

Canada's Peacekeepers Remember

Murray Johnston

Stopping wars, keeping them from re-starting, and observing the implementation of cease-fires - various shades of "peacekeeping" - have always been dangerous work. It has become particularly so over the past decade as peacekeepers increasingly find themselves in high intensity, near-war situations. No longer are belligerents constrained by world power blocs as they were before the end of the Cold War.

This is reflected in the list of the 107 Canadian soldiers who have been killed worldwide since 1950 while serving as peacekeepers, including 22 killed since 1992. The Peacekeeping Memorial in Ottawa reflects Canada's tribute to this sacrifice and *the* nation's pride in its soldiers' contribution to world peace. Too often, however, Canadian peacekeepers feel the courage they display and the sacrifice they make are ignored by the media and forgotten by an uncaring Canadian public. Police officers who have been killed in the line of duty draw extensive media coverage and large, elaborate funerals, but fallen soldiers appear to elicit no such attention. One response of peacekeepers in the field to this perceived indifference has been to create their own memorials to fallen comrades. Over the years, I have visited a number of these locally-made memorials, both in the former Republic of Yugoslavia and in the Middle East. This article tells their story.

In northern Bosnia in the former Republic of Yugoslavia, 11 November 1998 was a cold, dreary day as the Canadian contingent of the NATO Stabilization Force (SFOR) observed Remembrance Day. In Velika-Kladusa the memorial service was like none before. The



"Yugo" Memorial Stones, the soldiers' own memorial, had been returned to them for re-dedication. This completed a story begun on 17 August 1992 when Sergeant CM. (Mike) Ralph, serving in Croatia with the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was killed when his vehicle struck a mine.

Sergeant Ralph's unit, 4 Combat Engineer Regiment, commissioned a memorial stone locally made from dark grey granite. Dedicated to his memory it was the focal point for the contingent's 1992 Remembrance Day ceremony. The names of ten additional Canadian soldiers killed subsequently in the former Yugoslavia were eventually added, making the stones a living memorial. By 1995, the number of stones had grown to four, two bearing the names of the dead, and two emblazoned with United Nations and Canadian crests plus a memorial text in both English and French.

In mid-1995, Serbian forces in eastern Bosnia captured several UN-protected Muslim enclaves near Sarajevo. Air strikes by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), operating in support of UN edicts, subsequently forced the withdrawal of Serbian guns surrounding the city. In September, a Croatian offensive overran the Serbian-held region in northwestern Bosnia. As a result, Canada withdrew its battalion-sized battle group then serving in southern Croatia. In early October, after a cease-fire, Canada announced that it would withdraw another battalion from Visoko near Sarajevo in November. Also, the Canadian Logistics Battalion (CANLOGBAT) commenced a withdrawal in December. At the same time, however, Canada agreed to provide a contingent for the newly-

