

**Lowered, Shipped, and Fastened:
Private Grief and the Public Sphere in Canada's Afghanistan War**

by

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Abstract

This study examines how the personalization or “domestication” of Canada’s fallen soldiers from Afghanistan shaped the commemorative response of Canadians during the war. After 2006, when casualties from the war increased and support for the mission declined, Canadians shifted their attention away from the politics of the mission to the sacrifices of the fallen and their families. The Peace Tower flag, the Highway of Heroes and the “Support Our Troops” decals – three potent symbols which garnered considerable attention during the war – prompted widespread debates among Canadians as how to best mark and honour the sacrifices of the fallen. As the private grief of Canadians filled the public sphere, emotional impulses were notable, but they were overtaken by “instrumental” concerns of political and commercial interests.

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Abbreviations

ANAVETS	The Army, Navy & Air Force Veterans in Canada
CDS	Chief of Defence Staff
CFB	Canadian Forces Base
CFPSA	Canadian Forces Personnel Support Agency
CPVA	Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association
DND	Department of National Defence
ECAWAR	Edmonton Coalition Against War and Racism
EMS	Emergency Medical Service
GTA	Greater Toronto Area
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
KAF	Kandahar Air Field
LFWA-JTFW	Land Force Western Area – Joint Task Force West
MND	Minister of National Defence
NCVA	The National Council of Veterans Associations in Canada
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PPCLI	Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
RCR	Royal Canadian Regiment

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Introduction

158 members of the Canadian Forces (CF) were killed in the arid deserts and mountains of Afghanistan. 158 portraits of the fallen were disseminated throughout print, broadcast and online media outlets back home in Canada. 158 maple leaf-draped caskets made the 10,000 kilometre journey from Kandahar Air Field (KAF) in Afghanistan to Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Trenton, Ontario. 158 families mourned – many in the public sphere – the loss of a husband, wife, father, brother or sister. This continuous cycle of grief, transmitted and amplified with the help of information technology, left a mark on the psyche of Canadians over the ten-year war. Though dreadful, the losses in comparison to past wars were not notable. 267 Canadian soldiers had lost their lives in the South African War (1899-1902), Canada's first official overseas deployment of troops. In the First World War (1914-1918) more than 66,000 Canadians were killed. Two decades later another 45,000 were lost during the Second World War (1939-1945). Five years after that, in the Korean War (1950-1953), 312 Canadians fell.¹ Despite the relatively few casualties during the Afghanistan mission, the impact has run deep.² The question is why?

Throughout the ten years of fighting from 2002 to 2011, Canadians grew increasingly uncomfortable with the war in Afghanistan. Much of this change in attitude

¹ All figures taken from J.L. Granatstein and Dean F. Oliver, *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Military History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

² There are currently no studies on the impact of casualties for the Boer and Korean Wars, and surprisingly, little on the Second World War. Jonathan Vance's, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), is an important study for understanding collective grief after the First World War.

occurred as the mission quickly devolved into intense war-fighting, especially after 2006. This evolution challenged a widely held belief among Canadians: that Canada was a nation predominantly of peacekeepers, not warriors.³ Harrowing stories and images transmitted from the battlefield to the home front facilitated a new awareness of and unease about the war-fighting nature of the mission. Moreover, the growing casualties from 2006 revealed the human cost of a war that appeared to have no foreseeable end, with no credible plan for winning. Both Liberal and Conservative governments also seemed to sense the growing fragility of the mission. And so, despite the growing cost in treasure and blood, the government asked nothing in return from Canadians – no sacrifice, no increase in taxes, no deep commitment to winning the war. Canadians were left on the periphery, waiting and watching; there was a void between the comfortable lives of Canadians in North America and the strenuous circumstances facing the troops abroad.

This war differed markedly in one respect from all the major wars in the 20th century. The war in Afghanistan saw bodies of slain Canadians repatriated. Death on a foreign battlefield now means that Canadians witness the fallen move from across the ocean back to Canada. Observing the coverage of the ramp ceremonies at CFB Trenton struck an emotional chord. Canadians, or some of them, felt a need to mark the loss, to participate in the grieving process. In the wake of a contentious and unpopular war,

³ See Noah Richler, *What We Talk About When We Talk About War* (Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions, 2012); Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, *Warrior Nation: Rebranding Canada in the Age of Anxiety* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2012).

Canadians have attempted to fill the void between the public assessments of the war in Afghanistan and the state's rationale for going to war in the first place.

Throughout the ten-year-long mission, organizations and charities raised funds to support military families and wounded soldiers. "Red Friday" rallies, an initiative established in September 2006 by two military spouses, became a fashionable way to demonstrate solidarity with the troops. The military community, ordinary citizens, and federal politicians donned red apparel every week as a means to show support. Scholarship programs were set up for the children of the fallen: in the event that a CF mother or father was killed on duty in Afghanistan, post-secondary tuition would be fully paid for. Army runs materialized in towns and cities across the country, raising funds and awareness for various local and national programs. Songs, videos and elaborate obituaries, all in honour of the troops, made their way online – to the dismay of some, but to the comfort of many.

These widespread commemorative measures received significant attention from the Canadian press. They were impossible to ignore, but despite the extensive commemorative events across the country, the vast majority of Canadians were not involved in these commemorative acts. I was one of them, until in the summer 2010. Then the war touched me – when I unwittingly entered the void, stepping into the luminous space between the home front and the battlefield.

It was June 26. I was walking along Wellington Street, the main boulevard that runs in front of the Parliament buildings. It was a hot Ottawa summer day; tourists had congregated around the centennial flame; some were taking pictures, while others were

marvelling at the neo-gothic architecture. I took a brief respite from my trek, pausing and craning my neck upwards to catch a glimpse of the Peace Tower. As my gaze moved ever higher, I caught a glimpse of the maple leaf flag fluttering proudly in the wind. After a few moments of idling, I continued on my way. When I arrived home that evening, I turned on the television. Going through the channels, a bulletin from the CBC caught my attention. It confirmed that two more Canadian soldiers – MCpl. Kristal Giesebrecht and Pte. Andrew Miller, from 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR) – had been killed when their vehicle hit an improvised explosive device (IED), 20 kilometres southwest of Kandahar, Afghanistan. A soldier, wearing military fatigues, appeared before a throng of reporters. “Kristal prided herself on her health and fitness,” said BGen. Jonathan Vance, commander of Task Force Kandahar. “Although she always felt the solution to any problem could be found in a box of chocolates.”⁴ The other soldier in the convoy, Pte. Miller, was given the nickname “Caillou by his friends,” stated Vance. “[E]veryone acknowledged the resemblance [to the children’s cartoon character] as soon as they met him.”⁵

The first image conjured up in my mind, upon hearing Vance speak, was that of the Peace Tower flag. It was at full-mast as I had walked by. The sacrifice of two fallen soldiers was not marked at the paramount symbol of the nation. The tourists who had made the day trip to Parliament Hill and Canadians who had walked past the centre and

⁴ “2 Canadian soldiers killed in Afghanistan,” *CBC News*, June 26, 2010, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2010/06/26/afghanistan-soldier-dead.html> (accessed June 30, 2010).

⁵ *Ibid.*

symbol of our governance were not alerted – symbolically – to the fact that two CF soldiers had made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of their country.

Less than a week later, on July 2, I left Ottawa and took a road-trip down Highway 401 to visit friends in Toronto. After an hour or so of driving, I passed a large rectangular blue sign marked “Highway of Heroes, Autoroute des Héros.” Situated to the right of the text was a large red poppy. It occurred to me in that moment that I had crossed into a designated memorial site. As the road-trip continued, I passed by more signs – all similar in design and scope. In a somewhat belated response, I realized that I was driving down the same processional route made by the families of the fallen. Images I had seen on nightly news broadcasts over the preceding years quickly flooded into my mind: convoys of black sedans and hearses surrounded by police escorts with thousands of Canadians lined along the route waving their flags, standing at salute, all in honour of the families of the fallen.

As the trip progressed, I took note of the many yellow “Support Our Troops” ribbon decals fastened to the vehicles on the road. Some appeared to be new, while others were worn and faded; all were placed at the rear of the vehicle, usually above the license plate. I had been accustomed to seeing them, especially since 2006, when casualties from the Afghanistan war increased at an alarming rate. The decals had saturated public space – parking lots, laneways, and roadways – with an apparently endless tide of yellow support. Numerous debates, discussions, and arguments ensued with family, friends and colleagues – from all political stripes – over the interpretation of

the symbol. There was no consensus to what the ribbons ultimately signified or, more importantly, if they should populate public and private spaces.

From Ottawa, down Highway 401 to my final destination in Toronto, I came to a conclusion about what I was going to investigate in my thesis: the Peace Tower flag, the Highway of Heroes and the “Support Our Troops” yellow decals, three important symbols that a bystander like me – dissociated from the war effort and its impact – unwittingly encountered almost daily. This war on a foreign battleground, which started when I was sixteen years old, had been creeping into my consciousness for most of my adult life, as it had for many Canadians. I felt compelled to analyse in more detail how the war was symbolized and fought over in proxy battles and how it was being marked by Canadians, from all walks of life, who felt a need to fill the void with commemorative acts.

* * *

On September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked the United States. Three hijacked planes hit the twin towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. At the behest of Canada, Article 5 of the NATO charter – an attack on one is an attack on all – was invoked. In October 2001, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien announced to Parliament that Canada would contribute air, sea and land forces as part of the “War on Terror” in Afghanistan, a failed state where the terrorists had trained and organized. In February 2002, 1,000 Canadian troops were deployed to Kandahar, under the control of the US forces in the region. In March, that force, along with their American counterparts, went on the offensive. In the largest ground operation for Canadians since the Korean War,

they swept a valley in eastern Afghanistan, and rooted out Taliban strongholds. By July 2002, the six-month Canadian rotation had come to an end and the troops were ordered back to Canada. However, in February 2003, Chrétien announced that he would send 2,000 Canadian troops to Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, as part of the UN mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), although the Canadian Forces would be restricted to a one-year rotation.⁶

In March 2005, Prime Minister Paul Martin announced the redeployment of Canadian troops to Kandahar. With American military might and attention diverted to the war in Iraq, the Taliban had reappeared as a powerful force in the Kandahar region. In November 2005, the Allied units were ordered to go on the offensive; from this point forward, ISAF, American, and Canadian troops began to take increasingly heavy casualties. Images of maple leaf-draped caskets began to saturate the news-cycle, eroding overall public support for the mission. A Decima Research poll, conducted in September 2006, revealed that 59 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that Canadian soldiers were “dying for a cause we cannot win.”⁷ From that point onwards, polling data consistently revealed that a majority of Canadians were against

⁶ John Kirton and Jenilee Guebert, “Two Solitudes, One War: Public Opinion, National Unity and Canada’s War in Afghanistan,” *G8 Information Center*, University of Toronto, www.g8.utoronto.ca/scholar/.../kirton-afghanistan-071008.pdf, 9-11.

⁷ Alexander Panetta, “Majority see mission as lost cause, poll finds; 59% say soldiers dying for unwinnable war; 34% disagree Results reflect poor opinion of Bush leadership, pollster says,” *Toronto Star*, October 2, 2006, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/439092929?accountid=9894> (accessed June 24, 2011).

the Afghanistan mission. The unpopularity of the war led to much debate, and uneasiness with the mission spilled over into symbols of commemoration.⁸

* * *

I have faced the challenges in writing about the fallen from Afghanistan – a contemporary history topic not yet ten years old – not the least of them being a lack of secondary source material. Most of the books on the subject have been written by front-line soldiers or journalists.⁹ Very few of these works have focused on the nature of commemoration in Canada. However, I found and used a number of academic articles. Anthony King’s article, “The Afghan War and ‘Postmodern’ Memory: Commemoration and the Dead of Helmand,” offered insight into the British commemoration practices for the fallen. King observed that the obituaries dedicated to the British war dead from Helmand – where British troops were stationed, adjacent to Kandahar – grew more elaborate and more personalized during the course of the war. By 2006, a simple description of rank and regiment was no longer deemed sufficient. Included in the obituaries were “images of the dead” as “a central element” in the new memorial

⁸ For a political overview of the war see Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007); James Laxer, *Mission of Folly: Canada and Afghanistan* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2008); Lucia Kowaluk and Steven Staples, *Afghanistan and Canada* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2009).

⁹ See Christie Blatchford, *Fifteen Days: Stories of Bravery, Friendship, Life and Death from Inside the New Canadian Army* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2007); Kevin Patterson and Jane Warren, *Outside the Wire: The War in Afghanistan in the Words of its Participants* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2008); Rick Hillier, *A Soldier First: Bullets, Bureaucrats and the Politics of War* (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers, 2009); Murray Brewster, *The Savage War: The Untold Battles of Afghanistan* (Missisauga: John Wiley & Sons Canada Ltd., 2011); Terry Glavin, *Comes From The Shadows: The Long and Lonely Struggle for Peace in Afghanistan* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2011); Melanie Murray, *For Your Tomorrow: The Way of an Unlikely Soldier* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2011).

process.¹⁰ King believed that commemorative practices during the Afghanistan war had shifted from narratives of national sacrifice to the families of the fallen. In death, soldiers have been “domesticated,”¹¹ and their familial relations had taken precedence over their warfighting skills in the act of remembrance. Leslie Scrivener of the *Toronto Star* remarked, in September 2006, that these fuller and more domesticated obituaries have humanized the fallen, allowing Canadians to mourn them.¹²

Jan Roseneder’s 2006 article, “War Casualties, The Media and the Internet,” illustrated how information technology has provided Canadians with instant notification of war deaths.¹³ Unlike previous wars, the public knew not just the name but the face and personal details of the fallen, making the war a greater fixture in the lives of Canadians. Roseneder analyzed online obituaries featured on the *CBC News In-depth: Afghanistan*, and took note of the increasing volume of information posted for each of the fallen. In a May 2010 article in *Maclean’s* magazine, Stephen Marche wrote that as result of social media, we see the condolences of friends and family posted online even before bodies arrive home from Afghanistan.¹⁴

The revolutionized information technology has disseminated images of the fallen. William Watson of the *Ottawa Citizen* took note of this new phenomenon in

¹⁰ Anthony King, “The Afghan War and ‘Postmodern’ Memory: Commemoration and the Dead of Helmand,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 1 (2010): 13.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹² Leslie Scrivener, “A more nuanced patriotism? True patriot love; What makes a Canadian patriotic? Blind allegiance to our troops and their mission? Or questioning our role and demanding their withdrawal from Afghanistan? Leslie Scrivener on a touchy subject,” *Toronto Star*, September 17, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1128656061&sid=4&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

¹³ Jan Roseneder, “War Casualties, The Media and the Internet,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 9, no. 1, (Fall 2006), http://dspace.ucalgary.ca/bitstream/1880/44261/1/roseneder_war-casualties.pdf

¹⁴ Stephen Marche, “The return of Private Todd,” *Maclean’s*, May 5, 2010, <http://www2.macleans.ca/2010/05/05/the-return-of-private-todd/3/> (accessed December 13, 2010).

October 2006, remarking that the fallen seem to die repeatedly. This is the result of the cascade of images that are released to the press – at different intervals – as the bodies undergo the repatriation process.¹⁵ Canadian historian Serge Durflinger observed in a January 2007 interview in the *Toronto Star* that the images of the dead, particularly their faces, were bringing the war closer to Canadians than ever before.¹⁶ Valerie Fortney's *Sunray: The Death and Life of Nichola Goddard* chronicled the life of Captain Goddard, in which she took note of the new media paradigm. Fortney wrote that when Goddard – the first female combat casualty in Canada's history – was killed in May 2006, it released a wave of images across hundreds of media outlets in the country, all featuring her picture.¹⁷ This broadcast of the fallen across the country worked into A. L. McCready's article, "Tie a Yellow Ribbon 'Round Public Discourse, National Identity and the War: Neoliberal Militarization and the Yellow Ribbon Campaign in Canada." McCready drew attention to the shift in symbolic politics that occurred in Canada during the course of the war. By symbolic politics, she meant the recognition of the importance of the military in the everyday lives of Canadians. She noted that "cultures of militarism"

¹⁵ William Watson, "Afghanistan riddle is hardly elementary," *Ottawa Citizen*, October 17, 2006, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/240993740?accountid=9894> (accessed October 18, 2011).

¹⁶ Les Perreux, "Afghanistan tops editors' poll; Rising toll brings home the danger as war outranks Conservatives' election victory," *Toronto Star*, January 2, 2007, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/439150679?accountid=9894> (accessed October 19, 2011).

¹⁷ Valerie Fortney, *Sunray: The Death and Life of Captain Nichola Goddard* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2010), 290.

have moved from the barracks to the public sphere.¹⁸ The “domestication” of the fallen had played a significant part in promoting this shift.

The objective of this thesis is to investigate three powerful symbols – the Peace Tower flag, the Highway of Heroes and the “Support Our Troops” decals – that generated publicity and created controversy during the war. These symbols became a major focal point for Canadians, eliciting wide ranging debates over how best to honour and mark the sacrifices of the fallen. This investigation will explore, through these symbolic touchstones, the motivations behind so many Canadians’ need to commemorate the fallen.

Chapter One – Lowered: “Two Poles Apart” traces the Harper government’s April 2006 decision to limit the lowering of the Peace Tower flag to once a year on November 11. For the next two years, the Peace Tower flag was a lightning rod for controversy, as politicians and Canadians struggled with how to mark the deaths of Canadian Forces members abroad. The relatively small number of casualties from Afghanistan, coupled with the proliferation of elaborate obituaries and the very public repatriation ceremonies, had personalized the fallen in a way that would have been unheard of during the First and Second World Wars. Some Canadians demanded a flag protocol that took account of the fallen.

¹⁸ A.L. McCready, “Tie a Yellow Ribbon ‘Round Public Discourse, National Identity and the War: Neoliberal Militarization and the Yellow Ribbon Campaign in Canada,” *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 23-24 (2010): 28-51.

The April 2006 decision sparked considerable controversy among the public. It had inadvertently split them into two poles. Canadians who favoured half-masting the Peace Tower flag every time a soldier was killed in Afghanistan – in honour of the families of the fallen – gravitated towards the emotional pole of the debate. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Canadians who believed the flag should be lowered only once a year on Remembrance Day feared that the paramount symbol of the nation would be debased if it was lowered every time a soldier was killed. These Canadians were inclined towards the instrumental pole of the debate, which privileged political and commercial considerations over emotional ones. A commemorative void had materialized at the Peace Tower. Opposition parties in the House of Commons wanted the flag lowered. Yet the Harper government, which adhered to instrumental concerns, refused to bend. The Peace Tower flag remains at full-mast, only to be lowered once a year on November 11, Remembrance Day.

Chapter Two – Shipped: “The Living Memorial” examines the key developments that led to the creation of the Highway of Heroes in August 2007. In 2006, the 172 kilometre processional route – part of Highway 401, from Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Trenton, where Canadian troops are repatriated and shipped – to Toronto where the fallen undergo a formal autopsy, elicited significant public attention with the increase in overseas casualties. This chapter will illustrate how the public gaze shifted from the portraits of the fallen (released to the public after the closest kin are notified) to images of the grieving families (on the tarmac at CFB Trenton), before resting on the onlookers

who line the Highway of Heroes. It is not the fallen but the mourners who are positioned at the center of the commemorative process: they are the living memorial.

This chapter will also analyze three commemorative by-products of the Highway of Heroes. The Afghanistan Repatriation Memorial attempts to balance the uneasy feelings of a majority of Canadians towards the Afghanistan war with the honouring of the sacrifices made on behalf of the fallen and their families. The recently released Highway of Heroes commemorative plaques and coins, sponsored by government and corporate interests, are also investigated, as both situate the onlooker at the focal point of the motif, while the fallen and their families are relegated to the periphery or are altogether absent. The emotions expressed by the bystanders who lined the route have been instrumentalized – turned into a product. During this process of commodifying commemoration, the onlookers have become the focal point in the commemoration process.

Chapter Three – Fastened: “Support Our Troops” explores the debates around the City of Toronto’s June 2007 decision to phase out its popular Support Our Troops program. All of the yellow decals fastened to the city’s fleet of public vehicles were to be removed. The decision sparked a public outcry from Torontonians and other Canadians. When the mayor of Toronto, David Miller, received news that three more Canadian soldiers had been killed in Afghanistan, he extended the decal program indefinitely. The Toronto decision sparked similar city-wide decal campaigns in Edmonton, Calgary and Ottawa, each with its critics, reflecting the divisive nature of a decal campaign that was, initially, meant to unify Canadians in commemoration.

The Support Our Troops symbol conflates both the emotional and instrumental sentiments exhibited in the Peace Tower flag debates. Proponents of the decals believed the symbol to be a simple way to honour the sacrifices made by the soldiers and their families. Opponents viewed it as a political tool bolstering support for the war and suppressing dissent. Once the decals were fastened, the public discourse shifted from the politics of the mission to the sacrifices of the soldiers. Ironically, as the decal initiatives expanded into the public sphere, the emotional concerns Canadians had towards the fallen became politicized or instrumentalized in the process, prompting further discussions and debates as to the meaning of this contentious symbol.

This thesis will argue that the personalization or domestication of the fallen played an integral role in shaping the commemorative response of Canadians. The evolution of information technology, coupled with the very public repatriation ceremonies, diminished the distance between the home front and the battlefield. By the same token, the lack of sacrifice demanded of Canadians by their government during the course of the war – with no war taxes or conscription – and the unpopular nature of the war contributed to public acts to mourn and mark the deaths. Three symbols – the Peace Tower flag, the Highway of Heroes and the Support Our Troops decals – were a clear attempt by Canadians to fill the commemorative void and to recognize the sacrifice made on behalf of the fallen and their families for all Canadians. As the private grief of Canadians flooded into the public sphere, the emotional was overtaken by the instrumental; the fallen and their families were superseded by political and commercial interests.

Chapter One

Lowered: "Two Poles Apart"

On April 22, 2006, Canada's mission in Afghanistan claimed the lives of four more soldiers – Cpl. Matthew Dinning, Bdr. Myles Mansell, Lieut. William Turner, and Cpl. Randy Payne from Alpha Company, LFWA-JTFW – when their mixed convoy hit an improvised explosive device (IED) near Gumbad, Afghanistan.¹⁹ This incident brought the total number of Canadian fatalities to sixteen since the mission had begun in 2002. The flag on the Peace Tower – the paramount symbol of the nation – remained at full-mast.

