



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

ACVA



NUMBER 004



1st SESSION



41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, October 4, 2011



Chair

Mr. Greg Kerr

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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• (0850)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC)): Ladies and gentlemen, we have a quorum.

We are going to get started. I guess most importantly, Mr. Stoffer is in the building, so we can proceed.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): I would think so.

The Chair: We are pleased to have with us this morning Senator Meredith. He is going to discuss the study we are talking about, and there are some specifics he wants to raise.

I should point out that you have until 9:15 or 9:20, and then you have to go to an appointment at the Senate. We have to keep that in mind.

Welcome. It is nice to have you here. The floor is yours.

Hon. Don Meredith (Senator, CPC, Senate): Thank you, Chair.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, honourable colleagues, and committee members, thank you for giving me the opportunity to underline the importance of recognizing the outstanding contributions of African Canadians to the Canadian Forces and their country by honouring these veterans and fallen heroes with a national commemorative ceremony and an African Canadian war memorial commemorating black soldiers who fought and died to secure our freedom.

Earlier this year, on February 24, 2011, as part of Black History Month, the Department of National Defence recognized and honoured for the first time the contributions to the Canadian Forces of African Canadians from the British West Indies and Haiti and of Canadian-born blacks.

As a Jamaican-born Canadian citizen and the fourth African Canadian to be appointed to the Senate of Canada, I know first-hand the struggles minorities in this country face. I'm also doubly aware of the tremendous battle that black Canadians face to receive inclusion and recognition as members of the Canadian military.

In brief, these veterans paved the way for Canadian Forces members of all origins to take their rightful place to reflect the diverse Canadian society they serve. These black veterans struggled for their right to defend their country and fellow citizens. They equally deserve the honour of a national ceremony commemorating their contributions.

Honourable colleagues, I firmly believe that while the Canadian Forces maintain themselves to be a relevant, modern, and progressive national institution in the 21st century, we must be transparent and fully recognize the contributions and sacrifices African Canadians have shown in the past for a better tomorrow. It is crucial that our government commit to educating Canadians and the world about the rich history of African Canadians in the Canadian military.

During my research for this recommendation, I was glad to see that the National Defence, Foreign Affairs, and Veterans Affairs websites have several pages devoted to the African Canadian soldiers in the regiments in various wars. But honourable members, it was a real shame that one must dig for these historical facts; that this history remains buried in the past and is not recognized by a national commemorative ceremony.

The educational benefits of a national commemorative celebration recognizing the role of African Canadians in Canadian history are abundant, not only for our youth but for all Canadian men and women. We must remember the sacrifice and achievements of African Canadians for generations to come. Our black ancestors fought hard to break down barriers and open doors for those who follow. Their efforts should no longer be hidden, but should serve as inspiration and encouragement for our youth that they too can overcome the odds.

I strongly suggest that this proposed national commemoration take place annually, possibly on Emancipation Day—which is the first Monday of August—which represents the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834 and thus also in Canada.

I support the effort of my predecessor, the late Senator Calvin Ruck, to preserve, educate, and commemorate the history of black veterans, which resulted in his successor's having a memorial erected in Nova Scotia dedicated to the members of the No. 2 Construction Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, for this memorial specifically symbolizes the contribution of African Canadian men of the No. 2 Construction Battalion. I recommend a war memorial that represents all African Canadian soldiers who served and continue to serve their country—a national ceremony paying homage to all African Canadian soldiers, both past and present.

Honourable colleagues, it is important to Canada to honour the significant role that black people have played and continue to play in the history of our country. I want to point to something relevant here, the fact that our Prime Minister and our Minister of Defence, Peter MacKay, in a ceremony that was held in Tehran in 2009, also indicated this:

“The legacy is found in the Canada they helped to build and protect, a country that cherishes freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Black Canadians may take distinct pride in their service to our country, as they have a long and honourable tradition of patriotism, sacrifice and heroism.”

That was from the Prime Minister.

Defence Minister Peter MacKay noted: “We are fortunate that in modern times there has been an increase in recognition of the efforts these men and women have made in Canada's name. The history of the service extends from far beyond Confederation right up to the present day. Their efforts will not be forgotten.”

More important, honourable colleagues, a national commemorative reminds us that we have overcome and will continue to overcome many tribulations as we persevere to fight for equality and the preservation of our freedom.

I trust that this presentation was useful, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Thank you Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Senator Meredith.

Given your timeframe, I would like to restrict the question time to four minutes each to allow everybody to get a round in.

From the NDP we have Mr. Stoffer.

● (0855)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Senator, thank you very much for coming, and thank you for mentioning that No. 2 Construction Battalion has a ceremony every year in Pictou that is quite moving.

Sir, I have one question for you. You may have noticed that as you come from the Chateau Laurier toward the national cenotaph there are 15 busts of our heroes who served right from the beginning of 1812 and onwards—and even before that. But there is one missing: that of William Hall, Canada's first VC black naval person back in 1850. I have asked repeatedly that a bust be put up in his honour to recognize not just William Hall and the VC, but all black Nova Scotians and black Canadians who have served in our armed forces, but I have been turned down so far.

I am wondering if I can leave with you that I would like to meet you at a possible date to see where can move forward on that, because I believe that is a significant error. I don't think anyone did it on purpose. It was just an oversight, and it would pay great tribute to exactly what you are trying to do here today.

Hon. Don Meredith: Thank you so much. I absolutely agree with you.

Just a couple of weekends ago I was in Nova Scotia recognizing the Africville institution that took place there—the commemorative church that has now been erected in Africville. There was also

mention that there were 29 countries from the African diaspora heritage trail that came together in Nova Scotia to discuss the heritage.

I believe it is a crying shame that we haven't recognized those who made contributions to this country pre-Confederation. It is important that we continue to do so, especially for our young people, so they get a sense of what this country is about—we recognize, and they served.

Mr. Daniel and I were at a ceremony recognizing the Korean War. We had individuals of African descent who served in that war. I recognize that it has been a long time and it's a long haul, but it's something worth championing. I certainly will support you, honourable member.

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you very much.

You and Mr. Stoffer raised something very important, and that is the lack of information that we have about black history. In London, Ontario, where I am from, there is a church that was the centre of the Underground Railroad, and Londoners don't know anything about that.

We have the Congress of Black Women, which works every year to encourage young black members of our community to go to college and university and become part of that enrichment you so eloquently spoke of.

How do we encourage and make sure that the history of the blacks in our communities is recognized? Is there something that we as parliamentarians should be doing that we're not?

Hon. Don Meredith: Government plays a great role in recognizing the past and the contributions they made and bringing that forward. In the report that was done for the Canadian officership in the 21st century, we look at inclusion, recognition of the diverse community, and transparency. I don't believe we can truly tell the history of this country without recognizing those who have made contributions.

It's empowering to the young people of today that I can go out to high schools and go across this country to engage, encourage, and empower these young people to join the military, because they have seen themselves reflected in the faces of those who have gone on before. It's important that they recognize that they're part of the fabric of this Canadian mosaic, and they too can make a contribution similar to those individuals who went before. It's important and incumbent upon us.

I have taken on this task and have been supported by other members in the various parties. Senator Don Oliver is very supportive of this initiative—his ancestors were in slavery and also served in the war—as is the Ontario Black History Society.

It is important that we continue to educate and ensure that our young people are empowered by the past for a brighter future.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Senator.

We'll now go to Mr. Lizon.

