



Towards an Integrated Collection Development Plan at Library and Archives Canada for Canada's Military Documentary Heritage: Challenges and Opportunities

1. Introduction

This document should be read in the context of the three following documents, which are available on the Library and Archives Canada website ([link](#)) Library and Archives Canada's Story Continues; the Documentary Heritage Management Framework; and the Acquisition Orientation Instrument.

This document is part of a series of eight discussion papers that seek, through practical projects, to validate the four guiding principles and the key roles of the Documentary Heritage Management Framework developed by Library and Archives Canada (LAC) during summer and fall 2009. Specifically, each pathfinder project seeks to demonstrate the applicability of these principles and roles in the context of the acquisition business pillar. Each pathfinder project will result in a final report, which will add overall conclusions about the implementation of the Documentary Heritage Management Framework and the Acquisition Orientation Instrument. Based on observations, the final report will be even more effective in contributing to the achievement of LAC's mandate, within the current operating environment.

2. Background

The military documentary heritage of Library and Archives Canada (LAC) forms a significant proportion of the holdings of the institution and is the most used by its on-site clients.¹ LAC has amassed a rich military heritage that includes publications, art, photography, philately, cartography, architectural and engineering records, audiovisual, textual, and digital records, from both private and public sources. The result is a national resource that is indispensable to scholars and policymakers in particular and to all Canadians in general. Maintaining supportive and positive relationships with its clients while continuing to build, shape, and steward Canada's military heritage is recognized by LAC as a major challenge.

3. Current Acquisition Framework

The existing acquisition framework has a logical coherence and direction, which results from the use of conventional acquisition tools, such as legal deposit, government records disposition, and private-sector acquisition orientations and program strategies. The coherence derives both from the strength of these tools and from a range of informal arrangements that LAC has employed to ensure cooperation in the acquisition, preservation, and access to documentary heritage relating to the Canadian military experience.

¹ Based on circulation statistics through 2008-2009, military and war related records and private papers represent approximately a third of all materials circulated. This number does not include the approximate 60,000 requests for dormant service files, or publications, for which there are no statistics.



The acquisition of military documentary heritage has three main sources.

The first source is military records transfers from the Department of National Defence (DND) and other institutions such as Veterans Affairs Canada, Defence Construction Canada, and the Communication Security Establishment Canada. This source targets records that document the planning and conduct of Canadian Forces operations and the major factors which affect the success of these operations. In 2001, the National Archivist approved a more active engagement with DND, which marked a significant departure from the previous 30 years of acquisitions. LAC also stopped documenting certain activities completely (e.g., records related to military dress and non-combat equipment), and significantly reduced the scope of archival records in other fields.

The second source is papers obtained from military leaders, military personnel, and politicians. This source documents the role of individuals in all aspects of the Canadian military, from strategic planning, to the day-to-day activities in the Canadian Forces, and the issues they face in transitioning from military to civilian life and from war to peace. LAC has acquired hundreds of fonds and collections covering the early 17th century to the conflict in Afghanistan, and in all archival media.

The third source is legal deposit, through which LAC acquires all Canadian publishing materials. Published materials are the primary vehicle for the evolving interpretation of Canadian military history, and are a principle means by which the general public is exposed to and learns about our military heritage. Over the last 15 years there has been a tremendous revival of interest and publishing in Canadian military history, which is captured by and acquired primarily through legal deposit (supplemented by judicious purchases). This also includes published audio-visual materials, such as military-historical documentaries. Each of the three sources of acquisition for Canadian military heritage, mentioned above, compliment each other in unique and valuable ways.

4. Challenges to the Current Framework

There are factors at work that, at a minimum, cast doubt on the ability of LAC to sustain the existing acquisition framework for military documentary heritage. For the purposes of this discussion paper, LAC has organized these issues into three separate categories that reflect changes in the context in which LAC must operate to deliver on its mandated responsibilities.

Political and Military Context

Over the last 20 years, there have been two dramatic shifts in the international, political, and military context in which the Canadian Forces operates. The demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war brought about a period of instability and ‘asymmetrical conflicts’ into which Canada was drawn. The relatively static and predictable peacekeeping exercises and the operations of the post-war period gave way to peace enforcement operations in regions as diverse as the Balkans, the Persian Gulf and Southeast Asia. A second more dramatic shift occurred after September 11, 2001, when Canada and other NATO nations undertook their first offensive operations since the end of the Korean War.



