House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

ACVA • NUMBER 011 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Monday, March 30, 2009

Chair

Mr. David Sweet

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

Monday, March 30, 2009

● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC)): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to our meeting discussing the Memory Project of the Dominion Institute.

I said to someone very commendably today that the Dominion Institute is one of those institutions that are the guardians of Canada's history, so we're very grateful to have Jeremy Diamond, and Marc....

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Chalifoux (Executive Director, Dominion Institute): My name is Marc Chalifoux.

[*English*]

The Chair: *Pardon, monsieur*—and George MacDonell with us today to do a presentation.

Traditionally, we give witnesses approximately 20 minutes to make a presentation. Are all three of you going to make a brief presentation at the beginning?

Mr. Marc Chalifoux: Yes, Jeremy and I will make a brief presentation about the Memory Project and the Dominion Institute and our work. That should go for about 10 minutes for the two of us. Then Mr. MacDonell will speak of his own experience as a Memory Project veteran, which will go for no more than 10 minutes. We'll try to keep it to 20 minutes for the three of us.

The Chair: Very good. And then we'll go to rotational rounds of questioning. We're going to be suspending our meeting at 5:15 p.m. because we'll have some committee business at that time, and we don't think you need to endure that.

Without any further ado, please feel free to go ahead and begin your presentation. Thank you.

Mr. Marc Chalifoux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

My name is Marc Chalifoux and I am the Executive Director of the Dominion Institute. With me are my associate Jeremy Diamond, our Managing Director, and George MacDonell,

[*English*]

who is one of our best and longest-serving and most devoted Memory Project volunteers.

Together, the three of us would like to walk you a bit through the work of the Dominion Institute, focusing particularly on our flagship program, the Memory Project, which connects veterans with young Canadians across the country. Then I'll talk to you a bit about some of the public opinion research we've done, as it relates to the topic of veterans. I think it might be of use to the committee beyond this meeting. It might help inform your future research and future work. Then we'll talk about the future of the Memory Project. After that, Mr. MacDonell will present his own experience of having served for upwards of seven years as a Memory Project veteran.

A few of you will remember and will have met us at our Memory Project breakfast at the Crowne Plaza on February 26, so thank you very much for agreeing to see us again. We appreciate it greatly.

I have a few words about the Dominion Institute. We're a national charitable foundation. We were founded back in 1997. Our aim, our goal, our mission is to build more active and engaged citizens, and we do that through better knowledge and appreciation of Canadian history. We see Canadian history as being history, but also as identity and democracy. So we build education programs that develop on those themes.

[*Translation*]

Since its founding 12 years ago, the Dominion Institute has been mentioned in approximately 4,000 print and television reports. For an organization with six full-time employees, this means the Dominion Institute has been mentioned on average twice a day in the newspapers. Our projects enjoy a certain visibility, part of which comes from our public opinion research initiatives.

The Dominion Institute was founded in 1997 on the heels of a public opinion poll conducted in conjunction with Canada Day. This poll revealed that half of all Canadians could not name Canada's first prime minister, a story that made the headlines just about everywhere. This lead to the development of a number of executive projects.

[*English*]

The institute has produced about 18 hours of television programming, mainly documentaries, and we've published 14 different books, including three best sellers.

Apart from the Memory Project, we are very interested in keeping history alive and making history relevant. We have a program called Passages to Canada, which brings about 600 immigrant leaders into classrooms to talk about the immigrant story as part of the Canadian story. We run an aboriginal writing challenge, for young aboriginals to talk about aboriginal history as part of the Canadian story.

So you can see a theme evolve in the way we approach history—to tell an inclusive story of Canadian history. That involves military history and Canada's role overseas, it involves the immigrant story, and it involves the aboriginal story.

One of our better-known campaigns includes our 2006 online petition for a state funeral for the last living World War I veteran, which collected about 100,000 signatures and led to a motion being passed in the House of Commons. We also worked on the Passchendaele film, which we saw as a very important educational tool to talk about Canada's role in World War I. It provided a multimedia approach to telling the Canadian story.

We like to think we're high-tech as well. Back in 2004 we developed the first text messaging campaign for young Canadians so that young people could become active citizens and active future voters.

Jeremy will talk a bit about the Memory Project, which is probably the program we're best known for.

● (1535)

Mr. Jeremy Diamond (Managing Director, Memory Project, Dominion Institute): Thanks, Marc.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members, for being here today.

The Memory Project is a program that's closest to my heart. I started the institute about five years ago, working with our veterans. It had its own kind of humble beginnings. The Memory Project started in Toronto with about 12 veterans who were concerned with the erosion of historical memory when it came to our military history in classrooms. They felt that the opportunity for them to go out into classrooms and share their personal stories, their unique experiences, with young people was a really important way to connect with young people and to really complement the existing curriculum, going forward, with what they already had to learn with regard especially to the Second World War.

It became our flagship program when it started around 2001, with again about 12 veterans. It has since grown to about 1,500 right across the country. We've been represented in hundreds of communities in every province across the country, and nearly one million Canadians, over the past nine years. We're anticipating probably sometime in early fall, in the next school year, the one-millionth young person will host a veteran in a classroom, which we feel is a remarkable achievement. We hope that the students from seven or eight years ago who are now in university and even getting a little older...and at one point in the future, the children of the first high school students who hosted veterans may hear veterans 15 or 20 years from now.

In 2005 we continued to have a very strong partnership with the Royal Canadian Legion, and the Memory Project became the official in-school speakers' bureau of the Royal Canadian Legion. So the important partnership that we have with the Legion allows us to go to just about every community across Canada and encourage local Legion members to join the program as speakers, and then to also include their network of schools in communities all across Canada.

Our veteran volunteers are made up of just about every conflict and experience that Canadian military servicemen and servicewomen have experienced over the last 65 years, going from the Second World War to the Korean War, UN peacekeepers, Cold War era veterans, all the way up to those men and women who have recently returned from Afghanistan. They go into schools and share their stories, which are very recent—a year or two ago—with young people in a similar way as we have our Second World War and our Korean War veterans do that.

We facilitate over 700 veteran visits every year, again to probably about 300 communities, and it seems that every year we get more requests from teachers and more interested veterans to take part. So we know we're doing something right.

The federal government has been a very important partner and funder of ours over the years, to the tune of over $1.2 million from Veterans Affairs Canada and another $500,000 to $600,000 from the Department of Canadian Heritage, to ensure that we not only encourage veterans to go into the schools, but also train them and hold orientation or training sessions to discuss what's working and what's not working in classrooms. We also prepare them and provide them with some tips and suggestions on how to do their talk effectively.

The Memory Project digital archive was a spinoff of the speakers' bureau, where we encourage veterans to share their stories and artifacts with us to create a legacy project that could live on in classrooms and in communities for many years to come. Currently, we have over 1,000 oral history testimonials from veterans and more than 5,000 artifacts, like photographs, letters, and medals, that we've scanned and digitized. They're online at our website, where we know over the past number of years schools have been visiting to do projects on veterans from their local community. We're hoping in the future to make a real commitment to be able to record and digitize the memories and the artifacts of any veteran who wants to do so, so that we know their memories will live on for generations to come.

Mr. Marc Chalifoux: I mentioned when I started that the Dominion Institute made its first splash when it was originally founded, back in 1997, with a survey that measured Canadians' knowledge, or lack thereof, of their history. It showed that only half of Canadians knew who Sir John A. Macdonald was. It was our biggest headline.

