



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

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# Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 024**

Wednesday, May 5, 2021

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Chair: Mr. Bryan May





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• (1550)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 24 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, as is now the norm. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on October 27, 2020, the committee is resuming its study on a strategy for commemorations in the 21st century.

I'd like to welcome all the witnesses who have taken the time to join us today. I will introduce all of you, and then each of you will have five minutes for opening remarks. I will indicate to you when you have one minute left, but don't panic. You'll have lots of time to wrap up your remarks. That will be the case throughout the meeting. I apologize in advance for having to interrupt anyone. That is part of the job as chair: to be the official interrupter.

I will introduce everyone.

From the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust, we're joined by Mr. Wendall Brown, past chair, retired commander, and William Woodburn, retired captain, chair of the organization.

Thanks to both of you for being here.

We also have with us, from the Department of National Defence, Dr. Steve Harris, acting director, chief historian, directorate of history and heritage; from the National Association of Federal Retirees, Jean-Guy Soulière, president, and Sayward Montague, director, advocacy; from Operation Husky 2023, Steve Gregory; and, from the Rwanda Veterans Association of Canada, Kevin Sammy Sampson, vice-president.

Thanks to all of you for being here and helping us with this study on commemoration.

I will start us off with Mr. Woodburn.

The next five minutes are all yours, sir.

• (1555)

**Captain(N) (Retired) William Woodburn (Chair, Canadian Naval Memorial Trust):** Mr. Chair, honourable committee members, thank you for the important work you are doing.

My name is Bill Woodburn, and I'm here today with my close colleague and good friend, Mr. Wendall Brown. We are both repre-

senting the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust. We are both retired naval officers, and I might add, proud veterans.

The trust is an independent, not-for-profit Canadian charity, operated by volunteers. Our unique mandate is to ensure the long-term preservation of HMCS *Sackville* throughout the 21st century and beyond, and to honour those who served or continue to serve at sea.

*Sackville* is the last remaining World War II corvette, and is recognized by the Government of Canada as the Canadian naval memorial and a national historic site.

Every year on the first Sunday in May, we commemorate the Battle of the Atlantic. It was the longest continuous battle of the entire war. According to Sir Winston Churchill, it was the only battle that we could not afford to lose. This was not just about the navy; it was a monumental undertaking to save the free world. It forced our country to transform and grow into an independently industrial nation, holding meaningful voice amongst our allies.

*Sackville* is not just a historic ship or a naval monument; it is a concrete and enduring symbol of one of the greatest achievements of our nation. I suggest that we would not be sitting here today if not for everything that HMCS *Sackville* signifies. That is what this ship means to Canada.

More than 4,400 Canadian sailors, airmen and merchant mariners perished during the battle. Our navy would expand from six ships to 373 ships. Of the 269 corvettes built worldwide for the war effort, 123 of them were built here in Canada, in Canadian shipyards found coast to coast.

The global importance of *Sackville* as the last remaining vessel of its kind was recently confirmed by its appearance, using modern-day technology, in the Netflix film *Greyhound*, championed by Mr. Tom Hanks.

Canadian corvettes were named after Canadian towns and cities and crewed by men from every province and every walk of life. They suffered an endless mission of convoy duty in the North Atlantic under every imaginable condition. *Sackville* was there through it all, witnessing the hardships and the horrors endured by Canadians at war at sea. This year marks the 80th anniversary of *Sackville's* commissioning.

Our trust is made up of approximately 1,000 members, spanning every province, the U.S.A. and Europe. Our membership consists of serving military, veterans and civilians alike. *Sackville* exists today because of the efforts and dedication of our volunteers.

We are funded primarily through donations and the ongoing support of our members. Each summer we open the ship to visitors on the Halifax waterfront. *Sackville* has been rated as a top tourist destination in this city for several years now, based on its unique historic and commemorative significance.

However, collaboration truly holds the key to our survival. Without doubt, the strong support of the Royal Canadian Navy has been crucial. More recently, we have partnered with like-minded organizations to help create a maritime heritage district on the Halifax waterfront. In addition, we have established an agreement with the RCN and Heritage Canada to assist with the conservation of the ship, and have benefited from a formal agreement with the Canadian government to help us fund a crucial refit, which I'm pleased to say will be completed within a few days.

As a result, we have given *Sackville* a new lease on life for the next decade or so by addressing significant deterioration in the hull. However, long-term preservation will eventually require the hull to be completely replaced.

We estimate the cost to be in the order of \$12 million. Raising this money will be the main focus of the trust in the years ahead. In doing so, we look forward to working with all three levels of government and will need their support and guidance to achieve this vital goal.

HMCS *Sackville* represents and is a reminder of what Canadians from all walks of life, from all regions of the country, can do in times of peril. From builders and shipyards, to sailors who served, to families who were so tragically affected, *Sackville* still resonates as a pillar of our collective national history. We must ensure that legacy endures.

• (1600)

I would add that we would be pleased to invite each and every one of you to visit the *Sackville* at your convenience, should you ever be in Halifax.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Woodburn. I assure you that all of us look forward to a day when that kind of invitation is something we can take you up on.

Up next, we have Dr. Harris, for five minutes, please.

**Dr. Steve Harris (Acting Director, Chief Historian, Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence):** Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to speak to you today. I value your work as well.

I'm Dr. Steve Harris, the chief historian and the acting director at the directorate of history and heritage within National Defence, where I have worked for 42 years. I represent the directorate of history and heritage, which is uniquely placed within National Defence to maintain and preserve military history and heritage, as well

as to support the Minister of Veterans Affairs in their commemorative activities.

I am also the co-chair of the Minister of Veterans Affairs commemoration advisory group, a position I have held for five years. As such, I come to this discussion of commemoration in the 21st century with a historical lens and a great deal of institutional knowledge on the subject.

While the Department of Veterans Affairs has the mandate to commemorate the service and sacrifice of Canadian sailors, soldiers and aviators in past wars and conflicts, the role of the Department of National Defence is to support VAC's planning and the execution of its commemorative activities, including a long-term strategy for commemoration.

National Defence and the director of history continue to support VAC in its commemoration of those brave Canadians who have served Canada in armed conflict, with particular focus in the past few years on the First World War and Second World War.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to answering your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Dr. Harris.

Up next I believe it's Mr. Soulière who will be making opening remarks.

**Mr. Jean-Guy Soulière (President, National Association of Federal Retirees):** Thank you for inviting the National Association of Federal Retirees to speak today. I am joining you from Ottawa, Ontario, the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe peoples.

The National Association of Federal Retirees represents 175,000 members, including 60,000 veterans. It is the largest national advocacy organization representing active and retired members of the federal public service, Canadian Armed Forces, RCMP and retired federally appointed judges, as well as their partners and survivors. We are pleased to be a co-chair and collaborating partner on the Women Veterans Research and Engagement Network, or WREN, which seeks to ensure equitable lifetime outcomes for military and veteran women and men.

My colleague Sayward Montague and I are pleased to speak with you today about the long-term view for commemoration and remembrance of all Canadian veterans.

Canada has been a leader in commemoration and remembrance thanks to the robust programs developed and maintained by Veterans Affairs Canada, both here at home and abroad, and the efforts of veterans organizations, many of them volunteer-run. Commemoration should start with a shared understanding and goal, and we should ask ourselves some questions. Who and what do we commemorate and how? Who and what have we neglected to recognize? Why has that happened? How can commemoration be more inclusive and reflective of those who have served?

Commemoration should reflect what the Canadian Armed Forces and the RCMP are, from the composition of those forces to their work and the challenges faced by those who have served.

All military occupations were opened to women in 1989. Women today comprise over 16% of the military. There is a goal to have 25% serving by 2026. We know that military women face inequitable health and other outcomes during and after their service. Recent months have been difficult for women veterans with the lived experience of military sexual misconduct and military sexual trauma.

