

**CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM  
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

**INTERVIEW CONTROL NUMBER: 31D 5 LEVESQUE**

**INTERVIEWEE: Andre M. Levesque**

**INTERVIEWER: Bill Aikman**

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**Transcription of Interview Number 31D 5 LEVESQUE**

**Major Andre Levesque**

**Interviewed 11 January, 2005**

**By Bill Aikman**

INTERVIEWER: Hello. This is the Canadian War Museum Oral History Program interview with Major Andre Levesque. Recorded on the eleventh of January 2005 in Ottawa, Ontario. Interviewed by Bill Aikman. Tape one, side one.

LEVESQUE: Hi. My name is Andre Levesque, L e v e s q u e, Levesque. I confirm that I have signed the interview release form.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you. Andre, could you outline your background and how you became involved in this project?

LEVESQUE: Sure. At that time, that was during the spring of 1998. I was working for the municipality of the city of Ottawa, at that time. As pre-amalgamation for the region, they were laying off a number of people, hundreds of people. And I was on the last wave of the releases. So during the spring of '98, I was confirmed as no longer being employed by the city. I was looking for other employment elsewhere. My background was in economic development and communications, marketing, those kinds of things. The Department of National Defence who was looking for someone who was a member of the Forces, who could run for them their Millennium projects. So it was sort of a good fit. I was looking for something and they were looking for someone. At that point they hired me.

INTERVIEWER: Could you just explain? When you say you were in the Forces, could you explain your military background?

LEVESQUE: Yes. At that time I was a member of the Canadian Forces Primary Reserve. I was actually with the Governor General's Foot Guards at that time. I had about twenty-four years or so with the Forces at that time – probably more, actually. I'd have to count. But I joined in '74 and I had been an Army Reserve major, at that time. So I had a lot of experience under my belt, working all kinds of national projects.

INTERVIEWER: When you say you were a Reservist, you worked in the Reserves. Did you actually work on call-out during that time in any significant amount?

LEVESQUE: A combination of different things. I did a lot of courses during the summers. I did a lot of Regular Forces courses in Gagetown and things like that, so there were periods of fulltime employment. As well, I did the Changing of the Guard ceremony for four summers as well as worked fulltime as a recruiting officer for the Changing of the Guard. So I had a lot of experience on that side. As well, my civilian experience in communications gave me the tools and experience they were looking for – both a combination of understanding the military – what they do – but as well as having, again, the experience to run a number of public affairs projects.

INTERVIEWER: What units were you with in the Reserves?

LEVESQUE: I was for twenty-two years with the Foot Guards, from '74....

INTERVIEWER: The Foot Guards?

LEVESQUE: Governor General's Foot Guards. That's the senior infantry regiment in the militia, the Governor General's Foot Guards. And then later on, I transferred to the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa as the deputy commanding officer. They were short of officers. The current deputy commanding officer, at that time, was about to become the CO – commanding officer – and they were looking for someone else. So I basically, literally crossed the floor, as both units are located in Cartier Square Drill Hall. So that's how I became involved. I have to basically say that as a Reservist though, normally you parade on a part-time basis, which means a couple of evenings during the week and some weekends but there's some periods during the year though that you're more intense. As I mentioned before, doing summer courses and things like that.

INTERVIEWER: OK. Andre, could you go on from that then and how you actually, in detail, became involved in this project?

LEVESQUE: Like I mentioned, they were looking for someone and my name came forward. At that time, the acting Assistant Deputy Minister of Human Resources was Lieutenant-General Romeo Dallaire. He was looking to look for someone – at the rank of major – to work on all of his Millennium projects. They had sort of a partial list of a dozen different topics of things that they were looking at. And at that time, did not include the Unknown Soldier, funny enough, when they hired me.

INTERVIEWER: When exactly was that?

LEVESQUE: That was approximately the twenty-eighth of April, I believe, 1998. Something like that. I ended up starting the position on a Friday – my first day on the job – and was told promptly that I had a meeting the Monday morning at seven thirty with then Major-General Couture, who was the chief of staff for ADM HR(mil), which is Assistant Deputy Minister, Human Resources. So I had the day and the weekend to review the file and to meet him the next morning, or the Monday following, after the weekend, to discuss the different Millennium projects. I did that.

About two weeks into the projects, I was asked if I wanted to participate with the Unknown Soldier. I was aware that Dr. Bernier, which was my boss – the Directorate of History and Heritage – had already participated in a number of formal and informal meetings, as well as with General Dallaire, concerning the Unknown Soldier. But it appeared to be that the project, as a concept, was being solidified and was becoming more of a reality as opposed to another potential project. Then, that offer of wanting to participate quickly changed to how would this be if this was your primary project with the secondary reasons of being there to run the Millennium projects for the Assistant Deputy Director, Human Resources, ADM HR(Mil). So that's sort of what happened.

At that point my mission was pretty simple. It's jacks of all trades and master of all, in the sense of, I was to be the primary contact for the Unknown Soldier with all of the agencies, both internal within the Department of National Defence as well as external with other inter-departmental within the Government of Canada, as well as all the Veterans' organizations and non-Governmental organizations and the Legion. And I was to essentially develop, plan, approve and implement all aspects of the Unknown Soldier for the Department of National Defence. That was my mission.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that you started in 1998, the late fall of 1998. What was the situation at that time in the project?

