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# Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg





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Thursday, October 3, 2024

• (1105)

[*English*]

**The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 104 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motions adopted by the committee on March 9 and December 5, 2023, the committee is resuming its study of the recognition of Persian Gulf veterans and the definition of wartime service.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders.

Rachel Blaney is joining us virtually.

I'd like to welcome Anita Vandenbeld to the committee.

As you already know, all comments must be addressed through the chair.

Mr. Desilets will start things off.

**Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ):** Mr. Chair, I think this is meeting number 106, not 104.

**The Chair:** Is this meeting number 106 or 104?

You're absolutely right, Mr. Desilets. Thank you.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** I'm watching you.

**The Chair:** Yes.

Now, without further ado, let's hear from our witnesses.

[*English*]

I would like to welcome our witnesses with us today.

From the Persian Gulf Veterans of Canada, we have the president, Mr. Harold Davis, and the vice-president, Mr. Mike McGlennon. Welcome.

You will have five minutes for your opening statement, and then members of the committee will ask you some questions.

The floor is yours, please, Mr. Davis.

**Mr. Harold Davis (President, Persian Gulf Veterans of Canada):** Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee on behalf of the Persian Gulf Veterans of Canada.

My name is Harold Davis, and I'm the president. With me is Mike McGlennon, the vice-president. Our organization represents over 4,200 veterans.

We appear before you today to advocate the legal recognition of Persian Gulf veterans as wartime service veterans. This acknowledgement is long overdue and critical to the dignity, health and welfare of those who voluntarily served.

The objective of this study is to obtain definitions of "war", "wartime service" and "special duty service", and to establish the process of determining and criteria for veterans' benefits.

We have spent the last 10 years searching for National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada policies for these definitions, without success. This lack of fairness and transparency is egregious. National Defence is the government department responsible for these definitions and should be asked to provide copies of their policies for committee review, if they exist.

Since 1950 to today, when governments that deploy our military on overseas operations, they are initially placed by National Defence on active duty and classified as special duty veterans.

In 1981, Korean War veterans were redesignated as wartime service veterans, 28 years after they returned home. This legal precedence reflects that the Government of Canada has effected military service classification status changes when deemed appropriate and can do so in the future.

In 1990, under UN authority, Canada, along with 41 other coalition partners, liberated Kuwait. It was the largest concentration of military might in a theatre since World War II. Additionally, this was the first time Canadian servicewomen were deployed in a combat role.

Gulf veterans will tell you that they were in a war. Ask the pilot who flew a bombing mission against the fourth-largest military at the time. Ask the navy veteran who sailed into a minefield to assist in the rescue of a United States Navy ship that struck a mine. Ask a nurse who treated prisoners of war during the conflict, or ask the veteran who was under numerous Scud missile attacks.

Despite their service, Persian Gulf veterans in Canada have not been properly recognized as “wartime service”. This slight has ramifications upon military service records, military history, accurate commemoration and the medical benefits available to the effected veterans.

Our advocacy has received support from Korean War veterans, UN peacekeepers, NATO veterans, AMVETS, over 75 members of Parliament, 10 senators and even the late prime minister, Brian Mulroney, just to name a few.

The Governor General has issued a Gulf and Kuwait Medal, with bar, for service during the actual war, and both the CDS and Governor General approved six battle honours issued to Persian Gulf units for active participation with a formed and armed enemy. However, the pilots and sailors of those same units continue to be denied the same level of recognition by National Defence. Why are we being denied?

The country of Kuwait also recognized our service and issued the Kuwait Liberation Medal—I have it here—which we have been denied the right to wear with our regular medals.

As a country, we owe it to these veterans to honour their service with the same recognition that is afforded to others who have fought in wars on behalf of Canada. Designating Persian Gulf veterans as wartime service veterans will provide equality with prior wartime service veterans and restore a sense of pride and honour to veterans who feel forgotten, ensuring that their place in Canadian military history is accurately commemorated.

Persian Gulf War medical insurance coverage was initially provided under the Pension Act, which is also where you will find all preceding war service veterans listed.

Should we be reclassified to “wartime service”, our ill and injured veterans should be given the choice to elect coverage, either under the Pension Act or the 2006 Veterans Well-being Act.

Persian Gulf war veterans are seeking placement upon the National War Memorial alongside those who have served Canada in times of war.

In closing, I call upon the committee to act decisively, and I strongly recommend that Persian Gulf veterans be reclassified as “wartime service” veterans. Their sacrifices will no longer be minimized, and their service will be honoured in the same manner as those who have served in major conflicts.

● (1110)

Veterans served Canadians and all political parties, and we ask the committee to provide non-partisan solutions that will ensure our overdue honour is restored.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Davis.

Also, Mr. McGlennon, thank you for your service.

You can't hear? There's no sound? Let us check.

Does it work now? Okay. That's perfect. Thank you so much.

As you know, you're going to have questions in French also. Be prepared for that.

Now, for six minutes, I'd like to invite Mr. Blake Richards to start.

**Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC):** Thanks, Chair.

I appreciate you guys for being here today and pushing for the change that you're pushing for.

My role is that of shadow minister for Veterans Affairs. That's often referred to as “the critic” for Veterans Affairs, and for most people that is associated with someone who's complaining or is expressing negative thoughts or sentiments. Really, I don't see it that way. I see it more as the true root of the word “critic”, which is to be a judge, and that can apply in a lot of places.

For example, for you guys, when you served in the Canadian Armed Forces, you would, I'm sure, have received constructive criticism during training to help you be better prepared for combat. That's what would have been expected in any role. My role as the official critic in terms of the government is that I really try to do what I can to point out what I think the expectations of veterans would be of the government, much like for you when you served and the expectations for you as members of the Canadian Armed Forces would have been made clear.

My question for you, based on that, would be this: What are your expectations of the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the Prime Minister with regard to recognizing wartime service?

● (1115)

**Mr. Harold Davis:** I think you should answer this one, Mike.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon (Vice-President, Persian Gulf Veterans of Canada):** On “expectations”, there's not a simple answer.

In our opinion, it involves both National Defence and Veterans Affairs. Neither department is singly responsible for resolving our issues.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Yes, and I understand that. There's no question that it is the defence minister in consultation with the Veterans Affairs minister.

Let me rephrase the question. What would your expectations of the government be in terms of addressing this recognition of wartime service?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** As Harold said in his testimony, we're looking for a redesignation or a reclassification of our service status from "special duty area" to "wartime service" veterans. From discussions with senior Veterans Affairs officials, I know that it has an effect on their annual commemoration budget, what they spend money on and what they choose to place into their calendar for events.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** As much as it's great that we're having this study in committee, is there any reason you're aware of that this change couldn't be made right now? I don't think it requires a vote in the House of Commons. I don't think it requires a study or a report from this committee. I don't think it even requires new laws to be introduced. If this change could be made today—and I believe it could—why do you think it hasn't happened yet? What do you think are the reasons it hasn't happened?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** We don't believe that National Defence has any policies in existence.

We have been unsuccessful in finding out if they have a policy. Normally, governments place their policies out for public consumption, with fullness and transparency. It's a QR&O, Queen's Regulations and Orders. It's a Library of Parliament document. It's out there for everybody to see.

The committee is sitting here today and trying to get to the root of some problems. If there were policy documents that existed and were in place, then we wouldn't need to have a meeting—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** That's right.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** —or the meeting would be about something else: "Why haven't you followed existing policy?"

We cannot call out National Defence and say that they don't have a policy, but I would like to see it, and I do believe that you would like to see it. I would ask that you ask National Defence to produce it so that we can look at it. If we have something to read or to look at, then it could lead to a different change of discussion: "Why haven't you followed the policy?"

**Mr. Blake Richards:** It boils down to this for me, and this is circling back to my initial comments about my role here, which is really to try to push for the veterans' expectations of the government: You guys formed your group in 2017, I think, and you've been advocating since then. You're telling us that you're not aware of any policy that exists. It raises the question of, "Why not?" Why is there not a policy, when there is the ability to do that, when there is the ability to act on this? It could happen right now.