From there we've been doing public opinion research over the years, but I don't want to bore you with reams and reams of data. I'd be happy to share any of our research with you. It's all available on our website. I want to show you three trends and to focus on three aspects.

One is what we've found over the course of the 12 years of the institute's existence among the general population with regard to their knowledge of military history. Then I want to talk a bit about Canadians' attitudes toward remembrance. And then I'll talk about a survey of our Memory Project: veteran volunteer.

Over the first 10 years of the institute's existence, we found that generally, despite our best efforts, unfortunately Canadians' knowledge of political history in this country has declined. If you look at questions such as how many Canadians know the year of Confederation and who Canada's first Prime Minister was, given a multiple choice, that's gone down.

What we found somewhat encouraging, particularly with regard to our efforts with the Memory Project, is that generally Canadians' knowledge of our military history, over the period of 1997 to 2007, went up. It went up slightly, modestly, but it improved. We certainly can't take all the credit for that. There have been popular education campaigns, which the committee would be well aware of: the 90th anniversary of Vimy Ridge; the Year of the Veteran, back in 2005. These efforts seem to be paying off. There has been a modest increase in Canadians' knowledge of their military history over the 10 or 12 years of the institute's existence.

On Remembrance Day, November 2008, we measured Canadians' attitudes toward commemoration. Last year, as you know, was the 90th anniversary of the end of World War I. We asked for Canadians' agreement or disagreement to a couple of statements. One was whether it's important to commemorate Canada's military history. We found 92% agreement with that, including 59% who said they strongly agreed with that type of statement. Then we asked whether we should be doing more to educate young people about our military history. Again, we found 90% agreement, including 53% who strongly agreed with that statement.

In the slide presentation I pulled aside the Quebec numbers, where we've seen the strongest variation. As I was doing interviews on our military history, journalists put it to me that Quebec marches to its own drummer sometimes on these things. I think the survey data will show that while levels of support for those statements were slightly lower, they were really only slightly lower.

The institute sees itself as a national organization that has a footprint in both anglophone and francophone Canada. I think the ground is fertile for the type of work and remembrance activities we do and that the committee looks into.

Last year we did a survey of our Memory Project veterans, and there are a few highlights. Those are things to bear in mind when looking at activities with regard to remembrance. There were 80% of veterans who said they were concerned about how Canadians will remember the Second World War when all the veterans have passed away; 78% said they felt that Canadians were fast forgetting the history of the Second World War; and 53% told us that people, more today than at any time in the past, ask them about their military experience.

With regard to the Memory Project, two-thirds, 63%, felt that in-school programs, like the Memory Project, were probably the most effective way to educate young Canadians about our military history. This is something we have found. We do the Memory Project for students and for teachers, but nine out of ten of our veteran volunteers have told us that speaking in schools as part of the Memory Project is their most rewarding and significant volunteer activity.

Jeremy, perhaps you could say a few words about the future of the Memory Project.

● (1540)

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: Thanks, Marc.

At this point we've celebrated eight years at the Memory Project, and I'd probably say that we're at a little bit of a crossroads. We have the luxury, so to speak, of having three generations of veterans alive at the same time—our Second World War veterans, our peacekeeping veterans, and our Afghanistan soldiers. What we want to do is to look at all of those groups. From the Second World War and the Korean War side, we want to encourage as many of those veterans as possible to come out and volunteer with the Memory Project while they still can. Veterans, as we know, are on average in their mid-80s, about 86 years old, so we all recognize that they don't have a lot of time to be able to make the effort to go out into schools. I think what we're finding is that the same urgency that we have with teachers wanting to invite the veterans into classrooms, we have with our veterans who want to do it as well. So the real effort going forward is going to be trying to engage Second World War and Korean War veterans to come and join us to share their story.

Secondly, I think we need to look at the next generation of veterans, the opportunity to engage the younger generation, what we call the new generation, but a different face—our UN peacekeepers, our NATO veterans, our Cold War era veterans, and especially our currently serving Afghanistan servicemen and women. We know right now that about 500 Second World War veterans are passing away every week in Canada. Canada is losing more than 2,000 a month. It's a remarkable statistic, but one that really illuminates the fact that at the same time as we're encouraging those veterans to volunteer, we need to be looking at other men and women who have made similar contributions to Canada's military history. And the way to do this is really to go out to them, to go out to a Canadian Forces base, to their regiments or their units, or speak with the executives of the Canadian association of UN veteran peacekeepers and NATO peacekeeping organizations to encourage them to join the Memory Project, to share their story, and to get it to young people.

But the way we're trying to solidify the Memory Project's place going forward as an important piece of education is to work with our schools and with our teachers. We have several significant anniversaries over the next year, as everybody in this room knows, starting with the 65th anniversary of D-Day this June and into next year with the 65th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe and the Pacific. The opportunity for us to provide really top-rate educational resources and materials for teachers is going to revolve around those anniversaries and be a way for us to hook into the schools.

We recently put together a piece, which is in your packages, that went out to 50,000 teachers across Canada that talked about the significance of Canada at D-Day and at Normandy. We also provided the opportunity for those teachers to invite a D-Day veteran from their community to come and speak about those real life experiences. We've always said that the Memory Project and its veterans are real examples of Canadian history. They're real examples of what happened, what was experienced, and that really complements what students across Canada have to learn. This way it's done by real examples of what happened, shaking the hand of a veteran, thanking them for their experience, but also asking them real questions: what it was like, how did you feel, and what did you actually do? I think those are the things that resonate with kids the most.

● (1545)

Mr. Marc Chalifoux: That concludes the first part of our presentation. Now you'll be privileged—like thousands of young people have been across the country and in the GTA area—to hear from George MacDonell. George MacDonell is one of the best Memory Project volunteers we've had. He's a good friend of the institute. He shares his story. I believe he's reached out to kids in over 200 visits. If anyone can speak for the Memory Project more than Jeremy and I can, Mr. MacDonell can. His story is a wonderful story. He put it in a book that was published a couple of years ago, which is called *One Soldier's Story*. He brought a copy to give to the chair as a thank you for having us here today. It's quite a wonderful story.

Mr. MacDonell.

Mr. George MacDonell (Veteran Volunteer, Memory Project, Dominion Institute): Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I'm honoured to be here today to discuss the wonderful work of the Dominion Institute.

I thought I'd share some of the things I've learned, some of which surprised me, about teaching military history to our students. I've spent about 200 hours in secondary schools with students in their last or second last year of high school. I'd like to share with you some of the things I've learned.

One of the first things I'd like to mention is that specially gifted teachers understand that military history and history in general are connected directly to our ideas of freedom and democracy. Teachers tell me again and again that our students think freedom is like oxygen: it's there, you breathe it, and it's free. They have almost no understanding of how we came to be free, of how we have preserved our freedom, and of the price we have paid.

When I tell the students that at the moment there are over 116,000 young Canadians buried in foreign lands due to our various struggles to retain our freedom, they begin to see the connections between our history and our military history and the fact that they are free. It comes as a great surprise to them. It's a matter of wonderment and great interest to them, and sometimes to young teachers, that our freedom is not free, that it has to be protected and preserved, as we know.

I also discovered when I went into the classrooms of Toronto, which has a very multicultural atmosphere with people from all over the world in our classrooms, that instead of having little interest in Canada's military history, the multicultural students have an enormous interest in it. At the present time, I'm being asked to go to Chinese schools in the big Chinese churches in the communities of Toronto, because Chinese leaders are interested in teaching their children that in 1941 Canadian troops were their allies in defending their homeland in Hong Kong. It is of great interest and comes as a great surprise to these Chinese leaders that their children know absolutely nothing about this and that they are now in a country that came to their aid in 1941, as you know, with disastrous results when the entire force was wiped out.

