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MY FIVE YEARS AS VETERANS OMBUDSMAN

NARROWING THE GAP FOR
VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

GUY PARENT

Veterans Ombudsman

2010-2015

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Guy Parent, Veterans Ombudsman, 2010-2015

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NOVEMBER 11, 2010

I became Canada's Veterans Ombudsman on November 11, 2010: Remembrance Day. The morning started early with a series of television and radio interviews where there was little interest in what I wanted to do as Veterans Ombudsman but lots of interest in comparing me with my predecessor, Canada's first Veterans Ombudsman, Colonel (retired) Pat Stogran.

I stressed with the media that the focus should not be on me versus my predecessor but rather on Veterans and their families. As the new Veterans Ombudsman, I accepted the responsibility and was ready for the challenge of ensuring that the debt owed to those who serve is repaid in a fair and equitable manner.

After the media rounds, I had the honour and privilege of laying a wreath at the National War Memorial cenotaph. I stood side-by-side with traditional World War II and Korean War Veterans, Canadian Armed Forces Veterans and uniformed members who had served on peacekeeping missions and in Afghanistan, members and Veterans of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and their families and friends. United by our service to Canada, we stood there not as diverse groups of Veterans, but as *One Veteran*.

The day after Remembrance Day, I attended the funeral of Chief Warrant Officer (retired) Robert Osside, who was the first appointed Canadian Forces Chief Warrant Officer in 1978. As you may know, I held that appointment from 1995 to 1999. Attending his funeral was an opportunity for me to pay my respects to an old colleague who served Canada unconditionally. In my mind, this reinforced the idea that every day should be a day of remembrance. Too many of our comrades disappear without a simple thank you for their service and for the leadership and faithfulness that inspired so many others to accept the conditions of unlimited liability and to serve this great country.

WHY I APPLIED TO BECOME VETERANS OMBUDSMAN

You may ask why I would want to become Veterans Ombudsman in the fall of 2010 and take on the challenges of Veterans' issues when there was so much turmoil. The answer is simple: after almost 50 years of serving Canadians in many military and public service functions, I believed that I could make a difference and help move the issues of concern to Veterans and their families forward to resolution.

I have always been in the business of helping people. I began my career in the Canadian Forces as a Safety System Technician in the mid 1960's and spent most of my career as a Search and Rescue Technician. From the beginning, I enjoyed the military camaraderie and helping others. After retiring from the Canadian Forces in 2001, I still wanted to give back to those with whom I had served, so when an opportunity to help address fairness for those still wearing the uniform appeared, I took it.

I joined the Office of the National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman first as an Investigator, and later as Director of Investigations and Director of the Ombudsman Special Response Team. In 2008, I joined the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman as Director of Research and Investigations. That experience allowed me to gain significant knowledge about programs, policies, and procedures related to Veterans, and to appreciate the importance of the Veterans Ombudsman's mandate.

Therefore, when the Veterans Ombudsman position opened up in 2010, I opted to apply. Throughout both my military and civilian careers, I wanted to be part of something bigger, where dedicated and compassionate people were serving to make a difference. Being the Veterans Ombudsman would allow me to give back and put the skills and experience that I had acquired over five decades in action once again to support those that have served this country so well.

My coming into the position of Veterans Ombudsman was not, what some call, a “political appointment”: it was a competitive process. After reading the publication of expression of interest for the Veterans Ombudsman position in the Canada Gazette, I wrote a letter stating my interest and identifying how I would approach the work, including what I would change if selected.

This was followed by a lengthy online knowledge exam, one day of psychometric testing in Toronto, and an intense one-and-a-half-hour interview with a panel coordinated by the Privy Council Office. Based on the results of the tests and interview, I was selected to be Canada’s Veterans Ombudsman.

GETTING STARTED

THE ENVIRONMENT

The Honorable Roy McMurtry, former Ontario Chief Justice and Attorney General, remarked a few years ago that an Ombudsman is “an effective means of humanizing government and smoothing out the rough edges of relationships between the citizen and government and bureaucracy and bringing about important policy change.” I believe that to be true.

Even with the help of Veterans’ organizations, many ill and injured Veterans and their families simply do not have the resources to effectively fight for fairness against government bureaucracy. By investigating individual complaints, issuing reviews and then reports on systemic issues that highlight unfair practices and make realistic recommendations for change, and by measuring results against a fairness standard of adequacy, sufficiency and accessibility, the needs of Veterans can be met.

But, in the early months of my mandate, it was difficult to get that message out because of widespread discontent in the Veterans’ community and the degree to which the level of trust between Veterans and Veterans Affairs Canada had fallen.

Canada was more than eight years into its commitment to Afghanistan’s high-intensity conflict and the casualties from that war continued to mount. The New Veterans Charter, which came into force in April 2006, did not adequately address the needs of Veterans, and although touted as a “living charter”, no changes had been made to correct identified problems. After almost two decades of high-intensity operations, ill and injured Veterans were being released from the Canadian Armed Forces in greater numbers than ever before with very public comparisons being made as to how they would have less compensation under the New Veterans Charter than had they been under the previous legislative regime, the *Pension Act*.

At the time, the Government was being sued (*Manuge vs Crown*) by Veterans over the fact that their disability pensions for pain and suffering were being “clawed back” to offset the costs of the Service Income Security Insurance Plan (SISIP)

Long-Term Disability program; Veterans Affairs Canada was in the midst of a challenging situation over systemic breaches of privacy involving the inappropriate access and use of Veterans' medical information in internal correspondence; and, Veterans Affairs Canada bureaucracy was becoming less responsive to Veterans in processing applications: there were longer wait times, greater complexity of application regulations and an inability to connect with Veterans.

As well, Veterans Affairs Canada field staff was struggling to adequately meet the needs of the rising number of complex cases involving young Veterans under the New Veterans Charter. Their needs were very different from those of the traditional War Service Veterans whose needs are focused on end-of-life care. From a service delivery perspective, the confusion and frustration of understanding the new programs were palpable in both departmental staff and Veterans.

On the political level, the Minister of Veterans Affairs had been in the position for less than a year. He was trying to overcome the eroding trust that had resulted from the breaches in privacy and the slowness in Government action to recognize that Veterans' issues, particularly regarding the New Veterans Charter, had quickly reached a priority level and needed to be resolved.

My predecessor had elevated Veterans' issues to a national level by holding a press conference on August 17, 2010 where individual Veterans explained poignantly how their sacrifices and needs were not being honoured or met by the Government of Canada. The prolonged national coverage of Veterans' issues that this single event created fuelled the frustration of not only Veterans' groups, but the Canadian public at large.

In addition, the Veterans' community was fractured, as Veterans' groups and advocates sniped at each other and were unable to find common ground on how to challenge the Government to move forward to make much needed changes to Veterans' support and benefits.

Finally, the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman, which had just made Veterans' issues a political priority issue for the Government, was only into its third year of operation and was still going through the growing pains of launching a new organization.

That was the environment that I had to come to terms with in the fall of 2010. The next five years were going to be challenging.