In that role as critic or judge of the government, I have to say that not only would I give the government a poor review, but I would have to admonish it for the fact that they have claimed to express support. I've heard Liberal members—as I've heard all members—say they support what you guys are trying to do. They could

take action on it right now, and they haven't. I find that frustrating. Hopefully, we can get a recommendation out of this committee, and hopefully the government will actually start listening for a change.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** Yes—

● (1120)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, sir, quickly.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** This lack of a policy is long-standing and beyond. It started well before the establishment of the current serving government. We are seeking non-partisan solutions to this problem. It has been 33 years. There is a lot of blame to be thrown around, and I am not blaming the current serving government today for our current issues.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Richards.

Now let's go to Mr. Wilson Miao for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Wilson Miao (Richmond Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I'd like to thank our witnesses for being here today.

Mike and Harold, thank you for the service you've done for our country and especially for sharing your expertise in this area.

Both of you, along with over 4,000 veterans, served in the Persian Gulf War. Could you please share more with the committee about this operation and whether both of you were deployed under special duty service or wartime service?

**Mr. Harold Davis:** I went to the gulf on HMCS *Athabaskan*. We sailed over and ended up at Port Said before entering the Suez Canal. We were told that we couldn't go in there because an order in council had to come out to put us on active duty.

Now, you can ask the 300 people on my ship, or the over almost 1,000 people on all three ships, what that meant. The only thing we were told at that time was that we were going on active duty, and I think they said that they took out the clause that they can shoot you if you don't obey a direct order.

That's all we basically knew going in there, so active duty, to us, was not that much different from everyday duty, but come to find out, it's a big difference between active duty and just sitting-at-home duty, and we didn't really understand it.

I think that today a lot of veterans still don't understand it, because, as Mike said earlier, where's the policy that states what it all is and what it means to the veteran who is going overseas, period? For us, in going to the Persian Gulf, we were told, "You're coming home when you get home."

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** On that, let's talk about the benefit side.

You mentioned in your testimony the difference between the Pension Act and the Veterans Well-being Act. For those who served in the Persian Gulf War, what type of benefit do you have eligible access to for service during that time?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** I will speak for myself. I do believe that.... We're split medical insurance, both Harold and I, and that would also apply to our membership.

I had medical issues. Because of the timing, when I submitted my claims, they went in under the Pension Act, because they preceded the establishment of the 2006 Veterans Well-being Act.

Because the Persian Gulf was a 1991 event, the preponderance of our medical claims, if there were any, would have occurred under the Pension Act. As we get older, if we have new issues and are able to tie them to military service, Minister Petipas Taylor's reference manual says that because we are special duty area veterans, medical issues will be covered under the Veterans Well-being Act.

If we were wartime service veterans, the case could be made that wartime service currently is covered only under the Pension Act. The members could be given a choice on each claim: Would you like this covered under the Pension Act or would you like it covered under the Veterans Well-being Act?

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** It's an either/or.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** That choice would occur only if we were designated as wartime service veterans now.

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** Okay.

Harold, would you like to add more to that?

**Mr. Harold Davis:** It's a choice that we don't have but that we thought we had when we were serving in the gulf, because it was under the Pension Act. We were told by the commanders and others when we were over there: "Guys, this is a war. Now, by the time you get home, you'll be war veterans, if you get home."

That kind of talk put it into the situation that we came back from there thinking, "Yes, we're covered. We're also war veterans." We've come to realize that we're not covered like that and that we're not war veterans. When we put in our claims prior to 2006.... I have, like Mike, a Pension Act claim in, but anything else is under the Veterans Well-being Act.

I never had a choice. No matter if the injuries I'm claiming for now are a direct result of my service in the Persian Gulf, I don't have a choice of whether they're paid under the Pension Act or the Veterans Well-being Act. I'm going to get paid under the Veterans Well-being Act.

• (1125)

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** I would assume that this information was not known prior to being deployed, but only after.

**Mr. Harold Davis:** We didn't know.

Another thing is that we were told that we should "up our life insurance before we go". I went in and I took out \$300,000 extra because I didn't know if I was coming back.

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** Let's talk about commemoration.

I understand that veterans who were deployed to the Persian Gulf War currently are not commemorated at a level that some other special duty service veterans are. Can you talk a bit more about how you feel that this is appropriate to commemorate?

**Mr. Harold Davis:** Let me ask the people sitting here: When was the last time you were at an event for the military and the person speaking was talking about wars and veterans and you heard "Persian Gulf"? Does that tell you anything about commemoration for Persian Gulf service?

We're just a footnote now, and that's not right, you know. We served. We went where our country asked us to go. We didn't know if we were coming home, and now we're just asking for fairness.

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Miao.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Desilets, you may go ahead for the next six minutes.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To my fellow members, good morning, and to the witnesses, thank you for being here. It's nice to see you again.

Mr. McGlennon, it seems to me that, at one point, you were in contact with former prime minister Brian Mulroney, and the Gulf War was discussed.

Am I mistaken?

[*English*]

**Mr. Harold Davis:** I didn't hear the question.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** He was asking if we had contact with Prime Minister Brian Mulroney.

**Mr. Harold Davis:** Yes, we did, and in fact, I have a copy of his letter here. I reached out to the former prime minister, and when I did reach him—because he was not an easy guy to reach at the time—he was very—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Mr. Chair, there is a small issue with the interpretation.

**The Chair:** Just a moment.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** There's an issue with the French interpretation.

**The Chair:** You're not hearing the French interpretation after the English remarks?

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** That's right.

**The Chair:** Is it working now?

[English]

**A voice:** It's fine now.

**The Chair:** Okay, perfect.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Can we resume?

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Davis. You can start at the top.

• (1130)

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** You know the question, so please go ahead.

[English]

**Mr. Harold Davis:** When I finally got a hold of former prime minister Mulroney, he was amazed that it hadn't been done. He didn't know. He turned around and said to me, "We've got to fix this". Those were his exact words.

He became one of our supporters. He came to the war museum a couple of years back and presented Gulf medals and Kuwait Liberation Medals, along with the Kuwaiti ambassador, to veterans who never received their medals—33 years later, almost. I was walking with him and MP Brassard, and he told him that they had to get that fixed. He didn't even know at the time. As to why he didn't know, I cannot answer that question. To me, it goes right back to National Defence.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** That meeting was about two years ago, wasn't it?

Did you also meet with him when he was prime minister?

[English]

**Mr. Harold Davis:** No, I did not, sir—only at the war memorial.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** I'm very hopeful because our Conservative friends and Blake Richards have clearly said that this has to be remedied. If the Conservative Party came to power—and I did say "if"—the problem would be fixed, would it not?

My next question is for whomever wishes to answer. It may seem a bit odd, but here it is.

In your view, was Canada directly involved in combat in the Persian Gulf, or did its role focus more on supporting the countries officially at war?

[English]

**Mr. Harold Davis:** Canada.... I cannot answer that question 100%, because I'm what we call a "lower ranker"—I fixed a helicopter—but in talking to other officers and stuff like that, our air force, towards the end of the war, was flying bombing runs, and that's written down. That's on DND or...I can't remember the site, but it's written that they started. I have pilot statements that even

say the same thing. We've got that and we were in the Gulf, but we never turned around and fired a shot. My ship was a protective ship for the USNS *Mercy*, the hospital ship. We were protecting her while we were in the gulf, but there were other ships.

We went into minefields to bring out ships that had hit mines and couldn't turn a screw. We went in to get a ship out. When you ask about combat, we never had combat troops in there; we had a hospital for our injured. The only ones I knew were the pilots who flew bombing missions towards the end of the mission; plus, we had one who was shooting an Iraqi gun boat.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** You mentioned a letter that Mr. Mulroney had sent you. Did I hear that correctly?

