



THE MACDONALD-LAURIER INSTITUTE



COMMENTARY/COMMENTAIRE

“Honouring Sacrifice”

By Brian Lee Crowley

Executive Summary/Sommaire

Canada owes a duty of care to its veterans and their families. The resolute spirit of quiet self-sacrifice in the cause of duty that served us so well in two World Wars and the Cold War, and which is still on display today, is a tribute to the character of our people. But it also depends upon a contract between the populace at large and those who expose themselves to the horrors of combat on our behalf. If we break faith in this regard, we jeopardize our capacity to answer duty's call next time.

Veterans' Affairs ombudsman Pat Stogran has put forward a blueprint for keeping the civilian side of the bargain with those in the military, to ensure that we promise proper care for them if they are wounded and for their families if they are wounded or killed, and to ensure that we deliver on our promise. Those who wear a uniform have a duty to their country but also to their families. Their private lives do not cease to matter when they enlist in a public cause. And it matters greatly not only as a matter of honour but of practical reality that the rest of us should not act as if they did.

The story of free societies summoning the will to resist is as old as Pericles' insistence that Athens could meet danger because of the character of its people. The titanic struggles with Nazi and Soviet tyranny represent a brave, inspiring and frightening chapter in the defence of freedom but neither the first nor the final one. The world is not a safer place today than it used to be. Even now Canada asks its sons and daughters to fight in Afghanistan, and the world continues to be full of regimes and groups filled with terrible resolve and determined to test us.

To meet that test we do not only need the spirit that motivated Canadians in the World Wars, in Korea and in the long struggle against communism. We also need to keep the bargain that was kept with those who fought, and who stood on guard, in those contests. It is a lighter burden than soldiers bear, but it is no less essential. And like the quiet determination of the soldiers, it is ultimately a question of character. What kind of people are we, that we ask others to put their lives on the line for us and then do, or do not, ensure that we do all we can to repay whatever sacrifice it falls to them to make?

Le Canada se doit de prendre soin des anciens combattants et de leurs familles. Leur inébranlable esprit de dévouement qui nous a si bien servi pendant deux Guerres mondiales et la Guerre froide, et qui s'affiche encore de nos jours, est un témoignage du caractère de notre peuple. Mais il dépend également d'un contrat entre la population et ceux qui s'exposent pour nous aux horreurs de la guerre. Si nous ne respectons pas notre parole, nous mettrons en péril notre capacité de répondre à l'appel la prochaine fois que la situation l'exigera.

L'ombudsman des vétérans, Pat Stogran, a proposé un plan pour respecter les engagements de la société civile envers les militaires, afin de leur offrir des soins appropriés ou de s'occuper de leur famille s'ils s'ont blessés ou tués au combat. Ce plan vise à garantir le respect de nos promesses envers eux. Ceux qui portent l'uniforme ont un devoir envers leur pays mais aussi envers leur famille. Leur vie privée ne perd pas son importance lorsqu'ils s'enrôlent. Il importe grandement que nous n'agissions pas comme si c'était le cas. C'est non seulement une question d'honneur, mais une réalité pratique incontournable.

L'histoire des sociétés libres qui trouvent en elles la volonté de résister à l'envahisseur est aussi vieille que l'affirmation de Périclès voulant qu'Athènes puisse faire face au danger qui la menaçait grâce au caractère de sa population. La lutte contre les tyrannies nazie et soviétique représente un épisode courageux, inspirant et effrayant dans la défense de la liberté, mais certainement pas le premier ni le dernier. En ce moment même, le Canada demande à ses fils et ses filles de combattre en Afghanistan, et de nombreux régimes et groupes à travers le monde cachent de terribles desseins et sont résolus à nous mettre à l'épreuve.

Pour y faire face, il nous faut non seulement maintenir l'esprit qui animait les Canadiens pendant les guerres mondiales, en Corée et pendant le long combat contre le communisme. Nous devons également nous acquitter de notre devoir envers ceux qui se sont battus, et qui sont restés sur leurs gardes, pendant ces conflits. C'est un fardeau moins lourd que celui des soldats, mais tout aussi essentiel. Et tout comme la détermination tranquille des soldats, c'est en fin de compte une question de caractère.

Brian Lee Crowley is Managing Director of the Macdonald-Laurier Institute
Based on a talk to a panel organised by the Veterans' Ombudsman
in Ottawa on October 19th, 2010.

Pat Stogran's proposed blueprint for the fair treatment of Canada's veterans bears the title "Honouring Sacrifice". The title is exactly right, but the nature of the sacrifice and the obligation that it creates is largely assumed in the document itself. My experience is that the nature of the sacrifice is intuitively grasped by most Canadians, but they would be hard pressed to articulate the principles behind it. Yet if we are to succeed in ensuring that Canada discharges its obligation of honour towards those who have served in the military, it is necessary for us all to reflect on the nature of the sacrifice we wish to honour. My attempt to contribute to this task begins with a story.

