

The Unavoidable Shadow of Past Wars: Obsequies for Casualties of the Afghanistan Mission in Australia and Canada

There is an essential sameness in the purposes of the obsequies accorded members of the armed forces who die in wars in the service of their community. As Timothy Wolfe and Clifton Bryant remind us, the military funeral, “with its distinctive ceremonial characteristics and embellishments, serves to certify the deceased as a fallen warrior; it publicly legitimises the ultimate sacrifice, provides public announcement and celebration of the individual’s death, and memorialises the social fact of the soldier’s demise.” Most importantly, military obsequies are intended to ensure that “the memory of the fallen soldier is indelibly fixed in the collective consciousness of the society” (Wolfe and Bryant, 170). By the same token, however, how a government chooses to memorialise those killed in war will inevitably reflect the politics and political culture of the community.

There is perhaps no better illustration of this than how members of the armed forces of Australia and Canada who have died in the stabilisation mission in Afghanistan have been commemorated by their respective communities. Between February 2002 and January 2009, eight members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and 108 members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) died in Afghanistan as a result of Australian and Canadian contributions to the American-led Operation Enduring Freedom or the NATO-run International Security Assistance Force. How these 116 casualties were treated by their governments, however, differed dramatically. While all

were accorded essentially similar ceremonies—a “ramp ceremony” in Afghanistan where the body was loaded into a transport, a “repatriation ceremony” held at the air force base at home, followed by a funeral service and interment¹—there were essential differences in *how* they were memorialised, and who was involved in the obsequies.

The celebration and memorialisation of Australians who died in Afghanistan were mostly *public* affairs, even though many funerals were open only to family and invited guests. These obsequies involved members of the government and opposition at the highest levels, who participated in what became a *national* memorialisation of the war dead. By contrast, in Canada the involvement of federal government officials was limited to just one part of the funerary process, a ceremony, moreover, that was largely kept out of the public eye. Importantly, the funerals of those Canadians who died in Afghanistan were essentially *private* affairs, even in the case of those funerals that were ‘open’ to the public; there was no funeral where both federal government and opposition leaders were present for the obsequies.

This article seeks to explain this difference. I examine how the eight Australians and 108 Canadians who died in Afghanistan between February 2002 and January 2009 were treated, demonstrating the differences in practice between the two countries. I conclude by suggesting that the way that the war dead are treated in these two countries is a reflection of how war and the armed forces are regarded in what John Blaxland has called “strategic cousins.” Following Blaxland, who explores the similarities and differences in military culture and force structure in both countries, I argue that in both cases the shadow of past wars plays a crucial role in shaping how the political elites in each community treat their contemporary casualties. In Australia, the armed forces occupy a central place in the mythology of the nation, in part a function of the Gallipoli landing in 1915 and how that event is memorialised in Australian political culture; in part a function of the 1942 Kokoda Track campaign against the Japanese;

and in part a function of the way in which Australians who served in the Vietnam War were treated in the 1960s and 1970s.

In Canada, war casts a completely different shadow. The deep divisions within Canadian society exposed by its expeditionary campaigns of the early part of the twentieth century had exceedingly long-term effects on politics, and affected how Canadians saw themselves and the relationship of their armed forces to the development of the political community. In particular, it can be argued that political elites in Canada have always had powerful reasons to avoid commemorating war, with the result that over the course of the twentieth century the armed forces were increasingly constructed by political leaders in ways that depreciated and diminished their war-fighting capacity. This, in turn, affected the ways in which political elites commemorate those Canadians who died in war. These different shadows of past wars, I suggest, account for the differences in practices between Australia and Canada by making the military obsequies we can observe in each country seem quite ‘natural’ to that country’s citizens.

Australian Obsequies

Of the eight Australian soldiers killed in Afghanistan, one died in February 2002 as a result of a landmine planted during the Soviet Union’s occupation in the 1980s; the others were killed between late 2007 and early 2009, three from improvised explosive devices (IEDs), three in combat, and one from a rocket attack. For seven of these soldiers, repatriation ceremonies were held at three Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) bases close to where the individual’s unit was headquartered; one repatriation ceremony was held at Melbourne airport. These ceremonies were attended primarily by members of the units to which the soldier had been attached and their commanding officers, together with the leadership of the Australian Defence Force. The chief of the Army was present for every repatriation; the chief of

the defence force and the minister for defence were present for all but two.

In only one of the eight cases did the next of kin insist on excluding dignitaries. Kylie Russell, spouse of Sgt. Andrew Russell, killed in 2002, decided that the repatriation ceremony at RAAF Base Pearce with full military honours provided the opportunity for the Army and his regiment to honour him, and that the family wanted “to say goodbye away from the public eye.”²

In the other seven cases, the funerals were very much in the public eye (even though some funerals were not open to the public). The governor-general, Michael Jeffrey, attended one funeral as commander-in-chief of the ADF; the Governor of Queensland, Quentin Bryce, attended another. The funerals were attended by the ADF leadership—the chief of the defence force, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, and the two chiefs of the Army during this period, Lieut.-Gen. Peter Leahy and Lieut.-Gen. Ken Gillespie, together with the commanding officers of the unit.

The federal leadership attended all seven funerals. Prime Minister John Howard was at the funerals of Trooper David Pearce in October 2007 and Sgt. Matthew Locke in November. After the Liberal/National Coalition was defeated in the 24 November 2007 elections, the new Australian Labor Party prime minister, Kevin Rudd, attended the funerals of Pte. Luke Worsley in December 2007, Lance-Corporal Jason Marks in May 2008, Signaller Sean McCarthy in July 2008, Lieut. Michael Fussell in December 2008, and Pte. Greg Sher in January 2009. The minister for defence was also present at four funerals, and was represented by a junior defence minister at the others.

Moreover, these were bipartisan ceremonies. When he was leader of the opposition, Rudd attended the funerals with Howard, including the funeral for Pearce, which occurred in the middle of the 2007 general election campaign. After Rudd became prime minister, he was joined by Brendan Nelson, who had taken over the leadership of

the Liberal/National Coalition, at the funerals of Worsley, Marks and McCarthy, and by Malcolm Turnbull, who succeeded Nelson as leader in September 2008, at the funerals of Fussell and Sher. Likewise, Joel Fitzgibbon, the ALP shadow minister for defence, attended the funerals before he became minister for defence in December.

