

CHAPTER II:

A PLACE AT THE TABLE

In the years following the Boer War, political and military interests did not suspend operations while Canada created a viable armed force. Before there was much of an opportunity to take stock, Canada was agreeing to fulfil its obligation to the British Commonwealth and enter World War I. Canadians could not possibly have imagined what they were in for.

This was neither the Great War, except in terms of casualties, nor the War to End All Wars, despite being labelled both. Primarily, WWI advanced some of the military efficiencies, such as mechanization, that would characterize all future conflicts.

The first calls for volunteers to join the Canadian Army were enthusiastically over-subscribed. With minimal training, idealistic young recruits were transported to England for more training before consignment to the trenches in France and Belgium.

Finding ships to transport the recruits was difficult as the Royal Canadian Navy existed mostly on paper. Three top-line coastal Canadian Pacific Steamships had to be transformed into troop carriers.

To protect the West Coast against the threat of German battleships thought to be in the area, the premier of British Columbia had to broker a deal to buy two submarines, and these had no torpedoes or deck guns.

Canada also had no air force. Aspiring pilots first had to get to England, then join the Royal Air Force. Remarkably, two of the RAF's top aces turned out to be Canadians.

Canadians fought hard and fought well. Names such as Ypres, the Somme, Passchendaele, the Moreuil Woods and Vimy Ridge still carry profound meaning for Canadians. The casualty lists were long, and the loss of men and women profoundly impacted on thousands of families across the country.

Canadians particularly distinguished themselves when commanded by fellow Canadians. For this, they won a place at the signing of the Treaty of Versailles at the end of the war. Never again would Canada's military be the mere handmaid of another country.

A trench on the Canadian front showing "funk holes", France, 1917.

W.I. Castle / Canada. Dept. of National Defence / Library and Archives Canada / PA-001326



Personnel of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps checking the condition of a wounded Canadian soldier being evacuated to a Field Surgical Unit in Italy, January 15, 1944.

REMEMBERING JOHN MCCRAE

Military historians have used the century that has passed since World War I to autopsy every battle: the leaders, the politics, the weapons and lessons learned. Still, as the archived material and the memories become blurred by time, the war and its horrors are remembered with one blood red symbol, the poppy. Indeed, the poppy has come to symbolize the human losses of many wars.

The poppy's power to stir memory is attributable to a man whose short life was dedicated to saving lives rather than ending them: Canadian battle surgeon Lt.-Col. John McCrae, one of many thousands of people who did not survive that war.



Flanders, an area straddling the borders of Belgium, the Netherlands, and France, was the scene of some of the fiercest, most prolonged fighting in World War I, including the battles for Ypres and Passchendaele.

The 2nd Battle of Ypres, in 1915, was the first for Canadian troops, among them McCrae, who was in charge of a field hospital. With him, attached to the Canadian Field Artillery, was a close friend and former student, an engineer, Lieut. Alexis Helmer, all of 22 years old.

Helmer had enlisted in August 1914, following in the footsteps of his father, Brig. Gen. R.A. Helmer. Nine months later, Alexis was killed by artillery fire. Much affected, McCrae presided at his friend's brief burial service adjacent to the field hospital.

McCrae had already witnessed carnage, death and dismemberment on the battlefield, having first served in South Africa during the Boer War. Now, at 2nd Ypres, he saw that carnage expanded a thousandfold.

Still, the loss of his friend cut especially deep. His lament was intensified by the sight before him: poppies in full bloom around the field hospital and along the lanes, stark in counterpoint to the relentless din of artillery and acrid wafts of smoke and poison gas that tainted the country air.

During a lull, McCrae sat outside the surgery tent, within sight of his friend's makeshift grave, and wrote *In Flanders Fields*, a memorial for Helmer and for every fallen soldier.

In 1918, John McCrae died of meningitis, contracted at the front.

The poem was first published in the British periodical *Punch* later the same year, just as the general public was learning of the horrendous losses at 2nd Ypres. The expressive force of *In Flanders Fields* has resonated ever since.

IN FLANDERS FIELDS

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders Fields.*

ARTHUR CURRIE: CANADA'S CITIZEN GENERAL

The British Empire was built as much on the force of arms as on economic ambition. By the dawn of the 20th century, the British military had a well established pecking order, both in its relations with Britain's colonies and also within its officer ranks.

Then, during World War I, a Canadian general would emerge who would effec-



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General Currie, Commander of the Canadian troops in France and A.D.C.

tively shatter that pecking order. His name was Arthur Currie. Some have called him the greatest general of the war.

Within the pecking order, the colonies were expected to support any British military action without question. Britain still dictated the colonies' foreign policies, and colonial troops were expected to act under British command.

Colonial rank and file troops were generally held in low regard, almost treated as cannon fodder. Colonial officers, some of whom were professionals trained by the British, were obliged to toe the line. Still lower in the pecking order were reserve officers who were considered mere amateurs. One of those so-called amateurs was Arthur Currie.

In retrospect, suggests a former British officer, Currie's lack of military experience and formal officer's training may have been advantageous; he went to war without preconceived, often outdated notions of how to conduct warfare. He knew instinctively that strategies successfully employed by the likes of Napoleon wouldn't cut it along the trenches woven across France and Belgium.

