

# Hold a state funeral for the last WWI veteran

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After the **Great War**, Canada was never the same. More than 600,000 of a population of barely eight million served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Of those, 60,000 were killed and another 154,000 wounded. Such losses are on a scale that Canadians today might find hard to fathom. Yet the enormous sacrifices made by our soldiers, and the fierce reputation they earned at places like Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele, not only helped to secure victory but earned Canada its place in the world.

Our living bond to the First World War has almost been severed. Only three veterans of that heroic Canadian army remain: Lloyd Clemett, 106, John Babcock, 106, and Dwight Wilson, 105. The government of Canada should commit now to provide a state funeral for the last of them.

A state funeral is the highest honour a country can offer any individual. But in this case, such a funeral would honour more than one man. Through him, it would honour all who served. So many men sacrificed so much for God, king and country during those terrible years, 1914 to 1918, and, despite the best efforts of veterans' organizations, so many passed away in recent decades without the accrual of honour they deserved. It is time Canadians owned up to the debt they owe that great generation, nearly passed. The way to accomplish that is not by a "national day of mourning" or a "day of commemoration" - - artificial constructs that would likely fall below the nation's radar -- but by a state funeral.

By tradition, state funerals are reserved for current or former governors-general, current or former prime ministers, or other eminences so designated by the government. This is one occasion when an exception to the rule is mandated. There are precedents. Australia held a federal state funeral for the last survivor of the Gallipoli campaign. Britain has not gone that far, but has announced that a national memorial service will be held after the death of the last known First World War veteran. That service will be held in Westminster Abbey and will be preceded by a memorial procession. It might not be called a state funeral, but it has most of the trappings.

There is but one way to impress upon the minds of every Canadian, old and young, the scale of what Canadian soldiers accomplished during the First World War. There is but one way to ensure that the concept of remembrance is more than a generalized duty to a proud military heritage and is recognized for what it is: a way to give thanks for the gift of freedom given many peoples and the attainment of nationhood for our own. And that is for Prime Minister Stephen Harper to offer a solemn, religious state funeral to the family of the last veteran resident in Canada of the **Great War**. Let Canada put one face on the sacrifice of a generation.