LEVESQUE: Yeah. Actually it was the spring of '98. Yeah. The spring of 1998, April I think I mentioned, April-May. At that time, I was aware that there were a number of meetings that happened before that went back to about 1996. However, I was also aware, being given the files at that time from Dr. Bernier, that there was a private consultant who was looking to put this as a proposal. I also know that there was some discussions relating to the South African War as a potential for the Unknown Soldier. I also know that General Dallaire was involved in a number of meetings, personally, with Dr. Bernier, with the Legion, discussing the whole issue of the Unknown Soldier being more solidified.

So there was a few steps taken at that time. But again, I know that the Legion were very interested in making that their national project in terms of the Royal Canadian Legion but were also looking to see, to make it happen, they also knew it would take the Federal Government on board to make it happen. There's the funding aspect, of course. There's also the coordination, the logistical aspect, with other countries. They knew that that had to be done. And of course, since it's a former military person as the Unknown Soldier, they would need DND to be part of it. So, I think, everyone was cognizant that they needed a partnership. That's sort of what happened, is it was sort of a reality that to make the project happen, a number of departments, nongovernmental organizations, veterans' organizations and other partners would all have to agree on the same overall aim. So at that point, the Legion put a lot of pressure in the right places in order for the project to be presented as a national Millennium project for both the Legion and for the Government of Canada.

One of the major issues, in addition to knowing what they're going to do, was the funding aspect which continued to linger, you know, throughout the whole project. But it was something that had to be addressed because, without the funding, you couldn't construct the actual location for the Unknown Soldier as well as some of the ceremonies involved and things like that – the soldiers taking part, etc.. So there's some major considerations.

At the very beginning – although I probably missed one or two meetings before I came on board – I didn't really miss enough, in the sense of the concept. The concept was there but they weren't into the very details. Originally, they went very far and very wide. The Legion were very much interested in having the Unknown Soldier to be, to come from the Vimy area. That was always clear. There was no – after the issue of South African War was dealt with, basically convincing all parties that the Unknown is not that unknown, as there are very limited number of people which were not yet known by name but certainly narrowed down to a very few individuals. It was seen very quickly that that wasn't the avenue to go. So everyone was on board that the Unknown Soldier had to come from the, from Vimy, from the battle of Vimy. Actually, it's part of the Battle of Arras – the Campaign of Arras actually. But for all intents and purposes, everyone was talking in the same terminology.

At that point, DND had met with Veterans' Affairs, as Veterans' Affairs had the lead in terms of commemoration. DND were there to provide a number of things, but I'll talk about the division of labour a little farther.

Ultimately, the first plan from the Legion point of view – because they're the one who put the initial plan – was to disinter the Unknown Soldier and have the Unknown Soldier to be put in a number of countries, some of our Allied countries that we were at that time. And it was quite wide. They wanted the Unknown Soldier to be laid in state in a number of countries like France, England, Italy, Holland. It was probably a half a dozen countries originally.

My role in this, at the very beginning, is that all plans not only had to go through the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Working Group – that's fine in concept – but the reality is all of the plans had to be approved by DND. DND were tasked to provide all matters dealing with transportation. They were tasked to provide all matters dealing with protocol. All matters dealing with inter-Governmental, I guess, liaison with Veterans' Affairs. They worked side by side. They were also responsible for submitting a proposal to Cabinet, which we did. And as well, since the military were in charge of their own military, we had to come up with a negotiated agreement with all the group principals and commanders that they felt that they would be able to put the resources that they felt was certainly adequate for the parade and the event, but at the same time, keeping in mind operational requirements. So there had to be a fine balance.

So keeping that in mind, I did put an initial proposal, based on the request from the Legion, to do the Laying in State in all of those countries overseas. And I was asked to put all kinds of scenarios. And it literally went anywhere from less than two weeks to all the way to almost four to five months in duration because you had to keep in mind travel

time, preparation between each of the countries, Laying in State time and travel back to Canada. As well, originally the Legion were interested in having transportation to reflect all of the naval elements, the land elements and the air elements, which literally meant they wanted the Unknown Soldier to travel by boat, by plane and by land. So that's how the fourteen days to the five months or so sort of differentiated.

INTERVIEWER: Did that involve going to the provinces, as well, across Canada?

LEVESQUE: That's just overseas. On top of that, once it arrived in Canada, they also wanted to do a Lay in State at each of the capitals of each of the provinces and territories. So that's where the five and six months came in to. So, again, it was a huge effort. I put the original plan together, the proposal. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier project looked at it, of course, and 'quote', blessed it, in terms of the initial concept. But by the time it went to Armed Forces Council – this certainly is not secret – it was quite clear that Canadian Forces, based on operational requirements, were just not able to accommodate that kind of a scenario. So it was narrowed down from two weeks to five to six months to something more reasonable, from one week to probably three weeks. That was narrowed down in that kind of scenario.

