

CANADA'S



DAYS

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100

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The Mayor of Mons calls for three cheers for Canadians. November, 1918. Library and Archives Canada MIKAN 3397225



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Timeline of Canada's 100 Days

In contrast to the trench warfare from previous years, the final months of the First World War were characterized by a swift war of movement with changing frontlines. Ultimately, the successful German offensives of March-April 1918 were unsustainable and served only to put a drain on personnel and supplies. By May, the Allies had recovered from the initial shock of the German attacks and initiated a series of well-planned offensives of their own. From this point forward, the Allies gained the initiative and held it until the Armistice later on in November. The Canadian Corps was an integral part of these successes and typically served in the first attacking waves during key operations.

August, 1918

The Canadians participated in the massive Allied offensive at Amiens. At 4:20 am on August 8th a combined Allied force of 75,000 men, more than 500 tanks and nearly 2,000 planes attacked the German positions. The Germans were completely caught off guard. German high command described it as the "black day for the German Army". By August 15th the Canadians had advanced 22 kilometres at a loss of 9074 casualties. August 27-28th the Canadians pushed against fierce German resistance at the Fresnes-Rouvroy line taking a loss of 5801 men. After 3 days of fighting they advanced 8 kilometres.

September, 1918

On September 2nd, the 1st and 4th Canadian Divisions assaulted the Drocourt-Quéant Line which occupied key positions on the Arras - Cambrai road. Both divisions faced murderous artillery and machine gun fire and after 3 days of fighting and a loss of 5622 dead and wounded the Germans retreated behind the Canal du Nord. On September 27th at 5:30 am after detailed preparation and planning, the Canadian Corps assaulted and crossed the Canal Du Nord. Most of the Canal was flooded creating an impassable obstacle, but a kilometre long stretch of the canal was dry. Timing the assault with the covering artillery barrage, the Canadians were able to quickly cross the canal and secure a bridgehead. Successive attacking waves of Canadian troops then advanced across the canal.

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Timeline of Canada's 100 Days

October, 1918

The Canadians also succeeded in taking the Bourlon Wood which was occupied by the German guns. The Germans withdrew to the Marcoing Line. Determined not to lose Cambrai, the German forces offered brutal resistance but the attacking Canadian forces pressed on and by October 17th the Germans had fled their positions at Cambrai in order to reestablish a defensive line at Valenciennes.

November, 1918

On November 1st, 2149 tons of shells fell on the German positions on the heights of Mont Houy which offered the best approach to the city of Valenciennes. Close behind the falling shells were the Canadian attackers, who quickly overran the German defenders.

Pushing forward to Mons, the Canadians encountered sporadic German resistance in the form of snipers and machine gun fire but it was clear by this time that the end of the war was near. By November 10th the Canadians entered Mons without firing a shot.

11:00 am November 11th 1918 the Armistice came into effect.



Headline from November 11, 1918 in the Ottawa Citizen proclaiming the end of the World War

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Signalling the End

Wireless radio had become a crucial element in providing communications during Canada's 100 Days. Since Vimy Ridge the wireless sets available to the Canadian Signal companies had improved significantly were used more effectively. In the skies, aircraft on reconnaissance and artillery spotting missions were relayed information with small wireless sets the artillery batteries and the various command headquarters.

To keep up with the advancing infantry, cable wagons were employed and cable was laid on the ground or on low poles as there was no time, nor requirement, for deep buried line systems.



Infantry Brigade Signal Office, Flanders HQ Francis Patrick Martin. Government Art Collection, London UK



Canadian Signal Section laying cable. Advance East of Arras. Sept 1918. Library and Archives Canada MIKAN 3405814



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Signalling the End

Despatch riders on both motorcycle and horseback traversed new territories as the Allies advanced and were exposed to significant dangers as indicated in the Distinguished Conduct Medal citation for Corporal Earnest Mount:

"This man carried urgent operation despatches to one of the assaulting divisions, the headquarters of which was continually on the move. After six hours search over shell torn and congested roads, and despite continuous hostile fire, the concussion from which twice lifted him from his machine, severely injuring him, he finally delivered his despatches and brought back situation reports. His work undoubtedly assisted in the success of the operation."

