



CANADA & THE GREAT WAR—1918

The early months of 1918 on the Western Front became precarious for the Allies as the Germans, reinforced by troops released from the Eastern Front following the Russian Revolution, launched a series of three major offensives aimed at defeating the exhausted Allied armies before the impact of American reinforcements could take full effect.

The first, Operation Michael, struck at the British 3rd and 5th Armies with Arras as its objective. Initially, large gains were achieved and a gap was torn between the British defending armies. However, the effort exhausted the advancing Germans and they were finally forced to call off the offensive on 5 April 1918 despite large gains, but nevertheless, short of their objective.

Ludendorff's second offensive, Operation Georgette, launched on 9 April was an attempt to achieve a breakthrough to the Channel ports, thereby cutting off Allied resupply. Once again, large gains were achieved, but after three weeks of heavy fighting, both sides were exhausted and the offensive was halted on 30 April.

The third attempt was launched on 27 May and focussed on the French and American lines. The German

army pushed the Allies back to the Marne and got to within 60 kilometres of Paris before they were stopped and the offensive called off on 15 June.

An Allied counter-offensive, supported by 350 tanks began on 16 July and succeeded in pushing the Germans back to their June positions in the Champagne, north of the Aisne. The British followed this success up with an offensive aimed at Amiens and drove the German defences back over 15 kilometres in what Ludendorff described as "a black day for the German Army".

These Allied advances spelled the end for the German army as victory followed victory until the Germans were forced to seek the armistice that came into effect at 11:00 on 11 November 1918.

Meanwhile, in other theatres of the war, Allenby had dealt a crushing defeat on the Turks at Meggido on 25 September. Australian troops entered Damascus on 30 September effectively ending Turkish resistance.

Italy, with British assistance, defeated the Austro-Hungarians in a series of battles along the Piave river. In the wake of these defeats, the Austro-Hungarians sought an armistice and the war in Italy formally ended on 4 November.



The Charge of Flowerdew's Squadron by Sir Alfred James Munnings (CWM 19710261-0443)

The Canadian Corps in 1918 by Dr. Tim Cook

The Canadian Corps played a key role in the final year of the First World War. Commanded by Sir Arthur Currie from the mid-point of that year, the Corps of around 100,000 soldiers was a hard-hitting formation with four experienced infantry divisions. In 1917, the Corps had delivered victories at Vimy, Hill 70, and Passchendaele.

Some of the Corps's success came from the Canadians' desire to fight together and to ensure that the four divisions were not broken up and sent to fight with British formations in a piecemeal fashion. By training and fighting together, members of the Canadian Corps understood and trusted their counterparts. Such cohesion was also important in allowing for the pooling of artillery, machine gun, engineering, and labour resources.

In early 1918, Currie was pressured by the British high command to reduce his infantry battalions in each division from 12 to 9, and to use those extra battalions to form two new divisions. The British had done this due to a shortage in manpower, but Currie refused to dilute the effectiveness of his divisions for the sake of two additional weak divisions. Even when an army command was offered to him,

Currie stuck to his guns, knowing that his soldiers at the sharp end would have a better chance of survival if they fought together and in numbers.

With Russia knocked out of the war, with Italy reeling, with the British and French weary, and the United States' Doughboys not expected to arrive in large numbers to the Western Front until later in the year, the Germans transferred dozens of combat divisions from the East to the West and struck hard on 21 March. Under massive artillery bombardment of high explosive, shrapnel and chemical shells, the British defenders were stunned, with German attack formations knocking them out or sweeping around them. For a few weeks, the front tottered, as the German army made deep gains.

While the Germans had begun to master open warfare, they could not support the advancing infantry with enough guns and shells, which were left behind by the deep advances. As the British recovered, the defenders made the Germans pay for their multiple assaults over several months. By late summer, the German forces were exhausted, having suffered over 800,000 casualties. The



The Return to Mons by Inglis Sheldon-Williams (19710261-0813) Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum

Allies lost even more troops, but they could better deal with the casualties as more American troops arrived at the front.

In the dark days of the German offensives, the Allies came together in desperation and agreed that French General Ferdinand Foch be appointed supreme Allied commander to better coordinate the defence. While the British, under Sir Douglas Haig, would retain independence of action, Foch soon wielded the French, Americans, British, Belgian, and Dominion armies into a coherent force, ready to counterattack. The French and Americans attacked in July at the Marne, achieving a stunning victory against dispirited and worn-down German troops. Foch believed that another, larger assault could test the German forces and continue to wear them down in battle. Almost no one predicted the end of the war in 1918.