If anything, the multicultural students seem to have more interest in our history. Multicultural students want to know what it was all about. They weren't here, and often their parents weren't here, but they're really interested in how we have preserved our freedom, why we're different, and how it came about. This little country, in comparison to the great powers that were at war in World Wars I and II.... How did we behave? What did we do? What part did we play? Had it anything to do with our freedom? They love this country and they're fascinated. When it's question period time in the classroom, the first to put up a hand is somebody from India, Pakistan, Iran, Hong Kong, or wherever.

● (1550)

I thought you'd be interested in the fact that military history in the classroom unites our students even if they have come from very different lands. I thought I'd also share with you the fact that our teachers need help. It's a difficult job to teach about World War I, and especially World War II, out of a book. Young teachers are often not very confident about it, and the Dominion Institute provides valuable support to them. I see more and more of them turning to us for this help. The information and the technology that the Dominion Institute plans to use to help teachers is terrific. I have found that teaching the teachers is extremely important. The difference between the really gifted teachers and those who are not so gifted is amazing, and the difference in the classroom is significant.

I will outline for you how the Dominion Institute, through me, helps our teachers. When a school or a history teacher—usually the head of the history department of a high school—contacts the Dominion Institute, they ask for a veteran speaker, and the institute asks what sort of speaker they would like. If they would like to hear about the Battle of Hong Kong or the Battle of Vimy Ridge, we have special speakers for them. The Dominion Institute phones and asks me to speak at the school. When the agreement has been made that I will speak, I am given the telephone number of the teacher, whom I then call and arrange to see, usually at lunch, a week or two before the meeting is to be held. I ask her or him where they are in the curriculum, what it is they want to hear about, whether they want questions, and so on. We usually have lunch in the high school cafeteria, and there I often find out how well prepared the teacher is.

At this point, the teacher generally has some interesting questions for me, and we begin to discuss how we're going to present the meeting in about two weeks. The teacher will often take my book or some other reference and tell the class that this old man is coming to talk to them, and that they ought to get boned up on this stuff. They decide on the questions they want to ask me. This way, the teacher drums up a lot of interest and ideas, and it's much more fun than trying to read a history out of the written text. After all, they're going to go and meet this old man and they don't want to look like a bunch of dummies, so they have to read something before they can decide what to ask me. The next week they have a meeting, a regular class meeting, where they decide on their questions and pick the people who will ask them. Then the great day comes. The old man shows up with his 20 slides, and they spend an hour together discussing World War II.

This is all made possible because of the Dominion Institute. I couldn't imagine how we could do anything like this without their support.

I think I've said enough now. Those are some of my principal ideas. Students want to learn and become fascinated, and their teachers want to let them know that our freedom is not just like the oxygen you breathe. It has come at a big price, and we have to know our history to keep from making the mistakes of the past.

Thank you.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacDonell, on behalf of myself and the committee. We understand just how expensive freedom is, and we are grateful for your service and the service of many others in the history of Canada.

I know that members are just itching to ask more questions and get more information, so without further ado, I will go to Madam Sgro.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Thank you.

We have to be very appreciative of the Dominion Institute for investing its time and effort in something that is so very important, not just for our youngsters but for all Canadians. The fact that we're in a combat situation at the moment has turned our minds to what has happened in the past, and I believe this has triggered some of the interest from some of the young people.

Mr. MacDonell, I wonder if you could tell us one or two of the most interesting questions you've had from some of the students you have spoken to. Does anything interesting or odd come to mind?

Mr. George MacDonell: The questions vary, and vary greatly. The students really are interested. They have questions about why Canada was turned upside down.

I give them a presentation to show what happened at the level of our politics, at the level of our social life, when our factories were now peopled by young women instead of young men. They're fascinated by it and wonder how we could do this. They find it so strange, living the peaceful life we have now. Their questions circle around the fact that it must have been a tremendous experience for a little country to do what it did.

The teachers often ask me about the dropping of the atomic bomb. It's widely held, by some who don't know the facts, that the Americans dropped the bomb to kill more Japanese. But they dropped the bomb to stop killing Japanese. That begins a great discussion of how the war in the Pacific really ended, the dilemma facing President Truman when the bomb was dropped, and the role of the Emperor in hoping that some excuse would be given to him.

When there is a Japanese child in the audience, I point out that the Japanese people were the victims of their military dictatorship, and that we should be careful that this never happens here.

In the Toronto area, with a lot of very mixed-race students, you get a wide variety of that kind of question. But by the time I get there, I must say, with the slides, it's a very quiet room. They're really fascinated by this whole subject of the past.

● (1600)

Hon. Judy Sgro: No doubt they would be.

You mentioned to me earlier, Jeremy, that you had sent out a whole lot of kits to the various schools. How do you define the areas for this? You're not covering all of the schools across Canada, you're covering schools in specific areas, I would imagine.

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: We're doing both, I guess. We are trying to blanket everywhere, but over eight years we also know where our strengths are in terms of where our veterans reside. We also know where our weaknesses are in terms of where we need to make more of an impact.

We're very cognizant of connecting and establishing networks in areas outside of maybe six or eight major cities. We have strong groups of veterans and teachers in Victoria, Winnipeg, Halifax, and areas like that. In places like Newfoundland, for instance, and certain areas in Saskatchewan, we know there are veterans and we know there are teachers, but it's a bit more challenging to get out to those groups.

So we kind of blanket, but we also try to target areas where we know we need some more work to be done in.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Is it possible to get a list of the schools, for instance, in various areas to do a follow-up of the kind of information you're mailing out to the schools to encourage their participation?

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: Absolutely. We have developed a really strong list of not only teachers but also administrators of veterans organizations, and we've been able to separate out by province, by community.

So yes, absolutely, we're more than happy to not only provide information but also, obviously, to kind of monitor it throughout the year and find out where we need to do a little bit more work and do more follow-up. Sometimes it comes easy. In some communities, teachers who have a great experience will tell five teachers, who tell five more teachers. Other times, when they have a good experience they don't tell anybody. We have a little bit more work to do.

But we know, with teachers especially, it's a very tight community. They know what each other is doing. Schools know what other schools are doing, and they sometimes try to one-up them. We're more than happy to be the recipients of that kind of competition.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I would think, Mr. MacDonell, that when you go into the schools, especially Toronto schools—I represent a Toronto riding that's very multicultural—it would raise all kinds of discussions after you're gone. I would hope the teacher carries on with discussions about the ability of people to get along, and about what happens when they're not able to get along. Ultimately, we end up with a war and with the kinds of battles we're talking about.

I could see an awful lot of opportunities for the teachers to be able to take your comments and move them into a lot of other areas within our multicultural communities of Canada.

Mr. George MacDonell: As I said, the teachers use this experience to talk about Canadian values.

This is a wonderful way of asking why we lost all this life, why we spent all this treasure, why we put so much effort into this. It's because of who we are and what we are.

● (1605)

Hon. Judy Sgro: I thank you so very much for putting so much into this. It's an honour to have you come here before us today. We appreciate that very much.

Do I have any more time left?

The Chair: You have twelve seconds.

Hon. Judy Sgro: So really quickly, does DND encourage our younger vets to go out into the school system? Is it something they are able to do at this point, or are many of them just not able to go out into schools and talk about these issues?

