

Symbols of Honour: The Search for a National Canadian Honours System

HUGH A. HALLIDAY

Résumé

Les « distinctions nationales », que soulignent de façon tangible la remise de médailles et les lettres qui en désignent nominalement les récipiendaires, ont des racines profondes dans l'histoire et sont reconnues mondialement. Il n'en reste pas moins que le Canada a eu à leur égard une attitude ambivalente. Tantôt il acceptait, rejetait, puis reprenait les distinctions britanniques, tantôt il les abandonnait en faveur de distinctions proprement canadiennes. La conception des distinctions et les modalités de leur remise ont elles aussi varié. Les distinctions britanniques étaient subordonnées à des facteurs externes et à des préoccupations nationales. Depuis quelques années, il y a prolifération de distinctions canadiennes, certaines étant décernées au personnel militaire, d'autres à des titulaires de charges à risque élevé, et d'autres encore en reconnaissance de services à la société ou d'actes de bravoure.

Abstract

The concept of "national honours," expressed through visible awards of medals accompanied by post-nominal letters attached to one's name, has historical precedents and is recognized globally. Nevertheless, Canada has regarded them equivocally. The nation has embraced, rejected and re-introduced British awards, then abandoned them in favour of distinctive Canadian honours. The creation and bestowal of awards has also varied. While British honours were granted, they were limited by external factors and domestic concerns. In recent years Canadian awards have proliferated, some being for military personnel, others for persons in high-risk occupations or civilian services, and yet others for acts of bravery.

On 1 September 1980 Canadians were stunned to learn that Terry Fox had abandoned his cross-country run for cancer research; the disease that had cost him a leg three years before had re-asserted itself. The young man was being flown home for treatment, but in view of his recent exertions it was virtually a foregone conclusion that he was dying. Within weeks, Governor General Ed Schreyer had flown to Port Coquitlam where he invested Fox with the insignia of a Companion, Order of Canada. Terry Fox became the youngest Canadian so honoured. Nine months later, when Fox died, flags across the land dropped to half mast, though no official order went out and the youth had never held public office.

These events showed Canadians and their concepts of public honours in the very best light. But what is represented by medals and formal orders? How are they perceived by those receiving — and those denied — such recognition? What do they say about societies past and present — and about ourselves as a nation? The case of Terry Fox is unique, yet it illustrates much about this nation and its current system of public honours. Our highest awards (the Order of Canada and the Canadian Bravery Decorations) have been shared between civil and military authorities, although we have also created uniquely military honours (the Order of Military Merit and the Military Valour Decorations) and others that have been instituted with

both civil and military divisions (the Meritorious Service Decorations).

There are, of course, many types of honours bestowed by a vast array of authorities. The Nobel Prize in Literature and an Olympic gold medal in the high jump are both internationally recognized and honoured awards; the Meritorious Service Cross or Star of Courage may be respected in Canada but unknown elsewhere. All four are represented by visible symbols — the medals or medallions that accompany their award. Other honours come with less visible emblems — bestowal of the title “Queen’s Counsel” (now largely abandoned) enables recipients to wear a silk gown in court and to place the letters “QC” on their business cards and letterhead — but bring no direct material rewards or baubles. Yet men and women have sought these honours.

An explanation as to why people crave such honours or seek to bestow them on others lies more in the realm of psychology than history. The reasons are certainly related to elitism (the wish of some to be recognized above their fellow citizens) and deference (the willingness of many to see some of their number exalted). The fact remains that even regimes professing egalitarian ideals have ultimately reverted to hierarchial practices. Thus, the French Revolution, preaching “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” swept aside the symbols of the old regime including all the honours and decorations that had been bestowed by monarchs. Nevertheless, in an era of constant war, even the First Republic conceded that heroic defenders of the Revolution should be rewarded. Initially this was done through grants of money or symbolic weapons. On 4 May 1802, however, First Consul Napoleon Bonaparte established the Legion of Honour; on 18 May 1804, as Emperor Napoleon, he revised the system along lines which would survive the fall of emperors, kings and republics alike. The Legion of Honour, with its grades, symbols, and emphasis on meritorious service to the state, was duly copied by nations as diverse as Turkey and the United States.

Ideally, the bestowal of honours recognizes *experience* and *excellence*. Medals are one way of doing this, but not the only way. Through much of history, soldiers were rewarded by being given the sack of cities. Their generals might also share in the spoils of war, but could equally be accorded laurel crowns and triumphal parades before being retired. In medieval times, those who distinguished themselves might be knighted in the field (an early form of battlefield commission), issued heraldic arms, or (in the

case of commanders) granted estates from the Royal largesse (often lands seized from the losing side).