Up to this point in the war, the public had been accustomed to the flag being lowered in the event of a soldier's death. It was the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien (1993-2003) that had set an earlier flag-lowering precedent on April 18, 2002, when four Canadian soldiers were accidentally killed in a friendly-fire training exercise near Kandahar.²⁰ The Peace Tower flag was lowered in commemoration of the overseas combat losses, creating a new tradition in respect to the fallen.

The Chrétien practice broke with over eighty years of established protocol, which held that the flag would be lowered on November 11, Remembrance Day, to commemorate all the fallen equally. In November 2005, the Liberal government of Paul Martin (2003-2006) had quietly re-established the flag-lowering tradition broken by his

¹⁹ Valerie Fortney, *Sunray: The Death and Life of Captain Nichola Goddard* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2010), 229.

²⁰ Patricia Molloy, "Killing Canadians (II): The International Politics of Accident," *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 14 (Fall 2005): 6.

predecessor. The decision sparked widespread speculation that the government was expecting casualties from the Afghanistan mission to increase. In April 2006, the newly-elected Conservative government of Stephen Harper formally instituted two policy measures: the flag would no longer be lowered to half-mast in the event a soldier was killed in combat and the press would be banned from all repatriation ceremonies at CFB Trenton, the place where the bodies of Canadian soldiers came from Afghanistan. The Harper government's policies were not well explained to the public and soon the measures, according to political scientist Kim Nossal, "were widely interpreted as having been imposed so that Canadians would not be exposed to the sight of [a lowered Peace Tower flag and] flag-covered coffins returning from Afghanistan."²¹ An Ipsos Reid poll conducted in April 2006 revealed that a slim majority of Canadians – 53 percent vs. 45 percent – disagreed with the government's decision not to lower flags on Parliament Hill for soldiers killed in combat operations; a larger majority, two-thirds (66 percent) of the Canadian public, felt the media ban on repatriation ceremonies was "really a government muzzle and should be left up to the families to decide."²²

In his analysis of "flag power," Robert Shanafelt states that, "The symbolic act of lifting aloft a symbolic token (any symbolic token) is a gesture whose meaning is easily grasped both within and across political domains. The fact that flags are raised continuously above the head also gives them power. Not only does the display of a flag

²¹ Jean-Christophe Boucher, "Evaluating the 'Trenton Effect': Canadian Public Opinion and Military Casualties in Afghanistan, 2006-2010," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no. 2 (June 2010): 240.

²² Canada.com, "Country at odds with flag, casket policies," *Canwest News Service*, April 29, 2006, <http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/news/story.html?id=e759a640-366a-407b-a5f9-b247345196b6&k=54163> (accessed on May 24, 2011).

suggest social solidarity, it simultaneously demands political deference.”²³ Thomas Hylland Eriksen also draws out the idea of flags connoting power. His interrogation of national symbols has revealed that, “[F]lags representing modern nation-states have an *emotional* and *instrumental* pole in their range of signification. The emotional pole attaches the individual to an abstract collective identity, a metaphoric kin group. The instrumental pole may be political or commercial, [and it is] intended to mobilise for conflict.”²⁴ Eriksen’s analysis provides a useful theoretical construct with which to examine the Canadian flag debate. In April 2006, the Canadian public was bifurcated, situated in one these two poles.

Those who favoured half-masting the flag every time a soldier was killed represented the emotional pole of the debate. The primary concern for members of this group was the welfare of the soldier, particularly their families or metaphoric kin group. The need to participate – to grieve, as a nation – was also a principal motivating factor in lowering the flag. Those at the emotional end of the pole wanted a flag policy that was reactive to the suffering of both the families of the soldiers and to the grief of Canadians. This group was far more supportive of the new flag-lowering tradition initiated by the Chrétien government; they saw no discrepancy between lowering the flag every time a soldier was killed in Afghanistan and lowering the flag on November 11, to honour all the fallen collectively from wars past.

²³ Robert Shanafelt, “The Nature of Flag Power,” *Politics and the Life Sciences* 27, no.2 (2008): 16.

²⁴ Thomas Hylland Erikson, “Some Questions about Flags,” *Flag, Nation and Symbolism in Europe and America*, eds. Thomas Hylland Erikson and Richard Jenkins, 1-13 (London and New York: Routledge 2007), 10.

On the opposite end of the spectrum were those who favoured limiting half-masting the flag to one day a year, November 11, Remembrance Day: they were at the instrumental pole end of the debate. Those categorized in the instrumental pole were more likely to eschew symbols, such as lowering the Peace Tower flag, and instead sought to mark the loss with continued funding for equipment and providing what the soldiers needed to do their job effectively. Their concern was also political: members of this group feared that the national symbol of the nation would be debased if it was lowered every time a soldier was killed, and the act would also threaten the overall success of the mission. This pole wanted to re-establish the link to the eighty-year tradition the Chrétien government broke, as they felt it unfairly distinguished the fallen from Afghanistan from those of past wars.

This chapter will trace the contentious debates which began in April 2006 – when news of the four Canadian soldiers' deaths resulted in not half-masting the Peace Tower flag – to April 2008, when a Liberal motion to lower the flag for every fallen soldier passed in the House of Commons and was dismissed by the Conservative government. I will illustrate how Canadians who participated in the debate were bifurcated. There were two poles – the emotional (lower the flag) or the instrumental (keep the flag up). The debates revealed how Canadians saw and interpreted the fallen from Afghanistan, and offered a glimpse into who should ultimately be commemorated by the paramount symbol of the nation. Between April 2006 and April 2008, those who were part of the emotional pole of the flag debate grew from a slim majority to an outright majority, which suggested that increasing casualties from the mission were

pushing Canadians to demand a more inclusive flag protocol to mark the growing sacrifice of the nation's soldiers. The ruling Conservative government, fearing that the national flag would be debased, quashed the emotional desire to change the flag protocol.

This shift in demand for commemoration can be attributed, in part, to the revolution in information technology, which has diminished the space between the battlefield and the home front, making Canadian soldiers much more visible than ever before. The relatively few Canadians who fought in the war in Afghanistan – as opposed to Canada's overseas commitments during the First and Second World Wars – makes for a consistent trickle, as opposed to a flood of casualties. New technology, when combined with the few soldiers killed, has caused and allowed the fallen to be personalized to a much larger extent than ever before; "the biographies of the fallen are fleshed out and made human," wrote Leslie Scrivener, a columnist for the *Toronto Star*. "We have come to grieve for each one of them. This is new."²⁵

* * *

Two days after the April 22 attack, to quell an onslaught of criticism directed at the Conservative government over their flag policy decision, Gordon O'Connor, Minister of National Defence, wrote a letter to *The Globe and Mail*: "The previous Liberal government broke with this long-standing tradition and decided on an ad hoc basis to lower the Peace Tower flag. As Minister of National Defence (MND), I can tell you this

²⁵ Leslie Scrivener, "A more nuanced patriotism? True patriot love; What makes a Canadian patriotic? Blind allegiance to our troops and their mission? Or questioning our role and demanding their withdrawal from Afghanistan? Leslie Scrivener on a touchy subject," *Toronto Star*, September 17, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1128656061&sid=4&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

unfairly distinguished some of those who died in Afghanistan from those who have died in current and previous operations. Lowering the Peace Tower's flag on Nov. 11 ensures that all of Canada's fallen heroes are justly honoured."²⁶ This would be the major talking point of the Harper government in justifying its reversion to the traditional flag policy.

On April 24, Russ Hiebert, Press Secretary to the Minister of Defence, appeared on *CTV's Countdown* with Mike Duffy. Duffy asked Hiebert whether further casualties from the mission would keep the Peace Tower flag from being lowered, so as to prevent additional scrutiny of the Conservative government's policies in Afghanistan. "So isn't that, Russ, really what's behind going back to the [original policy], and isn't that why it wasn't done in the past?"²⁷ Like any good press secretary, Hiebert skirted the question: "Well, listen, it's a long-standing tradition that has served Canada well throughout our wartime history, this tradition of lowering the flag, as I mentioned, on November 11th, Remembrance Day, across all federal buildings and in sunrise to sunset here on the Peace Tower. I think that's the way that it ought to be done, that's the way it has been done, and you know it's important to note that the Royal Canadian Legion and the Association of Veterans, which represents 55 veterans organizations, all support our decision to, I guess, uphold the Liberal decision of November 2005, to sustain that 80 year tradition."²⁸ Both O'Connor and Hiebert touched upon two important issues that are pertinent to the flag issue: first, the extent to which the previous Liberal

²⁶ Gordon O'Connor, "Honouring the fallen," *The Globe and Mail*, April 24, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pdqweb?did=1058973931&sid=3&Fmt=3&ciientId=13709&RQT=309&Vname=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

²⁷ CTV Television, "When Should the Canadian Flag be Lowered?" *Countdown*, April 24, 2006, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/190833490?accountid=9894> (accessed January 18, 2012).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

governments of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin were involved in creating a new tradition in April 2002, but that the Liberals had found their way back to the old tradition in November 2005; and second, there was a eighty-year tradition that the Harper government claimed had been temporarily broken. Both must be examined more closely.

The half-masting precedent was initiated by the Chrétien government as a result of the friendly-fire incident that occurred in Kandahar, resulting in the deaths of four Canadian soldiers on April 18, 2002. Those four soldiers were part of Operation Apollo, which had sent Canadian air, sea, land and special forces as part of a coalition in Afghanistan, in response to the 9/11 attacks. On February 12, 2003, Chrétien announced that he would send 2,000 Canadian troops back into Afghanistan as part of the United Nations-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF); they were ordered to Kabul, the relatively safe capital of Afghanistan. The mission was restricted to a one year mandate. Many interpreted the decision to go back in as compensation for failing to join with America's coalition of the willing, which began military operations in Iraq in 2003. When Chrétien stepped down, Paul Martin became prime minister of Canada in December 2003. He viewed the mission in Afghanistan – military journalist Scott Reid contends – as “an inheritance from the previous government. The prime minister felt that Canada, as a member of NATO, had an obligation to stand with the alliance in Afghanistan, but his interest in Afghanistan ended there.”²⁹

²⁹ Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007), 192.

Martin and the Liberals won the June 2004 election and, in March 21, 2005, Martin announced the redeployment of Canadian troops to Kandahar Air Field (KAF). Their mandate included running the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in the highly volatile Kandahar province. Canadian troops began arriving on June 29, 2005, and before the end of the year, the Taliban had re-emerged as a major destabilizing force in the region. Canadian troops were ordered to go on the offensive to destroy the insurgency.³⁰ Traditionally, peacekeepers would enforce ceasefires while post-conflict Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) would deliver humanitarian aid. Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan were doing both, as part of the PRTs. The mission in Afghanistan was now a major counter-insurgency conflict, a new paradigm with which Canadians back home were just beginning to come to grips.

Some in the press speculated that the more intense operation was the reason why the Martin government had silently reverted to the traditional flag policy on November 24, 2005. It was on that date that Pte. Braun Scott Woodfield died in an accidental rollover 45 kilometres north-east of Kandahar. The flag on the Peace Tower remained at full-mast.³¹ It was also in November 2005 that the Department of National Defence (DND), under the direction of the MND Bill Graham, had conducted an internal review of its own flag protocol procedures. The outcome resulted in "The Department of

³⁰ John Kirton and Jenilee Guebert, "Two Solitudes, One War: Public Opinion, National Unity and Canada's War in Afghanistan," *G8 Information Center*, University of Toronto, www.g8.utoronto.ca/scholar/.../kirton-afghanistan-071008.pdf, 9-11.

³¹ Joel Kom, "Federal flags are not lowered for soldiers killed in action," *Ottawa Citizen*, April 1, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pdqweb?did=1014142231&sid17&Fmt=3&clientid=13709&RQT=309VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

National Defence's internal protocol on half-masting,"³² which stipulated that on the day of the death of the soldier, all flags on the home base or the station of the deceased, as well as at National Defence Headquarters, would be lowered to half-mast from sunrise to sunset. "This was developed by the military and for the military," said Len Westerberg, a spokesman for Canadian Heritage explained in April 2006, after the Harper government had taken power. "It has been accepted by the past government and the present government."³³ Yet a spokesman for National Defence offered a different interpretation. "My understanding is that the government always has the prerogative to lower the flags should they see fit," said Jay Paxton, public affairs officer for DND. "[T]he Conservative government has decided to revert to the Department of National Defence directives with this while the previous government took it upon itself to do it sometimes."³⁴ Thus, Canadian Heritage argued that it was doing what the military wanted, while DND stated that by drafting its own internal policy it was never intended to prevent other departments from lowering the flag in honour of the fallen.³⁵

The Martin government had been aware that casualties would mount as a result of the Taliban's resurgence in the Canadian sector of Afghanistan. In September 2005, Bill Graham and Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Rick Hillier were sent on what DND insiders

³² "Rules for Half-masting the National Flag of Canada," *Department of Canadian Heritage*, <http://www.pch.gc.ca/pgm/meb-hm/101-eng.cfm#e14>.

³³ Elizabeth Thompson, "To lower or not to lower?: Gagliano will be half-staffed in Ottawa, fallen soldiers will not," *The Gazette*, April 26, 2006, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/434320307?accountid=9894> (accessed December 19, 2011).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ The Director General of the Department of Canadian Heritage is responsible for the implementation of the Rules for half-masting the Peace Tower flag. Under Section III, Article 16, of the Rules, the Prime Minister may order the Peace Tower flag lowered in "exceptional circumstances."

called the “pre-body bag tour.” Both delivered a series of speeches in Vancouver, Montreal and Ottawa, giving extensive media interviews outlining the dangers of the Kandahar mission.³⁶ “Our role in Afghanistan is quintessentially Canadian: we are helping to rebuild a troubled country and we are giving hope for the future to a long suffering people,” stated Graham. “This is a clear expression of our Canadian values at work.”³⁷ In retrospect, it does not seem surprising that Canadians interpreted the mission as a peacekeeping operation.

“Being a soldier means that you go out and bayonet somebody,” said Hillier, who took a decisively different tack in explaining the role of Canadian Forces in Afghanistan. “We are not the public service of Canada. We are not just another Department. We are the Canadian forces and our job is to kill people.”³⁸ It is the divergence between the Canadian soldier as lofty benevolent builder and pragmatic killer that created confusion on the part of the public. More importantly, it created a schism in the public’s imagination as to what role Canadian soldiers were meant to play in foreign conflict zones, a theme that will be taken up later in the thesis.

What can be said about the eighty-year tradition that the Liberals broke and subsequently went back to in November 2005? It was on November 11, 1918, that the Great War came to an end with the Armistice between the Allies and Germany in Compiègne, France. A year later, on November 11, 1919, ceremonies across the British

³⁶ Canada.com, “From peacekeepers to Taliban hunters,” *Ottawa Citizen*, March 25, 2006, <http://www.canada.com/ottawacitizen/news/story.html?id=97373d9e-6a7d-4c13-b833-46659de04495&page=1> (accessed December 23, 2011).

³⁷ Charles A. Miller, “Endgame for the West in Afghanistan? Explaining the Decline in Support for the War in Afghanistan in the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, France and Germany,” *SSI Letort Papers*, (June, 2010), www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub994.pdf, 81.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

Empire commemorated Armistice Day. Communities across Canada marked the event with two minutes of silence and, a few years later, the sale of poppies.³⁹ By royal decree the Peace Tower flag was to be lowered every year on the 11th to half-mast, in honour of the war dead. In the years that followed, the full ramifications of the war became apparent – this bred disillusionment in some, diminishing the commemorative role of Armistice Day in the lives of Canadians.⁴⁰ By 1925, veterans of the war banded together to create the Royal Canadian Legion. The organization became a unified, and at times forceful, voice for the interests of Canada's veterans. Dissatisfied with the diminishing impact of Armistice Day, the Legion lobbied the government to amend the Armistice Day Act so that ceremonies would officially take place on November 11 (ceremonies had initially taken place on the first Monday in November, coinciding with the long Thanksgiving Day weekend). The Legion also pushed to change Armistice Day to Remembrance Day. In 1931 the government acquiesced to the Legion's demands.⁴¹

Historian Denise Thompson states that the name change was done to put “the focus of the day squarely on memory – and by extension upon the soldiers whose deaths and heroism were being remembered – rather than upon the Armistice, a political achievement in which rank-and-file soldiers were not directly involved.”⁴² Great War commemorations differed in three fundamental way from those of previous wars:

³⁹ Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 15.

⁴⁰ Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919-1946* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 11.

⁴¹ Denise Thompson, “National Sorrow, National Pride: Commemoration of War in Canada, 1918-1945,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1995/1996), http://lion.chadwyck.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/searchFulltext.do?id=R04235703&divLevel=0&area=abell&forward=critref_ft

⁴² *Ibid.*

“[T]hey were based on the principle of absolute equality of all war dead; they were much more universal and more highly organized; and they were expressly designed to endure over a long period of time, in order to communicate with successive generations of future citizens.”⁴³

On April 25, 2006, the day after O'Connor's letter in *The Globe and Mail*, Prime Minister Harper was confronted during Question Period by Liberal MP Paul Steckle. Steckle read out an excerpt of a letter sent to his office – as well as to the Prime Minister's Office – on April 7, 2006. It was written by Lincoln Dining, the father of Cpl. Matthew Dinning. The father asked the Prime Minister: “For all the support and respect that you say publicly, why do you choose not to fly the flag on Parliament Hill at half-mast when one of our soldiers is killed?”⁴⁴ Matthew Dining had been dismayed that the flag had not been lowered in honour of Pte. Robert Costall, who had been killed on March 29, 2006, when Taliban insurgents attacked his remote coalition outpost outside Kandahar.⁴⁵ In a cruel turn of events, two weeks after Lincoln Dining sent his letter, his son Matthew lost his life along with three other Canadian soldiers on April 22, 2006.

Harper sidestepped the question, reading an excerpt delivered to him by The Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada (ANAVETS): “[C]onsider the insult that this recent practice of lowering the Peace Tower flag for current veterans has had on the relatives of tens of thousands of past veterans who have given their lives for Canada and who were not granted this additional honour. Was their sacrifice any less important

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ “National Defence,” *Openparliament.ca*, April 25, 2006, <http://openparliament.ca/hansards/169/111/#hl> (accessed December 8, 2011).

⁴⁵ “Coalition soldiers honour comrade who ‘paid the ultimate price,’” *CBC News*, March 29, 2006, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2006/03/29/newkandahar060329.html> (accessed May 11, 2011).

than those of today? We think not.”⁴⁶ Cliff Chadderton, chairman of the National Council of Veterans Associations (NCVA), representing fifty-five veterans’ groups, concurred with the Prime Minister, stating that it was a “mistake” to half-mast in the first place: “We don’t draw a distinction on a death in Afghanistan or a death in Normandy.”⁴⁷ Harper lashed out at the Liberals: “This is an emotional issue. The path the government has chosen is in fact the policy introduced by the Leader of the Opposition [Bill Graham]⁴⁸ at the end of his term as defence minister to respect the traditional protocols of the military [...] We think that is the way we should do it and not try to pit one family against another.”⁴⁹ But the issue would not be dropped. Later that day, Robert Thibault, the Liberal Veterans Affairs critic, told the *Waterloo Region Record* that “our party will be putting a motion before the House to honour Mr. Dining's request.”⁵⁰

Moments after the heated exchange in Question Period, Thibault made an appearance on *CTV's Countdown* with Mike Duffy. Duffy, who had witnessed what had just unfolded in the House of Commons, asked the critic if could “recall a discussion

⁴⁶ “National Defence,” *Openparliament.ca*, April 25, 2006, <http://openparliament.ca/hansards/169/111/#hl> (accessed December 8, 2011).

⁴⁷ Joel Kom, “Federal flags not lowered for soldiers killed in action,” *Ottawa Citizen*, April 1, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1014142231&sid=17&Fmt=3&clientd=13709&RQT=309&Vname=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

⁴⁸ Bill Graham served as Leader of the Opposition (February 2006 – December 2006) and interim Leader of the Liberal Party (March 2006 – December 2006) after the Liberals were defeated in the January 2006 election, which resulted in a Conservative minority government under Stephen Harper. Graham stepped away from politics in December 2006, after the Liberal leadership convention elected Stéphane Dion as the new Leader of the Liberal party.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ “Tories control war imagery,” *Waterloo Region Record*, April 25, 2006, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.library.carleton.ca/docview/267180205?accountid=9894> (accessed January 19, 2012).

about these sort of things? Or how did we get into this position? Did it just happen?"⁵¹

Thibault responded:

It's my memory that the decision was made by the Prime Minister's office in the case of the friendly fire accident, and that it was the right thing to do. And that tradition has been pursued. And there was never any big question, I think everybody agreed. We're in the day of fast communications, of mass media, where I was able to listen on *CBC Radio* and *CTV News*, the very same day my friend Jim lost his son to his feelings about that loss and he was able to see two days later when his son returned, along with the rest of Canada. We're in the day of mass communications and people expect that.⁵²

The critic's response touched upon a persistent theme in the flag issue: the revolution in mass communications.

* * *

The Afghanistan mission illustrated that the days of simply submitting a dead soldier's name and rank to the press were over. Technology has diminished the space between the home front and the battlefield, while simultaneously personalizing the soldier to Canadians, a twin effect further compounded by the increasing arrival of flag-draped caskets. In her examination of online obituaries, academic Jan Roseneder suggests that the 9/11 attacks created a "new form of casualty report." In an analysis of the culture of commemoration of the 9/11 attacks, University of California professor David Simpson speaks to these obituaries in the American context: "They must somehow signify and acknowledge the idiosyncrasies and special qualities of each of the dead, so that each death is not simply merged with innumerable others, without allowing those idiosyncrasies to disturb or radically qualify the comforting articulation of

⁵¹ CTV Television, "Honouring fallen soldiers," *Countdown*, April 25, 2006, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.library.carleton.ca/docview/190791812?accountid=9894> (accessed January 18, 2012).

⁵² *Ibid.*

a common cause and a common fate.”⁵³ In the case of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan, Roseneder contends that: “Today, television and the internet have brought almost instant notification of war fatalities. The public knows immediately that a NATO soldier has been killed in Afghanistan; soon after we know the nationality [...] This focus on instant in-depth coverage of war casualties has resulted in what amounts [...] to a real time Roll of Honour.”⁵⁴

Roseneder is not alone in her assessment. In Britain, troops that were killed in Helmand Province – adjacent to Kandahar – were accorded similar online obituaries.

