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Feature:

Optics and Myopia - How our country treats its Veterans



PERIODICAL - Jun 2014

Issue No: 201459

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VVi is for you, all veterans, regardless of whether you belong to a veteran organization or not. VVi is a distribution centre, a conduit for making sure that the information you need as a veteran is there for you in a timely fashion. Our aim is to provide a forum for *all* Canadian veterans, serving members and their families to have access to information pertaining to veteran rights.

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Optics and Myopia By Perry Gray, Chief Editor VVi

The title was chosen because the status of Veterans and how our country treats its Veterans continues to be blurred by various perceptions of who is a Veteran and what debts are owed by Canada to its Veterans. The federal government lauds Veterans for their many services and sacrifices, and at the same time, limits its support for Veterans, particularly those who need help because of their wounds and illnesses. Nearsightedness (myopia) is a common vision condition in which you can see objects near to you clearly, but objects farther away are blurry. Myopia symbolises of the relationship between Canada and its Veterans Community; when Veterans serve Canada, they are treated with dignity and respect, but when they pose too much of a burden, then they are treated as pariahs. Canadians need to remember otherwise there is the risk of forgetting our debts.

This year could be one with many significant commemorations for military operations involving Canadians. It really depends on what the various levels of government decide to do to mark these occasions and whether using tax dollars is a good idea.

The federal government has spent a lot on commemorating the War of 1812, which was the last conflict in which foreign invaders entered Canada. There was criticism of the \$30 million plus spent on a special silver dollar coin (which sells for \$60), a new national monument, funding for historical re-enactments, upgrades for historic sites, museum exhibits, TV commercials and a mobile phone app. One major purchase was for the a collection of documents of Sir John Coape Sherbrooke (our governor-general between 1816 and 1818), which was listed at auction for \$160-240,000 and which our government bought for \$700,000 (or between 300 and 440%). Some felt that it was too much when the government was laying off public servants (including historians and other staff responsible for the War of 1812 activities) and the budget for Library and Archives Canada was cut by \$9.6 million in a recent federal budget and an entire grant program for community archives was eliminated. Ironically, the national archives contributed money for the purchase of the Sherbrooke collection.

Overall, Canadians were not impressed for federal activities commemorating the war. Most of the commemorations were limited to Ontario, where many of the military operations occurred between 1812 and 1814. Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were also involved. For Canadians interested in history, particularly pre-1867 history, the commemorations highlighted the involvement of Canadians in a war that was fought on a global scale. Canada has been involved in a few global wars before 1914 as many of the wars involving New France and New England were fought wherever France and Great Britain had colonies or commercial interests.

For some Canadians, it seemed a lavish outlay that could have been better spent on other programmes such as supporting the Veterans Community. Just 20% of the budget or \$6 million could have been used to increase the funeral subsidy for indigent Veterans (increasing federal support from \$3600 to \$10,000).

The federal government can argue that most of the funding was from the budget of Department of *Canadian Heritage* and not VAC. Although Canadians can be forgiven for confusing the two as VAC does commemorate Canadian military operations in many more modern wars (Second Boer War, WW1, WW2, Korean War, etc.).

In fact, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, Julian Fantino, and 10 members of two Canadian veterans organisations participated in a seven day commemorative trip to Cyprus (14-18 March 2014) to mark the 50th anniversary of Canadian involvement in the United Nations peacekeeping mission (UNFICYP).

This select group met with Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades, the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, the Minister of Defence, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as members of the last CF rotation to Afghanistan, who were visiting Cyprus before returning to Canada. This trip cost Canadian tax payers over \$100,000. (???)

This trip seems odd for a number of reasons. The mission is ongoing and despite progress in negotiations, neither the Greek-Cypriots nor the Turkish-Cypriots are likely to settle their differences in the near future. In fact while I was the Canadian contingent commander (1996 to 1998), international diplomacy was required to prevent a resumption of hostilities involving Cypriots, Greece and Turkey. Why were only two groups asked to participate? According to VAC's website, more than 25,000 CF personnel served with UNFICYP and 28 were killed. No other Veterans group was consulted and most did not know about the trip, even though the minister met with representatives of more than 20 groups in Oct 2013.

