

# COLUMNISTS



## Let's remember all our fallen

November 5, 2011 - 4:30am TIM DUNNE

Since Canada began military operations in Afghanistan in 2002, Remembrance Day has become far more than the "November holiday" and has gained more poignancy among Canadians, boosting attendance at war memorials and cenotaphs throughout the nation.

Master Cpl. Byron Greff, our latest fatality in Afghanistan, raises the number of Canadian deaths in that conflict to 162 in our nine-year campaign against the Taliban for its complicity in al-Qaida's attack on the U.S., and its seizure of United Airlines Flight 93 on Sept. 11, 2001.

Of these 162, four were civilians, no less courageous and no less heroic than our fallen soldiers. Canadian diplomat Glyn Berry died when a suicide bomber collided with a Canadian road convoy on Jan. 14, 2006; Jacqueline Kirk of Outremont, Que., and Shirley Case of Williams Lake, B.C., civilians working for the New York-based International Rescue Committee, were shot to death on Aug. 13, 2008. The fourth and most recent was Calgary Herald journalist Michelle Lang. She and four Canadian soldiers died on Dec. 30, 2009, when their armoured vehicle struck a roadside bomb.

The remaining 158 are members of the Canadian Forces; 12 are Nova Scotians and several others deployed to Afghanistan from this province.

We shouldn't identify them as "Canadian troops," as that implies that all were soldiers. Many were, indeed, Canadian soldiers, but others came from the Royal Canadian Navy and the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Canada has recognized each of her fallen service men and women with ramp services as they departed Kandahar and returned to CFB Trenton; Manitoba has named lakes after Canadian military fatalities from that province; and Ontario recognized each one who made that last trip along the Highway of Heroes. We can be assured that once Canada's mission in Afghanistan is completed, there will be further recognition at the National War Memorial.

All of these fallen heroes deserve the respect and recognition they have received for paying the ultimate price of their service.

But there are other military personnel who died in the performance of their duties elsewhere. They include Canadian Forces Search and Rescue personnel, such as the three killed on July 13, 2006, when their helicopter crashed off the coast of Canso during a SAR exercise; and more recently, on Oct. 27, when Sgt. Janick Gilbert of CFB Trenton, Ont., died in a rescue mission near Igloolik (Hall Bay), Nunavut.

The Royal Canadian Navy has also had its share of fatalities. Nine crewmembers of HMCS Kootenay died in a fire on Oct. 23, 1969, off the British coast; two of the navy's clearance divers perished when they were trapped against water intake valves of a U.S. Navy ship in the mid-1980s on NATO duties in the Mediterranean; and Navy Lieutenant Chris Saunders died Oct. 7, 2004, as a result of injuries he suffered from the fire aboard the submarine HMCS Chicoutimi.

There were also 114 Canadian peacekeepers who died in foreign lands from 1950 to 2007, who did not return to Canada as "fallen heroes." There was no ramp ceremony either on departure from the theatre of operations or on arrival in Canada; there was no official reception party, and there was no convoy along an equivalent of Ontario's Highway of Heroes.

One particular soldier underscores the poignancy and the stark differences between how we recognize those men and women who die in Afghanistan compared to those who made that same sacrifice in India-Pakistan, Cyprus, the Middle East and Bosnia Herzegovina.

In the autumn of 1995, the young soldier died in Bosnia-Herzegovina. There was no religious service, nor ramp ceremony at the departure airport in Zagreb, Croatia. Several members of the Canadian Contingent headquarters to the UN mission in the Balkans arrived at 5 a.m. to provide a personal presence and salute the casket as it was loaded aboard the aircraft for his flight home. But this was not possible: The casket was loaded early as air freight. The only recognition he received was a brief news release announcing his death.

As we attend Remembrance Day services, we should remember not only those who served and died on the battlefields of the two World Wars, Korea and Afghanistan, but also those who have served and died in other missions and deployments. And we should promise that we will never again allow our government to bring home our fallen as cargo, wedged between crates in the belly of commercial aircraft.

---

Tim Dunne is a Halifax-based military affairs analyst, a Research Fellow with Dalhousie University's Centre for Foreign Policy Studies and a member of the Royal United Services Institute (NS) Security Affairs Committee.