How and whether individuals identify as veterans should be explored more closely. U.S. research has found that military women are less likely than men to self-identify as veterans, which means they may not seek the benefits, services and supports to which they are entitled, and they may be less visible in how we honour those who have served. On the flip side, veteran well-being is positively impacted by recognition. These realities must influence our long-term planning for commemoration. Better understanding the experience, needs and expectations of military and veteran women is important.

The department's 10-year strategic plan for commemoration will expand the focus of commemorative programming and recognition of all those who have served, and highlight diversity in Canada's military history, including our role in advancing peace and security globally. The department is committed to GBA+ in commemoration and to ensure that programs, policies and initiatives are unbiased. Veteran women should know what that means.

Veterans Affairs has taken steps to ensure that commemoration better reflects the role of military and veteran women through profiles, interviews, educational materials and a lesson plan. The stories of veteran women are more present in our collective consciousness. The department, through the annual women veterans forums and through other stakeholder relationships, has an opportunity to connect with military and veteran women to explore modern-day commemoration. The government must continue to be accountable for its progress on these goals, and in closing systemic biases and research gaps, which contribute to and include commemoration.

● (1605)

Finally, there is a connection between respect, veteran identity, and commemoration. Respect is as fundamental as ensuring every veteran receives the care, respect and dignity which they deserve and are entitled to following years of service dedicated to Canada.

Issues like institutional betrayal and moral injury contribute to a loss of trust, impact veteran health and well-being and may contribute to whether and how veterans identify as veterans.

Commemoration without those essentials, respect and well-being, will ring hollow. Canada's commemoration plans must reflect the rich diversity of our military and veteran communities, particularly during Veterans Week and Remembrance Day ceremonies. All veterans must see themselves equitably represented at these significant national events.

Engaging women veterans and women veteran organizations in this work is mission critical. Applying the GBA+ lens to commemoration, from Canadians' perceptions of who veterans are, to national or global activities, is the right thing to do.

New ways to mark and honour the contributions of Canada's military and veteran women should be explored including, perhaps, a day of recognition dedicated to military and veteran women.

We owe effective and relevant commemoration to all veterans. This is an opportunity for commemoration to reflect who we, as Canadians, truly are. The story we tell must include the military and veteran women experience, as well as honour their contributions to the Canadian Armed Forces, the RCMP, and to peace and security at home and around the world.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Soulière.

Up next is Mr. Gregory for five minutes.

● (1610)

**Mr. Steve Gregory (Operation Husky 2023):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Steve Gregory. I'm a business owner from Montreal and the honorary colonel of the 2nd Field Artillery Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery. Before I begin, I need to explain to you why commemorations are so important to me.

In 2006, my then 10-year-old son Erik produced a history project about a specific battle in Sicily. It was very difficult for him to complete. We could find very few resources. Nothing was available that talked about the Canadians in Sicily in 1943. By chance, a year later, I visited a museum in Sicily that was dedicated to the allied landing, and I was disappointed. There was no Canadian exhibit, only a poster and a couple of small artifacts you could fit in a cup. Later that day, I visited our cemetery at Agira, not far away, and the register listed four visitors since the beginning of that year. It was then August 1.

These experiences led me to feel that we had abandoned the memory of our fallen, that we had neglected to honour their sacrifice. It stuck with me as a civilian. Motivated by this perception of injustice, I organized Operation Husky 2013 and 2018. They were large-scale, civilian commemorations in Sicily.

It is with this deep conviction that I share three ongoing projects.

The Walk for Remembrance and Peace is a 325-kilometre marked walking trail along the path of the 1st Canadian Division troops, from the landing at Pachino to Adrano, with an accompanying history book and walking guide. We hope that it engages Sicilians in remembrance and creates an economic engine that sustains their involvement. Imitating the Camino de Santiago, we're hoping that this walk becomes known as the "Canadian Camino".

The second invites youth from grades 10, 11 and 12 into a conversation about what makes peace possible. It's called the International Forum for Peace, Security and Prosperity. This annual event and student contest will be held online and in Sicily. It brings together high school students and officer cadets with academics to explore the role of our military and the institutions of public order and justice in establishing the basis for a flourishing peace and, ultimately, societal prosperity.

The third, Operation Husky, in 2023 and again in 2028 will commemorate the anniversary of the allied landing in Sicily. Here we'll honour our fallen and celebrate the rebirth of a peaceful, secure and prosperous society. As in past activities, a group of Canadians will walk the 325-kilometre path. It will take us 20 days.

Two strategic imperatives are guiding my team, and I hope they might be helpful to you.

First, we are focusing on engaging and educating our youth. The forum provides a critical link to commemoration in the context of the outcome that so many sacrificed their lives to achieve, and that is peace. In this forum, students can share perspectives, both historical and contemporary, with military officer cadets, academics and civilian leaders from western liberal democracies, who are preparing to fight or who have fought for peace. We're pushing out the contest to over 11,000 Canadian high schools. We're convinced that our youth need to feel they own the commemorative space and are deliberately brought on board as true partners in commemoration events. We must open the door wider to them.

Second, we are collaborating with, and leveraging, civilian organizations at home and abroad. Currently, many produce excellent educational materials, engaging programs and incredible outreach opportunities for youth. In a quick search, you'll find at least seven not-for-profit and private organizations distributing commemorative programs to Canadian high schools, and that's above and beyond what VAC is doing.

Sometimes services overlap and even compete for precious resources. While competition is obviously great for innovation and efficiency, a lack of collaboration can result in confusion and waste. To date, we've partnered with seven collaborative organizations, including: the 3rd Battery of Montreal Artillery, Valour Canada, the Conference of Defence Associations Institute, the Canadian Defence Academy, the Italian Army general staff, the Global Peace Institute and the Institute for Economics and Peace out of Australia.

● (1615)

This emphasis on collaboration is even more important when working overseas. During COVID-19, on November 11 a network of Italian civilians visited many of the 21 cemeteries, laying wreaths on our behalf. These valuable relationships are only possi-

ble if Canadians maintain their relationships and don't just show up every five years.

A commemoration strategy for the 21st century that leverages civilian volunteers and public-private partnerships must be deliberate and persistent. Collaboration, coupled with diversity and genuine inclusivity of our youth, should, wherever possible, use local partners to engage our youth and inspire a spirit of remembrance.

My hope is that VAC could play a central role in orchestrating and harnessing these civilian initiatives. There are just so many of them, all great citizens trying to do the right thing.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, sir.

Last, but not least, we have Mr. Sampson for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Kevin Sammy Sampson (Vice-President, Rwanda Veterans Association of Canada):** Mr. Chair, Ms. Wagantall, and members of this committee, I would like to thank you for the invitation to appear before you today as part of your study on commemoration.

Today I'd like to discuss existing Government of Canada policy that segregates active service veterans into categories and how that applies to commemoration.

To begin with, section 33 of the National Defence Act, which applies to service, and section 31, which applies to active service, segregate veterans into two categories legally. On any given day, roughly 90% to 95% of the military is performing service under normal day-to-day working conditions, while 5% to 10% of the military performs active service for the United Nations, NATO or other arrangements abroad, in hazardous working conditions that usually negate a soldier's charter rights and freedoms. Active service personnel are taking legal direction to perform dangerous tasks from an officer of Canada, and failing to adhere results in charges under the National Defence Act.

Mr. Chair, I would now like to refer you to Veterans Affairs Canada's core policy document 1447, pertaining to wartime and special duty service categories, which further segregates Canadians into two distinct classes for commemoration, and intrinsically, insurance. From my perspective, VAC document 1447 is quite possibly one of the most repulsive policy documents in Canada. Here's why.

The wartime service classification is top tier and has exclusive membership belonging to World War I, World War II and Korean veterans. Wartime service or elite veterans have received the majority of commemorative funding, and along with the RCMP, wartime service veterans receive the Pension Act for their active service injuries, Canada's premier insurance plan. The wartime classification also has all of Canada's Victoria Crosses.