Currie put a high price on life and possessed a fierce determination to preserve the lives of his soldiers, balking at throwing bodies after bodies in battle strategies. He risked court martial more than once in his refusal to sacrifice Canadian lives in what he considered futile endeavours.

Instead, Currie relied on meticulous planning and organization, a heightened level of training for troops under his command, confidence in and close communication with his junior officers. He trusted in his own stubbornness in the face of many British tactical proposals, and most of all, he trusted in his common sense.

The Canadian Way

The memorable Battle of Canal du Nord, in September 1918, was a clear case in point. Currie regarded the British plan as a summons to slaughter and insisted on implementing his own plan. The British saw this move as audacious and impractical but finally acquiesced, perhaps hoping Currie would be hoisted by his own petard.

Currie's plan called for a daring move across the dry section while engineers bridged the canal, and then for his forces to split, attacking behind the German positions to their left and taking Bournal Wood to the right of the crossing.

Although the task of crossing the formidable obstacle of the Canal du Nord required expert planning and precisely organized artillery and engineering support, Currie's plan succeeded.

After the success at Canal du Nord came further wins at Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele.

Currie was a brilliant tactician who used his skills to reduce casualties and is credited with accelerating the end of the war. His slogan was said to be "Pay the price of victory in shells—not lives." Partly because of the noise and construction used in their advances, the four divisions that comprised Currie's 1st Canadian Corps were so effective the German's believed they faced at least 12 divisions.

By the end of the war, General Currie was knighted by King George V. Yet his return to Canada as the greatest general the country had produced was met with little fanfare. He took a post as head of McGill University and seemingly settled into comfortable civilian life, all of his battles fought and won.

Thank You, Now Go Away

But there was an issue that continued to plague Currie: the government's abysmal treatment of its World War I veterans. In 1929, when he stepped down as president of the Royal Canadian Legion, Currie didn't go quietly. He lambasted the Canada Pension Board, its bureaucrats and its regulations.

In Currie's view, and that of many veterans, the pension board was devoted more to obstructing the receipt of veterans' benefits than to providing them. His impassioned testimony, laced with many first-hand accounts, led to a hastily formed pension committee, whose members were given the job of bringing about some radical changes.

When it became apparent that the pension board's bureaucrats were hell-bent on stonewalling the changes, Currie once again took up the struggle. In the end, the new government of R.B. Bennett dismantled the board and replaced it.

More Than Just Another War

While many of Currie's contributions and those of the 1st Canadian Corps were certainly of tremendous immediate value to Canada, there is a long-term and more

profound legacy to mention. Currie's implementations gave Canadian politicians the clout they needed to break the last significant colonial clutch the British had on Canada; control of the country's foreign policies.

The 1st Canadian Corps won Canada its independence on foreign battlefields. Canada was now strong enough to become a separate signatory to the Treaty of Versailles that officially ended the war. As well, Canada became a separate member of the League of Nations. This was tacit world recognition of the country's independence, finally confirmed in 1931 when the Statute of Westminster was passed by the British House of Commons.

Of this, Currie said, "Canadians have won their freedom by their own efforts and not because the Mother Country willed and wished it so to be."

"I would not wish to dignify warfare. I know too well that no pomp or circumstance, no waving of banners, can lend true dignity to war Those who have seen it and experienced it realize the horror of it, its frightful waste and extravagance."

– Sir Arthur Currie

MCBRIDE'S NAVY – EXECUTIVE DECISION

Sometimes the global military affairs of nations require a local touch to make sure they smoothly run their course.

When war was declared on August 4, 1914, Canada's West Coast was protected by only a few short-range coastal guns and a down-at-the-heels light cruiser, the *HMCS Rainbow*, based on Vancouver Island.

On the other side, known to be in the Pacific, was at least one ultra-modern German heavy cruiser — and maybe two — that could easily drop anchor outside the range of the coastal guns and systematically devastate the *HMCS Rainbow*, not to mention Victoria, Vancouver and the Nanaimo coal mines, for a start.

B.C. Premier Sir Richard McBride was well aware of his province's vulnerability from the sea. Until 1906, the might of the British Navy had protected Canada's shores, but she was at war now, her attention directed elsewhere.



Convoy carrying Canadian Expeditionary Force to Britain, October 8th, 1914.

The Royal Canadian Navy wasn't officially formed until 1910, and the government had not rushed to transform legislation into ships and sailors. The Royal Canadian Navy's total 1913-14 budget was barely \$500,000.

McBride was understandably desperate but not without resources, one of which was having an ear to the ground. Days before war was declared, he picked up the rumour that two new submarines, originally commissioned by the Chilean Navy, were berthed at Seattle and might be for sale. McBride determined that one way or another, he would have those subs.

What McBride did not have was authority either from Ottawa or the province to buy submarines. At the 11th hour, he wrested federal funding approval, then cut a cheque drawn on the provincial treasury for \$1.1 million. If Ottawa reneged on reimbursement, McBride's political career would be as dead in the water as his hopes, of course, for a navy. He might even end up in jail.

In the normal course of things, the acquisition would be a straightforward business deal between the province, the Canadian government, and the American shipyard that had built the submarines. These, however, were not normal times. As soon as Canada declared war, all sales of military material to Canada by American manufacturers were prohibited by the U.S. Neutrality Act. If McBride wanted the submarines, he would have to smuggle them to Canada. So he ordered just that.