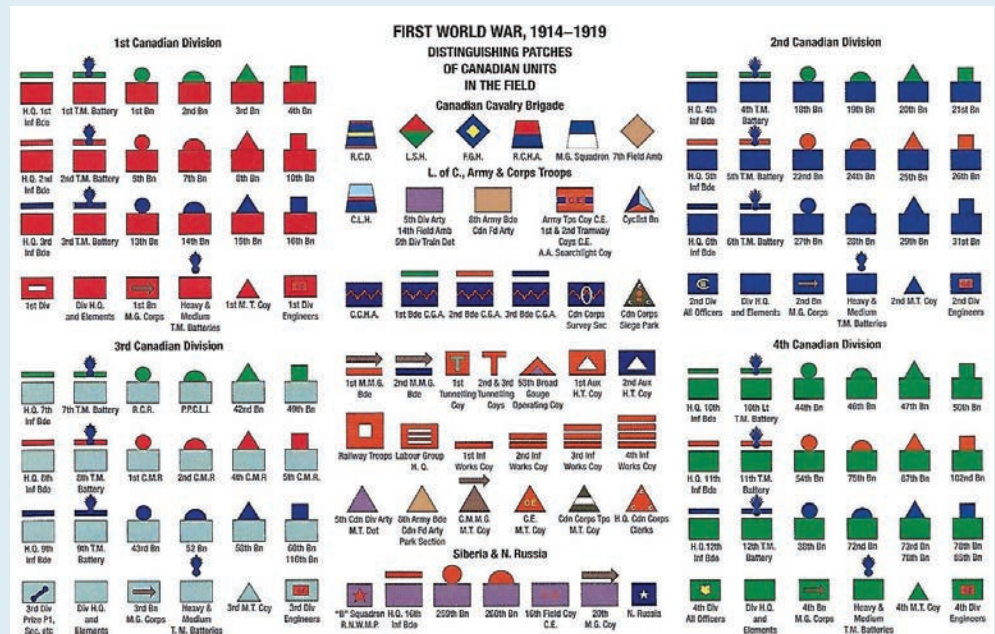
The Canadian and Australian corps moved secretly to the east of the key logistical city of Amiens. With British and French units on the flanks, the dominion forces would spearhead the offensive. The Canadians had a reputation as shock troops. When German intelligence detected their presence at the front, they predicted an attack. The Canadians therefore detached a number of units and sent them to the Ypres sector, where they engaged in deliberately clumsy communications that were sure to be picked up by the enemy. The Germans thought the Corps was there and rested easy for the moment. In the meantime, several hundred thousand Allied soldiers prepared for the coming battle.

Surprise and shock were key to the battle at Amiens, and while there would be a traditional infantry and artillery assault, some 604 tanks were to be unleashed against the enemy, of which 168 were allotted to the Canadians. At zero hour, 4:20am, the bombardment crashed down on the poorly-held enemy lines, with the infantry advancing behind a rapidly-moving creeping barrage. Tanks, armoured cars, and aircraft contributed to the all-arms battle. The German defenders died or surrendered by the thousands.

But there were no bloodless battles on the Western Front, and the deeper the Canadians pushed, the more they outpaced their protective artillery barrage and ran up against uncut wire. Brave and determined machine gunners made

Canadian Corps Distinguishing Patches (1914-19)

The following chart shows the distinguishing patches used by the Canadian Corps during the First World War. They allowed soldiers to identify their own and other's units and Divisions and contributed to unit cohesion and morale.



Source: J.L. Granatstein and D.F. Oliver, *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Military History*, Oxford University Press, 2011

the Canadians pay a terrible price, and the fighting became harder on the 10th and 11th as surprise was lost, communications and logistics broke down, and the enemy rushed forward reinforcements. The offensive ground to a halt on the night of the 11th, although fighting continued until the 20th, with dozens of soldiers dying in this seemingly quiet period.

The Allies had struck a heavy blow against the Germans. On the Canadian front alone, the Corps's four divisions met and defeated elements of fourteen German divisions, capturing 9,311 prisoners, 201 guns, 152 trench mortars, and 755 machine-guns.

