

# ON TRACK

## THE NATIONAL WALL OF REMBRANCE PROJECT

Terence Cottrell

*This self-funding project will create a single place of remembrance for all of Canada's fallen heroes.*

Why is it that great ideas seem to flourish whenever a group of old soldiers and friends gather round a table with suitable refreshments, and before the session is over they have solved most of the world's problems? It is probably because the modern military milieu does make—the old soldier, at least—“wonder why,” in Tennyson's immortal words. Well, the National Wall of Remembrance project owes its origin to such an occasion at a Kingston Royal Canadian Legion branch three years ago.

As the amateur oracles left the site, they carried with them the idea of a truly novel memorial to Canada's fallen. Several more formal meetings took place and a rudimentary committee was formed to pursue the idea. Soon a formal constitution and by-law were drawn up, the objects clearly defined, a method worked out and a roster of patriotic volunteers mustered: the National Wall of Remembrance Association (NWORA) was born, and later incorporated.

This self-funding project will create a single place of remembrance for all of Canada's fallen heroes: a facility that families, friends and the people of Canada will want to visit. The National Wall of Remembrance will honour those who fell in all conflicts of record, starting with the earliest, from the time of the 1791 Constitution Act up to today. It will not, however, seek to replace local cenotaphs and memorials as a sacred place.

The physical part of the project will be a true monument. It will comprise ten panels depicting aspects of the various conflicts and taskings during which Canadians and others fell in the country's service. A selection of particular details to be artistically created on appropriate material will be submitted for NWORA approval by a professional researcher. The design, architecture and layout of the site will be dovetailed with landscaping designs submitted by competition involving several community colleges in the eastern Ontario area.

So why did we want to do it? Perhaps we hear the reason at the Cenotaph on every Remembrance Day. But no address on that honoured day has yet surpassed “The Funeral Oration of Pericles” (c. 490 B.C), saluting the Athenian fallen, as reported by Thucydides in *The Peloponnesian War*:

The sacrifice which they collectively made was individually repaid to them; for they received again each one for himself a praise that grows not old, and the noblest of all tombs – I speak not of that in which their remains are laid, but of that in which their glory survives, and is proclaimed always and on every fitting occasion

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both in word and deed. For the whole earth is the tomb of famous men; not only are they commemorated by columns and inscriptions in their own country, but in foreign lands there dwells also an unwritten memorial of them, graven not on stone but in the hearts of men.... (Jowett translation)

We thought the time had come to do something new, to give a local substance and a name to airy nothing. We sought to go beyond the columns and inscriptions, worthy though they may be, to inscribe upon the hearts of men and women an authentic account of Canada's fallen through the magic of the computer, and to give substance in full to the, as yet, “unwritten memorial of them.”

Using 21st century technology, the educational aspects of the installation will be of particular interest to schools. In addition to the physical monument, the project will have two components: a series of panels portraying the various conflicts and a digital wall with a search function.

An all-inclusive screen presentation of the name of each fallen hero together with biographies, photos and



*The launch of the National Wall of Remembrance Project. L to R: Terence Cottrell, Chairman of the National Wall of Remembrance Association (NWORA) Advisory Board and Editor Remembrance Magazine; James Kingston, Treasurer NWORA; Lieutenant-Colonel Ken Carr, Deputy Base Commander, CFB Kingston; Debra St. Gelais, Secretary NWORA; Allan Jones, Chairman NWORA; Jack O'Brien, Director NWORA; Major Mike Jackson, Deputy Commandant CF School of Communications and Electronics; Phillip Osanic, Director NWORA, and his son Nicholas.*

*Photo courtesy TVCOGECO*

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clippings will be augmented from time to time as new material comes to light.

Just imagine: old great-uncle Charlie's naughty postcard home from Paris at Christmas 1917 will finally be made available to the whole country—the whole world. His saucy remarks on the back that made Grandma blush will be revealed to all and sundry. Alas, Uncle Charlie never made it home. He lies somewhere in Belgium. But the National Wall of Remembrance will put flesh on his lost bones.