The second category within this repulsive document, document 1447, is special duty, veterans consisting of every United Nations, NATO or other active service mission since 1953. Once again, if veterans had a rewards card, special duty service would be the discount class receiving little to no funding for commemoration over the past 50 years. There are no Victoria Crosses resulting from special duty service. Our injured active service veterans in the discount class receive 40% of the injury insurance that wartime service veterans and the RCMP receive for their active service.

Monsieur Samson, last week you asked a question regarding the Afghanistan war and the challenges faced by one of your constituents. VAC policy document 1447 clearly indicates that Canada does not think Afghanistan was a war or that injured veterans are worthy of equality when it comes to commemoration and injury benefits, but we know that's not true.

Members of Parliament, I ask you to refer to Library of Parliament document BP 303 and Library of Parliament document PRB 00-06 to understand why Afghanistan is not a war in Canadian policy and to learn a great deal about your responsibilities as members of Parliament, under section 32 of the National Defence Act, when government places Canadians on active service.

To be clear, I would like to provide an example. If a Korean War veteran, a member of the RCMP and a Rwanda veteran make a successful claim to Veterans Affairs Canada for PTSD, the Rwanda veteran will receive 40% of the injury benefits that the other active service veterans do. Numbers do not lie. Successive parliaments have not respected or cared for Canada's active service veterans equally. This is in spite of PBO reports and the concern being raised by today's generation of veterans.

As a retired warrant officer, an active service veteran of seven different missions, it's difficult for me to commemorate missions with my head held high when I know that privates and corporals are incapable of making ends meet, and it's simply because of document 1447 from Veterans Affairs.

- (1620)

Bullets, disease, explosions and trauma do not discriminate, but Canada does, and it discriminates against today's special duty service veterans when it comes to commemoration and, intrinsically, injury benefits.

I would recommend that document 1447 be decommissioned and that active service veterans be treated equally as it pertains to commemoration and insurance under the Pension Act. Missions should be named and classified appropriately, resulting in a more effective level of commemoration, care, transparency and accountability for Canadians, veterans and government.

Members of Parliament, I appreciate your work. You do fantastic work, but until Canada starts to look after its injured active service veterans to obtain equality, it's going to be challenging to encourage veterans like me to commemorate missions openly.

Thank you very much for your time today.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Sampson.

For the first round of questions, we go to MP Wagantall for six minutes.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, all of you, for what you're doing and for your service, as well as the commemoration that you're involved in. It's clearly a passion for all of you, and it means a great deal to me as well.

Hello, Sammy. It's good to see you again.

I am one of the civilians on this team who has found veterans very gracious in the way that they embrace teaching me a great deal about their lives and what they've experienced. Sammy has certainly done that in regard to his service and the role that he plays.

I just want to mention, Sammy, what you indicated. I have it on page 3 of the document you shared. You referred us, as members of this committee, to two documents that the Library of Parliament could provide for us to learn more about our responsibilities and issues around the Afghan war—sorry, the Afghan...not a war. I would like to ask if either our clerk or our analyst would provide that to all of us. It sounds like that's something we could definitely gain from. If that's possible, I would appreciate it.

If you would, Sammy, please explain more about section 32 of the National Defence Act and why you as a veteran feel that this legislation is important to veterans and to commemoration.

**Mr. Kevin Sammy Sampson:** Thank you very much for the question, Ms. Wagantall. It's wonderful to see you again too. Thank you very much for the invitation.

In 1994, Rwanda came up. Section 32 of the National Defence Act requires members of Parliament to sit in the House of Commons “within 10 days” for a period of 10 days to discuss openly, transparently and democratically the “active service” mission that Canada is planning to take on. From an accountability perspective, members of Parliament.... I go way back to 1991, when Canada went to the Gulf War. Members of Parliament came to visit us in the Gulf War. They sat and discussed the Gulf War for 10 days to determine whether Canada should or should not participate, but then they also asked questions to ensure a lot of necessities: who's coming, how many units are going to be there, when are they arriving, what's the safety, what's the security and what's the UN chapter and so forth.

Today, the Government of Canada no longer observes section 32, because they do not think it's relevant. I'm not sure how federal law works, but I understand that section 32 is a law, and it does require—it's almost obligatory—that you go and discuss our rights and freedoms under the charter and how they're going to be affected by the active service that Canada is placing us on.

Today, the Liberal government likes to make all of its decisions in secret. The Governor in Council, however, provides the active service legislation, and it's exactly at that point when you are all supposed to sit in the House of Commons for 10 days and discuss it.

Now we've just basically put Europe back on the table, in Latvia, Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic Sea, and I don't think any of you sat for active service legislation to determine whether that's the best thing for Canada or whether that's the best thing for our troops and so forth.

Section 32 is found in BP-303. It talks extensively about it, and I encourage all of you to read it. You're going to find out some very interesting information about your obligations.

• (1625)

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Thank you for that.

As a veteran, what are your thoughts on how Canada should engage the public on commemoration? I hear a little bit of your angst around that dynamic based on your perceptions in regard to those who have served since the Korean War, and the dynamics there.

What would you like to say to us in that regard?

**Mr. Kevin Sammy Sampson:** I would like to say not to recreate the wheel. I would suggest that we look to our partners inside the Commonwealth. Let's talk to Australia, which has a very successful relationship with its veterans. Let's talk to New Zealand. Both of those countries annually hold an event called Anzac Day. What that allows veterans to do is at dawn of one day a year everybody shows up for a commemorative veterans parade. It promotes camaraderie. It promotes healthy commemoration. It promotes a positive relationship with Canadians. You're doing it at dawn. You're not getting in the middle of rush-hour parades, and so forth.

What that does is it allows veterans to come together. I can almost guarantee that today's veterans are not coming together for commemoration unless there's a level of camaraderie involved within that commemoration, because the only thing that's going to

get me off my chair are my friends, my buddies, and my brothers and sisters in the military.

If we do something like that, if we start looking at what other countries have created, I think we will save ourselves a lot of time and money. I think we're able to use a lot of good ideas from other countries that would resonate with veterans and Canadians here.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Can I ask you about the Afghan memorial? It's in a 10-year plan, and of course, has been taking a very long time to come to fruition. I hear from veterans from that time that this is very important, that they have a place to go to meet each other.

Is that the type of thing you're referring to?

**The Chair:** A very brief answer, please.

**Mr. Kevin Sammy Sampson:** I actually don't have a comment on that, Ms. Wagantall. I'm not really sure about the commemorative plan for the Afghan war memorial, but I can tell you that to every Afghanistan veteran, it is almost a holy place where we would like to go and commemorate our fallen.

**The Chair:** Thank you, sir.

Up next for six minutes is MP Fillmore, please.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.):** Thanks, Chair, and a tremendous thanks to our witnesses for joining us today. You've each brought a unique and interesting perspective, and I want to say thank you for that.

I have the great privilege of representing Halifax, the home of Canada's east coast navy, the home port, and home to HMCS *Sackville*, so you won't be surprised if I am going to direct my questions to Captain Woodburn and Commander Brown as we proceed through today.

Wendall, it's nice to see you. We usually see each other at the Battle of the Atlantic event at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic. We've been unable to do that two years running now. I look forward to seeing you very soon once we emerge from this malaise that we're all under.

As you know, I've had the privilege many times of being aboard *Sackville*, including in the war room with the late great Jim Reddy, to hear him wax poetic about the history of *Sackville*, and its role in Canada's nationhood. It is a remarkable story, and one that absolutely needs to be preserved and maintained. That's really what I want to talk to you about.

I would ask each of you, Captain Woodburn and Commander Brown, to use the time I have for my questions to talk to us about what *Sackville* needs, and what you feel can and should be done to preserve it, so that its story can live on as the last surviving Canadian corvette.

• (1630)

**Mr. Wendall Brown (Past Chair, Commander (Retired), Canadian Naval Memorial Trust):** Bill.



**Capt(N) (Ret'd) William Woodburn:** Okay, I'll kick it off, sir. Thank you very much. I thought you might be asking some questions like this.