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: They are, and they are encouraged to do so.

Part of the understanding in the Canadian Forces is that we make a real effort to connect with communities. If you asked a lot of Canadians in communities that aren't military what our CF does, they wouldn't know. They'd think all the CF does is send people to Afghanistan, for instance. There is no other role for them.

I think it's partly an education process, not recruiting. By helping tell the story of what a Canadian Forces man or woman does in terms of training, in terms of the role they play on the home front, in terms of what it's like to be away from family, etc., the Memory Project is a great vehicle. Every year, we have more and more Canadian Forces members joining the Memory Project. We were here on February 26, and the next day we were involved with the Conference of Defence Associations Institute at the Chateau Laurier. We had 50 CF members come to that lunch and sign up for the Memory Project, wanting to tell their story about how they got into the service, what it means to leave their family, and what kind of impact they're making in these countries around the world.

They tell the story of the next generation of veterans, and I think Mr. MacDonell would agree that their stories are very similar to those of our Second World War veterans, even though they're separated in many cases by 60 or 65 years.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you very much. Congratulations. It's a fabulous initiative.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André, for nine minutes.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Good day, gentlemen. Thank you for joining us. You do a fine job helping young students become more knowledgeable about their country.

How many permanent employees does your organization have? How many volunteers do you have working in each province? How do you go about ensuring that these volunteers are conveying a uniform message? You can appreciate the values embraced by organizations such as yours. How do you train these volunteers?

Mr. Marc Chalifoux: To answer your first question, our organization has five full-time employees. Occasionally, we hire people on contract to work on a temporary basis.

During the school year, especially with the Memory Project, between 75% and 80% of our visits take place in the six to eight weeks leading up to Remembrance Day or week. The ranks of our organization swell a little during this period because of the demand that must be met. Since the Institute has remained relatively small, we are easily able to adapt to this situation.

As for the number of volunteers working for the Institute, close to 1,500 veterans are devoting or have devoted time to the Memory Project. Some have become more involved over time, while in the case of others, their involvement has decreased. It's a matter of supply and demand. When a teacher requests a visit, we try and contact a veteran in the area to arrange a visit.

Veterans involved in the Memory Project live in all regions and in all provinces of Canada. We try to adopt a uniform approach. Once a season is over, we review cases where we were unable to fulfill a request. We then try to recruit volunteers in regions where the demand for the program is high.

As for ensuring the uniformity of the message, as Jeremy mentioned earlier, recruitment and orientation activities and sessions have been organized. Committee members attended our breakfast on February 26. This was an opportunity to convey our appreciation and thanks to all of our volunteers. The breakfast was immediately followed by a training and orientation session to explain to veterans, some of whom may be new to the project, how they can share their stories with young people.

If we can't arrange an orientation session, we always find someone from the Institute to speak directly to the veteran prior to a visit. As Mr. MacDonell mentioned, we make every effort to put the teacher in touch with the veteran so that the latter's presentation reflects the classroom curriculum.

A wide range of tools has been developed for educators, such as the D-Day outline that has been distributed to members along with the other material. It helps teachers not only to prepare for the veteran's visit, but also to do a follow up. Therefore, it's not just a matter of the veteran making a 60- or 70-minute presentation. The visit becomes part of the existing classroom curriculum on World War II or some other event. The Memory Project is a tool that goes beyond ordinary textbooks. Too often, history is taught through textbooks. The Memory Project provides first-person historical accounts of events that occurred. In other words, the veterans who are invited to speak can answer questions as well.

Veterans who volunteer to share their stories are considered to be an extremely valuable resource.

● (1610)

Mr. Guy André: You explain from a historical perspective the First and Second World Wars, and even the Korean War and other conflicts. However, do you also delve into the different causes of such conflicts?

The Second World War and the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq are not comparable. They are very different types of conflicts and our reasons for being involved are different as well. Do you also take the time to explain this to people?

My question may be similar to the one asked by Ms. Sgro earlier. When you do a presentation, do you explain the causes of war and how war can be avoided? Perhaps these are topics that you should be broaching. School violence is on the rise. Taxing is a major problem in schools. I know that when conflicts arise, parties often turn to mediation. A number of conflict-avoidance techniques can be employed, such as intervention and peer support. Much work is being done in this area. Do you address t any of these issues?

I'm curious, because I know that there have been many tribal wars in African and that mediation was used for conflict resolution purposes. I was wondering if you advocate this technique at all?

Mr. Marc Chalifoux: In terms of explaining the causes of a conflict, you will note that in the educational tool prepared on D-Day, we focus on a number of areas. However, the Memory Project is an additional resource that allows teachers to go even further. It provides students with access to a first-person historical account, similar to documentary research.

We are not trying to give them the whole story, but rather to explore events in greater detail. Mr. MacDonell could tell you more, because I'm not the one who gives the presentations. There are as many different stories as there are veterans who visit the schools. The presentations are all similar, but not identical.

As far as mediation is concerned, we use the story telling technique. We practice an indirect form of mediation. You mentioned the causes of war and the different types of conflicts. Listening to a veteran talk about the Second World War furthers our understanding of a conflict like the one in Afghanistan and puts it into perspective, historically speaking. Learning about Canada's role on the world stage helps us to move forward. Without this historical perspective, it would be hard for us to move forward.

To understand the human dimension of war, there is probably no better spokesperson than someone who experienced it firsthand. To hear about the human dimension of war from a veteran like Mr. MacDonell is a truly personal and moving experience, one not soon forgotten by a young student. It's quite different from reading a dry account of war in a textbook.

Perhaps Mr. MacDonell would like to add to that.

● (1615)

[*English*]

Mr. George MacDonell: Well, that's a very good question.

Earlier, someone asked what some of the important questions are. One of the questions students are interested in, and we make very clear, is that war is a terrible thing. And as a veteran, I want to have them understand that we are not a military nation; we have no interest in military activity to subjugate other people and so on. We only became involved in World War II when it was a matter of whether we were facing the question of either slavery or maintaining our way of life. And after the whole nation was convinced we must draw a line here against the Nazi conquest of Europe, we explain, then it was only as the last resort that we became involved. And one of the problems with that, of course, was that we were not prepared for it and it was a great struggle and strain for us.

For, let's say, the Japanese children who are in the class, I always point out that the Japanese people were just as much the victims of their military dictatorship as the allied forces were, and that they too were victims of a bad political system, and that 2.9 million Japanese died in that terrible war. Far more died in the fire-bombing of Japan than were killed by the atomic bombs.

So we try to point out that the matter of politics is very important in avoiding the terrible conflict we've just been through. But I've never really heard any question as sophisticated as that, about how we do something even more significant. We just try to explain our history, how terrible it was, and we say in effect, I'm afraid.... One of the attitudes is that it was a terrible thing but the good news is that we retained our freedom. We pretty well stop there.

But we are very sensitive to the children who come from other cultures, because they have different ideas about what the war was about and we want them to hear our side of it.

● (1620)

The Chair: *Merci beaucoup, monsieur André.*

Now we're going to move to the Conservatives, with Ms. O'Neill-Gordon, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First I want to thank all of you for being here this afternoon. Being a teacher right fresh out of the classroom, I certainly realize the importance of the Dominion Institute.

I find, when I take the opportunity to check the website, that there's very little representation of Atlantic Canada. In fact, there is no one from the province of Newfoundland. Is there a reason for this? I know that in years gone by teachers did obtain a lot of information from the Dominion Institute. The one teacher we have at our school is a pro with it now, so he doesn't go back to it as much as he used to.