THE TEAM

Being an Ombudsman is not possible without a good team. From the beginning, I focused on building a high-performance team that would be excited to come to work every day to close the gap for Veterans and their families. I wanted the team to believe that working at the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman was not just another job, but a unique opportunity to create the conditions for change that could deliver on the issues of concern to Veterans and their families.

I focused on nurturing a team-oriented environment based on trust and respect. Several key leaders and support members of the first years of the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman decided to remain with me in support of my efforts. New team members began to arrive soon after I took up my mandate. They brought with them fresh ideas on how to enhance the work that was already in progress and take it to a new level. Before long, I had an integrated and cohesive team in place, ready for the hard work and challenges that lay ahead.

I made a point from the start to not get involved in day-to-day operations, but to offer guidance and leadership, to be accountable for failures, and to give the team credit for our successes. Let me be clear: the achievements and successes of the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman have come about through the dedicated and compassionate service provided by team members as they work on a daily basis to resolve individual and systemic issues that affect Veterans and their families. As an Ombudsman, I reflect this collective effort and the spirit of my team, but any accolades for what we have accomplished in the last five years need to be directed to them.

My team has put in a tremendous amount of energy and work since my appointment as Veterans Ombudsman and I believe the results show that they have been instrumental in creating the conditions that allowed change to occur.

THE MANDATE

The mandate of the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman basically gives me two roles. The first one is to address unfair situations both on an individual and systemic level that prevent Veterans and their families from accessing benefits and services. To enable this, I have no special powers to compel organizations to provide information or to subpoena witnesses or impose any recommendation. I have to persuade or, as we like to say, use moral suasion to convince the party in question to want to make a change.

Some have argued that the Office needs more “teeth” to effectively address issues. However, a counter argument can be presented that when one forces organizations to do one’s will, the organization imposing the change may become part of the problem. Objectivity can become a casualty when you own the change.

I believe that if one uses an evidence-based approach to analyzing a particular issue, the facts speak for themselves, and with sound logic, one can convince organizations to change. This mitigates the adversarial aspects of a divergence of views and can set the scene for a more collegial approach to addressing an issue. In the end, I think the most effective changes are made when an organization realizes that it must change, not when it is forced to change. Moral suasion can make that happen.

My second role as Veterans Ombudsman is to be a special advisor to the Minister of Veterans Affairs. This provides the Minister (and his staff) with a unique opportunity to obtain an objective viewpoint on issues affecting Veterans that is not potentially biased by departmental program and/or budgetary concerns. Not only do I have a team that is knowledgeable on Veterans Affairs Canada’s programs and services, I am also the only federally-mandated voice of Veterans, which allows me to provide a Veteran’s perspective on an issue. The Minister does not have to take my advice, but this role allows the Minister to receive an objective, independent, Veteran-centric view on any issue to better determine appropriate courses of action.

THE ORGANIZATION

Let me start by talking about the independence of the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman. Some have stated that because the Office resides in the administrative structure of Veterans Affairs Canada, its independence is compromised. I do not believe that to be the case.

Had the initial protocols for communicating between Veterans Affairs Canada and the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman stayed in place, our independence and ability to be objective would have been compromised. However, my predecessor effectively removed any departmental constraints and made the Office independent when it comes to operations. Yes, many of our administrative functions, such as pay and travel claim administration, go through the Department, but those particular activities have never compromised our operational ability at any time in my mandate.

When I started as Veterans Ombudsman, the Office was only three years old and was still dealing with hiring permanent staff, developing operational processes to manage the work effort and struggling to ensure that the team had the knowledge and the tools to support Veterans and challenge the status quo.

On average, there are about 35 people on our team. Being small allows us to be nimble so we can address issues quickly without a lot of bureaucracy. However, being small limits our capacity to tackle everything. When you consider that one third of the team is dealing with individual complaints by being in direct contact with Veterans and their families and one third is providing oversight and administrative support, it only leaves the last third to provide all of the research, analysis and communications activities necessary to give our products and views a voice.

Accordingly, we have to be very strategic when we decide to do something and to tackle the issues that are going to have the greatest impact for the Veterans' community. Any shortfalls in expertise have been offset by contracting out for specific types of knowledge or skills that we know we are only going to need for a specific period of time. This model has proven to be extremely successful over the course of my mandate.

The Veterans Ombudsman Advisory Council has also been of assistance in offering pertinent insight to me. Its membership consists of military and Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans, as well as professional advisors in fields of relevance to the work of the Office. There are also affiliate members who provide advice on a needs-basis.

Being strategic also means:

- We have to take a multi-year approach to determining what needs to be done to achieve a successful outcome.
- We need to understand the environment and to create the catalysts that will enable the outcomes that we want to achieve.
- We have to recognize that change takes time and government moves slowly.
- We have to have a plan to achieve the desired effects and we need to stick with it and adapt it to evolving circumstances.
- We have to be prepared to take criticism when stakeholders are focused on the near term and not considering the long game.

THE CAMPAIGN PLAN

We needed a plan to guide us through the five years of my mandate. To build it, we had to consider the following questions:

- What are the most important issues facing the Veterans' community?
- What are the outcomes that we are trying to achieve?
- What do we need to do first?
- How does each activity build on the previous activity?

In the military, we call this a campaign plan which, by definition, is a plan to achieve an objective, usually of a large-scale nature, over an extended period of time. We knew that, whatever we did, it was going to take time to generate the necessary conditions for change to occur. We also knew from the experience of the Office over the previous three years that, although an emotional or intuitive response to a situation can in the short term create action, it may in the long term have a limited effect.

To generate and sustain the outcomes we wanted to achieve, we needed to produce compelling evidence-based analysis that was communicated in an easy-to-understand way. It is very hard for Government or stakeholders to dismiss the facts when the facts are clear and based on evidence.

The following are some of the things we were working on in the fall of 2010:

- Benefits Navigator – a knowledge management tool to support frontline staff;
- Actuarial Tool – a tool to calculate the financial/actuarial differences between benefits provided under different acts;
- Procedural Fairness – analyses of administrative justice principles; and
- New Veterans Charter Analysis – an internal analysis of the new Act.

We also needed to integrate what we had produced to date with what we wanted to produce in the future and make sure that the impact of our efforts was worth the investment of our resources. Prior to developing our plan, we considered two key factors that tied the various elements together.

The first factor arose from my desire to have a yearly theme to help focus our activities and better communicate the outcomes we were trying to achieve. Our team quickly reminded me that it was unlikely that we would achieve any changes in one year for a particular theme before it would be time to move on to another theme. This would result in continuity and communication challenges. However if we chose a strategic theme, it could shape the entire span of all of our activities.

I put forward the *One Veteran* theme as I wanted to reinforce the idea that sailors, soldiers, airmen and airwomen, and members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, do not question where and when they must serve. Providing benefits on the basis of when and where they served did not sit well with me. After much discussion, we agreed that the *One Veteran* theme crossed almost every issue we were aware of and, if adhered to, could produce great results.

The multitude of eligibility criteria due to types of service and to where and when Veterans served creates unnecessary red tape, complexity, bureaucracy, extra costs and negatively affects service delivery. In addition, the differences in the level of benefits between classes of Veterans raised questions about the fairness of categorizing Veterans. The theme also spoke to the obligation a nation has to

its Veterans and how the treatment of Veterans, in general, has an effect on the Canadian Armed Forces' ability to meet its recruitment and hence national security obligations.