Anthony King’s analysis speaks to this very issue:

The publication of the casualty’s name, rank and regiment, is now deemed insufficient. Casualty announcements have become elaborate cultural artefacts. In particular, the announcements have been accompanied by a biography, a testimony usually by the soldiers’ Commanding Officer, a photograph and sometimes, by commentary from family members; a bald statement of name, rank and regiment has been replaced by a dense and elaborate obituary disseminated on the Ministry of Defence’s own websites and, subsequently augmented, in newspapers and television reports.⁵⁵

Information technology has reduced the distance between the home-front and the battlefield, facilitating civilian encroachment in a sphere usually reserved for soldiers and increasing the exposure of soldiers to civilians. “In addition to other governmental departments, CF members also find themselves working alongside members of the news media, non-governmental organizations, contractors and other civilians,” wrote historian Lane Anker, in her analysis of peacekeeping and public opinion. “Simply put,

⁵³ David Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 2.

⁵⁴ Jan Roseneder, “War Casualties, The Media and the Internet,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 9, no. 1, (Fall 2006), http://dspace.ucalgary.ca/bitstream/1880/44261/1/roseneder_war-casualties.pdf

⁵⁵ Anthony King, “The Afghan War and ‘Postmodern’ Memory: Commemoration and the Dead of Helmand,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 1 (2010): 8.

the 21st Century battlefield is no longer a domain exclusive to soldiers.”⁵⁶ It is worth noting that the news media, contractors and civilians were present in the 20th century conflicts – Vietnam, the Falklands, and the first Gulf War, to name a few. Yet the parameters of the Afghan mission – part combat, part reconstruction – have fuelled a need on the part of the Canadian Forces to include civilian actors and agencies like never before.

The constant interaction between families back home and soldiers in Afghanistan has also become the new normal in this particular mission. “I keep thinking about my grandparents, and what they must have gone through in World War I and II. This is nothing compared to that. I have an end-date. I know that I’ll be home sometime in August,” wrote Capt. Nichola Goddard, in one her online messages back home. “I have the ability to come back to a warm tent and call home to hear my mom’s voice. I have the ability to check email and message instantly.”⁵⁷ Goddard was not accorded a half-masting honour, yet what she did receive in death was intense press scrutiny: “Every single newspaper in the country led the day’s news with her death, her gap-toothed smile beaming out from the front pages,” wrote one journalist. “By week’s end, her name would appear no less than six hundred times in print and broadcast media, making her a Canadian soldier whose fame was now approaching that of World War I flying ace Billy Bishop.”⁵⁸ Goddard’s case was exceptional – as the first Canadian female

⁵⁶ Lane Anker, “Peacekeeping and Public Opinion,” *Canadian Military Journal* 6, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 26.

⁵⁷ Kevin Patterson and Jane Warren, *Outside the Wire: The War in Afghanistan in the Words of its Participants* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2008), 65-66.

⁵⁸ Valerie Fortney, *Sunray: The Death and Life of Captain Nichola Goddard* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2010), 290.

combat casualty of the Afghanistan war – but what was not exceptional was the proliferation of newspaper obituaries dedicated to the fallen like her.

* * *

On April 25, 2006, sitting next to Veteran Affairs Minister Thibault – MP Dawn Black, the NDP’s Defence and Peace Critic, was asked by Duffy whether Gordon O’Connor’s statement about half-masting “hold[s] water for you?”⁵⁹ “Traditions change all the time. As we were talking about it earlier, at one time when Canadian soldiers died overseas they were buried overseas,” responded Black. “That doesn’t happen now. We bring home the soldiers who die overseas. Traditions can be changed at any time [...] We’re talking about young men, with fathers, with mothers, with children of their own, who have lost their lives. It’s not politics. It’s the cost of war, and I think the government is attempting to hide from Canadians the true cost of the war.”⁶⁰ Ron Wassik, a journalist for the *Herald*, also touched upon “tradition”: “If it’s all about tradition then Remembrance Day should revert to a statutory holiday [...] Taking the ‘tradition’ reasoning to another step, tradition was that the fallen were buried where they fell. The cemeteries of Europe are full of Canadian fighters, as well as other allied fighters of wars past. Today we bring our war dead home. Their return should be front and center in our daily news. Lest we forget.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ CTV Television, “Honouring fallen soldiers,” *Countdown*, April 25, 2006, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.library.carleton.ca/docview/190791812?accountid=9894> (accessed January 18, 2012).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Ron Wassink, “There’s tradition and then there’s plain, old respect; Facing Facts,” *Herald*, April 26, 2006, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.library.carleton.ca/docview/362807791?accountid=9894> (accessed January 19, 2012).

In 1970, the Canadian government changed its policy to repatriate the remains of all Canadian soldiers killed in peacekeeping operations abroad.⁶² There was an understanding that “we were not likely to see mass casualties like in the Second World War,” said John Knoll, a spokesman for the Defence Department. “It was more feasible to repatriate the remains.”⁶³

Hundreds of Canadians began lining the 172-kilometre route from CFB Trenton to Toronto in 2002 to honour the bodies of fallen soldiers repatriated from Afghanistan. By 2006, caskets adorned with the maple leaf began arriving with more frequency. “[B]efore February 2006, Canada’s military had suffered eight fatalities over the previous four years,” wrote Janice Stein and Eugene Lang. “In four months, the Canadian army lost as many soldiers as they had lost in four years.”⁶⁴ In August 2007, Ontario premier Dalton McGuinty officially designated the route from CFB Trenton to Toronto as the Highway of Heroes. In A.L. McCready’s analysis of material culture, and particularly of the proliferation of yellow Support Our Troops decals in Canada, commenting that: “[T]he recent shift in symbolic politics around Remembrance Day Ceremonies, the commemoration of the battle of Vimy Ridge, and the ‘Highway of Heroes’ phenomenon (where citizens line the highways along which repatriated bodies of Canadian soldiers

⁶² Kim Richard Nossal, “The Unavoidable Shadow of Past Wars: Obsequies for Casualties of the Afghanistan War in Australia and Canada,” *Canadian Political Science Association* (Presented June 6, 2008), www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2008.Nossal.pdf, 4.

⁶³ Michael Den Tandt, “Harper’s staff behind the media ban, sources say,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 28, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1058990281&sid=3&Fmt=#&clientId=13709&RQt=309&Vname=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

⁶⁴ Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar* (Toronto: Viking Canada 2007), 233.

travel on their way to autopsy) have moved rituals and cultures of militarism from the barracks to the level of everyday life.”⁶⁵

The shift in symbolic politics was made possible by the increasing number of repatriation ceremonies and by the relatively limited nature of the war. “It was considered highly impractical to lower to half-[mast] all flags for every Canadian casualty of the Second World War, particularly when our collective action on Remembrance Day was, and still is, intended for this purpose,” wrote Lt-Comdr. (Ret'd) Mark R. Baker in a letter to the *Ottawa Citizen*. “We are not engaged in a conflict like a world war. Large-casualties are not foreseen in past large-scale conflicts. Perhaps it is time to reconsider how we, as a nation, should address this very emotive issue.”⁶⁶ Andrew Cohen, president of the Historica-Dominion Institute, built upon Baker’s insight, stating that, “Waging war in Afghanistan asks no sacrifice of us, as people, because it isn’t total war in the way of the Second World War. To fight the Taliban, there will be no new taxes, no war bonds, no scrap metal drives, no food rations, no military conscriptions. And no debate in the public square.”⁶⁷ That lack of sacrifice on the part of the public, compounded with no official recognition by the paramount symbol of the nation – the Peace Tower flag – stimulated strong visceral reactions from occupants of the emotional pole of the debate. If Canadians were not called upon to make great sacrifices,

⁶⁵ A.L. McCready, “Tie a Yellow Ribbon ‘Round Public Discourse, National Identity and the War: Neoliberal Militarization and the Yellow Ribbon Campaign in Canada,” *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 23-24 (2010): 33.

⁶⁶ Mark R. Baker, “‘Flag flap’ played on our emotions,” *Ottawa Citizen*, December 26, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1186349041&sid=16&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

⁶⁷ Andrew Cohen, “Living with the dead,” *Ottawa Citizen*, November 16, 2010, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=2192018801&sid=3&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

representatives of the emotional pole at least seemed willing to demand that the sacrifice of the soldiers be recognized.

On April 26, 2006, Richard Léger – the father of Sgt. Marc Léger, who died in the friendly-fire incident on April 18, 2002 – was asked to comment on the Conservatives' decision formally to limit half-masting to Remembrance Day. He stated, "We need to have the Canadian people see the consequences and the cost of lives of our soldiers [...] It's the ultimate sacrifice. They need to see it and they need to understand."⁶⁸

Léger's son was accorded a half-mast honour by the Chrétien government. Yet when Richard and his wife Carol made a request that they both receive the Memorial Cross, it was denied. The Memorial Cross (more often referred to as the Silver Cross) was first instituted on December 1, 1919. It was awarded to mothers and widows of Canadian soldiers who were killed on active duty. Historian Suzanne Evans points out that in "1976 a father could be awarded a Silver Cross but only if there were no mother, widow or child of the soldier."⁶⁹ Both the grieving parents reasoned that Richard's loss was just as worthy as Carol's, and yet the government was unwilling to reflect changes in gender roles.⁷⁰ MP Peter Stoffer, the NDP's Veterans Affairs Critic, who made an appearance on *CTV's Countdown* on April 24, 2006, touched upon this very point:

Mr. Duffy, if I may add, tradition is very important, but right now the wives and the mothers of those four fallen will receive the Memorial Cross, but we have a female killed in action in Afghanistan, her husband and her father would not receive the Memorial Cross. So I have a bill in the House of Commons to be more inclusive on the Silver Cross that would include mothers, wives, husbands, and fathers. And that breaks tradition, but I think in this day and

⁶⁸ Brian Laghi, "PM feels heat over policy for fallen," *The Globe and Mail*, April 26, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1058981121&sid=4&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

⁶⁹ Suzanne Evans, "History of the Silver Cross Medal," *Canadian Military History* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 47.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

age it would be very important to be a more positive inclusive aspect of that regard, so traditions do change in a very positive way.⁷¹

When Capt. Nichola Goddard was killed on May 17, 2006, the government capitulated, and awarded her husband Jason Beam – who also served in the CF – and her parents the Silver Cross medal. As a result of the change, soldiers are now asked to choose up to three names for the medal in the likelihood they are killed in combat.⁷²

The push to be more inclusive and representative remains a hallmark of those inclined towards the emotional pole of the debate. As Brad Lavigne, an NDP strategist, argued in *The Hill Times*: “[E]ach time a soldier dies, it should be more than just the flag at the Defence Department building in Ottawa that gets lowered to half-mast. These soldiers don’t represent the Department of Defence – they represent all Canadians throughout the country. And the impact of their sacrifice should be felt in every town, every city, each and every time.”⁷³ Lavigne’s statement could be construed as politically motivated, since the Conservatives seemed much more adept in wrapping themselves in the flag on issues of defence, but his statement did capture the sentiment shared by some Canadians.

⁷¹ CTV Television, “When Should the Canadian Flag be Lowered?” *Countdown*, April 24, 2006, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/190833490?accountid=9894> (accessed January 18, 2012).

⁷² Suzanne Evans, “History of the Silver Cross Medal,” *Canadian Military History* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 48.

⁷³ F. Abbas Rana, “What do you think of the Conservatives’ plan to honour those who have died in the service of our country by lowering the flag to half mast on all federal buildings throughout Canada, including the Peace Tower from sunrise to sunset only on Remembrance Day? Good idea or not?” *The Hill Times* (835), May 1, 2006, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/208555200?accountid=9894> (accessed January 17, 2012).

A sample of comments from editorials and message boards illustrate the association between those respondents who favour half-masting with a concern for families as an integral part of the soldiers' lives and deaths:

"I am the proud spouse of a member of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry who has already served two tours in Afghanistan, several tours in Bosnia and a tour in Croatia [...] I believe the Maple Leaf should be lowered to half-mast in respect for the families of the fallen soldiers [...] Instead of wasting time making ridiculous decisions not to lower the flag, the government should be ensuring that our soldiers are safe and that they will return home to their families."⁷⁴

"Lemme ask this...if he [Stephen Harper] had his proverbial balls on the line, wouldn't he want to be remembered and honoured? What about those families that hear the phone ring...'is this the call?' This should not be a political issue, it should be about Humanity."⁷⁵

"I think it is appalling that the government will refuse to acknowledge our fallen soldiers with the honour and respect they deserve!! The peace tower flag SHOULD be lowered for EACH and EVERY fallen soldier. It is Canada's way of showing respect, for the soldiers and their families. Are the casualties getting that high, that we no longer need to acknowledge each one of them?"⁷⁶

"Mr. Harper should be embarrassed and completely ashamed for refusing to acknowledge our fallen soldiers and their families, who have endured enormous suffering so that Mr. Harper, his family and the remaining Canadian people can continue to enjoy the little freedoms that we have left."⁷⁷

"All flags should be lowered to half mast, all over Canada. It is the VERY LEAST we can do to show our respect and pay our condolences to the families and friends, of the soldiers who so bravely gave their lives for our safety, and democracy for all."⁷⁸

Concern for the family is repeatedly invoked as the prime motivator to lower the flag.

Such comments reveal a strong visceral emotional reaction, one that is infused with an

almost helpless tone. As one commentator stated, "It is the VERY LEAST we can do," a

⁷⁴ Charlene Dufrot, "Flying flag at half-mast shows respect for our fallen soldiers," *Edmonton Journal*, April 26, 2006,

<http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/253303891?accountid=9894> (accessed January 18, 2012).

⁷⁵ Amanada Rookes, "Your Say: Honouring Soldiers," *CTV.ca*, April 26, 2006,

http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Specials/20060425/yoursay_afghanistan_060425/ (accessed January 30, 2012).

⁷⁶ Tracey Young, "Your Say: Honouring Soldiers," *CTV.ca*, April 26, 2006,

http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Specials/20060425/yoursay_afghanistan_060425/ (accessed January 30, 2012).

⁷⁷ Charlene Shrieve, "Your Say: Honouring Soldiers," *CTV.ca*, April 26, 2006,

http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Specials/20060425/yoursay_afghanistan_060425/ (accessed January 30, 2012).

⁷⁸ Kymberley Loschiavo, "Your Say: Honouring Soldiers," *CTV.ca*, April 26, 2006,

http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Specials/20060425/yoursay_afghanistan_060425/ (accessed January 30, 2012).

sentiment that runs throughout many of the responses. There appears to be a clear sense of exasperation from those who gravitate towards the emotional pole that so little sacrifice is demanded of the public. A simple gesture like lowering the flag seems to be “the least we can do.” As Anthony King explains:

The position of the family has been substantially revised in current practices. The dead soldier is no longer primarily a soldier, the servant of the state whose individuality and whose kin are recognized in the act of commemoration. Rather in Helmand, the dead soldier has been domesticated; his familial relations have become central to his identification in the moment of remembrance. Decisively, the soldier’s domestic relations have now become primary.⁷⁹

This vexation with the Harper government’s “lack of concern” for the soldiers’ families revealed a propensity towards class and rights considerations in the commemorative process. One commentator wrote in the *Ottawa Citizen*:

If flags are usually only lowered for VIPs, I wonder, given that the Conservative government professes to support our troops who seek to help others in the pursuit of freedom and justice, why military are not considered VIPs, as important as politicians or diplomats [...] The flag should be lowered. It is a disgrace for the Conservative government to not recognize the importance of supporting our troops by the simple act of lowering the flags. Shame on you, Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Either you’re with the troops or you’re not.⁸⁰

Another comment complements the sentiment above: “If the government won’t lower its flag on Parliament Hill when a soldier dies while fulfilling government policy then it shouldn’t be lowered when a politician dies either. Lowering the flag in time of war is the right thing to do.”⁸¹ Proponents of the half-masting measure were demanding a more inclusive and representative flag protocol. The demand for greater equality of

⁷⁹ Anthony King, “The Afghan War and ‘Postmodern’ Memory: Commemoration and the Dead of Helmand,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 1 (2010): 15.

⁸⁰ Sherry Hummel, “Show respect for dead military with half-staff flags,” *Ottawa Citizen*, April 1, 2006, <http://proxy.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pdqweb?did=1014143921&sid=8&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

⁸¹ George Manson, “Your Say: Honouring Soldiers,” *CTV.ca*, April 26, 2006, http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Specials/20060425/yoursay_afghanistan_060425/ (accessed January 30, 2012).

representation was underpinned by an assertion of rights – in particular, the collective right to grieve as a nation:

“The only way of showing support to the men and women in Afghanistan is to be informed. Our government has taken away our right to participate in the loss to this nation, to grieve together as a nation and most importantly to stand together, with heavy hearts, wondering if it is all worth it – if our loved ones are dying for the beliefs of Canada.”⁸²

“I am livid, as a retired civil servant who worked for the Department of National Defence in Halifax, I deserve the right to mourn my brothers and sisters in arms.”⁸³

“These are the virtues and values we all share and cherish in this country. We as citizens of this country should have the right to rejoice in the triumphs of our soldiers and to grieve at their passing. By not lowering the flag, we have been denied one of the most visible symbols of our grief.”⁸⁴

Those inclined towards the emotional pole did not see a discrepancy between half-masting the flag every time a soldier was killed and half-masting the flag only on November 11. Rather, they preferred an amalgamation of both the old and new traditions. “In a democracy like ours, it should be discussed and debated which of these missions are worth it and which ones are not,” wrote one commentator. “We as a nation sent them, we as a nation should honour them. I will be out on Nov. 11, as I usually am, telling everyone I know to go, as I usually do. I will be there to honour all of our fallen soldiers from all wars. That does not mean we can’t honour the recently fallen when they perish.”⁸⁵ These powerful sentiments captured some of the passion – the

⁸² Colleen McGregor, “Your Say: Honouring Soldiers,” *CTV.ca*, April 26, 2006, http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Specials/20060425/yoursay_afghanistan_060425/ (accessed January 30, 2012).

⁸³ Shirley Lecky, “Your Say: Honouring Soldiers,” *CTV.ca*, April 26, 2006, http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Specials/20060425/yoursay_afghanistan_060425/ (accessed January 30, 2012).

⁸⁴ Ron Martinello, “Lowered flag shows grief,” *Waterloo Region Record*, April 27, 2006, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/267179903?accountid=9894> (accessed January 19, 2012).

⁸⁵ Matthew Logan, “Lowered flags show respect Legion shouldn’t play politics,” *The Leader*, May 5, 2006, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/373078707?account=9894> (accessed January 17, 2012).

emotion – behind demands to formally commemorate each and every individual soldier killed in the service of Canada.

Unlike the emotional pole which attaches the individual to an abstract entity – such as a family or metaphoric kin group – the other pole of the flag debate is primarily motivated by instrumental concerns, which are commercial and political in nature. A sample taken from a variety of newspapers and editorials has revealed that the comments submitted to the press in favour of the Harper policy were predominantly written in by veterans and soldiers. A review of the general responses revealed six reoccurring themes: 1) “Where were you in the 1990s?”; 2) Recognition is related to funding; 3) A soldier’s right to agency; 4) “It’s a tragedy, not a crisis”; 5) Lowering the flag would “debase” its use; and, 6) Lowering the flag would unfairly differentiate recent veterans from those who had fought in past wars. The sentiments of this group were centered on the past, with a clear need not to be carried away by the grief of this more modern conflict.

Rick Hillier, who served under both Martin and Harper as CDS, stated in his memoirs that:

I made a commitment from the start that if we took casualties, it would not only be those of us in uniform grieving: all Canadians had to participate and experience that loss in some fashion. We had learned some lessons during the Bosnian campaign and other missions. When the bodies of soldiers came home from those missions, it really seemed as if the only people who noticed were those in uniform, and often not many of them [...] If we were going to take casualties and we were going to grieve, our nation was going to grieve with us. If Canada as a nation was to continue to ask young men and women to go out and put their lives in jeopardy on its behalf, then it owed us that recognition.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Rick Hillier, *A Soldier First: Bullets, Bureaucrats and the Politics of War* (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers, 2009), 445-446.

Hillier disagreed with the Harper government's media black-out on repatriation ceremonies and made a concerted effort to open up access.⁸⁷ While his stance on the half-mast issue remains obscure, as he has remained silent on the issue, one could assume that he was with those inclined towards the instrumental pole, since he was CDS when MND Bill Graham reverted to the "traditional" flag protocol and when DND had created its own internal flag protocol policy. However, as will be seen later, when Hillier spoke of "recognition," it meant something entirely different for him and those who gravitated towards the instrumental pole of the debate.

"Where were the cries of 'respect our troops,' before 2002? Their bodies were repatriated without fanfare or lowering the Peace Tower flag," wrote John E. Neilson of the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals (ret'd), on April 27, 2006, to the *National Post*. "Most Canadians didn't even know these people had died in the service of their country, 26 in the Balkans alone during the 1990s and over 150 in various 'peacekeeping' missions."⁸⁸ Retired Maj. Gen. Lewis MacKenzie, the first commander of the United Nations peacekeeping forces in Sarajevo, stated, "We lost 27 killed in Bosnia/Croatia in the 90s – and by the way, no one paid much attention," he said. "I'm glad to see the public paying attention for a change – particularly those who slashed the budget and personnel strength during the same 90s!"⁸⁹ (The Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans

⁸⁷ Ibid., 447.

⁸⁸ John H Neilson, "The media, war dead and respect," *National Post*, April 27, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1028804191&sid=2&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

⁸⁹ "Lewis MacKenzie," *The Globe and Mail*, April 25, 2006, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/opinions/article822599.ece> (accessed June 24, 2011).

Association (CPVA) casualty report lists 25 Canadians killed in peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslav republic.)⁹⁰

In slaying the national deficit of the 1990s, the Chrétien government had made severe cuts across the board, including personnel and funding at the Department of National Defence. In response to the criticism levelled by both the Liberals and the NDP at the Harper government's stance on the half-mast policy, historian Jack Granatstein commented that, "I think this is the most shameless crap that I've seen in a long time, playing on the dead bodies of soldiers [...] If these people had paid half as much attention to the soldiers' equipment over the last 40 years we would probably have fewer dead."⁹¹ In an op-ed he lashed out at both parties:

To have the New Democratic Party's spokesman calling for lowering the flag on government buildings might be tolerable if the NDP has ever called for more money to be spent on the Canadian Forces [...] The NDP hypocrisy is exceeded, hard as that might be to imagine, by that of the Liberals. The Chrétien government for a decade or more starved the military of funds and failed to replace obsolescent equipment. [...] For the next generation or so, common decency suggests that the Liberals should be very cautious in attacking Conservatives on defence matters [...] The Legion and the NCVA [National Council of Veterans Associations] are right. So too are Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan [...] In an age of hypocrisy, the vets and soldiers alone understand how to act.⁹²

Granatstein's statement is particularly germane to this debate. He, like others who leaned towards the instrumental pole of the debate, suggested that the party that allocated the most funds to DND should have a voice in the commemoration process.