The origins of European concepts in honours and awards date from the Crusades and the establishment of Religious Orders of Chivalry, commencing with the Order of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem (founded circa A.D. 1113–1118). These were followed by such groups as the Order of the Knights Templars and the Order of Teutonic Knights. All these began in the eastern Mediterranean and eventually spread to other regions. In Spain, where Christians and Moslems fought long for the peninsula, there arose several local Religious Orders of Chivalry, including the Order of Calatrava and the Order of St. James of the Sword. These groups performed many tasks, including protecting pilgrims and sacred sites. The manner of their organization, with systematic division into various grades and standardized symbols that distinguished one rank from another while setting all members apart from the general community, inspired subsequent honours systems.¹

In the mid-14th century a series of secular orders began to develop modelled after some of their religious predecessors. The first of these was the Order of the Garter (founded circa 1348), limited in numbers and initially restricted to persons of noble birth whom the monarch (Edward III) wished to honour for services, be they military, diplomatic, administrative or advisory. Other states followed with their secular orders. Countries did not confine themselves to a single order; in Britain, for example, while the Order of the Garter was considered the highest such honour, associated lesser orders were established. Some of these were for people associated with specific regions (the Order of St. Patrick in Ireland and the Order of the Thistle in Scotland).²

The development of military honours coincided with increased discipline within armies and restrictions on spoilage and pillage. Soldiers were discouraged from seeking their own rewards; the state, however, substituted some of its own. These circumstances gave rise to the evolution both of military pensions and honours.

Yet even after the development of formal, hierarchial honours systems, other means of rewards were used, either by the state itself or by senior officials acting on their own initiative. General James Wolfe, for example, reputedly presented a pair of pistols to a staff officer, Captain Samuel Holland.³ The Legislative

Assembly of Lower Canada honoured a battle-scarred native son, Jean-Baptiste Rolette, by presenting him with an engraved sword, in recognition of his services on the Great Lakes during the War of 1812.

Other methods were used to reward physical courage; these were most often associated with civilians and came from private rather than governmental sources. Thus, when Abigail Becker saved the lives of mariners who had been shipwrecked off Long Point, Lake Erie (1854) she received £50 from Queen Victoria, \$500 from seamen based in Buffalo, New York, plus medals from the New York Life Saving Benevolent Association and the Royal Humane Society.⁴ Mariners who rescued people at sea were frequently rewarded with cash gifts, sextants and spy glasses.

Medals and titles were difficult for colonists to secure during the early British regime; the accepted (and available) symbols of power were militia commissions, appointments to the magistracy, and election to the legislature.⁵ Nevertheless, a few imperial honours did come the way of Canadians. An early person so recognized was Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Michel d'Arumberry de Salaberry, victor of the Battle of Chateauguay, made a Companion of the Order of the Bath in 1816. Throughout the 19th century Canadians received scattered formal honours, sometimes at the initiative of the British government (knighthoods for Sir John A. Macdonald in 1867 and Sir Wilfrid Laurier in 1896), sometimes at the urging of the Governor General and the Prime Minister. Thus, in the aftermath of the Fenian Raids of 1870, five militia lieutenant-colonels were made Companions of the Order of St. Michael and St. George for services rendered in repulsing the intruders at Eccles Hill.⁶ Prime ministers used their limited influence with the Crown to employ honours as instruments of statecraft. Their freedom of action was restricted, however. Imperial honours were rationed and could not be bartered easily, while the British government itself sometimes granted honours against the advice of Canadian ministers.⁷

At various times certain Canadians sought to have the imperial honours system either abolished or "Canadianized." In 1918 and 1919 the House of Commons passed resolutions which were aimed at cutting off grants of hereditary and titular honours — the so-called Nickle Resolutions. Their practical effect was the suspension of all formal state honours save those so loved by politicians — Privy Council and King's Counsel appointments. Formal honours

were revived by R. B. Bennett between 1933 and 1935, suppressed by Mackenzie King until 1942, and continued in very limited fashion after 1 July 1946.

The alternative — creation of a distinctive set of Canadian honours — was discussed periodically from 1866 onwards, supported by Governors General, numerous military officers, the Royal Society of Canada, at least one Parliamentary committee, and the Massey Commission. All came to naught, either because the government of the day was enamoured with British awards (Bennett), terrified of short-lived egalitarian forces sweeping the nation (Borden), philosophically suspicious of or hostile to honours (King) or utterly indifferent to them (St. Laurent).