The presence of this wide range of dignitaries transformed these obsequies into a very *public* memorialisation of Australian deaths in Afghanistan. Moreover, the involvement of the representatives of the Crown, and bipartisan nature of the appearance of both the prime minister and leader of the opposition, and ministers and shadow ministers made these funerals essentially *national* events—commemorations intended to be shared with and by the entire nation.



Fig. 1: Australian political leadership at military funeral.

At the military funeral of Trooper David Pearce in Brisbane, Prime Minister John Howard and leader of the opposition Kevin Rudd offer condolences to Pearce's spouse Nicole. *The Age*, 18 October 2007.

Canadian Obsequies

Between 2002 and 31 January 2009, 108 members of the Canadian Armed Forces died in Afghanistan. Eight of the fatalities occurred between 2002 and 2005, but only three were caused by hostile fire: two from a landmine in October 2003, and one from a suicide bomber in January 2004. 'Friendly fire' killed four Canadians in April 2002, and one soldier died in an accident in November 2005. The major turning point occurred after the Liberal government of Paul Martin decided to contribute a battle-group to Kandahar in 2005. Those troops took up position just as the Conservative government of Stephen Harper was taking office, and the number of casualties increased dramatically: 36 deaths in 2006, 30 in 2007, 32 in 2008, and two in January 2009. Of the 100 deaths between March 2006 and 31 January 2009, 86 were caused by hostile fire, many the result of roadside bombs or IEDs.³

Some general patterns in the obsequies for these casualties can be observed. First, with but one exception, political elites played a limited role in the memorialisation of Canada's Afghanistan war dead: they were involved in the repatriation ceremonies held at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Trenton, but not the funerals or memorial services that followed. The exception involved the very first fatalities—four soldiers of the 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (3 PPCLI) killed by a bomb dropped on a Canadian formation by an American fighter at Tarnak Farm near Kandahar City on 17 April 2002.⁴ Prime Minister Chrétien, Art Eggleton, the minister of national defence, and the military leadership were present at the repatriation ceremony at CFB Trenton on 20 April. All four soldiers were given full military funerals, which were attended by a number of dignitaries. Nova Scotia premier John Hamm attended the funerals of Pte. Nathan Smith in Dartmouth and Pte. Richard Green in Hubbards, Nova Scotia. The governor general, Adrienne Clarkson, who had cut short a trip to London to visit soldiers wounded in the Tarnak Farm incident at Ramstein, Germany, attended Cpl. Ainsworth Dyer's funeral in Toronto, which was also attended by the

premier of Ontario, Ernie Eves, and the minister of foreign affairs, Bill Graham. On 28 April, Clarkson, Chrétien, Gen. Ray Henault, the chief of defence staff, and Gen. John de Chastelain, the colonel of the regiment, joined more than 16,000 people in a memorial service held at the Skyreach Centre in Edmonton, where 3 PPCLI was based (Gregoire).

But the obsequies for the four soldiers killed at Tarnak Farm were unique.⁵ No comparable public ceremonials were held for any of the other 104 Canadians killed in Afghanistan down to 31 January 2009. The governor general did not make a further appearance at a funeral held for any of those killed in Afghanistan. Chrétien did not participate in the obsequies for any of the other three Canadians who died in Afghanistan during his prime ministership. Two Canadians were killed in Afghanistan during Paul Martin's prime ministership: he attended the repatriation ceremony for Cpl. Jamie Murphy, killed by a suicide bomber in January 2004, but not the ceremony held for Pte. Braun Woodfield, who died when his LAV III was involved in an accident in November 2005.⁶

Following the deployment to Kandahar in February 2006, the number of casualties increased dramatically. However, under the Conservative government of Stephen Harper, the involvement of federal dignitaries was limited to the repatriation ceremony alone. When two soldiers died in early March 2006 and one soldier was killed at the end of that month, Governor General Michaëlle Jean, who had been installed in September 2005, was present at the repatriation ceremonies at CFB Trenton along with Gordon O'Connor, the minister of national defence, Gen. Rick Hillier, chief of defence staff, and other general staff officers.

Because the number of casualties had an impact on public opinion,⁷ the Harper government tried to lower the visibility of casualties. First, Chrétien's decision to lower the flag on the Peace Tower of the Parliament Buildings (and other government buildings) to half-mast whenever a soldier died in Afghanistan was rescinded.⁸ Second, when four soldiers were killed by a bomb in April 2006, the PMO sought

to try to limit the domestic political impact by trying to “manage” the media.⁹ The media was banned from CFB Trenton, the ban issued the day before the bodies were to be repatriated.¹⁰ Although it was justified on the grounds that the families needed privacy to grieve, it was widely interpreted as having been imposed so that Canadians would not be exposed to the sight of flag-covered coffins returning from Afghanistan. The governor general did not attend the repatriation ceremony: the PMO had told her that “it was better if she did not attend.”¹¹

These moves backfired badly. The half-masting decision drew considerable criticism, since it was portrayed by some as a slight to the sacrifice of the forces in Afghanistan. The media ban also aroused strong opposition. Officials at National Defence Headquarters went out of their way to signal to the media that they opposed the new rules. At CFB Trenton, some officials purposely undermined the media ban by moving equipment on the apron out of the way so that the media gathered along the fence of the base had an unobstructed view of the ceremony.¹²

The families of the fallen soldiers were uniformly critical. The father of Cpl. Paul Davis, who had been killed the month before, called the ban “a terrible mistake,” noting that it had been a “beautiful moment” when the governor general greeted his son’s body.¹³ At Cpl. Matthew Dinning’s funeral, his father showed a video of the repatriation ceremony taken by family members, introducing it with the words “Now I’d like to show you some of the video that Mr Harper wouldn’t let you see close up of Matthew’s arrival home.”¹⁴ Yet another father, Tim Goddard, claimed at the funeral of his daughter, Capt. Nichola Goddard, that he could see “no reason” for the ban, noting that he “would like to think that Nich died to protect our freedoms, not restrict them.”¹⁵

The negative reaction of the families was mirrored by thousands of critical emails,¹⁶ and condemnation not only from the opposition parties but also from some government backbenchers. Much of the

criticism focused on how Harper was merely copying President George W. Bush's efforts to control media coverage of fatalities returning from the war in Iraq.¹⁷ In the end, Harper backed down, amending the guidelines to allow the families to decide whether the media were to be allowed on the base for the repatriation ceremony.

