Canada and the First World War
Valour Remembered
1918 - November 11 - 1978

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The Conflict Begins

An assassination in Sarajevo in June 1914, went almost unnoticed in Canada. Few Canadians expected that it would lead to war; fewer still anticipated the sacrifices Canada would be called to make. Yet the war was to change the world they lived in, and in a very real sense the Canadian nation was born on the battlefields of Europe.

International relations in Europe in the summer of 1914 were, apparently, quiet: but great tensions existed under the surface. The Great European Powers were ranged against each other in two alliances—The Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy) and the Triple Entente (France, Russia and Great Britain). The situation was heightened by economic and imperial rivalries, national pride, the nationalism of new countries, ambitious statesmen, the instability of eastern Europe (particularly the Balkans where the Ottoman Empire was collapsing) and the constant talk of wars somewhere. All the ingredients were there for a small international fire to become a raging inferno. Once started by those fatal shots, efforts to stop the blaze proved futile.

On Sunday, June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was shot and killed by a Serbian nationalist during a visit to Sarajevo in Bosnia. Convinced that the Serbian government was involved in the plot, Austria-Hungary, supported by Germany, sent a harsh ultimatum to Serbia. Although Serbia met nearly every demand, Austria-Hungary, bent on conquest, declared war. The fire spread. Russia, the self-proclaimed protector of the Slav nations, mobilized. Germany demanded promises of peace from Russia and France and, when there was no answer, declared war on Russia on August 1, and on France two days later. France looked to Britain for support. Although Britain was not bound by a formal treaty to join France in a war, Sir Edward Gray, the Foreign Secretary, had made an informal agreement with the French. Then, on August 4, the German Army on its way to France invaded neutral Belgium. Britain sent an ultimatum demanding withdrawal of German troops and reminding Germany of the Treaty of 1839 guaranteeing Belgium's neutrality, to which Prussia (effectively the predecessor of Germany) was also a signatory. Unanswered, the ultimatum expired at midnight on August 4. Britain was at war. And when Britain was at war, Canada was at war. That was her sole obligation. How Canada reacted to the war and what measures she took in support of Britain was up to her own government.

It was with a spirit of light-hearted optimism and exuberant enthusiasm that Britain and her Empire went to war. It would be exciting; it would be good for business; and the boys would be home by Christmas. They did not know that four years of death and destruction lay ahead in a war revolutionized by high explosive shells, rapid-firing machine guns,

poison gas, mighty dreadnoughts, stealthy submarines, and airplanes. Nor did they know that it would destroy thousands of young men and transform society

Germany, France and Russia already had elaborate war plans and proceeded to put them into effect—all failed. The object of the German *Schlieffen* Plan was to strike quickly against France, destroy her armies, and then turn against the more slowly mobilizing Russians, on the eastern flank. The plan almost succeeded. Massive German armies struck through Belgium, battered the fortified cities of Liège and Namur, and wheeled southward into France. At Mons a small British Expeditionary Force made a determined stand, but the task was impossible, and the "Old Contemptibles" were forced to retreat. Then, the German advance weakened, and the French and British counter-attacked. In the First Battle of the Marne the invasion was checked, and the Germans were driven back to a line along the Aisne River. The *Schlieffen* Plan had failed.

The French "Plan XVII" also failed as French drives against Germany in Alsace and Lorraine were bloodily repulsed.

On the eastern front the outcome was similar. At first the Russians, moving with unexpected speed, threw back the Austro-Hungarians and advanced into Eastern Prussia. But Allied hopes were dashed as the Germans under von Hindenburg inflicted a crushing defeat on the Russian armies at Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes. By late autumn a military deadlock had been reached on both the eastern and the western fronts.

In the west, after the "Miracle of the Marne," there followed a race to the sea as German and Allied armies tried to outflank each other in a desperate bid to gain the Channel ports. While the heavy fighting moved north, the battlefields to the south became quiet. The soldiers there dug themselves into the ground to provide shelter and security from bullets and shells. The Germans were able to select the best positions for a defensive position—already they were expecting to defend a line rather than to attack on the Western Front. The positions they selected were not only, generally, excellent from the point of view of defence, they also ensured that vital strategic railways to maintain their armies were secure and away from enemy artillery, well behind the lines. They also took full advantage of the heavily industrialised areas of France and Belgium now under their control. These early and primitive fortifications were a start to a complex system of trench lines, machine gun and artillery positions that were to reach their height with the construction of the Hindenburg Line in the winter of 1916/1917. But at this stage they were simple trenches defended at best with a few strands of barbed wire. By December 1918 the line stretched for 750 kilometres from the Belgian coast to the Swiss frontier; and it was on this Western Front that Canada was to be chiefly engaged.

On October 29, the German Army made one final effort to reach the Channel ports. In the First Battle of Ypres, in a little corner of Belgium known as Flanders, the British Expeditionary Force and their French allies held against overwhelming odds and the ports were saved. Unfortunately in these early campaigns Britain lost the greater part of her precious regular army; while the efforts to protect the Ypres Salient were to be even more costly in the future.

The Conflict Widens

The war of rapid movement ground to a halt, and the two great enemy armies became completely deadlocked along a six-hundred mile front of impregnable trenches. For the

next four years there was little change. As attack after attack failed to penetrate the enemy lines the toll in human lives grew rapidly, and the Western Front became an area of bloody stalemate.

Faced with the prospect of a long struggle both sides began an urgent search for allies. The Dominions had already joined Britain and their troops were soon involved in the far-flung operations. The war became more truly a world war as Japan, in 1914, and Italy, in 1915 joined the Entente Powers, while Turkey lined up with Germany and Austria. Other countries were drawn in, one by one, until by 1917 every continent and all the oceans of the world were involved.