I came back with the second proposal. This time though, the overseas element was pretty well eliminated except for Vimy, France. And, as well, the Canadian provinces aspect was also eliminated just because of sheer amount of resources that would have been required. So what we were looking for is a variety of different activities happening between France, possibly between Vimy, possibly in England, back to Canada and only in Ottawa, but again, the number of events there could be amplified, i.e. the number of days Laying-in-State, etc..

After reviewing that scenario – it was hard to believe – but it was narrowed down right back to what the original, original, original proposal was, was basically less than two weeks. And that's exactly what happened. It gave enough time for the activities to happen without impeding too much on the operational requirements for the Armed Forces.

Having said that, all of the environmental commanders, with the support of the General Baril, who was the CDS – Chief of Defence Staff – at that time, definitely wanted maximum participation. One of the things that we looked at – we say 'we', that's the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Working Group committee – in line with what's going on nationally, is they wanted to not only include the participation of veterans in the ceremony – the military remembrance – but they also wanted to include participation of youth. And that was an important element. For that reason – although technically members of the cadets are not part of the Canadian Forces – we were very much in mind and discussion with cadet corps and things like that so that they had an opportunity to take part in the ceremonies back, you know, in Ottawa.

At the very beginning, once that mini plan was approved in concept, at that point we had to go back in to the details and determine how much traveling time, how much prep time

and things like that. One of the first things that we did with Veterans' Affairs is determine – myself, with the chief historian here, Dr. Harris, Don Ives and a number of other people at Veterans' Affairs – sat down and basically delineated within the Battle of the Arras, the Campaign of Arras, an area of which we would designate about a dozen cemeteries of which we thought which were predominantly Canadian soldiers which were buried there, so that would give us enough of an area for us to select the exact location of the Unknown Soldier. So it went from the Campaign of Arras to about a dozen cemeteries, which included a number of cemeteries, which were specifically part of the Battle of Vimy.

At the end of the day – the agreement was with Veterans' Affairs – is that Veterans' Affairs would make the contact with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. And they would make the final arrangements in terms of how that would be dealt with. It was eventually narrowed down to Cabaret Rouge Cemetery. And the agreement was with them, so that we would not have to go and revisit every single cemetery and save some time, is that what they would do is find a cemetery that had a good topography, a good geography, so that the aim was to find an Unknown Soldier with a skeleton as complete as possible. Because after so many years, since the First World War, odds are, should they dig, most likely they would find almost, if nothing, no remains. So by finding a good topography, which means good drainage, high ground, less mucky ground per se, it gave a better chance of finding a full skeleton.

The next step is to reduce the amount of excavation with the forensic team that they had in place. And the agreement was, is that they would find an area that would have at least two, probably three, markers of tombstones, headstones, that they knew, that indicated there was an unknown Canadian soldier but no more information than that. And these three tombstones, side by side, they would literally prepare and have a tent beside it and cover it. And they would literally dig up the first grave. If that search was unsuccessful, then they would immediately go to the next one, literally beside it, and then move on to the third if they had to. And in this particular case, the first one they dug, beside the other two, was perfect. They found a full skeleton remains and a few other items in there, which we'll let Veterans' Affairs talk about.

INTERVIEWER: Andre, what responsibilities, how did your responsibilities break out and what resources did you have available to you?

LEVESQUE: First, I want to tell you that although I was project manager for the Unknown Soldier for National Defence, technically I only had one other staff who was working with me. He was a chief warrant officer, infantry, who was basically responsible for all matters dealing with dress and deportment – well, dress ceremonial – for the Directorate of History and Heritage on behalf of all the Canadian Forces. But we asked them if that could also become his primary job for the year. And he was basically my right hand person in terms of coordination. Having said that, with only one staff to start with.

INTERVIEWER: Who was that?

LEVESQUE: It was Chief Warrant Officer Dan Palmer. With that one staff, what happened is that any other requirement for resources had to be centrally requested through the Group Principals at Armed Forces Council and other means so that they would become available. What that meant is, it included the availability of planes for transportation to and from Europe, back to Ottawa. It included the participation of probably around two thousand people from the Canadian Forces, including Navy, Army, Air Force, cadets, from junior officers who were being trained to become leaders as well as cadets from Cadet Instructor Cadre – we're talking about the youth here, as opposed to junior officers. So it involved, like I said, almost two thousand people.

On top of that, there are other logistical requirements that we needed. As such, I was required to not only develop a plan but actually implement the plan on behalf of the Chief of Defence staff. Of course, the higher powers to be, who are in position of authority and decision makers, made the decisions in terms of what the plan was going to be finalized and things like that. But at the end of the day, as I spoke on behalf of ADM HR(Mil) and CDS, in terms of making it happen.

Overseas, in Europe, what that meant, that included doing a reconnaissance – a recce – of the site in Vimy. That included possible areas where we would be looking at, in terms of preparation, where we could assemble the troops, the route to go in at Vimy. We knew that it was going to be at the Vimy Memorial. But the Vimy Memorial, itself, is quite large. We had to decide where the parade was going to be standing, where the spectators were going to be, where the military portion were going to be because half of the troops were French troops from the Government of France – Army soldiers. And, as well, we had a number of veterans and other spectators. We had to sort of outline a rough draft of where people were going to be.