Would you be able to provide the committee with a copy of the letter?

[English]

**Mr. Harold Davis:** Mike submitted 14 different documents to the committee, and the letters were in there also.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Was the letter one of the documents?

[English]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Malachie Azémar):** No, it isn't, because it was in English only. I sent it to translation.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** All right. We'll get it once it's been translated.

I have another question for you.

Do you, personally, see a difference between special duty service and wartime service? Is there a difference?

[English]

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** The closest things that we can find in government documentation.... In one place, it gives a description of what medical insurance coverage is applicable to special duty service. It uses the language "heightened risk". It doesn't give me the definition of what a "special duty area" mission is, but I found a definition in Veterans Affairs about what the level of insurance is, and that's "heightened risk".

When you get to war, wartime service, I testified earlier that we could not find any definition in government publications or National Defence that will help us, you and me, understand what my wartime service is. The closest example that I can find and give to you is in the criteria needed for battle honours, which is an internal National Defence process that I'll get into later, if I get an opportunity to speak about it, and it is to actively participate with a formed and armed enemy.

I'm not a lawyer, but that sounds like a good starting point for "wartime service" versus "heightened risk".

That's the best I have. Thank you.

• (1135)

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Thank you, Mr. McGlennon.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now, on the screen, we have with us Ms. Rachel Blaney, and she has six minutes to ask questions.

Please go ahead.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):** Thank you so much, Chair

A special thanks to both Harold and Mike. I'm really delighted that you're here, and I'm sorry that I'm not able to be there with you.

I see that behind you there are a few members who have also served. I want to thank not only you for your service, but also the folks behind you for their service as well. Thank you for being here to stand in solidarity.

My grandfather was a veteran of the Korea War, and I remember you, Mike—educating me about the fight that the Korean veterans took on to get their service recognized, and it's unfortunate that it seems as if every new generation has to do this fight now.

I'm wondering if either of you could talk about what this fight has felt like for you. I think what I've heard clearly from you is that it's both about the benefits and about the acknowledgement part. I'm just wondering if you could tell us what those two things are. What would be the fundamental change that would make this right for you, and what change needs to happen to make sure that there are never veterans fighting this fight again?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** Thank you for that question, Rachel.

The difference in commemoration is rather large. I understand why, and I actually agree with it in some levels. During my service career, I had five different tours, one of which I think qualifies me to be reidentified as a wartime service veteran, and for the other four, I'd be happy with my special duty service designation. Currently, all five of them are designated as “special duty area” service.

This country, rightly so, has put a lot of focus on the sacrifices and the military history—and for extremely important reasons—of their wartime service veterans. I had the good fortune to be posted to SHAPE in Belgium for three years. I was basically on the French-Belgian battlefield sites within a couple of hours' drive, so I made it a personal goal to go visit all the cemeteries and to go to Vimy Ridge. The experience made me feel extremely small. I really don't know if I would have had the courage to do what those soldiers before me did, but it was my way of paying homage to their service.

As I'm speaking about this, I'm getting chills up my back.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Really what you're saying, Mike, is that it's the definition that needs to be clearer so that it's more transparent.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** Well, at the moment, my military history records are inaccurate, in my opinion.

I have a family. I have grandchildren. I have a spouse and brothers and sisters. I want them to understand at some level what I endured during my service career. In some ways, through no fault of their own, they're blind to it. They weren't there, so they're never going to know it the way I know it, but this country doesn't call me a “wartime service veteran”, so my family doesn't think I am. My neighbours do not think I am.

I carry this inside me.

**Mr. Harold Davis:** May I add to that, please?

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Yes, of course, Harold.

**Mr. Harold Davis:** When we turn around and look at it, we went over there and our families sat at home, and they turned around and they watched that TV. Religiously, every day, they watched it. My wife did....

I have to stop.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** I recall—

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Harold.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** —telling my mother before I left that if I didn't come home, to please accept it: “I'm going overseas and doing my duty and proud to do it.”

I cared about the people I was serving next to on my left and my right, and I really did not know what was going to happen. It was the largest deployment of military might in the world after the Second World War. We all thought that it was going to last a long time, and I know that Canada was extremely worried about the potential casualties that could be incurred during that period, but it fooled us all.

Through great leadership and a bit of luck, it turned out to be a lot less than we all thought, but I was scared, you know. I didn't know what was going to happen. I was attacked with ballistic missiles, something that no other military service person since has had to endure.

• (1140)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

I so admire the work that you guys have been doing in your advocacy.

As my next question, I'm wondering if you've had a chance to meet with either the defence minister or the veterans minister, and what the response was if you did.

**Mr. Harold Davis:** I have reached out to their offices on many different occasions, and there's been nothing. I've also reached out to the CDS's office on a few different occasions, and I was told by the previous CDS office that he has a busy schedule and he doesn't have time.

When you turn around and look at that.... I have a veteran who is getting his Gulf and Kuwait medal and bar 33 years later. I reached out to the CDS office for a campaign medal to be given, because there are not a lot of them out there with the bar. I was told that he was too busy and “you could give it to him”.

I'm sorry, but I took that as an insult.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you for sharing that.



**Mr. Harold Davis:** Now Senator Rebecca Patterson is going to present that medal on Monday to this deserving veteran of the Gulf War. It took me quite a while to get that done.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you for that.

My time is up. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Blaney.

We have more questions to come. This is the second round.

I would like to invite Mr. Fraser Tolmie to take his five minutes, please.

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair.

Through you, Chair, to our guests, thank you very much for joining us.

Again, I want to recognize your service for our country and, for all those who are joining us today, we're grateful.

It can be very frustrating sometimes, sitting in our chairs and hearing the testimony. The onus is not on you to prove things. The onus is on us to be able to deliver and to get results.

I'm struck by what you said earlier on, Mr. Davis: that you've not been able to hold a meeting with the Minister of National Defence. Did I hear that correctly that he was too—

**Mr. Harold Davis:** That's correct.

I've met with the veterans affairs minister. Both Mike and I, whenever we've asked for a meeting, we actually got a meeting with her, but with the Minister of National Defence, no. I can't even get a reply back from his office.

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie:** This is about legal recognition for active duty, and you're not being recognized. You're not even getting a meeting with the Minister of National Defence. That's very disappointing because it seems to be that the solution.... The problem that you're facing is that there is no policy. You've been looking for a policy, but there is no policy with regard to your act of service being recognized. The power and authority is within that minister's hands, and he won't even meet with you.

I also find it challenging, and I want to share a little bit of a story.

We talk about how the Korean vets have been recognized, and when it seems so simple that they've been recognized for their service, doesn't it seem like you should be recognized for your service in the Persian Gulf?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** We are.... From a legal standpoint, the Persian Gulf special duty mission service was legally identical to the Korean War experience. Both were chapter VII missions, parts of a coalition for liberation of a country, although that term for Korea is loosely used because it only has that armistice. Actually, the country hasn't been liberated. We're still at war with Korea in some manner.

Because National Defence doesn't have a policy, it doesn't need to be held accountable for anything. Our opinion is that it's the office of the National Defence. After 33 years, multiple parties have

been in power. It's a long-standing issue. We're not here to point fingers. We're focusing in on the office.

• (1145)

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie:** I understand that, and that's not what I'm getting at. What I'm saying is that Korea has been recognized. In 1988, there was a badge that was issued for recognition of service. I believe it was Mulroney, who was also a big supporter. You've testified that you have a letter saying that we have to fix this.

What I'm saying is that there is a very simple solution, and you have a very good argument for your case. Why has this change not happened in the eight years that you've been trying to advocate for this change? It seems like a logical answer to this. Why has that not changed?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** Well, when I visited, some of you asked or commented around similar issues. The problem seems to be in front of my nose, but the office that we believe has the power to solve the problem is National Defence—

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie:** They're not answering your calls.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** They're not taking our calls. As long as they don't take our calls, the problem is not in their inbox. They don't know anything.