His attacks had a partisan ring – condemning the NDP for not spending enough, and the

⁹⁰ "Canadian Peacekeeping Casualty Figures," CPVA, www.cpva.ca/documents_e/news/obituaries/The%20Fallen.pdf.

⁹¹ John Goddard and Dale Anne Freed, "A small town pays tribute; 2,000 ribbons as Wingham awaits soldier's return Flag ruling 'like a slap in the face,' says bereaved dad," *Toronto Star*, April 26, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1027185351&sid=14&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

⁹² J.L. Granatstein, "Honouring the Dead Without Hypocrisy," *Army Forum*, May 3, 2006, <http://forums.army.ca/forums/index.php?topic=42871.0> (accessed January 11, 2012).

Liberals for cutting the defence budget in the 1990s – that underlined his central point about the 1990s as a dark period for the Canadian military.

For the instrumentalists, the 1990s were dark not just because of budget cuts. “This decade witnessed several controversies,” wrote Howard Fremeth, a policy analyst and communications expert, “such as the Somalia Affair, the failed attempt to stop the Rwandan genocide and the barbaric initiation rituals of the Canadian Airborne Regiment, as well as a defence policy, by Minister of Foreign Affairs Lloyd Axworthy, that positioned that military as a ‘soft power.’”⁹³ The effects of downsizing, coupled with the overextension of the Forces during this period, left many in the CF feeling alienated towards and resentful of the government. This mood led to a strong feeling of us versus them.⁹⁴ When Harper took office in 2006, he intimated that Canada would be a leader in Afghanistan and his government committed more funding towards defence. In March 2006, he flew to Afghanistan and addressed the soldiers – using a more “muscular” tone than his predecessors. “[T]here may be some who want to cut and run,” he said. “But cutting and running is not your way. It’s not my way. And it’s not the Canadian way. We don’t make a commitment and then run away at the first sign of trouble. We don’t and we won’t.”⁹⁵ Lawrence Martin argued that Harper’s “devotion to the war effort and the revitalization of the armed services were part of an effort to shape a Tory patriotism,

⁹³ Howard Fremeth, “Searching for the Militarization of Canadian Culture: The Rise of a Military-Cultural Memory Network,” *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 23-24 (2010): 54.

⁹⁴ Donna Winslow, “Canadian Society and Its Army,” *Canadian Military Journal* 4, no. 4 (Winter 2003-2004): 18.

⁹⁵ “Address by the Prime Minister to the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan,” *PMO*, March 13, 2006, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?category=2&padelid=46&id=1056> (accessed June 24, 2011).

one predicated on symbols and traditions. This was central to his goal of taking the flag away from the Liberal party.”⁹⁶

The intense press scrutiny of the fallen, which created such visceral emotions among certain segments of the Canadian public, was deemed by some as an obstacle to the successful completion of the mission. “If there wasn’t so much media coverage, I don’t think you’d have all this hoopla about bringing the troops home,” said Terry Wickens, Ontario regional president for the Korean Veterans Association of Canada. “People join the forces, they expect to go into action at some time in their career and this is unfortunately what happens.”⁹⁷

Soldiers had agency, and they naturally defined themselves in relation to the flag they served under. “We wear the Canadian flag on the sleeve of our uniform, we salute it every day in theatre and if we are killed, it drapes our coffin,” said Maj. Gen. MacKenzie, paraphrasing an Afghanistan veteran who had called into a Sunday Toronto radio talk show. “That is how the flag respects us. If the public wants to show its respect for us, give us the funding, the equipment, the training and the support to do the job you order us to do.”⁹⁸ Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle captured the unique relationship veterans and soldiers have with the flag: “They hoard the symbolic capital of the flag from those who have not been initiated into the bodily suffering of war. Non-

⁹⁶ Lawrence Martin, *Harperland: The Politics of Control* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2010), 51.

⁹⁷ Bruce Campion-Smith, “Coverage of fallen soldiers’ arrival banned; CFB Trenton bars media; ‘U.S.-style tactics’ condemned Conservatives bar media from homecoming of Canadians killed in Afghanistan,” *Toronto Star*, April 25, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1026556381&sid=14&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

⁹⁸ Lewis MacKenzie, “Respect needs more than a flag,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 25, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1058977731&sid=3&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

initiates are said to be unfit to appropriate the symbolic currency of the flag asserted by those who have become the suffering body it signifies. Embodying what the flag signifies, initiates claim the privilege of issuing, by uttering with their bodies, the meaning of the sign.⁹⁹ It is that sense of “ownership” that gave veterans and soldiers a position of strength on issues of commemoration, particularly with the Peace Tower flag.

Agency is tied to casualties. A soldier’s right to choose combat as a vocation will inevitably expose that soldier to the inherent risks of the battlefield. “In the Canadian government, we have done the opposite,” said Cliff Chadderton, a Second World War veteran. “It’s okay sending troops to Afghanistan – but if there are casualties, let’s play it up as a national disaster. Well, it is a disaster, but it’s not a national disaster.”¹⁰⁰ One commentator, who echoed Chadderton’s assessment, wrote to *The Globe and Mail*, after the four soldiers were killed on April 22, 2006, “Far better to mourn in quiet dignity, marking the loss and then moving on. This is what soldiers do when they lose one of their comrades. That is what we at home should learn to do, too,” he said. “Deaths like this weekend’s are a tragedy but they are not a crisis. We have seen their kind before in our history and we will see them again. They are the cost of defending

⁹⁹ Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, *Blood, Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the Flag* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 44.

¹⁰⁰ Bruce Cheadle, “Media reports ‘over the top,’ vets say; official mourning to be toned down, Tories signal a return to past protocol,” *Toronto Star*, April 24, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1025907781&sid=14&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

freedom.”¹⁰¹ These comments are symptomatic of an underlying fear that the national symbol – which many have fought and died under – would ultimately be “debased” if it is consistently lowered to half-mast.

This fear was bluntly expressed by Maj. Gen. MacKenzie who argued that, “The last thing we want is a trickle of casualties that keeps the flag, our national symbol, at its most important point on the Peace Tower, down for a month and a half.”¹⁰² Christopher McCreery, an expert on heraldry who was in accord with MacKenzie’s line of reasoning stated, “The point in this: When you see a flag at half-mast, you need to pause and reflect on the service given by the person who has died. But if it is routinely lowered to half-mast this effect is lost, and we become blind to the symbolism intended,” he said. “If we seek to honour the brave service of our troops, we should take forward an appreciation of their sacrifice every day, and not reduce their service to an ignominious political debate about ‘flag up or flag down.’”¹⁰³ One commentator posited that, “If every deserving Canadian was honoured by having the flag at half-mast when they died, you’d rarely ever see it flying high over the capital. What Harper did was make a tough

¹⁰¹ “The half-mast protocol,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 25, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1058977871&sid=4&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

¹⁰² John Goddard and Dale Anne Freed, “A small town pays tribute; 2,000 ribbons as Wingham awaits soldier’s return Flag ruling ‘like a slap in the face,’ says bereaved dad,” *Toronto Star*, April 26, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1027185351&sid=14&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

¹⁰³ Christopher McCreery, “Why the flag stays high,” *National Post*, April 27, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1028804291&sid=16&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

decision that is obviously (case and point) going to get major criticism, but was the most reasonable choice to make.”¹⁰⁴

The concern to maintain the utility of the flag was based partly on tradition and history. An anonymous opinion in the *Calgary Herald* illustrated the instrumental reasoning behind keeping the flag at full-mast:

By changing the protocol that served this country so well in times of great hardship to one more determined by politics devalues our past. After all, if the flag were lowered to half-mast for everyone of the 113,000 Canadians who died fighting certain tyranny in the two world wars, our flag would have to be lowered for more than 3000 years – straight. Flying the Peace Tower flag at half-mast is a solemn occasion. The more often it is done, the more its solemnity is compromised and replaced by a sense of it devolving into merely another routine that has lost much of its meaning.¹⁰⁵

The sacrifices of past veterans remained a principal factor in the instrumental justification of the Harper government’s decision to limit half-masting for war-dead to once a year. Lieut. Col. Ian Hope, Task Force Orion commander in Afghanistan in 2006, in the lead up to the 2007 Remembrance Day ceremonies stated that, “To focus upon our recent killed-in-action at the expense of those who preceded us would be wrong. I would like to see our Afghanistan veterans visible by the cenotaphs so that Canadians can see them as a living link to Canada’s past, but I would not draw attention to them.”¹⁰⁶ Emotional considerations were relegated to the sidelines. Safe-guarding the national symbol from further debasement was of paramount concern.

¹⁰⁴ Justin Campeau, “Your Say: Honouring Soldiers,” *CTV.ca*, April 26, 2006. http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Specials/20060425/yoursay_afghanistan_060425/ (accessed January 30, 2012)

¹⁰⁵ Anonymous, “From momentous to mundane,” *Calgary Herald*, April 3, 2008, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.library.carleton.ca/docview/243758060?accountid=9894> (accessed January 18, 2012).

¹⁰⁶ Rosie DiManno, “Afghanistan lends new focus ritual Memorials resonate more now,” *Toronto Star*, November 10, 2007, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.library.carleton.ca/docview/439321705?accountid=9894> (accessed October 19, 2011).

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The Harper government remained steadfast on the flag, but not on everything and not particularly on the media ban on repatriation ceremonies. On May 17, 2006, the government put forward a House of Commons motion to extend Canada's military presence in Kandahar until 2009. It passed by a slim majority of 149-145. James Laxer observed that the "debate was rushed and perfunctory, without the benefit of serious parliamentary hearing and input. MPs were notified only two days prior to the debate that it would be held, and they addressed the issue for only six hours."¹⁰⁷ A Strategic Counsel poll conducted in May found that 54 percent of Canadians were against the further deployment of troops into Afghanistan.¹⁰⁸

That same day Nichola Goddard was killed. After the vote, Harper told the House that:

On behalf of all Canadians, I wish to express our profound regret and sadness at the news of the death of Captain Nichola Goddard. Captain Goddard died helping bring peace, stability, and democracy to a troubled region of the world. She, and the other men and women who serve in Afghanistan, are involved in a difficult and dangerous mission. They are serving our country and its people with distinction. Our nation will not forget their sacrifice.¹⁰⁹

At his daughter's funeral, Tim Goddard delivered a moving eulogy that directly challenged the Conservative government's media ban: "I would like to think that Nichola died to protect our freedoms, not to restrict them [...] I cannot support the privacy decision. There was room on the tarmac for a military videographer and a still

¹⁰⁷ James Laxer, *Mission of Folly: Canada and Afghanistan* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2008), 5.

¹⁰⁸ "Most Cdns. oppose Afghanistan deployment: poll," *CTV News*, May 6, 2006, http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/TopStories/20060506/conservative_poll_060506/ (accessed June 20, 2011).

¹⁰⁹ Valerie Fortney, *Sunray: The Death and Life of Captain Nichola Goddard* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2010), 278.

photographer. They did not intrude on our grief.”¹¹⁰ Upon hearing the news, the Prime Minister back-peddled and lifted the ban: “I’m troubled to hear that [...] I had fairly clear instructions that when bodies were to come home, families should be consulted and if all families agreed on making that particular ceremony public, then I thought our government should have no difficulty with that [...] Obviously I’ll look into it and find out if the family’s wishes were different from what was done, why that was the case and we’ll correct it in the future.”¹¹¹ Days later the media blackout was lifted, but the flag protocol remained the same. Goddard sided with the Prime Minister when it came to the flag issue: “Lowering it on Remembrance Day is a stronger symbol of remembrance [...] I worry sometimes about the politicization of these things.”¹¹²

* * *

On March 13, 2008, the House of Commons voted 198-77 to extend the military deployment to Afghanistan until the end of 2011. Conservatives and the Liberals supported the motion; the NDP and the Bloc voted against it. Canadians were less certain that it was the right course of action; an Angus-Reid Strategies poll conducted in March revealed that 58 percent were against the extended deployment.¹¹³ In an

¹¹⁰ Lee-Anne Goodman, “PM flies into burst of flak at funeral of female soldier,” *Prince George Citizen*, May 27, 2006, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.library.carleton.ca/docview/361741620?account=9894> (accessed January 19, 2012).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Norma Greenaway, “Majority want flag lowered: poll; More women back honour for fallen soldiers,” *Calgary Herald*, April 9, 2008, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.library.carleton.ca/docview/243737187?accountid=9894> (accessed January 18, 2012).

¹¹³ “More Canadians Oppose Afghanistan Extension,” *Angus Reid Public Opinion*, July 10, 2008, http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/32775/more_canadians_oppose_afghanistan_extension/ (accessed December 21, 2011).

attempt to re-engage the flag issue, on April 2, 2008, the House of Commons voted on a motion put forward by Liberal MP Andrew Telegdi. The motion intended to:

[S]how respect and to honour Canadian Forces and other Canadian government personnel who are killed while serving in overseas peacekeeping, peacemaking or humanitarian missions, the government should lower the flag on the Peace Tower to half-[mast] for the day following their demise as a remembrance of their important service to Canada and Canadians and that a moment of silence to be observed in the House, if the House is sitting on that same day.¹¹⁴

The wording of the motion is worthy of some analysis. The term “peacekeeping” is repeatedly used, for it was, presumably, a widely understood concept among Canadians. This was not just sophistry on the part of Telegdi. The notion of peacekeeping had undergone a transformation, influenced by the heavy fighting in Afghanistan. Anker speaks to the issue of peacekeeping having evolved “to the point where demands placed on peacekeepers transcend their traditional role, rendering it virtually unrecognizable to its founders.” A report by Lieut. Gen. Romeo Dallaire in 2001, called “Debrief the Leaders,” suggested a coming convergence between the role of the traditional peacekeeper and the traditional soldier; Peter Kasurak explains that:

The report predicted that officers of the future would need a military ethos that retained the concept of the soldier as a warrior while complementing it with the concepts of the soldier as diplomat and scholar. In summary, the objective of the profession “will be viable international relations, not a defeated opponent, stability and the cessation of violence, not the classic battlefield success.”¹¹⁵

The roles of the peacekeeper and the warrior, in short, were easily conflated. The Telegdi motion passed 142-115; no Conservatives broke rank.¹¹⁶ Public opinion was with Telegdi. An Ipsos Reid poll revealed that two-thirds (66 percent) of Canadians wanted

¹¹⁴ “Half-masting of Peace Tower Flag,” *Openparliament.ca*, January 29, 2008, <http://openparliament.ca/hansards/376/236/#hl> (accessed December 8, 2011).

¹¹⁵ Peter Kasurak, “Concepts of Professionalism in the Canadian Army, 1946-2000: Regimentalism, Reaction, and Reform,” *Armed Forces & Society* 37, no 1 (2011): 112.

¹¹⁶ “Peace Tower flag-lowering motion passes,” *CBC News*, April 2, 2008, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2008/04/02/flag-motion.html> (accessed June 20, 2011).

the flag to be lowered for each soldier killed in combat operations. They also wanted the flag to be lowered on Remembrance Day to honour collectively all soldiers.¹¹⁷ As the Telegdi motion was considered non-binding, the Harper government ignored it. Instead, the government pointed to a report (never officially released to the public) commissioned in April 2007. Jason Kenney, Secretary of State of Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity, had asked Robert Watt, Rideau Herald Emeritus (former Chief Herald of Canada, 1988-2007), to offer recommendations on the half-masting issue. In a letter to Kenney, Watt, speaking on behalf of his colleagues¹¹⁸, stated that “we strongly believe that there is only one commemorative day each year when the National Flag needs to be half-masted [...] That is Remembrance Day. Our rationale in this case is that the coinage of half-masting has been debased.”¹¹⁹ Telegdi was not pleased by the Conservative tactic, and in an editorial in the *Waterloo Region Record* he vented his frustration: “The Harper government commissioned a secret report on my private member’s motion. This is gross interference. To not make the report available before the vote on the motion is also contemptuous of Parliament. Canadians affected by a decision to half-mast the flag were not consulted [...] Half-masting the flag to honour a fallen soldier is important to the grieving families, friends, comrades, and many

¹¹⁷ Norma Greenaway, “Lower the flag, Canadians say in poll,” *Ottawa Citizen*, April 9, 2008, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1460730781&sid=17&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

¹¹⁸ Other members of the federal advisory committee included: Claire Boudeau, Chief Herald of Canada (2007-present), Brad White, an officer with the Royal Canadian Legion, and historians René Chartrand and Jacques Monet.

¹¹⁹ Tim Naumetz, “Ottawa advised not to lower flag for dead soldiers,” *Toronto Star*, March 31, 2008, <http://www.thestar.com/printarticle/407748> (accessed December 6, 2011).

Canadians. Lowering the flag does not take away from Remembrance Day. Indeed it, adds to it.”¹²⁰

On April 3, 2008, the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage was tasked with considering Watt’s recommendations. The committee, headed by Conservative MP Jim Abbott, had four other members of the House of Commons. Conservative MPs Michael Chong and Abbott hewed to the instrumental line of reasoning, while Liberal MPs Andy Scott, Hedy Fry and Denis Coderre beat the emotional drum. The Liberal members wanted the April 2 vote in House of Commons vote honoured; the Conservative members would not think of it. The committee was effectively deadlocked. Abbott, clearly dismayed by the failure of the Liberal members to consent to the half-masting recommendation made by Robert Watt and his colleagues, stated in his closing remarks that, “The government wants to give the responsibility to the committee, and the committee is saying we’d just as soon not bother.”¹²¹ The flag on the Peace Tower remained at full-mast, only to be lowered on Remembrance Day.

* * *

The debates of 2006 and 2008 revealed that, at the elite level, the emotional and instrumental arguments for and against half-masting the Peace Tower flag were along party lines. The Liberals and the NDP argued for and voted in favour of half-masting,

¹²⁰ Andrew Telegdi, “Our war dead deserve a half-masted flag,” *Waterloo Region Record*, April 11, 2008, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.library.carleton.ca/docview/267253494?accountid=9894> (accessed January 19, 2012).

¹²¹ “House of Commons Committees - CHPC (39-2) - Evidence - Number 024,” *Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage*, April 3, 2008, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=3388422&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=39&Ses=2> (accessed December 9, 2011).

while the Conservatives argued and voted in favour of limiting half-masting. As for the general public, however, it cannot be said that those on the emotional side were Liberals or New Democrats. The same is true of those who gravitated toward the instrumental pole; there is no proof that they were affiliated with the Conservative party. It came down instead to this: support for a decision to break tradition and demand that the flag be lowered, or to uphold tradition and demand that the flag be kept flying high, was based on and justified by, either an emotional concern for the soldiers and their families or an instrumental concern that the flag must not be debased.

In 2008, going by polling data and the House of Commons vote, Canadians seem to have positioned themselves closer to the emotional pole of the debate. Yet the Conservative government of Stephen Harper discounted emotional arguments in favour of instrumental concerns. Though he eventually lifted the media ban on repatriation ceremonies, he continued to adhere to the old flag protocol, ensuring that the fallen would not be honoured at the summit of the nation.

In an age where technology is shrinking the distance between the home front and the battlefield, and soldiers are becoming personalised to a degree unheard of in previous wars, the public sphere and the emotional component of the argument increasingly became more important. Yet governments reasoned, or acted, otherwise. In their analysis of the political marketing of the Afghanistan mission, Joseph F. Fletcher, Heather Bastedo, and Jennifer Hove have argued that:

The Canadian government began a conversation with the public about Afghanistan but failed to connect on an emotional level. As a consequence they won some minds but too few hearts. On both sides of the House, party leaders turned to elite accommodation, rather than continued conversation with an engaged public. In this light, concerns about the inadequacy of the public in foreign policy debates and, more generally, in democratic

governance are misplaced for they are premised on too thin an appreciation of how citizens arrive at a political judgment.¹²²

As Fletcher, Bastedo, and Hove pointed out, such thinking was not restricted to the Harper government. “[A]ll Canadian governments since 2001 – those of Jean Chrétien, of Paul Martin, and of Stephen Harper – tried to downplay Canada’s military actions in Afghanistan,” wrote Stein and Lang. “An analysis of 139 official statements made by prime ministers, ministers of national defence, and ministers of foreign affairs between September 2001 and September 2009 found that political leaders acknowledged Canadian casualties on only 17 occasions.”¹²³

A Strategic Council poll conducted in March 2006 indicated that 89 percent of Canadians knew that Canada had troops in Afghanistan, suggesting that Canadians had been aware of media coverage of the mission. However, support for the mission was split, with 55 percent of Canadians supporting the mission and 41 percent opposed. But they were not split on the soldiers. The poll revealed that 73 percent of Canadians had a “strong emotional connection” with the troops in Afghanistan. Strikingly, about 70 percent believed the purpose of the mission was peacekeeping, not combat, while 26 percent assumed the opposite.¹²⁴ The mission would take a decisively deadly turn for the Allied forces in 2006, when, in the words of Stein and Lang, suicide bombings “more than quintupled, from 27 a year earlier to 139; roadside explosions more than doubled

¹²² Joseph F. Fletcher, Heather Bastedo and Jennifer Hove, “Losing Heart: Declining Support and Political Marketing of the Afghanistan Mission,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 4 (December 2009): 931.

¹²³ Jean-Christophe Boucher, “Evaluating the ‘Trenton Effect’: Canadian Public Opinion and Military Casualties in Afghanistan (2006-2010),” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no. 2 (June 2010): 240.

¹²⁴ “Perceptions and Views of Canadian Armed Forces Troops in Afghanistan,” *The Strategic Counsel*, (March, 2006), [www.thestrategiccounsel.com/our_news/polls/2006-03-13 GMCTV Mar 9-12 \(Mar13\) Afghanistan-Rev.pdf](http://www.thestrategiccounsel.com/our_news/polls/2006-03-13_GMCTV_Mar_9-12_(Mar13)_Afghanistan-Rev.pdf)

from 783 to 1,667; and direct attacks nearly tripled from 1,558 to 4,552.”¹²⁵ Yet many Canadians still thought of the mission as a peacekeeping one.