I'm just wondering if there is still information there for the teachers of Atlantic Canada, as much as there used to be.

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: There definitely is. As I was saying earlier, some areas are just tougher than others. I've been out to every province in Canada as sort of a representative and ambassador, so to speak, of the Memory Project, talking to teachers and Legion representatives and veterans themselves. And what we're finding in some areas of Atlantic Canada is that the Legions are taking the lead on organizing school visits. Some may see it as a duplication of sorts. We're trying to complement them by providing some additional education materials and resources to schools or to them directly to give to schools.

Newfoundland has been a tough one. I've been out there a few times and we plan to go out there again late this summer or early fall, hopefully. We know there are veterans out there; I speak to them. I got a call from a veteran last week who asked me the same question you did: why aren't there more of us out here who are involved in the Memory Project? We're out here.

So again, back to the answer before, we're trying to identify some areas where we really need to do a bigger push—places like Victoria, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal. Those areas are where we can hit the ground running if we go back to them. But as for the others, I wouldn't say they were under-serviced, but I think at least extra effort needs to be made to get to them again.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: The teacher who is at the school where I came from, I think, got off and running from you guys many years ago. He just has a passion for it. I don't know if he uses it anymore, but he has all the material. As a matter of fact, he now is a speaker and goes to different schools and organizes it.

I attended the Remembrance Day ceremony at that school. As usual, I must congratulate Mr. MacDonell. Not only have you provided a great service in years gone by, but you're continuing to provide a great service, because teachers and students certainly benefit a lot by having a veteran in there and speaking with the children. I know that at the school where I was, they usually chose a grandfather or a great-grandfather to bring in, and they honour that veteran. They would always make thank-you cards, and that's what the aim of the teacher was, to thank the veteran. And he also spoke.

My experience was with the younger kids, so you kept it to a minimum so they didn't get the real sad story. But we always had lots of funny questions from them. I'm telling you it's a day like you say. It's very quiet, and they're really paying attention.

It's a great service and I certainly want to thank you for all of it. It's something we can certainly grow on and improve on.

Mr. Marc Chalifoux: To your point about younger children, our typical and primary audience for the Memory Project would be high school and middle school students, particularly within Canadian history courses. But we do receive a large number of requests from elementary schools. We organize visits in elementary schools. You're right that the focus is just slightly different. It talks about things like the poppy, the meaning of the poppy, and the meaning of remembrance, as opposed to different topics that would be more appropriate to older children.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: It's important to get them at that early age to start to realize and appreciate what the veterans have done in the war and how lucky we are to have the freedom we have. So I certainly congratulate you, Mr. MacDonell, for all the work you've been doing.

Mr. George MacDonell: Thank you.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: We're always glad to have the veterans come to the schools.

Mr. Marc Chalifoux: We've also developed very valuable partnerships with organizations like Scouts Canada, the Girl Guides, and the cadets. Mr. MacDonell was talking earlier about churches. We'll organize Memory Project visits even in old age homes. We believe that with the message of remembrance and passing the torch of remembrance, our first market, if I may say—audience would probably be the better word—is schools and teachers. But we work with all sorts of partners, and our veteran volunteers will visit many different audiences and reach many Canadians in as many settings as possible.

● (1625)

The Chair: There is a minute and a half left if somebody has any more questions.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): I just want to pick up on something Tilly said.

And I want to thank you as well. Because I only have a minute and a half, I'll leave those until later.

My riding has the largest aboriginal community in Canada, at Six Nations. There are quite a number of veterans in that community and they have their individual Remembrance Day services. I'm just curious as to whether you have any of those individuals involved in the Memory Project.

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: We do, and it's a group of veterans. We've really tried to make a concerted effort to tell their story. We always say that every veteran's story is unique in its own way, but if you can be even more unique, if that's possible, I think the aboriginal veteran experience is even more unique.

I was in Winnipeg last week and we had several aboriginal veterans and representatives from veteran associations and communities come out and share with us their artifacts and their memorabilia and their stories there.

I would say we have maybe a dozen aboriginal veterans who are part of our group. We have close relationships with the Métis veterans associations across Canada. In 2006, a few years ago, with the help of the Department of Canadian Heritage, we were able to digitize and scan and create profiles of a few dozen aboriginal veterans in an opportunity for us to talk about their story a bit. We know from the First World War that they were the largest percentage of any Canadian people who volunteered for the war. It was something like 10% of the aboriginal community who volunteered for the First World War. As with many First World War stories, those stories are obviously gone and weren't recorded and captured the same way as we need to do with our Second World War.

So yes, the effort is being made. We know there are a lot of stories out there and we'd love to be able to be in a position, hopefully in the next six to twelve months, to go to these aboriginal veteran associations and do special presentations to their network, to their membership. In addition to inviting them to come out to different events in different areas, we would go to that and make it easy for veterans.

We're finding we have to make it easier and easier for veterans to hear our message, to get involved with the program, so oftentimes it's our going to them. An association or a society is easier for us to do, and we're definitely looking at doing that.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Diamond.

Now I'll go back to the Liberal Party, with Madam Foote.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. MacDonell, and Marc and Jeremy, for being here today. It's a pleasure to have you.

I really enjoyed the breakfast we had at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. That was quite an experience, and I had the pleasure of sitting, actually, with about eight veterans that day, only to find that all of them had actually been, at one time or another, in my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. George MacDonell: That includes me. I served nearly a year at Gander and at Botwood.

Ms. Judy Foote: Did you? Well, thank you.

It's interesting, because Newfoundland is my home province and to hear you say you're having difficulty getting in there.... I wish you had approached me when I was the minister of education. We might have had more luck...well, we would have had more luck.

One of the things I am doing is this. MPs always put out these householders, or 10-percenters, where they get a chance to promote. In my householder that's coming out in April I have in fact a photo that you so kindly sent to me that was taken that morning. I'm identifying the veterans in that, but I'm also talking about the Memory Project. So there is an opportunity there, if you'd like, for me to ask any veteran who'd like to be a part of or take part in that to call either my 1-800 number or yours, and we can take it from there to see if we can make some inroads.

Mr. Marc Chalifoux: That would be greatly appreciated. The Memory Project has grown to 1,500 veteran volunteers because of word of mouth, because people have heard or seen or experienced... or know a veteran and have recommended us. So yes, we need to get more of our foot in the door in Newfoundland—

● (1630)

Ms. Judy Foote: No pun intended, right?

Mr. Marc Chalifoux: Exactly.

Ms. Judy Foote: Absolutely. So we'll do that for you.

It's interesting that you're here today, because I just did a member statement in the House on Joy Samms from Port aux Basques. This lady is so involved in speaking to schools, and you're right, it's because of her involvement with the Legion.

You mentioned about Legions probably filling the void there, where you haven't been able to get into the province. What relationship do you have with the Legions in the various provinces?

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: The Legions are an interesting group because they can be quite fractured. The local Legion branch may not know what's going on at the provincial command or Dominion Command, but you may have a really active secretary or somebody who works in that particular branch number who does just about everything.

From a local level, we're connecting with those individuals as much as we can. We have great relationships with Dominion Command here in Ottawa, with past and current presidents and all of the executive branch. We have regular conversations or correspondence with different provincial commands. We find that's where we've had the best success with information getting down to the local branches in each of those provinces, whether it's through an e-mail blast, a newsletter, or regular meetings.