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie:** Well, it must be very frustrating for you to sit here when the solution is right there, and all it takes is one meeting.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Tolmie.

Now, colleagues, I would like to invite Ms. Anita Vandenberg for five minutes, please.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to be a guest here at this committee for this particular meeting. It is an extremely important meeting.

I know that you referenced that event for the 30th anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait at the War Museum. I was there as parliamentary secretary, and it was my first conversation with you.

I think that all of us feel very strongly that nobody should have to fight for recognition. I think that I speak for all members of this committee when I say that as far as we're concerned, you are war heroes. The long-overdue recognition is something that we all want to see happen.

I want to go to a little bit of the process issue, because I think that what we're facing here is that there is actually no mechanism through which this kind of recognition would be done. You've often said that it's not about just the Persian Gulf War. This is about creating a mechanism and a definition so that, for future battles, 30 years later no other veterans have to fight this issue.

Is it enough for you that you be recognized as wartime veterans, or are you really looking for a systemic change that would actually create a mechanism so that in the future it would be almost automatic—that if you have this, this and this, it automatically makes you a war veteran and no one else has to fight? Is that what you're looking for here?

**Mr. Harold Davis:** Do you want to talk about the battle honours system?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** Yes.

That is a great question—great question—on the lack of a process and the systemic issue.

Take everything the military has done since 1950. We didn't declare war on Korea. We didn't declare war on Iraq. We didn't declare war on Afghanistan. We only declared war on Germany and Japan. In those circumstances, it was rather obvious, but for everything since 1950, National Defence has put those military veterans on active service, classified them as special duty veterans and sent them off to do their business.

The veterans go off. They serve their country. Some of them die and don't come home. Those who come home are still wearing uniforms. They can't do anything. Eventually, they get out and become veterans. They become aware of issues, such as missing benefits and commemoration not being appropriate to their service. They start advocating. This is where we are. We are at this stage of the game. We are here to advocate for ourselves, because officially, we're the only ones we can talk about. However, as a concerned veteran, I would like to ensure that future veterans don't have to go through this process.

This idiocy has to cease. It's not fair. It's not transparent. Veterans have died before even knowing that they're wartime service veterans. I'm 66 years old. I don't know if I'm going to wake up tomorrow morning. It's possible. We're getting older. When we rededicated the National War Memorial in 2014, we put the Boer War on it. Those guys were long gone. They weren't wartime service veterans, in Canada's opinion, until 2014.

• (1150)

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld:** What I'd also like to get at from you, because you've been at this for some time, is that right now there really is no mechanism within either DND or VAC to do this. DND is saying that this is actually commemorations, which means it's under Veterans Affairs. I know that's why you've had many meetings with the minister. I do understand that there may be a process under way where those definitions are being looked at and what that would look like.

You described very well how, for you, when you went, you were going to war, in your mind. This goes beyond the benefits. It's easy to talk about benefits. I know there are certain parallels in benefits that DND has put in there. What this is really about, though, and what I'm getting from some of the veterans I've spoken to, is the acknowledgement. It's in your heart. It's so that you can stand up and.... You mentioned your grandchildren. I have often said that it matters to you, so it matters to us.

I wonder if you could talk a little about what this would mean to you, beyond all of the benefits and the details, if you were recognized as war veterans.

**Mr. Harold Davis:** Some of the veterans I know won't talk about it. They won't wear their medals. They will not have anything to do with anything veteran-wise. Here's the quote that I got: "Well, my own country don't give a shit, so why should I?"

Pardon my language, but that's what it was.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Davis.

[*Translation*]

Now it's over to Mr. Desilets, for two and a half minutes this time.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. McGlennon, if you could be concise in your answers, I'd appreciate it.

If I'm not mistaken, you met with the minister, Ms. Petitpas Taylor. Briefly, can you tell us what came out of the meeting?

[*English*]

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** Thank you.

I have met with the Minister of Veterans Affairs on a few occasions. The last meeting I had with her was an hour in her office, private, just her and me. It was a very cordial meeting. She has told us that she is hoping for a robust report from this committee on this issue. She has advised me that she would like to take some action, but she's waiting for the recommendations of the committee. I don't know; I'm not a politician, so I don't know what the definition of that is.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** When was your last meeting?

[*English*]

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** It was just before your summer break. It was in that last week before your....

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Very well.

I thought I heard earlier that the only document that distinguishes between "wartime service" and "special duty service" is an insurance document.

Did I hear that correctly?

[*English*]

**Mr. Harold Davis:** As far as we know, yes, because the insurance document states the SDA for it, the sea duty allowance, and there's no wartime service in the Veterans Well-being Act at all. It's not mentioned anywhere in the well-being act. You would have to look elsewhere for that answer.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I have a motion.

**The Chair:** Very well.

[*English*]

I'm sorry to interrupt.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Mr. Desilets.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** In light of what I've been hearing for the past little while, I think we're missing a very important perspective. Since we'll be hearing from department officials next week, I propose the following motion:

That the committee invite the Minister of National Defence to appear before the committee in relation to the study of the recognition of Persian Gulf Veterans, for one hour, as soon as possible.

I realize we have a pretty tight schedule. If there is unanimous consent, can we adopt the motion? If not, can it be sent out?

**The Chair:** The motion is admissible since it's related to the study. We can ask the committee members, but they don't have a copy of the motion.

Mr. Desilets, would you mind rereading your motion for everyone?

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** I move:

That the committee invite the Minister of National Defence to appear before the committee in relation to the study of the recognition of Persian Gulf Veterans, for one hour, as soon as possible.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Are there any questions?

Ms. Hepfner, go ahead.

**Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.):** Can we suspend briefly so members can discuss it?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay.

[*Translation*]

We'll suspend for a few minutes.

[*English*]

The meeting is suspended.

• (1155) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** We are back.

Before the break, Mr. Desilets's motion was on the floor.

If there are no questions or comments, we'll go straight to the vote. So far, I see no hands.

Is there unanimous consent to adopt Mr. Desilets's motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** I will immediately ask the clerk to schedule the witness for an hour as soon as possible, as per the motion.

Mr. Desilets, you have 30 seconds left of your two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Great.

Mr. McGlennon, a few minutes ago, we were talking about the minister. If I'm gauging the mood correctly, the minister is sensitive to the issue. I've had conversations with her about it. I say that, but other ministers have been sensitive to the issue in the past.

Are you expecting a follow-up from her?

[*English*]

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** I have seen her twice since that meeting. Recently I met with her at the blessing of the Afghan memorial. She promised that she would be meeting with me, Harold and Sammy shortly. She's waiting for a report.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** That's great. Thank you very much.

That's it for me, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. McGlennon and Mr. Desilets.

[*English*]

Now let's go to Ms. Blaney for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Chair.

I want to clarify that the minister does not have to wait for our report. She can do things without it, but I appreciate that she is waiting for our report.

The next question I have is for either Harold or Mike. In the work you've done, how are other countries recognizing service in the Persian Gulf similar to yours?

• (1205)

**Mr. Harold Davis:** I deal with the Americans and Desert Storm veterans quite a bit. I've talked to a representative in England. I've talked a bit to a couple of guys in Australia. That's the extent of it, but they don't seem to be fighting like we are to get recognition at all.

They invite us to whatever events they have because we were some of the coalition people working with them, and they respect us a lot. As an example, the United States Memorial Day parades go on down in the States, and Desert Storm veterans are the biggest group down there marching in that. Guess who's behind them? The six little Canadians carrying a Canadian flag. We're the only other country that's invited to march with the American Desert Storm veterans. We're included 100%.

They don't have the same fight down there that we have here. They recognize Gulf War illness. Canada does not recognize Gulf War illness. They have a registry down there of Desert Storm veterans with the VA. Canada does not have a registry of Persian Gulf veterans, or any other veterans from any other conflicts, as far as I know, for medical purposes.

It seems they can actually wear these medals. They're recognized by the country that gave them to us. They can actually wear them, and some of the other countries can too.