The Game's Afoot

Late on the night of August 4, McBride's representatives departed Victoria Harbour on a nondescript coastal steamer. About 10 o'clock the same night, the two submarines slipped their mooring lines and, running on quiet electric motors, stole out of Seattle harbour. Their departure was clandestine — they had no official clearances.

The steamer rendezvoused with the submarines near Trial Island, in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, where McBride's people spent four hours inspecting the subs. Finally, the cheque was handed over, and under full power, the subs were rushed into Canadian waters and eventually into Victoria Harbour. *McBride's Navy* was born.

Two days later, the Canadian government repaid the province and the Royal Canadian Navy took over the subs, renaming them C1 and C2. That should have concluded the drama, but another problem arose — the submarines had no torpedoes.

Another night operation was mounted, and two Chilean practice torpedoes were purloined from the Seattle dockyard and spirited to Canada. The Americans beefed up their security following this second successful night raid, and while the Royal Canadian Navy officers pondered a third to obtain some vital innards for the torpedoes, they learned the same materials were en route from Halifax.

The two submarines, finally fitted for engagement, would uneventfully patrol Canada's Pacific coast for the next three years. As for *HMCS Rainbow*, she was dispatched on a hunt for the German heavy cruisers which, luckily for the seriously outgunned *Rainbow*, were already back in the Atlantic.

NO WHITE MAN'S WAR: 2ND CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

Even in wartime, old ideas can die hard. Some in command of Canada's military during the First World War considered it a "white man's war." The country's people of colour proved them wrong.

Up until 1916, black Canadians were not permitted to enlist in the armed forces. But by this time, the number of new volunteers was dwindling and casualties in Europe were mounting at a shocking rate. Expedience pressured Canadian Army brass to relent, and to accept black recruits.

On July 5, 1916, the Canadian Army officially formed the 2nd Construction Battalion, based at Pictou, Nova Scotia. Five hundred men of colour enlisted from Nova Scotia, more than 400 more came from Ontario, and 50 from western Canada. Potential recruits far exceeded the number required to fill the battalion's ranks.

Going overseas in 1917, the battalion's work was non-combative until the end of the war, although it was slated for action in the spring of 1918 on the Western Front. The battalion's contribution to the war effort involved construction of buildings, roads, bridges and airstrips — the support infrastructure vital for effective combat.

PASSCHENDAELE – HELL FOR ANY SOLDIER

Commander Arthur Currie angrily predicted that 16,000 Canadian soldiers would die in their two-week 1917 offensive against Passchendaele. Give or take a few hundred, his estimate was accurate.

Passchendaele was a small village near Ypres, Flanders. It had been the scene of fierce fighting in 1914 as British and French forces halted a German offensive there. Since then, fighting had settled into static trench warfare.

In April 1915, the Germans mounted a massive offensive against Ypres, and this time they used poison gas. This battle marked Canada's initiation into the war. Allied forces retreated around them, but the Canadians held their position and halted the German advance.

Another Allied offensive began in mid-July 1917, a two-week sustained artillery barrage that poured 4.3 million rounds onto German positions, followed by two



Final instructions before going into battle in France, October 1916.

million more rounds per week as the offensive tried to move forward.

Throughout August, September, and October, record rainfall deluged the area, severely slowing any advance. Long ago stripped of vegetation or shelter by years of artillery fire, the ground was a sea of mud, pocked with water-filled shell holes deep enough to drown wounded soldiers who often fell into them. Troop supplies could not get through; wounded could not be evacuated. The dead either rotted where they had fallen or sank into the mud, their bodies often providing the only near-solid footing for soldiers.

Canadians entered the line to relieve Australian troops in October. Cpl. Will Bird, 42nd Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada) saw in the Australians “men who looked like grisly discards of the battlefield, long unburied, who had risen and were in search of graves.” Another Highlander in the 42nd remembered the stench, the “sour smell of disinfectants, stale gas, sodden clothing, and faint, sickly odours of decay.” It constantly hovered over the battlefield, no matter which way the wind blew.

On October 26, the Canadians began their assault. The casualty rate was high. The 46th Battalion lost 70 per cent of its men. The 49th Battalion lost 75 per cent of its men on October 30 alone. But the Canadians fought on, taking concrete pill

box machine-gun nests one at a time, capturing hundreds of Germans and killing or wounding thousands more.

Inch by inch, day by day, the Canadians persisted. Finally, on November 6, amid torrents of rain, the village of Passchendaele was captured. Not a single building was standing. The soldiers had fought across a wasteland to capture a wasteland, but every Canadian objective during the course of the offensive was taken.

Through the three months of fighting the Canadians established themselves as an elite fighting corps. By the end, nine soldiers received the Victoria Cross in recognition of their outstanding effort at Passchendaele, only one less than they were awarded during all of World War II.

BILLIE BARKER – THE LOVE OF FLYING

Born in Dauphin, Manitoba, Billie Barker spent his first year of World War I in the trenches as a machine-gunner. Then he started flying and became the most decorated flier of the war. Included among his honours was the Victoria Cross.