Canada Enters the War

The fact thatCanada was automatically at war when Britain was at war in 1914, was unquestioned as from coast to coast, in a spirit of almost unbelievable unanimity, Canadians pledged support for Britain. Sir Wilfred Laurier spoke for the majority of Canadians when he proclaimed: "It is our duty to let Great Britain know and to let the friends and foes of Great Britain know that there is in Canada but one mind and one heart and that all Canadians are behind the Mother Country." Prime Minister Robert Borden, calling for a supreme national effort, offered Canadian assistance to Great Britain. The offer was accepted, and immediately orders were given for the mobilization of an expeditionary force.

With a regular army of only 3,110 men and a fledgling navy, Canada was ill-prepared to enter a world conflict. Yet, from Halifax to Vancouver, thousands of young Canadians hastened to the recruiting offices. Within a few weeks more than 32,000 men gathered at Valcartier Camp near Quebec City; and within two months the First Contingent, Canadian Expeditionary Force, was on its way to England in the largest convoy ever to cross the Atlantic. Also sailing in this convoy was a contingent from the still separate British self governing colony of Newfoundland. A suggestion that Newfoundland's men should be incorporated into the Canadian Expeditionary Force had earlier been politely but firmly rejected.

Upon reaching England the Canadians endured a long miserable winter training in the mud and drizzle of Salisbury Plain. In spring 1915, they were deemed ready for the front line and were razor-keen. Nothing, they believed, could be worse than Salisbury. In the years that lay ahead, they were to find out just how tragically wrong that assessment was.

The first Canadian troops to arrive in France were the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, which had been formed at the outbreak of war entirely from ex-British Army regular soldiers. The "Princess Pats" landed in France in December 1914 with the British 27th Division and saw action near St. Eloi and at Polygon Wood in the Ypres Salient. Today, their battalion memorial stands on the high ground of Bellewaarde Ridge.

Early in February 1915, the 1st Canadian Division reached France and was introduced to trench warfare by veteran British troops. Following this brief training they took over a section of the line in the Armentières sector in French Flanders. Faced with the realities of dirt, disease and death, their illusions of military glory quickly disappeared.

On the Western Front

Ypres 1915

In the first week of April 1915, the Canadian troops were moved from their quiet sector to a bulge in the Allied line in front of the City of Ypres. This was the famed—or notorious—Ypres Salient, where the British and Allied line pushed into the German line in a concave bend. The Germans held the higher ground and were able to fire into the Allied trenches from the north, the south and the east. On the Canadian right were two British divisions, and on their left a French division, the 45th (Algerian).

Here on April 22, the Germans sought to remove the Salient by introducing a new weapon, poison gas. Following an intensive artillery bombardment, they released 160 tons of chlorine gas from cylinders dug into the forward edge of their trenches into a light northeast wind. As thick clouds of yellow-green chlorine drifted over their trenches the French defences crumbled, and the troops, completely bemused by this terrible weapon, died or broke and fled, leaving a gaping four-mile hole in the Allied line. German troops pressed forward, threatening to sweep behind the Canadian trenches and put 50,000 Canadian and British troops in deadly jeopardy. Fortunately the Germans had planned only a limited offensive and, without adequate reserves, were unable to exploit the gap the gas created. In any case their own troops, themselves without any adequate protection against gas, were highly suspicious of the new weapon. After advancing only two miles they stopped and dug in.

All through the night the Canadian troops fought to close the gap. In addition they mounted a counter-attack to drive the enemy out of Kitcheners' Wood, an oak plantation near St. Julien. In the morning two more disastrous attacks were made against enemy positions. Little ground was gained and casualties were extremely heavy, but these attacks bought some precious time to close the flank.

The fierce battle of St. Julien lay ahead. On April 24, the Germans attacked in an attempt to obliterate the Salient once and for all. Another violent bombardment was followed by another gas attack in the same pattern as before. This time the target was the Canadian line. Here, through terrible fighting, withered with shrapnel and machine-gun fire, hampered by their issued Ross rifles which jammed, violently sick and gasping for air through soaked and muddy handkerchiefs, they held on until reinforcements arrived.

Thus, in their first major appearance on a European battlefield, the Canadians established a reputation as a formidable fighting force. Congratulatory messages were cabled to the Canadian Prime Minister. But the cost was high. In these 48 hours, 6,035 Canadians, one man in every three, became casualties of whom more than 2,000 died. Heavy losses from Canada's little force whose men had been civilians only several months before had no idea of fighting in a war—a grim forerunner of what was still to come.

The War of Attrition

During the next three years the Allies hurled eleven full-scale offensives against the Germans on the Western Front. All of them were part of one basic strategic idea, to break through and force the Germans to come to terms. The great advantage of trench warfare in the first years of the war lay with the defence. Attacking generals had no alternative but to attack frontally, hopefully with such effect that the main defensive lines would be

broken which would allow for the possibility of making other parts of the defensive line untenable. Once the trench systems were left behind the war of manoeuvre could recommence. At this stage in the war manpower was plentiful but artillery and shells of the right calibre were not. The years 1914 to 1916 were years principally of manpower against defence; the later years of the war were those of men and machines, particularly masses of well commanded artillery. Casualty lists lengthened at an alarming rate; with the Germans generally acting on the defensive, the western allies could either do nothing and let the Germans occupy economically vital parts of France and Belgium, or they could attack and try and eject them. If they did nothing there was also the risk that Germany would concentrate on Russia, knock her out of the war and then concentrate all her resources on the western powers. And so for the first two years of the war, France in particular, with her great conscript army battled again and again against German lines. While one developed new methods of assault the other developed new methods of defence. The key lay in a massive expansion of artillery, improved communications and flexibility in operations.