•(0900)

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Thank you, Senator.

In your view, Senator, what actions should be taken to recognize contributions of not only African Canadians but other groups? We are very diverse here in this country; therefore, by recognizing one group only, I think we would be leaving others out. There were contributions from probably aboriginals, Japanese, Chinese, etc.

Can you elaborate on that?

Hon. Don Meredith: Certainly. Thank you so much for that question. It's a very valid question.

I think aboriginals are represented at the War Memorial over here, just down the road. I also believe—I not only believe but I know, specifically—that the Korean War vets are recognized in a commemorative ceremony that is established in Brampton. I believe it's important that we continue to champion for those who have served in this country.

Specifically, I think the black community has not stepped up to the plate, to be honest, in terms of continuous requests and a forthrightness. I believe it's incumbent upon me, not only as a Canadian but as a black senator, that these issues that come to the fray I bring to the attention of government and gain support from every member, right across all political stripes. This is not about a partisan issue here. This is a non-partisan issue where we recognize truly the contributions of all Canadians.

We know that the face of Canada has changed over the last 50 years. I believe we need to continue to recognize those communities that have served this country irrespective of where from around the globe they've come.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Going along this line, at the present time the Canadian Forces includes many different cultural groups or ethnic groups. Do you think we should keep doing this recognizing of each individual group or recognize all Canadians as a whole?

Hon. Don Meredith: We should recognize the contributions that various ethnic groups in this country make to the Canadian Forces. However we do it—through a plaque or through the various organizations that they represent—I think there should be some recognition of the work and the dedication and the sacrifice that these Canadians make to Canada.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Are young people in this country aware of that very fact you've mentioned? Are they being educated in this area?

Hon. Don Meredith: Absolutely.

One of the young soldiers who was recognized, Kevin Junor, was a stalwart within the army. He was recognized and given a medal in 2009. As a young soldier, he is educating a lot of the high school students, because a lot of them just aren't aware.

I think part of the problem—and as I said, I commend the Department of Veterans Affairs for the website and so forth—is that you have to dig for this information. I think it should be an education piece that goes through the schools, not just during Black History Month. This is history. History should not just be during Black

History Month. Every day of the year we should talk about the history and the contributions of various Canadians to this country.

I think it's important that we continue to talk to our youth, continue to engage them, and encourage them not only to look at the history but to become part of the Canadian Forces and to gain the experience that the military has to offer.

As you say, a lot of individuals are retiring from the force. I think the next generation should come up with a diverse face for the military as we serve around the globe and in these various countries. I think it's important that we truly reflect the diversity that Canada offers.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Senator.

Now let's go over to Mr. Hsu for four minutes.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks for coming today. I'm interested in your remark about having to dig for the information as you were doing the research. It sounds like you committed quite a lot of time to that.

Could you elaborate on that a little bit, on why it was difficult? Why did you have to dig so much? Is there something that we as parliamentarians could be or should be doing to make that information more accessible to you and other researchers, and to historians and artists and writers?

•(0905)

Hon. Don Meredith: I just came back from a conference in Nova Scotia, where it was brought up that a lot of history is just buried and there aren't commemorative events to remind people. We talk about remembrance and “lest we forget”. This information is on websites, but it's not something that is widely publicized. You have to go on search engines and what have you. This what I had to do to find this information.

Individuals like Senator Oliver, who is well versed, or Rosemary Sadlier, president of the Ontario Black History Society, make it a point to bring up this history and to talk about it. I think it's important that we create an education program that goes to the schools to talk about the diversity of the contributions that Canadians have made to this country. I think that's a starting point. There's an education process there and it's important that we continue along these lines.

There are also public ceremonies that recognize these contributions on a specific month or during the time of remembrance. We're recognizing all these various individuals from diverse communities who have made contributions to the country.

This committee has an awesome task. How do we recognize other communities? I think it's important that we start this process. Others have been recognized, like the Korean community, and I think it's important for there to be a place where people can go and remember.

The honourable Irene Mathysen reminded us that there's a lot of history that has not been told. I think it's important for this committee to recognize that and find a mechanism whereby this message can be communicated.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Do you think there's more research that needs to be done? Are there more things to uncover, or do you think the emphasis should be on making the information that we have more widely known?

Hon. Don Meredith: The report entitled "Canadian Officership in the 21st Century (Officership 2020)" refers to transparency and inclusion. I think it's important that we follow the path that's been laid. There's a lot of information out there. It just needs to be disseminated.

The history is there: it's been collected. There are individuals I'm speaking to right now who are going around and documenting those who served and are still alive, from the present back to the Second World War. They are capturing their stories before they pass on from the scene. I think it's important to pass this information on to our youth so they can hear the voices of those who have gone before.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Senator, for coming today. It's a very interesting topic.

Is your vision of this an Ottawa-based ceremony, an Ottawa-based memorial, or are you looking at something spread across the country?

Hon. Don Meredith: It's both. There are certain provinces that have started to recognize various individuals across the country. In Ontario they have done various things to recognize the soldiers. But Ottawa's the capital of the country, and I think it's important that something be done here.

As a starting point, we must recognize the contributions. A lot of folks who come to Ottawa would be able to see this. A lot of schools come to Ottawa, and this could be included in the tours of Parliament. Various and diverse individuals come to Ottawa.

I'd like to see something erected here in Ottawa, together with commemorative plaques placed across the country where these soldiers hail from. For example, we want to honour individuals who have come from Quebec and have served in the wars. We should recognize their hometowns with some sort of a plaque showing that they have made a contribution to the Canadian Forces.

Mr. Brian Storseth: One of the things this committee is going to be debating and struggling with over the next couple of weeks is going to be commemoration. You've obviously put a lot of thought into this. What's your view on connecting with the younger generation through social media? What would you like to see?

• (0910)

Hon. Don Meredith: Absolutely.

I'm so glad you raised that. Our young people are on Facebook 24/7. I have two teenagers, and they're on it. It's important that we tap into social media. That is the medium of the day and it's a way to get our message out, to talk about when a wreath has been laid, why it's been laid, and we can tweet that. You engage the young people right across this country. Our world has shrunk because of technology, so it's important.

It puts...not only from this conference that I attended with Senator Oliver and others...the fact that there are individuals.... There's a crossover with our major partner, the United States, and the rich history that exists with the British Loyalists and so forth who came across and served in World War I and defended Canada, and the War of 1812, and so forth. So you tie these museums together and you talk about the recognition and the contributions of these individuals in real time. It's important that we tap into that to connect to our young people. It would inspire them—wow, they did this; this was the first black pilot; this was the first Korean pilot. Or there's Jeremiah Jones, who fought hard for Canada in Vimy Ridge. Individuals like those will inspire hope in these young people.

A lot of the young people across the country feel marginalized and inadequate. By recognizing those heroes you will inspire them to become something and contribute to this country. I think it's important that we use media as a way to do that.

Mr. Brian Storseth: How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I'll be quick, then.

Hon. Don Meredith: I'll try not to be such a preacher.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Each military unit preserves its own history. That's something that you may want to look at as well, to make sure that the black soldiers are recognized within those unit histories. It's something that they all hold very near and dear to their hearts.

Hon. Don Meredith: That's a valid point.