The strong emotional connection Canadians had with the troops was forged as the casualties from Afghanistan increased. Canadians were inundated with images of the fallen: images of maple leaf caskets coming off the plane at CFB Trenton, images of the grieving family members left behind in the wake of this war. Elaborate obituaries in print and in the media flooded the airwaves, personalizing the fallen like never before. Canadians clearly understood who was dying. As a means to participate, to grieve for those who paid the ultimate sacrifice, and to acknowledge the loss of the families of the fallen, the emotional pole demanded a simple commemorative gesture – that the Peace Tower flag be lowered.

The Harper government denied such a gesture, so ordinary Canadians responded with one of their own. In 2009, Toronto firefighter Larry Lalonde petitioned various companies along the Highway of Heroes. He asked that they start a new tradition – to lower all of their flags to half-mast, in honour of the fallen making their journey from CFB Trenton to Toronto. “I realize[d] that Ottawa has some protocols but sometimes I feel that we have to refine some of these protocols, for not all of them are carved in stone,”¹²⁶ he said. The first person he approached was Sandra Kaiser, vice president of corporate affairs at Smart Centres. “It’s the least we can do,” said Kaiser. “You have men and women who are serving in Afghanistan and other dangerous places. It’s a

¹²⁵ Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007), 287.

¹²⁶ Pete Fisher, *Highway of Heroes: True Patriot Love* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2011), 131.

simple gesture to show respect to the fallen soldiers who are coming back.”¹²⁷ Now, when the fallen come back home, the flag on the Peace Tower remains at full-mast, but the flags along the Highway of Heroes are lowered by businesses and ordinary Canadians alike.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 131.

Chapter Two

Shipped: "The Living Memorial"

On September 7, 2008, Sgt. Scott Shipway, an infantryman with the Second Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI), based in Shilo, Manitoba, was killed when his armoured vehicle struck an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) during a security patrol in Panjwaii District. "His children were his first and greatest source of pride. His second pride was his life with the military," said Capt. Darren Persaud, the battle group chaplain, during his address the following day at the ramp ceremony at Kandahar Air Field (KAF). "He watched over his men, like a father guards his children, and that is how he will be forever remembered."¹²⁸ Sgt. Shipway or "Papa Shipway," as he was referred to by his fellow soldiers, was the 97 casualty of the Afghanistan mission. He left behind his wife Deanna and two children, Hayden and Rowan. In his home province of Saskatchewan, the flags at the legislature were ordered to fly at half-mast until the day of his funeral. Like the 96 who fell before him, Sgt. Shipway's body made the 10,000 kilometre-trip from KAF to Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Trenton, where all Canadian Forces (CF) personnel are repatriated.

On September 10, 2008, approximately 150 people lined the chain-link fence outside the base. Some wore red Support Our Troops t-shirts, others waved their Canadian flags, and a few even held up placards with their condolences. "I come to as many as I can, and it always leaves me feeling a little better about things," said Sue

¹²⁸ Scott Deveau, "Ramp ceremony begins repatriation for 97th casualty," *National Post*, September 7, 2008, <http://www.nationalpost.com/story.html?id=776016> (accessed May 20, 2011).

Evans, who lives in nearby Belleville, Ontario. "I suppose I'm not sure why. I suppose I'm trying to show how much I care about military families who suffer the loss of a son or husband."¹²⁹ Meanwhile, as the repatriation ceremony at CFB Trenton got underway, crowds began to congregate on the fifty nine overpasses between CFB Trenton and Toronto.¹³⁰ The 172-kilometre route, part of Highway 401, was designated by the Ontario government in August 2007 as the Highway of Heroes. Ken Calverley, a 75-year-old veteran who served in the British army as a youth, made the trip to one of the overpasses near his home town of Ajax, Ontario, 25 kilometres east of Toronto. "You've got to think about the relations ... When they see the people up here on the bridge, it will hopefully give them a lift,"¹³¹ he said while unfurling his big Canadian flag that would be visible to the family that would soon pass by in the cortege below. "It is curious to me that I am compulsively drawn to these things," wrote Christie Blatchford of *The Globe and Mail*. "It's as if I need to suffer a little – if not physically, as the infantry likes to do, then emotionally – so as to keep the pain fresh and alive."¹³²

In death, Canadian soldiers from Afghanistan were personalized. In this war "[w]e know who his friends were; they posted their mourning on *Facebook* before the

¹²⁹ Bruce Ward, "Daddy's finally home; Hundreds of roadside mourners watched yesterday as the coffin of another Canadian soldier kills in Afghanistan was moved from a heartbreaking ceremony to its final resting place, Bruce Ward write from CFB Trenton," *Ottawa Citizen*, September 11, 2008, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1554695801&sid=4&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

¹³⁰ Joseph F. Fletcher and Jennifer Hove, "Emotional Determinants of Support for the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan: A View from the Bridge," <http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2010/Fletcher-Hove.pdf>, 3.

¹³¹ Peter Kuitenbrouwer, "Paying respect on the Highway of Heroes; Hearses saluted in overseas ritual," *National Post*, September 11, 2008, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1554235711&sid=2&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

¹³² Christie Blatchford, "We owe the dead soldiers our attention," *The Globe and Mail*, December 17, 2008, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1613357461&sid=6&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

papers knew he had been killed,” wrote Stephen March, of *Maclean’s* magazine. “This time we know who is dying.”¹³³ Past war memorials paid tribute to a collective experience – large stone monuments crafted to honour the Unknown Soldier or large groups of the fallen, almost always years or decades after the end of the war. In this war, Canadians were suffused with images – on television, print and social media – of the fallen. The individual was paramount. Canadians knew who was being sacrificed and they witnessed the cost of that sacrifice on the faces of the grieving families.

The ritual of death is both official and unofficial, bureaucratic and personal, public and private. Once the closest kin had been notified of the death of the soldier, a portrait of the fallen would be presented by the media. For the days following the death, the portrait would be attached in a virtual link through new and old media to the covered body resting in a flag-draped coffin. As the body made its way back to CFB Trenton for the repatriation ceremony, images of the grief stricken family members, consoling one another, and a glimpse of the maple leaf casket were splashed on television screens across the country. On route to Toronto, there were dramatic scenes of people lining the bridges: “Soccer moms, firefighters, legion members too; School kids and teachers, folks like me and you; Standing at attention with the Maple Leaf held high”¹³⁴ sang Bob Reid, the composer of the “Highway of Heroes” Song. The maple leaf casket, out of view, played no public role, for the commemorations along the Highway of Heroes are for the living, not the dead. The contents of the hearse, the soldier’s body,

¹³³ Stephen Marche, “The return of Private Todd,” *Maclean’s*, May 5, 2010, <http://www2.macleans.ca/2010/05/05/the-return-of-private-todd/3/> (accessed December 13, 2010).

¹³⁴ Bob Reid, “Highway of Heroes Song,” *North Star Music* (Canada), 2009, <http://www.highwayofheroessong.com> (accessed October 12, 2010).

would only be revealed to a team of specialists at the Center of Forensic Sciences autopsy lab in Toronto, the end of the journey down the Highway of Heroes.

This chapter will outline the key developments that led to the Highway of Heroes being recognized as an official memorial site. I will then illustrate – using Sgt. Shipway as a case study – how the commemorative process unfolded once the fallen were repatriated to CFB Trenton. From the portrait of the fallen, our gaze is shifted to the grieving families, and then once more to the individuals who lined the route. As the emotions of those who lined the route have been commoditized or instrumentalized, the individual, or onlooker, has taken precedence in the commemorative process. The Highway of Heroes venerates the living, it celebrates the onlookers, and is, therefore, a living memorial.

* * *

Pete Fisher, a photographer for the *Cobourg Daily Star*, began documenting the spontaneous gatherings along Highway 401 on April 20, 2002, when the first four casualties of the Afghanistan mission were shipped back to CFB Trenton. 30 people in Port Hope, Ontario, came out to pay their respects to the families of the deceased that day. They stood on the overpasses lining the route; some waved their flags and saluted; others simply stood silent. “It is like it is the Field of Dreams,” said one bystander. “People will just appear, walking up the street to the bridge, coming out of nowhere.”¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Joe O’Connor, “‘How couldn’t we be here?’; A Canadian soldier returns home from Afghanistan,” *National Post*, May 7, 2010, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=2028862951&sid=8&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

From 2002 to 2005, there were 8 Canadians killed overseas in Afghanistan, and with the return of each one the crowds along the Highway of Heroes grew larger. In 2006, 37 Canadian soldiers were killed; in 2007, another 13 lost their lives; and the next year, 32 more soldiers were sent home in maple leaf caskets. The gatherings along the route grew substantially, mushrooming from a few hundred in 2002 to several thousand onlookers in 2008, with groups from Trenton all the way to Toronto.

In June 2007, Joe Warmington, a veteran columnist for the *Toronto Sun*, devised the idea of renaming the processional route, after hearing that three more soldiers – Cpl. Stephen Bouzane, Pte. Joel Vincent Wiebe and Sgt. Christos Karigiannis – had been killed by an IED. “It just popped in my head. I thought of [the name] Highway of Heroes, and I knew right away it would be a good headline,”¹³⁶ said Warmington. What started as a headline seemed to capture the imagination and sentiment expressed by many Canadians. On June 27, Fisher’s photograph of the procession of the three deceased soldiers was coupled with Warmington’s new tag line in the *Toronto Sun*.

¹³⁶ Pete Fisher, *Highway of Heroes: True Patriot Love* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2011), 42.

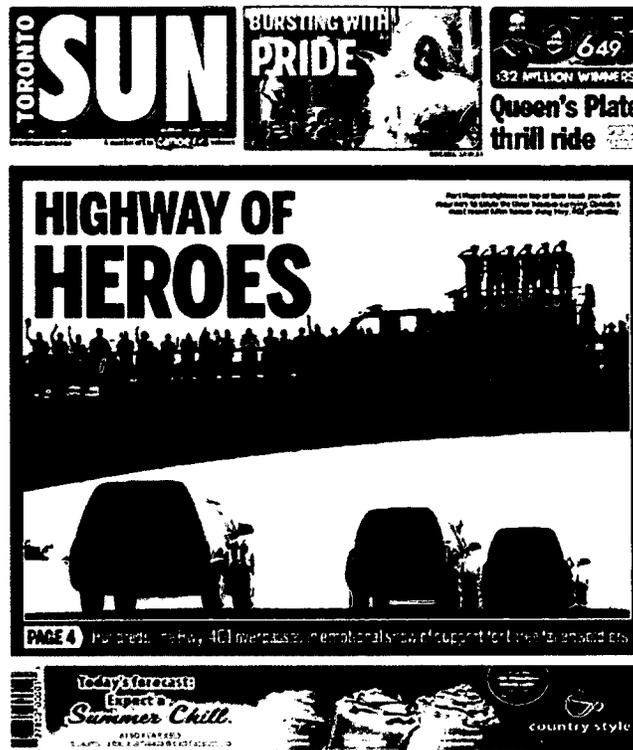


Fig. 1

A few weeks later, on July 13, 2007, Fisher wrote an article for the *Cobourg Daily Star* and the *Port Hope Evening Guide* entitled, “Highway of Heroes: Let’s Make It Official?”:

Five years after the first procession went through Northumberland County, hundreds of people – farmers, business people, firefighters, paramedics, police officers, Legion members, kids – pay tribute to the husbands, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters who have given their lives for their country [...] Everyone by now knows someone, or someone with a relation, who has been, or is, in Afghanistan [...] It would be a fitting tribute to all the people who stand on the bridges, and for all the families who have lost loved ones. Most of all, it would honour our soldiers who die so others can live a better life.¹³⁷

Jay Forbes, a twenty-two-year-old resident of London, Ontario, who planned to enlist in the armed forces, came across Fisher’s article. He began an online petition, garnering approximately 20,000 signatures, which created significant political pressure for the highway to receive a memorial designation. In August 2007, Fisher mentioned the idea

¹³⁷ Ibid., 47.

to Lou Rinaldi, Liberal MPP in Fisher's riding of Northumberland-Quinte West. Rinaldi later spoke to Donna Cansfield, Ontario's transportation minister. She liked the idea so much that she brought it to the attention of Premier Dalton McGuinty. Later that month, on the 24th, Premier McGuinty announced that the 172-kilometer route from Canadian Forces Base Trenton to Toronto – part of the 401 route – would be designated as the Highway of Heroes. When asked to comment on the new commemorative designation, Minister Cansfield stated that, "When someone does give that sacrifice it's a way to pay a kind of deference and honour and respect, not only to those individuals but their families. It's like a living legacy."¹³⁸

The formal unveiling ceremony took place on September 7, 2007, on top of the overpass in Port Hope, where the first ceremonies had been conducted five years earlier. "This Highway of Heroes reminds us that our freedom, safety, and prosperity is often purchased by the sacrifice of others," said Premier McGuinty. "We owe them a great debt – and while we can never repay that debt, we can see to it that their courage and commitment will always be remembered."¹³⁹

The act of remembering remains both private and public, but the commemoration of the war in Afghanistan has made the private sphere – particularly private grief – public with images of the deceased and their families. William Watson of the *Ottawa Citizen* observed that, "Each [soldier] dies five times: with the first news of the fatalities;

¹³⁸ Meagan Fitzpatrick, "Highway of Heroes to honour fallen soldiers; Section of 401 between Trenton and Toronto to receive memorial designation," *Ottawa Citizen*, August 25, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1326465991&sid=4&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

¹³⁹ Dalton McGuinty, "'Highway of Heroes' Signs Unveiled Along Highway 401," *Office of the Premier*, September 7, 2007, <http://www.premier.gov.on.ca/news/event.php?ItemID=3752&Lang=en> (accessed December 20, 2010).

when their names are released [...]; at the departure ceremonies at Kabul or Kandahar; when their bodies arrive home; and finally, at their funerals.”¹⁴⁰ Sgt. Shipway effectively died five times in the public sphere, igniting a cascade of images that circulated widely in the press and through social media. The images that were splashed on television screens and newspapers across the country were split into two frames: the first included an image of the fallen soldier – Sgt. Shipway, in this case – and the second frame included an image of his grieving family. Thus, the dead and the living were connected. “Nothing can bring it home like the faces of the dead,” said historian Serge Durlinger. “They can be your neighbour, they can be your son. They can be people you played hockey with, members of your community, people you volunteer with. They all look like someone you’ve seen somewhere. It makes [Canadians] understand we’re at war to a far greater extent than they did before.”¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ William Watson, “Afghanistan riddle is hardly elementary,” *Ottawa Citizen*, October 17, 2006, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/240993740?accountid=9894> (accessed October 18, 2011).

¹⁴¹ Les Perreux, “Afghanistan tops editors’ poll; Rising toll brings home the danger as war outranks Conservatives’ election victory,” *Toronto Star*, January 2, 2007, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/439150679?accountid=9894> (accessed October 19, 2011).



Fig. 2

Fig. 3

The conflation of the soldier's image (Fig. 2) with that of a ramp ceremony and his grieving family (Fig. 3) personalized the sorrow felt by the public at large. "By now Canadians are becoming numbingly familiar with the TV pictures from these ceremonies – the solemn honour guard, the impassive dignitaries, the piper's lament. But nothing prepares an onlooker for the heartbroken wails of a little girl with buttery hair who has lost her father,"¹⁴² wrote Bruce Ward of the *Ottawa Citizen* at Sgt. Shipway's repatriation ceremony. The "little girl with the buttery hair" is Rowan, Sgt. Shipway's daughter. Here, indeed, is one family's terrible grief made public. The image on the right (Fig. 3) illustrates Sgt. Shipway's maple leaf casket in the foreground, although the body remains hidden from view. In the background, in the bottom right corner, Sgt. Shipway's wife, Deanna, consoles Rowan. Her head is tilted downwards as she holds onto a stuffed teddy bear and a single red rose. Deanna has her arms wrapped around her daughter's

¹⁴² Bruce Ward, "Daddy's finally home; Hundreds of roadside mourners watched yesterday as the coffin of another Canadian soldier kills in Afghanistan was moved from a heartbreaking ceremony to its final resting place, Bruce Ward write from CFB Trenton," *Ottawa Citizen*, September 11, 2008, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1554695801&sid=4&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

tiny frame, while she looks up at the military procession as they solemnly march by. Sgt. Shipway is gone and all that remains are the living, his family.

Grieving families are a familiar theme and often the centerpiece of media coverage, even more so than the soldiers' bodies. They feed into a collective sense of guilt: the burden of sacrifice has been disproportionably borne by a select few, while the majority of Canadians have not been forced to sacrifice. The Highway of Heroes "is a ritual of giving back, of national grieving, and what it provides to the assembled mourners is a sense of belonging to a larger community; a sense that they are doing what they can,"¹⁴³ wrote Joe O'Connor of the *National Post*. Those who lined the route and bridges of the Highway of Heroes mourned the loss of the soldiers that passed them as a loss to the wider community. As one academic has written, this public mourning allows "the public [to] express grief and pity for an imaginary family member."¹⁴⁴ The grieving for this "imaginary family member" pivots the commemorative gaze away from the deceased soldier and directs the gaze towards the families of the fallen.

While we can not know all of what draws the onlookers to the Highway, many testify to the need to "show respect for the family and how much we appreciate their loss."¹⁴⁵ "It is ... to show our respect to the families," said Rev. Paul Acton, a member of

¹⁴³ Joe O'Connor, "'How couldn't we be here?'; A Canadian soldier returns home from Afghanistan," *National Post*, May 7, 2010, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=2028862951&sid=8&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

¹⁴⁴ Anthony King, "The Afghan War and 'Postmodern' Memory: Commemoration and the Dead of Helmand," *The British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 1 (2010): 18.

¹⁴⁵ Don Martin, "A Canadian tradition that brings out the best; Salute to fallen soldiers a ritual worth exporting," *National Post*, March 14, 2009, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1661972371&sid=8&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

the Canadian Army Veterans Motorcycle Association. "It is an important thing to bring back a soldier even if he's in a coffin, they need to come home."¹⁴⁶ Stated Bill Truman, president of an area motorcycle club, 1st Cav., whose members include many army veterans, "They are over there doing their duty. The least we can do is show our respect when they come back in these conditions."¹⁴⁷

The sentiment of it is 'the least we can do' runs throughout the discourse in the Highway of Heroes. Through these acts of public commemoration, many Canadians feel the need to participate and to partake in the grief. This relates to a sense of helplessness in the face of a contentious war. "The public no longer share the same experience of national threat and collective sacrifice," writes Anthony King. "For the armed forces, the domestic sphere has become a crucial way of reintegrating professional soldiers into the national community, especially since the media demand a personal perspective on casualties."¹⁴⁸ The media tacitly understood that it was far more expedient to engage the public on a visceral level with personal interest stories. In so doing, the biasing of the emotional over the political is reinforced. The Highway of Heroes phenomenon is a by-product of this shift in sentiment and so was the flag debate.

* * *

¹⁴⁶ Tobin Dalrymple, "Showing respect to soldiers' families; Hundreds line road as soldiers' bodies repatriated," *Ottawa Citizen*, August 27, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1328290701&sid=4&Fmt=3clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

¹⁴⁷ Robert Sibley, "It's so sad they come home this way'; Hundreds turn out to support families of six slain soldiers," *Ottawa Citizen*, July 9, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1303066101&sid=8&Fmt=3clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

¹⁴⁸ Anthony King, "The Afghan War and 'Postmodern' Memory: Commemoration and the Dead of Helmand," *The British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 1 (2010): 18.

Once the repatriation ceremony is concluded, the maple leaf casket is loaded into a black hearse. The family of the fallen normally rides behind in a convoy of black sedans. Police cars, with lights flashing, escort the military procession outside the gates of CFB Trenton. When Capt. James Francis, a forward observation officer and artillery co-ordinator with 1 Royal Canadian Horse Artillery, was killed by a roadside bomb on July 4, 2007, his aunt Melanie Murray chronicled her experience riding in the military cortege down the Highway of Heroes:

The streets are packed with people, dressed in red and white, waving Canadian flags, holding up signs:

WE SUPPORT OUR TROOPS
THANKS FOR OUR FREEDOM
WE LOVE YOU

Veterans, in navy berets and meal-bedecked blazers, salute with knowing eyes – *there, but for the Grace of God, go I*. Children in white-shirts wave small plastic flags. Hand over hearts, firefighters stand rigid on the roof of their engines, huge Canadian flags flying from the top of the extended ladders.¹⁴⁹

The viewer at home who watched this solemn commemoration for a dead soldier on television, or read the front page of a newspaper, was inundated with images of the living – policemen, firefighters, veterans, and hockey moms and dads. The memorial highway seemed to come alive with people; death was rendered invisible, as the body resided in a casket, hidden in a hearse.

¹⁴⁹ Melanie Murray, *For Your Tomorrow: The Way of an Unlikely Soldier* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2011), 195.



Fig. 4

Fig. 5

What were those lining the route, or those above on the multitude of bridges that intersect the Highway of Heroes, looking at? They were waiting for the motorcade of black vehicles to pass them by. Some bystanders might receive a simple wave from those in the cortege, yet others may encounter something much more emotive. “I just locked eyes with one woman,” said Hazel Reagan, a resident of Toronto. “Maybe a mother or a sister. She had tears in her eyes and I had tears in my eyes and we had a meeting of grief.”¹⁵⁰ In this particular moment, two private citizens – one grieving the loss of a loved one, the other paying her respects – grieved together, not privately, but in the public sphere.

¹⁵⁰ Peter Kuitenbrouwer, “Paying respect on the Highway of Heroes; Hearses saluted in overseas ritual,” *National Post*, September 11, 2008, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1554235711&sid=2&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).



Fig. 6

All along the route, the families of the fallen also encountered numerous Canadian flags, in all shapes and sizes. They were not at half-mast, but they were visible – held, waved, and draped along the multitude of overpasses that intersect the highway. In 2009, several corporations¹⁵¹ with offices on the Highway of Heroes joined the onlookers and lowered their flags in honour of the fallen. “Kids need to understand the sacrifice these boys made. Being out here turns the troops into real people,”¹⁵² said Colleen Sabian, on July 9, 2007, with her three children standing beside her, as she waited for the procession of black vehicles to pass by. Though 158 soldiers had been killed in Afghanistan, it was the grieving families in the convoys that made them real to those lining the route. It is for that reason that the Highway of Heroes is a living monument. The living legacy is transferred to the families of the fallen, which permits ordinary citizens to partake in the private grief of a mourning family by displaying it in the public sphere. In that moment, the onlookers along the route became the focal point of this new commemorative process.

¹⁵¹ Pete Fisher, *Highway of Heroes: True Patriot Love* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2011), 134.