The Canadian Corps suffered almost 12,000 casualties, but reinforcements, some of whom were conscripts, brought the fighting units nearly up to strength. The Canadians were moved north to the Arras front, near Vimy Ridge, and here they were to attack one of the most powerful German positions on the Western Front, the Hindenburg Line. The Germans were dug-in deep here with their trench system thick and anchored on multiples trenches and concrete machine gun bunkers. The most powerful trench was the Drocourt-Quéant Line and further to the east was the unfinished Canal du Nord that incorporated marsh land and numerous trench systems into its defences to protect the key logistical hub of Cambrai.

The tempo of battle was much faster than earlier in the war, where there were long pauses between offensives, and the Canadians had only about four days to plan for the attack against the Arras trenches. They did it, marshalling tens of thousands of men and, for zero hour on the 26th, some 762 Allied guns. After a week of battle, they Canadians clawed their way forward, eventually breaking the heavily-fortified Drocourt-Quéant Line on 2 September. It was a significant victory and at least seven German divisions were defeated in fierce combat, with some 10,492 prisoners captured. But the hard fighting cost another 12,000 Canadian casualties.

The Corps was worn down and its soldiers' weary, but Currie thought his Corps had one more battle in it. After three weeks of preparation, they delivered another astonishing victory in crossing the Canal du Nord in late September. This complex operation saw the Corps push across the canal, through a relatively narrow gap, and then fan out of the eastern side, driving deep into the enemy lines before the Germans could counterattack. The strongpoint

of Bourlon Wood fell to the Canadians on 27 September, the first day of battle, but fighting raged until the capture of Cambrai on 8 October.

The Canadians had punched far above their weight in defeating the enemy troops, acting as a spearhead in several battles. After Cambrai, the Canadians continued to push the Germans back, although there was little fight in their defeated forces. Currie's forces captured Mons on 11 November 1918, the last day of the war on the Western Front, and a symbolic victory for the British since it was the place where they had started their retreat in August 1914.

The Canadian Corps secured an enviable reputation in what became known as the Hundred Days campaign but it came at a terrible cost: over 45,000 Canadians killed or wounded.

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Dr. Cook is working on an exhibition on the Hundred Days that will open at the CWM in late October, 2018.

Sailors and Airmen, 1918—The RCN and the RAF

by Professor Alec Douglas

Canadian participation in naval operations during the last months of the Great War was dramatic and widespread.

The 1918 story in North America is not a happy one. The naval staff had recommended air stations at Halifax and Sydney, with 34 seaplanes and some 300 personnel. Early in 1917, while Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden and the naval minister John Hazen were both in England making plans to establish a Canadian naval air service, the acting Prime Minister Sir George Foster had rejected this arrangement on the ground of cost. The RCN therefore had to improvise measures for the defence of shipping, and requested help from the Admiralty.

The Admiralty, whose response to Admiral Kingsmill's proposals had always been consistently inconsistent, at first failed to take account of changing circumstances. In what the Canadian official naval history calls a "stunning reversal of opinion" the Admiralty had acknowledged in December 1917 that fast trawlers were necessary in the western Atlantic, but evidently the left hand in Whitehall did not know what the right hand was doing. Promises of such support proved worthless after Admiral Jellicoe had been replaced in December 1917 by Admiral Wemyss as First Sea Lord, and he had already persuaded the US Navy that all anti-submarine vessels, RN and USN, were needed in British Home Waters. Captain Walter Hose therefore advised Admiral Kingsmill that an air service provided the only chance of rendering enemy submarines hors de combat. Then in March

1918 the Admiralty Air Department stunned Canadian officials with a warning of the submarine danger and a preliminary plan for an aircraft patrol. This brought about a confusing train of events in which air bases in Dartmouth N.S. and Sydney N.S. were chosen, the United States Navy provided air squadrons for Halifax and Sydney, and from August to November conducted anti-submarine patrols over Canadian waters. Lieutenant Richard E. Byrd, later famous as an aviator and polar explorer was Officer-in-Charge, US Naval Air Force in Canada

