



A drawing of the Never Forgotten National Memorial, called Mother Canada, was supposed to be built in Cape Breton to honour all Canadian soldiers killed in war and who were buried overseas. But Environment Canada and Parks Canada pulled the plug on it.

## FEDS KILL IDEA TO ERECT CAPE BRETON'S NEVER FORGOTTEN NATIONAL MEMORIAL ... SLOPPILY!

Tony Trigiani, the man who spent over \$1-million trying to create a monument for Canadian soldiers killed in war and buried overseas, deserves more than an early morning phone call from a bureaucrat cancelling the project.



By LEWIS MACKENZIE

It was April 2009 and he was on a pilgrimage and close to his birth place in Italy, but because he left for Canada when he was only four years old he really didn't remember very much at all. Perhaps the cemetery off to the right was there back in 1950 when his parents left to settle in Canada, but he didn't recognize it now some 60 years later. It was so immaculate in its layout he decided to pay a short visit. Approaching the gate entrance the sign announced it was a Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery. On entry, he respectfully approached the first headstone which read, "Pte. Ted Truskoski, 17, Canada." Seventeen! He thought perhaps such a young age for a soldier was highly unusual—until he walked along row after row of Canadians killed in the Battle of Ortona over the Christmas period in 1943 and realized many, too many, including a 16-year-old soldier from Prince Edward Island, were high school aged. It was only a year later that he was told that Ted had actually lied about his age and that he too was only 16 when killed.

Tony Trigiani now realized that many young Canadians had travelled more than 7,000 km from their homes to purge a brutal enemy and liberate his home country. He made a silent pledge that he would find a way to honour their sacrifice and the sacrifice of all Canadians who crossed the oceans to help others recapture their freedom.

His research revealed that more than 114,000 Canadians are buried in 2,500 Commonwealth cemeteries around the world. This figure does not include the thousands lost or buried at sea. They will rest there forever but perhaps a specific monument here in Canada could welcome home their souls and provide a quiet place in Canada where relatives and friends could remember, away from the hustle and bustle of urban areas where so many cenotaphs are located.

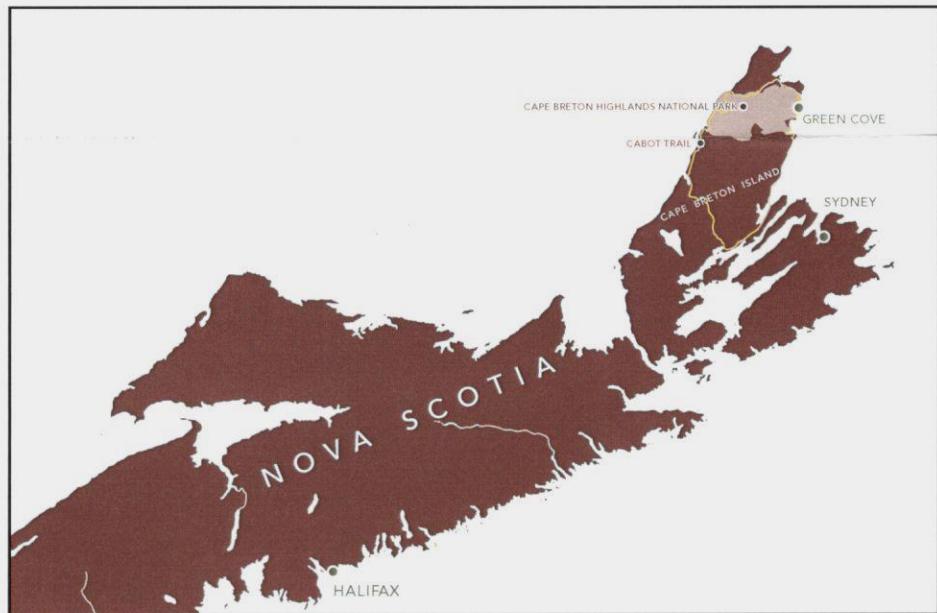
Later in 2009, he discussed the idea with a number of veterans he had supported financially during the fundraising campaign for the Juno Beach Centre in Normandy. Unbeknownst to him one of the well-known D-Day veterans, Bruce Melanson, contacted Veterans Affairs in Charlottetown, P.E.I., alerting them to Trigiani's idea of a monument. In April 2010, Trigiani was contacted by a senior official in Veterans Affairs and at that time a senior official with Parks Canada joined the discussions expressing interest and support for the concept.