By October 1918, Barker was credited with shooting down 46 enemy planes. On October 27, he found himself flying alone over France when a German formation of 15 Fokker biplanes pounced on him from the clouds. Sustaining severe injuries in both legs and an elbow, he continued to fly while slipping in and out of consciousness.

Barker managed to shoot down four of the planes in this condition, bringing his total to 50. He crash-landed his tattered plane behind Canadian lines, where he was rescued. When Barker recovered sufficiently, he was awarded the Victoria Cross at Buckingham Palace.

Almost immediately after the war, from 1919 to 1922, Barker partnered with another Canadian flying ace and Victoria Cross winner, Billy Bishop, in Bishop-Barker Aeroplanes Ltd. Using confiscated Fokker aeroplanes, they performed aerobatics and mock dogfights at fairs and other public spectacles.

Following that short-lived venture, Lt.-Col. Barker was involved in establishing the Royal Canadian Air Force. On April 1, 1924, the official founding day of the RCAF, Barker was its acting director (1922-1924). Among the innovations he spearheaded was the regulation that all RCAF air crews must have parachutes.

THE ROYAL NEWFOUNDLAND AT SOMME: A GENERATION ON THE LINE

For Newfoundlanders, July 1st is not an easy day to celebrate Canada's birthday. It's the anniversary of the Battle of Somme, July 1, 1916, one of the bloodiest battles of WWI and one that robbed Newfoundland of a staggering percentage of its fighting men.

Although Newfoundland did not join Confederation until 1949, the island was a member of the Commonwealth, supporting the British efforts in both world wars.

In 1914, Newfoundland raised a full volunteer infantry regiment of 1,000 men,



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Private Thomas Ricketts, V.C., 1st Battalion, The Royal Newfoundland Regiment.

the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, which faced its first action in September 1915 at Gallipoli. On the line for three months, they endured some of the worst circumstances that trench warfare had to offer. By the time the British withdrawal was complete in January 1916, the Royal Newfoundland had lost 40 soldiers.

Shocked by their defeat at Gallipoli, and with the war not going well on the Eastern Front, British commanders decided to redeem themselves in a massive summer offensive in 1916. This would be the Battle of the Somme, the largest battle of the war. Within this offensive, the Royal Newfoundlanders, 800-strong, would “go over the top” near the small town of Beaumont-Hamel.

The battle was fully engaged on July 1, but the Germans were ready for the charge. For the Newfoundlanders, the first harbinger of the horror to come was the delay encountered when they had to climb through piles of Allied bodies at the first line of British trenches. These men had not even made it as far as no man’s land.

With each soldier lugging 66 pounds of bulky kit, the regiment pressed into the German machine-gun assault. The fruitlessness of the mission soon became obvious, and they had to retreat across the same field of bodies. Only 30 minutes had elapsed since they had left their trenches.

SGT. THOMAS RICKETTS, VC: A TEENAGE HERO

Thomas Ricketts, from White Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador, was not yet 16 when he joined the Royal Newfoundland Regiment to fight for the Commonwealth.

On Oct. 14, 1918, his platoon was being severely battered by machine-guns during an advance near Ledgehem. Armed with a Lewis gun, Pte. Ricketts and his section commander attempted to outflank the Germans’ position but ran out of ammunition.

Ricketts backtracked under fire for more ammunition, then laid down such accurate cover-fire that his platoon was able to advance unharmed and capture four field guns, four machine-guns and eight prisoners.

Though he served long before Newfoundland joined Canada, Ricketts is considered the youngest “Canadian” to be awarded the Victoria Cross. Ricketts also received the Distinguished Conduct Medal and the Croix du Guerre.

In the end, the Battle of Somme would involve a million men. The Allied casualties exceeded 57,000, a great loss by any terms. But in sparsely populated Newfoundland, it was a rare home that was not immediately impacted by the destruction of the regiment.

At roll call the day after the battle, only 68 soldiers answered. The regiment had lost 710 men — dead, missing, or wounded, including every officer who had “gone over the top.”

ORPINGTON, AN ATYPICAL OLDE ENGLISH TOWN

On the outskirts of London sits the quaint town of Orpington. Locally, the town is known for its Orpington hens, an annual gypsy convention and its crowning of a May Queen every year.

From a Canadian perspective, Orpington’s finest hour began in 1915, when the government of Ontario donated \$2 million to construct a 2,180-bed hospital there to be devoted to treating soldiers severely wounded on the Western Front.



Library and Archives Canada / PA-149304

Wounded soldiers suffering from fractured femurs at No. 7 Canadian General Hospital, Etaples, France, 1917.

Canadian doctors and nurses treated more than 25,000 soldiers before departing for home in September 1919. By that time, the hospital (known as General Hospital No. 16) was providing state-of-the-art treatment, including occupational therapy for soldiers suffering from shell shock.

The hospital pushed medical frontiers in another direction as well, carrying out pioneering work in plastic surgery. Part of this ground-breaking effort was provided by Dr. Thomas McCrae, brother of Dr. John McCrea, who composed *In Flanders Fields*.

The services of the hospital were spectacular for its time. Only 182 of the seriously wounded soldiers that were admitted could not be saved.

Although #16 was demolished in the 1960s and replaced with a new hospital, the original is remembered in Orpington. One wing of the new Orpington General Hospital is named the Canada Wing and three wards are named Ontario, Quebec, and Mackenzie King, respectively.

