

# CANADA & THE GREAT WAR—1914

## Editor's Introduction by Mike Braham

This is the first of four scheduled supplements to the Torch over the next four years to commemorate the centennial of World War I. Each supplement will focus on the corresponding year(s) of the Great War. To set the stage, this first edition provides a brief overview of the contents of the World War I segment of Gallery Two of the Canadian War Museum. It also includes an overview of Canada's initial mobilisation effort with a specific scrutiny of Sam Hughes. Finally, the supplement details the composition of the Expeditionary Force.

Within the space available there is only room to scrape the surface of the events and individuals

that played such key parts in Canada's magnificent contribution to this "War to end all Wars".

On a poignant note, this supplement was written almost entirely by Howard Mansfield just before he passed away and therefore serves as a small memorial to that most dedicated of all Friends.

I hope that readers will provide feedback to this supplement and consider topics that they would like to see included in the next three. Written contributions will, of course, be gratefully accepted.

## The Great War in the Canadian War Museum

The primary focus of Gallery 2 in the War Museum is the Great War, with particular emphasis on the Canadian Corps and the Western Front.

From the poignant, ragged teddy bear given, by his 10 year-old daughter, to a Canadian medical officer killed at Passchendaele; to captured German artillery pieces, the gallery portrays the dynamism and harsh reality of war by the use of archival material, film, video and audio, together with the actual artifacts of war. All videos, audios and films are, of course, accompanied by bilingual narratives.

The Road to War, a 3 -minute video shows recruits in transition from attestation to embarkation for Europe, and visitors may search for the



name of any World War I soldier. A hands-on video then explains how the war began and how Canadians responded.

A larger-than-life picture of Sam Hughes guards the entrance, closely attended by a full-size Canadian Corps soldier of the First Contingent, armed, appropriately, with the much-maligned Ross Rifle. For the weapons buff, a wall cabinet holds a number of rifles including the Ross, a Short Magazine Lee Enfield and a Vickers machine-gun with belted ammunition.

An 18-pounder artillery piece stands opposite a display of anti-gas apparatus: anti-gas hood, box respirator, and rattle alarm; with a pair of binoculars viewing a simulated gas attack video. The pistol of John McCrae, who was a witness to the first use of mustard gas in the war at the Second Battle of Ypres, is also on display.

## The Great War in the CWM (cont'd)



Ross Rifle, Mk. II

A small-scale diorama with models, then lays out the trench system, with press-buttons to illustrate the front line trenches, dug-outs, machine-gun and sniper posts, and medical support locations. Visitors get a sense of the reality of life on the Western Front as they brush aside the camouflaged opening of a full-scale replica of a timbered, sandbagged front-line trench. A rifleman mans the rampart with a Lewis gun close at hand; another rests, huddled on duckboards in a gloomy, muddy corner of their battle station. Artillery rumbles in the background and the visitor may view ongoing action in the devastated No-Man's-Land beyond, through a video periscope.

On leaving the trench, a cabinet of trench warfare weapons includes bayonets, trench clubs, Mills bombs, stick grenades and knives, both German and Canadian, and a specialized Ross sniper-rifle. A captured German 88 mm machine gun, with ammunition stands nearby.

A sombre three minute video depicts the attack by the 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland Regiment (the Blue Puttees) at Beaumont-Hamel on 1 July, 1916 in which so many of the men of the regiment were casualties. By the end of the following day, of the 801 men who went into battle, 324 were killed or missing, while 386 were wounded.

Benches are provided for visitors to rest while they watch graphic films of the Battle of Vimy Ridge on a full-size cinema screen with, above, a full-scale replica of the Nieuport 17 bi-plane which flew reconnaissance missions before the battle. Heavy weapons on display nearby include an 8 inch howitzer, which fires a 90 kilogram shell a distance of 11 kilometres and a German 77mm gun with an exploded muzzle, captured by Canadians at Vimy Ridge.

The visitor then treks his way on duckboards through the bog of mud that was the battlefield of Passchendaele. The un-buried corpse of a uniformed Canadian soldier lies face-down, deep in the mud with only helmet and rifle protruding, and mangled weapons scattered in the devastation around.

Billy Bishop



The prominent role played by Canadians in the air war, as pilots, observers, mechanics and flight instructors is recognized in a 3-minute video "Knights of the Air" and by the display of the cold-weather flying suit from thigh boots to soft leather helmet, essential for wear in the flimsy aircraft. The actual fuselage of William Barker, V.C.'s Sopwith Snipe, recovered after the war, and the nose and propeller of Billy Bishop V.C.'s Nieuport 17 are among the many air war artifacts, as well as the awards and medals of these two highly-decorated flying aces.