A subsequent feasibility study, funded by Trigiani, concluded that there would be country-wide support for such a memorial. I was contacted for my opinion and was so impressed with the concept that I came on board as an ambassador for the project and was pleased that retired Col. Alain Pellerin, a good friend for many years, agreed to join Trigiani's team as a fellow ambassador.

The next step was to find a site. Considering the great majority of our fallen were buried in Europe it was decided that Canada's East Coast would be the closest and best location, particularly Nova Scotia, where the majority of troops dispatched to two World Wars embarked. A number of sites in Cape Breton were suggested by Parks Canada and Trigiani visited each one of them including Lakie's Head in Cape Breton Highlands National Park which he favoured.

At a meeting with Parks Canada in Halifax in 2011 Trigiani expressed his desire to erect the memorial at Lakie's Head. Parks Canada felt the site would be too small and recommended he return to Cape Breton and visit Green Cove, also in the National Park. Admiring its beauty from the tiny adjacent parking lot, in Tony's words the site "spoke to me" and he imagined a statue with open arms facing the sea, line of sight to the Vimy Memorial in France, welcoming our fallen home.

A month later, Trigiani made a more detailed presentation at Veterans Affairs headquarters in Charlottetown attended by an even more senior representative from Parks Canada who flew in from Ottawa strictly for the meeting. The presentation included a design for the monument based on Canada Bereft, the mourning figure on the magnificent Vimy Memorial in France. The family of the sculptor, Walter Seymour Allward, gave their permission and plans were made to merely elevate the figure's head and raise her arm's signifying a symbolic welcoming home gesture for our fallen wherever they may lie.



## OPINION NEVER FORGOTTEN NATIONAL MEMORIAL

In February of 2012, Trigiani met with the minister of Veterans Affairs in Ottawa. The minister of the Environment joined the discussions as a keen supporter.

In July of 2013, we were advised by the minister of the Environment that Parks Canada was authorized to negotiate with the Never Forgotten National Memorial Foundation regarding building the memorial in Cape Breton Highlands National Park of Canada.

All costs for the construction and maintenance of the memorial would be private funds. Parks Canada granted the foundation \$100,000 to partially pay for a business plan including tourism forecasts and a website.

We naively assumed we were on a roll. A recent vice chairman of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Sir Alistair Irwin, graciously joined our foundation as co-chair. He would subsequently hand a copy of our foundation booklet to Prince Charles.

During the months that followed, a large number of well-known and respected Canadians joined the project as patrons. To name only a few: Margaret McCain, Brian Burke, Rex Murphy, Jean Charest, Frank McKenna, Paul Manson, Mila Mulroney, Roy McMurtry, Hugh Segal, Ian Tyson, Peter Stoffer, and numerous other Canadians of similar prestige.

Dr. Donald Julien, the executive director of the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, joined us as a patron ensuring the interests of the Confederacy would be an important part of the planning process.



Green Cove is located in Cape Breton Highlands National Park. The minister of Environment, as the responsible department for Parks Canada, was the lead agency for the project. A highly-respected individual who during his political career had been the minister of the Environment told me to prepare for glacial project progress as Parks Canada was the most byzantine organization he had ever encountered and had to deal with. We were to discover the hard way that he grossly understated his warning.

In order to proceed with the project Parks Canada required a basic impact analysis (BIA) be conducted at the site to address any environmental issues. Consultation with the local community was also a prerequisite and

something the foundation continued to push Parks Canada to arrange. The foundation's requests for public meetings started early in 2013 yet these were delayed by Parks Canada until Oct. 7, 2014. These requirements were completed with encouraging results. Critics at the town hall deliberations were outspoken, some from outside the province but they were in a distinct minority and a number of times were drowned out by the "yea" side's standing-ovations.

In July 2014, we were shocked to be advised by Parks Canada that we would have to pay for and undertake a detailed impact analysis (DIA), a much more comprehensive and expensive undertaking (plus of well over \$200,000) usually only required when there are serious concerns regarding the results of the simpler basic impact analysis, which was far from the case.