There is a lot of respect out there for Canada. It's just that we have to fight Canadians on the stuff that we shouldn't have to fight Canadians on.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Just to clarify, the medals you're wearing are on the one side, and you cannot wear them on the other side with the other service medals.

**Mr. Harold Davis:** That's correct. We have to wear the Kuwait Liberation Medal and the Saudi Arabian liberation medal on our right side because we're deemed as being recognized. The Governor General has informed us, the committee, that we can't be recognized for that, but other countries seem to give veterans other medals, and they can wear them and nobody says anything about it.

It's a country that we helped liberate, and we can't do anything. We have been told no.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Davis.

Now let's go to Mrs. Wagantall for five minutes.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Thank you so much, Chair.

Thank you so much for your testimony today.

I want to clarify something with either of you, Harold or Mike.

You established Persian Gulf Veterans of Canada in 2017. How many times since then have you reached out to the Department of National Defence for a meeting?

**Mr. Harold Davis:** I think I've reached out two or three times.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** That's fine.

**Mr. Harold Davis:** It was only within the last year and a half or so.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Okay. You've reached out to them in the last year and a half, two or three times, and had no results.

**Mr. Harold Davis:** I've received nothing. I don't even get a return email.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Thank you.

You indicated that in your efforts, there appears to be no clarity or any existence of policies on designation within the Department of National Defence. Is that correct?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** Yes.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** In 1988, the prime minister of Canada, Brian Mulroney, created the Volunteer Service Medals for the Korean War. In 1992, he presented them. That's a while back. Now we're being told today that the Veterans Affairs minister is waiting for this committee to make a recommendation before she makes a decision.

When you were serving, you were told you were on active duty in that situation. Who told you this?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** For me, it came from our ship's commander at the time, the late Captain Becker.

• (1210)

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Okay, Mike.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** I'm sorry. I don't think either one of us is an expert.

When I'm told I'm going overseas, an operation name is created by National Defence. Your status on that mission is identified, as well as your rules of engagement and what kind of pre-deployment training you require. You go off, get on a ship or boat, go somewhere, do your business and come home.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** You were told on the ship. Was this the first time, though, that you were told, Harold, that you were on active duty?

**Mr. Harold Davis:** Yes. According to the ship's commander, we had to be put on active duty before we could sail into the Suez Canal.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Okay. Who told him that?

**Mr. Harold Davis:** I can't answer that question, because—

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Isn't that disconcerting, though? Obviously, it must have come from DND.

**Mr. Harold Davis:** It came from DND, but you have to remember that I'm a lower-deck guy. I don't question the captain or my officers—

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Of course.

**Mr. Harold Davis:** —when they give us an order. If they come down and say, "This is the way it is", as far as I know, it comes from higher up, which goes to DND.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** That's basically the point I'm trying to make here, not at all the other... Obviously, the decision had to come from the Department of National Defence for the direction your service was going in. This issue is stymied within the Department of National Defence.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** I agree.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Clearly, when the prime minister of Canada presented medals in 1992 to the Korean War vets, he was able to make that happen.

**Mr. Harold Davis:** I'm assuming so. It's beyond my pay grade.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** My point is that it happened.

In the present situation, I think that what should be happening could be happening right now, regardless of the past.

I want to make a comment. This idea that we need to wait for the Veterans Affairs minister to deal with this is a stalling tactic, because she can't make the difference. She is the associate minister of National Defence. I've tried to determine exactly how that role works for her, and I'm not clear on how it does. The bottom line here is that we, as a committee, need to make some recommendations that go beyond Veterans Affairs and directly to the Department of National Defence.

Do you have a comment?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** In my discussions with her, Minister Ginette Petitpas Taylor told me she has the ear of the minister, obviously, as the associate. The minister is her boss.

We strongly believe that it's not within the purview or under the authority of the Minister of Veterans Affairs to change our classification status. That should be done at National Defence, referencing a policy we can't find. If there's no policy that exists, you don't have to be held accountable. You can't nail anything to the wall.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** I would say that they need to be held accountable for not appearing to have a policy. I would certainly say that we, as members of Parliament, have had less and less opportunity over those years to even hear about what National Defence is suggesting or where they're going and whatnot. They have a responsibility to make sure those policies are definitely visible to us, and certainly visible to those that they are impacting.

Do I have more time?

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** All I need is 30 seconds.

I would just mention, sirs, that there are two individuals in this room right now who, over this course of this government, have served as parliamentary secretaries for National Defence, and I would encourage you to reach out to them to make sure that we take care of this now.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm going to invite Mr. Randeep Sarai to take his five minutes, please.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our vets, who have given a lot for this country in times of war.

The Gulf War was a massive international undertaking, with over a million members of the coalition working together. As part of that coalition, Canada's forces helped liberate Kuwait from the Iraqi forces.

On the topic of cohesion and collaboration, I'm wondering if there are similar groups like yours formed in other nations in the coalition, and if your organization keeps in communication with them to see how they have been recognized or what they are doing in their neck of the woods for the same thing.

• (1215)

**Mr. Harold Davis:** With regard to other countries, I mostly deal with the United States. They had the biggest contingency of personnel there. They're building a monument there, which Veterans Affairs has actually donated money to on behalf of Canada, on the Persian Gulf, to help build it, but they don't have the same problems that we have here, and neither do the other countries. They're not fighting their country for the recognition. They've already been recognized.

We're fighting our own country for recognition, and they support me, because they've just said, "Go get 'em, Harold."

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** You're saying that they haven't had the same challenge in designation in their neck of the woods, whether it's the U.S. or any of your other counterparts.

Go ahead, Mike.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** The lack of an existing post-deployment or post-conflict process leaves us in the situation that we're in today after 33 years, still walking the walk, whereas our Five Eyes coalition partners that we have relationships with have established veterans organizations. They've been granted wartime service status by their countries in a more timely manner. I'm not an expert, but they certainly haven't had to wait 33 years. Within one year or two years, they were reclassified by their countries.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Thank you.

My understanding is that representatives from DND and Veterans Affairs will appear before our committee next week as part of the study.

For each one of you, if you were sitting in one of these chairs as members of Parliament, what are the one or two questions you'd like us to ask them as officials?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** I really want to see National Defence's policies.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Okay.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** You're all parliamentarians here. You and your peers and the incumbents in whatever government was in place have been dealing with National Defence and that office of National Defence since 1950, but the absence of a policy.... I'm using that term carefully, because maybe they'll pull something out that was written in 1890 that I haven't been able to find, but I strongly believe that it doesn't exist. We're here having a study that wouldn't be necessary if a policy existed.

I want to see the policy. You guys need to see the policy.

Thank you.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Is there anything else, Mr. Davis?

**Mr. Harold Davis:** We have looked and looked, but if you can't find the policy, then how are you supposed to make decisions on how things go and where they're going to go? You can't do it.

If DND has the policy, well, then, it should be readily available to the public, to the taxpayers, and to you guys to help you make your decisions as to what's going on and to help you tell me the direction for how we are going to go or how we are able to argue the policy or not.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** While there were no deaths from enemy action, many of the Canadian veterans were left with lasting effects of PTSD and other significant long-term health issues as a result of the mission. Is this something that you hear from Persian Gulf veterans whom you interact with and engage with?

**Mr. Harold Davis:** We've heard that a lot.

I'm going to tell you that we never had any casualties in the Persian Gulf, but we've had casualties since the Persian Gulf because of the Persian Gulf and because of what we were exposed to. Plain and simple, we have people in the memorial book downstairs, but we had to fight to get them in that book, just so you know. They didn't automatically go in it. That's where our casualties come from.

Now we have veterans out there who can't explain some of the illnesses they have; I have some, but nobody can tell me where it came from or what it is. God knows what it's going to do to me and what it's doing to other veterans out there.

No, we didn't lose anybody in the war, but you don't have to lose somebody in a war for them to be classified as a war veteran.