Display cabinets and videos (with earphones) explain the devastating effects of war on the soldiers and the medical treatment provided by Nursing Sisters (Blue Birds) and medical staff.

Canada's "Last 100 Days" of the Great War are described in videos and cabinet displays together with the ceremonial headpiece of Cpl Francis Pegahmagabow, the most-decorated First Nation's soldier in Canada's military history and the most deadly sniper of the war.

Francis Pegahmagabow



Completing the exhibition is a picture of the gravestone of Private George Price, of the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion killed at 11 a.m. on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, 1918, the last man to be killed in action in the Great War.



George Price

*Honores ad Memoriam.*

## Mobilizing for the Great War



When Great Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August, 1914, the Dominion of Canada was also automatically at war and Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden's cabinet immediately authorized the creation of an infantry division of 25,000 men and ordered the Minister of Militia and Defence, Colonel Sam Hughes, MP, to recruit and train a distinctively Canadian Army for overseas service to be known as the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

Hughes threw out existing mobilization plans and directly ordered Militia unit commanders to provide rolls of volunteers, between the ages of 18 and 45 who could meet prescribed physical standards. Pay would be \$1.10 per day and a married man would require his wife's permission to enrol.

Construction began of a camp at Valcartier on the Jacques Cartier river, sixteen miles north-west of Quebec City and the first volunteers arrived on 18 August. Incredibly, in less than a month Valcartier reached its maximum strength of 32,000 and was transformed into an organized military establishment. Rifle ranges were set up and



range practise was carried out on 1500 targets using the Ross rifle. By 19 September practically all infantrymen had fired their prescribed weapons classification. Other training, however, was rudimentary.

Within two months, the First Contingent was on its way to England. Thirty liners formed up with British warships in the Bay of Gaspé and sailed on 3 October and were joined by another liner carrying soldiers from Newfoundland and by several other warships. The fleet entered Plymouth Sound on 14 October - the first large contingent from any of the Dominions. Then it was off to the tented Camp Bustard on the rain-soaked Salisbury Plain, where it rained for 89 of the next 123 days, turning the camp into a quagmire.



Canada's Answer by Norman Wilkinson

## Sam Hughes



Sam Hughes, Canada's Minister of Militia and Defence from October 1911 to November 1916, was the Government's senior military advisor and the driving force behind Canada's early war effort. Energetic and controversial he obtained substantial budget increases, raised the efficiency and strength of the pre-war militia, developed the Cadet corps, and constructed new rifle ranges, armouries and drill-halls (59 by

1915), earning the name, "Drill Hall Sam".

Hughes served in the South African War in 1899-1900 as a supply and transport officer and later as an intelligence officer. He did well in those capacities but was subsequently dismissed for indiscipline and returned to Canada. He later campaigned, unsuccessfully, for the award of the Victoria Cross for his actions in that war.

Overbearing and stubborn he was a poor organizer and prone to patronage, nepotism and cronyism in

## Sam Hughes (Continued)

awarding military promotions and munitions contracts. There were scandals over the purchase of drugs, horses, and other materials and he insisted on the utilization of Canadian-manufactured equipment that was often inappropriate for the Western Front.

He patented the MacAdam shovel which had a hole that a shooter could theoretically use as a shield. It was never used at the Front, but thousands were purchased by the government.



Hughes with the McAdam Shovel

He equipped the army with the Ross rifle and granted a subsidy of \$18 million to Charles Ross, the Ca-

nadian manufacturer. The Ross rifle was designed for great accuracy but tended to jam when exposed to the dust and the mud of the battlefield. It was withdrawn from service and Canadians were rearmed with a British-made rifle, the Short Magazine Lee-Enfield.

Made a full colonel in 1902 and a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath in 1915, he was promoted to Major-General in 1915 and was made an honorary Lieutenant-General in the British Army in 1916. He continuously confused his roles as a senior militia officer and as a Minister of the Crown, and the latter always took second place. His attempts to establish and control a Canadian military command structure overseas resulted in chaos, and eventually led to the creation, by the Prime Minister of an overseas ministry answering directly to Cabinet. To preclude Sam Hughes from taking command Major General E.A.H. Alderson, a British Army officer was chosen to command all Canadian troops in England.