After the summer of 2006, however, the obsequies for Canadians killed in Afghanistan assumed a certain routine. All the coffins were met by the defence minister and the chief of defence staff, together with other senior commanders. On numerous occasions, the commander-in-chief, Governor General Michaëlle Jean, attended the repatriation ceremony: she was there to meet 35 of the 91 fallen soldiers who were returned to Canada between July 2006 and January 2009.

Most of the funerals were held with military honours; most were closed to the media. Of the 104 funerals held between the four 'friendly fire' casualties in 2002 and January 2009, only twelve were attended by dignitaries. The lieutenant governors of British Columbia and Newfoundland and Labrador each attended two funerals; the lieutenant governors of Prince Edward Island, Québec and New Brunswick each went to one; provincial premiers attended four; members of provincial legislatures, mayors, or members of local town councils were also present at a number of ceremonies. Federal leaders, by contrast, were notable by their absence. Neither the prime minister nor the minister of national defence participated in any of the funerals held for the 100 Canadians killed between March 2006 and January 2009 (though two federal cabinet ministers from Québec attended funerals of soldiers in their own constituencies).

There were also a number of memorial services, usually held by the regiment. These were public, in the sense that they were open to the media and the community; however, on at least one occasion, the families of the soldiers specifically asked that government ministers and senior military officers not attend so that the service could be, as the families put it, a *community* memorial.¹⁸

In addition, there were a number of informal community memorialisations. For example, in 2006, LCol Dave Anderson, commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (1 PPCLI), decided to deploy soldiers from his unit to Remembrance Day services across Canada in towns and cities where those who had died in Afghanistan were buried (Blatchford 334–348). Don Cherry, a commentator for CBC's *Hockey Night in Canada*, regularly devoted a portion of his intermission show, "Coach's Corner," to those killed in Afghanistan. Some Canadians copied the American practice of wearing a red article of clothing on Fridays to demonstrate support for troops overseas, and organised Red Friday/Vendredi Rouge rallies. Perhaps the most visible community memorialisation evolved around the escorted convoys that took the bodies of soldiers from CFB Trenton down Ontario's major motorway, Highway 401, to the coroner's office in Toronto for autopsy: local police forces, fire services, ambulance services, veterans organisations and ordinary people took to lining the 172 km route to salute the passing hearses¹⁹—a practice that prompted the Ontario government to designate that portion of the highway as the "Highway of Heroes" to honour the fallen troops.²⁰

There was no bipartisanship in the commemoration of those who died in Afghanistan. While all the opposition leaders—Stéphane Dion, the Liberal leader of the opposition from February 2006 to December 2008, and his successor Michael Ignatieff; Gilles Duceppe, leader of the Bloc Québécois; and Jack Layton, leader of the New Democratic Party—routinely issued statements of condolence on behalf of their parties whenever a CAF member died in Afghanistan, they were not involved in their funerary rites. No member of the opposition was involved in the repatriation ceremony—under any of the three prime ministers between 2002 and 2009. As far as can be determined, no opposition leader or national defence critic attended any of the funerals of those killed in Afghanistan. Nor were opposition leaders involved in what were billed as non-partisan "non-political" support-the-troops events like Red Friday rallies.²¹ Rather, the only

commemorative occasion in which opposition leaders were routinely involved was the annual Remembrance Day service.²²

In short, the contrast with Australia could not be more marked. In Canada, obsequies for those killed in Afghanistan were not designed to provide the political community *as a whole* to participate in the memorialisation of those who died in the service of their country. With the singular exception of the four ‘friendly fire’ deaths in 2002, the commemoration of Canada’s war dead in Afghanistan was structured to emphasise the *private*, the *regimental* or, on some occasions, the *local*.

Explaining the Differences

How to explain the differences between the way in which the national leadership in Australia and Canada commemorate those who died in Afghanistan? A logical place to start might be to focus on the most obvious difference: the much larger number of war dead in the Canadian case—108 Canadians versus eight Australians. Could it be that the difference in the number of casualties had an impact on how the war dead were memorialised—in other words, because there were fewer Australian casualties, the more attention they were given in commemoration? The numbers of casualties will have an obvious impact on the ability of the leadership to attend obsequies: at a certain point it would become physically impossible for the leadership to attend the funeral of every casualty. However, in the case of both Australian and Canadian casualties, the variation in the numbers alone does not explain the difference. In both countries, patterns of national leadership attendance at funerals for those killed on service overseas had been set well before the variation in numbers of casualties emerged in 2006.

In Australia, there were already precedents for treating some military funerals as national events. When two Black Hawk helicopters collided in Queensland in June 1996, killing eighteen members of the ADF, the memorial service was attended by the governor-general,

the prime minister, John Howard, the leader of the opposition, Kim Beazley, and many other federal and state dignitaries.²³ Moreover, in the case of Australia's operations in the Middle East, Howard had also established an important precedent. In April 2006, Australia's first (and only) casualty in Iraq, Pte Jake Kovco, had died in his barracks as a result of a self-inflicted gunshot wound.²⁴ Unfortunately for his family, the wrong remains were repatriated to Australia; when Kovco's widow received the body of a Bosnian contractor, she angrily telephoned Howard directly. By all accounts, when Kovco's remains were finally returned, the prime minister wanted to attend the military funeral to make amends for the error in repatriation. According to sources in the ADF, Howard was eager to pay his respects by attending subsequent military funerals,²⁵ but even if he had not been so eager, the precedent set with Kovco's funeral would have made it difficult not to attend subsequent funerals, even if Australian casualties had mounted to Canadian levels.