The attitudes of Canadians themselves were more often favourable to honours than opposed. It is true that some fled from receiving them, or professed to be apathetic to those received. Sir Francis Hinckes, on being advised of his knighthood, reportedly said that it was all very well but he would have preferred cash. In 1934 these feelings were echoed by another Canadian; Lester Pearson, on learning that he was to be made an Officer, Order of the British Empire, asked R. B. Bennett if the honour might be set aside in favour of an upward civil service classification with a corresponding raise in pay.⁸

Nevertheless, the greater number of honours were accepted gladly and respected by the public at large. The knighting of Sir Charles F. Fraser in 1915 recognized a champion of services for blind Canadians.⁹ When publisher William J. Gage was knighted in 1918, he was being honoured for generous philanthropy, particularly in the battle against tuberculosis. Following the suspension of honours, prime ministers received many letters urging their restoration and nominating deserving citizens. Bennett's revival of honours in 1933 — 15 Canadians knighted and almost 200 lesser honours awarded to others — was greeted with great praise by the press for the quality of appointments. Thus, the *Ottawa Citizen* (no friend of the Prime Minister) admitted that: "So far as this New Years list is concerned, no exception can be taken to the Canadian names included. In every instance they have given public service worthy of such honourable recognition."¹⁰

Those receiving honours, even when declaring modesty, have expressed their delight and pride. In July 1942, for example, Flight Sergeant Thomas O. McIlquham reported that on learning he had been awarded the Distinguished

Flying Medal, he had felt shaken, although he was equally pleased with a telegram from the mayor of Carleton Place (his home town), marking "the proudest moment of his life."¹¹ Others have noted that among RCAF aircrew, the subject of awards was often discussed. Spencer Dunmore, in his history of a Second World War formation, No. 6 (RCAF) Group, concluded:

There is little doubt that many airmen craved medals and deliberately sought them, usually at the risk of their own lives and those of fellow crew. Although Canadian and British servicemen scoffed at the American practice of awarding medals for relatively minor accomplishments, it probably did (and does) a good job for morale.¹²

Further proof of the seriousness of awards can be found in our daily newspapers. Obituaries for veterans regularly list their decorations, evidence that 50 years onwards, they (or their families) wish their accomplishments to be publicly noted and remembered.

There have been those who have gratefully accepted medals and honours as official endorsements of their own organizations and team efforts. On being appointed a Commander, Order of the British Empire in 1934, Sister M. A. Piché, Superintendent General (Mother Superior of the Grey Nuns), wrote to Prime Minister R. B. Bennett, thanking him for the honour that she deemed to be recognition for the charitable efforts of her Order.¹³ Similar sentiments from a very different set of circumstances were those of Company Sergeant Major Charles C. Martin, a much-decorated Canadian soldier, who wrote in his memoirs:

Every man in that attack deserved the highest award a country can give and the award they gave me belongs to everyone. The individual gets and wears the medal, but always with the feeling that he's wearing it very much in honour of others who did so much.¹⁴

Needless to say, senior military personnel have generally looked favourably upon honours and medals. Their utility was expressed by one RCAF officer in 1943:

If the right individual is elected, recommended and subsequently receives an award, the morale and esprit de corps of the entire personnel on the station will receive impetus. It also brings to realization the fact that the airmen or officers who have, of necessity, been stationed in Canada can achieve awards for meritorious service and devotion to duty.¹⁵

The officer who expressed these views in 1943 was replaced in 1971 by a staff officer who explained the need for honours in more obtuse, bureaucratic terms:

The institution of the Order of Military Merit in three degrees will provide the Canadian Forces with a proven management tool which can be applied to all levels of military endeavour as a reward for both outstanding service of the greatest responsibility as well as exceptional devotion to duty at the lowest levels. Thus those who are rewarded for their efforts, no matter their station, will enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that their conspicuous contribution has been recognized publicly and officially. The Order of Military Merit will also serve as a concrete goal for servicemen to aspire to, and so encourage professional excellence at all levels of the Forces.¹⁶

In fact, one is hard pressed to find people today who profess to despise the honours they have received. A rare example is that of a Canadian who, in 1963, attempted to return his MBE (Member, Order of the British Empire) when he learned that the Beatles had received the same honour.