The first thing, I would say, is assistance by government, particularly for a group like ours, which is quite independent, using things like social media. The COVID crisis has really caused us to jump on board with social media, but it seems to me that with the power and oomph of an organization like Veterans Affairs—not only for us, but for a lot of similar organizations like ours—we could get a lot more bang for our buck out of commemoration, what all these different entities mean to Canadians, and on a more regular basis, as opposed to Remembrance Day or a special event.

I actually went to the Battle of the Atlantic commemoration ceremony this past Sunday. There were six of us there to commemorate and lay a wreath, but typically that is just buzzing with crowds and with the pomp and pageantry of what that battle was all about.

I think we could use help with developing better strategies on how we use social media.

I also thought that incentives to the private sector to help with commemorative initiatives may be a way we could improve what we have. We struggle to get funds together, and it's usually Canadians and the grassroots that are coming out to give us money and help us, because they believe in the cause and what we represent.

The last thing I would probably say is that I am very intrigued by what the U.K. has done with vessels of historic significance like HMS *Victory* and *Warrior*. They've turned the national lottery into a system that can help with historical and commemorative, significant items in their country. Both *Victory* and *Warrior* have survived because of that. It's a great strategy, but it would take a fair amount of work to move it out from what a lottery looks like today.

Those are some of the ideas that would be helpful, certainly, to us.

Wendall, I don't know if you have anything else you want to add.

**Mr. Wendall Brown:** I think those of us who are involved actively with *Sackville* have two focuses, really, on board. One is the actual preservation of the ship, and the other, as Captain Woodburn said, is bringing it to the public. It's so much more than a static memorial. It's a living memorial where you can get the veterans themselves, or more particularly now, the descendants of veterans coming on board to try to put together some feeling of what their ancestors went through.

This happens on a daily basis, and you have people coming on for very emotional visits, knowing very little, because, as you know, people from World War II were loath to speak about what they went through. They come down now with fragments of information or phrases that their ancestors said, and they try, by going and walking in the footsteps of their ancestors, to piece together what they're seeing.

To keep the ship in perpetuity for that, as Captain Woodburn said, we are going to need a volunteer group. It would take a large sum of money to reskin the ship, put a new hull plate in below the waterline, and we'll have to do that probably within a decade. We need funds for that.

With the electronic age now, we can certainly improve our presentation by having, say, videos of an engine running and showing how the action stations worked, and so on, just to improve our presentation.

• (1635)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm sorry that I have to interrupt.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Thank you, both.

**The Chair:** Up next we have MP Desilets for six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to all our witnesses for joining us and particularly, in a number of cases, for the loyal service they have provided to the country.

I am impressed by the quality of your testimony to this point.

My first question goes to Mr. Soulière.

What you said struck me and has stayed with me for a number of minutes. You talked about recognizing women, about the disrespect they are shown, and about the fact that many women do not see themselves as part of this community.

Mr. Soulière, can you provide some specific thoughts, please?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Soulière:** I can, but I will ask Ms. Montague to fill out my answer, because she has a deeper knowledge of the matter.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** That will be great.

**Mr. Jean-Guy Soulière:** We cannot deal with the matter in its entirety. Therefore, we have decided as an association to focus on women in the Canadian Armed Forces and in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. That is why we created this committee with a group of other concerned women.

Ms. Montague, do you want to continue?

[*English*]

**Ms. Sayward Montague (Director, Advocacy, National Association of Federal Retirees):** Thank you, Jean-Guy.

I think I'll respond by noting the statistic that we shared in the U.S. context. We know there's U.S. research that focuses on how women identify as veterans, and it's a different cultural context and lens, certainly.

There is work that needs to be done in the Canadian context so that we better understand Canadian military and veteran women. VAC has made strides in that regard, but there is certainly a way to go, and there is a way to go in terms of the gender and other lenses we apply to commemoration activities and to the study of our history in the military context.

I would leave it at that with reference back to our pre-budget submissions and other testimony we've given to this committee with regard to the study on the backlog.

You know, when it comes to very fundamental transactions with the organizations, with the departments that one depends on for very essential, very necessary benefits, and when those are difficult to access, when veterans are waiting several years for decisions and adjudication on the basis of their gender, that lack of respect becomes quite pronounced. It becomes a factor that alienates you from the culture, camaraderie and the connection, the community, that you had that is so unique to the military. It's unfortunate when that happens, but it's, again, a very fundamental issue that can be fixed with some attention to detail, frankly.

I would leave it at that and encourage, again, the focus on research and better data.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Let's continue with what you have just said.

In your opinion, are there major differences between the unresolved backlog for women and for men?

[*English*]

**Ms. Sayward Montague:** From the evidence that we have seen in terms of the reporting that's come out of Veterans Affairs just on the backlog, we know there are longer wait times for women. I can pull those statistics up. There are differences as well, and you're familiar with them, MP Desilets, on anglophone and francophone applications.

Veterans Affairs Canada has, to their credit, put some interesting solutions in place to really focus on reducing that backlog once they've identified that there were some structural or systemic issues that were creating the backlog.

The same thing could well be done for female clients. As of 2018, 42% of female clients waited over 40 weeks for a decision, while only 26% of male clients waited that long. We're aware of cases that have been left pending for 104 weeks, more than two years. Less is known about the experience of RCMP veteran women in claims processing, but that's what we're aware of, and we have asked for attention to that.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** We all want the backlog to disappear. We are aware of a major difference between the treatment of francophones and anglophones and between women and men. You are confirming that once more.

What recommendations would you have to get us out of that vicious circle?

[*English*]

**Ms. Sayward Montague:** As a simple start, investing in the GBA+ strategy and ensuring that the work at the department is carried out retroactively and prospectively, I think, is the most critical thing, as is ensuring that the dollars we put into research on women veterans' and military women's service issues are allocated according to SAGER principles, sex and gender equity in research. It comes down to understanding better data and ensuring that the things that are expressed in GBA+ plans, departmental plans and mandate letters are reported on and delivered on.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Up next, for six minutes, we have MP Blaney, please.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):** Thank you so much.

First of all, I acknowledge and thank all of you who have served for your service. Thank you for talking about things that are sometimes very hard to talk about. I really appreciate that.

I thank the folks here who are civilians, who know these stories are so important that you're doing that important support work of amplifying them and finding opportunities to make sure that the voices that are often not heard are heard.

I acknowledge and thank all of you for your presentations.

I'll go first to Mr. Soulière and Ms. Montague.

You said in your opening remarks that it's very hard for our veterans and military people to feel connected to commemoration if they're feeling neglected by the supports and services they're getting. I think when we talk about commemoration that is something we need to always connect with, think about and challenge ourselves to do better.

To follow up on what Mr. Desilets said earlier, you talked about the gaps for diversity and the need to put that GBA+ process also into reviewing commemoration. Could you talk to us about what those gaps are? Have you heard from folks what those gaps are? What could we do differently? What could VAC do differently, to start to address that in terms of commemoration?

I'll leave it to either of you to answer.

**Mr. Jean-Guy Soulière:** I'll leave that for Sayward because she has been working with the group that has come out with all this information.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

**Ms. Sayward Montague:** Thank you, MP Blaney, and thank you, Jean-Guy.

In terms of plans for commemoration, we're aware of the 10-year strategic plan for commemoration that has come from VAC. That was informed by one of the advisory groups that one of our colleagues, Dr. Harris, is involved with.

What we noted in reviewing the terms of reference and the records of discussion of the advisory group was that no discussion had come up about equity or about gender-based analysis in commemoration. The department has identified the need for GBA+ in commemoration, but there's nothing specific about what that exactly means. Therefore, how that's going to be achieved is another question we have, and the understanding of what that's going to mean is certainly a gap.

Again, it comes back to that gender-based analysis and applying that lens through all the work that's being done. Good work is being done by Veterans Affairs Canada and the organizations that are around the table supporting them.