Those patients who didn't make it are also remembered. A section of Orpington's All Saints Church cemetery is known as *Canadian Corner*, established for the interment of the 182 patients who died.

HALIFAX EXPLOSION

In 1917, as the war in Europe ground up men and material, Halifax, already one of the largest natural seaports in the world, was also the base for troops, munitions and other supplies destined for Europe from North America. Here the ship convoys were formed for the transatlantic crossing. Troops arrived by rail from all parts of Canada to be transported by ship overseas. Supply and munitions ships arriving from New York, Boston and Montreal clogged the harbour as they awaited inspection and clearance to join the convoys.

The threat of German submarines had resulted in antisubmarine measures at the mouth of the harbour. Harbour pilots had complained about the congestion for some time, and near collisions happened regularly. But for all intents and purposes, close calls don't count in wartime.

On the morning of December 6, 1917, the French freighter *Mont Blanc* entered the harbour to join a convoy heading east. The *Mont Blanc* was fully loaded with

highly explosive munitions. Exiting the harbour at the same time was the *Imo*, a Norwegian ship heading to New York City. The two ships collided in the harbour's Narrows at 8:45 a.m., and the *Mont Blanc* caught fire.

The spectacle soon drew crowds to the dockside. Seamen from the *Mont Blanc* immediately abandoned their ship, rowed to shore and desperately tried to warn onlookers of their peril. By then, the benzol on the deck was afire. The *Mont Blanc* drifted to shore and collided with a pier. Then she exploded.

The blast was the largest wartime man-made explosion to that time, being surpassed only by the atom bombs of the Second World War. Every building within a square kilometre was instantly destroyed. Shock waves shattered windows, tore off roofs and collapsed walls a kilometre and a half from the harbour. People close to the blast's epicentre were vaporized.

Flood and fire followed closely. A 60 foot tsunami swept through the flattened city, sucking victims back into the harbour as it receded. Fires burned in the wreckage near the harbour and rapidly spread beyond. Both Halifax and Dartmouth, on the harbour's opposite shore, shared the same fate.

The substantial Canadian military presence in the city doubtless saved many lives, but with six square kilometres of Halifax reduced to rubble, their efforts, along with those of the fire and other rescue brigades, could not be enough. Of one extended family of 66 people, for example, only 20 survived. Mary Jean Jackson lost her 10 children, her husband, mother, four brothers, two sisters and several nieces and nephews.

The 20 to 25 minutes between the collision and the explosion was also long enough to draw onlookers to windows. When shock waves shattered the glass, many were permanently blinded. Still, the horror did not end.

While the blizzard that blew in on the following day, dumping 40 centimetres of snow onto the devastated city, did much to stifle the fires, it greatly hampered the efforts of rescuers digging for survivors in the rubble. With very little shelter available, weather took its own toll. Bodies were still being recovered the following spring.

On December 5, 1917, Halifax was a prosperous city. The war had injected it with life and bustle. By December 7, 1917, Halifax was a shattered, smouldering hulk, a casualty of the war.

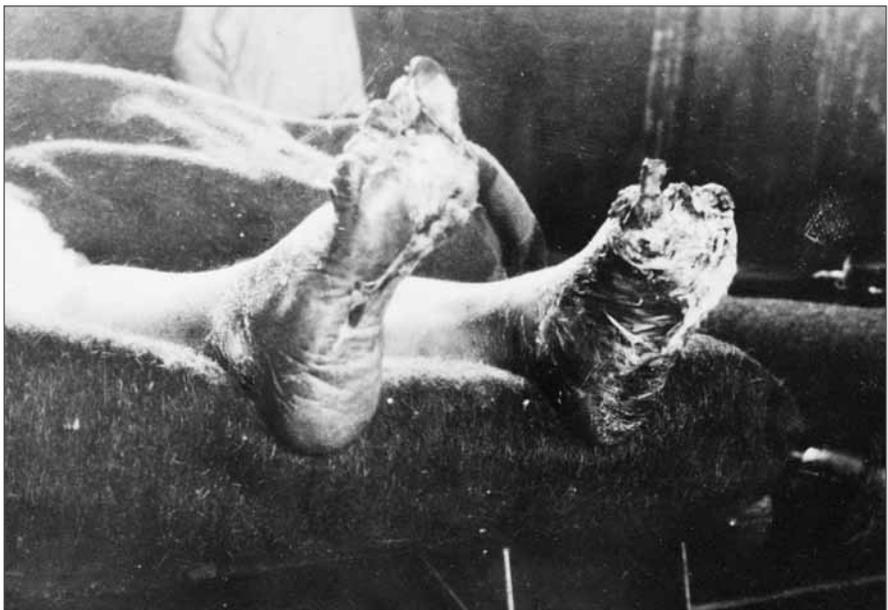
Nearly 2,000 people died in the blast, the tsunami and collapsed buildings, 134 of them Canadian service personnel. Nine thousand more people were injured. Six thousand were now homeless, and another 25,000 were left with severely damaged houses.

GOOD TIMES, BAD TIMES, AND THE TAX MAN

World War I had an upside for many stay-at-home Canadians. The war effort brought booming economic times. But after the shocking casualty lists came the economic downturn that followed Armistice. The good times stopped rolling.