Whenever we put an event together and blast it out to an invitation list, the first people we go to are the Legions. The first phone call we make is to our Legions, and we say that we are—as they may not know—the official in-school speakers' bureau of the Royal Canadian Legion. They probably know who we are through different ways. We tell them we're going to be holding an event and we'd love their Legion to be represented either by speaking there or at least by providing some information to their members to come and attend. The Legion, over the years, has been a great way for us to send our message out.

If we get a couple of very interested Legion members, the message goes to their meeting—which we hope happens kind of the day after we contact them or the day before the event—and takes advantage of that, and then hopefully that gives them some sort of opportunity to provide some information at the event itself.

It's hard when Legions are closing and the membership is really decreasing. The form the Legion took 50 or 60 years ago is much different now, and I think that as much as we can hold on to the relationships we have with different Legions from a provincial standpoint, the local ones would also help us. We need to keep an eye on that as well.

Ms. Judy Foote: You're right, of course. Legions are disappearing as our veterans die. I lost three veterans just last month, you know; they were in their nineties. It's always sad when that happens, even though you know the day has to come.

I'm just wondering about this. You said you recorded the memories of a lot of our veterans. Are those available through a library of some sort that individuals can access, in addition to schools accessing them?

Mr. Marc Chalifoux: The Memory Project digital archive was the project we did for four years, from 2002 to 2006. We recorded the oral history of veterans. It is available on our website, thememoryproject.com. There's a special section called the digital archive, which is a teaching resource we use all the time. We promote it to teachers, and you'll see in the D-Day learning tools that we handed out that these are stories from those veterans profiled in those learning tools. They share their stories on the digital archive. Those are available free to everyone, to every Canadian, to every teacher, to every student. They're used, again, as a primary resource.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's just a short round this time of five minutes. Madam Foote, I'm sorry about that.

We have Mr. Lobb for five minutes.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you again for being with us today. It has been very educational and informative, and I definitely appreciate Mr. MacDonell's contribution both years ago and ongoing. My grandfather, as I mentioned earlier, was a veteran in World War II. He was a drill sergeant and was stationed as a peacekeeper in Cyprus and in Germany years ago. I always looked up to him as a hero for sure.

This past week I had 29 members of the cadets up from our Goderich branch, and I know you referenced the cadets and various other groups, like churches and so on, but I wonder how you relate to the cadets. They were up here with their uniforms on and they looked very impressive, these young men and women. Where is that relationship?

● (1635)

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: It's a strong one. I think they were one of the first groups we went out to when, as a youth group, we first started the Memory Project in 2001.

After classrooms and teachers, cadets, for lack of a better term, “get it”. These are people who respect the importance of our military history, obviously, in terms of their training and the programming they work on within their units. They often come out to our events, whether it's a celebratory or a commemorative event, but we most like to have them at our training and orientation sessions. They sit with the veterans and talk to the veterans a little bit about their experiences. Some of these veterans themselves were cadets and some have grandkids who are cadets. They relate on all kinds of different levels.

So after a call to the Legion and to some of our local veterans associations, we'll go to the local cadet groups and their commanders, the heads of their units, to try to encourage them to attend events, sometimes in a formal role but oftentimes in an informal role, to sit with the veterans, eat with them, and learn about their experiences. Also, as I'm sure Mr. MacDonell will agree, the veterans themselves are so interested in the cadet experience and what it's like now: why they got into it, what they hope to do from the military side, whether they hope to eventually serve, which is often the case, and what kinds of experiences they're having with the cadets.

So it's a strong relationship and one that we think is a pretty obvious one. Again, we had a great event in Winnipeg last week, where we had with us a veteran from World War II and his son, who is a peacekeeper and who brought with him his son, who is an air cadet. They sat at the same table talking about the importance of intergenerational dialogue and sharing stories. We got some great photos of the three of them. They all came in their uniforms. The Second World War veteran still wears the same uniform he did in 1941, when he joined up. He's a slim, trim guy, and an amazing individual. To meet us with his grandson, who's probably about 16, was a great experience for him and his son, but it was also a great experience for us to see the real intergenerational approach to the Memory Project.

They are a good group to be involved with and to be engaged with throughout.

Mr. Ben Lobb: You have obviously achieved great results with the Memory Project. We've heard that you're trying to get into provinces and territories where you currently don't really have a presence, but beyond that, where do you see the Memory Project moving in the short to the medium term, in the next one to five years, let's say?

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: In at least the next two to three years, we're really going to be making an effort to get to that next generation of veterans, those veterans that we may have not made the same effort to reach six or seven years ago, when the real effort was made to get the Second World War and Korean War veterans involved. There are our UN peacekeepers, and we'll work on the post-Korean War veterans.

I think a real effort for the future of this program is going to lie in engaging the CF men and women. I think we have great support from the general right on down, through General Leslie. They really have bought into this idea that the stories of our men and women currently serving are just as important as those of the veterans themselves.

When you're talking about military history, the link that can be made through the generations is, I think, a really interesting one for teachers. Again, I think this all comes back to the idea that teachers have to teach this in school anyway. The Second World War, the Korean War, and peacekeeping are all part of the unit in history, but the more that Afghanistan is on the front pages, as someone mentioned earlier, the more teachers are going to want to incorporate that into their classrooms.

So you can take on something that has happened currently and then have somebody who was involved with that campaign, or at least very closely associated with it, come in and talk about it from a current perspective. Then you can have somebody like Mr. MacDonell come in a few months later and say, okay, students, let's try to compare these experiences a little bit. They may be separated by 60 years. Somebody may look quite old and somebody may look quite young, but you can ask the same questions. What was it like to leave home? What was it like to work as part of a team? What was it like to fight for freedom? All of those experiences are very similar.

At first glance they may look very different, but again, I think the future of the project is going to be in engaging that next generation and having them work as much as we can now with the older generations, such as Mr. MacDonell's.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lobb.

Now we'll go over to Monsieur Gaudet for *cinq minutes*.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd also like to thank Mr. MacDonell. On a number of occasions, I've attended ceremonies at Vimy, in Dieppe, in Passchendaele near Ypres, in Korea and elsewhere.

I'd like your opinion on something. Regarding attendance at a ceremony or at Remembrance Day ceremonies, the difference between what happens here in Canada and abroad is like night and day. Here in Canada, a handful of people come out to watch us lay a wreath, but overseas, hundred of people take part in these events.

My question is straightforward. Do we fail to recount our history? That's what I would like to know. Are we failing in this area? When we arrive in countries overseas, people run to greet us and touch us. They are happy and thank us, but here at home. . . Why are things so different? Perhaps it's because their countries were occupied and we were part of the allied forces. Why is it that so many Canadians do not know about our country's efforts during the war?

● (1640)

[*English*]

Mr. George MacDonell: That is a very important question.

I've noticed in the last ten years, and especially in the last seven or eight years, that there's a great deal more interest now amongst provincial politicians, provincial leaders. For example, the new wall at Queen's Park in Toronto is an example of the legislature doing something they had never done before, and that is to hold a great ceremony. I went to the ceremony with the minister of culture that day and I was astounded at the audience. It was enormous. We were all surprised. So there is a great deal more interest amongst our young people and amongst the public in general.