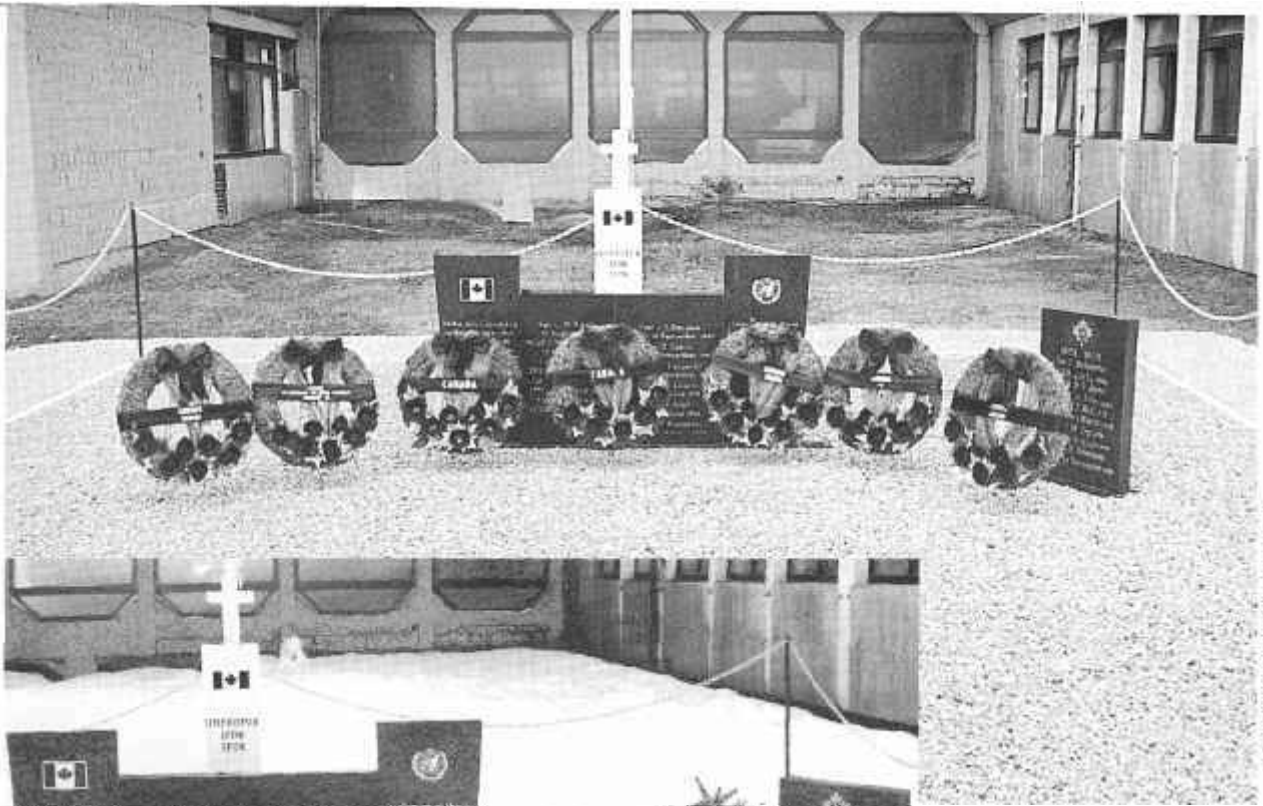


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Photo provided by author

The Canadian Memorial in Bosnia-Herzegovina comprising the four "returned UNPROFOR" stones, the new "IFOR/SFOR" stone and a "memorial" marker in typical Bosnian style.

formed NATO Implementation Force (IFOR), which, on 20 December 1996, became the NATO Stabilisation Force (SFOR).

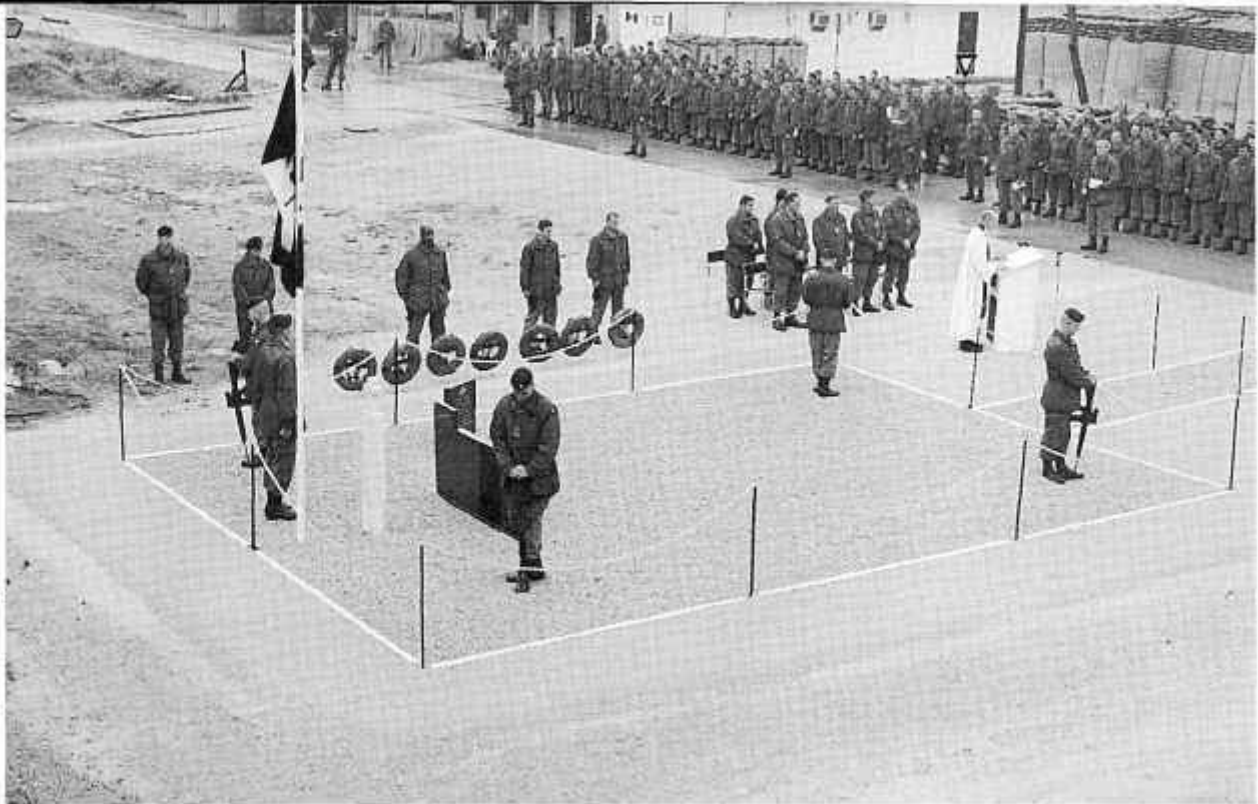
In the midst of this turmoil, Lieutenant-Colonel Dave Redman, Commanding Officer CANLOGBAT, telephoned me from Croatia. He wanted to ensure that the Memorial Stones were not lost. At his suggestion, we arranged to have them sent to the Canadian War Museum (CWM) in Ottawa. Victor Suthren, then the Museum's Director-General, realizing their value for the story of Canadian peacekeeping, agreed to our suggestion, and had them put on display in the museum's Peacekeeping Gallery.