Apart from Canada's obligation to support Britain's military endeavours, the Canadian government had its own reasons for becoming active early in the war.

Canada's economy was in the dumps entering 1914. Grain prices, then the mainstay of the country's economy, were taking a beating due to crop failures and deflated world prices. Skyrocketing unemployment was exacerbated by a record



A Case of trench feet suffered by an unidentified soldier.

Library and Archives Canada/PA-149311

influx of immigrants, which began in 1910.

Unemployment was reduced as soon as the call went out for army volunteers. Not surprisingly, almost 70 per cent of those who enlisted in English Canada were recent British immigrants.

Enlistment in the military supplied the war machine and also turned around the economy. The country's manufacturing and service industries received a huge shot in the arm and soon surpassed agriculture as the primary source of the nation's wealth.

But there were growing pains, mostly due to patronage in providing contracts and profiteering in the provision of goods. Canadian soldiers suffered for it. Trench foot was commonplace on the front because substandard materials and workmanship meant that soldiers' boots rotted off their feet. The Canadian-manufactured Ross rifles jammed almost as often as they fired, and even then, their accuracy was dubious.

From 1916 to 1918, Canada thrived on full employment. The buoyant economy also enabled the government to pay for the war. Feeling patriotic, citizens readily accepted "sin taxes" on items such as alcohol and tobacco. For the first time, they also began paying what government called a "temporary" personal income tax. It proved to be not nearly as temporary as the economic boom.

As wartime demand for goods ended, rising inflation and unemployment beset the country. Many returning soldiers could not find work. Moreover, 1918-1919 was the period of the Great Influenza Epidemic, which seemed to target the country's fittest people, many of whom were veterans. The epidemic took as many as 50,000 lives in Canada. Between war and disease, Canada's death toll between 1914 and 1920 exceeded 110,000 people, carved mostly from one generation.

FREDERICK FISHER: THE HERO FROM ST. CATHERINES

Due to his actions on April 22, 1915, St. Catharines, Ontario, native Lance-Cpl. Frederick Fisher became the first Canadian to be awarded the Victoria Cross during the First World War.

In 1915, Fisher was a machine-gunner with the 13th Battalion, Royal Canadian Highlanders Regiment, fighting near St. Julien in Belgium in the 2nd Battle of

Ypres. To protect regimental artillery from being overrun, Fisher crawled to a forward position and broke up a German advance. Of the six men accompanying him, four were killed.

The next day, while trying to set up a machine-gun to defend against German positions decimating his regiment ranks, Fisher was shot dead.

His Victoria Cross was awarded posthumously.

BISHOP AND BEURLING: THE KILLER B'S

Though wars apart, the "Killer Bs," air aces Billy Bishop and George (Buzz) Beurling, shared a singular passion – flying – and a singular distinction: Bishop was Canada's foremost combat air ace in World War I, and Beurling, Canada's best in World War II.

Billy Bishop, from Owen Sound, Ontario, was in his third year at Canada's Royal Military College when war broke out. In 1915, he arrived in England as part of a cavalry unit. But Bishop had no interest in horses or in modern trench warfare. He wanted to fly.



Captain William A. Bishop, V.C., Royal Flying Corps. Captain William A. Bishop, V.C., Royal Flying Corps.

William Rider-Rider / Canada. Dept. of National Defence / Library and Archives Canada / PA-001651

Canada had no air force, so Bishop used social connections (he was married to the granddaughter of Timothy Eaton, founder of the Eaton's department stores) to talk his way into Britain's Royal Flying Corps. He flew first as an observer and artillery spotter. It was 1917 before he made it to France as a fighter pilot.

Within five weeks, he shot down 17 German planes. In June 1917, Bishop won the Victoria Cross, having single-handedly attacked a German air field, destroying two planes in the air and one on the ground. In a German pilot's zeal to get off the ground and engage Bishop, a fourth plane crashed into a tree.

By May 1918, when he was recalled to Canada to a hero's welcome, Bishop was credited with 72 kills.

With the outbreak of the World War II, Canada decided it needed its own air force; Bishop was appointed its air marshal in charge of recruitment.

Beurling

George (Buzz) Beurling, from Verdun, Que., was still a teenager when he earned himself a pilot's licence. He tried three times to enlist in the RCAF but was turned down each time because he lacked a high school diploma.

His passion prevailed. Beurling made his way to England, where he was accepted into the Royal Air Force. In September 1941, he received his wings. In July 1942, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal. That September, he received a bar for it.

CANADIAN STEEL

Of the medal Beurling cherished most – the DFM – he said it was “the one gong that means something. You know what it means? It means all the time I spent trying to earn money for flying time to get a licence. It means that trip across Canada on the rods and the Seattle hoosegow and the long trek back. It means my attempts to get into the Canadian, Chinese and Finnish Air Forces and three trips across the Atlantic in a munitions ship to get into the RAF. It means all the months of training in England and the hell of a time I had to get posted to a front where I could get some fighting and prove to everybody else what I had known for years about myself.”

Beurling was assigned to the Malta defence. Vastly outnumbered by the Luftwaffe every day, Beurling accounted for 29 kills as part of the skeleton force of Spitfires allotted to defend the tiny island. By the end of his war, he had a total score of 32.

