

Vet's claim falls into a black hole

By PETER WORTHINGTON, TORONTO SUN

When he was alive and beset with health problems related to his wartime service in the army (86% disability pension), Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) helped Ken Barwise -- but in death, tended to ignore him and brushed off his funeral costs.

Barwise was a legendary hero of the Korean War, credited with killing six enemy at the 1951 Battle of Kapyong, re-capturing a Vickers machinegun from the Chinese, and earning the Military Medal for bravery.

He died in Penticton, B.C., March 3.

At the time both his legs had been amputated, he had a heart condition and prostate cancer. A widower, Barwise's stepdaughter, Jose van Berkel, was his only caregiver and believed Veterans Affairs and the Last Post Fund would absorb funeral costs.

LAST POST FUND

Cliff Chadderton, chairman of the National Council of Veteran Associations (NCVA, comprising some 51 groups), thought so, too, as did Barwise's beloved regiment, the Princess Patricia's.

Alas, of total funeral and interment costs of \$9,585.15, the Last Post Fund paid \$966 and the Canada Pension death benefit aid \$2,500, leaving Jose \$6,119.15 in debt.

As the best friend veterans have in Canada, Chadderton's War Amps organization made a memorial grant to Jose, and the NCVA lodged a formal appeal to Veterans Affairs Minister Greg Thompson to find Barwise "eligible for the funeral and burial grant as a matter of right."

The appeal was submitted on July 28. Chadderton was encouraged that the minister phoned to express appreciation for the action taken. Since then -- nothing. Chadderton fears that his brief "has more or less been swallowed up in the bureaucracy."

As Minister Thompson seems to have acknowledged, Barwise's case is strong, in that when he was alive and seriously disabled, a grant was made to him under the Veterans Independence Program to modify his home in Penticton to accommodate his wheelchair after his legs were amputated due to diabetes.

References to Barwise's wartime heroism have been documented in several books, and were included in the brief to the minister. David Bercuson's *Blood on the Hills* mentions Barwise as having "killed at least six in one of at least five attacks directed at 'B' Company" in the Kapyong battle.

John Melady's *Canada's Forgotten War* recalls Barwise's Military Medal being won when he "slaughtered six men in vicious close quarter fighting; two with grenades, two with their own guns, one with a machinegun retrieved from the Chinese, a sixth with his own rifle."

Ted Barris' *Deadlock in Korea* tells how 22-year-old Barwise "single-handedly recaptured the Vickers machinegun position," and carried the 90-kilo gun and tripod back to platoon headquarters.

Another, more detailed book, *Patricians in the Korean War* by Vince Courtenay devotes several pages to Barwise. It quotes Pte. P.J. Comeau: "When I saw what that big bastard did, charging ahead and taking over that gun under fire, I knew I had seen a man win the Victoria Cross ... I couldn't believe it when I heard they were going to give him just the Military Medal ... Ken Barwise is the bravest man I know and he got screwed."

CASE IS A PRECEDENT

All things considered, it's hard to see Barwise's case not being reassessed and the full costs of the veteran's funeral being approved, especially when by law the "benefit of doubt" section of the Pension Act is applied.

The Barwise case is significant because War Amps has at least 30 cases of wounded war veterans who have since died from complications that parallel Barwise's.

The case is a precedent. If (when) Minister Thompson follows through on the claim for Barwise, other outstanding cases will be bought up.

These include cases like a veteran who lost his right leg from a mine, suffered wounds to the elbow, hand, left foot and knee, his face and eye ... and at the time of death in 2006 had lung disease, diabetes, ulcers, respiratory and bowel infection.

This is just one of those Chadderton fights for, as war wounds evolve into other ailments that shorten the lives of war veterans.