On top of that, we were also responsible to do an initial first draft of what the potential scenario would be in terms of the ceremony. And, as well, at the end of the day, once all of that was approved, we had to make sure that the plan was implemented. And we did the formal liaison with the French Government, with the French Army, with Veterans' Affairs and all the other groups.

So we were the onsite managers, per se. That doesn't mean that we were the be-all-and-end-all. It just means that we were managing on behalf of the group. But each of the individual groups had their own responsibilities. Obviously, Veterans' Affairs were quite keen to make sure that they looked after the veterans on site, before and after. With the military again, we let the military look after the military. And in terms of the Government, per se, there was the Canadian ambassador in France, which was also had a stakeholder involved with the embassy and other, the diplomatic corps and things like that. Like I said, we were there as a liaison in order to be able to manage the project overseas.

As far as getting there and coming back, again, National Defence was responsible for putting together the flight plan, the plane, how many people. We were pretty well



dictated how many people could attend based on the number of seats. That was pretty simple. We worked backwards – how many soldiers that we would agree to put on the plane – key people who had to be at the ceremony. How many veterans there were left and etc.. So, it was fairly simple to calculate.

As well, in addition to bringing them over there, we made all the arrangements in terms of logistics with Veterans' Affairs on the transportation to and from hotels and things like that. So that was a cooperative effort down there.

As well as the other arrangements, a key aspect beforehand is actually the legalities of things in terms of having an Unknown Soldier, remains of a body being transferred from one country to the other. So we had to make sure – that was DND's responsibility – to make sure that we went through a variety of agencies to get the proper approvals, including Canada Food Inspection Agency, for example, included the Government of France, the embassy, the department, the Government of Canada. There was a lot of permits that were required.

One little anecdote that was interesting, that we did not want to commit the same – if I can say the word – mistake, is that when they did the Unknown Soldier for Australia, the Unknown Soldier was literally on the tarmac in France, waiting to go back to Australia. The French – I'll call the bureaucrat the Frenchman – was literally with a clipboard on the tarmac. And one of the requirements for him to fill in on the form for the body to be released is that they needed the name of the next of kin of the deceased. And he was not going to be leaving and letting the body go into the plane back to Australia for the formal ceremonies until he had the names of his next of kin. And the whole point is he is unknown and therefore we'll never know who is the next of kin. I understand there was some diplomatic phone calls made instantly, on the Airbus, as that was being handled. So we knew, from lessons learned, that we wanted to make sure that all the approvals, no matter how small, that they needed to be dealt with and had to be looked at ahead of time so there was no surprises.

How it was worked out in Canada is again, after the plan was blessed by the working group and then went to Armed Forces Council. We came to the agreement again, on number of days overseas, the travel time, the dates in and out and basically was pretty set that they needed three days on Parliament Hill, between the time of arrival to Lay in State and the actual final ceremony for the actual burial at the National War Grave, uh, National Cenotaph.

So DND's responsibility was to make sure that all of the transportation arrangements were done for the Unknown Soldier and custody as well. And the custody, we were also responsible overseas, as well, with the French Gendarmerie, etc. What it meant was that we had to negotiate with a number of players on transportation, what kind of vehicles, vintage, if they were workable. Also, not only are they vintage but are these vehicles, are they quiet enough because we didn't want to have vehicles that would end up smoking up the whole crowds and coughing to death. And as well, if the vehicles were too large and you were not able to see the Unknown Soldier, that was going to cause some problems in

terms of visibility. So we had to negotiate a number of things between what were being offered and what we could find.

One of the particular things that everyone was adamant was finding a gun carriage. And that resulted in having to deal with the RCMP. Canadian Forces, with all the museums across Canada, could not find a suitable gun carriage of an older vintage. There were a lot of howitzers and things like that that existed, but there was nothing old that we could use that was workable. There were lots in the system but nothing – we wanted something, obviously, that we could guarantee. And in fact, the only people that could really do it was the RCMP.

What it resulted in is, we ended up having to go to do a recce in Regina with the RCMP – physically went there, took a look at what they had, including the wheels and everything. And we basically agreed that we would be able to use one of the carriages that they had that they used for a number of other ceremonies as well that was quite old. But, as well, we got two wheels to be shipped from Regina by Canadian military transport to Ottawa so that we would have them as backup in case any of the wheels would break.

And, ironically, we didn't know that at that time, but when we did the Unknown Soldier in France, the plan for the French were to have a Gendarme caleche, which they were, it was going to be a horse drawn cortege on which the Unknown Soldier was to be placed. And they had some French people dressed in some old period costumes, way back from the turn of the century. And literally, the night before during the practice before the Unknown Soldier the next day in Vimy is, literally, the wheel to the horse drawn vehicle literally broke. They were unable to use what they had planned. So as a back up, and we had that as a backup, is we did have a regular funeral car ready on standby. As it turned out in France, that's what we had to use.