Festubert and Givenchy

Following the Battle of Ypres the decimated units of the 1st Canadian Division, reinforced by volunteers from the Cavalry Brigade, marched south to join in the Allied offensives which were already under way. While the British mounted diversionary attacks in French Flanders, the French launched an only partially successful attack on in Artois. Although the British were partly successful at Neuve Chapelle and bloodily repulsed at Aubers Ridge, the offensive continued, chiefly as a support for French operations further south, and for the Canadians who were thrust into the fighting at Festubert in May 1915 and Givenchy in June. The fighting followed the grim pattern of frontal assault against powerful enemy defences, and although the Canadians achieved some of their objectives the gains were negligible and the cost in lives extremely high. The Canadians suffered 2,468 casualties at Festubert and a further 400 at Givenchy.

Formation of the Canadian Corps

Meanwhile in Canada enthusiasm remained high despite the growing casualty lists. A second contingent sailed for England in the spring 1915, and from it was formed the 2nd Canadian Division. Following a period of training in England they joined the 1st Division in France in September. At the insistence of Canadian leaders, who had consistently resisted any division of Canadian troops, the Canadian Corps was now formed under the command of Lieutenant-General E.A.H. Alderson. Major-General R.E.W. Turner took command of the new 2nd Division, while Major-General Arthur Currie became commander of the 1st.

The Canadian Corps now settled down to a dismal winter in a section of the front between Ploegsteert Wood and St. Eloi. As steady rain filled the trenches with muddy water the men were forced to fight not only the enemy, but also "trench foot," colds, influenza and lice. They were joined by the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, which had served for a year with the British 27th Division; and the Royal Canadian Regiment which had been performing garrison duty in Bermuda. In December, the 3rd Canadian Division was formed under Major-General M.S. Mercer.

1916 - Prelude to the Somme

The Battle of the Somme took place in 1916. But, before the Canadians joined in that ill-fated operation they were engaged in local offensives, in the southern part of the Ypres Salient, intended to keep the Germans occupied. At the Battle of St. Eloi the 2nd Division received its "baptism of fire" in a battlefield of water-filled mine craters and shell holes. The Canadians, wearing the new steel helmets which had just been introduced, suffered 1,373 casualties in thirteen days of confused attacks and counter-attacks over possession of six water-logged craters and the dominating land on which they sat.

For the 3rd Division, the initiation to battle was even more devastating. This time the Germans mounted an attack to dislodge the Allies from their positions at Mount Sorrel just south of the Ypres-Menin Road. In the fiercest bombardment yet experienced by Canadian troops, whole sections of trench were obliterated and the defending garrisons devastated. Human bodies and even the trees of Sanctuary Wood were hurled into the air by the explosions. As men were literally blown from their positions, the 3rd Division fought desperately until overwhelmed by enemy infantry. By evening the enemy advance was checked, but the important vantage points of Mount Sorrel and Hills 61 and 62 were lost. A counter-attack by the Canadians the next morning failed; and on June 6, after exploding four mines on the Canadian front, the Germans assaulted again and captured Hooge on the Menin Road.

The newly appointed Commander of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Sir Julian Byng, was determined to win back Mount Sorrel and Hill 62. He gave orders for a carefully planned attack, well supported by artillery, to be carried out by the 1st Canadian Division under the command of Major-General Currie. Preceded by a vicious bombardment, the Canadian infantry attacked on June 13 at 1:30 a.m. in the darkness, wind and rain. Careful planning paid off, and the heights lost on June 2 were re-taken. The cost was high. At Mount Sorrel Canadian troops suffered 8,430 casualties, including General Mercer, who was killed by shrapnel while visiting the front line at the opening of the German assault.

The Somme

Still, both sides could see only one way to snap the taut chain of trenches—brutal frontal assaults to break the enemy defences; and, indeed, there was little other option. The Allied plan for 1916 was to launch simultaneous offensives on the Western, Eastern and Italian Fronts. In the West the region, the Somme was chosen for a joint French and British assault about mid-year.

But in February the Allied scheme was upset when the German Chief of the General Staff, General Erich von Falkenhayn, seized the initiative. For his battlefield he chose the fortress-ringed city of Verdun, a position, he correctly believed, so essential to the French that France would fight to the last man to hold it. He hoped to lure French forces into the narrow, dangerous salient, slaughter them with artillery fire, and thus "bleed France to death." He was the first commander to state clearly that the aim of an offensive was attrition—though he did not tell his field Army commander, the Crown Prince, this. On February 21, the German barrage began and for the next ten months both sides threw soldiers and shells at each other in a nightmare of death. The German Army bled as well. As Verdun was a symbol of life for France, its fall became a moral necessity for the prestige of the German Army. By Christmas, when the battle finally ended, casualties for both sides totalled 680,000, of whom some quarter of a million were killed.

During this holocaust of fighting, the French sent frantic appeals to Sir Douglas Haig, the new British commander, to hasten the Somme offensive and take the pressure off Verdun. With French forces being so thoroughly decimated at Verdun, the British now had to assume a far greater burden of the attack, so what was planned as a French dominated offensive in terms of manpower became a British dominated one.

The campaign was planned well in advance with a massive build-up of men and munitions. By the end of June all was ready for the "Big Push," and Haig was quietly confident that his planned assault would destroy the enemy lines and open the way for the cavalry to ride into open countryside and attack the German rear areas, battery positions, headquarters and communications. Meanwhile, the German Army, long forewarned of the attack, had engaged in a massive restructuring of their defences, most especially in the northern area of the British attack. They were firmly entrenched along the ridges and the villages of the northern Somme countryside.