To cut short a long and unhappy story, three German submarines preyed upon shipping in the western Atlantic between early June and 3 October 1918, sinking for the most part large numbers of fishing vessels, until the armistice in November 1918. (For the full story see Volume 1 of the RCN official history, *The Seabound Coast* by William Johnston, William Rawling, Richard Gimblett and John MaFarlane, Volume 1 of the RCAF official history by S.F. Wise, *Canadian Airmen and the First World War*, and *Tin Pots and Pirate Ships* by Michael Hadley and Roger Sarty)

Canadians in the Royal Naval Air Service, who as of 1 April 1918, found themselves in the Royal Air Force, continued to distinguish themselves in offensive air patrolling, convoy escort or tactical bombing. The maximum force would be deployed against the enemy's submarines in or near British Home waters, but it should not be forgotten that there was a significant Canadian presence in the

Adriatic, Aegean, Egypt, Gibraltar and Malta groups, under the orders of the local senior naval officer. As noted in Volume one of the official RCAF history by S.F. Wise,, "[In the Mediterranean] ...Despite the pre-occupations of the naval command with Otranto, and the bombing priorities of the Air Ministry, the slow-moving, weak convoy escort backed up by the bluff of kite balloons and a handful of out-of-date seaplanes defeated the U-boat threat".

The unrestricted German submarine campaign in the Atlantic and British Home Waters presented a far greater threat. At the end of 1917 U-boats were sinking ships faster than they could be replaced, but by March 1918 new construction shipping, British and American, rose beyond the tonnage lost. By September 1918 U-boats were sinking about 275 tons of shipping a day, contrasted with the 700 tons a day lost during the early months of unrestricted submarine warfare. In fact, by June 1918 the war against the submarine had virtually been won. There were two main reasons for this: the first was adoption of a complete convoy system, the second was the use of aircraft as an essential backup to surface escorts.

In addition, offensive air operations in British Home Waters increased in effectiveness. For example, by mid-summer the Grand Fleet had a substantial force of thirty four fighter aircraft. In late April after frequent exercising with the fleet, two flying boats under the command of Captain Robert Leckie sighted forty destroyers and four minesweepers near the Terschelling Light Vessel. Within a quarter of an hour they sighted two battle cruisers in company with two cruisers and eight destroyers heading east.

By the end of May, airships over the North Sea were experiencing frequent contact with German aircraft of various kinds, under the exceptional leadership of Leckie, who reported that "the greatest foes are not the enemy but our own petrol pipes." In July, Camels carrying 2 Cooper 60lb bombs attacked the Tondern Airship station, destroying

two airships and the base's captive balloon with the loss of one aircraft. (From this raid stemmed the evolution of the aircraft-carrier technique used so successfully by the USN in the Second World War.) On 10 August, Harwich force under RAdm R. Tyrwhitt: 4 cruisers and 13 destroyers, with three flying boats under Leckie, executed a remarkable operation. At 0710 Leckie had sighted the airship L53 cruising west at 1500 ft. Harwich Force came round 180 degrees with a heavy smoke screen, Lt S.D.Culley took off in a Camel from Redoubt's lighter at about 0840, and found L53 on a reciprocal course just above 15000 ft. "When my guns ceased firing the Camel fell into a stall and dropped some 2000 ft. This gave me no chance to watch the airship until after I had got back on an even keel...suddenly, at three widely separated points, bursts of pure flame shot out from the envelope; and within a minute the whole airship except the tail section was a mass of flames....The burnt-out frame, with the flag still flying from the tail section, then dropped in one piece....Time was 9:41, exactly one hour after I had taken off from the lighter."

It was while these dramatic events were taking place that British sea and air forces defeated the submarine. The role of aircraft in defeating the U-boat campaign in 1918 has frequently been overlooked. While it is true that, with one notable exception [the sinking of UB32 by F/S/Lt N.A. Magor on 15 September 1917] aircraft failed to destroy submarines, they proved exceptionally useful when employed as close and distant escorts to convoys. They rendered convoys virtually immune from successful submarine attack. They did so despite an Admiralty attitude that, at best, was ambivalent towards convoying. As the official history of the RCAF points out, the success of the anti-submarine campaign was partly due to the harnessing of aircraft to the convoy system. It was no way due to the development of any high degree of collaboration between the Admiralty and the Air Ministry.