So we were right to make sure that we had a standby. So despite all best plans, no one can guarantee anything. And again, to go back to Ottawa and the transportation of the remains with the gun carriage, the only people that could really almost guarantee that – there's never a perfect guarantee – was the RCMP. So that's what happened. They basically fixed up the carriage that they had. Beside the paint job and fixing some of the leathers and things like that, we were more concerned with the structural aspect of it, of the carriage.

One of the things that we looked at was the number of horses. Ideally, we were looking at eight. Four were too little. I think we ended up having, I think, six. But I think after retrospect, perhaps we should have went with two more than what we had. It was quite difficult on some of the streets because they were going up hill. And the wheels and the horses and everything was quite slippery and we were quite concerned that we didn't want to have any military or any person falling underneath the wheels as a result of the slipping going up roads and things like that.

In any case, to follow with what we were responsible for is transportation, which included a number of things such as from the funeral car, from the airport back to, let's

say, Cartier Square Drill Hall, where he was left there for veterans to be seen separately and then driven by an old vintage military vehicle to Parliament Hill. And then again, we kept the gun carriage as the last route, the last leg of the route, going from Parliament Hill back to the National War Memorial.

We looked at the.... We were also responsible for putting together routes to and from. One of the major issues is length. Another one is time. And another one had to do with visibility in the sense that we couldn't take routes that were too sharp, too difficult for the horse carriages, the soldiers, the troops and the veterans. As well, we needed a bit of an angle for the parade to arrive on the right angle so that the veterans could fall in to place in the right place. And at the same time, the hard logistical aspects of the horse-drawn carriage, the horses and all the other elements had to be able to go in the location but also, after removing the Unknown Soldier to put him his permanent position, those elements had to be able to go away and move away from the rest of the parades, as they weren't required any more. So those, we were responsible for.

The Legion were given the task of coordinating all aspects of the parade, per se, with the veterans, to make sure that they all fell in at the right location so that they could fall in and march to their location. As well, the Legion were responsible in the actual coordination on site at the National War Memorial, which included the seating plan and all the VIPs and all those participants. And Veterans' Affairs, with DND, were, I guess, responsible to make sure that the right people were in the right place, including the liaison with the media and public affairs. And that was sort of a joint venture, to make sure that there was a national center that was put together.

INTERVIEWER: The troops that were on parade, where did they come from?

LEVESQUE: Because the Unknown Soldier represented all the elements of the unknown, in the sense that he represented all elements of the Army, Navy and Air Force, as well as officers, noncommissioned officers, men, women, everyone. Although he came from Vimy, we did not want to place any emphasis on the fact that he came from that time period. That was just sort of an incidental thing.

And as a result, the Canadian Forces wanted to make sure that there was equal representation, wearing the distinct environmental uniform, i.e. Army green, the Navy the dark blue and the Air Force with the light blue. And the way it worked out is the only unit, per se, that was singled out because – well, it's more of an organization – is the Royal Military College, per se, representing the young officers and youth to be of the military. That was the only formation group that sort of was put there as a unit, a representation, I think, of about 50 people or so. But all the other organizations, all the other people parading on the parade, basically each guard consisted of all of the Army, Navy and Air Force. All of the subgroups within the Canadian Forces were asked to participate. Each sent representation from across the country. Obviously more from the National Capital Region but there was very much an effort in having equal representation from all the groups. And that's sort of how it went out. There was no singled-out unit representation for that reason because he represented all.

One other task that we had at National Defence is the coordination and selection of the bearer party. The bearer party basically are the individuals who actually carried the Unknown Soldier from one point to another. What we had agreed is that the Unknown Soldier, the bearer party, was to consist of primarily member of the Canadian Forces but as well as a few members from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police as some of them did participate during the wars as members of the Canadian Forces. That was as a Federal Agency, as former members of the Forces, at certain points in time, was seen to be the way to go.

So what we did is we conducted a national – I don't want to use the word competition – but we put a call out nationally for commanders to suggest names of potential participants who basically were able to carry themselves well, who had some knowledge of drill and able to handle themselves well with weapons, had a good demeanor, had represented themselves well and their units well so that it would well represent for the Unknown Soldier and for the Armed Forces.

So it was sort of a thank you for those who worked hard in the past but, rest assured, it was not a free trip. They had to work very, very, very long hours, night and day, to practice in and out, carrying a duplicate casket that was made available to us in sites that were put together from Public Works. That we had to practice going in and putting it on and transferring. It was at the point that basically very few words were being said and they could just act on instinct.

So that was a participation of the Canadian Forces members and the RCMP and, as well, we had representation from across the country – Army, Navy, Air Force, men and women – so it was pretty terrific.

The Legion group helped in providing honorary pallbearers that were basically shadowing the bearer parties when they were being transported from one location to another. And the honorary pallbearers were selected, I guess, by the veterans' organizations, coming from different groups and different people at different times.

And the same thing with the bearer party. There was not always the same people with the casket with the Unknown Soldier. They rotated, depending on what leg, what place, what time. As well, it was a bit of an insurance for us that we didn't want to have any; we had to be prepared to have some backup in case something happened. So there was some good reasons for us to have some extras there. But, as well, there were some other associated jobs including the carrying of hats and things like that that's part of the ceremony that has to be included. So hence, the bearer party and a few spares.