On July 1, at 7.30 a.m, at a time dictated by the French to allow their artillery observers clear views, thousands of British and French troops began their advance across No Man's Land on a front of over 40 kilometres toward the German positions The result was slaughter—57,500 British soldiers killed, wounded or missing in one day— the heaviest day's combat losses ever suffered by the British Army. At the end of the day the French had gained nearly all of their objectives as had the British divisions to the south; but for two thirds of the British sector almost nothing at all had been gained.

At Beaumont-Hamel, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, part of the 29th British Division, lost two-thirds of its entire strength in about an hour's exposure to German artillery and machine guns. July 1 in Newfoundland is still a day of commemoration and mourning.

Canadians on the Somme

The Battle of the Somme was not a one day affair, and the fighting continued, notably with a largely successful dawn attack by the British on July 14, through the summer months. In late August 1916, the "Byng Boys" moved from the muddy fields of Flanders to the Somme, where they took over a section of the front line west of the village of Courcelette. They ran into heavy fighting and suffered some 2,600 casualties before the full-scale offensive even got underway.

In the major offensive which began at dawn on September 15 the Canadian Corps, on the extreme left of the attack, assaulted on a 2,200 yard sector west of the village of Courcelette. Advancing behind a creeping barrage (a tactic which had recently been introduced by the British, a consequence of adequately trained gunners, more and better guns and more reliable ammunition), the infantry was aided by the "new engine of war," the armoured tank. There were only a few of these and they were extremely unreliable and very vulnerable to artillery fire. However, at this early stage of the war their sheer presence often threw the enemy into confusion. The attack went well. By 8 a.m., the main objective, a defence bastion known as the Sugar Factory, was taken, and the Canadians pushed ahead to Courcelette. Numerous German counter-attacks were successfully repulsed and by the next day the position was consolidated. The enemy then brought up reinforcements, the fighting intensified, and gains became microscopic.

In the weeks that followed the three Canadian divisions again and again attacked a series of German entrenchments. The final Canadian objective was that "ditch of evil memory," Regina Trench. It repeatedly defied capture, and when the first three divisions were relieved in the middle of October, Regina Trench was closer, but still not taken.

When the newly arrived 4th Division took its place in the line it faced an almost unbelievable ordeal of knee-deep mud and violent, tenacious, enemy resistance. However, despite the almost impenetrable curtain of fire, on November 11 the Division captured Regina Trench—to find it reduced to a mere depression in the chalk. A week later, in the final attack of the Somme, the Canadians advanced to Desire Trench—a remarkable feat of courage and endurance. The 4th Division then rejoined the Corps opposite Vimy Ridge.

There were no further advances that year. The autumn rains turned the battlefield into a bog and the offensive staggered to a halt. The line had been moved forward only six miles, though ground of itself was not particularly important except in terms of morale. The Allies had suffered some 650,000 casualties, and both sides had about 200,000 killed. The Germans refer to the Battle of the Somme as *das Blutbad*—the blood bath. One German officer described the Somme as "the muddy graveyard of the German Army," for the British it turned an army of eager, inexperienced recruits into a fighting machine on a par with those of France and Germany, but at a terrible cost in human life.

The Somme had cost Canada 24,029 casualties, but it was here that the Canadians confirmed their reputation as hard-hitting shock troops. "The Canadians," wrote Lloyd George, "played a part of such distinction that thenceforward they were marked out as storm troops; for the remainder of the war they were brought along to head the assault in one great battle after another. Whenever the Germans found the Canadian Corps coming into the line they prepared for the worst."

Vimy

The 1916 battles of Verdun and the Somme produced a casualty toll of almost two million men. Yet this war of attrition and stalemate had almost two years to run.

Early in 1917, the Allies launched another massive offensive, ever determined to achieve the elusive breakthrough. This time the plans called for a French offensive in the south between Reims and Soissons, combined with British diversionary attacks about Arras.

The Germans, meanwhile, withdrew to strong new defences, the Hindenburg Line, in March 1917. In so doing they exchanged a long, bulging line, a consequence of their losses on the Somme, for a well-situated shorter one which they fortified with powerful defences, many concreted positions and huge swathes of barbed wires protecting several lines of defence, themselves several kilometres in depth.

The Canadian share of the British assault was the seizure of Vimy Ridge. The task was formidable. For the Germans it was a most important element in their defence system and they had fortified it well. The slopes which were in their favour were interlaced with an elaborate system of trenches, dugouts and tunnels heavily protected by barbed wire and machine guns, and defended from a distance by German artillery. Attempts to take Vimy had failed in the partially successful assaults by the French in 1915; but these attacks had

succeeded in pushing the Germans back to a position where they had very little room to manoeuvre, with the Douai Plain now immediately behind them.

Canadian commanders, however, had learned well the bitter lessons of assault by vulnerable infantry. This time the preparation was elaborate and the planning thorough. Arrangements for a battle commenced in October 1916 and staff officers were sent off to learn from the experiences gained elsewhere on the front, including Verdun, where the French had pushed the Germans back, almost to their start point. Engineers dug great tunnels into the Ridge; roads and light railways were improved, and a vast mass of supplies of every type was readied. The operation was to be supported by a huge concentration of artillery of all types, including large numbers of heavy guns and howitzers. The men, too, were fully prepared. As for the Somme, the area was simulated behind the lines and troops practised their roles until every man was familiar with the ground and the tactics expected of him. This time more information was available, aerial photographs were widely distributed; and of course the men had been hardened—in all ranks and at all levels of command—by their experiences on the Somme.

Preliminary bombardment, designed to conceal the exact time and extent of the attack, began on March 20. It was intensified from April 2 with such crushing blows that the enemy called the period "the week of suffering." On the night of April 8, all was ready and the infantry moved to the prepared forward positions.