That's one of the major gaps. The other gap comes to research, which is a difficult question. We quoted some U.S. understanding of how women are less likely to identify as veterans. There may be any number of factors or reasons that underlie it, but understanding that is really critical in terms of identifying why it happens. It's an unfortunate and damaging factor in and of itself, but it can also mean that women veterans are not accessing or able to access the benefits, services and supports that they need so the inequitable outcomes are snowballing from there. We need to ensure that the research effort and dollars are focused on where the gaps are so we can understand this group a lot better and then we can commemorate them a lot better.

The final thing I would add is that there are opportunities for VAC to connect with the women veterans community. They have stood up the office of women and LGBTQ2. It has been two to three years now. It was announced a year ago in March, but it has been operational a little longer than that. Continuing on with that work is incredibly important. So is the women veterans forum, which the minister had committed to as an annual event. I believe there have been two now. Ensuring that forum continues and that commemoration is perhaps a stream in there would be critical.

• (1645)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you for that.

Mr. Gregory, you talked about some of the work that's being done. I'm very interested in the Walk for Remembrance and Peace. I'm writing notes very quickly, so if I've missed anything, I apologize.

Could you outline how that works? Is that walk something we're engaging Canadians to do in remembrance as well? I know it's important to have it there.

You talked a lot about youth. This is something that, of course, I'm very passionate about. How do we make sure youth remember? We only do things when we remember what the past is. This is so important.

**Mr. Steve Gregory:** I couldn't agree with you more.

I have a deep concern that for our children, our youth, their world is getting smaller and smaller. To the extent that we can help them understand what makes peace possible and the role of our profession of arms, our soldiers, men and women, in making that peace possible, I think they'd have a different appreciation of the need for commemoration.

We're framing our communication to youth not about our military and not about remembrance for the sake of remembering soldiers; that's a difficult sell to high schools. It's the truth. As a matter of fact, in Bloomberg, Max Hastings wrote about the decline of education on military history in U.S. universities. It's catastrophic. In fact, in Canada, there are very few provincial curricula that include military history. The way to get to youth from our perspective is to pursue a conversation about what makes peace and productive, prosperous democratic societies possible, and what role the military does have in them.

It's hoped the Walk for Remembrance and Peace will be an economic engine that engages civilians in Canada as well as in Italy. It has had a lot of success. The governor of Sicily signed an MOU with the Italian military to dedicate all landing sites as heritage sites. That means funding is going to go to those sites for the purpose of establishing more communication with, obviously, the allies. For them, it's tourism.

**The Chair:** Sorry, Mr. Gregory, I have to jump in there.

Up next for five minutes, we have MP Brassard, please.

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, all, for being here.

It's good to see a couple of you again. I think you were here, if I recall, on the benefits. No, it wasn't benefits. It was another subject that we were dealing with, but Sayward and Mr. Soulière, good to see you again.

Mr. Gregory, I want to pick up on what Ms. Blaney was talking about in terms of youth outreach. You talked a lot about the why. In previous panels that we've had we've heard about youth outreach and how important it's going to be for commemoration going forward. I'm wondering if you could speak to the how. Maybe a couple of others could weigh in on this too. How do we best reach youth in order to ensure that the type of commemoration issues that you're talking about are sustained for future generations?

Mr. Gregory.

**Mr. Steve Gregory:** Thank you, sir.

We've had limited experience. We're at the beginning of a process. We ran the first International Forum on Peace, Security and Prosperity in 2019, and our last one was this past February. We had 831 participants, 23 countries, 22 military colleges. Ambassador Rae from the UN spoke to the kids as did Senator Loffreda. It was by all accounts a success.

We believe we can create the biggest peace conference in the world. That's our goal. We can do so by just grassroots knocking on doors. Just imagine some of the largest organizations with outreach to high schools. Their database of teachers is less than a thousand. There are 200,000 high school teachers in this country. In fact, that number is a little shy.

We have a lot of work to do with respect to creating a database of teachers in social science, in history, in ethics and in being a better citizen. Just to reach out to these individuals, we funded an ad that's going into Canadian Teacher Magazine. We're building a database through a number of collaborations. It's our expectation that it's going to be a ton of hard work calling on individual schools.

• (1650)

**Mr. John Brassard:** There are a lot of individual schools that take that on, on their own. Where I am in Barrie just north of Toronto, Simcoe County District School Board, for example, really engages with youth. There were a couple of thousand who went to Vimy 100, for example. If I hear you correctly then, it's just a matter of funnelling all of those resources into a one-stop shop where we can get that information out to those schools to help them participate. Is that correct?

**Mr. Steve Gregory:** I'm not sure about the one-stop shop. I think there's an opportunity for VAC to coordinate and orchestrate the civilian resources. Just in Ontario and Quebec, for instance, we collaborate with 13 of 22 different civilian organizations that were trying to get themselves engaged in commemorations, and that's not including veterans associations or regimental associations. There are a huge number of civilians who would like to be pointed at this. I think VAC can bring these organizations together in some way to help them stimulate collaboration.

I'll give you one perfect example.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Make it brief, if you don't mind, because I do have another question.

**Mr. Steve Gregory:** When VAC funds an initiative for outreach, those organizations that can demonstrate collaboration should be preferred with respect to funding. We're collaborating with seven different organizations to stretch every dollar. I think VAC could encourage that.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Thank you.

The other thing we've been hearing about is the impact that COVID has had on commemorations and the adjustment that's had to be made by various organizations, like Legions, to move to a more virtual setting. They have found that they've been able to expand their reach.

I don't know who to direct this to. Perhaps it should be Sayward or Jean-Guy. Do you see virtual commemorations or a hybrid of such becoming the reality of the future? Even when COVID is gone, is this the kind of thing we are going to be doing on a more permanent basis?

**The Chair:** Give a brief answer, please.

**Mr. Jean-Guy Soulière:** It depends on who you want to reach.

I haven't heard of social media being used to educate the youth. That is critical. If we could use social media to educate, that would be a start. For other generations, there are other methods.

We've found that we are reaching our membership through social media more and more, and we're talking about the older population. The younger population can't live without it, so maybe that's the way to start.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, sir.

Now we go to MP Amos for five minutes.

**Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our committed witnesses. We all thank you for your incredible public service, and for just giving of your time and living out that passion that Canadians feel through you.

I have a few questions.

I want to start with Mr. Harris, given his history and his keen awareness of so many years and going through so many governments on this question of commemoration.

I wonder what lessons, Mr. Harris, we can learn from your four decades in public service and your awareness of the commemoration challenge. What are your take-aways after, literally, a lifetime of service in this area?

• (1655)

**Dr. Steve Harris:** It's funny; the real experience has nothing to do with where I work or my role as a co-chair of the Veterans Affairs commemoration group.

For 32 years I was a reserve army musician. When you are a reserve army musician, you end up playing at a lot of commemorative events and a lot of November 11 ceremonies. I was in Halton with the Lorne Scots, in Toronto and finally in Ottawa with the Governor General's Foot Guards.

I was shocked in June 1994, on the anniversary of D-Day. There was a large event planned for Ottawa. We knew that CBC and CTV were going to broadcast live from Normandy. Whether or not I was just cynical, I'm not sure, but I figured that when the band marched out of Cartier Square Drill Hall and turned down Elgin Street, there would be kind of a dutiful crowd.

That's not what we found. When we marched out and got onto Elgin Street, the crowd was 10 people deep, and enthusiastic. We turned left onto Wellington Street, and the crowd was 10 people deep, and enthusiastic. We were all kind of shocked, because none of us in the band—heck, I'd been the director of history at that point for 20 years—anticipated that response to that anniversary of D-Day.

The next year when CBC and CTV televised the VE day celebrations in Apeldoorn, it was the same thing, and it hasn't stopped since: the attention paid to the 90th anniversary of Vimy, the attention paid to the death of the last World War I veteran and the last veteran from Vimy Ridge, and more importantly, the folks who went onto the bridges over Highway 401 following the friendly fire incident of April, 2002. That was absolutely spontaneous.