In Canada, a pattern had likewise emerged after the initial 'friendly fire' deaths in 2002, and was well established before casualties started mounting in 2006: the prime minister expressed his condolences, but did not attend any of the actual funerary ceremonies; the repatriation ceremony was attended by the minister of national defence, the CAF brass, and on occasion the governor general; opposition leaders were not formally involved in the obsequies. Importantly, that pattern did not change even as the number of fatalities increased. In short, the variation in the number of casualties does not appear to explain the difference.

Could the difference lie in how the war was seen in both countries? It might be surmised that one of the reasons why the political leadership in Canada has not appeared at military funerals is because the mission is not popular and the presence of politicians would be interpreted as an attempt to politicise the issue and increase support for the mission. The problem with this explanation is that the public opinion numbers in both Australia and Canada are virtually identical: in both countries, opinion about the mission is essentially divided, and has

not changed markedly in response to the number of Australians or Canadians killed in Afghanistan. In a Decima poll in April 2006, 45 per cent of Canadians polled approved the mission and 46 per cent were opposed. In February 2007, an Angus Reid poll showed that 46 per cent wanted Canadian troops brought home; by April 2007, after nine further fatalities, that number jumped to 52 per cent. As of May 2008, 54 per cent of Canadians opposed an extension of the mission.²⁶ These figures mirror Australian attitudes almost exactly. An AC Nielsen poll in March 2006 found 45 per cent were in favour of the Australian mission, with 48 per cent opposed. A Lowy Institute poll in April 2007 found 46 per cent favoured the mission and 46 per cent were opposed. A University of Sydney poll released in October 2007 showed little change, with 50 per cent in favour and 46 per cent opposed.²⁷

Could the difference be explained by the positions of the political parties on the Afghanistan mission? While in Australia there is clear bipartisan support for the mission in Afghanistan—despite tepid public support—in Canada the positions of the opposition parties are more ambiguous. The Conservative party—and its predecessor, the Canadian Alliance²⁸—was in favour of the Afghanistan mission, both in opposition and in government. The New Democratic Party has consistently pressed for a withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Bloc Québécois is not in favour of the mission but has not pressed for an immediate withdrawal. The Liberal party is in an ambiguous position: it was a Liberal government that contributed forces to the original mission to oust the Taliban and it was a Liberal government that volunteered to contribute a battle group to Kandahar. On the other hand, in opposition after February 2006, not all Liberal MPs have been enthusiastically in favour of a continuation of the mission. The problem with this line of argument is that the Canadian pattern of not having the political leadership present in a bipartisan way had already been well established by the time that some of the ambiguity in the Liberal party's position on Afghanistan emerged.

Could the difference lie in the different ways that politicians are viewed in each country? There is little doubt that if the prime minister and the leader of the opposition showed up at a funeral for a Canadian soldier killed in Afghanistan, they would likely be accused of ‘playing politics’ with casualties. The same is not true in Australia: Australians appear to be generally entirely comfortable with the national leadership attending these funerals, and there were few suggestions that Howard or Rudd were ‘playing politics’ with Australia’s Afghan casualties. (Indeed, in Australia the national leadership was criticised when they *did not* show up for a military funeral: when Howard and Rudd could not attend the funeral of Capt. Mark Bingley, who died in a Black Hawk helicopter crash on HMAS Kanimbla off Fiji in November 2006, they were roundly criticised by the deputy mayor of Townsville.²⁹)

In short, the differences cannot be attributed to a particular prime minister, or a particular government, or a particular party. The practices in each country outlined above were unchanging over time, and persisted despite changes of leadership and political party in both countries. In Australia, prime ministers from both political parties attended funerals; they were accompanied by leaders of the opposition from both parties. In Canada, three different prime ministers from two parties did not attend a single funeral, and leaders of opposition parties were nowhere to be found in commemorations.

A more fruitful explanation, I suggest, is to be found in how Australians and Canadians react to the practices outlined above. Australians appear to find it quite *natural* that their political leadership—the governor-general as commander-in-chief, the prime minister and leader of the opposition, ministers and shadow ministers, and the Australian Defence Force brass—would gather for a public commemoration of the war dead, even in the middle of a bitterly-fought general election campaign. By contrast, Canadians appear to be quite comfortable with the absence of their political elites at funerals and the absence of any bipartisan commemoration of the sort that is routine in Australia; indeed, one could reasonably hypothesise

that Canadians simply would not take kindly to efforts to turn funerals into something more *public* and *national*.

What might account for the ‘givenness’ of such divergent practices in the two countries? I argue that the answer lies in how war is historically seen in Australia and Canada, and what impact wars of the past have on contemporary political culture.

In Australia, the commemoration and celebration of the armed forces and the war dead are deeply embedded in national culture. This comes from the long-term effects of three wars and how those Australians who fought (and died) in those wars are commemorated: the Great War, the Second World War, and the Vietnam War. We must begin with the importance attached to the role of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) in the First World War—particularly the ill-fated landing on the Gallipoli peninsula on 25 April 1915 and the campaign that followed. Gallipoli cost 8,700 Australian and 2,700 New Zealand lives, but that “glorious defeat” is a deeply-entrenched “collective remembrance”³⁰—an event that almost since the campaign itself has been widely regarded by Australians as crucial in the creation and shaping of their nation (Blaxland 273).³¹ The dawn ceremony that marks the commemoration of ANZAC Day on 25 April is a *national* experience. Even though it is a holiday, huge numbers turn out each year well before dawn for what is an intensely *military* ceremony that celebrates the role of the armed forces in the creation of the nation. And because families now routinely take their children to these ceremonies, the annual ANZAC ceremonies socially reproduce this celebration of the armed forces.

The degree to which Gallipoli is entrenched in Australian culture can be seen in the large numbers of Australians who take what is in essence a pilgrimage to Anzac Cove (which under the terms of the 1923 Lausanne peace treaty with Turkey is a single war cemetery under the management of the Office of Australian War Graves): in 2002, 10,000 people attended the dawn ceremony on 25 April; by 2005, that number had grown to 17,000. A large tourist industry has grown to accommodate the demand, with considerable environmental

stress on the site itself.³² As Bruce Scates has argued, the pilgrimage plays an important role in how “the nation invents, and reinvents, a sense of community” (1–21).