Recognizing a Canadian hero when they had one, the RCAF now pursued Beurling and persuaded him to join up, using him to promote recruitment in a tour across the country. In his view, this was a waste of his time and expertise.

Beurling was 22 when he resigned from the RCAF. He tried the RAF again, but they wanted him to train pilots in tactics. He did manage to get some fighting time in, but Luftwaffe planes had become scarce. Beurling resigned from there too.

After the war in Europe ended, Beurling continued looking for another fight. For a time, he negotiated to join the Chinese against the Japanese, but that fell through. He married, and that fell through, too. On May 20, 1948, George (Buzz) Beurling, DSO, DFC, DFM and Bar, died in a plane crash in Rome as he took off for a flight to Israel, which at that time was fighting for its life as a new nation. He was 28 years old.

VIMY MEMORIAL: VISION OF A VICTORY

The drawn-out horrendous Battle of Vimy Ridge is considered by many historians to be Canada's greatest military victory.

In recognition of this achievement and the sacrifice made by Canadian military men and women at Vimy and, throughout France during World War I, the French government in 1922 ceded a square kilometre of land at Vimy to Canada for its use in perpetuity.

At this fitting location, Canadians decided to construct the most striking memorial to the country's casualties outside its own national boundaries in that war.

A design competition was conducted, attracting 160 submissions. Selected was the design of Walter Seymour Allward, Canada's foremost sculptor of Canadian military and civic memorials.

Work on the Vimy Memorial began in 1925, slowly and cautiously at first because the area was still cluttered with live munitions.

Central to Allward's vision were two massive limestone pylons rising 27 metres from their base. Once those were in place, the memorial began to take shape.



Work got underway on 20 sculpted figures. The most prominent of these is carved from a 30-tonne block, the figure of a woman representing Canada and mourning its lost sons and daughters.

The memorial is at once solemn and majestic, speaking as much to hope as to sorrow. From the ridge where it stands, many of the 30 nearby cemeteries where Canadians soldiers are buried are visible.

In 1936, 11 years after Allward's masterwork was begun, King Edward VIII officially unveiled it.

In 2001, the Canadian government began an ambitious program to restore its 13 World War I battlefield memorials in Europe, mostly in France and Belgium. Eight of these were specifically Canadian, and the remaining five were for the Dominion of Newfoundland. The restoration of the Vimy Ridge Memorial was completed in April 2007.

The original plaster models of Allward's 20 figures are permanently displayed at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.



Canadian machine gunners dig in, Vimy Ridge.

THE LAST LAUGH

The Bedouins, nomads of the North African desert regions, have survived for centuries in their harsh environment not only because they have adapted to it, but also because they are resourceful and always have an eye open for the main chance.

In 1918, a 120-member Canadian army unit — mostly engineers, medical officers and nurses — on the Turkish Front (present-day Iraq) discovered Bedouins had another talent. They were skilled pilferers.

One night, an unknown number of enterprising Bedouins stole into the army camp, silently cut away the side of a tent and made off with the unit's mule harnesses.

Discovering the brazen theft the next morning, the Canadians were righteously indignant. Then outrage turned to laughter: the Bedouins had only donkeys; the mule harnesses wouldn't fit them.

Knowing the resourcefulness of the Bedouins, one soldier surmised that once the harnesses were found to be useless, they'd bring them back and try to negotiate a finder's fee. The soldier was wrong.

That night, the Bedouins crept back into the camp and stole the mules.

WINNIE THE POOH: STORY OF A MASCOT

The trapper wasn't waiting for a train. He was simply resting on a bench at the White River, Ontario, railway station. Leashed to the bench was a small black bear cub, which the trapper had brought out of the bush. The cub was an orphan, its twin and its mother having been killed. Leaving the cub on its own would have meant its certain death.

Lieut. Harry Colebourn, a Canadian Army veterinarian, happened to be traveling from Winnipeg to Valcartier on a troop and supply train. When the train made a stop at White River, the lieutenant hopped off to stretch his legs and, spotting the cub, got into conversation with the trapper. The lieutenant soon persuaded the trapper to sell him the cub for \$20, then bundled it onto the train.

By the time the train pulled into Valcartier, the cub had endeared itself to both



Harry Colebourn and Winnie, 1914.

the soldiers and the train crew. Colebourn had given the cub the name Winnie, after Winnipeg, the home of many of the troops travelling with him that day.

Valcartier was the scene of the largest assemblage of Canadian soldiery in the country's young history. More than 20,000 recruits were training there as the Canadian Expeditionary Force in preparation for action on the front lines of France and Belgium.

On October 4, 1914, just a few weeks later, Colebourn and Winnie were shipboard headed for England. While the vet from the Prairies spent most of the voyage seasick in his bunk or with his woozy head drooped over the rail, Winnie took to the ocean like an old salt. She was a bubbly social butterfly, always on the lookout for a friendly face or a free snack.

After disembarking in Liverpool, Winnie travelled with the veterinary contingent to the CEF base on the Salisbury Plain. By now, she was a mascot extraordinaire, even appearing front and centre in formal Winnipeg Veterinary Corps photographs.

