

July 31, 2015 Letter to the editor of the Cape Breton Post

The U.K.'s 'Guardian Newspaper Letters' masthead has this quote: "Comment is free ... but facts are sacred."

In a public statement, Sean Howard, spokesman for the Friends of Green Cove, said that his group was not opposed to the Never Forgotten National Memorial (NFM), which will honour the memory of the more than the 114,000 fallen Canadians who never made it "home." Rather, they were against the site based on two premises: Green Cove has a protected Wilderness Zone Designation and it was against Parks Canada policy. These declarations, he supported with an open letter by 28 former Parks Canada senior managers.

After careful inspection, George Mercer, a former Parks Canada warden and passionate protector of Canada's national parks, and a co-signer of the letter, publically acknowledged that they were wrong. In fact, Green Cove has the same Zone Designation IV as the campsites and the golf course. Secondly, the Park Plan has the mandate to preserve and present the cultural resources of the park and their stories. When the major premises of an argument are defeated, your argument is defeated. That's debating 101.

The national parks were never intended to be ecological reserves. They also have an equally important cultural component. After the introductory preamble to the National Parks Act, this statement follows: "The National Parks of Canada are dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment ..." Parks were created so that the general public would have access to these areas to enjoy the wonders of nature without compromising private property."

That said, the Cape Breton Highland National Park is mandated to actively reach out to the cultural knowledge holders to facilitate opportunities for these individuals to tell their own stories – the human history of the Cape Breton Highlands. As such, the stories of the indigenous people, the early settlers, the Metis connection and the fishing village of Green Cove must be preserved and presented. The storytellers like Tuma Young, Jimmy Cooke, Tommy Young, Emerson Barron, Joanne Doucette and Lawrence Barron, others must have their stories preserved and presented before they are lost in the mists of time. Freddy Williams, in his book "A Better Rock," chronicles the history of Green Cove in chapter seven.

Howard may not be aware of the strong cultural connection that the people of Cape Breton, and throughout Nova Scotia, have with Canada's armed forces. Even today, with around three per cent of the Canadian population, approximately 10 per cent of armed forces personnel are from Nova Scotia.

Cape Bretoners are proud of their service to the nation, particularly in the times of the first and second world wars. They have willingly honoured Canada's commitment to fight oppression by tyrants and secure peace throughout the world.

In the First World War, almost 50 per cent of the eligible military-aged Maliseets and Mi'kmaq answered the call to arms. Three hundred of the 4,000 indigenous recruits in Canada made the ultimate sacrifice. In both of the world wars, the area North of Smokey had one of the highest recruitment rates

per capita in Canada. During the Second World War, New Waterford had the highest recruitment rate for comparative sized towns in the whole of the British Commonwealth. So many coal miners were signing up, they had to stop recruiting for fear the mines would not function.

The Never Forgotten National Memorial should not be a political football to toss about to fit some individual's or group's agenda. Its purpose is to honour the service and memory of our war dead. The price of human life should always be clearly remembered.

Katherine MacLennan, the savior of Louisbourg, stated: ..."a visual memorial is a necessary adjunct to a living past, and it is far more illuminating than the most eloquent words".

Ray Stapleton is a retired teacher and a passionate supporter of the Never Forgotten National Memorial. He lives in Ingonish.