The attack (delayed by a day because of the weather) began at dawn on Easter Monday, April 9. All four divisions [with the 5th (British) Division under Byng's command] of the Canadian Corps—moving forward together for the first time—swept up the Ridge in the midst of driving wind, snow and sleet. Preceded by a perfectly timed artillery barrage the Canadians advanced. By mid-afternoon the Canadian divisions were in command of the whole crest of the Ridge with the exception of two features known as Hill 145 and the Pimple. Within three days these too were taken. The fighting had been hard and costly—10,602 Canadian casualties, but the result was emphatic. Elsewhere on April 9, the dozen or so other attacking British divisions obtained excellent results.

The victory at Vimy Ridge is celebrated as a national coming of age. For the first time all four divisions of the Canadian Corps had attacked and triumphed together; four Canadians won the Victoria Cross.

Later in the summer the Canadian Corps received its first Canadian commander when the recently knighted Sir Arthur Currie was promoted to lieutenant-general and succeeded Sir Julian Byng, who became commander of Third Army. A businessman from British Columbia, Currie, with only Canadian Militia background, won the high esteem of professionals and rose from the rank of a lieutenant-colonel in the non-permanent militia in 1914 to commander of the Canadian Army Corps. It was a remarkable achievement; he and Monash (of the Australian Corps) were the only non-regular soldiers to achieve corps command in the British Army.

Behind the Lines

When their regular turn in the firing line ended the numbered men moved into the rear for a few precious days of rest. Here they played games of poker, blackjack, Seven-toed Pete

sang of the charms of mademoiselle from ArmenmtiPres, and took simple pleasure from place names at the front—Wipers (Ypres) and Plug Street (Ploegsteert). The Dumbells Concert Party brought impudent, funny and very pertinent entertainment to these war weary troops. This extraordinary troop show was organized by Merton Plunkett of the Y.M.C.A. from soldiers of the Third Division. They delighted the troops with the "Dumbell Rag,""Oh It's a Lovely War," and their featured female impersonators. Starting out with costumes made out of bandages and lamps made out of tin cans they achieved a level of success that was to survive demobilization and take them to the heights of London and Broadway.

Hill 70 and Lens

Following the victory at Vimy the Canadians continued operations in the Arras area to divert attention from the French front, and to conceal from the Germans the planned offensive in Flanders. In the Battle of Hill 70, August 15-25, Canadian forces captured this strategic position on the northern approach to the city of Lens and secured the western part of the city. The fighting here cost the Canadian Corps 9,198 casualties. However, considerable ground was gained and enormous casualties inflicted on the Germans by skilful use of machine guns and the creation of deliberate 'killing grounds' across which the Germans would have to counter-attack; the battle hampered enemy plans to send fresh troops to Flanders.

The Third Battle of Ypres and Passchendaele

To the south the French offensive on the Chemin des Dames under General Nivelle was a disaster—although some ground was gained, the results were nowhere near as good as Nivelle had promised. With losses in the neighbourhood of 200,000 men it precipitated a wave of mutinies which semi-paralyzed the French Army for some months and generally made it only capable of defensive activity.

In July the British commander, Sir Douglas Haig, launched his controversial drive in Flanders to seize strategic rail heads and capture the German submarine bases on the Belgian coast. The offensive had a successful prelude at Messines in June (where Canadian Tunnelling Companies played an important role), but this local success was followed by weeks of delay caused by logistical requirements and political indecision.

The second and main stage of the attack got under way at the end of July with a tremendous artillery barrage which not only forewarned the Germans, but also ground the battlefield into potholes and dust. Unusually heavy rains poured down on the very night that the offensive began, and in no time the area became an impassable swamp. The impressive gains of the first day were overshadowed by the morass the battlefield soon became. As the British soldiers struggled in the morass, the Germans inflicted frightful casualties from lines fortified with machine guns placed in concrete pill boxes. But in September the sun came out, and new tactics were adopted—a series of "bite and hold" operations—to which the Germans had no obvious answer and themselves suffered huge casualties.

Early in October, with the strategic objectives still in German hands (although a significant proportion of the high ground from which the Germans had dominated Ypres for years had been captured) and the British forces reaching the point of exhaustion, Haig

determined on one more drive. The Canadian Corps was ordered to relieve the decimated Anzac forces in the Ypres sector, and prepare for the capture of Passchendaele.

Lieutenant-General Currie inspected the muddy battlefield and protested that the operation was impossible without heavy cost; and that he would not fight under the command of Fifth Army. He was overruled (but came under Second Army), and so began careful and painstaking preparations for the assault. In a series of attacks beginning on October 26, 20,000 men under heavy fire inched their way from shell-crater to shell-crater. Then on October 30, with two British divisions, the Canadians began the assault on Passchendaele itself. They gained the ruined outskirts of the village during a violent rainstorm and for five days they held on grimly, often waist-deep in mud and exposed to a hail of jagged iron from German shelling. The total of attackers killed came to 4,028 by November 11. Currie's estimate of 16,000 casualties proved frighteningly accurate; in fact there were 15,654 for this period in the Salient. Passchendaele had become a Canadian Calvary.