I don't know why this happened. I've spoken to Tim Cook about this, because he's interested in this same question. We don't know why. Whether or not there was a sudden surge of collective guilt for having ignored veterans for a long time, I don't know, but going forward, my sense is that the appetite to commemorate is there.

Unlike for the First World War and Second World War veterans who died before they could see this happen—I'm not trying to defend that or speak to it—the idea is that we have to commemorate now, before the veterans of the post-Korea era are dead and don't see the enthusiasm for it.

**Mr. William Amos:** Thank you, Mr. Harris. That's tremendous testimony.

I'm going to pivot, given the limited time here, and ask an open question, a short one.

Mention has been made of the power of social media and the importance of connecting with youth. What do you think of the idea of connecting to younger Canadians through video game producers?

**The Chair:** There is time for a very brief answer from somebody.

**Capt(N) (Ret'd) William Woodburn:** Mr. Amos, we've already been investigating, not necessarily video games, but actually getting active video into our ships. Someone could put their phone up to the ship, and the next thing they'd know, they'd be looking through their phone back into a battle of the Second World War. Things like that, which may be more specific to different items, I think would be tremendous in attracting youth to come and see what's out there. That's one idea.

• (1700)

**The Chair:** Thank you. I'm afraid I have to interrupt you there.

I see your hand up, Mr. Gregory. Maybe somebody will come back to you on that point.

Up next is MP Desilets for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question goes to Mr. Sampson.

You are saying that commemoration should come after fair and respectful treatment for veterans, both men and women. Could I ask you to provide more specifics on that for a few moments and talk about the example of Australia and New Zealand?

What could we take from the experience of those countries? What do they do better than us?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You're on mute, sir.

**Mr. Kevin Sammy Sampson:** And I was practising my French.

[*Translation*]

I am sorry, Mr. Desilets, I would really like to answer in French, but I do not have the vocabulary I need to do so.

[*English*]

To begin with, your question regarding male and female, I believe that question is for Mr. Soulière. He was discussing men and women. I believe they are treated equally on active service operations. I'm not familiar with any inconsistencies there with regard to men and women.

With regard to your question on Australia and New Zealand, I'm very happy to explain that. First I'd like to mention that November 11 is Remembrance Day, and it's for remembering our dead. Unfortunately, what happens is on November 11 we tend to make it somewhat about veterans as well. This more or less takes away from what November 11 is really about, Remembrance Day.

My suggestion is that we could probably look to our partners in New Zealand and Australia. Annually they have a veterans day. Of course, they have Remembrance Day on November 11, but they recently had Anzac Day. Anzac Day saw veterans from across the countries come together to commemorate their veterans' service at a dawn parade in major cities throughout Australia and New Zealand. Everybody goes to this event. It's a camaraderie event. Everybody comes together. They march together. Then, of course, civilians who recognize what's happening also come out to witness the parade.

To some of the comments earlier about how Canadians are responding, Dr. Harris, Canadians really love their veterans and they want to hear more about the things we're doing. The challenge is we don't always have the mechanism or the means to communicate effectively with Canadians.

These events, like an event of camaraderie or a commemorative event like Anzac Day, would probably work very well in Canada, because we have similar cultures. Also, I mentioned that if you're going to get me to respond to a commemorative event and come out to represent veterans, it's going to definitely have to be something where some camaraderie is involved, where I get to see other veterans.

Thank you, sir.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Sampson.

For two and a half minutes we have MP Blaney, please.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

Dr. Harris, one thing that has been talked about in this process is how important it is to capture the stories of the folks who served us before they're gone. What you just talked about is so important, that we need to recognize all these people's histories. The War Museum, of course, is doing incredible work in gathering those stories and creating a way to present those stories so people can hear them, understand and move forward.

I'm wondering if you could talk about the work you do around that gathering of the stories before they're gone.

**Dr. Steve Harris:** When it comes to what the directorate does, its main historical responsibility is to write the official histories of Canadian deployments. To that extent we will conduct interviews to support the writing of the official histories, which means in the long run those stories will be told.

I know that within Veterans Affairs the virtual memorial, which is self-generating because people are being asked to contribute material to it, is also important. This is not so much commemoration, but during the process of our casualty identification program at National Defence—when we are able to identify a First World War or Second World War individual who had been missing until we were able to identify the remains—we've found that pushing that story out garners a lot of attention. From what I've heard, it leads local schools or other organizations to ask their students to look for soldiers and to try to tell their stories.

There is no central repository of interviews, if you will, where there's a central collection of interviews. I think the combination of what the War Museum does, what Veterans Affairs is doing, what we are doing at the directorate of history and heritage, and what some universities like UNB are doing is gradually making a catalogue, if you will.

• (1705)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Excellent. Thank you very much.

Up next, for five minutes, we have MP Davidson, please.

**Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone. I love talking about history.

Witnesses, you weren't on the last call, but I showed a picture of my grandfather that was recreated in the War Museum.

William, this is my Uncle Bert. He was on a corvette which was sunk in the North Atlantic. That's my Uncle Don. He was a tail gunner and was shot down on July 23 over France. He hid with the French underground for a year until after the war.

Colleagues, I'm sorry to bring this up again.

Steve, because I'm new to the committee, you're the first one I have from DND as a witness.

I have a Silver Cross mother who works for me. Her son was killed in action in 2010 in Afghanistan. It was horrific.

With the unveiling of the Afghanistan memorial two years ago, she was notified of that by letter two days after it happened. I haven't had anyone yet who can assure me that the families of the fallen, definitely those from Afghanistan, are notified when there's an unveiling.

I wonder if you know of a process that has been put in place for this, because I'm having trouble finding the answer.

**Dr. Steve Harris:** Unhappily, I had nothing to do with the Kandahar memorial opening at the Carling campus of NDHQ.

However, going forward, for the national Afghanistan monument, which will be across from the War Museum, I know that the Veterans Affairs' plan is to be inclusive. That will happen with great notice.

**Mr. Scot Davidson:** Thanks, Steve. I appreciate that. That was a devastating day here for me and definitely for Mrs. Collier.

Steve, I love your enthusiasm, your story about the crowd that day. I'd like to see a couple of Lancasters ripping it down Wellington a couple of days, showing the Canadian pride. To see that small-town Snowbird thing we had going on last summer, I think was very inspirational to Canadians.

Steve, with the anniversary coming up in 2023, would you say that Canadians' awareness and recognition of the Canadian contribution in Operation Husky and the Italian campaign is where it should be?

When I was looking at Operation Husky, I only knew of Husky Squadron, who were the heavy lifters in the Second World War. I had no idea there was an Operation Husky that took place in Italy. How can we get that message out more?

**Mr. Steve Gregory:** Well, let me give you an example. I lobbied the CBC for seven years—seven years—to get them to do anything about coverage. We did receive, on July 30, 2013, approximately two and a half minutes of coverage, followed by a crocodile that was eating golf balls in Florida. The opening reel of footage showed Americans in Okinawa. The coverage that Operation Husky has had is dismal.

I must give credit to VAC and our embassies. Last year, the minister came out, and didn't just go to Ortona, but came down to visit Agira. That's twice that a minister of veterans affairs has come—as far back as we have records.

I'm committed to 2028. I'll tell you, with this Walk for Remembrance and Peace, if we can convince Canadians that this is worthy of the title “Canadian Camino”, we could engage the imagination of Canadians and get them to walk that battlefield, where 562 men died in 28 days and 2,310 were wounded.

My goal is to put Operation Husky on the map by 2023 in a stellar way.

• (1710)

**Mr. Scot Davidson:** Okay. I love the enthusiasm, Steve. Make sure you keep us in the loop on that.

**Mr. Steve Gregory:** You'll be in the loop for sure. Thank you, Mr. Davidson.

**Mr. Scot Davidson:** I appreciate that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We have MP Samson up next, for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thanks for all the presentations we heard today, and thank you to those who have served and those who are contributing directly to the recognition of our men and women who serve.