We were convinced that the *One Veteran* theme could act as a strategic focal point for our campaign plan and I was very pleased when we came together and made that decision.

The second factor we had to consider as a result of our discussion on the *One Veteran* theme was the matter of **fairness**. As the voice for fair treatment of Veterans and their families, I believe that fairness has to be at the forefront of all of our analysis. After all, providing redress for citizens treated unfairly by the bureaucracy is the core function of all ombudsmen.

Although it is talked about all the time, very seldom do we consider how to actually measure fairness. We decided that from a Veterans benefits' perspective, we could measure fairness in terms of **adequacy** (Are the right programs and services in place to meet the needs?), **sufficiency** (Are the right programs and services sufficiently resourced?), and **accessibility** (Are eligibility criteria creating unfair barriers, and can the benefits and services provided by Veterans Affairs Canada be accessed quickly and easily?). This definition anchored our campaign plan.

With these considerations and factors in mind, we created a multi-year plan that detailed specific activities to be completed in the immediate year and potential activities for the following years. Each activity built on each other and was directed to achieving strategic outcomes.

Our objective was for the campaign plan to be focused yet flexible enough to be able to adapt to environmental changes. To do this, we scoped out the types of activities within the plan that we needed to achieve the desired outcomes. A senior member of the team was made responsible for identifying and mapping future needs.





MAKING A DIFFERENCE

OUTCOMES FROM THE CAMPAIGN PLAN

Frontline Encounters – Let me tell you first and foremost about the toughest, but most rewarding, job in the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman.

Every day, our frontline staff interacts with Veterans and their families who are struggling to have their needs met. The situations are seldom simple, are generally emotionally-charged and affect real people with real issues. If the problems were easy to fix, it would have already happened. So, for many Veterans, we are their last hope to resolve an issue.

The reality is that we cannot resolve everything in favour of the Veteran.

- Sometimes it is because we have no authority to address an issue, such as overturning a Veterans Review and Appeal Board decision.
- Sometimes it is because legislation and regulations do not permit what is being requested.
- Sometimes it is because the expectations of the Veteran are not realistic or there is no evidence to support their claim.
- Sometimes it is because the nature of the complaint alleges activities such as breaches of privacy or harassment which are better handled by organizations such as the Privacy Commissioner, the Canadian Human Rights Commission or the Public Service Integrity Commissioner, who have power under the *Inquiries Act* to investigate and enforce changes.

Having to dash someone's hopes by telling him or her we cannot help resolve the problem is very difficult. It can result in our staff being subjected to angry outbursts or feeling responsible for the emotional devastation of the caller. We also receive calls from Veterans who are contemplating suicide. The cumulative effect of these types of calls takes its toll on our frontline team members.

On the positive side, the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman has had a very beneficial impact on many Veterans' lives. It ranges from simply providing callers with the information they were requesting in a timely manner, to putting in place appropriate treatment benefits, to obtaining financial settlements for Veterans who have been fighting Veterans Affairs Canada for years. Here are some examples of what our dedicated and compassionate frontline team members have done:

A Veteran who suffered from chronic pain for several service-related health issues was unable to take pain killers due to anaphylaxis – a condition that causes severe reactions that could be fatal. His only remedy for relief was through massage therapy, which could only be received from a therapist for 60 minutes several times per week. The Veteran requested a high-end massage chair worth \$9,000 for pain relief while at home. The request was denied due to regulations and policy. Our Office was successful in convincing Veterans Affairs Canada to allow this therapeutic equipment on an exceptional basis.

An 89-year-old Veteran in the Veterans Independence Program was denied a handrail to go to his basement because of policy requiring that home adaptations be made only for activities of daily living. After the review was upheld for the same reasons, our Office intervened with Veterans Affairs Canada program management to alert them that the Veteran was sliding down the stairs on his back to go to his basement. We argued that because of the safety risk for the Veteran, approval on these grounds was allowable under the program and the railing was promptly approved by Veterans Affairs Canada.

Talking to Veterans and their families every day influences everything else we do. It keeps us grounded and gives us insight into the effectiveness of Veterans Affairs Canada's policies and service delivery. It also challenges us to look at Veterans and their issues through a holistic lens and from their perspective. In addition, it alerts us to systemic issues that are either developing or have only been addressed as individual cases.

Here is an early example of that type of success:

In 2011, a Veteran called the Office about his eligibility for the Exceptional Incapacity Allowance. This allowance of up to \$1,348.57 per month (2011 values) is provided to pensioners who are exceptionally incapacitated. The Office contacted Veterans Affairs Canada to discuss the case and found that half of the 1,800 Veterans who were potentially eligible for the allowance had not been informed. Veterans Affairs Canada quickly corrected the situation by sending a letter to those Veterans. As a result, close to 600 Veterans were found to be eligible and received retroactive payments totaling \$14 million.

Part of our success with our early interventions, through our direct contact with Veterans and their families, is that we decided at the outset that we wanted to be different from other Government call centres. Real people answer the telephones, as much as possible, and if the request is not within our mandate, we find out who is responsible and facilitate the transfer to that organization. In other words, we do whatever we can to help the caller. We also look beyond what the caller is specifically requesting to see if there are other areas of concern that we can help address.

Without knowledgeable, dedicated and compassionate frontline staff, the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman would have no credibility. This team is the foundation of the Office and is an objective and credible support to the Veterans' community.

REVIEWS AND REPORTS

As part of the campaign plan, we intended to publish our evidence-based analysis. We knew that we were going to publish formal reports with recommendations and social media products, but was that the only output the Office would produce?

When we looked at the outcomes we were trying to achieve, such as creating an environment for informed debate, we recognized that we had a role to play in educating stakeholders. Since all of our reports start as an analysis of “what is”, we thought perhaps that analysis could be published as an educational tool.

As we worked through the concept, it became clear that this two-step process had a lot of value:

- A Review would contain all of the data and information detailing the current situation on a subject, but with no detailed analysis or recommendations.
- It would be published first in order to provide stakeholders with the same information that the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman was using to conduct its analysis and formulate its recommendations for a Report.
- It would put facts that are often impossible to obtain for someone outside of Government into the hands of stakeholders.
- It would act as the catalyst to start an informed debate in the public forum.
- When the Report came out later, debate would continue, but the focus would shift to the analysis and required action because the data had already been discussed.
- It would also give momentum and visibility to the issue in question because the release of the Review would generate anticipation of the Report’s release.
- Finally, the level of effort to conduct a Review would be much less than for a Report.

Initially, I wanted to publish at least three reports per year. That would give us a performance measure to work towards. But, in the end, it was the requirements of our campaign plan with its focus on preparing for the future that determined what we needed to accomplish.

The Office of the Veterans Ombudsman was so new that we had only published one report by 2011 and we were still unsure of how best to communicate our analysis. We knew that we did not want long-winded, hard to read, bureaucratic reports with hundreds of recommendations. So, we have attempted to keep our reviews and reports as short as possible, written in simple language with a small number of recommendations that are achievable and measurable. I believe that we have become better at doing this with each publication.