In the summers of 1996, 1997, and 1998, I visited the Canadian soldiers in the former Republic of Yugoslavia and noted the mounting toll of deaths that were unrecorded on the Memorial Stones since they had been removed to the CWM in Ottawa. At the end of my 1998 visit I suggested to Colonel Ray Romses, then the Canadian contingent's commander, that the names of the six soldiers killed since mid-1995 in UNPROFOR, IFOR, and SFOR, should be

added to the Memorial Stones. On my return home, I discussed the idea with Daniel Glenney, Assistant Director at the CWM. He quickly agreed, noting that keeping the Memorial Stones up to date was a task the museum would be glad to undertake on behalf of all Canadians. He felt it would be an important gesture for the troops, assuring them that their efforts and sacrifices were indeed appreciated by their fellow citizens.

Around this time, Colonel Romses called me to say that the soldiers in SFOR wanted "their" Memorial Stones back, as they planned to build a formal memorial in one of their camps using the stones as a central feature. Again, Daniel Glenney agreed, noting that the Memorial Stones would become a unique "working" artifact. Together, we made arrangements to return the stones to Yugoslavia. The museum would retain "ownership" of the them on behalf of the people of Canada, but would "loan" them to the Canadian contingent for the duration of its mission in the Balkans.

The soldiers in Bosnia built their memorial, which included the four returned stones. They



Rededicating the "Yugo" Memorial Stones in the NATO SFOR Canadian Contingent's camp in Velika Gladusa, Bosnia-Herzegovina during the Remembrance Day Ceremony, 11 November 1998.

added an eleventh name to one, that of Corporal J.F.Y. Rousseau, killed on 25 August 1995 while serving with UNPROFOR. The memorial also includes two additional stones made locally. One is in typical Bosnian cemetery-marker style. The other lists the names of the five Canadian soldiers killed while serving in IFOR/SFOR: Private G.C. Hopolina, Corporal R.D. Vialette, Master Corporal T.S. McRae, Corporal J. Ogilvie, and Sapper CD. Desmarais. The rededication ceremony on Remembrance Day 1998 thus saw the soldiers on parade actually remembering two of their own, Corporal Ogilvie, and Sapper Desmarais, killed in August and September 1998 respectively, whose units were still deployed in the theatre.

Canadians overseas have also commemorated their fallen in other ways. The Canadian camp near Coralici in Bosnia is now called Camp Holopina in honour of Corporal C.G. Holopina of 2 Canadian Engineer Regiment, killed on 4 July 1996 while on a mission to assist an IFOR vehicle damaged in a minefield. His armoured engineer vehicle left the road near Bihac, Bosnia and tumbled into a wooded ravine. The Military Engineering Branch also built a memorial to him at the site of the accident.

Corporal J.W. Ogilvie of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, serving as part of the 3rd Royal

Canadian Regiment Battle Group, died on 30 August 1998 when the armoured vehicle in which he was riding slid off the road during a patrol in difficult terrain. In December, the Battle Group unveiled a memorial to him near the accident scene. The Canadian Field Engineer Camp in Kosovo has likewise been named in honour of Corporal M. (Izzie) Isfeld of 1 Combat Engineer Regiment, killed on 21 June 1994 while clearing a Croatian minefield.

Along with our more recent commitments in Eastern Europe, Canadians have been peacekeeping in the Middle East for more than 40 years, and 54 have given their lives while serving there. A Canadian memorial cairn in the Golan Heights originated in a similar manner to the "Yugo" Memorial Stones, and has since become a memorial to all Canadians killed while serving in the area.