During the entire time from 2013 to 2016, it is essential to note that we were not able to start fundraising in the absence of a completed and positive DIA. It would have been inappropriate to solicit and accept significant private funds when we didn't have a licence of occupation ("building permit") which could only be issued on completion of the DIA process. Concurrent with this agonizing pause in proceedings our critics, in a well coordinated campaign to halt the project, gained momentum. While some were ideologically and environmentally opposed to the project and entitled to do so the many "facts" that were repeated ad nauseam by some were outright fabrications. To our dismay even editorials from influential news organizations joined the band wagon repeating false-truths and giving them inappropriate and unearned credibility.

## OPINION NEVER FORGOTTEN NATIONAL MEMORIAL

We were accused of planning construction within the park's restricted zone when we were clearly outside that zone. We were allegedly covering a unique (definition: "being the only one of its kind") rock formation when in fact the monument would partially cover 0.4 of a hectare on a suite of some 26,000 hectares up and down the coast. The creation of a parking lot for 300 cars was routinely quoted when the plans call for a mere 60. A "towering monstrosity" was a favourite criticism when the actual height at 20 meters in the current plan, pales in comparison to the Statue of Liberty at 45 metres and Christ the Redeemer in Brazil at 38 meters and is only a bit higher than the fiddle replica greeting the tour boats as they dock at Sydney harbour. Not satisfied with just "towering," an "ugly" monstrosity entered the debate.

This in spite of the fact that the monument's image was based on the design of Canada Bereft that won a competition with 160 entries in 1920 and now is an essential part of the Vimy Memorial in France. For heaven's sake even the government financially supported Vimy Foundation, which I have outspokenly supported along with six other charities assisting soldiers over the years turned their back on us even though our objectives coincided to honour our fallen. Out of nowhere, because they were aware of our intentions years earlier, trademarking "Mother Canada" got their knickers in a knot and they joined the cue of critics. What a shame, missing an opportunity for some synergy in honouring our fallen.

In the local area where what is affectionally referred to as North of Smokey and where the monument would stand, local resident Lisa MacLeod started a Facebook page that grew to thousands of followers and resulted in petitions totalling more than 1,100 signatures presented to the House on Jan. 28, 2016, by local Liberal MP Mark Eyking in a less than inspiring manner.

Perhaps the lowest blow of all was the accusation that Trigiani, the devious Toronto business man, would be flogging cheap trinkets in a gift shop and placing sponsor's signage on the monument site itself and had trade-marked the image of Mother Canada in his own self-interest. All of these vindictive comments never mentioning that the government's approval to build required that funds, in the millions, be provided for the long-term maintenance of the monument. One hundred per cent of the profits from the gift shop would go to the maintenance fund. Trademarking would avoid "cheap trinkets" on the market. The plans also clearly directed that there would be absolutely no sponsors or anyone else's signage on the monument site itself.

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Four years and thousands of dollars after commencing the process to complete the final DIA to the satisfaction of Parks Canada it was finally submitted on Feb. 4, 2016.

The following day, Feb. 5, Trigiani was advised on an early morning phone call that Parks Canada was withdrawing its support for the project and the monument would not be permitted to be built in the park.

All of us, including a large number of Cape Bretoners, are gutted with the termination of the government's support for the project. We are, however, embarrassed and angry regarding the disrespectful way a unique, yes unique, Canadian patriot was treated in the final days of the Never Forgotten National Memorial. Trigiani, with the purest of reasons and an unmatched dedication to this country and our fallen—having sacrificed his health and expended over a million dollars of his own money to underwrite a process made more expensive and time consuming each and every time Parks Canada inflicted another bureaucratic requirement—deserved so very much more than an early morning phone call from a bureaucrat displaying a shocking lack of insight regarding the project.

Once the previous government approved proceeding with the project in 2013, with the exception of Peter MacKay, we received little or any support from other ministers. In truth, they were speed bumps throughout the process. But to their credit, they had the decency to grant us an audience or respond to our letters.

At the very least, the current minister of the Environment should have invited Trigiani to her office to communicate her decision face to face, thank him for his patriotism and express regrets regarding the glacial decision-making process within Parks Canada. It is hoped that good manners alone will dictate such an invitation. After all it is 2016.

*Major-General Lewis MacKenzie is a retired Canadian general, author, and media commentator.  
The Hill Times*