Cambrai - 1917

That there was a possible alternative to the ghastly strategy of attrition was shown by the brilliant British success at Cambrai in November 1917. This was the first effective tank attack in history. Three-hundred and eighty of these new monsters rolled across No Man's Land, just as a massive bombardment opened up. Huge technical advances in the methods available to artillery meant that the entire bombardment was able to be planned off the map. The elimination of the usual preliminary bombardment took the Germans by surprise, not to mention the fact that they thought the British would be incapable of an attack while Third Ypres still continued. The trenches of the first systems of the Hindenburg Line were quickly crossed; and by nightfall the Allies had reached the open countryside beyond, but still with the prospect of facing the German second and third lines of defence. The hoped-for breakthrough appeared to have come at last. In Britain church bells were joyfully rung; and the German Supreme Command considered options for a general retreat. Both reactions were premature. The initial gains could not be exploited because the British lacked a reserve of tanks and had insufficient troop reserves available in France. The Germans meanwhile rallied and checked the attack and in fact launched a major counter-attack of their own. Despite the obvious limitations of the tank—its unwieldiness, its lack of mechanical reliability, the appalling conditions in which the tank crews had to operate, Haig remained a great enthusiast.

Cambrai also has an important place in Canadian battle records, for here the Canadian Cavalry Brigade and the Newfoundland Regiment fought with distinction with the British formations. Soon after the battle, the Newfoundland Regiment was granted the title "Royal"—the only regiment so honoured during the war.

The German Drive - 1918

In the spring of 1918 the German High Command mounted a series of grand offensives to break the Allied front and end the war with victory or at least a draw. The German plan was to separate the Allied armies and force a decision in the west before the full potential of the newly-arrived American troops could be realized. It very nearly succeeded.

On March 21 thousands of specially trained troops were thrown upon the weakest part of the British front between St. Quentin and Arras. In the desperate fighting east of Amiens the Canadian Cavalry Brigade distinguished itself, showing the value of the horse in a battle of manoeuvre.

This was followed during the next four months with a series of blows against the Allies in the vicinity of Ypres, Soissons, and Reims. All achieved considerable territorial success, and once more the Germans reached the Marne and were within 42 miles of Paris. Exhausted Allied troops reeled and retreated, but the front did not collapse, and the expected gap did not develop. The Allies had agreed to the appointment of General Foch as co-ordinator of all the Allied Forces on the Western Front, and the steady build-up of American troops provided needed reserves. The desperate German gamble failed. During these months the Canadian Corps never took part in the defensive battles, but took over much greater lengths of line to allow the relieved divisions to take part in actions elsewhere on the front.

Now the Allied turn came. On July 4, Australian and American infantry and British tanks and aircraft inflicted a small scale but stunning defeat on the Germans at Le Hamel. It was the first use of the integrated attack—co-ordinated use of artillery, infantry, tanks and air power—the basis of the modern battlefield. On July 18, French, American and British forces launched a counter-attack on the Marne and by August 2 they had regained much of the territory lost in the German July offensive. Light tanks overran enemy forward positions and, together with a massive artillery bombardment, shattered the morale of the German troops. All along the line, quick relentless attacks followed in one section after another. By early September the Allies were advancing in every sector: the British were hammering at the Hindenburg line; the French were pushing forward in Champagne; and the Americans, victorious at St. Mihiel, were advancing in the Meuse-Argonne.

Canada's Hundred Days

August 8 to November 11, 1918 has come to be known as " The Hundred Days", and in effect for the Canadian Corps it was Canada's Hundred Days, for in this period it was in the vanguard of the successful march to Mons.

When the Allied advance began the Canadian Corps was assigned the task of spearheading an attack on an important salient near Amiens on August 8. Utter secrecy was vital since the Germans had come to regard any movement of Canadian troops as a sign of imminent attack. To deceive the enemy, part of the Corps was sent north to the Ypres section. After making their presence known to the Germans they hurried back to Amiens. Preparations for battle were carried out at night, and there was no preliminary bombardment to warn the enemy of impending action. Surprise was complete. Flanked by Australians and French, and spearheaded by British tanks, the Canadians advanced twelve miles in three days. The morale of the German High Command was badly shaken. In Ludendorff's words, August 8 was the "black day of the German army". The three days of heavy fighting came at a cost - the Corps suffered 9,074 casualties.

The Allied plan was to advance on a broad front with a series of connected attacks in sensitive areas. Only now, in mid-1918, did the British have sufficient rolling stock and guns to be able to carry out offensives on a number of Army fronts without having to stop and regroup. Therefore, after the breakthrough at Amiens, the Canadians were shifted

back to Arras and given the task of cracking the Hindenburg Line - Germany's main line of defence - in the Arras area.

Between August 26 and September 2, in hard continuous fighting, the Canadian Corps launched a succession of attacks that broke through the German defences, including breaching the infamous Drocourt-Queant Line, in front of the Canal du Nord, part of the main Hindenburg Line. The rapid movement from the Somme caught the Germans by surprise, but nevertheless the fighting was most intense and the Canadians suffered 11,400 casualties. Currie regarded the breaching of the line as 'one of the finest feats in our history'.

The Corps was now in front of the main part of the Hindenburg Line, defended by the Canal du Nord, an only partially completed canal. There was a pause while the Corps regrouped and the British armies to the south came up to the Hindenburg Line themselves. The combined offensive to smash the line came on September 27. Currie came up with a breathtaking and audacious plan, so daring that it took Haig to over-rule the Army commander and to give it his blessing. The whole Canadian Corps (with an attached British division) was to be channelled though a 2,600 yard dry section of the Canal du Nord. The attack along the whole front was accompanied by the most massive single day bombardment of the war. The Canadians not only crossed the canal and breached three lines of German defences, they also captured Bourlon Wood, a staggering achievement. Coupled with great successes elsewhere on the British front, the Hindenburg Line was well and truly breached.

Further heavy fighting led to the capture of Cambrai. By October 11 the Corps had reached the Canal de la Sensée. It was the last of the actions of the whole Corps, though individual divisions continued to perform effectively as the Canadian Corps continued to overcome opposition in Valenciennes and Mont Houy before reaching Mons at the time of the armistice.