¹⁵² Matt Hartley, “These boys fought with honour,” *The Globe and Mail*, July 9, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1301319721&sid=6&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).



Fig. 7

After the bodies of the fallen soldiers made the 172-kilometre journey from CFB Trenton to Toronto, a formal autopsy was conducted. In an interview with Dr. Micheal Pollanen, Ontario's chief forensic pathologist, *The Globe and Mail* reported, "A typical autopsy might involve a pathologist and two assistants; a soldier's post-mortem also includes an X-ray technician, two military investigators, a military doctor, a forensic dentist and occasionally a forensic anthropologist."¹⁵³ It is only now that the body is truly revealed – not to the public, but to a team of specialists, and far from the act of commemoration. Joseph Hall of the *Toronto Star* examined how military and medical analysts were probing the deaths of Canadian soldiers to improve upon existing battlefield equipment and medical techniques.¹⁵⁴ "We hope that we can learn from them to protect other soldiers,"¹⁵⁵ said Dr. Bonita Porter, deputy chief coroner of the Toronto Center of Forensic Sciences. The damaged body, ravaged by an IED explosion or riddled with shrapnel, appeared to those specialists – privately in the confines of the autopsy room – as a victim of battle, but also as an opportunity to learn something from

¹⁵³ Anthony Reinhart, "His work begins when a soldier's life ends," *The Globe and Mail*, November 7, 2009, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1895621611&sid=6&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

¹⁵⁴ Joseph Hall, "Autopsies on fallen soldiers reveal ways to save their comrades," *Toronto Star*, June 12, 2009, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1745221871&sid=4&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

the war, a way to prevent others from encountering the same fate. The autopsy room, clinical and non-emotional, contrasted markedly with the outpouring of grief witnessed at the Highway of Heroes. In this setting, there were no flags – symbolism gave way to reality.



Fig. 8

Fig. 9

After the autopsy, the bodies went back home. On September 18, 2008, Sgt. Shipway's maple leaf casket was transported to his home town of Esterhazy, Saskatchewan, 175 kilometres east of Regina. Yellow ribbons and tiny maple leaf flags lined the entranceway to the S.N. Boreen Community Centre, where the last ceremony would take place. Soldiers from Second Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) – Shipway's unit – escorted the body. "He loved his job, but he loved his family even more," said Deanna Shipway. "To his two children, he was a hero – not because he was a soldier, but because he was 'Daddy.'"¹⁵⁶ The soldier was no longer a servant of the state, but a family member, made more so in this final moment of

¹⁵⁶ Canada.com, "Town honours its fallen soldier," *The Leader-Post* (Regina), September 19, 2008, http://www.canada.com/story_print.html?id=3cf60ef3-da6f-4b6e-a135-b6cc1c66841c&p=1 (accessed May 5, 2011).

remembrance at home: the fallen were “remembered in purely domestic terms, as the loss of a husband, son, wife, or daughter,” wrote King. “[T]his interpretative framework, not a narrative of national sacrifice, invests these deaths with meaning.”¹⁵⁷ The ceremony ended with a procession through the streets of Esterhazy and a final laying to rest of Sgt. Shipway at the Esterhazy town cemetery.

* * *

The war in Afghanistan has been received unevenly by Canadians. A poll for CTV and *The Globe and Mail* conducted between July 12 and 16, 2007, revealed that 59 percent of Canadians opposed the mission in Afghanistan.¹⁵⁸ However, despite the disapproval, there was support for honouring the fallen, and particularly the families they left behind, even as the war seemed distant and difficult. “I don’t know a lot about politics, but it seems to be a losing cause,” said Brian MacKenzie, who was on the Highway of Heroes to salute Sgt. Shipway’s hearse. “They are fighting an invisible force. They are not fighting an army, they are fighting terrorists.”¹⁵⁹ “If I had my way, I’d bring them all home,” said Brenda Miller, who organized the local Support Our Troops groups that appear at each repatriation ceremony to line the fences around the base with Canadian flags. “We’re probably going to lose a lot more before this is over.”¹⁶⁰ “While I

¹⁵⁷ Anthony King, “The Afghan War and ‘Postmodern’ Memory: Commemoration and the Dead of Helmand,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 1 (2010): 17.
¹⁵⁸ “Most Canadians oppose Afghanistan mission: poll,” *CTV News*, July 18, 2007, http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/TopStories/20070718/afghanistan_poll_070718/ (accessed May 20, 2011).
¹⁵⁹ Bruce Ward, “Daddy’s finally home; Hundreds of roadside mourners watched yesterday as the coffin of another Canadian soldier kills in Afghanistan was moved from a heartbreaking ceremony to its final resting place, Bruce Ward write from CFB Trenton,” *Ottawa Citizen*, September 11, 2008, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1554695801&sid=4&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).
¹⁶⁰ Robert Sibley, “It’s so sad they come home this way; Hundreds turn out to support families of six slain soldiers,” *Ottawa Citizen*, July 9, 2007,

can't say that I agree with the war, these boys fought with honour," said Brian Frasier. "And we have to get out there and show them respect."¹⁶¹ There seemed to be no desire to abandon the dead even as the war continued to prove unpopular, with one national poll February 22-28, 2011, revealing that 63 percent voiced opposition to the war.¹⁶²

* * *

Nowhere is the moral ambiguity of the Afghanistan war better reflected than in the Afghanistan Repatriation Memorial. Currently in the development phase, this grassroots initiative has raised approximately \$600,000 from individuals, companies and organizations across Canada, with a goal of \$1.5 million. Located on the Bay of Quinte, near 8 Wing/CFB Trenton, the monument would mark the beginning of the processional route along the Highway of Heroes.

<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1303066101&sid=8Fmt=3clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

¹⁶¹ Matt Hartley, "These boys fought with honour," *The Globe and Mail*, July 9, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy/library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1301319721&sid=6&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

¹⁶² "Britons and Canadians Oppose Afghan War; Americans Evenly Divided," *Angus Reid Public Opinion*, March 3, 2011, <http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/43776/britons-and-canadians-oppose-afghan-war-americans-evenly-divided/> (accessed December 21, 2011).



Fig. 10

The creator of the memorial, James Smith of Campbell Monument Co. Ltd., in Belleville, Ontario, envisions a solitary soldier, in black, illustrating the loss to the wider community – the extended family, the nation. Two large granite maple leaves are visible. One is red – the national colour – inscribed with the CF's emblems and provincial shields. It represents the state, sacrifice, duty and heroism. The other is black, containing the names of those who died in the war. It seems fitting that there are two leaves instead of one. The red leaf is casting a shadow, represented by the black leaf. The black leaf, parallel to the red, illustrates the true cost of the war. Just as on the Highway of Heroes, the solitary soldier in black granite remains 'hidden' in the shadows. The symbol of blood and the nation, the bright red maple leaf draws the attention of the viewer, yet it is the black leaf that intrigues – dark and enigmatic, this piece of the monument disturbs the psyche. Hero and victim, life and death, soldier and family appear to mirror one another – all concepts are in flux.

The memorial is designed to “honour our nation’s recognition of the loss of sons, daughters, husbands, wives, fathers and mothers.”¹⁶³ It reflects the uneasy feeling many Canadians have towards the mission, and yet their need to honour the sacrifice of the soldiers and their families. The space between the two maple leaves illustrates the chasm between the state and its objectives for going to war in the first place (red leaf) and the public’s assessment of the war in Afghanistan (black leaf). The bystander at the memorial site, just like the onlooker at the Highway of Heroes, walks in between the leaves – they fill the void with their own bodies, with their own sentiments, their own grief. The Afghanistan Repatriation Memorial will be funded, in part, by donations to organizations like the True Patriot Love Foundation, a national foundation which supports the Canadian military and their families.

On August 18, 2011, the True Patriot Love Foundation, in concert with the Government of Ontario, unveiled a bronze plaque in Toronto to commemorate the sacrifices of the deceased soldiers and their families. From Trenton to Toronto, twenty-six overpasses on the Highway of Heroes were selected to feature twenty-six of these plaques. “It’s a proud day to be Canadian when government, companies, regular citizens and a foundation all come together to recognize the sacrifices made by our men and women in uniform and the families who serve by their side,”¹⁶⁴ said Michael Burns, vice chair of the True Patriot Love Foundation. The plaques, according to the foundation, stand for “ordinary Canadians who gathered on those bridges to welcome home those

¹⁶³ “Campaign,” *Afghanistan Repatriation Memorial*, <http://www.afghanistanmemorial.ca/campaign> (accessed May 13, 2012).

¹⁶⁴ “True Patriot Love unveils HoH Plaques,” *True Patriot Love Foundation*, August 18, 2011, <http://truepatriotlovefoundation.com/2011/08/23/true-patriot-love-unveils-hoh/> (accessed May 15, 2012).

that fell and were being repatriated to their home and families.”¹⁶⁵ Each will incorporate the sponsor’s name or logo. So far, the sponsors include SkyLink Aviation, The Dunkley Charitable Foundation, 33 Signals Regiment, Porter Airlines, RE/MAX, THALES, Tim Hortons and WestJet.¹⁶⁶

Sponsorship was split into two categories: “Founder” and “Builder.” Founders paid \$200,000 for a twenty-five year sponsorship of the plaque. By participating, they received recognition at the annual Tribute Dinner for five years, recognition at future press conferences, and a “Thank You” advertisement in a national newspaper. Builders pay \$50,000 for a five year sponsorship of the plaque, and receive recognition at the annual Tribute Dinner for two years. Like the Builders, they receive recognition at future press conferences, and inclusion in an advertisement in a national newspaper.¹⁶⁷ The Highway of Heroes, identified as a grassroots movement by ordinary Canadians, has to a considerable degree been commodified and appropriated by corporate interests.

In our post 9/11 world, states Dana Heller, “[P]opular political involvement becomes structured by a pattern of spectatorship and consumption.”¹⁶⁸ On the Highway of Heroes, corporations have observed the potential benefits of being closely associated with an association like the True Patriot Love Foundation. Free advertisements, press conferences and access to tribute dinners blur the line between commemoration and objectification. The Highway of Heroes plaques have repackaged the heartfelt emotions

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ “True Patriot Love, Highway of Heroes Sponsorship,” *True Patriot Love Foundation*, August 18, 2011, <http://truepatriotlovefoundation.com/site/wp.../06/Sponsorship-Pkg.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2012).

¹⁶⁸ Dana Heller, *The Selling of 9/11: How a National Tragedy Became a Commodity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 4.

of the crowds who lined the route from Trenton to Toronto; the sentiment has been captured and made it into a product.



Fig. 11

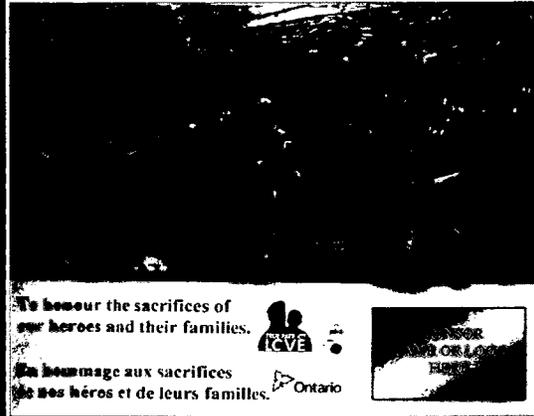


Fig. 12

The spectators who line the route take precedence in the plaque's bronze relief – not the soldiers. With their hands across their chests, the sacrifice of the soldier is physically expressed by the community – as a collective moment of grief shared by all Canadians. Yet in so doing, the plaque venerates the onlookers; it makes them the principal subject of our gaze. The sponsor box in the bottom right of the plaque makes it reminiscent of commercial billboards that one sees along most highways. Companies are effectively sponsoring the public to watch themselves. This is equivalent to having a cenotaph built to those who gather on November 11, and not to the soldiers who fell.

The plaque also features a large Canadian flag fluttering in the wind. Relegated to background, it is positioned above the soldier, not the onlookers. The sacrifice of the war falls squarely on the soldiers and the Afghans, not the Canadian public. Death is quarantined to such a considerable degree that the solitary soldier in the motif is one that is alive and well, holding the hand of an Afghan child. Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle have argued that, "Sacrificial willingness assuages the guilt of the community that

sends soldiers to die by denying its killing agency.”¹⁶⁹ The depiction of the soldier, holding the Afghan’s child’s hand, walking off alone into far-off winding road, while the community looks away, obfuscates the highly charged role Canadian soldiers played in Afghanistan. The soldier is rendered invisible, not to the viewer, but to the onlookers; their gaze is situated to the left of the plaque. This is how the Highway of Heroes functions. It honours the living, those who line the route, rather than the dead.

The lack of soldiers’ sacrifice in the plaques seems lost on many. “I enjoy the thought that I could be driving down the Highway of Heroes and see the plaques,” said Sgt. Cameron Laidlaw of the Royal Canadian Regiment. “It shows an appreciation to every military member. It’s good recognition from everyday people.”¹⁷⁰ Pte. Anna Davidovitch, an employee in a Toronto military recruiting centre stated, “I got teary when they were talking about [the plaques]. We’re all like family; every time a soldier dies I go to the bridges on the Highway of Heroes. I appreciate the plaques.”¹⁷¹

The creation of a Highway of Heroes coin is the final step in monetizing the memorial site. On October 30, 2011, the Royal Canadian Mint unveiled a silver Highway of Heroes commemorative coin that reflected the themes and motifs apparent in the repatriation memorial and plaque. Peter Fisher, the photographer for the *Cobourg Daily Star*, petitioned the Mint for a special coin in 2010, but was turned down repeatedly. The director of communications at the Mint, Francie Baltzan, explained that the Mint

¹⁶⁹ Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, *Blood, Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the Flag* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 77.

¹⁷⁰ Jessica Hume, “Bronze plaques to line Highway of Heroes; ‘Good recognition,’” *National Post*, August 19, 2011, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/884503084?accountid=9894> (accessed April 20, 2012).

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

had produced more than thirty coins since 2004 honouring veterans and various forms of remembrance. Fisher contacted his colleague at the *Toronto Sun*, Joe Warmington. In an article titled, “Mint not too sweet on Hwy. of Heroes coin,” Warmington pointed his criticism at the left, as a possible explanation for the inaction. “[I]f the decision was made not to go ahead with the coin because of some lefty peace freaks not wanting to honour the fallen, watch for the reaction of Canadians in the next few months. You’ll learn something about patriotism,” warned Warmington. “There is always some lefty stiff in the way of doing what is right.”¹⁷² Another colleague of Fisher’s, Caroline McIntosh, started an online petition to gather support for a Highway of Heroes coin:

In honour of those fallen soldiers, their families and all of the good people of Canada who choose to stand and honour on bridges, overpasses, and along the roadsides each time we must repatriate those who paid the ultimate sacrifice, I am asking you to sign this petition and send a clear and strong message to the Royal Mint and the Federal Government that “we shall never forget” ... we want a coin that commemorates our passionate support for our soldiers. This is NOT a political statement; this is simply the ways and means to have our voices heard. We did it once before in a simple, powerful way, let’s do this again. Our soldiers, their families, past and present, deserve nothing less.¹⁷³

These critical first proponents of the Highway of Heroes – Fisher and Warmington – had watched the Highway of Heroes grow from a simple gathering of individuals to a national phenomenon shared by ordinary Canadians from all walks of life. Now they wanted the public to consume the product they helped cultivate. And they eventually succeeded. “With this special coin, the Government of Canada is paying homage to every day Canadians who have shown their unwavering support to the families who have accompanied our fallen soldiers as they made the journey along the Highway of

¹⁷² Joe Warmington, “Mint not too sweet on Hwy. of Heroes coin,” *Toronto Sun*, November 5, 2010, http://www.torontosun.com/news/columnists/joe_warmington/2010/11/05/15993241.html (accessed May 16, 2011).

¹⁷³ Pete Fisher, *Highway of Heroes: True Patriot Love* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2011), 102.

Heroes,” said Jim Flaherty, Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Royal Canadian Mint, on October 30, 2011. “The donation to the Afghanistan Repatriation Memorial and the Military Families Fund through the sale of this coin will ensure that the spirit of the Highway of Heroes will endure for years to come.”¹⁷⁴ Numerous coins have been distributed, with a cap of 25,000 coins in total, retailing for \$69.95 each. The coin has a face value of \$10, with \$20 of the proceeds from each sale going to the Afghan Repatriation Memorial and The Military Family Fund.

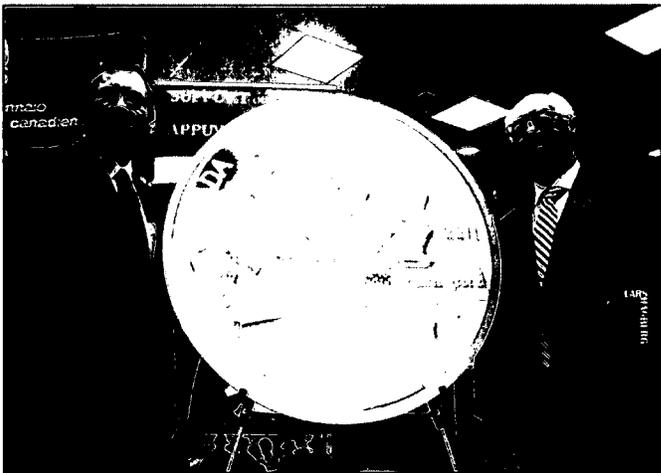


Fig. 13



Fig. 14

The coin is designed in such a manner that the viewer inhabits the perspective of those in the military cortege – the families of the fallen. “What you’re looking at is what the families are looking at when they are proceeding down the Highway of Heroes,”¹⁷⁵ said Maj. Carl Gauthier, the designer of the coin. The coin puts the living in full view – firefighters, emergency personnel and ordinary Canadians with their flags – and the

¹⁷⁴ “Royal Canadian Mint Unveils Highway of Heroes silver commemorative coin,” *Canadian News Wire*, October 31, 2011, <http://www.newswire.ca/en/story/868597/royal-canadian-mint-unveils-highway-of-heroes-silver-commemorative-coin> (accessed May 15, 2012).

¹⁷⁵ Ray Yurkowski, “Highway of Heroes commemorative coin unveiled,” *Stirling EMC*, November 3, 2011, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/902203265?accountid=9894> (accessed April 20, 2012).

fallen soldier is entirely removed from the motif. Again, we are commemorating the onlookers, through the gaze of the families of the fallen. As in the Afghanistan Repatriation Memorial and the plaque, there is a gulf between the perspective of the families and the large maple leaf (the mission) that looms in the background. In between reside the onlookers. They fill the void.

The coin's rendering of death is almost hidden. The only acknowledgement of it is made by the appearance of the Memorial Cross in the upper left corner of the coin, illustrating the personal loss to families of Canadian soldiers killed in action. While the soldier is represented by a cross, he or she is again hidden or pushed to the periphery, a seeming afterthought. Even as the symbolism of the cross has been expanded and democratized to include a more representative sample of grieving families, it seems to fade from the public manifestations of the Afghanistan war's commemoration. The loss and grief commemorated on this coin has also been expanded to include not the fallen, nor their families, but the onlookers themselves. The focus, has, indeed, changed to the extent that they have become the centerpiece of the commemorative coin.

As private grief has crept into the public sphere, Anthony King speculated as to whether this growing personalization of the troops and their families would diminish the power of the state. But he also hypothesized that "this personalization [may] also legitimate the state. The state no longer acts in the abstract name of the national but on behalf of and through identifiable personalities and families."¹⁷⁶ The Highway of Heroes evolved from a simple gathering of ordinary Canadians paying their respects to the

¹⁷⁶ Anthony King, "The Afghan War and 'Postmodern' Memory: Commemoration and the Dead of Helmand," *The British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 1 (2010): 21.

families of the fallen to a national phenomenon, where the public now appears to be the focus rather than the soldiers. And as this new type of monument grew in size and scope, it devolved from being a grassroots movement owned by Canadians everywhere and moved gradually into the hands of the government and corporate interests.

The Highway of Heroes functions as a living memorial. At the repatriation ceremony at CFB Trenton, images of the fallen are conflated with images of grieving families. As the military cortege makes its way down the processional route, death is quarantined; all that remains are the families of the fallen and the onlookers who line the route. The legacy of the soldier is transferred to the living family – both the immediate one and the larger community of grievers. Private grief is made public and the commemorative gaze shifts to those who line the route. They fill the void left by the Afghanistan war. This is encapsulated in the Afghanistan Repatriation Memorial, where two maple leaves, one red, the other black, stand apart, allowing the onlooker to pass between representations of the mission and the family.

The commemorative Highway of Heroes plaques and coins effectively repackaged the public grief exhibited by ordinary Canadians in response to the fallen. Mirroring the flag debate, the emotional reactions of those who lined the route were overtaken by instrumental interests – they were made into a commodity, a product. This evolution from the emotional to the instrumental shifted attention away from the fallen and their families to the onlookers themselves, who have become the principal subject in the commemorative process. They are the living memorial.

Chapter Three

Fastened: "Support Our Troops"

On June 19, 2007, the city of Toronto announced that all yellow Support Our Troops decals fastened to the city's emergency vehicles would come off as of September. The action was widely criticized by Torontonians and other Canadians. The mayor, David Miller, had prior to the decision received numerous complaints from residents, who interpreted the decals as a formal endorsement on the part of city council for the mission in Afghanistan. "There are people who see it as support for the troops," said Miller, on the day of the announcement. Yet "there are people who see it as support for the war."¹⁷⁷ He later told reporters, "I don't think, frankly, it's the job of city council to debate the war in Afghanistan."¹⁷⁸ When news surfaced on June 20 that three Canadian soldiers were killed by a roadside bomb, the mayor revised his decision, and the "Support Our Troops" decal program was extended indefinitely.

"Council backed off," said historian Jack Granatstein, "because there was so much pro-military support, if not pro-war support, that they were afraid they would take a hit."¹⁷⁹ Mark Federman, a specialist in public messaging and former chief

¹⁷⁷ Anthony Reinhart, "Do yellow ribbons show support for troops or support for what?" *The Globe and Mail*, June 20, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1291384501&sid=8&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

¹⁷⁸ Kelly Patrick and Shannon Kan, "Troop decal removal 'a slap in the face'; TORONTO FIRE TRUCKS. EMS," *National Post*, June 20, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1293723021&sid=2&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

¹⁷⁹ Chris Cobb, "How a simple phrase got tied up in symbolism, politics; Whether the slogan 'Support Our Troops,' is pro-war or pro-soldier is in the eye of the beholder, writes Chris Cobb," *Ottawa Citizen*, June 23, 2007,

strategist at Toronto's McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology, believed Toronto city council had no choice but to acquiesce. "It was that [...] or people saying so you don't support the men and women who are putting their lives in danger to keep you safe. What sort of person are you? It's a strategy and shuts off real discourse."¹⁸⁰ The Toronto decision triggered other municipalities – Edmonton, Calgary and Ottawa – to put forward their own decal initiatives, in turn sparking similar debates.