INTERVIEWER: Could you describe the actions in France?

LEVESQUE: Sure. The agreement with one of our partners, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, was that they were responsible with Veterans' Affairs to have the Unknown Soldier ready for us. When we arrived in the chartered plane, with all the rest

of the group on the plane in Lille, France, is that once we disembarked and went to our individual hotels, etc.. Then at that point the military were about to engage the next day – well, that day, but more particularly the next day – with the military forces and the Gendarmerie to basically talk about how the handover would happen. Because the Unknown Soldier was unearthed, he was put to casket and it was put under the protection of the Gendarmerie in a local prison or something like that so that the remains would be in custody and ready to be transferred at the appropriate time. So once that was done, we were able to, as part of the recce – we agreed which part at the Vimy Memorial – because there are a number of onsite little cemeteries there. We agreed to which one we would basically form up so that the cortege would form up with the military component. So that there was literally be the ceremony surrounded on, doing a handover, from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission as the custodian of the Unknown Soldier – because he was buried in a Commonwealth War Graves cemetery – to the Canadian Forces on behalf of the Government of Canada. And I only say ‘to the Canadian Forces’ because physically the Canadian Forces were the one that had the physical custody of the Unknown. But, obviously it’s on behalf of all Canadians, civilian and military alike.

So the ceremony went on from the small little cemetery within the Vimy Memorial itself on to in front of the Vimy Memorial itself. The handover was done. The way it was worked out is that the French troops were to march in the Unknown Soldier, put him in front of the alter, at which point then there would be some speeches and present – well, not presentations but speeches from both the French Government, Canadian Government, Veterans’ Affairs. And then the handover would happen to the Government of Canada, at which point forces from, military forces, from Canada would physically pick up the Unknown Soldier and take possession and then go backwards, up to a point so that they were ready to travel from Vimy, France, to a predesignated route. Not going too quickly but to a pace which allowed dignity and visibility, to go back to Lille Airport, at which point the rest of the group were to depart and move on and meet them at the airport.

INTERVIEWER: Interview with Major Andre Levesque. End of side one.

### END OF SIDE ONE

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum Oral History Program interview with Major Andre Levesque. Tape one, side two.

LEVESQUE: So we were in France at the airport. At this point all the visitors, the veterans, were going back on the plane. And all the other people who were invited to attend, to witness this, were all waiting at the Lille Airport and were basically awaiting for the arrival of the Unknown Soldier. So the arrival of the Unknown Soldier has come. There’s a quarter guard. The Unknown Soldier is placed, eventually, on to the plane. Literally, it’s the last, if I can call it, the last item to go on board because, unfortunately or fortunately, that’s what happens with a normal remains for people who have died in service overseas, is it’s literally put with the baggage etc.. So it’s certainly not an

injustice or appeared to do anything wrong, but it was just part of the scenario, part of the logistics. And it was done all properly and done proper.

At that point, everyone went on board. Everyone goes back on the plane and the plane departs. I was asked to sit near the front because at that point we had to be in constant communications with the Ottawa Airport. We had made arrangements that the arrival be put not at the main arrival point of the Ottawa International Airport but where the VIP mini airport was to be located, which is adjacent to the main building.

One of the things that we had to do, literally, is while the plane was approaching in the last hour, there were some minor adjustments that had to be done onsite, on the tarmac, with the media, communications group, the location of the speaker, etc., that we had to be made aware of and negotiating on the plane, in the cockpit of the pilot, as the scenario that was printed had to be adjusted accordingly. So that was all ongoing, changing every minute until the last. We arrived. The plane was oriented in the direction to fit the requirement.

And then what happened is that the VVIPs within the plane descended first. They congratulated all the members who were, en francais [?] in the back of the plane, the majority of people that were behind and congratulated them. So as they went off, they shook hands and everyone took their place. Once everyone was out of the plane, witnesses were in position. The media were in position. At that point, the Unknown Soldier was taken off from the plane, put into a hearse – a vehicle hearse – and slowly made its way through a predesignated route – police escort and everything – to Cartier Square Drill Hall, where again, the Unknown Soldier was to be held for a short period of time to allow other departure points and other transportation to be arranged.

But more particularly is, there was a high interest from other veterans who were not able to be as mobile as others, others were not as mobile, to attend. And they came mainly from the Perley-Rideau Veterans' Home. Colonel John Gardem was helping out with that. I think he was a member of the board or something like that. It was quite poignant because they had people in wheelchairs and some of them in beds and things like that, that they had a once in a lifetime opportunity to be close and see the Unknown Soldier. And that was a sort of a special time for those veterans who were not able to take part in other parts of the ceremonies. They were, again, they were given a once in a lifetime opportunity to do that.

One of the things that the Canadian Forces were responsible for coordinating is a national rehearsal. We had done some timelines for participation of all kinds of groups. All of the groups, including as well the participation of the RCMP, the hearse, the horses, the gun carriage, again, all those people. We had done some time estimates and Chief Warrant Officer Palmer and others walked and walked and walked the beat and did many counting of times. But the problem is that that was still not a factual estimate of count of how much time that would be. What was key was that everything was being televised. Everything was being recorded. We had to meet certain timelines in order to be able to have the plan put into place. As well, we had coordination of CF-18 and things like that.