Procedural Fairness Reports

As I mentioned earlier, some of the work we had ongoing when I began my term as Veterans Ombudsman was analyzing procedural fairness – a fundamental element of administrative law.

Procedural fairness is a very broad topic as it pertains to natural justice or “the duty to act fairly”. We had a lot of data that covered a variety of subjects within various Veterans Affairs Canada programs, but no clear path on how to focus the analysis or how the published products were going to contribute to our outcomes. In the end, it was the nature of the individual complaints that the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman was receiving that guided our way ahead.

Many Veterans did not understand the reasons for the decisions being made by Veterans Affairs Canada in their case or what evidence was being used to make that decision. In many ways, this spoke to the culture within Veterans Affairs Canada at the time. So we decided to do a series of reports that covered reasons for decisions, the right to fair adjudication and the right to disclosure.

These weren’t the most headline-making subjects to talk about, nor were they the burning issues for which most Veterans’ groups and advocates were demanding change. They were, however, basic elements of natural justice that, if addressed correctly, could fundamentally change the environment.

To me it was self-evident that it is hard to fight back if you do not know why you are denied a benefit. It is also hard to fight back if you do not know what evidence was used to make that decision. Finally, it is hard to trust an adjudication system that you perceive to be unfair.

The three reports we produced were focused on specific processes within Veterans Affairs Canada and the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. This allowed us to apply our limited resources to gathering only the data and evidence particular to that process and to make recommendations that were clearly supported by compelling evidence. Although we wanted to see changes to the processes identified, the strategic outcome we wanted to achieve was a cultural change that applied not only to the processes identified, but to all processes.

For example, in the *Veterans' Right to Know Reasons for Decisions* Report, we analyzed the application process for disability benefits. In the report we stated:

*However, **providing information to support a decision** is fundamentally different to **providing a reason for a decision**. The Ombudsman believes that this difference is not understood by the Department nor is it applied in the drafting of letters.*

It is not sufficient for decision-makers simply to outline applicable statutory provisions and the evidence and arguments, and then to state their conclusions. Good reasons for decisions do require the listing of evidence considered in rendering a decision but that does not reveal the rationale for the decision. For each conclusion of fact, law and policy relevant to the decision, the reasons should establish a rational connection between the evidence presented and the conclusions reached by the decision-maker. The decision and the reasons supporting it must then be communicated clearly.

We expected Veterans Affairs Canada to not only apply any changes they made to disability benefit decisions to achieve this outcome but to other processes where decisions are being made. The natural justice principle is the same for all.

When we published these procedural fairness reports, we recognized that we would have to follow up at some point in time to determine the effect of our recommendations. The key was figuring out how much time had to elapse to provide Veterans Affairs Canada with a reasonable amount of time to address a recommendation and for the effects of that change to flow through the system. We have recently finished

a combined follow-up report to the *Veterans' Right to Know Reasons for Decisions* and *Veterans' Right to Disclosure* Reports.

I cannot overemphasize the critical importance of providing clear reasons for decisions and disclosing the information that was used to render a decision. Getting this right is the key to building trust.

Our December 2014 report on the Veterans Review and Appeal Board – *Veterans' Right to Fair Adjudication: The Follow-up Report* – showed that the Board had clearly addressed the recommendations we put forward in March 2012 in our report – *Veterans' Right to Fair Adjudication* – and used the original report as a catalyst for developing a continuous improvement culture.

New Veterans Charter Reports

A subject that was clearly not only an issue for the Veterans' community, but a divisive one, as well, was the adequacy of the *Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act* or the New Veterans Charter, as it is more commonly called.

The Act came into force in 2006 and was radically different from the *Pension Act*, which had supported Veterans since 1919. Because the changes were significant – especially the change to a lump sum payment to compensate for pain and suffering – many did not have a clear understanding of the real effects of these changes. Poor communication, gaps in the adequacy, sufficiency and accessibility of various benefits, and the limited appetite of the Government to change, made the Charter a focal point for Veterans' groups and advocates.

Unfortunately, it also divided stakeholders into those who wanted nothing more than to go back to the *Pension Act* regime and those who wanted to move forward with an amended New Veterans Charter that addressed the identified gaps. This divided the Veterans' community and, coupled with the lack of understanding of the new benefits, diminished the community's ability to project a united front on how to move forward.

From the inception of the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman in 2007, one of the main priorities has been and continues to be a full understanding of all aspects of the New Veterans Charter suite of benefits, because this legislation is central to supporting

Veterans both now and in the future. Understanding the intricacies of its various programs and their inter-relationships with existing Veterans Affairs Canada and Canadian Armed Forces programs is not an easy task. It has taken our Office years of dedicated analysis to fully comprehend the effects of the Charter, and we are still learning new things about its inter-relationships with other programs. Therefore, it is not surprising that many Veterans – and for that matter many Veterans Affairs Canada and Canadian Armed Forces staff members – can often be confused about how the various programs come together.

Veterans wanted to know whether the New Veterans Charter provided the same or better benefits than the *Pension Act*. The introduction of a lump sum payment to replace the monthly pension to compensate for pain and suffering became the main focus of public attention and the reason for calls to return to the *Pension Act*.

In our outreach to Veterans, it is interesting to note that when the lump sum was discussed, everyone in the room became an accountant by quickly doing the math on their mobile devices to show that it only took nine years of monthly payments to equal the one-time lump sum payment. Without taking into consideration any of the other New Veterans Charter programs, Veterans were concluding that it was insufficient. To make matters worse, Veterans Affairs Canada did not provide the data to counter these conclusions.

What was missing were the facts that provided an objective view of the actual effects of the New Veterans Charter. Under my predecessor, the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman had contracted an actuarial company to build a tool that would quickly allow us to assess the New Veterans Charter benefits in comparison to the benefits of the *Pension Act*. By the time my mandate began, our team had a good appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of the Charter. At the same time, the Government was moving forward with Bill C-55, which when passed in March 2011, represented the first changes to the New Veterans Charter since 2006.

Although we had not published anything yet, we used the analysis that we had done up to that point to shape our position and provide the evidence for our activities. One of these activities was my appearance before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs in March 2011 on the subject of Bill C-55. At the end of my address to the Committee I said:

Bill C-55 is a small but important step in making the Charter a 'living' document, and bringing about changes to the legislation to better address the needs of Canada's Veterans and their families. It should be considered as the beginning of the promised ongoing renewal process that is needed to afford Veterans the care that they deserve. Other steps must follow, and soon. Waiting another five years to bring about further improvements to the New Veterans Charter would be unacceptable.

In the discussion that followed, my comments on renewing the Charter on a regular basis were not only noted but acted upon as the following amendment was added to Bill C-55:

Within a two year period from the time of coming into force of this Act, the provisions of the Act are to be reviewed by the appropriate standing committee of the House of Commons.

This was the first successful strategic outcome that we achieved in my mandate. Not only did this amendment generate the work direction and timelines of our activities in the next two years, it also set the conditions for changing the environment three years later. As well, it was a clear reminder that the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman does not have to always produce a report with recommendations to achieve results. Sometimes, it just has to exploit opportunities at the right moment as an objective and credible voice for change.