Secondly, I think Canadians are so un-warlike, and our military traditions have only been during some great crisis such as the crisis with Nazi Germany, that we're not very much interested in the army. I don't think the Canadian army has ever been seen as a really great career. Now I think that may be changing, but the military in Canada has been very small, usually housed up in Petawawa or somewhere, and I don't think we have much of a military culture. As mentioned, now that we are so involved in Afghanistan I think we're becoming more interested in why we are there, what it has to do with citizenship, who we are, and what this is all about. I think there's a great interest. Is this a good thing? Why are we over in this foreign country losing our young people? I think there's a great deal more interest now.

I hope that's a reasonable answer.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Thank you. I now have a question for Mr. Chalifoux.

A while ago, you said that you commence preparations anywhere from six to eight weeks before Remembrance Day. The day after Remembrance Day, everything stops and you resume your activities a year later. If I compare what happens here to the situation in other countries, or at least in the countries that I have visited, ceremonies are held throughout the year in those countries. At 8 o'clock every evening, a ceremony is held in Ypres. I was fortunate to be there on November 11, Armistice Day. A huge crowd of people attended the ceremonies. It was incredible. Every evening, a brief, 10-minute ceremony was held in Ypres. Yours efforts are laudable, but it seems to me that you could be doing more.

Mr. Marc Chalifoux: I totally agree with you. I would like us to do more. We're constantly striving to do more. The Memory Project was launched in 2001 with the assistance of 12 veterans. Today, there are 1,500 veterans involved in the program. The numbers continue to increase. In fact, it is during the six to eight weeks before Remembrance Day that we receive between 75% and 80% of all requests from teachers for classroom visits. Part of this has to do with Remembrance Day, and another part with the way in which school curriculums are structured in Canada. That is the time of the year when classes study World War II or World War I. Certainly, we're trying to diversify the activities, to ensure that discussions of military history and Canada's history are not limited to once a year.

I completely agree with you. I can tell you that we have many visits scheduled for this year in late May or early June, to mark the 65th anniversary of the Normandy Invasion, or D-Day. Next year, 2010 will be a special commemorative year. I can't guarantee that ceremonies will be held every evening, but we will be doing our part. In my opinion, it's not enough to set aside only one day or one week per year to commemorate Canada's military history and the service and sacrifices of veterans. The Memory Project is not merely an initiative to help people recall our history. It was also designed as an educational tool that allows people who experienced these events firsthand and who wrote about them to educate others about Canada's role on the world stage. The Memory Project is a worthwhile initiative that can help educate students year round, whether the classroom curriculum focuses on World War II, the Cold War, peacekeeping operations or current events.

You compared what happens in Canada to events that are staged in other world countries. I can only say that in Canada, we need to do a better job teaching people about our country's history. Our organization is small. It has five full-time employees who endeavour to expand people's knowledge and appreciation of history. History is a degree pre-requisite in only four Canadian provinces. Students in Quebec must take two history classes in order to graduate. History is also a pre-requisite in Ontario, Manitoba and Nova Scotia. In the other provinces,students can attend school from grades 9 through 12 without having to take a single Canadian history course. This is not the direct cause of the problem you identified, but in my opinion, this situation is partly to blame.

● (1645)

Mr. Roger Gaudet: It's partly to blame.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: *Merci beaucoup, monsieur Gaudet.*

We'll now go over to Mr. McColeman for five minutes.

Mr. Phil McColeman: I get to thank you a little more, especially Mr. MacDonell. I truly appreciate your being here and your commitment to this project.

I can't help but sit here and think about where it goes from there in terms of mentoring, as we've lost the World War I veterans and then we're so rapidly losing the World War II veterans. I know you're preserving stories and you're preserving documents and all the things that veterans...and we can't obviously stop the transition of life cycles. But I wonder what your strategies might be moving forward. I know we've talked about current veterans and Korean veterans and such, but are we doing any kind of mentorship of people—who I met as well at the breakfast meeting—who are just incredibly passionate and will be the people who take this message forward for generations to come, for my granddaughter, my grandchildren, and so forth? Is that something you see in the long term?

Mr. Marc Chalifoux: On the World War I front, Jeremy and I have a pretty unique job insofar as we get to interact with Canadian history every day. This year we met John Babcock, who's Canada's last living World War I veteran. We drove to Spokane, Washington, to meet with him for three hours, to interact with him and to hear his story. I think that living history of Canada's contribution to World War I is largely lost. It's really a very sad thing.

With regard to World War II, our World War II veterans are 86 or 87 years old, on average. At the Memory Project we'll do our part through the digital archives to record stories for posterity. We'll go the extra mile to make sure every living World War II veteran who wants to share their story in the classroom can do so. But there aren't that many years left of large numbers of visits by veterans who are 90 years old. We certainly need to be very aware of this problem, and I think the example of World War I veterans certainly should send a message to us. The committee is right to point to that, and you're right to point out that we need someone passing the torch of remembrance on, preserving memories of our World War II veterans. That's what we're trying to do here at the Memory Project.

Mr. Phil McColeman: I've been so moved in observing what Mr. MacDonell has referred to as an almost heightened awareness over the last number of years. I know in our community we have a thank-a-vet luncheon and it attracts 800 people. It's incredible. I've noticed that.

I think the message you've delivered today is that this is about the fact that we have this wonderful, free country. That's what this is about. This is leading to my question: what more can you do to help us know what we should be doing as legislators to make sure we preserve that and take that forward in a very real and tangible way? I'm not suggesting that it's going to be lost, naturally, but once the generations who served in the major wars and the world wars are gone, certainly it won't be as tangible as it is today. I just hope and pray that we will be able to carry it on.

I'm wondering if the Dominion Institute has a long-term vision for the things that we might be able to do and we might be able to help with.

● (1650)

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: One thing we definitely have found as our veterans are just generally slowing down—or passing away—is that those veterans who did eight or nine visits a year a few years ago are doing maybe one or two now. In some cases our number of veterans within the Memory Project are staying flat, for lack of a better term, or growing a bit. The frequency that they go on visits is obviously decreasing a little.

We've found more and more in recent events that children of veterans are coming to these events, representing their fathers, bringing their medals, talking about what they were told growing up and up to maybe a year or two ago when that veteran passed away. They're also bringing the medals to the table to have them scanned and digitized and they're having those stories recorded. We have quite a number of World War I veterans' stories recorded from the kids and grandkids who have spoken for them. We're seeing a really important passion from the kids, the grandkids, and the great-grandkids, but especially the children, people who are in their fifties and sixties, to carry on that tradition because they know how important it is.

The key in terms of keeping those stories alive, I think, is going to be in the technology. It's going to be in the opportunity to capture not only the textual and photograph elements of that story, but to also record their stories and to listen to a veteran speak. Recently I was on our digital archive and listening to First World War veterans speaking, whom we had recorded, who have obviously passed away. To hear the grainy voice of a First World War veteran, a combat veteran, is a remarkable experience for me as a history person, but obviously for students, to help them understand the important contribution the veterans made in the First World War.

So I think technology, engaging the next generations from their families, and also doing what we can to get teachers to keep that memory alive is important. And Mr. MacDonell has found that as well.

Mr. George MacDonell: I think this is a very important question. It's very important to carry forth the idea that, yes, we should thank the veterans, but we should also remember that the 1,100,000 Canadians who served in World War II were simply doing their duty as citizens of a free society.

I try to leave the students with the idea that it's not so much about thanking; it's to understand. Especially for the newcomers to the country, this is how you behave when your country has a crisis like World War II. You simply do your duty.

And to your earlier question about what questions are being asked, often the teacher will ask the students what we would do if there was another crisis like we had in 1939. There is often a very interesting discussion about whether a student would volunteer. Other students ask, well, if you're a citizen of this county, is there really any question...?