The air force recognizes their captains and so forth. In my research.... There are a couple of names, which fail me right now, in terms of individuals who were the first ones. Again, I must raise the point that our military has come a long way in that they have allowed various individuals now to join. Before, blacks weren't allowed to even serve side-by-side while they were making contributions. Some of them lied just to serve their country. In reading this I said, wow, here is dedication, where somebody wants to put their life on the line and they would hide their age to make sure they serve. They found some way, whether it was just to clean the yard or clean a piece of equipment, to dedicate their lives to the service of the armed forces.

We definitely need to continue to make this recognition of these individuals. It's important for our youth going forward.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Senator.

We'll now go to Ms. Papillon, for four minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): First of all, thank you very much for having come today.

Hon. Don Meredith: I only speak a little French, madam.

Ms. Annick Papillon: I hope the translation works properly.

I think we do need to increase awareness of this. This history is not well known at all. Given the situation, perhaps we should create something or find a way to really promote this more.

Do you have examples to share with us? Has anything been done in this area in the United States, for example, that could serve as an inspiration and that could allow us to continue this discussion?

[English]

Hon. Don Meredith: Thanks so much for that question.

One of the things in terms of Washington, D.C.—I'm doing some more research on this and I will be able to come back with quantitative data—is that they have started to recognize, through their monuments, the contributions. Museums are going up. One gentleman spoke to me at the conference. They're starting to recognize the contributions that blacks have made to the American armed forces, and it is widespread. Obviously, we're talking about 40 million to 45 million blacks across the United States, so it's in terms of the autonomy they have to make sure that these things actually get recognized.

In Philadelphia, one of the museum contributions that individuals made was a home that one of the soldiers lived in. There was real estate development and they wanted to rip down a particular house. The community fought against it, because the house reminded them of the individual who served in the war. So that was preserved as history. There are various examples, and my office can certainly come back to you on that with respect to specific locations. Those are the two that I can cite right now.

Thank you.

• (0915)

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon: Thank you.

[English]

Hon. Don Meredith: Thank you.

The Chair: Is there anybody else? You have a couple of minutes left if anybody....

[Translation]

Mr. Réjean Genest (Shefford, NDP): Thank you for your presentation.

In Quebec, black people have historically been concentrated in the Montreal region. However, given the new form of immigration, instead of staying in ghettos in Montreal or elsewhere, the black community is increasingly settling in the province's towns. In my riding, there is a municipality where a major black community is becoming increasingly integrated, and I think that is good.

Regarding this black community, what approach should we take with associations to show them that black people in Canada are not just those who arrive with current immigration, but rather that they are part of our history? Do you have ideas to show youth and people who come from across the Atlantic or South America that they too have a history in their new country? Do you have an idea as to how to integrate that into our community?

[English]

Hon. Don Meredith: Honourable member, I thank you so much for that important question.

I keep going back to education. I keep going back to our institutions of learning. When I was in high school, I'd learned about

Samuel de Champlain and Mathieu Da Costa. I didn't know that Mathieu Da Costa was a black man. So the issue is really one of being transparent and making our history relevant, making our history clear. Our history books are there; we need to make sure that the faces of these soldiers, who are on our Veterans Affairs website.... I'm seeing some of these faces for the first time, and I've been in this country over 35 years. So it's important that we continue through the educational institutions to talk to our young people. I think that's the medium.

Our faith community and our youth organizations have a responsibility with regard to the information they receive, but again it has to be coordinated. So I think Veterans Affairs has to make an effort to make sure our schools are supplied with the necessary resources to be able to talk to these young Canadians who are coming in, so they are aware of the true history of this country instead of not seeing themselves represented in the military. They'll see the contributions of Canadians from the past who have been involved in exploits and done great work. I think that has to come to the forefront now.

I think we start with our education system. We start with our community centres. Again, they would receive a package from Veterans Affairs to say, "This is the true mosaic of Canada; these are the contributions of various individuals, whether you are from India, whether you are from South America. You've come to this country and you've contributed. Whether you're from China or Korea, you've made contributions to this country." I think it's important that those recognitions be brought forward.

What has to be put forward is an education piece that is concise and accurate and that is not missing information. It must be clear and consistent with the website information that gets transferred, and I think it's easily done. I think if the information is already there, it has to be packaged and marketed so individuals can, on a daily basis, pick up a book or go to the website or be inspired in some way by seeing some sort of a plaque or by going to a commemorative event that recognizes these contributions. These things will engage our young people and encourage them.

The Chair: Thank you, Senator.

I know we're running up next to your timeframe.

• (0920)

Hon. Don Meredith: That's okay. I can take a couple more. I'm enjoying this.

The Chair: I can tell, and that's good.

We'll go over to Ms. Davidson for whatever time we have left.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Senator, thanks so much for being with us this morning.

This isn't my normal committee, so I'm finding it quite interesting. One of the things I always remembered when growing up was that my dad was a proud veteran of the Second World War and he spent five years fighting in Europe. I always remember him saying that it didn't matter who you were fighting beside, who you were fighting with; you were aligned with them, they were Canadians, and they were all fighting for Canada so they were all seen as equals. There was no division among the people who were actually in the forces.

You talked about the Korean War vets who have been honoured, and of course they have been, as have lots of others. We're starting to see now the ceremonies to commemorate the Afghanistan veterans, which include everyone who was there, whatever their ethnic background. You referred to some people who lied so they could serve their country. That's been historical and has always happened. Kids who were 16 years old lied in the Second World War and probably in the First World War too. I know that friends of my dad did and were able then to serve their country.

I understand what you're saying, but what kind of a reception have you received? Have you talked to veterans groups? Are the veterans themselves supportive of this? What kind of communication have you had with them?

Hon. Don Meredith: I have not had extensive communication with the veterans groups specifically, just those around them—vis-à-vis Kevin Junor, who was decorated, as I said—who have been calling for this recognition. There's the detachment in Regent Park in Toronto, where he hails from, and also the soldier, Mr. Dyer, who was killed in Afghanistan hails from there. There is also another gentleman, whose name has just escaped me. There is consensus from the various groups across the country. The Victorious Legacy organizers have, again, been champions of this cause, saying that we need to recognize it.

It was great to hear the PM and Peter MacKay make these statements in 2009. Coming from the Prime Minister and the Government of Canada, it speaks volumes across Canada.

I think it's important that other groups are going to come on board as they see something. Sometimes out of frustration folks just give up, because they feel that it's not going to happen, so why even bother. But if you know my history, I don't give up easily. There is this sort of fighting spirit that's within me. I've fought for the rights of young people in our city to have a quality of life and to stay away from gun violence, and so forth, and that same spirit will take me into this battle. Hopefully it's not going to be a huge war, but we're going to be victorious in the end.

I think it's an important commemorative thing. And I've been supported by others in this room, and Senator Downe, Senator Oliver, and MP Joe Daniel have also been very supportive of this initiative moving forward. I think it's important that as we reflect the diversity in this room, the diversity in this country, we need to reflect that within the military and the contributions also need to be reflective in the same way.

Thanks very much.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thank you. That's all.

The Chair: Actually, that runs you very nicely up to where you want to be.

I just want to say, Senator Meredith, thank you very much for the presentation. Certainly your passion and your commitment to this obviously mean it is going to continue. And I think there's a lot of interest, as our Ms. Eve Adams, parliamentary secretary, has pointed out, in following through and making sure the government and the country do the proper thing as we move down the road. Your insight and participation this morning is very welcome, so thank you.

Hon. Don Meredith: Thank you so much, Chair.

And thank you also, honourable members. It was great to be here. Thank you.