It has been reported that Canada is showing an interest in the developments of Cyprus' hydrocarbons sector based on statements to regional media by Robert Peck, the Canadian Ambassador to Greece and High Commissioner to Cyprus (Cyprus is a member of the British Commonwealth as is Canada). (Canada seeks involvement in Cyprus' offshore hydrocarbons sector 13 Mar 2013)

One might conclude that the trip was more about reminding the Cypriots that Canadian businesses are interested in the exploitation of the hydrocarbons. Why else did the group visit so many ministries on what was a commemorative visit. As a Veteran of UNFICYP, I would have been more interested in visiting the landmarks related to the UN mission such as walking the Green Line in Nicosia as depicted in the Canadian War Museum. (Of note, the monument identifying those CF members, who died while serving with UNFICYP was constructed by the British Army. I should know as the construction occurred during my tour. The Canadian High Commissioner was visiting Cyprus and he agreed to participate in the unveiling ceremony. I wonder if Minister Fantino reimbursed the British government?)

The cost of the trip may seem paltry compared to the amount spent on the War of 1812, but it does seem odd when compared to how much VAC plans to spend on sending Veterans to commemorate the 70th anniversary of D-Day. Currently, the 100 Veterans planning to attend the ceremonies in France have been allotted only \$2,000 each. VAC budgeted \$360,000 or enough for 180 Veterans.

This was still more than DND initially budgeted for the National Day of Honour to commemorate the CF personnel, who served in Afghanistan, until the Minister of National Defence, Rob Nicholson, corrected the erroneous statements made in an earlier letter sent to the families of the 158 killed in Afghanistan. The families were provided with funding so that up to five members could attend. The federal government actually expected charities like True Patriot Love and corporate sponsors to help with the expenses.

The ceremony held on 9 May 2014 was a fine tribute to the more than 40,000 CF personnel and other Canadians who served. It certainly could have been better if it was a truly national event with activities planned across Canada. Unfortunately, it seemed rushed and many Veterans were unwilling to participate because of their frustration with the federal government.

"With so much lead time, many veterans groups, including the Royal Canadian Legion, wondered why the Prime Minister's Office waited until the last troops were homeward bound in March before announcing this precedent-setting day of honour. Many veterans voiced their opinion that Remembrance Day on Nov. 11 is already dedicated to honouring those individuals who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country in all previous wars and conflicts." (Scott Taylor, 11 May 2014)

It was less of a political showcase than a previous event to mark the conclusion of the CF participation in Libya. The ceremony on 24 Nov 2011 included a parade, a flypast and a special recognition for LGen. Charles Bouchard, who was dubbed the "hero" of the campaign, and cost taxpayers more than \$850,000.

The same government that celebrated "victories" in Libya and Afghanistan (and both countries are still in the midst of conflicts that prompted Canadian involvement) is also slashing the budgets of DND and VAC a part of its efforts to balance the federal budget by 2015. Rather than preparing the CF for future operations and there are numerous potential ones based on recent headlines (including Ukraine and Nigeria) and ensuring that the wounded and injured Veterans of previous operations are properly supported, the federal government is saving lots of tax payer dollars (more than \$2 billion from DND and more than \$226 million from VAC). Again spending money on ceremonies instead of funding operations seems illogical. Yet the federal government is planning to commemorate more than 50 anniversaries by 2020 including WW1 and WW2 milestones.

No less than the Royal Canadian Legion has urged caution, expressing concern over the massive expenditures at a time the government is cutting budget and services to veterans. The government should listen .

This is unlikely to happen even though VAC admits that:

there is a real risk that recent changes to the department, which have included laying off hundreds of employees amid a strong move toward more online services, "will not meet the needs of veterans, CF members, and their families". Veterans could see poorer quality of service as the department increasingly relies on outside organisations, provincial and municipal governments, and other federal departments. (6 Mar 2014)

The cost of these commemorations is borne by the existing budgets of DND, VAC and other departments, which means that monies are diverted from programmes that benefit the Veterans Community.

"funding for the commemoration program will be provided from within existing departmental resources," something military brass have warned "will have significant resource implications for DND organisations and CF units."

Surely Canadians would prefer to have its money used to provide support for its serving and retired Veterans. Thousands of Afghan Veterans came home wounded and injured as a result of their service.