## Composition of the Canadian Expeditionary Force

The CEF comprised several combat formations, the largest of which was the Canadian Corps, consisting of four divisions. When the 1<sup>st</sup> Contingent finished its training on Salisbury Plain it became the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was mobilized and moved to England in May and June, 1915 and when the division arrived in France in mid-September the two divisions formed the Canadian Corps. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was raised in December, 1915 from units already overseas and the 4<sup>th</sup> Division moved to France in August, 1916.

The CEF eventually numbered 260 numbered infantry battalions, two named infantry battalions (The Royal Canadian Regiment and Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry), 13 mounted rifle regiments, 13 railway troop battalions, 5 pioneer battalions, and numerous ancillary units including field and heavy artillery batteries, ambulance, medical, dental, forestry, labour, tunnelling, cyclist, and service units. The CEF also had a large reserve and training organization in England, and a recruiting organization in Canada. There were 619,646 enlisted soldiers, nurses and chaplains

during the CEF's existence.



On 3 August, 1914, a wealthy Montreal militia officer, Captain Andrew Hamilton Gault, offered to raise and finance a unit for overseas service in the event of war. War was declared the following day and Captain Gault's offer was accepted and he was authorized to raise a battalion of infantry. Lt Col Farquhar, Military Secretary to the Governor Gen-

eral was appointed commanding officer and the battalion was named after the Governor General's daughter and became Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI). Although not then part of the CEF, it was the first Canadian infantry unit to enter the theatre of operations, arriving in France in December, 1914.

In September 1914, French Canadian pharmaceutical entrepreneur Arthur Mignault offered the Canadian government \$50,000 to finance the formation of a

## Composition of the CEF (continued)

solely French Canadian regiment and accordingly, on 14 October 1914, the 22nd Infantry Battalion was brought into existence. Mignault participated in the recruitment campaign, and the ranks of the battalion were filled in less than a month. The 22nd went to France as part of the 5th Canadian Brigade and the 2nd Canadian Division in September 1915, and fought with distinction in every major Canadian engagement until the end of the war.



The Canadian Automobile Machine Gun Brigade was a distinct entity within the CEF consisting of several motor machine gun battalions and nineteen machine gun companies. Brigadier Raymond Brutinel, CB CMG DSO, a pioneer in the field of mechanized warfare, initiated and commanded the Brigade which played a significant part in halting the major German offensive of March 1918. From October 1916 until March 1918, Brutinel was Machine Gun Officer of the Canadian Corps.



The Canadian Cavalry Brigade was raised in December 1914, under Brigadier Jack Seely and was originally composed of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) a Royal Canadian Horse Artillery battery and a British regiment, which



was replaced in September 1915 by the Fort Garry Horse, making the Brigade an all-Canadian formation.



The Brigade landed in France in May, 1915 and took part in the Battle of Festubert as infantry in the trenches. For the duration of the war, the Brigade performed as infantry and cavalry. Its most memorable action took place on 30 March 1918, when the entire Brigade carried out a classic cavalry charge at Moreuil Wood but lost some 300 men and 800 horses.



The Brigade was originally equipped with 8 Armoured Autocars mounting 2 Colt Model 1914 machine guns (later replaced with the standard British Vickers machine gun) manufactured by Autocar which also supplied 6 unarmoured support vehicles, 4 "roadsters" for the Brigade's officers and an ambulance. In 1918 Brutinel's force consisted of 1st and 2nd Canadian Motor MG Brigades (each of 5x8 gun batteries), Canadian Cyclist battalion, one section of medium trench-mortars mounted on lorries (plus an assumed wireless and medical support). This totalled 80 machine guns and about 300 cyclist infantry.



Armoured Autocar

## The Victoria Cross



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 the FCWM Research Paper, "Chronicles of Courage", available on the FCWM Web Site, the 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 these criteria, he has identified 73 Canadian winners of the award during World War I. No one from the Canadian Expeditionary Force won the VC during the period covered by this first supplement. Subsequent supplements will record the Canadian Victoria Crosses awarded during the period covered.

## Concluding Remarks

Canada responded promptly to the call to arms in August of 1914 and in a remarkably short period of time thousands of Canadian young men found themselves aboard ship in the Great Armada on their way "over there", confident that they would be home again, victorious, by Christmas.

They were to be cruelly disillusioned when they came face to face with the reality of modern warfare and the horrors of the trenches. Nonetheless, over the

next four years, the men of the Canadian Corps became the shock troops of the British Army and earned for themselves a reputation as the best troops in the Allied line.

Subsequent supplements will take each year of the war and look at the Canadian experience, highlighting some of their more memorable moments and achievements.



26th Battalion CEF