His name on the Menin Gate, which nobody in the family has ever been to see, will not be his only sterile memorial. We will be able to see what he looked like as a boy. We can see him with his sweetheart on their way to church. We can read one of his letters to her; she kept the rest, but through that one letter we can get to know something about Uncle Charlie as a young man in love. We might even have a few pages of the diary he kept and was picked up on the battlefield by a comrade and sent home by the padre with a few words of condolence. We might even see that letter of condolence and learn a little from a man who knew Uncle Charlie from an angle slightly different from that of his comrades.

Going back to the War of 1812, we might have miniatures of soldiers or their loved ones. We might have letters home—treasured and kept in special protectors, but which a generous and concerned family might consider having scanned and donated to the project, all the while keeping the family heirlooms safe.

The more than 118,000 names will thus not have to be chiselled into blocks of granite with the attendant difficulties incurred by other such worthy projects. Families will be able to lend their family treasures to the project to be scanned-in without giving up actual possession.

It is anticipated that eventually the massive database accumulated will be available to persons at home. Remembrance magazine, distributed across the country and focusing on the various conflicts with reviews, memoirs, stories, verse and memorials of those who served or fell for Canada, will be vital to the project.

The right location for the installation of the physical monument is crucial. NWORA believes that Kingston, Ontario is the right place. In 1673, under the French regime, Cataraqui became a defended trading post consisting almost entirely of Fort Frontenac and its garrison. In 1758 this fell into British hands. In 1783 it became the "King's Town" and the focal point of British Empire Loyalist settlement. The fort has had a military function ever since, first as Tête de Pont Barracks, home of the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery, and then of the Canadian Army Staff College and its Canadian Forces' successors.

After the invasion scares of the War of 1812 and further occasional conflicts at sea between British and American vessels, disputes over both the Maine and Oregon boundaries and amateurish American invasions across the St. Lawrence River, Fort Henry, with its associated Martello towers, was built as part of Canada's defences in the 1830s on the site of an earlier wooden fort.

It is today one of the country's outstanding tourist attractions. A designated National Historic Site, it guards the entrance to the Rideau Canal, itself a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Planned in 1874, the Royal Military College was opened in 1876 on the site of the earliest Canadian civil marine and naval stations. HMCS Cataraqui, one of Canada's leading naval reserve units, carries on that fine tradition today.

In 1903, the Canadian Boer War hero of the Battle of Hart's River, Major Bruce Carruthers, established in Kingston the first independent school of military signalling in the British Empire. Today, the Kingston Signals School's Military Communications and Electronics (C&E) Museum is one of Canada's prime tourist, and a history buff's must-see, sites. A natural fit, it will also be the home of the National Wall of Remembrance.

To bring the National Wall of Remembrance project to fruition, a panel of mainly retired, senior military officers has stepped forward to form an advisory board. An executive board of seven directors is tasked with driving the operational aspects of the project.

The required funds will be raised through corporate sponsorships and advertising revenue from Remembrance magazine. Remembrance thus thanks our advisors, sponsors, the authors of articles submitted for publication, and ON TRACK magazine for their support.

Thanks to the courtesy and support of two successive base commanders and their staffs, the commandant of the C&E School and his staff, the director of the C&E Museum, and the entire Kingston signals establishment, the National Wall of Remembrance will be unveiled in November 2016 at CFB Kingston's Military C&E Museum. It will be a place for all Canadians to reflect upon who we are as citizens, as a people, and as a nation.

It will be a fitting place to distil the very essence of the notions of duty, service, love of country and sacrifice—the ultimate gifts of Canada's fallen sons and daughters, graven not upon stone but in the hearts of the men and women of Canada.

See our website at [www.worassociation.ca](http://www.worassociation.ca) and the C&E Museum website at [www.c-and-e-museum.org](http://www.c-and-e-museum.org) ©