The changing nature and intensity of conflict over this period produced significant institutional and individual changes in the Canadian Forces and in Canadian society. Far more than any time in the last 50 years, Canadians are engaged in thinking about Canada's place in the world and the role of the Canadian Forces in maintaining or changing that position, and the effects of conflict on Canadian veterans. In turn, this is reflected in both political and policy discussions, and in the range of new activities in which the forces are engaged, such as disarming improvised explosive devices (IEDs), building schools, running surveillance on suspects, handing over prisoners, and training foreign armies. Decisions to undertake these new roles are reflected in the records that are produced and the experiences of the troops.

The passing of the Second World War generation also poses a dilemma for LAC. As these men and women age, their attics and basements are being emptied of papers, letters, photographic albums and other ephemera of war. LAC and other military heritage institutions are wrestling with this reality, recognizing that there are great disparities in the quality of these materials. Nevertheless, none can be really dismissed without investigation; many treasures can come from these sources.

If LAC is to sustain its capacity to document the Canadian military experience, then it has to respond quickly to the changing political and military context. It must be ready to analyze and understand the effects of this context on military recordkeeping as well as on the information created and distributed by military members. Without proactive research, LAC will not be able to identify significant documentary heritage or to address the questions of sufficiency.

Technological and Information Context

At the same time as political upheaval alters the role and capacity of the Canadian Forces, technology has a similarly dramatic effect on the creation, distribution, use, and storage of information. New information requirements are not met by old technology. The Canadian military was the first to exploit the use of computers, by leveraging information technology to meet new requirements faster and more efficiently. One dramatic example is the three aerial and satellite mappings of Kandahar province conducted by the Canadian Forces in 2005, 2007, and 2009. The data, approximately 7 terabytes, are used to generate the maps for all military and aid operations in the province. Mapping requirements that formerly required days to produce, are now accomplished in minutes.

These changes are not limited to institutional players. Individuals—whether as members of the Canadian Forces, their families, or ordinary Canadians engaged in aspects of military life—are also using technology to create and distribute information in new ways.² Dozens of examples can be cited, from unprecedented volumes of personal photography and video resulting from military operations, to social spaces unique to Canadian Forces members, to blogs commenting on every aspect of life in the forces. YouTube offers a simple quantifiable measure of this point: on October 26, 2009, there were 4,180 videos tagged “Canada Afghanistan”.

Therefore, LAC has to engage aggressively in this context if it hopes to capture any of this new content. It has to build up the technological capacity to acquire and preserve digital documentary

² Canadian civilians are more engaged in the military aspects of the conflict in Afghanistan than in any other previous conflict. Whether it is aid workers, civilian contractors, entertainers, or the men and women behind the counter at the Kandahar Tim Horton's, these individuals are living unique experiences with the Canadian Forces.



heritage. LAC must also be willing to undertake the difficult effort to seek out significant sources of documentary heritage, particularly in the less structured non-governmental realm, and be ready to quickly assess its capacity to acquire and sustain an acquisition. With digital documents and new media, there are few Canadian archival institutions, public or private, to which LAC can direct donors. Unless other institutions start to build their digital capacity, LAC will have to recognize that records it does not deem significant within its own acquisition framework will not be preserved.

The other challenge facing LAC is its capacity to deal with the unprecedented volume of conventional military records. There will be an entirely new and unique set of problems in storing, preserving, and providing timely access to the 28 kilometres of Second World War service records that will become archival on April 1, 2010.

5. Opportunities

The evolving environment in which LAC must operate presents significant challenges to its continuing ability to document the Canadian military experience through the acquisition of documentary heritage. However, with an effective and coordinated effort, there are a number of approaches which LAC can take to sustain and build on its current pre-eminence in this field.

Planned, Targeted and Co-ordinated Acquisition

To achieve a truly accountable integrated acquisition framework for military heritage, LAC needs to formalize its acquisition planning and programming. This planning means such things as the development of a comprehensive documentation strategy for all military documentary heritage and the activities that generate it; the re-examination and refocusing of government records disposition activities in concert with this strategy; an active research and monitoring program for new media and Web content; and structured consultations with stakeholders such as creators, clients and other institutions involved with acquisition, preservation, and discovery of military heritage.