An equally important celebration commemorates one campaign of the Second World War: the Kokoda Track³³ campaign in Papua New Guinea. In 1942, Australian forces held off a Japanese overland advance towards Port Moresby in a series of battles fought along a 96 km single-file track crossing a mountain range (Ham 2005). This battle was only elevated to national prominence after 1992, when Paul Keating became the first Australian prime minister to visit the site on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary. Kneeling to kiss the ground where a memorial was located, Keating declared that there could be “no deeper spiritual basis for the meaning of the Australian nation than the blood that was spilled on this very plateau, in defence of Australia.”³⁴ It may well be that, as Graeme Davison suggests, “there was more than a little political calculation in Keating’s use of history” (3) in this case. However, by this single action Keating had “baptised Kokoda as a new Gallipoli in national memory,” as Warren Snowdon (ALP: Lingiari) put it in the House of Representatives.³⁵

Indeed, walking the Kokoda Track is increasingly being embraced as a pilgrimage comparable to Gallipoli: in 2001 just 76 individuals walked the track; in 2007, over 5,100 did so. In April 2006, when he was leader of the opposition, Kevin Rudd did a bipartisan walk with Joe Hockey, a Liberal member of Parliament. In January 2007, Rudd announced that the Track should rank with Gallipoli in the country’s military history, and promised that an ALP government would work with the PNG government to have the Track placed on UNESCO’s world heritage register.³⁶

Australian participation in the Vietnam War from 1962 until December 1972 also plays an important role in the contemporary celebration of the military—but in a paradoxical way. The Australian contribution to that war—which climbed to a strength of more than 7000 combat troops after 1965—grew to be intensely unpopular in Australia, particularly after conscription was introduced in 1964.

The unpopularity of the war manifested itself in a wave of antipathy towards the approximately 47,000 veterans who served in Vietnam. Many veterans from the Second World War spurned Vietnam veterans, and some RSL (Returned Services League of Australia—Returned and Services League as of 1990) branches made it clear that Vietnam-era veterans were not welcome. Certainly the national RSL refused to cooperate with the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia in the VVAA's struggle for recognition and support. More importantly, on numerous occasions it was made clear that Vietnam veterans were not welcome to join in ANZAC Day ceremonies. The ALP was critical of the war—and of those who had fought in it. In Canberra, there was a period when soldiers were barred from wearing their uniforms—in order to prevent incidents (Ham 2007; Damousi chapter 7; Hiddlestone; McKay xv–xvii).

However, this ill-treatment had a paradoxical long-term effect: following the lead of American Vietnam veterans who organised “Welcome Home” parades long after the war, the VVAA organised a “Welcome Home” march in Sydney on 3 October 1987 that involved more than 25,000 veterans. Hundreds of thousands of Sydneysiders turned out to “welcome” the veterans home—fifteen years after the last combat troops were withdrawn. This single event appears to have been a watershed, for it was after this that a Vietnam memorial was constructed on Anzac Parade in Canberra, dedicated in 1992, and rededicated in 2002. Moreover, Howard used the 40th anniversary of the battle of Long Tan in 1966 as the opportunity for the expression of a collective apology to the Vietnam veterans. Speaking to the House of Representatives, he said:

The sad fact is that those who served in Vietnam were not welcomed back as they should have been.... The nation collectively failed those men. They are owed our apologies and our regrets for that failure. The very least that we can do on this 40th anniversary is to acknowledge that fact... and to acknowledge the

magnificent contribution that they have continued to make to our nation.³⁷

The efforts to reconstruct the Vietnam experience so that it conformed more closely to the historical tradition demonstrates the continuing long-term impact of the two world wars on political culture in Australia. It also suggests that one of the reasons why the war dead from Afghanistan receive truly *national* commemoration, despite the tepid support for the mission, is the remembrance of how the nation treated the Vietnam veterans.

In Canada, by contrast, war casts a completely different kind of shadow. During the formative years of the self-governing dominion in the late nineteenth century, English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians had fundamentally different views of the proper role of their country in global affairs. For English-speaking Canadians—the vast majority of whom had either been born in the United Kingdom or had family in Britain—fighting in the wars of the British Empire was entirely natural; French-speaking Canadians, who had had no connection to France after 1763, had a very different definition of interest. The wars of the early twentieth century—particularly the South African war of 1899–1902 and the Great War of 1914–1918—exposed these cleavages most unambiguously.

But it was the issue of conscription during the First World War that had the longest effect on Canadian politics. In 1917 the Conservative prime minister, Sir Robert Borden, decided that the best means of countering declines in voluntary enlistments was to introduce conscription, and invited the Liberals to join a Union coalition government for the duration of the war. The measure split the country along linguistic lines. Borden's ministers from Québec opposed the measure, as did the Liberal leader, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, although some Liberals did join the Unionist government. The December 1917 election, fought over conscription, revealed the depth of the division: although Unionist candidates swept English Canada, they won just three of Québec's 65 seats.

The 1917 election had exceedingly long-term electoral effects in Canada. Beginning in 1921, the Liberal party reaped a long and enduring harvest from Borden's and Laurier's decisions: for the remainder of the twentieth century, the Conservative party was cast into the electoral wilderness in Québec, and the Liberal party became what in the 1980s and 1990s was widely described as Canada's "natural governing party."³⁸ Over the course of the twentieth century, there were only three short interludes—1930–1935, 1957–1963, and 1984–1990—when the Conservatives were able to secure enough seats in Québec to form the government.