When Bill C-55 received Royal Assent on March 24, 2011, we now had a firm date in the future to work towards. We had to decide what evidence-based analysis to produce to enable an informed debate that would create the conditions for change in the fall of 2013. We also had to figure out the resources that we would need for this effort.

Over the next several months, we planned what needed to be done and followed up by assigning the resources necessary to make it happen:

- We needed to update our actuarial tool to incorporate and understand the new changes brought about by Bill C-55;
- We needed additional expertise to run the project and create the actuarial tables to support our position;
- We needed to start with a Review of the New Veterans Charter to ensure that everyone had the same understanding of its programs, followed by a Report with specific recommendations; and
- Because of the financial aspects that were going to be covered in our work, we needed to support our Report on the New Veterans Charter with an Actuarial Analysis to provide a detailed examination of financial implications.

All of these activities were incorporated into our campaign plan with the goal of having all of our products in the public domain when Parliament started its review of the New Veterans Charter two years later.

Although we focused on the long term, it did not stop us from reaching out to stakeholders and parliamentarians to convince them of the importance of conducting a review not only pertaining to the Bill C-55 changes, but to the entire New Veterans Charter.

In April and May of 2013, we organized a series of six consultative meetings with key stakeholders and advocates from within the Veterans' community. This included chairs of past Veterans Affairs Canada advisory committees and representatives from various organizations who had consistently shown leadership on Veterans' issues. I wanted to hear their honest opinions on the preliminary results of the extensive research and consultation effort that my Office had undertaken. In addition, I wanted to get their ideas on the best way forward to the fall's parliamentary

committee review of the New Veterans Charter. Their comments and suggestions were excellent and many were integrated into my Report – *Improving the New Veterans Charter: The Report* – released in early October 2013.

We had to come up with a strategy to structure the future debate so that there would be no confusion as to what elements of Veterans’ benefits needed to be addressed. It is for this reason that we structured our Review and Report to focus on the economic benefits, with the caveat that, once the financial security aspects of Veterans’ compensation were addressed, a discussion on non-economic or pain-and-suffering compensation should begin.

Our analysis indicated that demands to change non-economic compensation were often influenced by a Veteran’s need for long-term financial security. I believed that discussing this in two steps would bring clarity to the purpose of the New Veterans Charter economic benefits. After it was shown that financial security could be achieved through these benefits, we could focus on non-economic pain-and-suffering needs in a less emotionally-charged way.

As we worked through our campaign plan, another New Veterans Charter report was released to address Vocational Rehabilitation concerns – *Investing in Veterans’ Vocational Training*. So, by the fall of 2013, we had published the key Reports and Reviews necessary to shape the debate in the public domain. A fourth report on access and eligibility to the Permanent Impairment Allowance – *Supporting Severely Impaired Veterans* – was published in August 2014 to complete the series.

Did our efforts help to change the environment leading to the broad scoped parliamentary hearings on the New Veterans Charter that began in the fall of 2013? I believe that they did.

Annex A captures the steps that the Office took and the strategic effect that was achieved. While I am not suggesting that the results are solely because of the work of the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman, because there were many other stakeholders pursuing the same goals, I believe that our work focused the debate and created common ground to allow many voices to work together collaboratively. Then, when stakeholders had the facts and analysis in their hands, they began to develop one shared message, and the environment began to change. The debate moved from “what” was needed to be done to “how” the change should be made.

When I started my mandate only one change to the New Veterans Charter had been tabled: Bill C-55. Almost five years later, multiple changes have been made or put forward to be made to the legislation and regulations of the Charter: changes that directly address many of the priorities of stakeholders involved. There is also now a tacit commitment that more will be done on a regular basis in the future.

Would this have happened if the demands for change were not as focused as they were in the last couple of years and supported by evidence-based analysis? I doubt it. I believe that the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman played a strategic role in shaping the environment and creating the conditions that made the need for change compelling.

Other Reviews and Reports

As you can see, a significant portion of my mandate was dedicated to procedural fairness and New Veterans Charter issues. However, I still have to keep an eye to the future recognizing that, just like the Charter, it takes time to gather the evidence, build the case and start seeing results.

We have started to work on end-of-life care. This issue needs to be looked at in relation to the existing programs and changing demographics of today's Veterans' community. In preparation for that future debate, we have published reviews on in-home care – *Veterans' Long-Term Care Needs: A Review of the Support Provided by Veterans Canada through its Veterans Independence Program*; long-term care – *Veterans' Long-Term Care Needs: A Review of the Support Provided by Veterans Affairs Canada Through its Long-Term Care Program*; and assisted living – *Veterans Long-Term Care Needs: A Review of Assisted Living Options for Veterans*.

As part of our *One Veteran* theme, we have been working with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to publish a review that details the benefits available to them in preparation for a future discussion on meeting Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' needs. What has become clear to me over the last five years is that in comparison to the Canadian Armed Forces, there is a significant difference in what is provided to Royal Canadian Mounted Police members. This is not to say that both should have the same benefits, but a discussion needs to be started on how to better support members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and their families.

I have already initiated a request to have the Royal Canadian Mounted Police included in the *Children of Deceased Veterans Education Assistance Act* that provides post-secondary educational assistance to the children of Canadian Armed Forces members and Veterans whose deaths are service-related. It is small in nature to many other programs, but it has a big impact for families. There are other gaps like this that I feel could be addressed if there is agreement to discuss the current Royal Canadian Mounted Police benefits package.

For the first time, we are working with the National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman to review the transition to civilian life process and support to families for medically-releasing members because what affects Veterans and their families in relation to transition often starts well before the member releases from the service.

This project began in early 2014 as a result of the well-documented need to ensure that the transition process be as seamless as possible, including clear and transparent information and communication to members. The goal of the joint effort is to identify and recommend ways to streamline administrative processes and support services.

The project includes five areas of study: mapping the transition process for medically-releasing members; examining the impact of service attribution on the transition process; examining the role of, and support provided to, families during the transition; reviewing recommendations of parliamentary committees and the Auditor General of Canada; and reviewing the role and impact of third-party service providers.

There is one Report that I want to single out because it may not be obvious as to why we chose to put resources into it. A report on a National Veterans Identification Card was published in October 2012 – *Honouring and Connecting with Canada’s Veterans: a National Veterans Identification Card*. The aim was to address the following:

While the Department is generally well engaged with its approximately 140,000 Veteran and still-serving clients, it is challenged to identify, establish and maintain contact with the larger group of Veterans and their families who are not its clients at the present time, but who constitute its potential client population.

At the time the Report was published, Veterans Affairs Canada was in the midst of its “transformation agenda” exercise. We felt that Veterans Affairs Canada would have a higher success rate and achieve more impact within the Veterans’ community if it used a Veterans ID Card as its vehicle to reach out and connect with Veterans on new programs than through conventional advertising. While initial discussions have been held, no substantive action has been taken.

EXCELLENCE IN OMBUDSMAN PRACTICES

In striving to be an agent of change, I wanted to ensure that the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman embraced the principles of independence, impartiality, neutrality, confidentiality and informality, and adopted best practices that characterized effective ombudsman offices.

