow over the excellence of its commemoration program.

The members of the Committee were delighted to see the strength and diversity of the initiatives being taken to honour the service of Canadian veterans. They would like to highlight the remarkable work and dedication of the individuals who carry those initiatives: employees of VAC, affiliated public bodies, community groups and private enterprise; the thousands of volunteers who support them; all Canadians who take part in commemorative activities, whether in public or in private; and of course veterans and their families, who are the soul of those activities. They continue to give true meaning to the privilege of living in a free country.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1:

That the Government of Canada publicly recognize the important role World War One played in shaping the Canadian identity, and that the government consider establishing an advisory committee to ensure the suitable commemoration of the centennial anniversary.

Recommendation 2:

That the Government of Canada consider holding an official public commemoration of the 110th anniversary of the end of the Boer War.

Recommendation 3:

That the Government of Canada consider erecting a bust of William Hall at the Valiants' Memorial in Ottawa to commemorate the military contribution of Black Canadians.

Recommendation 4:

That the Government of Canada continue to support the Canadian War Museum, the Juno Beach Centre, the Vimy Foundation and the Historical-Dominion Institute in their efforts to bring the riches of their exhibits, research and publications to all Canadians so that they have the opportunity to learn more about Canada's military history.

Recommendation 5:

That the Government of Canada study the best ways of improving the visitor experience and visitor services at major Canadian memorials in Europe, in collaboration with organizations such as the Vimy Foundation.

Recommendation 6:

That the Department of Veterans Affairs, in collaboration with the Last Post Fund, the Office of the Veterans' Ombudsman and veterans' organizations, consider amending the *Veterans Burial Regulations, 2005*:

- To expand eligibility criteria;**
- to ensure that the deduction used in calculating the net value of assets is reasonably increased and annually indexed; and**
- to replace the list of maximum amounts for eligible expenses by a reasonably increased lump sum that would be indexed annually.**

APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Department of Veterans Affairs Peter Mills, Director, Canada Remembers Derek Sullivan, Director General, Canada Remembers Division	2011/10/04	4
As Individual Don Meredith, Senator		
Canadian War Museum Yasmine Mingay, Manager, Communications James Whitham, Acting Director General and Vice-President, Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation	2011/10/06	5
Royal Canadian Legion Steven Clark, Director of Administration, Director of the National Remembrance Day Celebration Brad White, Dominion Secretary, Dominion Command		
Army Cadet League of Canada Terence Whitty, Executive Director	2011/10/20	6
EF Educational Tours Canada Greg Owen, Vice-President, Public Affairs and Event Tours David Robinson, National Student Tour Coordinator		
Juno Beach Centre Association Kevin Eyre, Associate Director Susan Mousseau, Director		
Vimy Foundation David Houghton, President		
Army Cadet League of Canada Terence Whitty, Executive Director	2011/11/03	9
British High Commission Barry Le Grys, Defence Adviser		

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Canadian Agency of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Bradley Hall, Secretary-General	2011/11/03	9
EF Educational Tours Canada Greg Owen, Vice-President, Public Affairs and Event Tours David Robinson, National Student Tour Coordinator	2011/11/15	10
Juno Beach Centre Association Susan Mousseau, Director		
Vimy Foundation David Houghton, President		
Last Post Fund Louis Cuppens, Past National President	2011/11/17	11
Power Workers' Union Andrew Nellestyn, Co-Producer, The documentary series, The Veterans		

APPENDIX B LIST OF BRIEFS

Organizations and individuals

Army Cadet League of Canada

Australian High Commission

Canadian Agency of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Canadian War Museum

Juno Beach Centre Association

Meredith, Don (Senator)

Royal Canadian Legion

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant Minutes of Proceedings ([Meetings Nos. 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 16 and 17](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Greg Kerr, M.P.

Chair