

The Canadian Department of National Defence (DND) plays two major roles in the recovery of Canadian military heritage remains, primarily Canadian war dead. Each of these roles can be linked to two different policies that Canada has had regarding what to do with Canadians killed in overseas conflicts. First, the policy was that of the United Kingdom, keeping Canada aligned with the Commonwealth, before shifting to resemble more closely that of the United States. Through an understanding of the Department of National Defence's Casualty Identification Program and repatriation policy, the Department's importance to military heritage recovery becomes clear.

The massive scale of death seen during the First World War created a multitude of problems with how to handle the war dead. The problem of how to properly care for and commemorate the British Commonwealth's war dead was given to the newly established Imperial War Graves Commission. The solution was to consolidate smaller or individual grave sites into larger, dedicated war cemeteries (Congram 2017; Commonwealth War Graves Commission n.d.). The Commission had multiple different reasons for choosing to bury the dead in Europe instead of repatriating them such as allowing the dead to "lie with their comrades" (qtd. Congram 2017), the fact that "to empty some 400,000 identified graves would be a colossal work" (qtd. Congram 2017), and the immense cost that such a feat would require (Congram 2017). There were some wealthy families who would be able to afford to both exhume their loved one as well as repatriate them, but the Commission's desire for all soldiers to receive equal treatment eliminated this as a possibility (Congram 2017). This policy of burying those killed in action where they died would stay in place for the Second World War and the Korean War (Congram 2017; Burtch 2024).

While the Commonwealth was in favour of letting the dead lie where they fell, the United States was less so. Though some Americans were buried in Europe with their Commonwealth counterparts, the choice of whether or not to bring the dead home was left up to the family of the deceased, with most families wishing for repatriation. Repatriation of the dead would not be able to begin until the cessation of the war, at which point the identifiable bodies were removed from the cemeteries in which they were buried during the war (Burtch 2024). The importance of repatriation for the United States was reinforced following the creation of United States Public Law No. 383 in 1946. This law not only made the repatriation of American war dead the responsibility of the Secretary of War, but also required them to, when requested,

return to the homeland for interment at places designated by the next of kin, or in national cemeteries provided such remains are entitled to interment therein, the remains of persons who died on or after September 3, 1939, and are buried outside the continental limits of the United States (U.S. Pub. L. No. 383)

This law created a strain between the United States and the Imperial War Graves Commission, which believed that there should be no exceptions to its rule of no repatriation and that all who were killed in action serving with British forces should be buried with their comrades, American or not (Congram 2017). One example of this strain was the case of Flight Sergeant Richard Stageman, an American serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force. F/Sgt. Stageman was killed in action in 1942, and as he was a serving member of the RCAF, he was buried alongside his fellow RCAF crew. When F/Sgt Stageman's family requested that he be brought back to the United States, an exception was made by the Commission to allow his exhumation and repatriation. The request had sparked mild controversy within the Canadian government because while some hoped to stay aligned with the rest of the Commonwealth

against repatriation, others feared that refusal could potentially damage the relationship between Canada and the U.S (Congram 2017).

The non-repatriation policy would be put to the test again during the Korean War. Due to controversies within the American military and the threat of cemeteries being captured during a possible Chinese offensive, there was an increased desire for the American war dead to return home (Burtch 2024). For the Commonwealth countries that took part in the war, the question of how to handle their dead was more complicated. The Commonwealth members that were present were there as a part of the United Nations, over which the IWGC had no authority. However, the Commonwealth's previous deferrals to the IWGC over what to do with the war dead during the First and Second World Wars led to the following statement from the British Commonwealth Occupation Force:

The general policy for all British Commonwealth nations represented in Korea will follow the normal practice of establishing cemeteries in Korea under the control of the Imperial War Graves Commission. If any of the British Commonwealth countries concerned desire to depart from that policy (which I doubt), and inform me to that effect, I will arrange for the exceptions to be made in those particular cases (Qtd. Burtch 2024)

The decisions made by the United States and IWGC were at odds with each other, and the IWGC's choice not to repatriate sparked a small amount of uproar, particularly because the repatriation efforts by the United States demonstrated that logistics were not a concern in the same way they were in the First World War (Burtch 2024). While Canadian politicians were in favour, or at least supportive, of repatriation, the DND's Personnel Members Committee was in favour of Canada keeping its war dead in South Korea. The Committee's main reason for why they did not wish to repatriate was due to their belief that repatriation would imply that Canada

believed that South Korea would eventually “be overrun by the Communists” (Qtd. Burtch 2024).

Canada’s policy on the repatriation of the war dead would eventually shift to be more in line with that of the United States. In July of 1970, Privy Council Order 1970/1254 was introduced, allowing for the repatriation of members of the Canadian Armed Forces at the request of their next-of-kin (Congram 2017). While the change in policy did bring Canada in line with the United States, alignment was not the only reason. A combination of increasing refrigeration and transport capacity, and significantly lower numbers of combat deaths compared to the World Wars, made it easier to bring the deceased home (Congram 2017). The policy was not without controversy, however, as unlike U.S Public Law No. 383, the repatriation policy would only apply to those killed after its creation; any Canadian killed during the Second World War would not be repatriated (Congram 2017). Despite the controversy, Privy Council Order 1970/1254 still represented Canada’s general shift away from the United Kingdom toward the United States.

Canada was not the first Commonwealth nation to move in favour of repatriating its war dead. Australia’s participation in the Vietnam War from 1962 to 1975 resulted in 521 Australians being killed. Though they had been part of the war for three years at this point, it was the deaths of three members of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam in late 1965 that finally pushed Australia away from its no repatriation policy. In early 1966, the policy was officially reversed, and Australians killed overseas would be repatriated (Returned & Services League of Australia n.d).