The Canadian troops remained in Europe to share in the allied occupation. They crossed the Rhine into Germany at Bonn where Sir Arthur Currie was accorded the distinction of taking the salute in honour of Canadian achievements.

Finally, in 1919, the Canadian troops came home where they were greeted by grateful and enthusiastic crowds in cities and villages across the country.

The War in the Air

The airplane, regarded by military authorities in 1914 as little more than a novelty, became over the next four years a military necessity. Remarkable technical advances in aerial warfare enabled the aircraft to fulfil every expanding functions. In the early stages of the war aircraft were used largely for reconnaissance, to observe enemy troop movements and spot artillery, and to obtain photographs and motion pictures. Then came the bombers and fighters as airmen sought to destroy railroad centres and industrial targets far behind enemy lines, to destroy Zeppelin bases, and to hunt submarines at sea.

The war in the air offered to the airman and to the public a glimpse of the fame and glory once expected of war, at a time when mud and shells turned battlefields into nightmares of horror and revulsion.

The flyer became a new kind of warrior - a chivalric, twentieth century, knight-errant. Men went up in rickety planes with few instruments and no parachutes. The fighter pilot was one of the elite, one of the most daring, and his job was one of the most dangerous. What started out as a hazardous adventure developed into a science of killing. One third of all the fliers died in combat, among them 1,600 Canadians.

Canadian airmen played a particularly significant and brilliant role in the air. No less than 25,000 Canadians served with the British air service as pilots, observers and mechanics, in every theatre of the war. Canadian airmen won more than eight hundred decorations and awards for valour including three Victoria Crosses. The names of Canadian flyers as W.A. "Billy" Bishop, W.G. Barker, Raymond Collishaw and A.A. McLeod became household names in Canada, and they left a record of daring and devotion that was famous everywhere.

The War at Sea

The struggle at sea was chiefly between the British effort to strangle Germany by naval blockade; and the German attempt to cut off Britain's source of food and supply by submarine warfare.

Vigilance of the British navy kept most of the German fleet bottled up in home ports, and at the same time British warships freed the seas of German commerce raiders. The rival fleets met only once, in the battle of Jutland off the coast of Denmark. The British suffered heavily in this encounter, but the decisive result was that the German battle fleet never again dared to leave its bases.

Deprived of the use of surface ships Germany increasingly resorted to submarine warfare to bring Britain to her knees. The German U-boat fleet preyed on enemy and often neutral ships, sank merchantmen on sight, and threatened the supply lines on which the survival of the Allies depended. Protests from the United States brought a reluctant promise in 1915 not to sink ships without warning, but this greatly reduced the effectiveness of the submarine as a weapon.

By the end of 1916 the British blockade was beginning to be felt severely in Germany. In January 1917 the Germans, convinced they could starve Britain in five months, prepared to risk the American entry into the war. They resumed unrestricted submarine warfare.

The policy was initially spectacularly effective. Allied shipping losses mounted, reaching a peak in April 1917 of 869,000 tons. However, the submarine campaign did not achieve the expected speedy victory. New anti-submarine devices, together with the Allied adoption of the convoy system, gradually overcame the submarine menace.

On the other hand, by the middle of 1918, the effects of the British blockade were such that Germany could not continue the war for much longer.

When the war began in 1914 Canada had an embryonic naval service consisting of less than 350 men and two ships, HMCS *Rainbow* and HMCS *Niobe*. It was decided that Canada's war effort would be best concentrated on the army and, therefore, the protection of Canada's coasts and shipping in Canadian waters was handed over to the Royal Navy.

The share of the Royal Canadian Navy in defence though small was, nevertheless, important. The RCN assumed responsibility for such services as examining and directing shipping in Canadian ports; radio-telegraph services, vital to the Admiralty's intelligence system; operation of an auxiliary fleet which engaged in mine sweeping and patrolling operations. In 1916, when the threat of submarine warfare spread to North American waters, the Canadian government undertook, at the request of the British Admiralty, to build up a patrol force of 36 ships.

Canadians in Other Campaigns

Although the major Canadian war effort was concentrated in the Canadian Corps on the Western Front, Canadians also served in other campaigns and endeavours. Of some 150,000 Canadian troops in France and Belgium at the time of the Armistice, nearly 40,000 were outside Currie's command. They included the Cavalry Brigade which served directly with British formations, and those men who served in the naval and air operations.

In western Europe a small army of Canadians toiled in specialized units. Foresters cut much needed timber in British forests and created airfields for Allied air forces. Tunnellers worked under very difficult conditions underground, digging extensive tunnel systems, fighting a terrifying underground war and laying and guarding mine charges. The railway battalions, often under shellfire, laid and maintained most of the British light railway networks on the Western Front. One railway company was sent to Palestine to rebuild the rail bridges of the Yarmuk Valley, which had been destroyed by the Turks.

Canadian infantry and artillery garrisons served in Bermuda and St. Lucia; Canadian hospital units in the Mediterranean cared for casualties from the Gallipoli campaign; small parties of Canadian engineers operated barges on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in Mesopotamia; and Canadian instructors trained troops in the United States.

Some six thousand officers and men from the future province of Newfoundland served with the British forces in Egypt and Gallipoli, on the Western Front, and at sea. The Newfoundlanders' long service overseas exacted a heavy toll. The total fatal casualties of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment numbered 1,305 all ranks, or more than one in five. In addition 179 Newfoundland sailors were lost at sea.

When the Canadian Corps was celebrating the armistice in Mons, other Canadian soldiers were engaged in battle with the Communist forces on the Dvina River, south of Archangel, in northern Russia. More than five hundred Canadians were sent to occupy the ports of Murmansk and Archangel to prevent the Germans from seizing them and to open a new front.