We learned a great deal through membership in the International Ombudsman Institute and the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman and continually adjust our approaches to new developments in the field. Our participation in the Community of Federal Ombudsman Offices, created in 2012 to share best practices and discuss shared concerns, has also been useful in fine tuning our operations.

In addition, our involvement with the “ombudsman community” has reaffirmed my conviction that a proactive approach based on solid research and investigation to address systemic issues is a critical complement to our equally important complaint-handling activities.

The ombudsman institution is well known for its adaptability to changing conditions and new challenges. To inform decisions about the approaches and tools used by the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman and to ensure that they reflect current thinking, in the fifth year of my mandate, I asked a member of our team to conduct research into best practices and challenges confronting ombudsman offices in Canada and around the world. I wanted to be sure that we have in place what we need. One of the first things that we recognized needed to change was the skill sets associated with our core function of defining the root cause of an issue.

For almost all of the issues that we work on, the first and core component of the activity is to analyze why the regulatory framework is not producing the desired outcomes. When you understand that, you know what questions need to be asked and to whom. It is also the basis for determining whether one should intervene or not.

The Office had originally been staffed using the concept of conducting “investigations”. Whether we investigated the situation of an individual Veteran or conducted a major investigation of a systemic issue, we wanted the skill sets that investigators brought to the table, such as interviewing, recording information and writing reports. However, what we found over time was that the skill sets that provided the most “value added” were those associated with analyzing policy.

So what is the difference? A good investigator or analyst uses similar skills to do their work, but what makes them good at their particular job is that certain skills are more developed than others. For example, an investigator needs good interviewing skills, whereas a policy analyst does not. On the other hand, a policy analyst needs to be able to dissect a policy into its various elements, which is not a skill set that is highly developed in an investigator.

We needed the investigation skill sets, but focusing solely on this side of our work resulted in us not fully developing the policy analyst skill sets that are also core to our activities. Understanding this difference in our core activities allowed us to better focus our staffing requirements.

Another area that we had to reconsider was our “issues-based” approach to engaging with Veterans Affairs Canada. This was brought to our attention in 2012 when we contracted a company to provide an assessment of how well the Office was conducting business at the strategic level.

The project lead, a former deputy minister, pointed out that if we wanted to effect real change, we needed to build consensus through engagement and negotiation. By approaching everything as an “issue”, any engagement could be perceived as negative, with one organization pointing out the faults of another.

To build consensus, the Office needed to address things from an “interest-based” approach. Understanding the viewpoint of the other side and finding common ground would allow the Office to present a position in a manner that works in concert with the interests of the Department or the Government. This facilitates the creation of conditions for change.

As we strove to do our job more effectively, we created tools to enhance our ability to engage with Veterans or to more effectively analyze systemic problems:

- We built a Benefits Navigator that provided our staff with the ability to not only quickly determine what benefits were potentially available to a Veteran, but also provide instant access to all relevant regulations, policies and procedures. The tool was so successful that we convinced Veterans Affairs Canada to not only manage it but to also improve it and give complete access to its entire staff;
- We created a complaints management system that many other ombudsman offices have stated that they would like to emulate;
- As mentioned earlier, we created an actuarial tool that allows us to quickly determine the financial effects of various policies. This gives us the ability to do evidence-based policy analysis at our desktops;
- We developed a unique PowerPoint Presentation tool that trains our staff on the interrelationships of the various programs provided to Veterans and Canadian Armed Forces members by multiple departments and agencies; and
- We also use a wiki to help our team create the collaborative spaces they need.

Not only did we look at the tools that staff needed to efficiently do their jobs, we also took into account the training required. To this end, we developed a strong culture of mentorship with both formal and informal relationships between team members. Each team member has a learning plan that is followed and funded. We have also created a Professional Development Program that provides a path for a staff member to follow from an entry level position to senior analyst. Over the course of the program, the staff member receives focused training and is promoted along a career path to higher position levels within the program as the required activities are completed.

So in the end, has our approach to doing business enabled our team to make a difference in its performance and engagement? Yes, it has. The 2014 Public Service Employee Survey shows that the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman has one of the highest ratings for employee satisfaction in the Public Service in almost every category measured. The professionalism and productivity of our small team has been commented on many times and individuals have been singled out for awards.

In addition to striving for excellence in the Office, I wanted to strengthen the ombudsman community, as a whole. In fiscal year 2011-2012, many federal ombudsman offices began holding collaborative meetings with an aim to uncover best practices in their operations. Discussions also began on the topic of case management and evolved into other functional capacities including corporate services and systemic investigations.

Together, staff from the Office of the Taxpayers' Ombudsman and the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman formalized these exchanges and created the Community of Federal Ombudsman Offices. This "community of practice" was formally created in August 2012 with a mandate to, "... encourage all member offices to engage in open and productive dialogue with each other to share information with a goal to develop best practices and improve each Office's organizational efficiency."

Since then, the organization has grown and includes the following ombudsman offices:

- Office of the Taxpayers' Ombudsman
- Office of the Veterans Ombudsman
- Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime
- Office of the Procurement Ombudsman
- Office of the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman
- Food and Drug Act Liaison Office

Representatives from these organizations meet on an ad-hoc basis to discuss matters of mutual interest. Not only are we exchanging ideas, our Office has also provided access to the training associated with our Professional Development Program to allow members of the Community of Federal Ombudsman Offices to take advantage of our investment in training to strengthen the ombudsman community, as a whole.

BUILDING TRUST

My leadership style is different from my predecessor's. For some, this did not sit well. They thought that the only way to obtain action from the Government on Veterans' issues is to be confrontational. While I believe that such an approach is important when called for, I decided early on that to continue the momentum and build on the legacy of my predecessor, I needed to place emphasis on bridge building. That was the only way that I believed we could create the conditions needed for consensus on issues of concern to Veterans and their families.

For the most part, Veterans agreed with this approach to resolve their long-term, outstanding issues. As time progressed, more and more of the early naysayers came around to support this way forward, and approval for our actions increased. I think this was due to the positive effects of our campaign plan, and the recognition of the professionalism of our frontline team who worked with individual Veterans every day.

Meeting Veterans

To build trust with the Veterans' community, I make it a priority to meet regularly with Veterans and their families through town halls, events, commemoration trips and visits to long-term care facilities. I also make a point of meeting with Veterans' groups and advocates on a regular basis to discuss issues of importance to the community. This gives me a very personal and informed perspective to act on.

One comment that I have received, however, is about the time I have spent away from the Office while participating in Veterans Affairs Canada commemoration trips that usually involve a week or two each year. Aside from the fact that commemoration falls under the mandate of the Veterans Ombudsman, participating in these overseas pilgrimages has allowed me to meet with many Veterans and their families, and assist Veterans Affairs Canada staff in supporting these Veterans. In addition, these trips have given me an opportunity to have one-on-one time with the Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Deputy Minister, Members of Parliament, and other senior departmental staff in an informal setting. This has gone a long way to strengthen trust, increase understanding of positions and build consensus. On a personal level, I find that each

time I come back from one of these trips, my resolve is strengthened to do everything possible to ensure that we honour the sacrifice made by all those who have gone before us by ensuring that those who are with us are properly supported.