The key to the persistent electoral success of the Liberal party in the twentieth century was the ability to maintain the support of French-speaking Québécois. The prime minister, Mackenzie King, framed his foreign policy with an eye to the avoidance of committing Canada to any conflict that might reopen the cleavages of the Great War (Nossal, Roussel and Paquin 246–254, 294). Part of the isolationism of the interwar period was that the Liberals embraced what can be called an attitude of indifference towards the Canadian military as an institution important for the building of the nation.³⁹ It is thus not at all surprising that during the interwar period the King government did not celebrate the armed forces as an institution that helped forge the nation in war. While the war dead were commemorated in Canada as in other countries, the commemoration tended to be local (Vance). And while King himself worked hard to erect a war memorial in central Ottawa to commemorate those who had died in the Great War (Gordon and Osborne), the federal government never put in place a pan-Canadian ceremonial celebration comparable to ANZAC Day; nor was there any comparable celebration of the contributions of the armed forces to the Canadian *nation*.⁴⁰

These historical habits had long-term consequences, affecting attitudes and practices towards the armed forces long after the conscription crises of the world wars had passed into history. After Lester B. Pearson, the foreign minister in the Liberal government of Louis St. Laurent, was awarded the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize for his

diplomacy during the Suez crisis of 1956, more and more Canadians came to the view that the primary mission of the armed forces was peacekeeping (Wagner; Maloney; Granatstein 1993), that Canadians were an “unmilitary people,” (Stanley, George) and that Canada was a “peaceable kingdom” (Howard). This was accompanied by a progressive depreciation of the war-fighting abilities of the armed forces under the Liberal governments of both Lester Pearson and Pierre Elliott Trudeau—a trend continued under the Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney. The dominant view was reflected most clearly in the name of the forces themselves, which allowed politicians and other elites to neatly strip the “Armed” from the name.⁴¹

In the first decade of the post-Cold War period, depreciation turned into denigration. J. L. Granatstein has argued that defence policy in the 1990s was marked by a series of “disasters” (2004a, xii). For others, the period 1993–2003 is widely known as the “decade of darkness,” a phrase popularised in 2007 by Gen. Rick Hillier, chief of defence staff.⁴² And indeed for the CAF, it was not a happy time. The Liberals did not return to office in November 1993 with a positive view of the military. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien’s first act was to cancel a military procurement agreed to by the Mulroney government—the purchase of EH-101 helicopters—for purely partisan reasons. The Chrétien government used cuts to the National Defence budget as the primary means of bringing federal finances into balance. But it was also clear from Chrétien’s words and actions that he had little sympathy for the military, openly questioning for example the arguments being made for re-equipping the armed forces (Bland; Granatstein 2004b). Importantly, the depreciation of armed force accelerated with the cuts to the military budget. One example was the Korean War memorial dedicated by Chrétien in 2003: it features an unarmed (and unhelmeted) soldier carrying a Korean girl and holding the hand of a Korean boy, giving little sense of what Canadian ground troops actually did in Korea.⁴³ Another example was the way in which a firefight involving the CAF in the Medak Pocket in Yugoslavia in September 1993 went completely unremarked by the Chrétien

government when it came to power in November—becoming, in Carol Off’s phrase, “Canada’s secret war.”⁴⁴

One of the reasons why the Chrétien Liberals had negative views of the military was because of the “Somalia Affair” and its aftermath (Bercuson). In March 1993, during a United Nations mission in Somalia, members of the Canadian Airborne Regiment tortured and killed Shidane Arone, a Somali teenager who had broken into the Canadian camp at Belet Huen. While the soldiers who killed Arone were arrested, the killing evolved into a major scandal over the course of 1993 as it became clearer that there were serious problems in the Airborne that senior officials in the Department of National Defence had sought to ignore, paper over, and then cover up. While in opposition, the Liberals had called for a public inquiry and eventually the Liberal government appointed a commission of inquiry in March 1995; later that year the regiment was disbanded. However, the Somalia Commission of Inquiry engaged in such a detailed investigation of the Department of National Defence that the Chrétien government decided to shut it down before the 1997 elections.

The Commission did not go quietly: its final report was a damning indictment of the Canadian military and particularly its leadership. Much of the scathing anger evident in the final report came from what the commissioners called the “wall of silence” that confronted them: “the testimony of witnesses was characterised by inconsistency, improbability, implausibility, evasiveness, selective recollection, half-truths, and plain lies.” The report pulled few punches:

Evasion and deception, which in our view were apparent with many of the senior officers who testified before us, reveal much about the poor state of leadership in our armed forces and the careerist mentality that prevails at the Department of National Defence. These senior people come from an elite group in which our soldiers and Canadians generally are asked to place their trust and confidence.⁴⁵

Such is not the stuff of which national celebration of an institution can readily be made, and it can be argued that the highly negative and widely-publicised views of the Somalia commission report played a powerful role in legitimising and entrenching the negative attitudes towards the military being displayed by governing elites in the 1990s. Public trust in the military was deeply affected by the scandal, the large number of resignations of senior officials notwithstanding. One measure of the poor regard of the public was that members of the armed forces were embarrassed to wear their uniforms. As Hillier admitted in 2007, after Somalia “we were disowned by our population.”⁴⁶

It is true that the “decade of darkness” came to an end with Chrétien’s retirement in December 2003; with Martin’s appointment of Hillier as CDS in February 2005;⁴⁷ and with the election of the Conservatives under Stephen Harper in January 2006. However, there is still little of the bipartisanship towards the armed forces in Canada that one finds in Australia. For example, during the 2005–2006 election campaign, the Liberal party produced a campaign advertisement that sought to play to Canada’s putative ‘unmilitary’ nature by implying that a Conservative proposal to redeploy CAF units to different cities for handling natural disasters was in fact a nefarious plot to stage a coup.⁴⁸

In short, just as Blaxland has demonstrated the degree to which differences in military history between Australia and Canada have affected military culture more broadly in both countries (Blaxland, especially 259–264), the argument here is that the ways in which war and the role of the armed forces in the development of the two countries is remembered has important impacts on how those who have died in the service of their countries abroad are commemorated and memorialised.

Conclusion

For Australians, the repatriation of those who have fallen in the service of the nation provides an opportunity for the *nation* as a whole to mourn; the obsequies are very public, and the bipartisan attendance of the prime minister and the leader of the opposition at the funerals underscores the essential unity of the state's commemoration of the fallen. For Canadians, the memorialisation of the war dead is much more private. The Canadian state—personified in the form of the governor general, the minister of national defence, and the CAF brass—meets the remains of the fallen as they are returned to Canada in a ceremony that is semi-public or semi-private depending on the wishes of the next of kin, but then passes the body to the family for obsequies that are essentially private, even if they involve full military honours. Neither the prime minister nor the leader of the opposition are involved in any of the commemorations.