I want to say hi to my colleagues in Nova Scotia, of course, Mr. Brown and Mr. Woodburn, and thank them for their work that they continue to do here in Nova Scotia to recognize the battle of the *Sackville*.

I really want to thank you as well, Mr. Harris, for your 42 years of research. It is very important. We need to have you in this study. Your information will be essential.

Also, thank you to my colleagues with the federal retirees and the big questions of who, what and how. These are very important questions for this study.

Mr. Gregory, thank you for your work for young people. I find that very impressive. This is so important in our research as we're going forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sampson, I believe that you are from Nova Scotia. I don't know whether or not we are related, but it's a pleasure to meet you.

[*English*]

Thanks to all of you for that information. I have three quick questions.

I'll start off with my colleagues in Nova Scotia. You talked about the *Sackville*. I have a painting of the *Sackville* right in my office. It's from a veteran. I'm very proud of it, and every time I visit the ship, I'm always impressed.

You talked about celebrations. Very quickly, the Battle of the Atlantic is essential for everyone to know about. How are we celebrating that, not just in Nova Scotia, but in Atlantic Canada and in Canada as a whole?

**Capt(N) (Ret'd) William Woodburn:** Mr. Samson, thank you.

I would say that certainly it's a big deal here in Nova Scotia and Halifax. We do a tremendously appreciated large event in front of the sailors monument down by the oceanfront every year—in a normal year.

I would say that the same happens in Ottawa. There is quite a significant parade and a commemoration that happens in front of the National War Memorial. I'm aware of Victoria as well, where a fairly large contingent of people—large crowds—come out to witness a ceremony.

I'm just not sure elsewhere within Canada how large the commemoration of the Battle of the Atlantic really is.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Maybe that's something you could send us some information on as we finish this study, because that's a very important one. We need all Canadians to be aware of this important battle.

My second question would be directed to Mr. Harris and Mr. Sampson. How do you think we can better apply a service of peace lens to recognize the other wars? We recognize World War I, World

War II and the Korean War, of course, but for the other wars as well, how could we apply a better lens to the service of peace?

We'll start with Mr. Harris and then maybe go to Mr. Sampson very quickly.

• (1715)

**Dr. Steve Harris:** I think the idea that Veterans Affairs has developed going forward is to focus on geographical parts of the world over a five-year cycle and then, within that five-year cycle, not repeating the focus each time. If it is a Middle East focus, for example, it may be UNEF 1 on the first go-round that will have the focus, although the whole commitment will be covered, but then the next time it'll be Iraq. The next time, it could be the Jordan-Isra-aeli border.

I think that notion of going around the world geographically on a repetitive cycle but changing the specific focus each time is going to bring out the large number of deployments that there have been.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you. I think that's a very good approach as well.

Mr. Sampson, maybe you could give us your comments around that.

**Mr. Kevin Sammy Sampson:** Absolutely, Mr. Samson, and for the record, I'm from the better-looking side of the Sampsons from Nova Scotia.

First off, I agree with Dr. Harris's comments. I think what Veterans Affairs Canada is doing is very good, but I want to make a note that there is no mission classification system. From the service of peace, Rwanda was recorded as a peacekeeping mission, but it wasn't a peacekeeping mission. It was a humanitarian intervention. How do we classify that?

Why is Afghanistan not classified as a war? I just did e-petition 3217 with Mr. Brassard to have the Gulf War elevated into the next class, because there's no mission classification system. It was very successful. Canadians were very concerned.

I submit that the absence of a mission classification system to accurately define missions is key.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you.

Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** No, I'm afraid I let you go over a little bit there.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I can't negotiate on that piece.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** I'm afraid not. Sorry.

Up next for five minutes is MP Wagantall.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Thank you again, Mr. Chair.

This is just so good. Thank you so much.

I just want to mention, with regard to the Battle of the Atlantic commemoration, that as a brand new member of Parliament back in the first spring that I attended that, it blew me away. The action out on the lawn was late happening. It was raining. It was cold. It took me hours to get over that. Those veterans refused umbrellas—refused. I just looked at them, and I kept saying, “If they can do this, I can do this.” The pictures of them out on the Atlantic covered in ice and what they went through. I don't know how we can explain that further to young Canadians. I regret that we haven't had the opportunity to do that again as members of Parliament.

With regard to what Sammy has said as well, we, as members of Parliament, need to understand what our armed forces go through. I know, to a certain point.... I believe Sammy told me once, “No, you do not want to know; you shouldn't know.” Of course, there are things that are beyond what we can handle, but to just have that level of appreciation....

Sammy, again, you talked about the issues around the Gulf War and then with Afghanistan. Canadians think that they're all wars. If you don't know any different, of course it's a war. When you find out that it isn't a war, you ask why we make these differences. Rwanda.... What I've learned about that circumstance, it is a peace-keeping dynamic.

Our soldiers face horrific things no matter what circumstances they end up in. Why are you so passionate about that recognition of the difference in terms?

**Mr. Kevin Sammy Sampson:** Because it's absolutely imperative to veterans. Veterans are very intelligent, and we're very keen on specifics. We're forced to learn policy. We're forced to follow standing operating procedures. Everything makes sense in the military, with the exception of the fact that there's no mission classification system. How can we have defecation drills for using our chemical suits that actually tell us how to go to the washroom while we're using chemical uniforms, but we absolutely do not have a way to clearly communicate to Canadians, to members of Parliament and to veterans what it is that we're asking them to do?

In the case of Rwanda, that changed on the fly in 1994 when we were on the ground: new rules of engagement, new mission. Everything changed. As veterans, we were standing there confused. We absolutely did not know what was going on. I'm very passionate about fixing that for young Canadians who take a chance on the Canadian Armed Forces.

• (1720)

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** That's where you're saying, though, that would change your perspective on commemoration—

**Mr. Kevin Sammy Sampson:** Absolutely.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** —that that isn't dynamic.

**Mr. Kevin Sammy Sampson:** Yes, absolutely.

I think it's important to have that classification. Just to be clear, since 1941, everything we've done has come with a United Nations Security Council resolution. Those are very specific in telling us what is happening on the ground and what they want us to do. However, what happens is that it gets muddled when National Defence tries to speak to Canadians.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Okay, that's great. Thank you. I really wanted clarification there.

With regard to our navy and our air force.... We have the Moose Jaw base. We're so proud of the things that we have in Saskatchewan that very few people are aware of. We also have, I believe it's called HMCS Unicorn, in Saskatoon. It's a building, but they train as though they are on a ship. Apparently, we prairie boys and prairie gals make great sailors because of our horizons and the waves of the fields and whatnot.

I went out on the HMCS *Fredericton*. I am not a good prairie girl navy person in any way, shape or form. I've never been so sick in my life. However, the experience was phenomenal. I sometimes get concerned about.... I mean, we have the navy, the air force and our ground troops. Do we do enough to recognize the navy and the air force? I think our ground soldiers who face that face-on type of battle sometimes.... I'm not saying we should take away from them at all. I'm asking if we need to do more to really appreciate, learn about and understand our navy and our air force.

**The Chair:** Give a brief answer, please.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** I'm sorry I took too long.

**Capt(N) (Ret'd) William Woodburn:** I'll jump in.

One hates to put one element of the Canadian Armed Forces against another. I would say the battles that happened at sea are out of sight and, to some degree, out of mind. I hate to put it this way. One of the luxuries that a soldier may have is to go back and visit the ground he once fought on, to remember and relive what happened there and to really mark hallowed ground. It's a very difficult thing, and another thing for a sailor to do that. There is no place to go; it's out at sea.

That's where monuments like *Sackville* allow sailors to come to some place. As Sammy said, it's a place to gather. The sailor's monument in Point Pleasant Park is exactly that way.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Sorry, Mr. Woodburn.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Thank you.

**Capt(N) (Ret'd) William Woodburn:** No, that's fine.

**The Chair:** I have to keep us moving, here.

MP Casey, you have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses.