The Chair: We have some time until the next witnesses are here because we don't start until quarter to, so we can take a little break, unless there is any particular business you want to take a look at.

Okay, we'll break until about twenty to ten. Thank you.

● (0920)

(Pause)

● (0930)

The Chair: Could we reconvene? Our witnesses are here and we have a quorum, so that allows us to perhaps wrap up a little early today. Our Liberal member is not here, and we only have one missing here, one or two, so that's fine.

If we're all comfortable, then, I want to say thank you and welcome to a gentleman who we've certainly seen before at the committee. We've talked to him many times. We're very pleased to have back with us Derek Sullivan, director general of the Canada Remembers Division, and also, of course, Peter Mills, director of the Canada Remembers program.

We're very pleased to have you here this morning, gentlemen. Also, as you are familiar with, we like to hold our opening comments to about ten minutes, if possible, which gives the committee a lot of time to do the questions and answers. If we're all settled, I'll turn it over to you. Please proceed.

● (0935)

Mr. Derek Sullivan (Director General, Canada Remembers Division, Department of Veterans Affairs): Thank you very much.

Usually, Mr. Chair, I say that I can speak for anywhere from twenty minutes to three days on remembrance. Today I'll try to keep it to ten minutes to respect the committee's guidelines.

Thank you very much for inviting us to talk to you about remembrance. Certainly any time of the year is a perfect time to talk about remembrance, but in the lead-up to Veterans Week and Remembrance Day, this is a particularly appropriate time.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has two business lines. One is, of course, providing services and benefits to veterans and assisting serving members in their transition to civilian life. The other business line is the Canada Remembers business line. The purpose of that business line is to ensure that Canadians are aware of the services, sacrifices, and contributions of our veterans and to encourage Canadians to take an active part in honouring those services and sacrifices.

Within the Canada Remembers program, there are a number of elements. There are national and international memorials. We are the stewards of some quite extraordinary cultural resources that belong to the people of Canada. We have 13 First World War battlefield memorials in France and Belgium, and we have responsibility for the Canada Memorial in Green Park in London, England. In addition, at the two largest of those sites, we have a student guide program that offers Canadian university students an opportunity to provide interpretive services to the one million visitors we receive at those two sites each year. We also have some responsibility, with other departments, for the National War Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier here in Ottawa and for the seven books of remembrance, which reside here in the Memorial Chamber in the Peace Tower.

In addition, a really critical element of our work is public information and learning resources. We provide information to Canadians, in quite a wide variety of ways, about the military history of Canada and the service and sacrifices of our veterans. We have extensive information and material on our web site. We provide print materials, booklets, and historical sheets and that sort of thing, which are distributed throughout the country.

One of the most remarkable and most successful ones for really informing and engaging Canadians is the learning material we provide to schools, teachers, youth organizations, and veterans organizations across the country. We have comprehensive learning materials that are provided year-round, but each fall, in the lead-up to Veterans Week, we provide all 16,000 schools, as well as many youth organizations, with Veterans Week learning materials. These are particularly tailored to two groups: the kindergarten to grade six group, which get something called *Tales of Animals in War*; and the junior and senior high students, which get the *Canada Remembers Times*.

The sample kits provided to schools are also provided to all members of Parliament. Your offices would have received these in early September. Those are samples of the materials we have, and teachers order them in class packs of 30. Teachers have to actually do something, take an active step to request these. These kits have been remarkably successful, and teachers' feedback to us has been quite extraordinary. Two Veterans Weeks ago, in 2008, teachers ordered 2.3 million pieces of these Veterans Week learning materials. The following year there was a 38% increase to three million, and last year there was a further increase to 3.9 million.

● (0940)

So over the two years we had a 70% increase, and the evaluations by teachers have been very gratifying for the former educators who we have developing them, because 98% of teachers said that they were appropriate to the grade and learning levels of their students and that they were effective learning tools for them.

If you want teachers in these days, with a high pressure on curricula across the country, to teach about something, particularly remembrance, you need to make it easy. So we provide them with high-quality tools tailored to the curricula of the provinces and with comprehensive teaching guides so that they have lesson plans, etc., to be able to teach it. So we're very pleased with how successful that has been over the last few years.

We also have a number of online features and resources that are used by students in their research projects, such as the Canadian Virtual War Memorial, which is the official registry of all Canadians who have died in service to the country, as well as the Heroes Remember website, where we have thousands of hours of interviews with veterans of all eras, and those have been edited into clips that are available for viewing not just across Canada, of course, but around the world.

In addition, we have been one of the lead departments in government in venturing into the social media field. Two years ago we began Facebook pages in English and French on October 14, four weeks before Remembrance Day, and by Remembrance Day we had 170,000 friends, four weeks later. Over the last couple of years that has grown to now over 500,000 friends on the Facebook pages. As well, we have YouTube channels that allow us to post videos related to veterans as well as to link to videos made by Canadian students.

More recently we have smartphone applications that allow Canadians with smartphones or on the computer to find out what is happening in remembrance across the country, what events are taking place in their communities or near their communities—time, location, etc.

The most recent advertising campaign last year during Veterans Week was particularly important to us because a large part of it was the "I am a veteran" campaign to assist Canadians in understanding that veterans come in all ages and they're from all eras in Canada. I think those have been particularly effective, and those we will continue again this year with some improvements.

As well in Veterans Week, we have been challenging Canadians with a campaign that asks them how they will remember. It is intended to be a call to action to Canadians in asking them to take an active part in honouring service.

Across the country we work with communities and all sorts of not-for-profit groups to assist them in organizing remembrance activities, ceremonies, events, learning activities. We also have three funding programs that can assist here. The Community Engagement Partnership Fund can provide funding to not-for-profit groups that are organizing events anywhere in the country. We have the cenotaph and monument restoration program, which can assist, again, non-profit groups and communities in restoring some of the over 6,000 cenotaphs and monuments across Canada. And we have a new program that came into place last November that can assist communities in building new cenotaphs and memorials at the community level.

Veterans Affairs provides leadership in organizing ceremonies in many parts of the country, including many here in the national capital region. We have a benefit program as well within the Canada Remembers program, and that is the program that provides funeral and burial assistance to eligible veterans and all veterans' next of kin. On honours and awards, we provide new medals in the case of some veterans who did not receive medals when they left service, medals that they had earned. As well, we can provide replacement medals for medals that have been lost or in some cases stolen.

● (0945)

We are also responsible for maintaining the graves of Canada's war dead—110,000 Canadians died in the two world wars—and we do that through our membership in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and our funding of the commission. As well, we are responsible for maintaining approximately 250,000 veterans' graves. These are graves of Canadians who came back from military service and subsequently died and for a variety of reasons their funerals were paid for by the Government of Canada or their grave markers were erected at the expense of the Government of Canada.

Mr. Chair, I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sullivan.

Mr. Mills, you have a little bit of time to add to that if you'd like to.

Mr. Derek Sullivan: So I didn't use it all?

The Chair: Well, it was pretty close.

No, I was going to say, if there's anything that you want to add beyond what the paper has.... Or are you ready for questions? Either way....

Mr. Derek Sullivan: No, I think we can go straight to questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was very insightful.

We now go to the NDP. Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Derek and Peter, thank you once again, and to your staff and all the organizers who did the commemoration of the Battle of the Somme and Beaumont Hamel. You guys did an outstanding job. When you have six Newfoundlanders crying at every cenotaph they're at...it really was quite emotional. So thank you so much to your team for what you've done.