• (1220)

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** No, I'm not implying that at all. I'm asking if there were long-term health effects or if you've heard from others, which you said you have.

From decades of service and your vast experience, would you say there's a lot of adjustment to going from working and living in a wartime mentality in the military to a peacetime mentality, and can you share some of those adjustments?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** Thanks for that question.

There is definitely... On each deployment—and I had five of them, both wartime and non-wartime—there's a significant amount of personal investment and effort that goes into each of these missions when a soldier goes. There's pre-deployment training that goes on for months for five days a week. It's hard, for 10 hours a day. Then, when you get overseas, your only job is to eat, sleep and work. I'm pulling 15-hour or 18-hour days for six months, so when I get back on that plane to go home, I'm done, and it takes a while to recover.

Depending on what you are exposed to as a soldier, because we have a variety of different missions, there is a decompression period, a serious decompression period, required for some soldiers.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to have four more MPs intervene.

[*Translation*]

Next we have Luc Desilets.

Mr. Desilets, you have two and a half minutes. Go ahead.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Davis, I have a basic question for you, one I or someone else should have perhaps asked you at the outset.

In your view, what was the mandate of Canada's mission in the Persian Gulf War?

[*English*]

**Mr. Harold Davis:** That's a very good question, and you're going to have to ask Commodore Summers that question because he was the commander over there.

Again, I'm not in a position that I can answer what our mission was over there. All I know is that I fixed the plane and the plane

flew and the plane came back. He's on the witness list here. He's the one this question should be directed to, sir, because he would have the answer. He did all the talking.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** All right. Thank you.

You clearly said earlier that there needs to be a documented clear policy, and I completely agree.

What should the policy include? In simple terms, what would you like to see in the policy?

[*English*]

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** There is a pseudoprocess in place that already exists within National Defence, and it's specific to something called a "battle honour". A battle honour is a public recognition of a significant service event for a unit. There's an internal process involved. Units don't have to ask for it; it's automatic, following a conflict. A review is done internally within National Defence using criteria I don't know.

However, there is a criteria list. Recommendations are made to the chief of the defence staff to award a battle honour, if applicable, to a unit. One of the criteria is "active participation in battle against a formed and armed enemy".

We received battle honours in November 1993. Why didn't National Defence reclassify us as wartime service veterans in 1993? The Governor General gave us a medal with a bar. The bar meant we actively participated during the hostilities. These things were done. Why didn't National Defence roll us over? It's because there is no process.

If you have a process to create a battle honour, awarding one would automatically flip you over. The reason I say this is that the only recipients of battle honours are wartime service veterans, with two exceptions: the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan.

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Thank you, Mr. McGlennon.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Desilets.

We now go to Ms. Blaney for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

[*English*]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

My next question will be for both of you.

It's very clear to me that the impact comes from Veterans Affairs, but the decision-making power is with DND. I think you guys have done a great job of explaining that and what needs to happen.

As my next question, what do you believe the barriers are to the Government of Canada recognizing Gulf War syndrome, as other countries have?

**Mr. Harold Davis:** That's a good question.

I'm not sure what the barrier is.

Well, I am sure I can guess. The barrier, to me, is that the Department of National Defence didn't make a decision back in 1990, 1992 or 1993 to recognize our service. That's the barrier right there. If the recommendation had to come from the Department of National Defence and had been given to the Minister of National Defence at the time, maybe it would have already been done and we wouldn't be sitting here rehashing what our Korean brothers and sisters had to do back in the fifties. Now we're sitting here.

What happens down the road when other groups show up here? What's going to happen in the future when the guys come back from Ukraine? We're just rehashing it. A policy should be put out there, one we can all turn around, read and understand. The way Mike was explaining battle honours, the procedures are already set up. You can tweak that and end up having the exact same thing to denote what type of service someone had. Did he have a special duty area, a special duty service or duty operator....?

I'm getting mixed up here, guys. I'm getting excited.

It can be done. To me, it starts with DND. They need to produce the policy directives on how they come out with these decisions.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** With the Korean War veterans having to do this work and being successful, and the fact that, so many times, back in the nineties, there was acknowledgement on a metalevel but not on that policy.... Really, it's governments since the nineties that have not taken the opportunity, repeatedly. Here we are in 2024, and you're still not recognized.

I'm wondering what the emotional and mental impacts are, not only on yourselves but also on your families, because of this lack of recognition.

**Mr. Harold Davis:** That's a very loaded question for me, because I get....

Mike, take it. I can't do it. I can't answer the question.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you. I'm sorry.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** Everything's personal. Each one of us is different from the other. We experience things in life differently. I'm proud of my service career. I'm proud of the places I went and the people I served with. I am joined to them for life.

You live in a mudhole, you sleep in the dirt and you eat cold meals. You endure hardship. You're separated from your families. It's Christmas, and it's like, "Oh, this sucks."

It's not any one thing. It's just the impact that special duty service or wartime service has on you, because if you're out doing one of those, you're not at home. You're off somewhere with your peers,

servicing your country because your country asked you to go somewhere and do the country's business.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much.

Now I'd like to invite Mr. Terry Dowdall to take his five minutes, please.

**Mr. Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mike. Thank you, Harold.

I've had the opportunity to have you guys in my office for meetings, and you've certainly enlightened me on the issue. I want to thank you for your service and thank those in the audience as well, and I really thank you for bringing this issue forward. I'm sure that all of the other veterans who are watching today would probably give you a big shout-out for being here to continually push this issue.

You say that you started in 2017, I think. I've been on committees since I was elected in 2019. I don't know if you've thought of what we actually do and can accomplish in reality. The news part is good—the news story—but at the end of the day, I'm disappointed.

The minister has not met.... I hope that we will have the minister in here. The minister would be the one who would do the policy. It's not so much this committee.

We heard last week from Mr. Sampson, who happened to be here as well, that there are really two issues that he feels are probably the reason. One is that the current government might not recognize war in general; it's perhaps just not what they want to get out there. The second is the financials.

Sitting here, I'm of the belief, quite frankly, that they don't want to do it. Why do you think they don't want to support this? As a committee, I think everyone in this room is thankful for your service and believes in what you're saying, and you've met with many MPs.

Why do they not want to support this?

• (1230)

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** Thank you for that question.

I'm a 66-year-old Canadian citizen. I grew up looking at history books in school and learning about Lester B. Pearson, the United Nations service, the blue berets and the good stuff that we've done in the world and that we continue to do. We're happy-go-lucky nice and polite Canadians and we do not do horrible things to each other. It's not going to happen.

Every time we raise into the consciousness of the country that “Oops, we’ve gone to war”, it’s “Shh—don’t tell anybody, and maybe they won’t know and we won’t upset them.” I think there’s an element of that there, but—

**Mr. Terry Dowdall:** Do you not think that the individuals who are here...? I’m not on the government side. Hopefully, I will be at some point in time. I know that if I get a question or if there’s something I feel strongly about, I... Should they not be pushing harder on the minister and saying that this is something they’re hearing in their ridings and that this is important?

You had a great comment: “I don’t give a—”. I won’t fill in that word. Why do they...? I hear that at the Legions. I’m from a base town—Angus, Ontario, for CFB Borden—and I hear that.

The role of the individual is to push for that. You’ve met some of these MPs. I’m just saying point-blank that I don’t think they want to do it.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** In the military population today, in the 2021 census, there were 450,000 of us or something—regular force and then reserve force—so add another 100,000 people to that number. As a community, the military community is getting smaller as this country grows to 42 million or 43 million people. You’re not seeing me. We’re less and less.

In the First World War, it was.... What was the number? Was it one in...?

**Mr. Terry Dowdall:** You talk to people here. It should have changed.

My colleague wants one last question. It will be a quick question.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Thank you so much, Chair.

I want to get clarity on this. You indicated that in 1993 you got battle recognition, and in 1992 medals were presented to the Korean War veterans for their wartime service.