So all that had to come into play. It had to be perfect. We couldn't afford to have a fudge factor of tens of minutes. Perhaps minutes but certainly not tens of minutes.

So what we had to do is a full sized rehearsal of all of those groups. And one of the things, if you can think about this, if you've got hundreds and hundreds of troops, soldiers, gun carriages, horses, escorts and barricades all involved in the middle of downtown, going on Wellington Street, Rideau Street, Elgin Street and other major streets, in the middle of the day, that would have caused an absolute havoc. So the only way that this could be done – and this was the part that people were shocked – is that we had to do and conduct a rehearsal early in the middle of the night. And in fact, all of the participants, including the commander of the Army, the commander of the Navy and the commander of the Air Force, which were all lieutenant-generals – they're three stars – all had to attend and be a part of the rehearsal in the middle of the night. The troops had to arrive in the middle of the night. If I recall, the rehearsals began at Cartier Square Drill Hall at something like four o'clock in the morning. So, let's just say that it was a little bit of a shocker for a lot people to be up in the middle of the night in uniform doing practice rehearsals, doing left, right, left, right, left.

So all of that happened. The actual rehearsal probably finished early in the morning – seven thirtyish, eight o'clock in the morning or so – so that at least the majority of the roads would be cleared by that time. But there was a period of time that, literally, the Forces overtook most of downtown and there's nothing that could go through, absolutely nothing.

INTERVIEWER: Was that done prior to going overseas or afterwards?

LEVESQUE: That was done... that was done after, once the Unknown Soldier was back. It was sort of right at the beginning when the Unknown Soldier came back.

INTERVIEWER: And was Laying-in-State.

LEVESQUE: And was Laying in State. Because unfortunately, the thing is, you can't be in two places at once. You can't have some elements, the key people organizing the Unknown Soldier to be both in Vimy, France and in Ottawa conducting rehearsals. And the other thing is too, we needed some time – particularly the RCMP – to finalize their arrangements in refurbishing some of the aspects, like I said, the leather harnesses. They had to repaint some of it. They had to fix the wheels, touch-ups and things like that. They needed the time. And on top of that, they had to practice with the wheels, the equipment, things like that, at the N Division RCMP.

INTERVIEWER: N Division RCMP?

LEVESQUE: N Division RCMP is where Rockcliffe is located, along the Ottawa River. And they literally had all of those physical elements of the carriage for them to practice with the horses so they would get used to the horse carriage and, as well, be able to know how much effort it would take to pull and go up and things like that.

So, for that reason, the rehearsal was done sort of in the beginning, once we arrived back in Ottawa. Again, it didn't detract from anything because the Unknown Soldier was still Laying in State and that's sort of what happened.

INTERVIEWER: The Unknown Soldier then Lay in State where exactly, and for how long?

LEVESQUE: Once the Unknown Soldier arrived from the airport, went to Cartier Square Drill Hall for a short time, and then it went from Cartier Square Drill Hall to the Hall of Honour at the Parliament Buildings. That was the place that was talked about from the very beginning and it was unwavering in that aspect. Special arrangements had to be made with on-site to accommodate a number of agencies, including the House of Commons, the Senate, the Office of the Governor General, the Office of the Prime Minister. Some of the things were done in conjunction with the Royal Canadian Legion and Veterans' Affairs because just in the sheer number of people that you have to talk to and deal with at the same time, it was not physically – we were not physically able to do it. But all of that was being coordinated from there.

DND specifically – and me specifically – was responsible not only for the transport but literally the minute and second by second movement of the bearer party and as well as the vigil. We had done a master list for the vigil. DND had coordinated volunteers – mainly from the National Capital Region – that separated the vigil to include participation from all elements – Army, Navy, Air Force as well as noncommissioned members and officers. If it would have been a normal vigil, you would not normally have had participation of senior officers doing that kind of duty. But again, because the Unknown Soldier represents all walks of life, all aspects and all avenues, we wanted to include those kinds of people.

Going back to the final leg, from after the Unknown Soldier Laying in State for almost three days, from beginning to end, then the last leg was from the Hall of Honour, outside back on Wellington Street and then back its way to the National War Memorial, where we eventually took position and literally did the final ceremony with the Governor General giving the eulogy. A few other things were said. The passing of the CF-18.

And finally at the end, there was a great wanting to pay respects to the veterans who were there on parade. It was part of the plan to give them an opportunity to be thanked by the general population and the military. So there was a march past in which veterans were thanked. And there was a big ceremony at the end. Sorry, not a ceremony but a celebration reception that was organized by the Royal Canadian Legion at the Government Conference Centre.

So while that was going on, there was a few of us from the military that had to stay behind because what was happening was that the Unknown Soldier, although he had been put in his place, the top portion of the sarcophagus had to be lowered in place and sealed so that it would cover the Unknown Soldier. At that point, well, we stayed there until the



crane basically lifted it, put it on, they made sure it was properly sealed and everything and that was it. That was sort of the closure to the whole ceremony. Over two years of work, countless hours of volunteers, inter-Governmental efforts, veterans' organization and a lot of, I guess, sweat was put in to it. But I think at the end, everyone was quite happy, if not jubilant, of having something done, a once in a lifetime project.