I have a couple of questions. It says you administer the honours and awards for the First World War, the Second World War, and the Korean War. Do you administer the modern-day medals, such as for Bosnia and Afghanistan, that are lost or misplaced? Do you also do any of the South African and Boer wars? That's my first question.

Secondly, you talked about the program that allows some funding for new community-based cenotaph construction. Lloyd Swick, who will be appearing before the committee soon, is a World War II veteran who is setting up a community base, which I am part of, to have a monument for the animals placed at Confederation Park. The problem is that because it's at Confederation Park, DVA is not permitted to assist in the funding of that program. I'm just wondering if you have the answer why. If not, could you let us know later?

It's quite frustrating. If it was anywhere else but federal land, DVA could assist, but because it's at Confederation Park, where the aboriginal monument is and others are, they're being denied some access to funding. Could you elaborate on that, please?

Thank you once again for all that you do.

Mr. Peter Mills (Director, Canada Remembers, Department of Veterans Affairs): I can certainly speak to honours and awards, Mr. Stoffer.

In terms of medals issued for post-Korean War service, that's the responsibility of the Directorate of Honours and Recognition within the Department of National Defence. Veterans Affairs' responsibilities are limited strictly to the First World War, the Second World War, and the Korean War. As well, we do not have responsibility for anyone who served in the South African wars, just those three conflicts that I've indicated.

Mr. Derek Sullivan: I was speaking with Mr. Swick yesterday, most recently, and a number of times before, and you're absolutely correct that the community war memorial program cannot assist with that particular project. The reason is the program, like many federal government programs, has a stacking restriction. It does not permit the stacking of federal contributions from different departments or different federal organizations. So in this case, if the monument is placed on crown land, the provision of that crown land for the monument is a federal contribution, and therefore our program is not permitted to also provide a contribution to the same project.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Mr. Mills and Mr. Sullivan, for a very informative presentation.

I have to say, I was at Monte Casino this summer and it was very beautiful. The work you do with the Commonwealth is much appreciated by visitors from across the world.

This is a very impressive program in terms of outreach and in appealing to kids. I used to teach, and I know how important this kind of outreach is. You've touched so many bases with the Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter components. What else would you like to do? Is there something more? We're looking at commemoration in the 21st century. Is there some additional kind of programming that you'd like to add to your lexicon?

● (0950)

Mr. Derek Sullivan: Wow, that's like asking a child if they'd like anything in the candy store.

The Chair: Within a minute, please.

Mr. Derek Sullivan: Yes, there are always more things we can do. But the important thing to remember—and this is a key part of how we carry out our work—is that it is not about the Government of Canada remembering or honouring Canadians. Our work is focused on encouraging Canadians to express their thanks to veterans for their service and their contributions.

Most of our work is in fact not directed to the Government of Canada, to remembrance activities of our own; rather, our most important role is that of catalyst. That is where we, through things like the partnership programs, can assist Canadians in expressing their thanks themselves. That isn't really something that requires a lot more tools.

What it really requires is for us to find innovative ways to connect with Canadians. That's really what we're trying to do through work right at the community level, as well as through both the advertising and awareness campaigns and through social media such as Facebook and the other resources.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sullivan.

Now we'll move to Ms. Adams.

Ms. Eve Adams (Mississauga—Brampton South, CPC): I'd actually like to follow up on that. You have been doing wonderful work in reaching out to kids and to the general population. The Facebook pages really have taken off.

But what more could we be doing? If we were going to modernize, if we could have a wish list and look to some other countries and some best practices that you've seen, what would be at the top of your list?

Mr. Derek Sullivan: Actually, that's interesting, because a number of other countries are looking to what we're doing. That's been gratifying most recently, but there are certainly opportunities. For example, we know that in the coming years, with the centennial of the First World War on the horizon—the 100th anniversary will take place over a five-year period from 2014 to 2018—other countries have some pretty ambitious plans, most notably Australia. They haven't finalized what their plan is, but they have a list of proposals and some of them are quite significant.

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

If there's one thing that I would really like to see within Canada, it is even more ability to reach Canadians through the media all year round, but in particular during the fall period. For the last number of years we've been working in a different way, really: we're trying to bring remembrance to Canadians, rather than trying to bring Canadians to remembrance. We've been partnering with professional and amateur sports teams to do tributes to veterans before sports contests, whether it's for NHL teams or all of the major junior hockey leagues. We've now moved into university sports—university football, university hockey—and we've had just fabulous reactions from them.

That's an area that I think is particularly important for us to continue to expand, because there you're making remembrance part of the everyday lives of Canadians, rather than trying to drag them to where remembrance is, at monuments and at ceremonies.

● (0955)

Ms. Eve Adams: Mr. Sullivan, that is incredibly important.

Do you have any information about that one-off program with the projections of poppies on the building? It's a very remarkable program. I think it's something that, if you ever visualized it, you would remember and speak of for years to come. Can you give us a quick overview of that?

Mr. Derek Sullivan: Yes. Last year we did something that we had never done before. In Montreal we projected a virtual poppy field on the side of the Bell Centre, home of the Montreal Canadiens, my team—

An hon. member: Hey—

Mr. Derek Sullivan: —and we invited Canadians to text a particular number. When they did that, a poppy grew in the virtual poppy field in this massive projection on the side of the building.

We've been looking into how we could do that again this year, and not just there, because hopefully we can expand it to other places in the country. It can be a little pricey, so we're looking at ways of doing that in the most economical manner possible.

Ms. Eve Adams: I find that fascinating. To me that seems like quite the commemoration and really speaks to 21st century commemoration.

Mr. Derek Sullivan: You mentioned the Facebook pages. That is probably the most successful innovation we've had in the last while. Again, it's just under two years old. Next week it will be two years old. What we have there are thousands of Canadians expressing their own thoughts. They're posting to the Facebook pages every single day, all year round. Their friends see what they have been posting, and they've been becoming friends of the Facebook pages as well. That's really what it's about. It's encouraging Canadians or providing them a forum or a venue where they can say how they feel.

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

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Sullivan.

When you have the technology to put it on the Air Canada Centre, we all look forward to it.

Now over to Mr. Hsu for five minutes.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for coming here today and telling us about your very innovative work. Congratulations on that.

I wanted to ask how the budget for the Canada Remembers program has changed over the last ten years. Can you give me a bit of history on the budget side?

Mr. Derek Sullivan: In the years 2004–05, which was the 60th anniversary cycle of the Second World War, we received some additional one-time funding to recognize the key 60th anniversaries of the Second World War, both in Canada and overseas. There were overseas events that took place with large numbers of Second World War veterans and events that we were able to support here in Canada as well, right across the country. That was one-time funding.

At the same time, our budget was increased by, as I recall, \$6 million per year ongoing, which enabled us to undertake many of the new activities I talked about earlier. There was a reduction more recently. I can't give you the year, I'm sorry. It was two or three years ago and related to something that we were doing in any case. We were reducing the size of our delegations for overseas events. Our overseas events are related to commemorations of the First and Second World Wars, and the Korean War. Veterans of the Second World War and the Korean War as well are less able to participate in those delegations. The only reduction that I have had in this budget is related to the size of our overseas delegations.

• (1000)

Mr. Ted Hsu: Otherwise, the budget has been constant?