Julian Fantino may claim that 90% of his budget directly benefits its clients; however, this budget is also paying for a 500% increase in the deputy minister's staff and a lot of self promotion work (advertising and publication of Salute newsletter). VAC spent \$100,000 on promotional tweets as part of its advertising campaign. The federal government spent a reported \$9 million to promote competition among cellular telephone providers and then did nothing to ensure that rates were decreased. It seems there is a lot of effort to suggest that the government is doing things, when in fact it is not.

If VAC wants to save money, then there are a few things it can do that Veterans would support. Stop conducting self serving client surveys and stop publishing Salute. Another cost that could be reduced is the bonuses to the senior bureaucrats, why should any extra money be paid to these people while there are homeless Veterans and Veterans living in poverty (a deputy minister and others can receive up to 140% of their annual income). It is ridiculous that the deputy minister has an office in the VAC headquarters in Charlottetown and a second co-located with the minister's offices in Ottawa. The cost of meetings could also be reduced if VAC stopped using non-departmental facilities and reduced the travelling of senior bureaucrats. Why is it necessary for VAC personnel to shuttle between Ottawa and Charlottetown on a regular basis in an era of video conferencing?

Why is it so important to have a balanced budget next year? The answer should be quite obvious to Canadian voters because it is when Prime Minister Harper will be seeking re-election. This may also help to explain why Mr Harper likes to be prominently featured in national ceremonies such as the National Day of Honour. He may believe that these events will offset the negative attention for his many battles with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (and the other justices who have voted against significant Conservative policies), the more recent conflicts with the premier of Ontario, the Public Service Alliance of Canada, and various senior officials (the first Parliamentary Budget Officer, the first Veterans Ombudsman, Chief Electoral Officer, and the auditor-general).

A cynic may view some of these public ceremonies as part of the Conservative Party's election campaign. Why else would the prime minister be playing such a pivotal role?

Canadians appreciate the honour bestowed on its Veterans during the commemorations discussed above. It is important to remember the sacrifices made by Veterans to defend Canada and its values. It just seems odd that a Conservative government is not being conservative in its spending. It also should not siphon monies away from military readiness and caring for disabled Veterans.

While the federal government is busy honouring Canadian Veterans, it has also been dishonouring them. This is very irrational behaviour. There are two landmark legal cases that exemplify the latter. The first was the SISIP class action case and the federal government only conceded after the courts ruled in favour of the plaintiffs. The second is the Equitas class action, which seeks to redress the inequity between the Pension Act and the NVC.

In 2012-13, VAC paid out \$1.6-billion under the Pension Act and only \$552.3-million under the New Veterans Charter.

The federal government by opposing these two legal actions is using tax dollars that could be instead used to support the Veterans Community.

Veterans fought to defend Canadian democratic values as identified in our charter of rights and freedoms, and yet the federal government argues that different generations of Veterans should receive different amounts of federal support. This is clearly very discriminatory. Veterans must defend democracy, but do not enjoy it. This is a fundamental flaw in the relationship between the government and the Veterans Community.

It is a pity that the federal government has not learned from these historic commemorations. For example, here is a synopsis of the WW1 experience:

Canada had few war pensioners prior to 1914 and little experience in handling veterans' issues. Politicians and most bureaucrats were equally cautious about the long-term costs of veterans' welfare, but recruitment needs, public patriotism, and common sense demanded a more generous and comprehensive approach.

Initial planning that focused on the care and reintegration of disabled veterans soon expanded to include long-term disability issues, pension administration, and the return and re-settlement of several hundred thousand able-bodied personnel.

*From humble beginnings, Ottawa by war's end administered a large medical system, long-term care facilities, soldier insurance, a land settlement program, and many other benefits and types of aid. It offered employment preferences for returning troops, led most nations in programs for disabled training, and had the **world's most generous pension rates**. In 1920, veterans' pensions would consume more than 20 per cent of federal revenues; in 1914, it had been 0.5 per cent. (Canadian War Museum)*

Here is what Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden said to Veterans:

"You can go into this action feeling assured of this, and as the head of the government I give you this assurance: That you need not fear that the government and the country will fail to show just appreciation of your service to the country and Empire in what you are about to do and what you have already done.