Convoy in Bedford Basin by Arthur Lismer 1919, CWM 197102610-0344

In September 1918 (at the request of the Air Ministry) the Admiralty sent out a questionnaire to Commanders-in-Chief and Flag Officers Commanding, asking for their 1920 aircraft requirements. The replies were illuminating: they included requests for long-range shore-based aircraft for convoys, merchant aircraft carriers, and escort carriers. They indicate that operational commanders in the Royal Navy, (more than their masters in the Admiralty) had finally grasped that the most valuable work done by naval airmen in 1918 was in anti-submarine operations. This task, involving at least 215 Canadians, was anything but dramatic in nature, nor did it result in a heavy toll being taken of submarines. Yet the defeat of the submarines owed much to

aircraft, and that defeat meant that enough merchantmen were able to deliver their cargoes to meet the needs of the British war effort. It is remarkable that in the Second World War, when exactly the same problem would have to be solved, it took the imminent threat of convoy losses in 1943, an amazing intelligence system, and the final persuasion of the naval high command that the war could not be won before defeating the enemy attack on shipping.

Professor Douglas is the former Director of History in DND and is currently a volunteer with the FCWM. He is the author and co-author of a number of important histories of the RCN and RCAF.

The Last to Fall

More than 60,000 Canadians gave their lives during the First World War. The last of those was Private George Lawrence Price who succumbed to a German sniper bullet at 10:58 on the 11th of November 1918 — just two minutes before the armistice took effect.

Price was born in Falmouth, Nova Scotia, on 15 December 1892, and as a young man he moved to Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. He enlisted in the 210th Infantry Battalion (Frontiersmen), Canadian Expeditionary Force (C.E.F.) in Moose Jaw on 15 October 1917 and was enrolled with the 1st Saskatchewan Depot Battalion on 4 December 1917.

Private Price completed basic training in Regina and was then posted overseas. He embarked from St. John's, 21 January 1918, on the S.S. *Scotian* and arrived in Liverpool on 6 February 1918. He was taken on strength at the 15th Canadian Reserve Battalion, Bramshott, 6 February 1918 and subsequently transferred to the 28th Battalion. He arrived in Etaples, France, 2 May 1918 and eventually arrived at his unit on 1 June 1918.

On 8 September 1918 Private Price was gassed in the Canal-Du-Nord area and sent to the 1st Canadian Casualty Collection Station for treatment and subsequently to the 26th General Hospital in Etaples, France. He was discharged and returned to his unit on 26 September 1918.

On 11 November 1918, Private Price was part of an advance to take the small village of Havré. After crossing the Canal du Centre into the town of Ville-sur-Haine under German machine gun fire, Price and his patrol moved toward a row of houses intent on pursuing the machine gunner who had harassed their crossing of the canal.



The patrol had entered the house from which they had thought the shooting had come, but found the Germans had exited through the back door as they entered the front. They then pursued into the house next door and again found it empty. George Price was fatally shot in the chest by a German sniper as he stepped out of the house into the street and died at 10:58 am, just 2 minutes before the armistice ceasefire that ended the First World War went into effect at 11 a.m.

George Price is widely regarded as the last Canadian and the last soldier of the British Commonwealth to be killed in the First World War.

This would make him the 60,661st Canadian killed in the conflict. He was posthumously awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. He now rests in the Military Cemetery at St. Symphorien, a few kilometres to the southeast of Mons, Belgium.

The Aftermath

After a stunning German offensive along the Western Front in the spring of 1918, the Allies rallied and drove back the Germans in a series of successful offensives. On 4 November 1918, the Austro-Hungarian Empire agreed to an armistice, and one week later, on 11 November 1918, Germany, defeated on the field of battle and economically crippled by the British naval blockade, followed suit.

The armistice concluded four years of fighting that had been truly global in scale. Sixty-five million men from 30 nations had fought in this war of unprecedented scale. At least ten million were killed; with twenty-nine million

The Victoria Cross – Canadian Awards 1918



The Victoria Cross (VC), instituted in 1856 by Queen Victoria, is the Commonwealth's premier military decoration for gallantry. It is awarded in recognition of the most exceptional bravery displayed in the presence of the enemy, although in rare instances the decoration has

been given to mark other courageous acts.

Since its inception during the Crimean War, the VC has been awarded 1,358 times. Depending on which of a variety of sources is cited and on the selection criteria applied, somewhere between 94 and 100 Victoria

Crosses have been awarded to Canadians or to others serving with the Canadian Forces.

A distinctly Canadian version of the medal was introduced in 1993. To date no one has been awarded the Canadian medal.