Mr. Derek Sullivan: Otherwise, it's been stable. In fact, there have been some increases to the grant that we provide to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to take care of the fluctuating exchange rates and also the increased costs in the 134 countries, I believe it is, in which there are Commonwealth war graves.

Mr. Ted Hsu: This roughly \$6 million increase—

Mr. Derek Sullivan: That was in 2004–05.

Mr. Ted Hsu: —five or six years ago has allowed you to do a lot of innovative things? Is that fair to say?

Mr. Derek Sullivan: It's certainly been a great help, yes.

The Chair: Mr. Hsu, is that all the time you want to use of your allotment?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

Now over to the Conservative side. Ms. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks very much for your presentation this morning. It was certainly very interesting.

I was really happy to hear you say that 98% of teachers are in approval of the kits you're sending out. That's great, because educating our young people is extremely important. We need to get that message out there. We need to start at a young age, and you're doing that. Also, using the social media is certainly getting our young people engaged.

There's been a lot of controversy in my riding, and I have a constituent who's been working for twenty-some years trying to have November 11 designated as a holiday. Do you have any comments on that? It used to be a school holiday in Ontario and now isn't. I know that there are pros and cons to that. Can you speak about what your experience has been with getting the message out?

Mr. Derek Sullivan: Yes, I can.

First of all, statutory holiday designation for November 11 is a provincial jurisdiction. I believe eight of the provinces have November 11 as a statutory holiday. One of the provinces has it as a statutory holiday but not in all circumstances. It sort of crosses the line.

In two provinces it is not a statutory holiday, so students are not off school and people are not off work. It is a holiday, however, for businesses and organizations that are federally regulated, in all provinces. It's an interesting one.

It's a challenge for provinces to make their decisions, because there are arguments that can be made on both sides of this one. On the one hand, it would be wonderful for all Canadians to have the opportunity to participate in remembrance activities, ceremonies, etc., in their communities and be off work. The same can be said for students. However, there is a strong counter-argument as well. In fact, the Royal Canadian Legion has come out in favour of it not being a statutory holiday. The reason they have stated is that they feel students should be at school and have the day dedicated to learning about remembrance.

So you can see that there are strong feelings, and I would suggest strong arguments, on both sides of the issue for reasons that, in each case, you can understand.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: As a disseminator, if you will, of the information and the teaching product, do you see any differences between the provinces that have it as a school holiday and those that don't?

Mr. Derek Sullivan: Not really. There has been a very strong response right across the country. The variations we have per capita are not very significant. I don't think I can attribute that to whether or not it's a statutory holiday in the province.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I wanted to ask you a question on your honours and awards. You said that you only look after the First and Second World War and Korean War medals, so not Bosnia, Afghanistan, and so on. Do you do the full spectrum of events and ceremonies? We, as politicians, attend commemorations of the Battle of Britain and the Battle of the Atlantic, Afghanistan and Korean War commemorations, and Bosnia in some cases. Are you involved with all of those from the event and ceremony end but not the recognition end?

•(1005)

Mr. Derek Sullivan: Absolutely. In fact, a major part of our efforts for quite a number of years has been encouraging and supporting the recognition of modern-day veterans. Our mandate covers the full gamut. The only exception to that is that the Department of National Defence has retained responsibility for medals for post-Korean War service in the Canadian armed forces. But in terms of commemoration, recognition, and remembrance, absolutely. A key part of the "I Am a Veteran" campaign is to ensure that Canadians are not just aware but are encouraged to acknowledge the service of all veterans, up to and including Afghanistan and other missions in Canada and overseas today.

If you look at the learning materials we provide to teachers and schools—we have some here for any of you who may not have seen them—you will see that they cover all eras, from the South African war up to and including Afghanistan. There is no question. We work with community organizations and their organization of events to ensure that modern-day veterans are taking their proper place as part of the group to whom tribute is being paid, rather than in the audience, if you will, paying tribute to those who went before them.

Sometimes that's a challenge, because some younger veterans don't see themselves as veterans. Part of our work as well is assisting them in seeing themselves in their rightful place as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Sullivan.

We'll now move to the NDP. Ms. Papillon.

Ms. Annick Papillon: I don't have any questions for now, but Réjean Genest does.

[Translation]

Mr. Réjean Genest: Regarding cenotaphs, you said that any government contribution means that you cannot make a second contribution.

Does that include contributions from the Government of Quebec, municipalities or individuals?

Mr. Derek Sullivan: No. It is only in the section on federal programs. Only federal contributions are considered government contributions under the terms of this program.

Mr. Réjean Genest: Contributions are equivalent to what percentage of the actual cost of putting up a cenotaph?

[English]

Mr. Derek Sullivan: For projects that we can fund, we provide up to 50% of the cost of the cenotaph to a maximum of \$50,000.

Does that answer your question?

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Genest?

Mr. Réjean Genest: Very well. That is all.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Papillon.

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon: First of all, thank you for coming today and thank you for the work you do.

I would like to know how you involve the private sector in activities. I would like to have some information on that.

[English]

Mr. Derek Sullivan: Our work with the private sector does not include providing any contributions to them. Our funding programs are exclusively directed to the not-for-profit sector and community groups. However, we encourage the private sector to use their own resources to take on a leadership role in remembrance.

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

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

•(1010)

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon: Do you have any examples to give us?

[English]

Mr. Derek Sullivan: Yes, and some of it goes back a number of years.

There was a spectacular television ad from Bell Canada some years ago, where a young man was walking on the beach in Dieppe talking on his cellphone. He called his grandfather, who had been a veteran of the Dieppe raid, to say thank you. The ad didn't talk about cellphones or any of the company's services, but it was very powerful. They did not overly commercialize it, but they sent a powerful remembrance message to viewers, while making them aware of Bell Canada at the same time.

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Sullivan.

We'll now go to the Conservatives. Mr. Anders.

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Thank you very much.

I think the only person who has been on the committee long enough to remember this discussion would be Mr. Stoffer.

I am still bothered by the idea that Beechwood Cemetery and many other cemeteries across the country have what I would term to be unmarked graves. If I go to Beechwood today, I can find patches of grass where a veteran has been buried. I appreciate the fact that the Government of Canada or our funeral and burial program has provided a space for people to inter their loved ones who have served us so well, but not all of them have gravestones, markers, or even plaques to indicate who is buried there. The only way to actually know who is buried would be to ask the people who tend the graves. They have paper copies in their records of all the grave sites, and they therefore know that private so-and-so is buried there, but there's no indication whether in stone or in bronze in the earth for somebody visiting the cemetery to even know a body is there.

We go to great lengths on many levels with regard to newspapers, videos, slide presentations, and this, that, and the other damn thing, but for me, in terms of the "we will remember them" part of the ceremonies that we have every November 11, \$1 million would make sense. I remember when Brent St. Denis was a Liberal member here and we actually calculated what it would cost for the couple of hundred dollars per thousands of them. We calculated that we could actually mark all of those graves for about \$1 million.

I leave it as something for the committee to consider. We spend lots of money in this place on all types of other things. I think it would be a worthwhile project.

Mr. Derek Sullivan: We actually have a program that provides for the marking of unmarked veterans graves. As part of our funeral and burial program, we work with the Last Post Fund corporation, which delivers the program for us. They have an unmarked graves program as part of their activities.

If anyone is aware of any unmarked veteran grave that has remained unmarked for five years, the Last Post Fund would be very pleased to provide a marker for that grave. The vast majority of the funding for the program comes from Veterans Affairs. We have the means and the mechanism to do it now. Anyone who is aware of any unmarked veterans graves should contact the Last Post Fund or us, and we'll make sure that it's done.