Our heroes are important, like Billy Bishop, but I think it's citizenship we should be stressing. One of the great values that the Dominion Institute can instill when people like me are no longer available is to point out how important it is to understand that this is part of your obligation if you want to be free. As Pericles said, “Freedom is the sole possession of those who have the courage to defend it.” He said that 2,000 years before Christ was born. It hasn't changed.

Now, I didn't properly answer the first question, and I'd like to add this. The girls always ask the intelligent questions. The girls always ask you how you felt when you came home, what your mother thought, and so on. The boys will ask how it works. I have to admit that with the girls, you have to be careful with their questions. They get right down to the nitty-gritty quickly.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacDonell.

There's another rotation spot, if there are any other questions from the Conservatives.

Mr. Clarke, for five minutes.

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. MacDonell, Mr. Chalifoux, and Mr. Diamond for attending the committee.

Mr. MacDonell, the amount of hours you spend volunteering to document not only your stories but also other people's stories must be astronomical. Testing your memory and dealing with what you faced, and your ordeals, is no doubt quite difficult.

I'm curious about the number of schools you attend per year. How many, on average, do you attend?

Mr. George MacDonell: I've been attending as low a number as eight schools, and as high as 12 or 13, so it's about 10 or 11 schools a year. I'm often invited to speak to teachers, such as history teachers, who would like to have somebody help them with their teaching. I might have averaged a dozen a year over the last eight or nine years.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Are you usually attending by yourself, or do you have someone else who goes with you?

Mr. George MacDonell: I go by myself, but I always meet with the teacher beforehand. I also arrive half an hour to an hour early, to check all the equipment and so on. The teacher is always there as my helper.

Mr. Rob Clarke: And do the presentations last between 45 minutes to an hour?

Mr. George MacDonell: They last 45 minutes, depending on what the teacher likes and whether she wants more or less of a question period. If I'm going to, say, Leaside High School on Tuesday morning, I leave at 8 o'clock and I get home at 11:30. It takes the whole morning.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Now, for each classroom presentation, do you take the time to record this?

Mr. George MacDonell: Often they have their own students take a video camera picture of what happens.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Right.

This is for the Dominion Institute, in regard to some further questions I have. How many veterans outside the province of Ontario have you interviewed, just off the top of your head, since this program began?

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: Out of the 1,000 we have in the digital archive, I'd say probably about 500 to 600 would be from Ontario and the rest would be scattered across Canada.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Now, being a western boy, I'll ask how much involvement you have with western Canada.

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: In terms of our speakers' bureau, we have great support, especially in Vancouver and Victoria and throughout Alberta. They're two of the most active provinces. I'd say with the 1,500 speakers, western Canada would probably have about 300. It depends. We've been out to certain communities for our digital archive, and pretty much every or every other community for our speakers' bureau.

The digital archive was a project we worked on for about three or four years, and we hit several cities. We went out and did an *Antiques Roadshow* style of event, where we encouraged veterans to bring their artifacts, recorded their stories, digitized all their materials right on-site, and then we picked up the gear and the travelling road show went to another city. We hit western Canada with that tour, as well.

● (1700)

Mr. Rob Clarke: How much funding has the Dominion Institute received specifically for the Memory Project?

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: We have received about $1.3 million from Veterans Affairs and probably another $600,000 from the Department of Canadian Heritage, so it's almost $2 million since 2001.

Mr. Rob Clarke: You mentioned earlier that all the interviews with participants are being recorded. Are they being translated as well?

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: From time to time the events in the classrooms are recorded, but really they're being recorded by the teachers. We're not set up to be able to record the 700 to 800 visits a year that happen across Canada. The ones in the digital archive were where we specifically targeted veterans in different communities, recorded their stories over a phone line. At that time, they weren't translated, but we made a special effort to reach out to francophone veterans and communities and had a good number of French veterans' stories recorded in their native language and then transcribed on-site.

Mr. Marc Chalifoux: Right. And to the point—I guess this is kind of self-evident—we're a small charity. We're a project-based organization. The Memory Project has been our flagship program for many years. We've received excellent funding. We've had, really, no greater partner than the federal government for doing the work we do.

The funding has been tied to various aspects of the project, so we're able to continue or focus on one particular aspect of a project at a particular time. That might be the digital archive from 2002 to 2006. Now we're trying to engage the next generation of veterans in particular. We're part of a three-year funding agreement at the moment that is paid half by the Canadian studies program grant at the Department of Canadian Heritage, and half through Canada Remembers at Veterans Affairs Canada.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. MacDonell, I have to commend you and thank you and the other volunteers for actually taking the time to tell the stories. It's lost information that we have to maintain.

Thank you again.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Clarke.

I generally don't get the opportunity, but I'm going to take the liberty to ask you a couple of questions myself since everybody has had the opportunity to ask a question and we're going to be doing some committee business in very short order.

When you have a veteran go to a school, do you ask for a fee or a voluntary donation or anything to try to have some long-term sustainability for the project?

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: We don't. The project itself was designed originally and it's continued to operate as a free service for teachers. Sometimes teachers will provide...and I'm sure Mr. MacDonell has received these, whether it's a donation to the institute on behalf of a school or a thank you, gifts and the like. We create educational materials that we pass on for free to teachers, and the veterans themselves are not paid, outside of the fact that from time to time we provide a small per diem to them to come to events, to cover parking and stuff. In terms of anything other than that, we don't. It's a free service for the teachers, and we're very grateful for our veterans to be able to do this somewhat out of pocket with their time and some of their minor expenses.

The Chair: How long has the Memory Project been running?

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: Since 2001. I think it was the summer of 2001. We started in that school year. That's when it was created, so it's been about eight years.

The Chair: I was very happy to hear your answer to Madam Foote about the fact that you would welcome any kind of help or partnership. I want to mention two. One is that we have the largest military tattoo in Hamilton, Ontario, and I hope you decide to contact them and capitalize on just having some material there, if not a presence.

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: Yes. We've been there before. It's a great event.

The Chair: Oh, okay. Going back to what you said earlier, that's your target, right?

● (1705)

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: Yes.

The Chair: Of course, we also have Her Majesty's Canadian ship *Haida* there as well. I'm certain that some of your veterans must be navy boys or women—

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: They sure are.

The Chair: —and they would be prepared to partner as well on something with HMCS *Haida*. Of course, the HMCS *Star* is there as well, at the reserve base. They kind of steward the ship, along with the friends of HMCS *Haida*.

That's all I have. I'm very grateful, like the rest of the committee, that you showed up here today. We're grateful that you invited us to the breakfast and we got a little bit of a taste—enough of a taste that we wanted to have you here. Then, of course, you were also here on the Senate side with the other project you run, Passages. We went over there and visited you as well, so we're getting quite a heavy dose of the Dominion Institute.

We're grateful, Mr. MacDonell, again, for your service and for what you do.

Also, again, we're grateful to the Dominion Institute, not just for the Memory Project, but for the fact that you have decided it's important enough to have an institute to maintain the overall memory of Canadian history. You're doing it very well, with class and professionalism, and you've educated us on another dimension of it. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much.

We're going to take a short minute now, because I'm certain most of the committee members would like to shake your hands and thank you.

Mr. Jeremy Diamond: Thank you.

Mr. Marc Chalifoux: Thank you very much. It was our pleasure.

The Chair: We appreciate your being here today. Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
http://www.parl.gc.ca