INTERVIEWER: How were the funding issues? How did they play out?

LEVESQUE: Funding was an issue throughout the whole project. What ended up happening is that everyone was hoping that the Government of Canada was going to provide a centrally funded resource so that all of the elements would be paid for – from some of the costs with the participation from the military to some of the costs for the ceremonies, to the receptions, the flights, to the cost of the sarcophagus, everything – that's what they were hoping for. That's not what happened.

Although memorandum went to Cabinet, it was approved as a national project for the Government of Canada for the Millennium National Project, the reality is that there were no funds available, per se. Each department of the Federal Government had to pay for their own portion of the project. What it turned out to be is that Public Works, for example, paid for all of the design element and construction of the sarcophagus. A huge amount of dollars. As well, Veterans' Affairs had to deal with the cost of accommodation and covering transportation costs for veteran groups and participation in France, as well as in Ottawa. DND had to cover all the costs for the transportation itself, all of the personnel which were involved, all the meals involved, all the hotels of the military, all the recesses that were being dealt with. So there were a lot of costs involved but at the end, everyone paid for. I do believe that the Millennium Fund did provide a limited amount of money, very small, to the Legion on behalf of all the participants to cover some of the costs for the reception. But again, that was very minor. And again, all the other departments paid for their own. As well, the Legion covered some of their costs themselves with their own transportation for their own Legionnaires, things like that.

But at the end of the day, it happened. I think that of all the issues, which I think still left a sour taste in everyone's mouth in the end, I think that's the issue that everyone would have liked, that the Government could have taken perhaps a better leadership. But again, it happened at the end of it so it's hard to complain when the project happened. It's just that it didn't go the way that everyone wanted it to be.

INTERVIEWER: You were very busy throughout that time. Did you get a break after the project was completed?

LEVESQUE: Not really, but I can say that, yes, we worked a lot during the project. But I can say that in the last two weeks, at the time of the Unknown Soldier itself, and in particular in the last week, in particular in the last three days, there was a point that I didn't sleep for almost two days. I was physically up all day, all night. I had enough time to shave, take a shower, put a new clean shirt and put back my kilt on, at that time, since I was with the Camerons. But that was the reality of things because logistically,

everything was bent on timings, meeting timings, making sure that things were being realized. And again, I was only one of many others who also spent countless hours and not much sleep at the end. Because of the interactions between the Offices of the Governor General, the Office of the Prime Minister, the veterans' groups and, as well, the fact that the vigil was open at pretty incredible hours – lengthy hours – that meant that there had to be some involvement of people at sort of all kinds of weird hours.

After the project, I continued on a little bit with the Directorate of History and Heritage but I was given the opportunity to join the Public Service in the area of communications. And I joined when National Defence Headquarters did the Canadian Forces' Parliamentary Program for about a year. After that, hard to believe, but I went back to the Directorate of History and Heritage, this time as a civilian. And I'm now responsible for all the honours and awards of the Canadian Forces. And incidentally, I'm still with the Reserve part-time. I parade from time to time at night. I've now been promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel Reserve.

INTERVIEWER: Congratulations.

LEVESQUE: Thank you very much.

INTERVIEWER: Looking at it now from four to five years after the event, how do you feel about it? What is your perspective?

LEVESQUE: I think for me is that it's sort of a personal satisfaction. I keep wanting to say, 'job well done' in the sense that it's not just the amount of time that you put in but I think there was a lot of thinking. I've probably used every single tool, expertise, trick I've ever learned in order to make it happen. And, as well, I think what's more personal for me is I can actually say I was part of this once-in-a-lifetime project. It's a physical entity that's with the National War Memorial in Ottawa, of which I was born in Ottawa, came to Ottawa – my family came to Ottawa in the 1880s, so it means a lot. As well, we can go back and physically point and touch, saying, you know, I had a significant ability to make something good out of something that didn't exist before. More importantly, in addition to all the co-workers that we worked together and were able to enjoy the moment after, is, I think, is the ability to see veterans – older veterans and younger veterans – to go down today and to watch them on Remembrance Day itself, and as well Canada Day, to see how they appreciate the symbol that's been put there for all Canadians to admire.

There was a little bit of a new, I guess, custom that started recently – I don't know if someone talked about it – but the first Remembrance Day after, no one could ever dream that people wanted to put all their poppies there, on Remembrance Day and on Canada Day, they put the flag there. And that's something that was spontaneous. It's something that the veterans, serving military, civilians, families and all Canadians have done it wholeheartedly. They're not asking for anything back. It was done there as a sign of respect to the Unknown Soldier. And, again, it's something that happened that no one – I mean no one – foresaw something like that happening. And when you see that and you

realize how much it affected and continues to affect people going to visit the Unknown Soldier, I think to me is my feeling of saying thank you.

INTERVIEWER: Interview with Major – pardon me, Lieutenant-Colonel – Andre Levesque on the eleventh of January 2005. Interview ends.

**TRANSCRIPT ENDS**