These differences between the way that the armed forces in Australia and Canada are viewed and celebrated can best be explained by looking at the impact of earlier wars on the political culture of both countries. In Australia, the armed forces are widely commemorated as an institution crucial to the emergence of the nation as an independent community within the British Commonwealth and crucial to the defence of the country in the Second World War. The depth of the ANZAC legend helps us understand the paradox that it was the very ill-treatment of the Vietnam-era veterans which resulted in a strengthening of the national commemoration of the armed forces. In Canada, by contrast, war has historically been divisive, exposing the contradictions in a political community that has never been able to create a singular *nationalism*. I have suggested that the habits of the first half of the twentieth century have had long-term consequences: while the attitudes of ordinary Canadians towards their armed forces have been supportive, the shadow of past wars has meant that Canadian political elites are disinclined to celebrate the contribution of the armed forces to the *nation*.

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Notes

¹For the ramp ceremony of Canadian Trooper Darryl Caswell, killed on 11 June 2007, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=rS76hhnphG0; for the repatriation ceremony of Australian Trooper David Pearce, killed by an IED on 7 October 2007, www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIQJGLsvZYs.

²Kylie Russell's statement at www.defence.gov.au/media/DepartmentalTpl.cfm?CurrentId=1283.

³Down to 31 January 2009, 56 were killed by IEDs, roadside bombs or landmines, 22 as a result of combat or other hostile fire, eleven by suicide bombers, ten in accidents, six from 'friendly fire,' and one from suicide. In two cases, the cause of death was classified as "non-combat related."

⁴The pilot had ignored an order to "hold fire," for which he was eventually disciplined (Friscolanti).

⁵When a submariner, Lt(N) Chris Saunders, was killed on 6 October 2004 as a result of a fire aboard HMCS Chicoutimi, Martin postponed a state visit to Europe so that he could be in Halifax for Saunderson's repatriation; Governor General Adrienne Clarkson, the minister of national defence, Bill Graham, and the premier of Nova Scotia, John Hamm, attended the funeral. Shawna Richer, "Farewell to a submariner," *Globe and Mail*, 14 October 2004, A1.

⁶Martin did not attend the funeral of Glyn Berry, a Canadian diplomat killed by a suicide bomber in Afghanistan on 15 January 2006.

⁷Polls taken in early April showed that 46 per cent of Canadians were opposed to the Afghanistan mission. *Angus Reid Global Monitor*, 17 April 2006: www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/11588.

⁸After the 'friendly fire' deaths in 2002, Chrétien had waived the standard Heritage Canada rule that flags be half-masted only on Remembrance Day: www.pch.gc.ca/progs/cpsc-ccsp/sc-cs/occasion_

e.cfm; Joshua Errett, "Tories won't lower flag for troop deaths," *Ottawa Citizen*, 5 April 2006.

⁹Bea Vongdouangchanh, "Reporters strike war-footing with PMO, but Harper won't be dictated by national media," *Hill Times*, 27 February 2006.

¹⁰Harper initially claimed that the idea was O'Connor's; it was quickly revealed that the idea came from Sandra Buckler, Harper's communications director, who suggested that a ban would generate "a week of bad publicity" and then be accepted as a *fait accompli*. Michael den Tandt, "Harper's staff behind media ban, sources say," *Globe and Mail*, 28 April 2006.

¹¹"Families welcome home fallen Canadian soldiers," CTV.ca News, 25 April 2006.

¹²"Military officials opposed repatriation media ban," CTV.ca, 2 July 2006.

¹³"Families welcome home fallen Canadian soldiers," CTV.ca News, 25 April 2006.

¹⁴Lauren Larose, "Family buries fallen son amid criticism of PM," *Brantford Expositor*, 1 May 2006, A8.

¹⁵"'Truth, duty, valour' described fallen Canadian soldier," CBCNews.ca, 26 May 2006; Kerry Williamson, "Fallen soldier's dad lashes out at Harper," *Calgary Herald*, 27 May 2006, A1.

¹⁶James Gordon, "Harper scolded over military bans: Canadians swamped PM with criticism, documents show," *Calgary Herald*, 19 June 2006, A1; Pigott 113.

¹⁷Bush was criticised for trying to hide United States casualties in Iraq by banning coverage of repatriation ceremonies: "Curtains ordered for media coverage of returning coffins," *Washington Post*, 21 October 2003. In fact, the ban had been imposed in 1991 by George H. W. Bush during the Gulf War. Under the so-called "Dover Ban," the United States Department of Defense banned media from

photographing the coffins of war dead being repatriated at Dover AFB, although the ban had not been widely enforced until the Iraq war (Gran).

¹⁸The families of Cpl. Robbie Beerenfenger and Sgt. Robert Short, killed in October 2003, requested that the service held at the Pembroke Memorial Centre on 7 October 2003 exclude government ministers and senior military officials; it was attended by approximately 3,000 soldiers and civilians. Stephen Harper, leader of the opposition, was present but took no part in the ceremonies.

¹⁹For an illustrative example of one of these convoys, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbCg1uf6XB8.

²⁰www.premier.gov.on.ca/news/Product.asp?ProductID=1689.

²¹At an Ottawa Red Friday rally in September 2006, only Harper, O'Connor, and Hillier gave speeches. Katie Lewis and Suzanne Ma, "A sea of red washes over Hill," *Ottawa Citizen*, 23 September 2003, A5.

²²This lack of bipartisanship is even evident in such ceremonies as the return of the unknown soldier in May 2000, or the dedication of the Korean War memorial in September 2003, when members of the opposition were conspicuous by their absence:

www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=Memorials/tomb/ottawadirect4; www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2003/09/28/korean_tribute030928.html. By contrast, when the names of Australia's Vietnam war dead were 'entombed' in a memorial in Canberra, both Paul Keating, the prime minister, and John Hewson, the leader of the opposition, gave addresses. Likewise, when the unknown soldier was returned to Australia in November 1993, both Keating and Hewson were pall-bearers. Tony Wright, "Goodbye to heroes of the forgotten war," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 July 1992; Tony Wright, "Home at last, a soldier with no name," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 November 1993, 1.