The United Kingdom would also change to allow for repatriation as well. Beginning in the 1980s, the United Kingdom began the repatriation of British war dead. This change was

similar to United States Public Law No. 383 in that repatriation would be at the request of the deceased's family, though it would not apply to those killed during the First or Second World Wars, similar to the Canadian policy (Ministry of Defence and Veterans UK 2022). The United Kingdom's change in policy was likely a direct result of the Falklands War in 1982 (Royal British Legion n.d.). Of the 30,000 British servicemembers involved in the war, only 255 of them were killed (Royal British Legion n.d.), a significantly smaller number than the 880,000 killed during the First World War, or the 384,000 killed during the Second World War (UK Parliament n.d.). It is not unlikely that the British policy may have changed for similar reasons as the Canadian policy did; better technology and significantly fewer casualties made it a much simpler task to repatriate the war dead.

Though Canada was neither the first nor the last Commonwealth nation to begin repatriating its war dead, that does not make the policy any less important. The Department of National Defence has a strict policy that it follows throughout the repatriation process. All deceased Canadian service personnel are returned to Canada through CFB Trenton by means of military transport aircraft (Government of Canada 2016). A Canadian Forces chaplain holds a ceremony during the loading and unloading of the deceased. After the deceased arrives in CFB Trenton, it follows the "Highway of Heroes" on Highway 401 to Toronto, where it will undergo an autopsy at the Ontario Coroner's Office. After the autopsy, the next-of-kin may choose to have the deceased buried at the National Military Cemetery of the Canadian Forces in Ottawa, or at a cemetery closer to where they live. If the family chooses not to have the burial at Ottawa, the deceased is typically transported via commercial aircraft like any other death in Canada, though it will be received by a CF chaplain at its final destination (Government of Canada 2016). Regardless of where the deceased is being buried, the Canadian government pays for not only the

funeral but also transportation for the family of the deceased, a headstone or gravemarker, and the obituary (Government of Canada 2016).

The Department of National Defence not only plays an important role in the repatriation of Canadian war dead, but in their identification as well. The DND operates the Casualty Identification Program, which is responsible for the identification of Canadian servicemembers from the First and Second World Wars, as well as the Korean War (Government of Canada 2023). Although those identified by the CIP will not be returned to Canada for burial (Lockyer and Davis 2020, 5), as already discussed with Privy Council Order 1970/1254, it still plays an important role in the recovery and commemoration of Canadian war dead.

The Casualty Identification Program utilises a number of different methods to identify human remains. First, the Program researches the history of the site where the remains were found, as well as any artifacts that may have been recovered. In the case of aircraft wreckage, it is possible to identify the aircraft itself. This information is then combined with other records, such as lists of still missing personnel, to create a list of possible individuals the remains could belong to (Government of Canada 2023). After a list of possible candidates is created, a forensic anthropologist examines the remains to determine factors such as age at death, sex, and height, to compare with the list of possible identities. This information is not always helpful, however, as the information in the personnel files may not have been accurate to the individual when they died, and because it was not uncommon for men to lie about their age when enlisting, so the individual's actual age at death would not be consistent with what is in their file, even if everything else is (Government of Canada 2023; Lockyer and Davis 2020, 5). When there is dental material such as jaws or teeth, the Canadian Forces Forensic Odontology Team can be involved to aid in the body's identification (Government of Canada 2023). The CFFOT is

typically only brought in to help identify bodies associated with the Second World War; however, as the dental records of many First World War personnel were destroyed (Lockyer and Davis 2020, 6). Stable isotope analysis is sometimes used to identify the place of birth of the individual, as the amount of oxygen isotopes absorbed by the body differs by geography, and can be determined through chemical analysis of tooth enamel. When a place of birth is identified, the information is used to again shrink the pool of possible missing personnel that the remains may belong to (Government of Canada 2023; Lockyer and Davis 2020, 6). Although it is not always required, DNA testing is a very useful tool in identifying remains, both for confirming an identity or for eliminating possible individuals. The CIP first does genealogical research to identify family members of personnel who are missing in action, then collects (with permission) DNA to be used in analysis (Government of Canada 2023). The genealogical research is usually carried out in-house, though the CIP sometimes finds it necessary to bring in civilian genealogists (Lockyer and Davis 2020, 6). When genealogical research is complete, the CIP can use mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) or Y-chromosome short tandem repeat (Y-STR) DNA to establish a lineage or parentage of the individual through the individual's mother or father, respectively, although mtDNA is preferred as it is more stable (Government of Canada 2023). When the remains are finally identified, the next-of-kin of the deceased are contacted, and a burial ceremony is planned for the nearest cemetery deemed appropriate by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The deceased is given a full military funeral, oftentimes with large amounts of family in attendance, including a representative from the deceased's regiment, a bugler, a CF chaplain, and even a casket specially made in Canada. This respect is not limited to identified servicemembers, as those whom the CIP were unable to identify are given the same funeral (Lockyer and Davis 2020, 7-8).

The Department of National Defence's repatriation policy and Casualty Identification Program are both representative of the role the DND plays in the recovery of Canadian military heritage remains. The repatriation policy is what is responsible for returning the actual remains of modern conflict to Canada. Its adoption was an example of how the United States has become a greater influence over Canada in the modern day compared to the rest of the Commonwealth. The CIP is a connection to the DND's past. Those who were killed in the nation's past conflicts are identified, but not fully recovered, as they will remain where they died in respect for Canada's original policy. As technology continues to change the idea of modern conflict, it invites discussion on how the DND will handle the military remains of the future.

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