Working with Veterans Affairs Canada

On becoming Veterans Ombudsman, I also had to build trust with Veterans Affairs Canada. At the working level, my team and I find that departmental staff is very willing to work with us. In fact, some of the individual cases that we have resolved started with a call from a Veterans Affairs Canada staff member who could not get the Veteran the support they needed and asked the Office to intervene. In addition, on each of my outreach tours, where possible, I make a point of visiting the local Veterans Affairs Canada office to talk with staff and hear their concerns directly.

Very often I find that frontline departmental staff members are just as frustrated with the bureaucracy as are many Veterans and their families. Listening to them is key to our understanding of why certain outcomes occur. When I regularly meet with the Deputy Minister and his Assistant Deputy Ministers, I ensure that they are aware of what we are hearing both from their staff and from Veterans and their families.

Engaging Parliamentarians

The Office of the Veterans Ombudsman has also worked to build trust with parliamentarians. For us, this is about ensuring that those who have the most influence have the best information possible to decide what future benefits and services are needed for Veterans and their families. It is simply about providing parliamentarians with the facts and figures that accurately describe the current situation and an objective analysis that is not encumbered by departmental concerns.

In the past five years, I have also appeared on numerous occasions before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, the Senate Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance and the Senate National Security and Defence Committee. On two occasions, our work has influenced the direction taken by parliamentary committees, first in relation to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, and secondly on the New Veterans Charter.

Also, since becoming Veterans Ombudsman, I have worked with four Ministers of Veterans Affairs. I found that once I obtained credibility with the previous Minister, transition to a new one was fairly easy. Importantly, I have always emphasised to Ministers and other parliamentarians alike that I work for the Government of Canada, not the political party in power. To clearly make that point, I have consistently embraced an apolitical approach, briefing all political party leaders on the evolving needs of Veterans and their families.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Much has been accomplished in recent years, but that is not to say that more does not need to be done. The gap between Veterans' programs and Veterans' needs has been narrowed, but not closed. Supporting Veterans should not be seen as a static event where once every five years or so, the system makes a few incremental changes. We need to support Veterans in a dynamic way with regular evaluation of existing programs and services, and frequent assessment of the evolving needs of Veterans and their families.

The announcements in recent months demonstrate that progress is being made and the gap is being narrowed:

- The new *Retirement Income Security Benefit*, which would provide moderately to severely disabled Veterans - those who need it most - with continued assistance in the form of a monthly income support payment beginning at age 65;
- The new *Family Caregiver Relief Benefit*, which would provide eligible Veterans with a tax-free, annual grant of \$7,238 so that their informal caregivers - who are often their spouse or other devoted family members - will have flexibility or relief when they need it, while also ensuring that the Veterans' care needs are met;
- Broadened eligibility criteria for the Permanent Impairment Allowance, which together with its Supplement, provides approximately \$600 to \$2,800 a month in lifelong monthly financial support to Veterans whose employment potential and career advancement opportunities have been limited by a permanent service-related injury or illness;
- Enhanced benefits for injured part-time Reserve Force Veterans, who will now be assured the same minimum income support payment through the Earnings Loss Program as full-time Reserve Force and Regular Force Veterans;
- The proposed new *Critical Injury Benefit*, which would provide a \$70,000 tax-free award to support the most severely ill and injured Canadian Armed Forces members and Veterans;

- The hiring of new frontline staff and case managers to improve one-on-one support for Veterans; and
- The Hire-a-Veteran initiative.

However, even with these positive changes, there is work to do in understanding and addressing program gaps. Non-economic compensation for pain and suffering, transition from military to civilian life, and Veteran-centric service delivery need to be addressed next.

I would also like to see a commitment by the Government, in consultation with the Veterans’ community, to systematically address deficiencies in an ongoing process of continuous improvement with timely reviews and updates so that the New Veterans Charter can really be a “living Charter”.

Going forward, other issues beckon. The continuum of care that Veterans receive and what programs should be accessible to them requires attention. We have published Reviews on Long-Term Care, Assisted Living and the Veterans Independence Program. Now, a cohesive strategy is required to link these programs in order to improve the outcomes for all Veterans and eliminate the unnecessary bureaucratic complexity that is a current burden to them and their families.

In addition, Veterans’ families also need better support. Providing compensation for informal caregivers is one area that needs to be examined. When family members become the primary caregivers for severely impaired Veterans, we, as a country, need to recognize their commitment in a tangible way. These families have already sacrificed more than we can imagine. They should not be penalized financially as well.

Another area that needs consideration concerns Royal Canadian Mounted Police programs and benefits. As indicated earlier, a discussion is needed to review the support provided to members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and their families.

Some will say that the Government’s fiscal framework does not have the flexibility to fund more initiatives for Veterans at this time or in the foreseeable future. However, I believe that the Government cannot afford not to fix the problems identified. This is a matter of both fairness and national security.

The Canadian Armed Forces cannot recruit and retain members if there is a perception that Veterans are being treated poorly. Our armed forces ability to effectively conduct operations is based on having trust in the leadership of the military and the conviction that the nation they serve supports the individual member, no matter what happens. Trust takes a long time to build and only moments to lose. So, as a country, we need to stay on top of meeting the evolving needs of our Veterans and their families.

While the changes put forward in Bill C-59¹ will have a positive effect on meeting the needs of Veterans and their families, we now need to address non-economic compensation for pain and suffering, transition from military to civilian life, and Veteran-centric service delivery. We also need to always remember that the New Veterans Charter is a “living” document that requires timely reviews and updates in order to best serve Canada’s ill and injured Veterans and their families.

1 Obtained Royal Assent on 23 June 2015 and came into force on 1 July 2015.

IN CLOSING

I hope that this overview of the past five years provides you with a strategic summary of what the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman has accomplished and why we chose the path that we did.

It has been a tremendous honour to serve as your Veterans Ombudsman. The work we have done could not have happened without the trust and support of the Veterans' community.

Early in my mandate, I took time to get to know the many Veterans' organizations across Canada that work hard to help our Veterans and their families to voice their concerns to Government. I also took time to meet as many individual Veterans as I could in order to better understand their concerns and often frustrations with Veterans Affairs Canada's programs, benefits and service delivery system. Looking back on that time, I know it was well spent because the progress achieved since 2010 owes much to the Veterans' community coming together to present a common message to the Government of Canada on the need for change.

Together, we have made a difference and, as a community, we are in a much stronger position today than we were five years ago. In the process, we have made a difference in the individual lives of Veterans and their families, and by doing so have strengthened our nation.

The future holds promise and the bonds we have created with our past efforts will enable our future ones.

Let's keep narrowing the gap and moving forward.