This is but one of the many decorations for gallantry and heroism awarded to signals personnel during the last months of the war.



Canadian Signallers using German rifle as telephone pole, advance east of Arras, Sept 1918. Library and Archives Canada MIKAN 3405816



The famous Canal du Nord showing construction and cutting across which Canadians crossed with their supports and supplies. Advance East of Arras. Library and Archives Canada MIKAN 3329287

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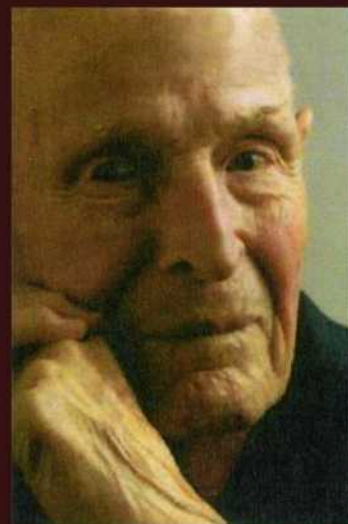
Over 30 signallers were killed during Canada's 100 Days. This number does not include those who were wounded in action and died later from their wounds, nor does it include those who died of disease or sickness during the last months of the war.

On the 80th anniversary of the attack on Vimy Ridge Thomas Spear visited the grave of his 23-year-old brother. William D. Spear MM, who was killed in action on September 27, 1918, during the attack on Canal du Nord while he was repairing damaged telephone lines. Both Tom and his brother Will served in Signals in the First World War; Tom with the Canadian Corps Signal Company and Will with the 1st Divisional Signal Company.

Before the War, Tom was a telegrapher for the Canadian Pacific Railway and Will was a driver/mechanic. Both men received signal training in England with Will being sent to France in the middle of 1917 while Tom was sent in April of 1918. Tom Spear worked doing wireless interception during the time he was in France. On many occasions this work was done from a truck that had an antenna on its roof, capable of receiving signals from as far away as the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Wireless radio offered some advantages over line communication; while German artillery routinely targeted wireless radio positions, the exposed telephone wire was most susceptible to the high explosive shells. It was the dangerous work of repairing these telephone lines under fire which cost Tom's brother his life.



Veterans Affairs Canada
Canadian Virtual War Memorial



Thomas Spear
Canadian Military Engineers Association
<https://cmea-agmc.ca/Tom-Spear>



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While Will Spear's life was tragically cut short by the war, Tom Spear lived a long and happy life. Repatriated in 1919, Tom Spear settled in Emerson MB where he returned to work for the CPR and became active in the local community including the command of the local Cadet Corps. During WW II, he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and held several appointments in Ontario and Manitoba, including supporting the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in Souris MB. Starting at the rank of Flying Officer in the Repair Depot in Trenton ON, he rose to the rank of Acting Wing Commander in charge of the Repair Depot at the Royal Canadian Air Force Station Uplands in Ottawa ON.

After serving in his second world war, Tom returned to the CPR holding different positions and ending his career as the National Supervisor for System Rules. On his retirement from the CPR in 1963 he had the distinction of not having had a single day's absence.

In 1997 and 1998 he visited several European battlefields in tribute to his brother. On the 80th Anniversary of Vimy Ridge pilgrimage, he was selected to read "The Soldier's Lament" at the Vimy Ridge Memorial. On the 1998 pilgrimage, he received the "Légion d'Honneur", France's highest distinction for his WWI contributions. Tom has been presented twice to the Governor General in Rideau Hall in Ottawa. He was presented with the Medal of Liberation from Queen Juliana of The Netherlands, was presented to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and as well as King Albert of Belgium at Mons in 1998. In 1999, Tom wrote and had published his autobiography a book entitled Carry On: Reaching Beyond 100. Tom Spear (Ret'd) died on 28 September 2000, just 24 days short of his 104th birthday.