It is also evident that people not only seek honours for themselves but for their fellow citizens. Correspondence in the National Archives of Canada indicates that between 1946 and 1966, when there was a virtual ban on service (as opposed to bravery) awards for civilians, many people petitioned that individuals be publicly recognized for contributions to their community and nation. The official reply — that such honours were not then being granted, or were being allowed only for acts of bravery — was not always understood and in one notable instance was hotly resented. In 1952 several letters sent to the Secretary of State urged that a 94-year-old country doctor in Prince Edward Island be made an Officer in the Order of the British Empire. When informed of the official policy, Bishop A. A. Sinnott angrily wrote:

One might be justified in believing that a Doctor who has practiced his profession for almost 70 years and is the oldest living practitioner in the British Empire has done something to save human lives. The policy of the Canadian Government is that a man who saves a tomcat from drowning has rendered greater service and is entitled to recognition. What an absurdity!¹⁷

In 1943 the Canadian government instituted the Canada Medal, and then failed to award it to anyone.¹⁸ No effort was made to devise

Fig. 1
 Cross of Valour: *The most prestigious of three bravery awards instituted in 1972, this honour has been bestowed only 17 times to date; three recipients were serving military personnel, one was a retired army officer, and the balance were ordinary Canadians showing extraordinary heroism. (Courtesy National Museum of Canada)*



uniquely Canadian honours. Inertia was almost certainly the main reason that Canada delayed establishing her own system of state honours; nationalism, patriotism, sentimentality and a leader with a plan brought about their creation. Ostensibly modest and egalitarian, Prime Minister Lester Pearson nevertheless was determined to forge Canadian unity by every means available. His tools included internal diplomacy, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, and every symbol within reach, be it the flag, "O Canada" or the name of the national airline. In 1966 he proposed to his Cabinet that distinctive Canadian honours be created; in April 1967 he reported their institution to the House of Commons; on 1 July 1967 the first Companions of the Order of Canada were announced.

Since then the Canadian honours system has been modified and expanded to a bewildering degree. The Order of Canada, as cast in 1967, was changed radically in 1972, when three grades were established (Companion, Officer and Member). In addition, three distinctive bravery awards were created: the Cross of Valour (Fig. 1); the Star of Courage; and the Medal of Bravery. In the same year a three-tiered Order of Military Merit was added. In subsequent years there have been other honours instituted. August 1983 saw the creation of the Police Exemplary Service Medal, followed by the Corrections Exemplary Service Medal (June 1984), the Fire Services Exemplary Service Medal (August 1985), the Canadian Coast Guard Exemplary Service Medal (October 1990) and the Emergency Medical Services Exemplary Service Medal (July 1994). All recognize 20 years of meritorious service in high-risk professions related to public protection. The medals employ

a symbol related to the specific services; the Corrections Exemplary Service Medal is modelled on the collar and hat badges worn by members of the Canadian Penitentiary Service (a key and a torch signifying security and education) while the Canadian Coast Guard Exemplary Service Medal was inspired by the badges worn on Coast Guard uniforms.

In addition to these there have been the Meritorious Service Decorations (established in 1984, revised and expanded in 1991), now comprising a Cross and a Medal and awarded in military and civil divisions. Prolonged lobbying by service and veterans' groups resulted in a formal revival of the Victoria Cross (whether, in fact, it had ever been defunct is open to question). It is, however, to be a *Canadian* Victoria Cross. It closely resembles the original Victoria Cross, but the inscription on the back, *Pro Valore* (For Valour) neatly sidesteps the matter of official languages by using Latin.

The new Victoria Cross is to be accompanied by two other decorations, the Star of Military Valour and the Medal of Military Valour, open to all ranks; the awards are based on the degree of hazard. These are patterned after the earlier Star of Courage and Medal of Bravery series, with minor differences. The Star of Courage is a silver star of four points inscribed with "Courage" on the reverse while the Cross of Military Valour is a gold star of four points with *Pro Valore* on the reverse. Unlike the earlier bravery awards, the military valour decorations are specifically for courage "in the presence of the enemy," i.e. combat situations. However, "enemy" is so defined that combat itself has a broad meaning that could include peace-keeping situations or even prison riots; specifically, "enemy" is defined as a hostile armed force, and includes armed mutineers, armed rebels, armed rioters and armed pirates.

Recent years have also brought a trickle of new medals for services rendered in far-off lands. On 3 June 1991, Letters Patent were published for an insignia denoting Mentions in Despatches. On 17 June 1991, the government announced two new campaign medals — a Canadian Volunteer Service Medal for Korea, to add to the two medals already held by Korean War veterans (the United Nations Service Medal, Korea which was instituted in 1954, and the Canadian Korean War Medal dating from 1951) plus the Gulf and Kuwait Medal. On 28 November 1991, a new Queen's Medal for Champion Shot was instituted superceding previous shooting medals for forces personnel.

Medals themselves often incorporate considerable heraldic traditions. The insignia and medals associated with the Order of St. John of Jerusalem (most frequently represented by members of the St. John Ambulance Corps) includes an eight-pointed star on a black field. This dates back to 1023 when wealthy merchants of the Republic of Amalfi (a maritime city-state in southern Italy) purchased land in Palestine for the establishment of a Crusaders' hospital. The grateful monks who actually administered the institution took as their badge the insignia of their benefactor state.¹⁹

In spite of the prestige associated with the Victoria Cross (Fig. 2), that particular medal is remarkable for being plain and unpretentious — a simple bronze cross inscribed "For Valour" on the reverse. It contrasts sharply with its complex American counterpart, the Congressional Medal of Honour. Awards created afterwards have often been much more elaborate. The George Cross and George Medal both bear a figure of St. George in combat with the famous dragon.

In recent years certain medals designed in Britain have been adapted for Canadian issue. The British and Commonwealth Service Medal, authorized in 1951, was issued in modified form to Canadians; it included the word "Canada" on the reverse. Similarly, medals such as the Queen's Medal for Champion Shots and Queen Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee Medal began as British designs but were modified for Canadian issue.

Indeed, those who formulate honours systems and design the medals or insignia that accompany them work with a limited number of totemic symbols. These may be real or mythical animals (lions, eagles, unicorns, the phoenix), botanical items (national flowers or trees), figures (Britannia) or other devices (spears, stars, moons, harps, a spinning wheel), combined with national colours, coats of arms and national mottos (*E pluribus unum* or "Advance Australia").

Canada traditionally borrowed much of its symbolism from France and Britain, which was acceptable until the last half-century when the borrowed or inherited totems were deemed to be more divisive than unifying. Unfortunately, one of Canada's better-known symbols, the beaver, has not lent itself to heraldic representation; cartoonists such as Roy Peterson have made the animal more comedic than inspiring. Only two instances are known of attempts to employ the beaver in proposed Canadian honours. The first (in which the



Fig. 2
Major Paul Triquet with his Victoria Cross: As a Captain with the Royal 22^e Régiment, Triquet won his VC at Casa Barardi, near Ortona, Italy, in December 1943. Canadian authorities subsequently kept him away from further action; live heroes were more valuable in promoting bond sales and recruiting. (Courtesy National Museum of Canada)

animal was shown passively) was the Upper Canada Preserved Medal, 1813, struck by the Loyal and Patriotic Society of Upper Canada, which had been formed early in the War of 1812 to relieve wartime distress and commemorate conspicuous bravery. The medal, described in a Society Resolution was to show:

A straight between two lakes, on the north side a Beaver (emblem of peaceful industry), the ancient armorial bearing of Canada. In the background an English lion slumbering. On the south side of the straight, an American eagle planing in the air, as if checked from seizing the Beaver by the presence of the Lion.

Recipients were to be recommended by officers of the militia. In all, 62 gold and 550 silver medals were struck, but controversies arose over their cost and the authority that would grant them. The medals were eventually melted down. When the National Archives of Canada exhibited an example, it was actually a modern re-strike, made from the original moulds.²⁰

The second serious proposal for use of the beaver in a distinctive Canadian honours system was directly related to the growing sense of Canadian identity on First World War battlefields. On 30 March 1916 an unidentified Canadian Expeditionary Force staff officer suggested "the creation of a Canadian Order, either granted for military services, or for military and civil, and given by the Canadian Government." This went to Major-General John Wallace Carson (a crony of the Minister of Militia, Sir Sam Hughes) who

Fig. 3 (right)

Order of Canada:
Creation of the Order of Canada in 1967 was one of several steps instituted by prime minister Lester B. Pearson to "Canadianize" national symbols including the flag, anthem, and national airline. (Courtesy National Museum of Canada)



Fig. 4 (far right)

Star of Courage: Stars per se feature in many awards, flags and other national icons; they have been associated with nations as diverse as the People's Republic of China, the United States and Israel. The design of the Star of Courage took into account Canada's position as a Polar nation. (Courtesy National Museum of Canada)



endorsed it and sent it to the minister. This was discussed at the Acting Overseas Sub-Militia Council (8 September 1916) which recommended to Hughes the creation of a Canadian order styled on the Star of India, to be called "The Order of the Beaver and Maple Leaf" or "The Star of Canada." It would be "something for Canadians to work for and fully appreciate as an all Canadian Order." No more was heard of this, due in large measure to re-organization, suppression of the Sub-Militia Council (28 October 1916), the firing of Carson and later the forced resignation of Hughes.²¹

Given the difficulties of the beaver, Canada has relied heavily on the maple leaf as the inspiration for awards; the national coat of arms has also been used, but it incorporates many of the old symbols that have been deemed divisive. Political acceptability has affected even the naming of awards. In 1866 Lord Monck suggested a Canadian order of chivalry, to be called the "Order of St. Lawrence," the same term used in a proposal to the same effect in 1917. By 1951, however, nomenclature referring to that noble saint was considered unacceptable on two counts — too regional in tone and too closely resembling the name of the prime minister of the day.

In spite of these restrictions, the current Canadian honours display interesting features and bear witness to the ingenuity of their principal designer. When the government instituted, in 1967, the Order of Canada (Fig. 3), design of the actual decoration was entrusted to Flight Sergeant Bruce Beatty, who was at that time employed in the Directorate of Ceremonial, Department of National Defence. The prime minister (Lester B. Pearson) laid

out one directive — the ribbons associated with the insignia should include the same colours that were on the Canadian flag (red and white) and in the same proportions.

By Beatty's account, he was walking on a snowy night when he thought of using a snowflake as the basis of his design. He consulted a scientific treatise on the subject, which stated that snowflakes exhibit great variety but with a characteristic common to all — they are hexagonal. The insignia of the Order of Canada was subsequently modelled on one of the illustrations in the treatise.²²

Beatty was subsequently called upon to design other Canadian decorations, including the three gallantry awards created in 1972 (the Cross of Valour, Star of Courage and Medal of Bravery). The Star of Courage (Fig. 4) was particularly Canadian — a four-pointed device representing Polaris as it is often depicted in artwork and heraldry. When pressed further on this design, Beatty adds that a five-pointed star would have been too "American", while a six-pointed star would have been taken to be the Star of David.²³

Medals associated with Canadians demonstrate the changing nature of their country. The North West Canada Medal, for example, issued in 1886 to troops who had put down the Metis and Indian rebellion the previous year, was a unilingual campaign award, even though units from Quebec had participated alongside those from Ontario, the Maritimes and the West. The fact that the Minister of Militia (Sir Adolphe Caron) had a hand in its design simply underlines the degree to which some French-Canadian ministers overlooked the sensitivities of their constituents.

The 1943 Canadian Volunteer Service Medal (CVSM) reflected very different thinking (Fig 5). Although the medal was not struck until after the war, its basic design was defined at the outset. It was to be "circular in form and in silver... [and] bear on the obverse marching figures representing the three Services with the inscription "CANADA" above and "VOLUNTARY SERVICE VOLONTAIRE" below. On the reverse the Canadian Coat of Arms."²⁴

Two features of the medal were already apparent from this description; it was to recognize bilingualism years before the public became conscious of it, and it was to employ only *Canadian* symbols; the monarch was conspicuous by his absence from the medal. Moreover, when the CVSM was finally designed (by noted artist Charles Comfort) it incorporated six marching figures representing not merely the army, navy and air force but their *female* components. This was an early and remarkable numismatic recognition of women's contributions, particularly since they had constituted only about five per cent of the Canadian forces.

In 1950 King George VI declared that no further awards were to be made or instituted for Second World War services. This policy blocked attempts by special interest veterans to be accorded particular recognition, since tampering with clearly British or Imperial awards would be unthinkable. As Canada's unique wartime medal, however, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal has proven useful to the government in dealing with discontented veterans. In 1993 the regulations governing the CVSM were amended to extend eligibility to Canadian merchant seamen, who had long complained of inequitable treatment on several counts, including veterans' benefits. Dieppe veterans (a strong group given the emotional trauma associated with the Dieppe Raid) also clamoured for a special mark of distinction; in 1994 the Canadian government bowed to their pressure and directed that a special "Dieppe" Bar be issued, to be worn on the CVSM.

Sometimes the ribbons were designed haphazardly; on other occasions they were laid down with significant colours and patterns. The ribbons associated with the Campaign Stars of 1939–1945 incorporated considerable symbolic significance. The Aircrew Europe Star (awarded for a minimum of two months operational flying over Europe, between 3 September 1939 and 5 June 1944) had a ribbon of pale blue with black edges and a yellow stripe on either side, symbolizing the



Fig. 5
Canadian Volunteer Service Medal: Instituted in 1943, the design was executed after the war by one of Canada's most distinguished artists, Charles Comfort (1900–1994) following directives laid down in the original Order in Council. (Courtesy National Museum of Canada)

continuous day and night services of the air forces. The Italy Star's ribbon carried five stripes of equal width (red-white-green-white-red) with the colours drawn from the Italian flag.²⁵

The stories associated with Canadian honours demonstrate how the design of ribbons may in turn be thoughtful or capricious. Bruce Beatty described the design of the ribbons for the 1972 gallantry awards as an instance of the latter. Approval of the designs was in the hands of an inter-departmental committee whose members neglected to think of ribbons until the decorations themselves had been approved. Prior to a key committee meeting, Beatty decided that his proposed Cross, Star and Medal would look better if displayed with a ribbon, and a roll of red ribbon was at hand. He mounted the medals with this, and to distinguish them he took some blue paint and splashed two blue stripes on one ribbon (for the Star of Courage) and three blue stripes on another (for the Medal of Bravery). To his surprise the committee, when approving the decorations, also approved his interim ribbons.²⁶

Beatty was also involved in the design of the Order of Military Merit. The Chief of Defence Staff, General J. V. Allard, expected that the Order would be in five grades, and strongly suggested that as the senior member of the Order he should wear a blue sash. Beatty demurred; such insignia would too closely resemble that of the Order of the Garter, and would not contrast sharply with the dark green dress uniform that had recently become Canadian issue. To resolve these problems, he suggested that the blue sash have gold borders. In its final form, the Order of Military Merit had only three grades (and no sash) but the insignia would be blue with gold edges.²⁷

Once one learns the background to a ribbon it becomes easier to "read" a set. The Canadian Centennial Medal (1967) incorporates the national colours with wide red edges and four narrow white stripes; the latter signify four quarter-centuries. The Canada 125 Medal (1992) has the national motto engraved on the medal itself; the ribbon has blue edges signifying the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and five narrow stripes matching the elapsed quarter-centuries.

In the Commonwealth tradition, gallantry medals awarded a second or third time are denoted by a bar worn on the ribbon of the medal or a small rosette worn on the ribbon on a tunic. In the case of some (though not all) campaign medals, an inscribed clasp worn on the ribbon indicates participation in a particular battle or segment of a campaign. The North West Canada Medal, with its single clasp inscribed "Saskatchewan" is an example. Twenty-six clasps were issued in conjunction with the Queen's South Africa Medal (1899-1902); Lieutenant-Colonel (later General Sir) William Otter, who led the Royal Canadian Regiment in South Africa in 1900, was entitled to four such clasps (Cape Colony, Paardeburg, Dreifontein and Johannesburg).²⁸ More recently, Canadian personnel who have served more than one tour of duty in places like Cyprus wear a numbered clasp on their ribbons indicating the frequency of their tours.

The establishment and evolution of Canadian honours reflects historic forces that have shaped our country and continue to operate within society. As a nation we long accepted the British system of state awards; for much of the 20th century that same system was rejected in peacetime without substituting Canadian equivalents. This mirrored Canadian uncertainties; we knew what we were *not*; but it was more difficult to define what we *were*.

Rising Canadian nationalism, however, created a need to recognize domestic achievements, without waiting for either British or American approbation. Centennial year was both a symptom and a cause; it is not surprising that

Canadian state honours were launched in 1967. Unlike earlier initiatives, however, they were expanded and pursued, in large measure because Canadians *liked* nominating and honouring their heroes. The Order of Canada bestowed on Terry Fox was fitting, deserved and popular. The Cross of Valour awarded to René Jalbert was equally fitting; he confronted, calmed and eventually disarmed a gunman in Quebec's National Assembly in the course of what was probably the most publicized heroic act in Canada. Television cameras that normally recorded legislative debates filmed Jalbert for 50 minutes of his three-hour exploit.²⁹

All heroes are unique, but the Canadian honours system is not. The same forces that led to our array of awards have been active in other countries. Australia provides a striking example. Our sister Dominion has also been undergoing changes, including loosened ties with Britain, evolution into a multiethnic society, and increasingly integrated relations with geographic neighbours. The Order of Australia was established in 1975, together with the Australian Bravery Decorations (which included a Cross of Valour and a Star of Courage). In this respect, Australia lagged about three to six years behind Canada. On the other hand, in creating particular military gallantry awards (including an "Australianized" Victoria Cross), that nation acted two years ahead of Canada.³⁰

At the same time, factors other than cosmic forces continue to operate upon the Canadian honours system. Unstated, but evident in each new honours list, is the need to balance geography and professions. Moreover, particular groups have succeeded in drawing attention to themselves. Reference has already been made to the Dieppe Bar for the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal. The institution of a new Korean War Medal for Canadian veterans of that war is further evidence that the honours system does not operate in a political vacuum. This simply underlines the importance of these honours. Medals are significant artifacts precisely because they reflect the society that creates them, preserves them, and exalts their recipients.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The writer wishes to acknowledge generous assistance rendered by the staff of the Chancellery, Government House.

NOTES

1. See Vaclav Mericka, *Book of Orders and Decorations* (Toronto: Hamlyn, 1975), 29–32.
2. *Ibid.*, 33–34.
3. The pistols, now held by the McCord Museum, Montreal, were supposedly used in a 1797 duel in which Holland's son and namesake was killed.
4. "Abigail Becker," *Encyclopedia Canadiana*, Volume I (Toronto: Grolier, 1970), Volume I, 352.
5. See J. K. Johnson, *Becoming Prominent: Regional Leadership in Upper Canada, 1791–1841* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989).
6. Militia General Order No. 1, issued in Montreal, 4 June 1870, and printed in *Report of the Department of Militia for 1870* (Parliamentary Sessional Paper No. 7, 1871).
7. A striking example is provided by the events of 1885. Macdonald had no objection to Major-General Frederick Middleton being knighted following the military campaign against Riel and insurgent natives; he felt, however, that the Minister of Militia, Adolphe Caron, was too junior a Cabinet Minister to be knighted and that such an honour would be resented by other ministers; over Macdonald's head, Caron was knighted.
8. Lester B. Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson*, Volume I (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 77–78.
9. See Borden Papers, microfilm C.241; letter from unidentified person to Lieutenant-Colonel E. A. Stanton, Military Secretary, Ottawa, 4 May 1915. The writer is transmitting Borden's views on a proposed Honours List; the Prime Minister personally suggests Fraser because he is a Maritimer (and the list lacks names from that region) as well as his "almost unaided exertions" on behalf of the blind. Borden prefers a knighthood, but suspects a CMG may be all that is available. In the same letter, Borden is reported as lamenting a lack of French-Canadian nominees; he had canvassed Quebec colleagues but had received no names.
10. *Ottawa Citizen*, 4 January 1934; see also the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 2 January 1934 for an equally favourable comment.
11. Biographical file, Directorate of History, Canadian Forces Headquarters.
12. Spencer Dunmore and William Carter, *Reap The Whirlwind: The Untold Story of 6 Group, Canada's Bomber Force in World War II* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991), 186.
13. Sister M. A. Piché to Bennett, June 4th, 1934, in National Archives of Canada, Bennett Papers, microfilm M.1068, folios 235954 to 235956.
14. Charles Cromwell Martin, *Battle Diary: From D-Day and Normandy to the Zuider Zee and VE* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1994), 129.
15. National Archives of Canada, Directorate of History file 181.009 D.1409, found in RG. 24, Volume 20598.
16. Report of the Working Group on Honours and Awards, February 8th, 1972, found in unnumbered file, "Honours and Awards, General," Volume 2, RG.24 Volume 20152.
17. National Archives of Canada, Secretary of State Records, RG.6 D.1 VOL.361, File 114-2-01-2, "Awards (Specific) — Order of the British Empire (Submissions)."
18. See H. A. Halliday, "Lost Honour: The Very Strange Story of the Canada Medal" *The Beaver* (August/September 1993).
19. G. W. L. Nicholson, *The White Cross in Canada: A History of the St. John Ambulance* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1967), 4; Strome Galloway, *The White Cross in Canada, 1883–1983* (Ottawa: National Printers, 1983), 4.
20. Bruce G. Wilson, *Records of Our History; Colonial Identities — Canada from 1760 to 1815* (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1988), 288. This is the catalogue of an exhibition organized that year by the National Archives.
21. Colonel A. Fortesque Duguid, "Historical Memorandum re Institution of a Distinctive Order for Canadian Award," November 9th, 1940, King Papers, folios 230591–92, microfilm H-1523; Carson to Hughes, April 7th, 1916, folio 230594, microfilm H-1523; Carson to Hughes, August 18th, 1916, folio 230595, microfilm H-1523; Carson to Hughes, September 29th, 1916, folio 230597, microfilm H-1523.
22. Interview with Bruce Beatty, February 6th, 1995.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Canadian Army Routine Order 3929, December 18th, 1943.
25. H. Taprell Dorling, *Ribbons and Medals* (London: Osprey, 1983), 68–69.
26. Beatty interview, February 6th, 1995.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Dorling, *op.cit.*, 58.
29. No man has ever been photographed in the act of winning the Victoria Cross; Charles Stacey, *The Victory Campaign* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1960), photo caption opposite page 274. The case of Jalbert is probably unique in world history — a man being filmed in the opening stages of an act leading to his nation's highest award for bravery.
30. *The Australian Honours System*, a booklet provided by the Australian High Commission. The Order of Australia began with five grades (as opposed to three now existing in the Order of Canada); this was reduced to four grades with the highest level, bestowing knighthood, was abolished in 1986.