On 6 November 1980, Private Perry Porter, a signalman serving on the Golan Heights with the United Nations Disengagement and Observer Force (UNDOF), was killed when the antenna tower on which he was working collapsed. In 1984, the UNDOF Memorial was erected in his memory, which includes a pair of lineman's spurs mounted in front. Instrumental in having the



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Above and left: The UNEFI Section in the Gaza Military Cemetery.

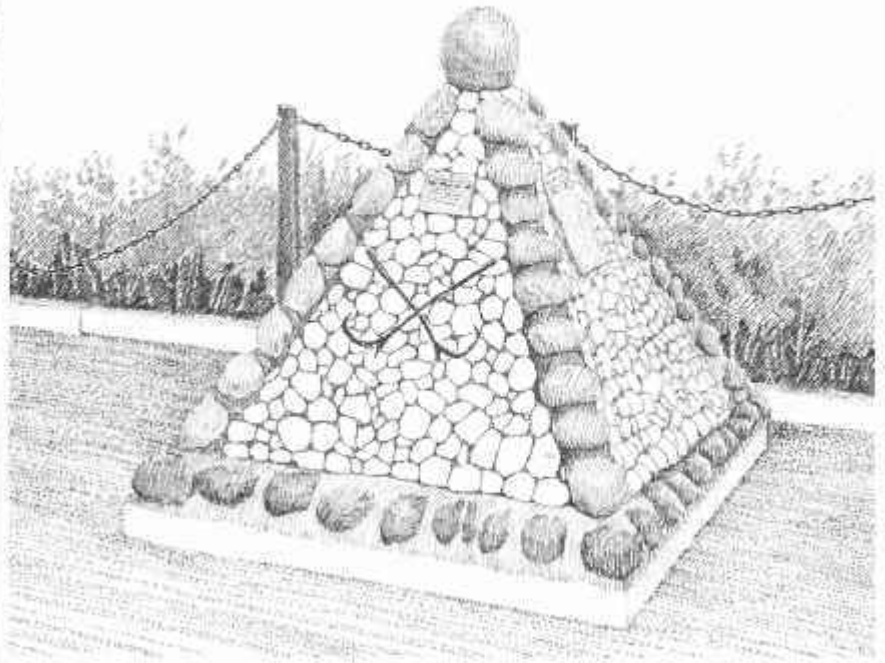
Below: The memorial to Corporal J.W. Ogilvie in Bosnia.



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Photo provided by author



Left: The memorial to Corporal C.G. Holopina in Bosnia.

Above: The "Middle East" Canadian Memorial in Camp Ziouani in the Golan Heights. (Illustration by Michel Brunei.)

memorial erected was Chief Warrant Officer Roger Ladouceur, who had served with Private Porter in 1980. The UNDOF Memorial has been refurbished several times and now honours the memories of all Canadian soldiers who have lost their lives while serving on UN missions in the area. Located centrally near the camp entrance, all soldiers pay their respects by saluting every time they pass. On 5 February 1998, the Canadian Signal Troop from Camp Ziouani, on the Israeli-Syrian border, held a memorial service led by Sergeant Danny Porter, Perry's brother. It was a deeply moving occasion for all those who attended.

Since the 1970s governments have brought home the remains of service personnel killed abroad for burial in Canada. Before then, all Canadian soldiers killed overseas were buried in cemeteries near where they fell. The military cemetery in Gaza thus has a special section for Canadians killed while serving in the United Nations Emergency force, established in 1956. The main part of the cemetery contains the graves of Commonwealth soldiers killed during the First and Second World Wars, including several Canadians. The Canadian military attaché in

Israel regularly visits this cemetery on behalf of Canada, most recently in February 1999. Appropriately for Canada, this cemetery, an oasis of calm in a sea of turmoil, includes the graves of soldiers killed in war *and* in peacekeeping.

Like all veterans on Remembrance Day each year, Canadian peacekeepers in Canada and around the world remember their fallen comrades. In the Golan Heights and in Bosnia these ceremonies are held at memorials that, as inscribed on the "Yugo" Memorial Stones, are dedicated "to those Canadians who gave their lives in the service of peace." But whereas in Canada the ceremonies are held at memorials built either by the government or by grateful communities, in the peacekeepers' camps overseas they are at memorials erected by the soldiers themselves.

Colonel Murray Johnston served as a Regular Force officer for 31 years. His tours of duty included Germany and Vietnam. Today he is the Colonel Commandant of The Electrical and Mechanical Engineering Branch, Past President of the Friends of the Canadian War Museum, and Vice-Chairman of the Perley and Rideau Veteran's Health Centre. He has recently visited the memorials described in this article.