In his book, "Men of Valour" this author recognises 100 Canadian recipients. In this case, the author has used the word "Canadian" as an adjective and his criteria for inclusion has been persons born in Canada; those who lived and died in Canada; those who were awarded the VC while serving in the Canadian armed forces; and, finally those (actually only one) who won the VC while serving in Canada.

Based on those criteria, he has identified 73 Canadian winners of the award during World War. The following 32 were awarded the decoration for their acts of bravery in 1918. (* Indicates awarded posthumously)

*Lt. **Wallace Lloyd Algie**,
11 October 1918, Canal du Nord

Cpl. **Picton Brereton**, 9 August 1918, Amiens

*Lt. **Jean Baptiste Arthur Brillant**,
28 May 1918, Amiens

*Sgt. **Hugh Cairns**, 1 November 1918, Valenciennes

LCol. **W. Hew Clark-Kennedy**, 28 August 1918, Arras

Cpl. **Frederick George Coppins**,
9 August 1918, Amiens

*Pte. **John Bernard Croak**, 8 August 1918, Amiens

Pte. **Thomas Dinesen**, 12 August 1918, Amiens

*Lt. **Gordon Muriel Flowerdew**,
30 March 1918, Bois de Moreuil

Cpl. **Herman James Good**, 8 August 1918, Amiens

Lt. **Milton Fowler Gregg**, 1 October 1918, Cambrai

*Lt. **Samuel Lewis Honey**,
27 September 1918, Canal du Nord

Capt. **Bellenden Seymour Hutcheson**,
2 September 1918, Drocourt-Queant

*Cpl. **Joseph Kaeble**, 9 June 1918, Arras

Lt. **George Fraser Kerr**,
27 September 1918, Bourlon Wood

*Sgt. **Arthur George Knight**,
2 September 1918, Drocourt Queant

Lt. **Graham Thomson Lyall**,
27 September 1918, Bourlon Wood

Capt. **John MacGregor**, 3 October 1918, Cambrai

Lt. **George Burdon McKean**, 28 April 1918, Gavrelle

Sgt. **William Merrifield**, 1 October 1918, Canal du Nord

L/Cpl. **William Henry Metcalf**,
2 September 1918, Arras

*Cpl. **Harry Garnet Bedford Miner**,
8 August 1918, Amiens

Capt. **Coulson Norman Mitchell**,
9 October 1918, Cambrai

*Pte. **Claude Joseph Patrick Nunney**,
2 September 1918, Drocourt-Queant

LCol. **Cyrus Wesley Peck**,
2 September 1918, Drocourt-Queant

Pte. **Walter Leigh Rayfield**,
4 September 1918, Drocourt-Queant

Pte. **Thomas Ricketts**, 14 October 1918, Ledeghem

Lt. **Charles Smith Rutherford**, August 1918, Amiens

*Sgt. **Robert Spall**, 13 August 1918, Amiens

*Lt. **James Edward Tait**, 11 August 1918, Amiens

Pte. **John Francis Young**,
2 September 1918, Drocourt-Queant

Sgt. **Raphael Louis Zengel**, 9 August 1918, Amiens

more were wounded, captured or missing. The financial cost was measured in hundreds of billions of dollars.

By the end of the war or soon after, the German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires ceased to exist. National borders were redrawn, with nine independent nations restored or created.

During the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the Big Four (Britain, France, the United States and Italy) imposed draconian terms on the defeated Germans in a series of treaties. The League of Nations was formed with the aim of preventing the repetition of such a conflict. These terms and efforts failed however, as economic depression, renewed nationalism, weakened successor states, and the festering sense of humiliation in Germany all conspired to the rise of Fascism and World War II. The War to end all Wars had failed to achieve that lofty goal and only served to lay the seeds for future, even greater conflict.

For Canada, the First World War marked a significant step in the development of Canadian nationalism. Entering the war in 1914 as an obedient colony she emerged, in 1918 having forged visibly ahead on the road to independent nationhood.

For a nation of eight million people Canada's war effort was remarkable. Over 650,000 Canadian men and women served in uniform during the First World War, with more than 66,000 giving their lives and over 172,000 more being wounded. 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.

It was this Canadian war effort that won for Canada a separate signature on the Peace Treaty. Nationhood was gained 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.



For What by Frederick Varley (CWM 10910261-0770) Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum