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The “Canadian Virtual War Memorial” at Veterans Affairs Canada

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The “Canadian Virtual War Memorial” at Veterans Affairs Canada

Ken Reynolds

This note is the next instalment in a series of short pieces on Internet resources and tools available to researchers, writers and readers of Canadian military history. The author, Ken Reynolds, an historian with the Department of National Defence, also writes “The Cannon’s Mouth” blog <www.cannonsmouth.ca>.

The Veterans Affairs Canada website <www.vac-acc.gc.ca> is a virtual goldmine of historical material, too much to cover in one instalment in this series. Among the many items created under the auspices of the department’s Canada Remembers cell is the Canadian Virtual War Memorial (CVWM) <www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=collections/virtualmem>. (Despite my reference solely to the English-language version of the project, it also exists fully *en français* on the Veterans Affairs site as the Mémorial virtuel de guerre du Canada – click *français* at the top of the website).

I’ve been using the memorial for a long time now for professional work and for personal projects and find it an extremely useful tool. In a sense, the CVWM is the electronic counterpart of the Books of Remembrance <www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=collections/books>, the seven memorial volumes listing the names of Canadians who fought and died serving Canada that are beautifully displayed in the Memorial Chamber in the Peace Tower in Ottawa. The CVWM is, however, much more than just an electronic “copy” of the Books of Remembrance.

The goal of the CVWM is to provide information about each of the approximately 116,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders killed while on wartime, peace support or other operational or training duties. As a result, the memorial is based on individual entry pages, each listing the name and rank of the deceased military member and the date they died. Information on the individual’s military service – service number, age, unit and

formation (this section is in need of revision as the definitions often don’t match the category of units or formations listed) and honours and awards – follows.

After that comes “additional information,” typically a link to an image of the page of the Book of Remembrance in which the person is commemorated. Sometimes there is also genealogical information or details concerning honours and awards. If photographs, documents or other electronic images have been submitted to the CVWM, or located by its researchers, they will be found in this section as a “digital photo collection.” This can be a very interesting and informative collection of information for an individual fatality, some of the collections providing basic, yet immediate, research assistance. Visitors are encouraged to submit further imagery for placement in the individual entry.

Finally, there is the “burial information” section listing the cemetery in which the person is buried, his or her grave location (with an image of the cemetery’s layout) and directions to the cemetery.

The CVWM website provides two types of search functions – basic and advanced – in order to access the individual entries. The basic search is exactly that, with boxes for “surname” (mandatory), “given name” (optional), “initial” (optional) and “year of death” (optional). This type of search is best used when the visitor knows exactly who they’re searching for in the memorial database. This type of search is less useful when



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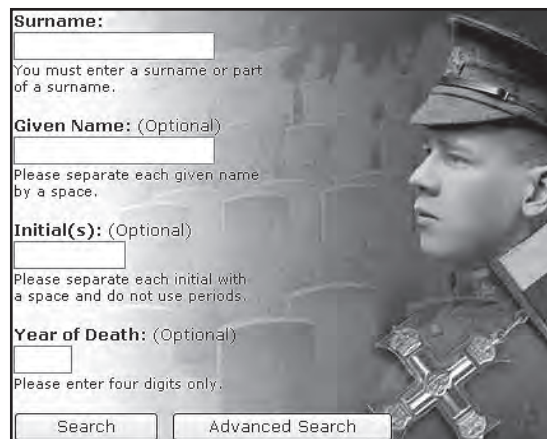
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CANADIAN VIRTUAL WAR MEMORIAL

This site contains a registry of information about the graves and memorials of more than 116,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders who served valiantly and gave their lives for their country. Included on this site are the memorials of more than 1500 soldiers who died in service to Canada since the Korean War, including peacekeeping and other operations. The site also contains digital images of photographs and personal memorabilia about individual Canadians. The purpose of the Canadian Virtual War Memorial is to recognize and keep alive the memory of the achievements and sacrifices made by those who served Canada in the defence of freedom and so have contributed to the development of Canada as a nation.

the search information is less certain, or if the researcher wishes to look at all the results for a common surname (the search results will only display the first 500 records found) or all those for a specific year. One aspect of the basic search I find particularly appealing is the fact that it appears at the bottom of each webpage within the memorial, making subsequent searches more efficient than having to go back to a specified search page.



Surname:

 You must enter a surname or part of a surname.

Given Name: (Optional)

 Please separate each given name by a space.

Initial(s): (Optional)

 Please separate each initial with a space and do not use periods.

Year of Death: (Optional)


 Please enter four digits only.

The advanced search is of more use to the historical researcher as it permits a wider range of flexibility. Please note – the 500 maximum return on search results still exists, although the result in such a case notes: “If you require complete results, please contact cvwm@vac-acc.gc.ca”. The advanced search pages allow for searches based on a specific “date of death,” so if you want to see the CVWM entries for Canadian fatalities on 1 July 1916, for example, entering that date – and no surnames – will display a list of 298 records found, each with a link to their individual page. The advanced search also allows for a “date range – date of death” query where the researcher inputs “from” and “to” dates and any other refining information available. Obviously using this search for everyone killed in 1944, for example, will return more than 500 results. However, combining 1 January 1944 to 31 December 1944 with the surname “Johnson” will provide a list of the 68 Johnsons killed in 1944. The final extra search possibility on the advanced search page is “unit / regiment,” a drop-down list of the Canadian, British





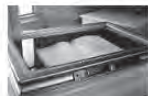

and other units, formations, corps and branches with which Canadians were serving when they died. Extracted from the “service detail” portions of the individual entries in the CVWM, this list can take some getting used to in terms of its structure and the repetition of some unit names with a variation of the unit title. Naturally, any of the refined search abilities on the advanced search page can be combined if the researcher has that information.

As the CVWM website notes, the “purpose of the Canadian Virtual War Memorial is to recognize and keep alive the memory of the achievements and sacrifices made by those who served Canada in the defence of freedom and so

have contributed to the development of Canada as a nation.” The CVWM undoubtedly fulfils that purpose. Beyond that it also provides a useful tools for students of Canadian military history.



Each book acts as a record for all of the names of the Canadians who fought and lost their lives in each of the six wars.

First World War 	Second World War 	Newfoundland 
The Korean War 	South African War / Nile Expedition 	The Merchant Navy 
In the Service of Canada 