• (1015)

Mr. Rob Anders: I appreciate that.

On the visits I've made to Beechwood, I'm quite certain those graves have been left unmarked for more than five years. Is it merely because nobody has filled out the paperwork or made an application, or approached this body or entity with regard to those graves?

Mr. Derek Sullivan: Yes, I would say that's the case. We can't fix what we don't know.

Mr. Rob Anders: All right.

The Chair: We will go to Mr. Lizon, for five minutes.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Thank you.

Thank you very much, Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Mills.

What significant anniversaries are coming up that Canadians will celebrate or recognize?

Mr. Derek Sullivan: There are a number of them coming up over the next few years.

There are significant anniversaries that we recognize every year. A couple were mentioned earlier, which are the Battle of Britain, D-Day, Merchant Navy Day, and National Peacekeepers' Day on August 9 every year, or in many places on the closest Sunday to that date.

In terms of major cyclical anniversaries, we have the 95th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge on April 9, 2012. On August 19, 2012, we have the 70th anniversary of the Dieppe Raid, which is a truly Canadian commemoration. In 2013, in late July, we have the 60th anniversary of the Korean War armistice. The big one that is coming up is quite a series of anniversaries during the entire 100th anniversary of the World War I period, beginning in August 2014 and going right through to November 11, 2018.

Those are some of the key anniversaries that are coming up.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: I have a question with regard to the social media. Of course it's very popular and it is very good that social media are used, but I still believe the participation of people in commemorative ceremonies is very important, and that goes for people of all ages.

Do you gather any information on how social media helps or if they have any impact on participation of people in commemorative ceremonies?

Mr. Derek Sullivan: That's a really good question. I haven't thought about it in exactly those terms.

It is very difficult to draw a connection between an online activity with people in one area and a commemorative activity in another. I don't have any evidence or analysis that I can draw on for this, but on the Facebook posts I have seen people talking about how they are planning to go out to ceremonies for key anniversaries in the lead-up to November 11. Having them talking about it online, seeing it, making it visible to them every time they go on Facebook helps them remember.

We do know from estimates that have been done by the CBC as well as veterans organizations that participation at Remembrance Day ceremonies across the country has increased dramatically from the early nineties to today. This predates the work we have on Facebook and other social media. The CBC tracks this because they want to know both the in-person attendance here in Ottawa as well as the television viewership. They found that between 1993 and 2003-04, both the in-person attendance and television audience had tripled. I think many factors contribute to that, but one of the key ones, of course, would be that remembrance is not just about things that happened long ago. People recognize more and more that it is what Canadians are doing today in places such as Afghanistan.

• (1020)

The Chair: Okay, we are just about out of time on your side. Do you have a very quick one?

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: This is a technical question. Maybe in other constituencies people have the same questions. Sometimes one I hear in my constituency is what a veteran should do when he loses his medals.

Mr. Peter Mills: If a veteran loses his medals, he should contact the Department of Veterans Affairs. The staff that work for me will process the inquiry and can provide replacement medals to him, regardless of whether they are lost or stolen.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That ends round one. We are going to do round two, move into four-minute rounds, and we start with the NDP, Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

On Mr. Anders' comments on Beechwood Cemetery, consider yourself asked, Derek and Peter. I do believe that a request was made at a previous committee to look into that, and with Mr. Anders' submission here it is obvious it hasn't moved forward yet. So if it is possible to look into that, that would be great.

The other point I have is that you talk about commemoration, but—and that is just me—as I go around the country I don't see very much commemoration of the Boer War. One of the concerns I have is that this is truly the forgotten one. That was the first time we organized battalions to go to Halifax and take a ship to South Africa. Over 250 lost their lives in that particular battle. I would like to know what commemorations are going to take place next year for South Africa, for the 110th anniversary.

As you know, next Christmas will be the 70th anniversary of Hong Kong, and you have a lot on your plate in this regard. You have indicated truthfully that as the veterans get older they can't travel any more. My fear is that no one will go to visit these sites on very special commemorative days.

Will there be opportunities for people such as you and others to travel to these sites on behalf of all Canadians to pay tribute and our respects to those who went before us so many years ago? That is not just Vimy Ridge and Beaumont Hamel, what I would call the more popular sites that most people know about, but very few people know about the Battle of Hong Kong, about where our first VC winner was. He's buried in Ethiopia. A lot of people don't know that, and there are these kinds of things to go forward.

As my last question, I understand there is a push on to recognize women in the military in the commemorative events, what women have done in our armed forces. What they have done is tremendous history as well.

Mr. Derek Sullivan: Okay, there are some good ones there.

The Boer War, the South African War, is something that we in fact commemorate. I think if you look at the *Canada Remembers Times* this year and last year and the year before, you will see we have material on the South African War. We think it's important that Canadians, particularly young Canadians in this instance, are made aware of what happened, because for most Canadians it is entirely forgotten.

We're trying to correct that in terms of a special commemoration for next year, which, as you say, is the 110th anniversary of the end of the South African War. We don't have a particular event planned, but I am going to look into something we might be able to do here at the National War Memorial that would raise awareness further on that.

In terms of overseas commemoration, I do agree that it's important. We have 110,000 Canadians, or thereabouts, who are buried all around the world. It is important, I think, that Canadians pay tribute to them where they lie.

One very, very encouraging part of what we've seen over the last number of years is that increasingly large numbers of Canadian high school students, through the support of their teachers, are raising their own funds and travelling overseas to pay tribute to Canadians where they lie. While these tend to be on the major anniversaries, they don't just go to the major sites, such as the Canadian National Vimy Memorial or the Beaumont Hamel Newfoundland Memorial, they go to many other Canadian war cemeteries and Canadian memorials overseas.

Next year, for example, for the 95th anniversary of Vimy, there are already 4,000 to 5,000 Canadian high school students who will be participating in the ceremonies we will organize at Vimy next April. Last year we had over 2,000—2,200, I think it was—in the Netherlands for the 65th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands.

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

• (1025)

The Chair: Thank you very much. We're over five minutes.

I want to point out that Mr. Stoffer has this magical way of asking 50 questions and expecting people to answer in the time. We're going to squeeze the NDP a little bit on the last one, if we have to.

It's just that we have to keep to the time limits. I apologize, but I do have to cut you off at that point.

Mr. Daniel.

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Thank you very much for attending. I've listened to what you've said.

For me, I just want to know if you could explain a bit better the funeral and burial program process, in particular the assessment on whether veterans are eligible or not and how you determine whether they have sufficient funds. It seems like a difficult time for them and their families in how long that process takes.

Mr. Derek Sullivan: I'll start by saying that any veteran who dies as a result of their military service—so if they die as a result of an illness or injury for which they have a disability pension or disability award—Veterans Affairs will provide funeral and burial assistance without regard to their financial means at the time of their death.

In addition, Second World War and Korean War veterans who have insufficient means.... And that's based on a means test that takes into consideration whether or not they have a surviving dependant, usually a spouse, and it looks at what assets there are between the veteran and the surviving spouse. A couple of things are exempted—the principal residence and one automobile. Other assets are considered as part of the means test, the asset test, to determine whether or not they are eligible. If they have more than \$12,700 in those other more liquid assets, they are expected to contribute to the cost of the funeral and burial. If they are a few hundred dollars over that line, then that is what their contribution would be, a few hundred dollars, and they would receive a partial funeral and burial grant.