A nation at war is one that is in a "liminal state."¹⁸¹ Once soldiers are deployed and perceived to be in danger, the "parameters of public discourse shift from the politics or necessity of the engagement to discussions of soldiers, their families and sacrifices."¹⁸² The yellow decals were reflective of this shift. Imported from the United States, they were a commercialized remnant of the yellow ribbon. There was no historical precedent for the Canadian version of the decal. It appeared in 2002, when Canadian troops were first deployed to Afghanistan. Inscribed with the Canadian flag, it proliferated in cities and towns across the country in 2006, when casualties from the mission substantially increased. The Canadian Forces Personnel Support Agency (CFPSA) was the first organization to mass market them. The agency is charged with providing all its Canadian Forces members with competitive employee benefits and services.

<http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/241063109?accountid=9894> (accessed June 27, 2011).

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Jack Santino, "Yellow Ribbons and Seasonal Flags: The Folk Assemblage of War," *The Journal of American Folklore* 105, no. 415 (Winter 1992): 32.

¹⁸² A.L. McCreedy, "Tie a Yellow Ribbon 'Round Public Discourse, National Identity and the War: Neoliberal Militarization and the Yellow Ribbon Campaign in Canada," *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 23-24 (2010): 43.

Proceeds from the sales of the decals go to various morale and welfare programs for the Forces.¹⁸³



Fig. 15

This chapter will touch upon the evolution of the symbol – from a tactile ribbon wrapped around a tree, it evolved into the ubiquitous product we now see on vehicles across the country. The decal brings together both the emotional and instrumental poles examined in the Peace Tower flag debate. Proponents see it as a simple gesture to honour the fallen and their families – ‘it’s the least we can do.’ Opponents view it as political tool employed to bolster support for the mission in Afghanistan and one that stifles debate. The two messages are conflated into one symbol, making it difficult for the public to distinguish between the two and allowing Canadians – like many of the onlookers who lined the Highway of Heroes – to reject the mission outright and still claim support for the troops. As Support Our Troops initiatives were unveiled, contentious debates over the decals ensued, but city after city – in some form or

¹⁸³ Jen Seipp, “Untangling the Yellow Ribbon,” *CFPSA*, January 2012, http://www.cfpsa.com/en/corporate/Publications/MWTeamUpdates/January2012/YellowRibbon_e.asp (accessed February 3, 2012).

another – adopted measures to commemorate the fallen. In the same way as in the flag debate and the Highway of Heroes, the troops were increasingly personalized and domesticated. The emotional concerns Canadians had towards the fallen became politicized or instrumentalized as the decal initiatives unfolded in the public sphere. To take issue with the decals was construed as disparaging the soldiers. The symbol that was meant to unify the public behind the soldiers instead created disunity on the home front.

* * *

The yellow ribbon made its televised debut during the Iranian hostage crisis (1979-80). The wife of one of the American hostages tied a yellow ribbon around the family's oak tree as a sign of solidarity.¹⁸⁴ According to folklorist Jack Santino, ribbons at this time were made of "plastic, cloth, crepe paper"¹⁸⁵ and a myriad of other tactile materials.¹⁸⁶ Ribbons in war were reportedly first worn by the wives of American cavalymen, who left their homes to fight American Indians during the "Indian Wars" of the 1860s and 1870s.¹⁸⁷ With the onset of the first Gulf War (1991), the ribbon's referent leaped from "personalized stories of familial suffering and captive innocence that characterized the civic relationship with the hostage [...] to characterize the civic

¹⁸⁴ Roger Stahl, "Why We 'Support the Troops': Rhetorical Evolutions," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12, no. 4 (2009): 544.

¹⁸⁵ Jack Santino, "Yellow Ribbons and Seasonal Flags: The Folk Assemblage of War," *The Journal of American Folklore* 105, no. 415 (Winter 1992): 23.

¹⁸⁶ The colour of the ribbon, yellow, is the "traditional colo[u]r of non-combatants and cowards," wrote Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle. Moreover, ribbons "call to mind hair bows and gift wrap, feminine symbols of fertility and bountifulness." See Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, *Blood, Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the Flag* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 239.

¹⁸⁷ Warren Kinsella, "Tie a yellow ribbon...," *National Post*, August 3, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1089364331&sid=2&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

relationship to the soldier.”¹⁸⁸ It was also during the Gulf War that the yellow ribbon began to be twinned with the American flag: “To show concern for the troops was humanitarian,” wrote Santino, “but in order to signal support of the war effort,” both symbols were displayed together.¹⁸⁹ The ribbon had become so entrenched as a symbol in the American psyche that it was merchandised on t-shirts, bumper stickers, and pins, much as it is today in Canada.¹⁹⁰ Entrepreneurs took full advantage and sold them to a wide range of consumers.¹⁹¹

The Support Our Troops slogan is believed to have first surfaced during the Vietnam War, as a means to generate public support in an increasingly unpopular war. It repositioned the rationale of the conflict “from external objectivities to the internal struggle to protect the soldier.”¹⁹² The slogan, the yellow ribbon, and the flag were eventually joined during the Gulf War, coalescing into a single unit. The decal is widely interpreted by academics as an ambiguous symbol. “[W]hether it’s a pro-war statement or simple pro-soldier statement is in the eye of the beholder,” said Granatstein.¹⁹³

“Nobody wants to see 19-and 20 year-olds die,” said University of Ottawa Professor Joel

¹⁸⁸ Roger Stahl, “Why We ‘Support the Troops’: Rhetorical Evolutions,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12, no. 4 (2009): 544.

¹⁸⁹ Jack Santino, “Yellow Ribbons and Seasonal Flags: The Folk Assemblage of War,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 105, no. 415 (Winter 1992): 27.

¹⁹⁰ Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 223.

¹⁹¹ Linda Pershing and Margaret R. Yocom, “The Yellow Ribboning of the USA: Contested Meanings in the Construction of a Political Symbol,” *Western Folklore* 55, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 50.

¹⁹² Roger Stahl, “Why We ‘Support the Troops’: Rhetorical Evolutions,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12, no. 4 (2009): 536.

¹⁹³ Chris Cobb, “How a simple phrase got tied up in symbolism, politics; Whether the slogan ‘Support Our Troops,’ is pro-war or pro-soldier is in the eye of the beholder, writes Chris Cobb,” *Ottawa Citizen*, June 23, 2007, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/241063109?accountid=9894> (accessed June 27, 2011).

Westheimer, in a September 2006 interview with the *Toronto Star*. “Who doesn’t want to support our troops? ‘Support Our Troops,’ is a vacuous cliché. It’s not a call to anything,”¹⁹⁴ As the Toronto debate will illustrate, it is a call to something – a call to mark the sacrifices of the fallen, to fill the void in public space. But for others, it is also a call for particular policy choices.

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On June 19, 2007, on the same day that Mayor Miller commented on the divisive nature of the decals to the press, Bruce Farr, chief of Toronto’s Emergency Medical Service (EMS), and Bill Stewart, fire chief of Toronto, announced that all of the yellow “Support Our Troops” decals – the adhesive ribbons – fastened to the city’s 170 fire trucks and 175 ambulances would be removed. “This is part of our maintenance rotation starting in September of this year,” Farr told reporters. “It’s our intention to peel the stickers off.”¹⁹⁵ The EMS decals, which cost \$3000, were paid out of the taxpayer-funded EMS budget. “I did it within my authority,” said Farr. “I chose not to continue because we are doing a number of things to support and work with our Canadian Forces men and women each and every day.”¹⁹⁶ The Toronto firefighters union, with the approval of Chief Stewart, had organized a fundraising drive; it raised \$3000 to pay for the decals on

¹⁹⁴ Leslie Scrivener, “A more nuanced patriotism? True patriot love; What makes a Canadian patriotic? Blind allegiance to our troops and their mission? Or questioning our role and demanding their withdrawal from Afghanistan? Leslie Scrivener on a touchy subject,” *Toronto Star*, September 17, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1128656061&sid=4&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

¹⁹⁵ “Time limit for ‘Support Our Troops,’” *CTV News*, June 19, 2007, http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Canada/20070619/troops_ribbons_070619/ (accessed May 28, 2011).

¹⁹⁶ Kelly Patrick and Shannon Kan, “Troop decal removal ‘a slap in the face’; TORONTO FIRE TRUCKS. EMS,” *National Post*, June 20, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1293723021&sid=2&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

the back of the fire trucks. The program, originally scheduled to last only a year, was widely criticized by some residents who believed the city was expressing an opinion on the war. Some councillors, like David Shiner, had expressed doubts as to who had ultimately made the decision. "I can not comment on what they were told to say or not told to say."¹⁹⁷ Fire Chief Stewart rejected any suggestion that the decision had been directed from somewhere else.¹⁹⁸

The decision to remove the decals sparked widespread condemnation across the country; local radio talk-shows in Toronto were inundated with calls, some threatening to boycott the city altogether during the busy summer tourist season. "It was an insult to everybody. It was an insult to me," said one veteran. "Especially it was insult to everybody who wears a uniform and serves this country."¹⁹⁹ City Councillor Frances Nunziata, who was thoroughly displeased with the measure, told reporters, "Leave things the way they are. Leave the ribbons."²⁰⁰ Nunziata put forward a motion calling for the extension of the decal display as long as Canadians were in combat operations in Afghanistan. Janet Davis, another city councillor, did not support the directive from City Hall. "I don't think we should be using city facilities or vehicles for promoting messages about matters that fall outside the city jurisdiction," she said, "particularly if they're

¹⁹⁷ "Time limit for 'Support Our Troops,'" *CTV News*, June 19, 2007, http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Canada/20070619/troops_ribbons_070619/ (accessed May 28, 2011).

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ John Barber, "Council's soldier support is changing with the wind," *The Globe and Mail*, June 21, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1292151551&sid=8&Fmt=3clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

²⁰⁰ "City votes to keep 'Support Our Troops' decals," *CTV News*, June 20, 2007, http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Canada/20070620/decals_vote_070620/ (accessed May 28, 2011).

contentious.”²⁰¹ Davis later told the *Toronto Star* that she supported the troops, but was opposed to the decals. The debate had grown so strident that federal politicians from Ottawa waded into the fray. Defence Minister Gordon O’Connor placed a call to the mayor’s office, urging him to reconsider his decision. “The ‘Support Our Troops’ campaign is a fantastic way for Canadians to show their appreciation for the brave men and women of the Canadian Forces,” he said to reporters. “We hope the mayor and the City of Toronto will extend this valuable program.”²⁰²

The war overseas continued to intrude into domestic Canada when, on June 20, a vehicle carrying Cpl. Stephen Frederick Bouzane, Pte. Joel Vincent and Sgt. Christos Karigiannis, from the Edmonton-based Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI), hit a roadside bomb on patrol in southern Afghanistan. Their deaths brought the total number of troops killed since the mission began in 2002 to sixty.²⁰³ Upon hearing the news that day, Toronto Mayor Miller put forward a motion extending the use of the decals, with the proviso that it referred to “all Canadian troops,”²⁰⁴ as distinct from Nunziata’s earlier motion, which directly referenced Canada’s war in Afghanistan. This extended the use of the decals indefinitely, and the program was expanded to include the city’s fleet of police cruisers.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² John Ivison, “Toronto Mayor treads recklessly; Miller makes bumper stickers a political debate,” *National Post*, June 20, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1292151551&sid=8Fmt=3&clientdl=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

²⁰³ “Military identifies 3 Canadian soldiers killed in blast,” *CBC News*, June 20, 2007, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2007/06/20/afghan-nato.html> (accessed November 5, 2011).

²⁰⁴ Donovan Vincent, “Miller relents, city keeps support-the-troops decal,” *Toronto Star*, June 21, 2007, <http://www.thestar.com/printarticle/227839> (accessed May 24, 2011).

The motion was passed by 37 councillors, with eight members abstaining. A second vote was put forward by a two-thirds majority of the council, to give those members who were not present at the first vote or who had abstained, a second chance to vote on the motion. Councillor Pam McConnell, who abstained from both votes, felt the second vote was an attempt to single out council members who did not vote in favour of the first motion. "I don't believe that is the way we should support our troops," she said. "The way to support our troops is to bring them home."²⁰⁵ McConnell, who lost her father in the Second World War and had a nephew who was injured in Afghanistan, believed her decision to be a "moral" one.²⁰⁶ The decal campaign was "being used in a political way to say that you're either with us or against us," said Councillor Adam Vaughan. "You either support the troops or you don't support the troops and if you don't put a yellow ribbon on your car, what does that say about you?"²⁰⁷ Those who went against the campaign could be seen as dishonouring the soldiers and maybe, more importantly, the dead. Mayor Miller understood this; he attributed his reversal on removing the decals to the three soldiers killed in Afghanistan.

The mayor's rewording of the motion entirely dissociated the troops from the ongoing war effort. Councillors who took issue with it were placed in a politically precarious situation. To abstain or vote against the decals would be construed by a segment of the voting public as dishonouring the sacrifice of the troops. Councillor McConnell, in an attempt to save face, tried to associate the slogan "Support Our

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ "Toronto to keep 'support the troops' decals," *CBC News*, June 20, 2007, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/story/2007/06/20/ribbon-toronto.html> (accessed May 28, 2011).

Troops” with that of “Bring Them Home.” “Many people who oppose our mission in Afghanistan are strong supporters of the troops,” said pollster Frank Graves, “but I doubt very much whether anyone who opposes the war would display the decal – unless they added ‘Bring Them Home.’”²⁰⁸ According to one commentator, “if ‘support our troops (and by extension the war)’ works to justify *any* military action, ‘support our troops: bring them home’ implies the mirror opposite – that *no* military action can be justified for the simple fact that it puts soldiers in danger.”²⁰⁹ Councillors who stood against the Miller motion attempted to separate the troops from the mission. In the case of McConnell, she tried to add the bringing home of the troops. Both tactics proved futile, and the councillors could not successfully stand against their colleagues who supported the mayor’s initiative. The “Support Our Troops” motion put forward by Mayor Miller passed; decals would stay on all Toronto emergency vehicles for the foreseeable future. As the commotion unfolded in the chambers of City Hall, similar debates brewed in the streets of Toronto.

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Emergency vehicles in the city of Toronto, as in any other municipality, are public property. Whatever is fastened to the vehicle suggests to the public a seal of approval from City Hall. That symbol, attached to the city’s 170 fire trucks, 175 ambulances, and numerous police cruisers, moves around the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). As the

²⁰⁸ Chris Cobb, “How a simple phrase got tied up in symbolism, politics; Whether the slogan ‘Support Our Troops,’ is pro-war or pro-soldier is in the eye of the beholder, writes Chris Cobb,” *Ottawa Citizen*, June 23, 2007, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/241063109?accountid=9894> (accessed June 27, 2011).

²⁰⁹ Roger Stahl, “Why We ‘Support the Troops’: Rhetorical Evolutions,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12, no. 4 (2009): 559.

vehicles go from call to call, they expose the symbol to a wider segment of the population, diffusing the message. The wider the exposure, the more entrenched the symbol becomes. "We would prefer to keep them on our vehicles," said Scott Marks, president of the Toronto Professional Fire Fighters Association. "It is not political. We did it to show support for the men and women in the military."²¹⁰ Brad Watters, president of the Toronto Paramedics Association, echoed Marks, "Whether you support the war or not is not the issue;" he went on to say that the decals were "the least we can do."²¹¹ For those who wanted the Peace Tower flag lowered to commemorate each of the fallen from Afghanistan and the onlookers who lined the Highway of Heroes, this sentiment reflected, in the words of one theorist, "detached veneration rather than invested political accountability."²¹²

After the September 11 attacks, first responders became increasingly associated with the soldiers deployed to Afghanistan. "Firefighters, police, and emergency medical workers – ordinary working-class people doing their jobs – emerged in American culture as extraordinary,"²¹³ wrote Dana Heller. To a lesser extent this also occurred in Canada. This sentiment is expressed by some of the responses forwarded to the *Toronto Star* by residents of Toronto and the GTA with regard to the decals. "Leave them on. What is the matter with our mayor? Firemen and paramedics and police are our frontline soldiers; it

²¹⁰ Kelly Patrick and Shannon Kan, "Troop decal removal 'a slap in the face'; TORONTO FIRE TRUCKS. EMS," *National Post*, June 20, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1293723021&sid=2&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² Roger Stahl, "Why We 'Support the Troops': Rhetorical Evolutions," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12, no. 4 (2009): 548.

²¹³ Dana Heller, *The Selling of 9/11: How a National Tragedy Became a Commodity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 11.

only makes sense that they would support the troops no matter where they are,” wrote one Toronto resident.²¹⁴ “We can certainly learn from the Americans. Supporting our troops is akin to supporting our police and firefighters. It’s incredible that we have some bureaucrats that do not agree,” wrote another.²¹⁵ Emergency responders in the post-9/11 environment can be interpreted as a “domesticated” army, one in which, as the purveyors of the public trust, they are publicly bestowed with a symbol that stands in solidarity with the troops. The public identifies them as a version of a frontline army, for the risks they take and for the uniforms they wear. Thus, when it was announced that the decals were to be removed, that was interpreted by some segments of the population as an insult not only to the soldiers but all those who wear a uniform. “Nobody over there wants to go and kill people,” said one firefighter in his late 20s. “They want to help people, same as on our job.”²¹⁶

Other residents were not as keen on having the decals on public vehicles. “Emergency Service Vehicles should not be used to promote either side of a political issue,” wrote one resident. “It can create the impression that those that don’t share the view will not be able to get the same degree of responsiveness as those that do.”²¹⁷ The fear of curbed access in an emergency because of political affiliation may seem

²¹⁴ Patricia Murtagh, “Voices: Decal spat,” *Toronto Star*, June 20, 2007, <http://www.thestar.com/opinion/article/227509--voices-decal-spat> (accessed May 18, 2011).

²¹⁵ Walter Zarins, “Voices: Decal spat,” *Toronto Star*, June 20, 2007, <http://www.thestar.com/opinion/article/227509--voices-decal-spat> (accessed May 18, 2011).

²¹⁶ Anthony Reinhart, “Do yellow ribbons show support for troops or support for what?” *The Globe and Mail*, June 20, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1291384501&sid=8&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

²¹⁷ Brian Burch, “Voices: Decal spat,” *Toronto Star*, June 20, 2007, <http://www.thestar.com/opinion/article/227509--voices-decal-spat> (accessed May 18, 2011).

overblown, yet it does signal a degree of uneasiness among those who wanted the decals removed. “Would government support fire trucks with ‘end the war’ or ‘no blood for oil’ stickers on them?” one resident asked. “If not, then, the argument is clear. Fire and police departments are there to aid the community, not to sell a government’s message.”²¹⁸ “‘Support Our Troops’ really means ‘Support our government’s foreign policy’ – an entirely different idea,” said another resident. “Next I suppose emergency vehicles will have bumper stickers telling us who to vote for.”²¹⁹ The decals were clearly political. They proliferated when casualties from the Afghanistan mission were at their peak, and yet they seemed able to withstand political critiques. Inscribed on the symbol is a clever rhetorical device that accomplishes this goal.

The argument was sometimes made that the yellow decals supported “our Troops” not “our Soldiers.” “Soldiers,” in this interpretation, denoted a group of individuals who fight. “Troops,” on the other hand, represented a singularity, a monolith, not bound up necessarily with the parameters of the Afghan mission itself.²²⁰ Those critical of the mission, could not distinguish between those “troops” in Afghanistan and those in other missions at home or abroad, some of them in peace-keeping missions. As one serving member of the Canadian Forces and a former resident of Toronto said: “As for the argument that the ribbon is a political statement, I will remind you that the CF serves in many other missions around the world and performs

²¹⁸ Ted Heeley, “Voices: Decal spat,” *Toronto Star*, June 20, 2007, <http://www.thestar.com/opinion/article/227509--voices-decal-spat> (accessed May 18, 2011).

²¹⁹ Patrick McDonald, “One symbol, two meanings,” *Toronto Star*, June 22, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1292849461&sid=4Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

²²⁰ Roger Stahl, “Why We ‘Support the Troops’: Rhetorical Evolutions,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12, no. 4 (2009): 549.

numerous dangerous tasks at home.”²²¹ Thus the decal allowed an individual to say that ‘I support the troops, but not the mission.’ “I display a decal supporting our troops in Afghanistan and anywhere else they are deployed. I am supporting our troops not the war. I do not agree with our troops being there,”²²² said a resident of Brampton. “You can support the troops without supporting the mission,” said Katherine Hodgson-McMahon, executive director of the Toronto Military Family Resource Centre. “It is all about bringing your soldiers home safely. Family members tell me that when they are driving on the road and see a yellow ribbon, they say, ‘Yay, someone believes in my kid.’”²²³

The distinction was lost on those who could not separate the two. “On the one hand, they claim to support our troops; on the other, they claim to oppose the mission. How is this possible?” asked one resident. “The troops embody the mission. If you oppose the war, you oppose our victory in that war. And if you oppose our victory, you support our failure. And anyone who supports our failure cannot possibly support our troops.”²²⁴ The repeated emphasis of “our” in the statement above is particularly germane to the decal debate. “In conditions of ‘siege mentality’ it is always the ‘other’ who breaks faith,” argued Michael Billig. “[O]ur’ actions are justified by circumstance,

²²¹ Keith Lobo, “Voices: Decal spat,” *Toronto Star*, June 20, 2007, <http://www.thestar.com/opinion/article/227509--voices-decal-spat> (accessed May 18, 2011).

²²² Ron Hughes, “Voices: Decal spat,” *Toronto Star*, June 20, 2007, <http://www.thestar.com/opinion/article/227509--voices-decal-spat> (accessed May 18, 2011).

²²³ Kelly Patrick and Shannon Kan, “Troop decal removal ‘a slap in the face’; TORONTO FIRE TRUCKS. EMS,” *National Post*, June 20, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1293723021&sid=2&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

²²⁴ Ron Laffin, “One symbol, two meanings,” *Toronto Star*, June 22, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1292849461&sid=4&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

but 'theirs' are said to reflect a deficiency of character."²²⁵ While some feel they can condemn the mission but support the soldiers, the decal undoubtedly weakens the position of those who oppose the war.