With five minutes, I'm probably going to get a chance to pose only a couple of questions. I want to acknowledge the work you do.



The Association of Federal Retirees certainly has an active chapter here in Prince Edward Island. I would say that would be due in large part to the number of retirees from the national headquarters of the Department of Veterans Affairs. You're probably aware that there's only one federal government department that has its national headquarters outside of the national capital region. Both the employees and the retirees are extremely important to our province and to our economy. Thank you for the work that you do. Your chapter is alive, well and active here in Prince Edward Island.

To our guests from Halifax, the Battle of the Atlantic is also something that is commemorated here in Charlottetown each and every year. The fellow who keeps it together is an air force guy, if you can imagine, by the name of Dan Miller. In recent years, there's been a marked increase in the level of participation of that particular commemoration.

Honestly, I am going to pose a question. It's for you, Mr. Gregory. Before I do, kudos to you, sir, as a civilian and a businessman to be so passionate about commemoration and those who gave their lives.

If I can get out of a standing committee obligation tomorrow, I will be attending a ceremony where there will be the Canadian Forces Medallion for Distinguished Service. As you would know, it's an honour presented by the military to people like you who aren't members of the service but who work so hard in support of them. Also there's the fact that you're an honorary colonel. This is something that I know is reserved for only the most dedicated and upstanding supporters, and we've all seen that here.

The work that you're doing and the way you've laid it out is absolutely impressive. I have two questions for you, but I'm probably only going to be able to get one in.

You talk about the march and the International Forum on Peace, Security and Prosperity and the commemoration of Operation Husky along with the march. Can you talk about the level of federal support you have received for each of the three initiatives? What else could and should we be doing?

I take your point with respect to collaboration and that it should be rewarded. I think that each of the projects you mentioned deserve support on their own merit. Could you talk about that, please?

• (1725)

**Mr. Steve Gregory:** First of all, thank you for asking the question.

I'll tell you, I'm doing everything I can to make sure I ask Veterans Affairs for only what I absolutely need. It's my belief that we can engage Canadians and, by engaging them, pull them in to make them feel useful and take their money. I mean that. When people send \$100 or \$150, they have a higher interest in participating, so I'm not shy about that.

On Operation Husky, you know, I had to raise over \$648,000, and 157 Canadians paid close to \$5,000 to come and be in this cemetery with me at the same time. But the CBC didn't do a documentary for us; RAI did, the national broadcaster of Italy. It produced a 22-minute documentary that focuses on the Canadian contribution to Operation Husky. That plays four times a year. We have

nothing like that in Canada, so Veterans Affairs could step up in a big way to help me.

I will be asking them—and believe me, Veterans Affairs has been very, very generous to me. When I ask, we get. For instance, in 2013, they gave me \$62,000, which I paid to UNB to produce a booklet. I'm now asking them to help me make a contribution to Canadian history, which is a unique book. Three Canadian authors and three Sicilian authors will be producing the history of each day of the battle from both perspectives, showing the cost of war in civilian terms. We think that will be very effective.

The signs are costing us 40,000 euros. I've virtually guaranteed to pay for those, but, man oh man, could it ever.... That could be really helpful.

For the commemorations in 2023, for the stage alone, where.... In 2013, we paid for everything. Veterans Affairs came, and the minister came, but we paid for everything.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Steve Gregory:** Just for the stages at the cemetery and where we had our concert in front of 4,000 people—those kinds of costs were \$10,000 here and 20,000 euros there. We'll stretch every nickel. This is why I say it's important for the future to leverage these organizations that have roots in foreign countries. Whether it's Juno Beach Centre, which is a great outfit, or it's Valour Canada in Canada, leverage these organizations that function predominantly with volunteers. Anybody who works with me is a volunteer, so—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gregory. I'm sorry but I have to interrupt you here. I do want to try to get to at least—

**Mr. Steve Gregory:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** —the next few questions, and we do have to wrap up soon.

MP Desilets, go ahead for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Harris.

Each conflict is important, and every involvement of the Canadian Armed Forces deserves to be known, valued and highlighted.

Now, clearly, some conflicts have a greater place than others in what could be called the “great national story” for Quebecers and Canadians.

In your opinion, are some conflicts forgotten or underestimated when it comes to commemorations?

• (1730)

[*English*]

**Dr. Steve Harris:** That's a difficult one to answer.

I think I would say that, as of today, everything that has happened since Korea has probably been undervalued and under-recognized. I'm not sure why that has been the case. Perhaps it is because it certainly hasn't been as dramatic as the two major world wars and Korea. I think, going forward—although I'll agree with Sammy that the categorization of conflicts as it relates to the provision of benefits may be one thing, but I would be very hard pressed to say that the Middle East was more important than Cyprus or more important than service to the Geneva accords or Laos, Cambodia or Vietnam.

Commemoration is meant to honour service and sacrifice, and every deployment involves service and sacrifice. The numbers may be greater for some than for others, but it's the principle of service and sacrifice, and I would not want to be put in a position of ranking. It's the recognition of service and sacrifice wherever they have been that is key.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Thank you.

Let me pick up on your idea. My uncle lost his life in the Korean War. I have been running around looking for commemorations that could exist, but not finding a great deal. My father never spoke about it, even though he knew.

Perhaps Mr. Sampson would like to answer that question.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'm afraid you're well over time, Luc. I'm sorry. I was trying to sneak both you and Rachel in at the end, so bear with me.

MP Blaney, you have two and a half minutes, please.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

I will follow up with you, Mr. Sampson. You said some very powerful things in your testimony today. You talked about things like no recognition for special duty; how it is defined really has an impact; and Rwandan vets receive 40% less than other vets for their pension.

I'm wondering if you could talk about what type of recognition you think is important. I think what you said is incredibly powerful: I don't want to go to recognition unless I'm with the people I served with. I think that's an important thing for us to hear. What kind of commemoration would be powerful, and what things have to go hand in hand with that?

**Mr. Kevin Sammy Sampson:** Thank you very much for the question, Ms. Blaney. I'll just answer Mr. Desilets' question first.

The Rwandan mission went missing from the Government of Canada and from National Defence for 25 years. It's impossible that we served under General Dallaire and nobody knows anything

about what we did. It was to the point where trauma was increasingly difficult for Canadians, because they would try to communicate what their stories were, and in some cases they were called liars, because there was no history within DND. We've discussed it with Dr. Harris. We're going to work together with Dr. Harris to fix that.

Mr. Desilets, I was on a small mission in Iran in 1988. There were only 250 Canadians who were on that mission in Iran. That's just another example. We don't hear about these missions because they're small.

I do agree with you, Dr. Harris, that the ranking of missions is absolutely out of the question, but definitely we do need to....

Mali was not a peacekeeping mission. Mali was a United Nations chapter 7 counterterrorism mission. ISIS did not invite Canadians to come for peacekeeping, which is a requirement. How can you call that a peacekeeping mission unless you're trying to placate Canadians who want to do peacekeeping?

Ms. Blaney, having that accuracy is important to veterans, as is having that camaraderie that has to be in everything we do once we become veterans. Anything with camaraderie that involves Canadians so that they can transparently and openly understand what we've done in these missions around the world is very beneficial psychologically to us because we have an opportunity to speak, but also to Canadians.

My family doesn't even understand what I've been through, because the Government of Canada fails to write anything about our missions. That's a fact.

• (1735)

**The Chair:** That will have to be the last word.

I thank the members of the committee for their indulgence. I am a little late today, but we did start late, so I do appreciate that. I wanted to give everyone a fair shot at questions.

To all our witnesses, thank you very, very much for being here today and contributing to this study. I think the fact that I had to interrupt a few of my colleagues and a few of you shows that we could probably go another hour and continue with questions. There's a lot on this topic, and I think we'll have some very fruitful discussions as we proceed.

Colleagues, the next meeting will be on May 10. That will be the last meeting on commemoration.

Thank you to all the folks in Ottawa who help us all be heard.

I adjourn the meeting for today.

Thank you very much, everyone.







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