When the corps had to move on to the battlefronts in mainland Europe, Winnie couldn't make the trip. Colebourn found her a temporary home with the Royal Zoological Society at the London Zoo, intending to pick her up upon his return.

Although he visited her as frequently as possible during leaves, he decided not to take her back to Canada after the war. Winnie had settled nicely into her new digs. In no time she had become the zoo's most popular resident, a must-visit for every family that came through the gates.

Two of these visitors were children's book author A.A. Milne and his son, Christopher. Milne began to make up stories about Winnie for his son and finally put them into a book. In 1926, Winnie became Winnie the Pooh, history's most lovable fictional bear.

Winnie would live to be 20 and throughout her life never turned on a human, friend or stranger. She had her likes of course – condensed milk high on the list, as well-known to Londoners as Pooh's honey pot. Today, Winnie continues to be the official mascot of the Fort Garry Horse, Colebourn's original regiment before his transfer to the veterinary corps.

SIBERIAN SOJOURN

In late 1918, Canadian troops were shipped to Siberia. For these soldiers, Canada's war would not end that November 11. For many of these troops, it had only started.

Apart from the historic achievements of Canadian forces at Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele, 1917 was a bad year for the Allies.

Despite millions of casualties, the front in France and Belgium was stalemated; morale was at an all-time low. The French army mutinied, and to the south, the Italians were generally out of the war. In the east Lenin concluded the Treaty of Brest-Litvosk with the Central Powers (primarily Germany and Austria-Hungary), thus taking Russia out of the war.

Heading into 1918, civil war and anarchy still raged throughout Russia. Advancing southward with ease into this vacuum, Germany could occupy the Russian grain belt and elsewhere capture more than \$1 billion worth of military materiel stockpiled in warehouses and on the docks of Vladivostok, Murmansk and Archangel. Perhaps with the latter in mind, Germany had already invaded Finland.

If successful, Germany would be able to divert troops to the Western Front and also resupply those already there. The Allies decided to send troops to Siberia to ensure the war materiel did not fall into German or Bolshevik hands. Britain called for Canada to provide the bulk of troops representing the Commonwealth.

Negotiations among the Allies as to the division of duties dragged into August 1918. Finally, matters were resolved, and recruitment began in Canada. The hope was to create the force with volunteers drawn in large part from veterans already returned from Europe. The effort failed, forcing the government to turn to conscripts, many of whom were French-Canadians already opposed to conscription.

The first Canadian contingent arrived in Vladivostok on October 26, 1918. Even after the Armistice on November 11 and well into December, Canada continued to send more troops, the government reasoning that war would continue with only the enemy changing, that is, from the Central Powers to the Bolsheviks.

The Canadians were based at Vladivostok, tasked, as far as they understood, to secure the stores of war materiel. From the onset, to the government's credit, the troops were not required to undertake any action except in defence of the stores.

Nevertheless, the Siberian winter was torturous. Frigid temperatures, interminable guard and patrol duties, poor living conditions, boredom and the knowledge that for every other Canadian soldier the war was over — these conditions haunted the soldiers throughout the deployment.

Finally, on April 22, 1919, the Canadian pullout began. The last Canadians arrived home in June. British, American and Japanese troops remained, the Americans and British into 1920 when support for the anti-Bolshevik forces collapsed.

The Canadian's Siberian sojourn hardly rates a comma in the postscript of the war, but it was part of the Allied "sojourn" that eventually culminated in the Cold War. It was, in many respects, the Cold War's first choosing of sides.

For the Canadian forces, the "sojourn" was significant because, despite both British and American pressure, Canadian commanders in the field refused repeatedly to involve their troops in offensive action, a strong indication of Canada's growing movement toward military independence.

VALOUR ROAD, WINNIPEG'S REAL MAIN STREET

To some, Portage Avenue and Main Street may be the most famous intersection in Winnipeg, but Portage and Valour Road in the city's west end has more going for it than a constant wind.

Until the First World War, Valour Road was Pine Street, a few blocks of inconspicuous bungalows and not many trees. Then, over the course of the war, three young soldiers who'd grown up on Pine Street were awarded Victoria Crosses for their selfless gallantry in separate actions.

The first Pine Street recipient was Sgt.-Maj. Frederick Hall of the 8th Battalion (Winnipeg Rifles), Canadian Expeditionary Force. He was honoured for successfully rescuing wounded comrades from no man's land during action at the Ypres Salient on April 15, 1915.

On September 9, 1916, Cpl. Leo Clarke of the 2nd Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, chose fight over flight when he became separated from his unit during the Somme Offensive. After emptying his revolver against advancing Germans, he picked up abandoned German rifles and continued shooting, killing



five, wounding several and capturing one before the Germans retired. This individual action merited a Victoria Cross.

Lieut. Robert Shankland of the 43rd Battalion, Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, Canadian Expeditionary Force, was the third Pine Street lad to receive the Victoria Cross. He was awarded the medal for leading a successful counterattack on October 17, 1917, retaking trenches lost at Bellevue Spur during the Passchendaele battles.

Hall and Clarke would be killed in action later in the war. Shankland would survive the war and eventually become a lieutenant-colonel, commanding the Cameroons.

In 1925, the City of Winnipeg officially changed the name of Pine Street to Valour Road in honour of these three soldiers and erected a small plaque at the corner of Valour and Portage.