Does this not tell you that for the Prime Minister to make that happen, he had to work with DND? There needed to be some significant interaction to create this policy, if it didn’t already exist, so why can it not be done now?

You indicated that there’s no process in place. That’s your impression. How can that be when this has happened already? Do you not think DND has the capability even right now to make this happen?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** I can only guess that it’s politics or something that evolved. You can do anything very quickly if you’re motivated, but I don’t believe we’ve found any policies in place. What the government did with the Korea guys.... I haven’t found anything. I don’t know.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** You haven’t been told or shown anything?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** We haven’t been shown it at all. No one’s opened the window.

**Mr. Harold Davis:** We can’t find out how they got it done because the Library of Parliament is.... It’s so old that it’s not online anymore, so I can’t reference it.

• (1235)

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** I have a friend over there. We’ll see.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

For the last questions, I invite Ms. Hepfner to close this out.

**Ms. Lisa Hepfner:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I know the Conservatives are trying really hard to make the government look bad, but I just want to point out that the reason we have a former parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs here is she remains engaged, and she’s been arguing with....

**An hon. member:** It was defence.

**Ms. Lisa Hepfner:** Defence. Thank you.

Anyway, I just want to give a shout-out to my colleague for taking the time and being here. We have an extra member today because she is engaged and she cares.

We’ve all agreed to bring in the Minister of National Defence. I have a meeting coming up with you in my office, so I don’t want to leave the impression that we don’t care and we haven’t been hearing you.

Harold, you gave an excellent summary of what you think the process should look like with regard to battle honours. Could you expand on that or talk a bit about it? If there is no process or policy, maybe both of you could weigh in on what it should ideally look like.

**Mr. Harold Davis:** I’m going to pass it to Mike, because Mike has been researching battle honours, how they have been delivered and what the procedures are. He’s better placed to answer that question than I am.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** In some ways, that’s above our pay grades, but if I were to visualize it in my head, and you created a committee, you’d look at whether it should be inside National Defence or outside. I don’t think they’ve been handling the topic properly.

Anyway, you could think of putting a veteran on it, putting a military historian on it and putting a prominent Canadian on it who has no skin in the game. Make it fair. Make it transparent. They would be given a list of criteria. They’d look at it and go, “Ding, ding, ding”—yes or no.



That process would transparent to the veteran community, so I could go off on the Hill and go to Haiti, and I'd have an opinion. National Defence, or wherever this process is going to exist or be placed, would make it evident to me and say, "No, Mike. We disagree with you. Get lost," or, "Yes, we do. We have a wartime service event", and it would be done. It wouldn't be putting this responsibility on the backs of the veterans, which is the current situation.

I am walking on a worn garden path that veterans have walked before me. If you don't solve this problem for us or think about the future, I know some other veterans who might be headed in your direction, whom I can't speak for officially.

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** Do you want to add anything to that, Harold?

**Mr. Harold Davis:** On the process that is lacking right now and that we see.... As Mike was saying, it's not there. It's there for battle honours, but it's not there for anything else, except for the policy. Where in the policy does DND turn around and say they'll make you this type of veteran or they'll make you that type of veteran? If it's taken out of their hands and, as Mike says, you have a committee, the committee doesn't have to be a public committee. They can sit anywhere. If they come out with a recommendation that this is what that service should be recognized as, well, then, who are we to turn around and argue after that?

Until that point, show me in the policy where it says that I'm not.

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** Thank you.

I have a minute left. I'll pass it over to my colleague Anita Vandenberg.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** Thank you.

This is actually a machinery of government question, because I think the political will is here on all sides. In terms of the machinery of government, the cenotaph is under Canadian Heritage. Commemorations are under Veterans Affairs. The designation is under National Defence, but would normally have been done at the time. We're looking at coordination between government departments and inertia within the system because there is no policy.

We all know that it takes a lot longer to create a policy, particularly in a department that may believe that it is actually not their jurisdiction, with a sort of back-and-forth between different departments. Is this really what you think we're facing?

**Mr. Harold Davis:** Well, to me the policy is this: DND has had a lot of years to make the policy, and they keep making decisions without a policy that we can find. You're saying it takes a lot of years to do a policy. Guess what? They've had a lot of years to do a policy. DND should be able to produce the policy.

● (1240)

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** We've been the recipient of National Defence responses to e-petitions and written policy letters that are sort of canned responses. They skate down the middle and don't say anything. They quote policy that, in our opinion, doesn't even exist. They've not been challenged. They've been allowed to get away with it. They've not been forced to produce it.

We're just two simple little soldiers. Quite frankly, we can't make that happen. You guys need to make that happen. Please make it

happen. If we find out what I think is there, it's going to create a lot of problems

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** You've done an amazing job in articulating this. Thank you so much.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

As you know, there will be more meetings on that subject. I'm pretty sure you'll be following our meetings, including with veterans who are in the audience.

Mr. Harold Davis and Mr. Mike McGlennon from the Persian Gulf Veterans of Canada, president and vice-president, I'd like to thank you.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** From looking at the clock, it looks like we have over 15 minutes. Could we not do another short round of questions?

**The Chair:** It's possible. It's up to you guys, if you want to go on.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** The witnesses have come all this way. We might as well use all the time we have.

**The Chair:** Okay. We have 15 minutes, so we'll have a second round. We'll start with two interventions of five minutes and two interventions of two and a half minutes.

Mr. Blake Richards, the floor is yours for five minutes.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thanks, Chair.

Today we've talked a lot about a policy that may or may not be required. Whether one exists or not, I don't know, nor do you. You've made it really clear that you don't know whether one exists. There may be a policy and there may not be. There may need to be one to get this done and there may not.

For me, it boils down to this: If there's a policy required, the person who would be responsible for making that policy would be the Minister of National Defence. If a policy does exist, the person responsible for making a decision under that policy would be the Minister of National Defence. Either way, that's kind of where the buck stops here, it seems.

I get that you've had meetings with the Minister of Veterans Affairs, who says she's had conversations with the minister, but that hasn't gone anywhere. You've had meetings with other members of the government who say they support you. What they've done about that to actively support you I don't know. Maybe you do.

The bottom line is that we have a Minister of National Defence who won't meet with you guys, and it's his decision as to whether this happens, whether he has to apply a policy or whether he has to create a policy. In my mind, there are only two things that could be the case here. One, there is some barrier that none of us seem to be aware of that is preventing him from being able to do that, or two, he just doesn't want to do it. I don't know which one it is.

Is there some barrier that you are aware of that is preventing the minister from doing this? I'm not aware of one. Are you aware of any barriers that may be preventing this?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** Thank you for that question.

There are two things that we believe exist. There's a bias out there that we hear about often enough: "You guys didn't have any casualties, so you're not a war." That would be one.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** That's not a real barrier. That's someone's opinion or thought on why they wouldn't want to do it.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** It's a bias.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** It's not a barrier, though.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** Right, so I guess part two of that, then, would be.... You heard from Sammy Sampson on September 19. He talked about the financial deltas between the Pension Act and the well-being act. Wartime service is embedded in the Pension Act but not in the well-being act.

If there were changes done, as we understand the process, it's legal, which means that then you need an act. Because there may be money involved, you need royal assent, as we understand the process. Even if we come to wanting to effect a change, it's going to take a while.

• (1245)

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Yes, and if that is accurate, then that's a legitimate barrier. It would be interesting to hear the thoughts of our analyst on that.

I'm not sure if I can ask the analyst a question now, but do you think that barrier actually exists? Is there a need here to change policies in order to have financial benefits and get this done?

**Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré (Committee Researcher):** To my knowledge, for financial benefits, the only difference between being a wartime service veteran, as designated by Veterans Affairs Canada, is long-term care. That's the only difference I could find.

The other difference is wartime service. I haven't found anything in the legislation defining what that means. For special duty operations, there's a clear process for that, but there's no special definition of—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thank you.

It sounds to me like that barrier may not actually exist either. It really comes down to the will to do it.