"The government and the country will consider it their first duty to see that a proper appreciation of your effort and of your courage is brought to the notice of people at home that no man, whether he goes back or whether he remains in Flanders, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with the men who won and the men who died." (Apr 1917)

Ironically, Borden's words influenced later government policy, but it has never been officially included within the Constitution – something that government lawyers have used in their lawsuit defence.

The government, which intends to defend itself against a class-action lawsuit by veterans of the war in Afghanistan, says it's unfair to bind current and future governments to promises that date back to the First World War.

Why is it unfair to bind today's government to older promises when Veterans are still expected to make the same sacrifices as those who fought in WW1?

The CF demands universality of service and any government should provide universality of support to all Veterans, regardless of whether they are regular or reserve, or where and when they served, and whether they are 18 or 100.

Unfortunately, the federal government has repeatedly endeavoured to disenfranchise new Veterans. Following WW2, distinction was made based on where Veterans served. If a Veteran served more than two miles offshore, then they received preferential treatment. Canadians should remember that Newfoundland was not yet a province of Canada so Veterans stationed there were given "overseas" status.

VAC is responsible for more than just military Veterans and its clients include Veterans of the Canadian Merchant Marine (CMM):

The Battle of the Atlantic was not won by any Navy or any Air Force, it was won by the courage, fortitude and determination of the British and Allied Merchant Navy. (Rear Admiral Leonard W. Murray 1967)

After the war, CMM Veterans were denied benefits and official recognition for decades. This was not corrected until the 1990s and many individual cases remain unresolved.

Korean War Veterans were also subjected to alienation. When George Griffiths returned from the war and being a POW, he received a rude reception at the Kingston, Ontario VA office:

"There he requested a veterans allowance of \$700 for a down payment on a house where he and Barbara could have a family and forget about the war and his imprisonment.

"You have no benefits", the civil servant told him.

"What do you mean?" Griffiths said.

"No benefits. It wasn't a war... not officially, anyway."

"You don't think that Korea was a war?" shouted Griffiths, pounding the official's table. "You'll have one here before I leave!"
(pg 7, Deadlock In Korea by Ted Barris)

For many decades, the Korean War received little national attention and is often considered "the forgotten war". It was one of the first UN military operations, often defined as police or peacekeeping operations. While an armistice was signed, there was no official end for this conflict.

From 1950 to 1953, more than 26,000 Canadians served in Korea—working to restore peace and stability to the area. On July 27, 1953, the Korean War Armistice was signed, ending three years of fighting. Some 7,000 Canadians continued to serve between the signing of the Armistice and the end of 1955, with some Canadian troops remaining until 1957. In total, 516 brave young Canadians made the ultimate sacrifice during the Korean War.

*2013 is the Year of the Korean War Veteran—Canada proudly remembers the heroes of the Korean War and **their brave fight to uphold freedom, democracy and the rule of law.** (VAC website)*

Aboriginal Veterans were also treated differently because they had different federal status. They have had to argue with several federal departments as well as VAC and DND.

*In recent years, **ABORIGINAL VETERANS** have received acknowledgement for their special service during the World Wars. In 2002, the federal government offered a redress package of \$20,000 to individual First Nations veterans; in November 2004, the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and **NON-STATUS INDIANS** announced \$100,000 in funding for Métis veterans to promote their contributions to war-time efforts. For some Saskatchewan veterans, both offers represented long overdue recognition. For others, it was too little, too late. (P. Whitney Lackenbauer)*

Those who served during Canada's wars expected danger at the hands of the enemy. But they were ill prepared for the fight that awaited some of them at home. Most veterans were welcomed home with open arms and assistance in putting their lives back in order. But several groups — native Canadians, Métis, merchant mariners and Hong Kong prisoners of war — found themselves ignored and denied the recognition and benefits so crucial to rebuilding their lives. For them, the fight would last another half century. (CBC News website)

In addition, to those mentioned above, VAC also includes certain non-military clients specifically Veterans of the RCMP. Both CF and RCMP personnel have served on UN operations as well as members of other Canadian police forces. There is a memorial to the many police officers killed in the line of duty behind the buildings on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. They are also worthy of regular recognition for their services and sacrifices.

Why does it take so long for the federal government to acknowledge its debts to Canadian Veterans and other Canadians of similar status? Why does our government repeatedly try to avoid its responsibilities in honouring its social covenant or contract?