It came to me from a good friend who was brought as a young child from the Holland of his birth to live in Canada and it concerns how his family chose to come to our country.

A job to do

Everyone here will know that the liberation of The Netherlands from Nazi occupation was a job that fell to the Canadian forces in Second World War. This job was carried out with typical Canadian effectiveness and self-effacement. The losses were considerable.

My friend's father was walking down the road not long after the Nazis were driven from Holland, and the sacrifices of Canada and its troops on behalf of that country were still fresh in his mind. Walking down the road in the opposite direction came a Canadian soldier. The Dutchman stopped the soldier and said, "You don't know me and I don't know you, but I know who you are and what you represent. You and your fellow Canadians came from across the Atlantic, from far away, knowing nothing of my country and having little at stake here. At great expense in blood and treasure you have freed us from cruel oppression, and I imagine you have lost friends and colleagues in the effort. The least I can do is to tell you how deeply grateful my fellow-countrymen and I are for what you have done for us."

"No need to thank me sir.
We had a job to do
and we did it."

According to my friend's father, the Canadian just looked at him quite calmly, smiled and said, "No need to thank me sir. We had a job to do and we did it." Then he saluted and carried on down the road.

Apparently my friend's father arrived home and announced to the family, "I think we have found the country where we must go to live." My friend is now a distinguished member of the Canadian parliament. His name is Peter Stoffer and he is a keen advocate of the rights of veterans.

Now why do I tell this story to open my contribution to a discussion of the great record of Pat Stogran as ombudsman on behalf of our veterans and the difficulty veterans in this country have in getting many of the services to which they should be entitled? Because I think it neatly encapsulates one half of the moral bargain that links Canadians and their veterans.

On freedom's road

Why was that Canadian in the road? The job he and his comrades had to do wasn't just to fight the enemy. It was far more than that. The job they had to do, and for which each one of them was prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice, was to defend the moral principles on which our society is based, values like individual freedom, democracy, the rule of law and the willingness to put oneself and everything one holds dear on the line. They were there to protect and defend not just their families and their communities, but the precious way of life that we enjoy in those communities.

It has long been thought that those who come from societies that celebrate freedom, responsibility and democracy, where each of us is given the chance to live according to our own beliefs and experiences, these are the societies whose members fight most fiercely to preserve these freedoms. Only think back to Thucydides' account of Pericles' funeral oration. There to sing the praises of the dead from the



Peloponnesian War, Pericles thought that, in order to understand the valour and success with which Athenians fought to protect their homeland, one needed most of all to know what kind of a society Athens was. He talked at length about the centrality of freedom, democracy and equality before the law. He lauded the openness of Athenian society and contrasted the city's life of freedom with that of rivals like Sparta, "where our rivals from their very cradles, by a painful discipline, seek after manliness, at Athens *we live exactly as we please, and yet are just as ready to encounter every legitimate danger.*"

And he concludes: "if I have dwelt at some length upon the *character of our country*, it has been to show that our stake in the struggle is not the same as theirs who have no such blessings to lose."

From Athens to Afghanistan

What Pericles said about Athens is entirely applicable to the Canada of the Second World War, of Korea and the Cold War, and of today. We enjoy freedom in large part because when we are called upon to protect that freedom, brave men and women step up to the plate. So a key idea here, as Pericles makes clear, is *what is at stake* when our country calls upon its men and women to defend its people and their way of life. And the sacrifice we are called upon to honour is not a sacrifice for personal gain or for some abstract ideology or the Fatherland. It is the willingness of a few to risk everything, including death and terrible disability, in order to ensure that this life of freedom shall not pass from the world because we were not prepared to defend it from its enemies. And Canadians have long been willing to sacrifice to preserve not only their freedom, but that of other countries who share our belief in freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

Thus it was that when Europe was engulfed by Nazism and Fascism, the entire democratic world – Britain, America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and others – rose up and, at great cost to themselves, rescued Europe – to the wonderment of my friend's father. Thus it was when the Soviet Union threatened

all the values Canadians hold dear, politicians like Louis St-Laurent and Mike Pearson spoke up and convinced Canadians that they needed to sacrifice, through higher defence spending and membership in NATO. Canada, alongside America, put military bases in Germany for the sole purpose of guaranteeing that if Soviet tanks rolled into Western Europe, they could not advance without attacking our two countries as well. We put ourselves intentionally in harm's way as a sacrifice to protect shared values. We are today in Afghanistan

because we are bound by an honourable treaty that obliges us to rise up in defence of our allies who share these values if those allies are attacked. The September 11th attacks arose from the failed state of Afghanistan, and we are there to ensure that such an attack can never happen again.

The debt we owe

To defend ultimate values we must be prepared to make ultimate sacrifices. And those sacrifices are not made just by the men and women in harm's way. They are made at the request of Canadian society and it is from this relationship that the debt of honour owed to our veterans arises. They were in the field on behalf of every one of us, by definition ready to make the ultimate sacrifice. And in return, we owe them.