²³Tony Wright, “Nation’s leaders pay tribute to young warriors,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 June 1996.

²⁴A military board of inquiry determined in December 2006 that Kovco had shot himself accidentally while engaged in “skylarking behaviour” with his service pistol—a finding confirmed by a subsequent coronial inquiry. “Skylarking all along, not suicide,” *The Age*, 3 April 2008.

²⁵One confidential source asserted that Howard was equally keen to be publicly associated with the ADF for political/electoral reasons, since the ADF tended to be drawn from a demographic that was the Coalition’s ‘heartland.’

²⁶April 2006 poll: www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/11588/canadians_divided_over_Afghanistan_mission; February and April 2007 polls: www.angusreidstrategies.com/uploads/pages/pdfs/2007.04.25_Afghanistan_Press_Release.pdf; May 2008 poll: www.angus-reid.com/uppdf/2008.05.12_Afghanistan.pdf.

²⁷March 2006 poll: www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/11050; Lowy Institute, *Australia and the World: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (Sydney, 2007), fig. 7; Murray Goot, *Australian Attitudes towards the United States* (Sydney: University of Sydney United States Studies Centre, 3 October 2007), 26: sydney.edu.au/us-studies/docs/Survey_Presentation_3_Oct_2007-Part_1.pdf.

²⁸In the early 1990s the Progressive Conservative party had fractured with the rise of the Reform party, a populist protest party in western Canada. However, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the PCs and Reform (which became the Canadian Alliance in 2000) consistently split the conservative vote. In 2003, the two parties merged to become the Conservative Party of Canada.

²⁹“Anger over pilot funeral snub,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 December 2006.

³⁰As Winter and Sivan remind us, “Collective remembrance is public recollection. It is the act of gathering bits and pieces of the past, and

joining them together in public... Collective memory is constructed through the action of groups and individuals in the light of day.” (6). See also Mosse.

³¹As an iconic event, the “ANZAC Legend” is constantly being socially reproduced, with new histories making a periodic appearance: see Bean; Stanley, Peter; Carlyon. For an exploration of the social construction of Gallipoli in Australia, see the contributions in Macleod.

³²When the Turkish government widened the roads to the site to accommodate the increasing numbers of tourists, significant damage was done to the local environment: see Australia, Senate, Finance and Public Administration Committee, *Matters Relating to the Gallipoli Peninsula*, 12 October 2005: http://202.14.81.230/Senate/committee/fapa_ctte/completed_inquiries/2004-07/gallipoli/index.htm.

³³Known as both a track and a trail before the Second World War, American wartime reporting entrenched the use of “trail.” Kokoda Trail was the official name adopted by the Battles Nomenclature Committee in 1957, the New Guinea Place Names Commission in 1972, and the Australian War Memorial. Despite this, “track” remains the common nomenclature: access to the trail is regulated by the Kokoda Track Authority, and many Australians, including Howard and Rudd, and even the Department of Veterans’ Affairs, routinely refer to it as the Kokoda Track.

³⁴Peter Hartcher, “PM pays homage to heroes with a kiss,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April 1992, 2. The kiss was a last-minute and spontaneous act; some in the prime minister’s entourage thought he was suffering a heart attack (Watson 181–184).

³⁵Australia, Parliament, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* (hereafter *CPD*), House of Representatives, 26 August 2002, 5574.

³⁶“Rudd vow on Kokoda Track,” *Herald-Sun*, 21 January 2007.

³⁷*CPD*, Representatives, 17 August 2006, 41.

³⁸The term was from discussions of British politics in the 1970s (for example, Watkins 411). At first used by academics (for example, Black 141), the term gained wide currency in Canadian politics in the 1980s and 1990s.

³⁹Analyses of Canadian nationalism do not mention the military as a nation-building institution: for example, the contributions in Russell; Bashevkin; Resnick 207–220.

⁴⁰In 2003, 86 years after the battle for Vimy Ridge, the Chrétien government declared 9 April Vimy Ridge Day, to commemorate the Canadian attack that began on 9 April 1917. However, Vimy Ridge Day is not a national holiday and is not widely commemorated.

⁴¹According to the National Defence Act, 1985, “The Canadian Forces are the armed forces of Her Majesty raised by Canada and consist of one Service called the Canadian Armed Forces.”

⁴²The phrase was first used by LGen Al DeQuetteville, former chief of the air staff, in an interview on 10 March 2003 to describe the unpredictability of the defence budget during this period. Joe Sharpe and Allan English, “The Decade of Darkness,” Report for the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, Kingston, July 2003. DeQuetteville’s phrase was later picked up and popularised by Hillier: see Mike Blanchfield, “Top general calls Liberal rule ‘decade of darkness,’” 17 February 2007.

⁴³See www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2003/09/28/korean_tribute030928.html.

⁴⁴In September 1993, soldiers serving with the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Yugoslavia engaged in a firefight with a Croatian army unit seeking to prevent UN troops from entering a Serb area in the Medak Pocket that was being ethnically cleansed by Croatian forces. Four Canadians were wounded in the battle, with 27 Croatian fatalities (Windsor; Off).

⁴⁵Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of Canadian Forces to Somalia, *Dishonoured Legacy: The Lessons of the Somalia Affair* (Ottawa 1997), Executive Summary: www.dnd.ca/somalia/somaliae.htm.

⁴⁶“Canada’s top soldier not sorry for speaking out,” CBC News, 7 November 2007.

⁴⁷“Hillier’s appointment would fundamentally change the philosophy, the strategy, the organization, and the culture of the Canadian Forces. He would become the most important and influential CDS in living memory” (Stein and Lang 151).

⁴⁸The ad was posted to the Liberal party website. The English-language ad was immediately pulled, but a French-language version ran in Québec: www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20060103/ELXN_liberal_attackads_060110/20060110/.