There are too many adjectives placed in front of the word Veteran in federal documents and statements. These include war-service, allied, traditional, CMM, aboriginal, regular, reserve, and peacekeeping. There are just too many when only one Veteran should be recognised:

VAC announced a new definition in 2001 that reads as follows:

VAC and DND have extended veteran status to former Canadian Forces members and Reserve Force members who: meet DND's military occupational classification requirements (MOC -qualified); and

have been released from the Forces with an honourable discharge.

Veteran status recognizes the potential risk that Canadian Forces members assume by donning the uniform and pledging allegiance. Veteran status does not mean that all former members are eligible to receive VAC benefits and services. As in the past, access to VAC benefits and services will continue to be based on your eligibility status and need.

The Royal Canadian Legion has its own definition, which was approved in 2000:

A veteran is any person who is serving or who has honourably served in the Armed Forces of Canada, the Commonwealth or its wartime allies: or who has served in the Merchant Navy or Ferry Command during wartime.

In 2006, VAC provided clarification of who is a Veteran:

Veteran status recognizes the potential risk that Canadian Forces members assume by donning the uniform and pledging allegiance. Veteran status does not mean that all former members are eligible to receive VAC benefits and services. As in the past, access to VAC benefits and services will continue to be based on your eligibility status and need.

Canadian Forces members need not have served where war was declared or in a combat zone. If they served in Golan Heights, Cyprus, and other UN zones, as long as they meet DND's military occupational classification requirements (MOC-qualified); and have been released from the Forces with an honourable discharged, they would have Veteran status with our department.

The addition of the sentence " Veteran status does not mean that all former members are eligible to receive VAC benefits and services" allows VAC continue to segregate Veterans. It may take years for some Veterans to be officially recognised as Veterans based on Canadian history as discussed above; however, a modern Veteran, who fails to apply for client status within a relatively limited window (two years) risks being denied support from VAC. So if a modern Veteran denies that he or she has a problem because of pride or the stigma of appearing weak, they may never get the support that Sir Robert Borden offered in 1917.

A National Day of Honour has to be remembered for all the other days of the year by those federal departments responsible for providing support in return for the services and sacrifices of its Veterans Community. The role of VAC is to help Veterans in need not to abide solely by Treasury Board policy. If the federal government continues to spend tax dollars on commemoration, then it has to ensure that it does not do so at the expense of military readiness and support of the Veteran Community. It definitely should not use commemoration as part of any political agenda.

Recessional by Rudyard Kipling

God of our fathers, known of old—
Lord of our far-flung battle line—
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine—
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

The tumult and the shouting dies—
The Captains and the Kings depart—
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

Far-called our navies melt away—
On dune and headland sinks the fire—
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

If, drunk with sight of power, we loose
Wild tongues that have not Thee in awe—
Such boastings as the Gentiles use,
Or lesser breeds without the Law—
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

For heathen heart that puts her trust
In reeking tube and iron shard—
All valiant dust that builds on dust,
And guarding calls not Thee to guard.
For frantic boast and foolish word,
Thy Mercy on Thy People, Lord!
Amen.



You Can Help!

All veterans are encouraged to pass information, opinions, links to self-help sites onto VVi. VeteranVoice.info is a distribution centre and we are dependant on others to pass information. This is your site. Tell other veterans about your site. Email info@VeteranVoice.info .



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 VVi Database	http://www.veteranvoice.info/db/all_records.asp

 <p>VVi CSAT Forum</p>	<p>http://csat.top-talk.net/</p>
 <p>Veteran's Aide Memoire</p>	<p>http://veteranvoice.info/archive/aide_memoire/Vet_Aide_Memoire.pdf</p>
<p>National (US) Gulf War Resources Center, Inc.</p>	<p>http://www.ngwrc.org/</p>
 <p>PPCLI Association Volunteer Patricia Program (VPP)</p>	<p>http://vpp.ppcliassoc.ca</p>
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 <p>Sean Bruyea</p>	<p>http://seanbruyea.com</p>
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<p>Summary of CF Programs and Services for Ill or Injured CF Members (PDF)</p>	<p>http://www.veteranvoice.info/Archive/info_09dec_CF Programs and Services-Draft-Dec_16_09 1.pdf</p>
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Ombudsman des vétérans

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Veterans of Canada.ca
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