It should also be acknowledged that the development of a new acquisition framework for military heritage may very well mean that LAC will stop acquiring certain types of records or papers. Decisions of this type may be challenged by parties who take great interest in things military, to respond to controversy when they see it.

Partners

A corollary of an accountable and integrated acquisition framework would be the extension of LAC's planning and coordination to include other memory institutions (i.e., archives, libraries and museums). Contacts already exist between LAC and some of the members of the Organization of the Military Museums of Canada (OMMC), as well as other technology-based institutions, but it is proposed that a more formalized and coordinated approach be instituted. There are clear examples where LAC could be working with specific institutions to ensure that military documentary heritage is preserved in the location that is best able to preserve it.

One obvious case relates to certain forms of military equipment and materiel. Museums with a material culture orientation might be in a better position than LAC to describe and sustain



records on equipment, particularly technical and engineering drawings and photography. Among the members of the OMMC and the Canadian Aeronautical Preservation Association, there are several world-class institutions which have the facilities to preserve and make this heritage accessible. Another example is the photographs recently transferred from the National Defence Image Library. This transfer took place with the explicit understanding that LAC would not retain all of these images. The expectation is that a significant number of the images will be offered to member institutions of the OMMC.

The benefits to such a planned and coordinated approach with other institutions is that military documentary heritage can be preserved alongside the material culture to which it relates, and in institutions to which clients more readily associate equipment and materiel. Moreover, a proper acquisition network could be established so that LAC is coordinating rather than casting off those materials which it does not collect. Finally, LAC would benefit from a more focussed and integrated approach to its own acquisitions.

Partnerships need not be restricted to conventional records and other memory institutions. As noted above, there are huge quantities of private digital records being generated by members of the Canadian Forces and being posted in social networking spaces. Canadian Forces members may be reluctant to donate or deposit this type of material at LAC. However, given the significance and uniqueness of some of this material, LAC should explore what other avenues exist to ensure the preservation of significant documentary heritage. This would include making arrangements with service providers for hosting spaces and e-deposit systems, and in providing guidance and advice to individuals so they can preserve their own digital heritage.

LAC must consider large-scale digitization efforts, whether alone or in partnerships, to sustain the acquisition and preservation of Canada's military documentary heritage. The Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) service documents and Second World War service files are in high demand; however, demands for documents such as war diaries, operational records books, ships logs and other wartime records and papers, could jeopardize the long-term preservation and sustainability of these collections.

The costs involved in technological solutions lead naturally to an exploration of potential partnerships. Again, the military domain offers unique opportunities because of both the nature of the material and its popularity. It should also be noted that these partnerships do not necessarily have to be institutional. The intense public interest in military heritage can also be used to leverage technology in another way. The large number of enthusiasts offers a standing force to generate user-supplied metadata for both LAC acquisitions and those of its partners. Whether it is to identify people, events, or equipment, the expertise of these people can be engaged in imaginative ways to enhance accessibility and relevance of LAC's collections and expertise to Canadian society at large.

It is widely understood that there is value in consultation and partnership, yet LAC must enter into these arrangements with a clear sense of its institutional expectations and objectives.

6. The Way Forward

In collaboration with its partners, LAC will continue to explore and to discuss the various issues related to the development of an integrated acquisition framework for military documents. By



the end of March 2010, LAC will have developed a clearly integrated collection development plan to acquire, preserve, and make available the documents that describe the Canadian military experience. This plan will determine the roles and tools required in order to create a truly holistic and coherent institution-wide approach to these documentary heritage materials.

7. Conclusion

The final report in March 2010, will describe the results obtained by the implementation of the project described in this document and will be used to achieve the objectives of Library and Archives Canada (LAC) in two respects. On the one hand, each of the eight pathfinder projects will produce operational specific deliverables, which will develop approaches and practices of LAC in respect of certain specific activity areas. On the other hand, the lessons learned during the implementation of each pathfinder project, in the context of the four guiding principles and the key roles, feed the LAC approach to the acquisition, preservation, and the resource discovery of Canada's documentary heritage. Your comments and feedback on this discussion paper will support the modernization work of LAC, as it prepares to revise its approach to meet the challenges of the digital environment in order to continue fulfilling its mandate, and thus better serve Canadians.