I guess my next question would come to this. You've had meetings with MPs of all parties, but obviously the Liberal members you have met with have the ability—they're part of the government—to go to the minister and try to encourage this to happen.

When you've had these meetings, I know that many members—probably almost every member, if not all members—of this committee have indicated their support. Have they committed to take it to the Minister of National Defence? If they have, have they reported back to you what the results of those conversations were?

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds, guys.

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** We have visited more than 40 MPs and 10 senators. Party affiliation was irrelevant to us. We just wanted time to sit before someone, make the business case and cross our fingers that at some point we would reach a tipping point and get some assistance in helping us move this issue down the football field.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I guess my point, though, is that Liberal MPs could actually go to their minister. I would really encourage you to encourage them to do that and report back what they hear from that minister, because at the end of the day it sounds to me like the roadblock is right there.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I would encourage you to have people go and speak to him.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Mr. Richards.

Now let's go to Ms. Anita Vandenbeld for five minutes, please.

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld:** Thank you very much.

I also wanted to say to you that I appreciate that you are ensuring that this is not a partisan issue. This is something that we know all of us care about. Getting you that recognition is something that we owe you as a country.

I wanted to ask you, because it's sort of coming out as if it was just nothing, but over the years there have been certain things that have changed. I know that under Minister Sajjan there were changes to make the wellness benefits. I think that at that time the understanding was that it was about trying to create equivalent benefits.

Really, at this point, I think we're starting to understand that it really is more about the actual commemoration, the actual recognition, the acknowledgement of the service. In my understanding, there has been a committee within Veterans Affairs that is looking at criteria and is doing the consultations.

If you could, please talk about what has been happening and the process and the fact that turning a machine as large as DND can be not the easiest thing at all times, especially when there isn't actually any policy to begin with.

For instance, the commemoration on the cenotaph falls under Canadian Heritage. There are so many different departments. Could you talk a bit about the progress that's been made over the years and the fact that this is really a trajectory that ultimately should be going faster but is moving in the right direction?

Is that correct?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** No.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** No, no, no. I'll talk a little bit about the National War Memorial itself.

Pre-2014, the National War Memorial was strictly reserved for wartime service veterans. We all know who they were at this point. In 2014, the Government of Canada added "In Service to Canada", added the Boer War, and added Afghanistan. Remember, the title of the National War Memorial is National War Memorial.

The UN peacekeeping monument that most of us probably know on Sussex Drive was built and dedicated in 1992, because the UN peacekeeping veterans of Canada were told, "No, you cannot go onto the National War Memorial. You are not wartime service veterans, so you have to go off and build your own." They did that in 1992.

To go back to 2014, the Government of Canada added "In Service to Canada". It's in very tiny letters, and directly placed under the dates of the First World War.

When I stand there and look at it, I see "1914-1918 In Service to Canada". That's cool. I'm okay with that. However, my discussions with Veterans Affairs were, "No, Mike, you're wrong. You don't need to be separately inscribed in the National War Memorial, because you're not a wartime service veteran." Got it, but if I get reclassified, I want to be there with my own dates. No. "You also don't need to be there because you're captured by 'In Service to Canada'."

I say, "I didn't know that." The letters are one-third the size of the date letters, and they're placed directly underneath. They're not pulled out or blown up like all the other dates so that there's transparency and awareness—and as well, "In Service to Canada" is to capture the non-wartime deaths.

Excuse me? With the National War Memorial, now you're telling me you're changing your rules here, and you are saying, "Oh, we're going to memorialize non-wartime service." Did you tell the country that?

I think a discussion needs to be held with Veterans Affairs about this issue. We certainly have had the discussion. Veterans Affairs knows I have an issue, and they're working on it.

• (1250)

**The Chair:** Mr. Casey, you have 45 seconds.

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Gentlemen, I have a quick question.

You heard the analyst indicate that there is no difference between wartime service veterans and special duty veterans with respect to compensation under the Pension Act or the Veterans Well-being Act, with the exception of the availability of long-term beds.

Do you agree with that?

**Mr. Harold Davis:** I believe Sammy Sampson was here on September 19. He discussed all of the ins and outs, and ups and downs and the policies. To me, that question was answered back then, so I won't be answering it.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

It's over to Mr. Desilets.

You have two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What would you say is your greatest obstacle or opposition when it comes to this issue, Mr. Davis?

[English]

**Mr. Harold Davis:** The worst struggle for me is fighting the government for something that we should already have and that future veterans should have.

You guys all agree, but DND hasn't pushed it out. It should have been pushed out 30-odd years ago. It hasn't, so our struggle is trying to get that DND machine to move again. That's the big struggle, because it's not co-operating, as far as I'm concerned. There are no policies that tell which way we're going to go and how we're going to go. As a direct result, we are sitting here today, because we don't know where to go. It's not working.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** I have an easy question for you.

You're a veteran. You put your life on the line. Your family had to come second, and for years, you sacrificed for your country. What does it feel like when that's the response you get from the government—rejection?

As I said, you'll have no trouble answering that question.

• (1255)

[English]

**Mr. Harold Davis:** I'll give my opinion as a veteran.

I spent almost 32 years serving my country and I didn't ask for anything back. I just asked for support when I got out. At the time, when I was serving in the military, I didn't really care. I had medical support there, and my family had it. We didn't think about it.

The minute you walk out of that door, the first thing that happens is DND cuts you off and Veterans Affairs picks you up. You then have to fight for what you want to get from Veterans Affairs. It's not as simple as saying, "I have bad hearing." You have to prove to them that you have bad hearing and where you got it.

Being a veteran, I shouldn't have to go through extraordinary lengths to get anything. It's only what I deserve. I'm only asking for what I deserve, not for anything else or anything extra. It's just what we deserve.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Davis.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Blaney, you may go ahead for two and a half minutes.

[*English*]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank both of you for answering questions for two hours. That's a tremendous amount of work, and I really appreciate your doing that.

One of the things we know is that recruitment and retention are becoming bigger and bigger issues for National Defence and the CAF. Based on what you're hearing from folks you speak with, and with your experience of being out there and fighting so hard to just get that recognition, do you feel it's going to impact people's interest in being recruited to serve our country? Will that make it harder for us to get people to join?

**Mr. Mike McGlennon:** In theory, you're looking at two walking recruiters. There are a couple more behind us. On paper, we're supposed to be selling the service to the next generation and the benefits that are obtained by being a member of a family that has important work to do, and on and on. When you end up in the situations we're in today and have been on the journey we've had to go on, it doesn't necessarily incentivize you to tell the teenager who rings your doorbell and asks if they should join the military, "You know, it's great when you're in—maybe—but be careful when you get out and if you have issues."

You guys are more of an expert on that than I am. You could be homeless or you could have PTSD. You could have all kinds of issues. This is not something you think about when you're wearing a

uniform. Your laser focus is on training, doing your mission and looking after the person on the left and the right. That's all you care about. It's only when it's over and you're out that you then discover what the heck is going on here.

If this gets out.... We've been trying to work within government. We've been trying to solve this inside the tent. Harold and I are not standing on Parliament Hill, waving placards, talking to CBC or doing anything. We're relying on your good graces as parliamentarians to see the problem and fix the friggging problem in a timely manner.

This is what you do. You know how to do it. I can't do it. I now turn it over to you. I have to say "please". I have my tin cup.

Thank you.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** As soon as he saw the time card, he stopped.

Mr. Harold Davis, as president of the Persian Gulf Veterans of Canada, and Mr. Mike McGlennon, as vice-president, thank you so much for your testimony during the two hours today.

Colleagues, members of the committee, I have to inform you that this is the last committee of our clerk, Mr. Malachie Azémar. He's going to move to another committee this Thursday, so please join me in a round of applause for Malachie. Thank you so much.

Also, thank you to the technicians around here, and to the translators.

Ladies and gentlemen, this meeting is adjourned.

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