What is the nature of the debt? Remember that while the values we call on our military to protect are collective ones enjoyed by all Canadians, the burden of taking up arms in their defence falls to specific people. Don't mistake my meaning – we all sacrifice, through taxes and some other kinds of deprivation during wartime and its aftermath. But democracy

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and freedom can only exist when enough of the individuals who benefit from it are willing to sacrifice their safety and potentially their lives to ensure that the life they value so much may be passed on to the generations that follow. As the American bumper sticker so eloquently puts it, Land of the Free *Because of the Brave*. The willingness of free citizens to become warriors in defence of free citizenship is the unspoken condition of our way of life.

But free citizens have many obligations besides those to their country. They have families and others who depend on them. They run the risk of disfiguring and disabling injuries that may impair their ability to look after themselves and their families. They may not come back at all. A society that wants its citizenry to be prepared, when the need arises, to rise up in its defence therefore has both a practical and a moral obligation to offer generous and unstinting support to those who serve, and to their families.

The moral consideration is that those who risk all on behalf of Canada are entitled to an equally unlimited liability from our nation. And since every serving member of the military accepts this principle that they may have to risk all, and since the man or woman in the field can only be there as the result of a team effort involving every other member of the military, the moral obligation extends to every person who has served, without distinction.

The practical obligation is that if we wish to be able to call on Canadians to serve and sacrifice on behalf of the nation in the future, we must show them by our behaviour toward those who served in the past that they can face the prospect of death or grievous injury secure in the knowledge that

they will not be a burden on their loved ones and that those loved ones will be generously provided for if necessary.

Strong societies and strong bonds

Strong societies can call on their populations to make sacrifices for values they believe in. I've just indicated what such a strong society needs to do in order to make the choice to serve in the military one that our citizens can make with a clear conscience. In conclusion, let me point out that, contrary to what some people apparently believe, these issues are by no means of purely historical interest. We (by which I mean we members of the western alliance) are faced, elsewhere in the world,

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with regimes and peoples who are in absolutely no doubt about the values they embrace, and who demonstrate a willingness to make great sacrifices to preserve and promote those values at home and to project those values abroad. There are tests of strength going on all the time between the West (of which Canada is a part) and the Russians over energy supplies; or the Iranians and the North Koreans over nuclear proliferation; or international terrorist groups over our ability to live free from attack; or the Chinese over currency manipulation or dominance in the Asian seas or control over natural resources around the world. Every one of us lives in hope that each of these conflicts, and those that may yet come, can be resolved without resort to force of arms.

Yet if the Cold War, for example, taught us anything, it is that the ability credibly to threaten to defend our values on the field of battle is often the price of peace.

So let me add my voice to that of Pat Stogran's in calling on Ottawa to live up to both the moral obligations of honour and the practical obligations of the future by ensuring that the treatment of our veterans is based on the highest Canadian standards of decency, generosity and fairness. Our soldiers' past sacrifices deserve no less. Our future preparedness to defend our values depends on it.





THE MACDONALD-LAURIER INSTITUTE



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The Macdonald-Laurier Institute for Public Policy exists to make poor quality public policy unacceptable in Ottawa. We will achieve this goal by proposing thoughtful alternatives to Canadians and their political and opinion leaders through non-partisan and independent research and commentary.

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Allan Gotlieb, former Deputy Minister of External Affairs and Ambassador to Washington

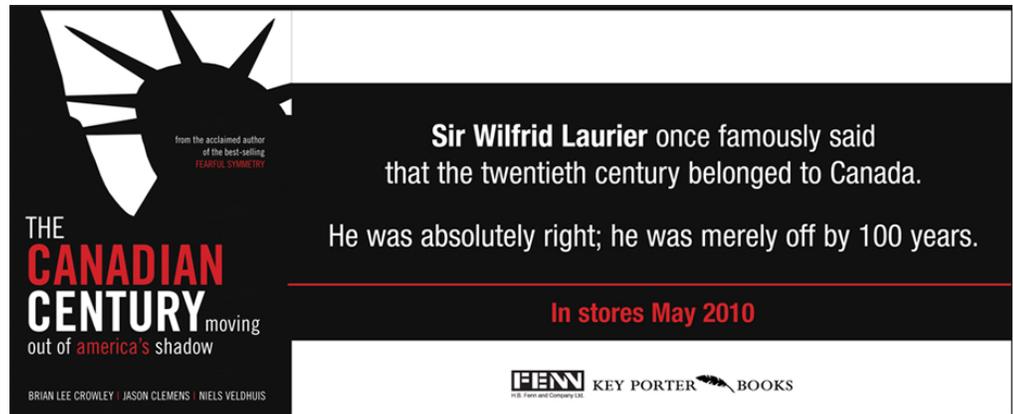
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Hon. James S. Peterson, former Minister of International Trade and Member of Parliament for 23 years

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-Allan Gotlieb, from the foreword



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