For post-Korean War veterans, there is one difference in the eligibility criteria. In order to be considered for the means test, they must be in receipt of a departmental benefit. That could be a disability pension, a disability award, an income support, or, right now, earnings-loss compensation. If they die while in receipt of any of those benefits, then exactly the same means test is applied.

Mr. Joe Daniel: How long does that process take?

Mr. Derek Sullivan: It usually doesn't take very long. That program is administered for us by the Last Post Fund, a not-for-profit corporation with offices across the country. Their staff can do it very quickly. As you say, it's a very difficult time for the family, and the biggest challenge and unfortunately the delay are most often related to in fact getting the information needed to do that assessment.

There are instances in which the Last Post Fund will provide the assistance and do the assessment afterwards, and if they are required to do some recovery of costs afterwards, they will do that.

•(1030)

Mr. Joe Daniel: Okay.

The Chair: Go ahead very briefly, Mr. Daniel.

Mr. Joe Daniel: I will change the subject completely. Is there any support for veterans who were not Canadians when they were fighting—for example, Vietnam War veterans who are now living permanently in Canada? Is there any support for any people like that?

Mr. Derek Sullivan: No, there isn't. The programs we have are for Canadian veterans and allied veterans from conflicts in which Canadians participated.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to Ms. Mathysen for four minutes.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm interested in the role of women. We haven't discussed that to any great degree. Yesterday I received a poster from Status of Women Canada in honour of Women's History Month and the contribution of women. I wondered what role Veterans Affairs will be taking in terms of celebrating and honouring women. Very often they do tend to be overlooked.

Mr. Derek Sullivan: Actually, thank you for coming back to that, because I think last week, or maybe the week before, we launched on our website a brand-new web feature in time for Women's History Month. It is called "Women at War". It is in fact a feature that pays

tribute to the service of women throughout Canada's history, up to and including today.

We have about eight or ten special web features. This is one that we have done specifically to recognize the role of women in the services over the years.

As well, most recently, in 2009 or 2010....

Mr. Peter Mills: Winterlude? Yes, 2011, in February.

We have a partnership with the NCC for Winterlude where we do a major ice wall sculpture. This year's sculpture focused on the history of women in the Canadian Forces. It featured a re-creation in ice of the nursing sisters memorial that sits here on the Hill, and then had figures of women in non-traditional roles surrounding that with some interpretive panels. Then we had some marquee female veteran guests out, such as the first Canadian female fighter pilot, and the first Canadian female general was out with us that evening to commemorate the exploits and the history of women in the Canadian Forces.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

The Chair: We have a little bit of time left if you have another question.

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon: The senator spoke to us earlier, and I would simply like to know if there are any projects involving black veterans. Are there projects in the works in that area?

[English]

Mr. Derek Sullivan: Actually, yes.

There are not necessarily plans in the works. There's actually a great deal being done now to recognize black Canadian veterans. I mentioned that we have a relatively small number of special features on our website paying tribute to groups of veterans. One of these web features is called "Black Canadians in Uniform", and we've had that for two or three years. I forget exactly how long since we launched that. It in fact is called "Black Canadians in Uniform—a Proud Tradition". It presents the history, from before the First World War right up to today, of black Canadians in uniform. It profiles in particular, as many of our things do, some individuals' stories as examples to highlight or profile. There are profiles of four black Canadians from each of the major conflicts over the last century or so. There is a photo gallery. We also have seven of our heroes remember, in interview clips, as part of this feature with black veterans.

Also, in the learning materials you have in front of you, in four of the last six years we've had special features on black veterans. In 2006 we had an article on Canada's black battalion. In 2009 we had an article entitled "Nova Scotia hero receives VC", and that was on William Hall. In 2010 we had a story called "A Real Life Band of Brothers", and it featured the Carty family. I can't remember exactly the number of members of the Carty family who served, but it was five or six. I can get you more information if you are interested. This year we also have a piece, in the paper in front of you, entitled "Recognized at Last", and it's on Jeremiah Jones.

In fact there is quite a bit that Veterans Affairs does to specifically recognize black Canadians who have served and continue to serve. As well, Canada Post issued a stamp in the last few years, also recognizing William Hall. Other government departments and organizations have also taken a role.

• (1035)

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

For the last word, Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming today.

I understand you said there is a 98% uptake on the Canada Remembers.

Mr. Derek Sullivan: We had 1,463 responses to our evaluation from teachers, both those who had ordered and those who had chosen not to, and 98% of them said that it met their curriculum needs and the learning levels of their students.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Across the country, what was the distribution like? Were there more in the west? Did Ontario receive significant numbers? What about Quebec?

Mr. Derek Sullivan: There were significant numbers across the country. We were gratified last year with a very dramatic increase in the province of Quebec. It went up approximately 200%. I don't have the actual numbers with me. Of course, by far the largest number was in Ontario, simply as a function of the population of the province. But there is a pretty even distribution across the country. If you'd like, I can provide you afterward with the distribution.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I would appreciate it if you could just table with the committee what the distribution numbers would be across the country.

I have to admit I very briefly went through it, and it seems like it's well done, but I don't see—for my daughter, who is a Facebook junkie—where there are any links to go to the DVA website for Facebook or any of those kinds of things so that you can follow up and continue to monitor or facilitate engagement with our youth at this point. It seems like a good first step, but I'd like to know where you are taking it from there.

Mr. Derek Sullivan: It's a good question in a couple of respects. Our website is listed on the bottom of it—www.veterans.gc.ca—but you're quite correct, there isn't a link directly to Facebook. Encouraging them to go directly to Facebook I don't think is in this year's. We may have done that last year. But I think you're right, it's something that we should have every year.

What we had tried to do this year in time for those learning materials, but we missed it by about a month in terms of getting all of the approvals and making sure we were doing it properly, was to add to the newspapers, particularly the *Canada Remembers Times*, but to all our products, what is called a quick response code, a QR code. It's rather like a bar code but it's more dots or splotches than anything else. Those can be scanned with a smart phone, and they take you directly to our website, to our Facebook pages, and things like that. We will have those for next year, for sure, but also I think you're absolutely right that we should be putting something, even a small advertisement or promotion, if you will, in the *Canada Remembers Times* to encourage the students to go to our Facebook page.

Mr. Brian Storseth: The only other thing I would just quickly mention, and it's as much a question as anything, is I know one of the things that always interested me when I first started learning about this was the Victoria Cross recipients and the stories that go behind that. Perhaps there is some way to promote that on your Facebook, in here. There are unique stories and actions that Canadians have taken. There are things we can be very proud of as Canadians. It's just a way to better promote that within DVA itself.

Mr. Derek Sullivan: I know Peter's writing this down, because we have the citations of all Canada's Victoria Cross recipients on our website, but you're right, there is nothing we're doing specifically to encourage people to go there and find them. That's something we can easily do. We post periodically to our Facebook pages. We don't overdo it because we don't want people to feel that it's becoming spam and to block the site. I think that's a worthwhile one as well.

• (1040)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Sullivan.

We're at the end of our time. I think we'll put Senator Meredith in touch with you, because I know he had some comments and questions about the availability of information on black recognition. That's probably a good connection.

I want to say thank you to Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Mills. You do great work. Certainly it looks like it's continuing to increase, so thank you very much for your time. We look forward to seeing you again.

We're adjourned.

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