One Veteran

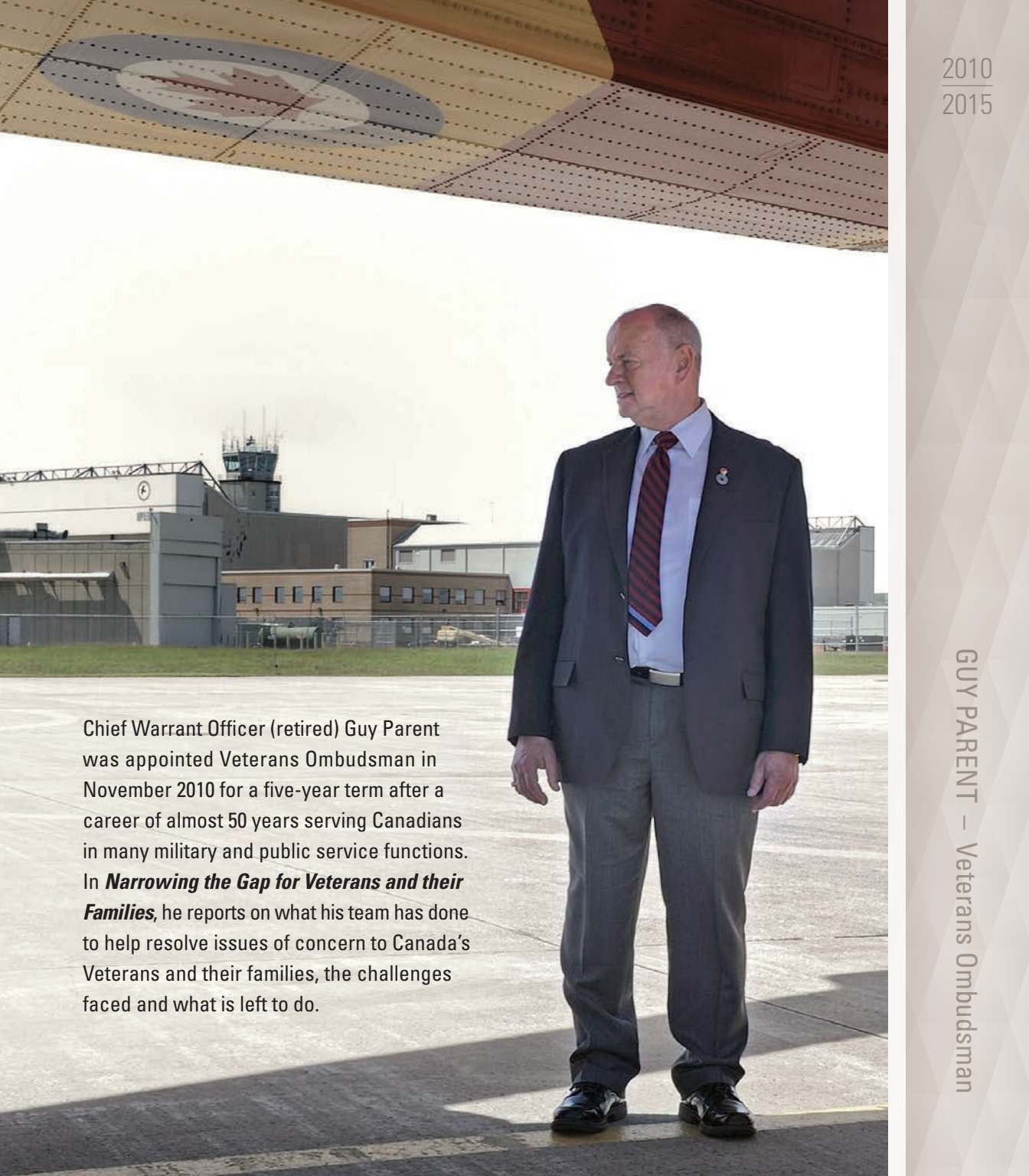


Guy Parent
Veterans Ombudsman

ANNEX A: THE STRATEGIC EFFECT OF THE VETERANS OMBUDSMAN'S ACTIVITIES 2010-2015

VETERANS OMBUDSMAN ACTIVITY	STRATEGIC EFFECT
<p>Review Charter. Appeared frequently before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA) about necessity of reviewing the New Veterans Charter (NVC) on a regular basis.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-year review clause added to Bill C-55.
<p>Review Entire Charter. In public and behind the scenes, encouraged Government and stakeholders to support a two-year review of the NVC to encompass not only the changes as a result of Bill C-55, but also to include the entire NVC.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister of Veterans Affairs announced that he was going to request that ACVA review the entire Charter. • ACVA reviewed all of the NVC and produced a report in June 2014.
<p>NVC Review. Review was published in April 2013 providing stakeholders with details of NVC programs and how they worked.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided stakeholders with a comprehensive package of NVC programs and relationships. • First step in creating the conditions for an informed debate on the subject.
<p>NVC Actuarial Review. Review was published in October 2013.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the first time, provided evidence to stakeholders of the financial impact of NVC programs in comparison to the <i>Pension Act</i>. • Replaced conjecture of NVC benefits' effects with precise actuarial data. • Data was made available to all prior to ACVA starting its review of the NVC allowing for informed debate.
<p>NVC Report. Report was published in October 2013.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided guidance to review economic benefits first, before non-economic benefits, which was the approach taken by ACVA. • Established five top priorities which most stakeholders also identified as their top priorities. • Analysis was made available to all prior to ACVA starting its review of the NVC allowing for informed debate.

VETERANS OMBUDSMAN ACTIVITY	STRATEGIC EFFECT
<p>Vocational Rehabilitation Report. Report was published in June 2013 and advocated for greater flexibility in the areas of cost, duration and training. In addition to the Report, the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman (OVO) advised the Minister’s staff that they should adopt a “pot of money” approach rather than the very prescriptive process Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) employed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The OVO was initially the only group that identified flexibility within the program as a systemic issue that needed to be addressed. • The Minister of Veterans Affairs announced that the VAC Rehab program would adopt a “pot of money” approach and increase the flexibility of the program.
<p>Permanent Impairment Allowance (PIA) Report. Report was published in August 2014 and highlighted problems with the eligibility criteria and how the allowance grades were determined.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The OVO was initially the only voice that identified these problems. • April 2015 – changes to PIA eligibility came into force that now address the OVO’s concern. • The Minister of Veterans Affairs has asked for advice from the OVO on how to move forward with changes to grade determination.
<p>Outreach to Stakeholders. Throughout the time period, the OVO sought input from stakeholders through direct consultation or normal outreach activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct consultation with all major Veterans’ groups and advocates created understanding and common ground. • Top priorities were discussed and although there were some variances in specific details, there was agreement on what needed to be done. • Veterans groups’ demands to Government were consistent and supported by evidence provided by the OVO.
<p>Appearances before Parliamentary Committees. Spoke before various committees about the results of the OVO’s analysis.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The analysis and recommendations in the OVO reports were cited by many witnesses as what needed to be addressed and how to move forward. • When ACVA published its report, the recommendations covered all the major recommendations put forward by the OVO.



Chief Warrant Officer (retired) Guy Parent was appointed Veterans Ombudsman in November 2010 for a five-year term after a career of almost 50 years serving Canadians in many military and public service functions. In ***Narrowing the Gap for Veterans and their Families***, he reports on what his team has done to help resolve issues of concern to Canada's Veterans and their families, the challenges faced and what is left to do.