Another, much larger, Canadian contingent was sent to Siberia on Russia's eastern flank. In all about 4,000 men embarked for Vladivostock in October 1918. The need for a new front disappeared with the Armistice and the force was withdrawn in April 1919.

Forty Canadians also served in a third Russian theatre. In the summer of 1918 they joined a British Mission known as "Dunsterforce" which occupied the Caspian port of Baku to protect the oil fields from the Turkish enemy.

On the home front war demands called for efforts that paralleled the military endeavours overseas. The War of 1914-1918, unlike those which preceded it, involved not only arms and men, but whole civilian populations as well. Although Canadians at home were spared the direct ravages of war, they nevertheless felt some of the burdens and suffering of the conflict. Canadians from farm to factory were called upon to make their sacrifices for the war effort.

In addition Canadians made up a substantial part of the ships' companies of Canada's cruisers and the two submarines which had been acquired by the British Columbia government. At the end of the war the RCN numbered more than 100 war vessels and about 5,500 officers and men—the nucleus of a future, effective naval force.

Canada also made a direct contribution to the war at sea providing men and ships for the Royal Navy and for other Allied powers. Although the shipbuilding industry in Canada was not highly developed in 1914, a considerable number of warships were built or assembled in Canada during the war.

Some 3,000 Canadians were recruited by the RCN for service with the Royal Navy, and an unrecorded number enlisted directly. Canadians served in many parts of the world. On November 1, 1914, Canada lost her first men at sea when four young midshipmen went down with the HMS *Good Hope* at the Battle of Coronel off the west coast of Chile.

The Aftermath

The armistice of November 11, 1918, brought relief to the whole world. The horrible struggle with its death, destruction and misery was at last halted. It had truly been a world war. Sixty-five million men from 30 nations were involved in it; at least ten million men were killed; twenty-nine million more were wounded, captured or missing; and the financial cost was measured in hundreds of billions of dollars. Never before had there been such a conflict.

The Great War was also a landmark in Canadian national development. In 1914, Canada entered the war as a colony, a mere extension of Britain overseas; in 1918 she was forging visibly ahead to nationhood. Canada began the war with one division of citizen soldiers under the command of a British general, and ended with a superb fighting force under the command of one of her own sons.

For a nation of eight million people Canada's war effort was remarkable. A total of 619,636 men and women served in the Canadian forces in the First World War, and of these 66,655 gave their lives and another 172,950 were wounded. Nearly one of every ten Canadians who fought in the war did not return.

It was this Canadian war record that won for Canada a separate signature on the Peace Treaty signifying that national status had been achieved. Nationhood was purchased for Canada by the gallant men who stood fast at Ypres, stormed Regina Trench, climbed the heights of Vimy Ridge, captured Passchendaele, and entered Mons on November 11, 1918.

Canadian First World War Memorials

Foremost among memorials is the National War Memorial in Ottawa's Confederation Square. The 23 figures in its archway represent all arms of the service and its sole inscription is "1914-1918". The memorial honours 619,636 Canadians who served abroad, 66,655 of whom gave their lives.

In the Memorial Chamber of the Peace Tower of the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa the story of Canada in the First World War is inscribed in marble panels set in the walls. On the alter rests the Book of Remembrance.

Of the 105,210 members of the British forces of the First World War who have no known graves, 19,660 were Canadian. The names of these men are inscribed on memorials in Canada and Europe. There are 11,285 on the Vimy Memorial, and 6,994 on the Commonwealth Memorial at the Menin Gate in Ypres. On the Newfoundland Memorial at Beaumont-Hamel are the names of 814 Newfoundlanders who have no known grave.

In addition, the Unknown Warrior, interred in Westminster Abbey on November 11, 1920, represents all the First World War "missing" of the British Commonwealth.

Canada has in France and Belgium 13 battlefield memorials commemorating the exploits of Canadian and Newfoundland troops in the First World War. Two of these, Vimy and Beaumont-Hamel, were also used by the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission to commemorate the names of those whose last resting places are unknown. All the Memorials are maintained by the Commission acting for Canada. The five memorials erected by Newfoundland following the First World War became the responsibility of the Government of Canada when Newfoundland entered Confederation in 1949.

Memorials in Belgium	In Commemoration of:
Courtrai	The action of Newfoundland Forces in the Battle of Lys in October 1918.
Hill 62	The part played by Canadian troops in the defence of the Ypres Salient, especially during the period April to August 1916.
Passchendaele	The capture of Crest Farm by the Canadian Corps and the Battle of Passchendaele in October 1917.
St. Julien	The heroic stand of the First Canadian Division in the first gas attack at Ypres in 1915.

Memorials in France	
Beaumont Hamel	The action of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment in the Battle of the Somme on July 1, 1916.
Bourlon Wood	The crossing of the Canal du Nord, capture of Bourlon Wood and rupture of the final Hindenburg Line defences on September 27, 1918.
Courcelette	The part played by the Canadian Corps in forcing back the German troops on the slopes of the Somme from September to November, 1916.
Dury	The capture of the Drocourt-QuJant Switch and the breaking of

	the Hindenburg Line on September 2, 1918, during the Second Battle of Arras.
Gueudecourt	The action of the Newfoundland Forces in the Somme Battle on October 12, 1916.
Le Quesnel	The attack by the Canadian Corps, 100,000 strong, on August 8, 1918, which drove the enemy back a distance of eight miles.
Masnières	The participation of the Newfoundland Forces in the Battle of Cambrai on November 20, 1917.
Monchy-le-Preux	The Newfoundlanders' participation in the Battle of Arras on April 14, 1917.
Vimy	The capture of Vimy Ridge by the Canadian Corps on April 9, 1917.