The Toronto decal decision was the opening salvo of smaller debates that later reached Edmonton, Calgary and Ottawa. Toronto differed in one respect; the announcement that the decals would be removed triggered a heated debate. In Edmonton, Calgary and Ottawa, the opposite occurred; the announcement that the city would put decals on all public vehicles prompted discussion and debate.

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"It's good to see that Toronto's got their heads screwed on straight,"²²⁶ said Edmonton Councillor Mike Nickel, a day after Toronto City Hall voted to extend the decals indefinitely. Nickel had put forward a motion to adorn his city's emergency vehicles with the decals. This sparked controversy in some anti-war groups, like the Edmonton Coalition Against War and Racism (ECAWAR). "When we first heard the Councillor Nickel was bringing a motion before city Council to have this done to all city vehicles we were appalled," said ECAWAR spokesman Doug Meggison. "We think that it is absolutely inappropriate."²²⁷ Nickel took issue with the criticism directed at the initiative. He pointed out that Canadian troops served all over the planet, not just in

²²⁵ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 82.

²²⁶ "'Support-Our-Troops' decals considered (10:25 a.m.)," *Canada.com*, June 21, 2007, <http://www.canada.com/edmontonjournal/news/story.html?id=16cb47c0-b53c-4748-9c7c-f69a754079cd&k=54386> (accessed May 30, 2011).

²²⁷ Chris Saltel, "Edmonton decides to tie a yellow ribbon 'round the ole ambulance," *Vueweekly.com*, July 10, 2007, http://vueweekly.com/front/story/edmonton_decides_to_tie_a_yellow_ribbon_round_the_ole_ambulance/ (accessed May 30, 2011).

Afghanistan. "If you are against the war in Afghanistan bring that to the federal ballot box," he said. "They're projecting another agenda for this, but that needs to be debated on the federal level."²²⁸ The councillor interpreted the symbol as apolitical, devoid of any specific reference to the mission itself. Echoing Toronto Mayor Miller's earlier statements, Nickel believed it was not within the purview of City Hall to debate the merits of the mission; that was the role of the federal politicians responsible for it.

Paula Simons of the *Edmonton Journal* lamented the initiative, stating that:

Edmontonians don't need to be lectured on their patriotic duty by the backsides of city vehicles. The geopolitical realities of the Afghan mission are complex, and worthy of informed public discussion [...] Want to support our soldiers and their mission? How about lobbying the government for better pay and equipment for our forces? Or volunteering at the Edmonton Garrison's Family Resource Centre? Or donating to an agency doing relief work in Afghanistan?²²⁹

Simon's editorial is noteworthy because she equated "support" with funding for better equipment for the soldiers, volunteering and donations. She reflected the "instrumental" rationale examined in the Peace Tower flag debate. Deeds rather than gratuitous symbolism were her interpretation of what supporting the troops meant. In this war, support "took on a much different character than it had in the days of rationing war bonds, and the draft," wrote Roger Stahl. "It instead translated into a set of behaviours that implied a strict division of sacrifice between citizen and soldier."²³⁰

Simon attempted, in some small measure, to close the gap between the citizen and soldier – recommending more substantial measures than simply putting decals on city

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Paula Simons, "I'm seeing red over yellow ribbons supporting troops; City of Edmonton has no business importing Bush's toxic political baggage," *Edmonton Journal*, July 7, 2007, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/253427723?accountid=9894> (accessed June 7, 2011).

²³⁰ Roger Stahl, "Why We 'Support the Troops': Rhetorical Evolutions," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12, no. 4 (2009): 548.

vehicles. Yet her plea fell on deaf ears. The motion passed, and city hall purchased 1,500 decals at a cost of \$5,250.²³¹ Edmonton, like Toronto, placed yellow decals on all its emergency vehicles.

In neighbouring Calgary, the issue was far more complicated. On July 23, 2007, a month after the Toronto and Edmonton votes in favour of the decals, Calgary councillors voted against having city vehicles fastened with the decals. The issue came to the fore when Sean Burnard, owner of Can West Label Inc., donated 5,000 stickers to outfit all of the city's vehicles. This spurred Alderman Ric McIvor to put forward a motion in June to aid Burnard in his effort to get the city to adopt the decals. "This is not about supporting any or all of those missions or deployments," said McIvor. "This is just about saying thank you."²³² Council voted against McIvor's proposal 11-4. It remains unclear as to why the mayor of Calgary, Dave Bronconnier, and the other councillors voted against McIvor's motion. It may be that what happened in Toronto gave them pause for concern. Many claimed that the decals were not political, but clearly that was not the case, as the debates across the country illustrated.

Mayor Bronconnier put forward a different plan for the council to adopt. He called on the council to keep the decals off city vehicles and instead sell them to the public to raise funds for military families. "Why don't we take those decals and put a five-and 10-dollar donation, and raise another \$50,000 to do something meaningful?"²³³

²³¹ "Council all tangled up in ribbons," *Toronto Star*, July 30, 2007, <http://www.thestar.com/printarticle/240709> (accessed June 3, 2011).

²³² "Yellow-ribbon campaign for military families comes untied," *CBC News*, July 24, 2007, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/story/2007/07/24/troops-stickers.html> (accessed May 10, 2011).

²³³ *Ibid.*

The initiative was adopted and funds were donated to local military family support groups. What was clear was the mayor's uneasiness with the symbol. His actions suggested to Calgarians that the decals were indeed politically charged. In order to dissipate the political fallout, he put forward a fundraising measure, as a means to placate the proponents of the decals.

Burnard was dismayed that his gesture had become politicized. "This was a simple offer that we made to the city thinking that the city has thousands of vehicles on the streets," he said. "But we're going to find a way to get these ribbons out there to private citizens and to corporations, with or without council's help on this."²³⁴ As this episode was unfolding, Emergo Group, a Calgary-based investment firm, urged residents to put decals on their own vehicles. One advertisement admonished: "To deny our troops this simple token of support, from the ivory tower of our safe homes and workplaces, is difficult to understand and hard to accept."²³⁵ Can West Label Inc. and Emergo Group were gaining free advertising and standing up to the politicians at City Hall, in support of the troops, which positioned both players on the right side of the moral divide.

"We're not in the business of staging public demonstrations or civil obedience or anything of that nonsense," said Emergo's vice president for international relations, Cameron Ross (also a retired major-general). "We thought maybe the best way,

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Canada.com, "Renew yellow ribbon campaign, ad urges," *Calgary Herald*, August 23, 2007, http://www.canada.com/story_print.html?id=99f6e2a7-fcba-47dd-ab4f-711fd6508d15 (accessed May 30, 2011).

perhaps, they should write to their members in the council and the mayor.”²³⁶ Ross, on behalf of Emergo, a commercial enterprise, urged Calgarians to take political action – ‘write to council and the mayor’ – in order to adopt a symbol that he and Emergo claimed to be apolitical – a ‘simple token of support.’ Opponents of the decals were construed as unwilling to recognize the sacrifice of the troops from the “ivory tower of [their] safe homes.”²³⁷ In an attempt to press Calgary council to adopt the decals, both commercial and political resources were employed by Can West Label Inc. and Emergo Group. The varied emotional sentiments Calgarians had towards the “troops” in Afghanistan were once again instrumentalized.

As the debate unfolded, some city workers began to put the yellow decals on city vehicles, prompting fleet managers to scrape them off and threaten disciplinary action in the future. Alberta’s premier, Ed Stelmach, even got involved. In August, he told reporters that his cabinet decided that the province would purchase enough decals for the approximately 3,000 government vehicles in the province. It was left up to the employee’s discretion whether he or she wanted to affix the decal on the vehicle.²³⁸ On September 5, 2007, Mayor Bronconnier, in a face saving measure – much like Mayor Miller – launched yellow-ribbon month in Calgary as a means to mollify the anger directed at his administration. “I wish they’d be more decisive as far as allowing them on

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ian Bailey, “Police take up the yellow ribbon,” *The Globe and Mail*, August 11, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1318371271&sid=8&Fmt=3clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011).

city vehicles because they can't really suck and blow at the same time," said Al Koenig, head of the Calgary Police Association. "You either support it or you don't."²³⁹

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On September 12, 2007 the city of Ottawa entered into the fray when Councillor Glenn Brooks put forward a motion for the yellow decals to be fastened to all the city's municipal vehicles. It was approved 21-2. "Clearly, this is a very strong message that we support the safe return of our troops to Canada,"²⁴⁰ said Larry O'Brien, mayor of Ottawa. As in other cities, though, some criticized the move, believing it condoned the mission in Afghanistan. "I'm not talking about that," responded Brooks. "I'm talking about showing appreciation for our troops any time, any where, past, present and future."²⁴¹ However, the two councillors who voted against the initiative had reservations about political messaging and public funds. "The role of public vehicles is to discharge civic responsibilities and not become billboards for political beliefs," said Councillor Alex Cullen, in an earlier comment on Ottawa Police Chief Vernon White's unilateral decision to outfit the city's police cruisers with the decals. "Where do you draw the line? Do you want stickers about pot laws? Do you want stickers about right-to-life issues? That's not the role of public vehicles."²⁴² Councillor Clive Doucet felt it was

²³⁹ "Calgary proclaims yellow ribbon month," *CBC News*, September 6, 2007, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/story/2007/09/06/ribbon-month.html> (accessed June 2, 2011).

²⁴⁰ Canada.com, "Council approves 'Support our troops' stickers on all municipal vehicles," *Ottawa Citizen*, September 12, 2007, <http://www.canada.com/ottawacitizen/news/story.html?id=99fdf7d6-8ead-4bdb-bc83-bbcea0b3fc18&k=32012> (accessed May 30, 2011).

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² Neco Cockburn, "Police care no place for politics, Cullen says; Councillor opposes 'Support Our Troops' decals on cruisers," *Ottawa Citizen*, August 28, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1328316931&sid=4Fmt=3clientId=13709&RQT=309VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

inappropriate to put any sticker on municipal vehicles that was not directly related to municipal business; he considered it a waste of tax payer dollars. The city staff estimated it would cost \$15,000 to outfit all the municipal vehicles with the decals.

The Legion also waded into the political issue. "The Royal Canadian Legion is most pleased when a city, or any other group, decides to carry decals that show support for our troops," said Royal Canadian Legion spokesman, Bob Butt. "It doesn't say we support our troops in Afghanistan. It doesn't say anything about Afghanistan, and it's too bad some people have decided to politicize these things because of the war in Afghanistan."²⁴³ Both Butt and the organization that he represented were opposed to lowering the Peace Tower flag in Ottawa to mark the fallen from Afghanistan.²⁴⁴ Butt and the Legion's concerns were "instrumental," fearing that the action would discriminate against those who were sacrificed in past wars and that it would ultimately debase the national symbol during wartime. Yet he endorsed the proliferation of the decals, which he interpreted as a simple "emotional" token in honour of the troops.

The appearance of the yellow decals in cities and towns across Canada illustrated the shift from debating the mission to a renewed focus on the welfare of the "troops." In Toronto, Mayor Miller swiftly changed his earlier stance on removing the decals,

²⁴³ Jake Rupert, "Sticker debate takes 'sad' political turn; Both sides lament what's happened to Support Our Troops decal issue," *Ottawa Citizen*, September 14, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1336808971&sid=4&Fmt=3&lientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 27, 2011).

²⁴⁴ Joel Kom, "Federal flags not lowered for soldiers in action," *Ottawa Citizen*, April 1, 2006, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1014142231&sid=17&Fmt=3&lientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed June 28, 2011); "Legion makes statement on half-masting of flags," *The Royal Canadian Legion*, April 24, 2006, http://www.legion.ca/News/06_Apr24_e.cfm (accessed June 27, 2011).

attributing this reversal to the deaths of three soldiers in Afghanistan. His motion referred to all Canadian troops and made no reference to the mission. In Edmonton, Councillor Mike Nickel's motion was characterized by some as political. He stated that the decals had nothing to do with the mission in Afghanistan; he directed those who had problems with the mission to take it up at the ballot box. In Calgary, city council voted against adopting the decals. Yet, two months later, Mayor Bronconnier announced that September would be "Support Our Troops" month for the City of Calgary. In Ottawa, Councillor Glenn Brooks put forward a motion calling for decals on all public vehicles. He, like Nickel, dismissed any accusations that the ribbons were about the mission. Mayor O'Brien endorsed the motion as support for the safe return of the troops. In all these cases, political accusations were levelled at the symbol and its adherents, but in each instance, supporters dissociated the decal from the mission itself.

The division of sacrifice between the home front and the battlefield has fuelled a need to commemorate the fallen and their families. As in the Peace Tower flag debate, the decals "bridged" both the "emotional" and "instrumental" poles. This made it exceedingly difficult for opponents of the decals to frame the symbols as political – even though they had only proliferated in a time of war. The majority of Canadians were against the war, yet concerted attempts – by the opponents of the decals – to fight back, with slogans like "Support Our Troops: Bring Them Home," simply worked against them.

Pacifying the home front entailed "politically disarming and domesticating the citizens, which mean[t] defining the citizen's rightful place not in public life but rather in

a supportive role," wrote Stahl. "The yellow [decal] is the totem of this transformation."²⁴⁵ The pro-troops side clearly won the decal wars, and the decals indeed seemed increasingly tied to the pro-war side. To attack the symbol was to dishonour the fallen. The decals allowed the onlooker to fill the void between the parameters of the mission and the sacrifices to the families. One could support the troops and be opposed to the mission. That was the genius of the decals. They seemed apolitical, but as the debates in the summer of 2007 illustrated, they clearly were not.

²⁴⁵ Roger Stahl, "Why We 'Support the Troops': Rhetorical Evolutions," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12, no. 4 (2009): 545.

Conclusion

The Peace Tower flag, the Highway of Heroes and the Support Our Troops decals became symbolic hallmarks of the home front's experience in confronting the human cost of the Afghanistan war. From 2006, Canadians were increasingly polarized in how they viewed the war overseas; they slowly but steadily turned away from the war. Contentious debates occurred over the nation's flag and the yellow decals that saturated public spaces. At the same time, the images of the fallen and their grieving families at the repatriation ceremonies sparked solidarity among some of the residents who populated the Highway of Heroes route.

As casualties from the mission in Afghanistan began to mount, Canadians developed an increasingly stronger bond with the soldiers. A Strategic Council poll conducted in March 2006 revealed that 73 percent of Canadians possessed a "strong emotional connection" with the troops. In April of that year, four more CF soldiers fell, sparking a public outcry for the Harper government to lower the Peace Tower flag on Parliament Hill to mark the losses. The government refused. An Ipsos Reid poll conducted that month revealed that a slim majority, 53 percent, believed the flag should be lowered for each of the fallen. Canadians were split into two poles on the contentious issue. Those who gravitated towards the emotional pole of the debate were primarily concerned with the welfare of the soldiers, notably their families or metaphoric kin group. They wanted to participate and grieve as a nation; a powerful icon of this shared grief was the embracing of a lowered flag policy. On the opposite

side of the debate, those on the instrumental pole premised their concerns on political and commercial considerations. By repeatedly lowering the flag for each fallen soldier, they believed that such actions would debase the symbol and dishonour the memory of the fallen from past wars. They were inclined to dismiss the emotional pole as trivial, equating true recognition with funding and equipment for the troops.

Public opinion had shifted considerably in April 2008, in favour of those inclined towards the emotional pole the debate. An Ipsos Reid poll revealed that 66 percent of Canadians believed the flag should be lowered for each of the fallen from Afghanistan. Though the federal opposition parties united against the ruling Conservative government and pushed forward a Liberal MP's flag-lowering motion in the House – passing the motion 155 to 142 – the ruling Conservatives dismissed the vote as non-binding. A majority of Canadians between 2006 and 2008 wanted to mark the deaths of the fallen with the paramount symbol of the nation, yet the Harper government did not agree.

As the flag debate raged in Ottawa, portraits of the fallen, in conjunction with scenes of grieving families, were disseminated by media outlets across the nation. But at the repatriation ceremonies the fallen remained hidden from view; it was the living families that took precedence. Ordinary Canadians congregated on the many bridges along the Highway of Heroes, watching as the black motorcade made its way down the processional route. The grieving families in the convoys made the fallen real to the onlookers on the overpasses. This living legacy was transferred to the families of the fallen, which allowed the bystanders to participate in the private grief of a mourning

family while exhibiting it in the public sphere. As this process unfolded, the commemorative gaze shifted from the families of the fallen to the onlookers who lined the route. They filled the void – between the state’s objectives for going to war in the first place and the public’s assessment of the war – with their own bodies; they became the principal subject in the commemorative process; they became the living memorial.

Of the ordinary Canadians who lined the Highway of Heroes, many were pro-mission, while others were against it, yet they were all united in expressing their support for the families of the fallen. As the Highway of Heroes has been commoditized or instrumentalized, the commemorative plaques and coins position the onlooker as central in the motif. The plaques that will be affixed to twenty-six of the fifty-nine overpasses along the route, each sponsored by a separate corporate donor, relegate the soldier to the background. The onlookers take centre-stage in the foreground of the bronze relief. The coins, the final evolution in monetizing the memorial site, echo the design of the plaques; the onlookers are once again central in the Highway of Heroes commemorative experience.

As the continuous flow of maple leaf-draped caskets made its way to Toronto for final autopsies, another storm brewed in Toronto City Hall. The city’s June 19, 2007, announcement that it was going to remove the yellow Support Our Troops decals on all municipal fire trucks and ambulances sparked public outcry across the country. David Miller, the mayor, attributed the three CF deaths that occurred on July 20 to his swift political reversal on the decals. The decision sparked wide ranging debates among city residents. As the Toronto decision unfolded, Support Our Troops initiatives spread to

Edmonton, Calgary and Ottawa. Debates among residents ensued, but they all adopted Support Our Troops measures.

The decals incorporate elements of the emotional and instrumental poles illustrated in the Peace Tower flag debates. Proponents viewed the symbol as an easy gesture to honour the troops and their families. Opponents interpreted it as a political tool that suppressed debate and bolstered support for the mission in Afghanistan. The decals apparently disassociate the troops from the mission, and yet to question the symbol is construed in some quarters as attacking the fallen. The proliferation of the yellow decals in Toronto, in 2006, signalled a shift from discussing the politics of the mission to honouring the sacrifices of the fallen. The decals, interpreted initially by some Canadians as a simple emotional token of support for the troops, devoid of any political connotations, became politically charged or instrumental symbols of the Afghan war.

In May 2010, Chris Alexander, Canada's former ambassador to Afghanistan, stated in an interview with *Maclean's* magazine that, during his six year tenure in Kabul, he did not break down once, even though he lost numerous colleagues and friends in the war:

"I never felt the full force of my emotions in Afghanistan. The tragedy is everyday. Everyone is stoic," he explained. Only back in Canada, when he happened to be driving from Ajax to Toronto on the Highway of Heroes with his wife, were his emotions unleashed. "Suddenly we see the people on the bridges. In their numbers. It's just astonishing how crowded these bridges are. I had never seen before how much ordinary Canadians care about this campaign."²⁴⁶

Canadians, or rather some Canadians, though half a world away from the pitched battles and grisly scenes of the Afghanistan war, were resolutely aware that – in the words of

²⁴⁶ Stephen Marche, "The return of Private Todd," *Maclean's*, May 5, 2010, <http://www2.macleans.ca/2010/05/05/the-return-of-private-todd/3/> (accessed December 13, 2010).

the Ambassador – “the tragedy is everyday.” They bore witness to the calamity that had befallen Canadian soldiers and their families. Images of the fallen, disseminated with the help of information technology, circulated widely in the media. Elaborate obituaries accompanied the portraits, personalizing the fallen to an unprecedented degree. Their nicknames, hobbies, friends, and above all the family members they left behind and their private grief entered the public sphere.

After 2006, when casualties mounted and support for the mission declined, the military campaign itself was superseded by the fallen. As the personal or domesticated soldier rose to the forefront of the collective consciousness of Canadians, ordinary citizens stepped into the commemorative void, demanding that the national flag be lowered. They stood by – waving their flags, saluting, as the fallen were shipped past them, and they supported city-wide initiatives that fastened yellow decals on vehicles in support of the troops.

As the private grief of ordinary Canadians entered the public sphere, the emotional was overtaken by the instrumental. In the Peace Tower flag debate, a majority of Canadians – in 2006 and 2008 – wanted the flag lowered in honour of each of the fallen from Afghanistan. The emotional request was denied by the Harper government. Instrumental concerns took precedence – fear of debasing the national symbol, the desire to honour all past veterans equally and the wish not to direct unwanted attention to the increasing casualties from Afghanistan.

As ordinary Canadians began lining the Highway of Heroes in 2002, their grassroots movement, their emotions, displayed in the public sphere, were eventually

instrumentalized. Jay Forbes launched an online petition after reading an article by Pete Fisher, who requested an official memorial designation for the site. In September 2007, Premier Dalton McGuinty unveiled the official signage that would designate the route as the Highway of Heroes. In August 2011, the True Patriot Love Foundation partnered with the Government of Ontario, and unveiled the first in a series of Highway of Heroes plaques. In October 2011, Fisher enlisted his colleague Joe Warmington of the *Toronto Sun*, and friend Caroline McIntosh, to pressure the Royal Canadian Mint to create a Highway of Heroes coin. An online petition was launched; the Mint eventually acquiesced and produced an official coin.

When the City of Toronto extended the Support Our Troops decals indefinitely, in June 2007, it stirred wide-ranging debates on the Afghan war. Emotional interpretations of the symbol, once in the public sphere, clashed with instrumental suspicions that the decals were inherently political in nature. The vehemence of the debates played out in cities across the country, discrediting the emotional argument that the symbols were merely apolitical in nature.

“On one side, [Afghanistan] is a warfighting enterprise abroad,” wrote political theorist Peter Alexander Meyers, on the shifting tenor of war in 21st century North America, “on the other side [in Canada], it is a domestic way of life.”²⁴⁷ Killed in an unpopular and faraway war, the fallen were mourned as extended kin. Yet the fallen came to be endowed with political and commercial importance. As a consequence, the emotional response Canadians had expressed for the fallen was tempered. In each

²⁴⁷ Peter Alexander Meyers, *Civic War and the Corruption of the Citizen* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago, 2008), 96.

instance – the Peace Tower flag, the Highway of Heroes and the Support Our Troops
decals – death and sacrifice and the true implications of Canada’s involvement of the
Afghanistan war were overtaken by government and corporate interests.

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