

CHAPTER XVII

AFTER THE ARMISTICE

The March to the Rhine

ALTHOUGH the signing of the Armistice brought an end of fighting for most Canadians, new duties lay ahead. Several months were to elapse before the majority of Canada's overseas forces returned to their homeland. For some, indeed, there were tasks which would engage them in operations in more remote fields than any where Canadians had previously served during the war.

Immediately after the conclusion of hostilities steps were taken to concentrate the formations of the Canadian Corps as far forward as possible in preparation for the forthcoming march to the Rhine. The 3rd Division was centred in Mons; the 2nd was on its right, east of Frameries; and the 1st and 4th were in the rear about Jemappes and Paturages, west and south-west of Mons respectively. The sector thus held by the Canadians was about five miles wide.¹ In accordance with the terms of the Armistice the leading troops stood fast on the final cease-fire line, and examining posts were placed on all roads to restrict the east-west movements of civilians. No fraternization or other intercourse with the enemy was allowed, nor were the Germans permitted to approach the Canadian lines. "I ordered commanders to pay the strictest attention to discipline and smartness", wrote General Currie, "and especially the well-being of their men."²

The Armistice had provided that Allied troops would advance to the left bank of the Rhine and occupy a series of bridgeheads on the right bank at the principal crossing-places, each bridgehead having a radius of thirty kilometres.³ British forces were allotted a bridgehead which centred upon Cologne, and extended along the river from Düsseldorf to south-east of Bonn. Under the plan which was originally approved the Second and Fourth Armies would occupy the British bridgehead. The Canadian Corps on the right and the 2nd British Corps on the left would lead the Second Army's advance. The selection of their Corps to take part in the occupation was a distinction that the Canadians prized highly.⁴ The 1st and 2nd Divisions (the senior formations of the Corps) would be in the Canadian van, followed later by the 3rd and 4th Division.⁵

On Sunday, 17 November, a day of thanksgiving, representatives of Canadian units attended special services in the Mons churches. In honour of the liberating troops the city's carillon played "O Canada". At nine o'clock on the

following morning, leading units of the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions crossed the outpost lines and commenced the march to the Rhine. Each division proceeded in three brigade columns, on separate routes. Those of the 1st Division on the left, had Cologne as the destination; the 2nd Division on the right headed towards Bonn. A cavalry screen advanced one day's march ahead of the leading infantry, and each column provided its own close protection, in which it was assisted by cavalry and cyclists attached from Corps Troops. The whole 250-mile march was conducted under operational conditions, and all military precautions were taken against surprise. To ensure a smooth take-over from the enemy the country had been divided into zones. The Germans had orders to deposit war material at selected places in each zone and to withdraw from the area the day before the Allies entered it.⁶ Before the 3rd and 4th Divisions could set out, however, supply difficulties necessitated a change in the general plan for the advance. The almost complete destruction of all railways and roads in the old battle areas made it impossible to maintain two armies on the move and at the same time provide for the Belgian civilian population. Accordingly the Second Army now went forward alone. The Canadian occupation force was reduced to the 1st and 2nd Divisions, together with Corps Headquarters and some Corps Troops already on the march. The 3rd and 4th Divisions, with the 8th Army Brigade Canadian Field Artillery and the 1st and 3rd Brigades Canadian Garrison Artillery, were transferred to the 4th Corps, of the Fourth Army. They remained billeted in Belgium until moving back to England, on the way to demobilization.⁷

Meanwhile, the marching divisions made frequent halts to permit the Germans to evacuate zones as planned. They encountered no enemy troops but saw much evidence of their passing. The wreckage of a great fighting machine was everywhere at hand. In accordance with the terms of the Armistice the Germans had assembled, usually in or near the villages and towns, huge parks of guns and dumps of munitions and other war equipment. Miles upon miles of laden barges had been left tied up on the canals, and the roadways were littered with helmets, discarded army clothing, and even weapons.⁸ The march through Belgium was in general a triumphal progress, particularly for the leading battalions. The inhabitants of the various communities through which the Canadians passed where Germans had been in occupation were warm in their welcome and expressed their gratitude in many ways. In other places the populace was more restrained, for no soldiers of any nationality were wanted. At Nivelles, a town twenty miles north-east of Mons, which the 16th Battalion reached on 21 November, there was not only the luxury of warm billets and soft feather beds, but "eight thousand bottles of wine were dug up from the chateau grounds."⁹ In marked contrast was the cool reception afforded the Canadians after they had crossed the German border. Here the only spectators in view were children with close cropped heads who stared curiously from the roadside. Their elders remained discreetly out of sight, peering through half closed doors or shuttered windows at the marching columns.¹⁰

The weather was generally good until 25 November, the day the leading

troops reached the Meuse at Namur; but thereafter it rained daily, and this, together with the heavy traffic, caused roads to deteriorate rapidly. There was no move on the 26th, and on the following day, since side roads could no longer be used, each division was compelled to march in two columns. The Corps advance, which had been due east to Namur, now continued to the south-east. Boundaries between divisions were rearranged so that each would have one first-class road. Leaving the Meuse at Andenne, the 2nd Division, destined for Bonn, was directed south-east to the German frontier at Beho, a village some six miles south-east of Vielsalm. The 1st Division, some ten miles to the north, followed a parallel route to reach the frontier at Petit Thier, three miles north-east of Vielsalm.¹¹

Owing to the lack of suitable billets among the sparsely inhabited hills of the Ardennes and the Eifel district, on and after 28 November each division moved in only one column. Brigade groups, each covering between eight and ten miles of road space, were separated usually by one day's march. The long hours of marching over cobblestones or through heavy mud were taking a toll in blistered feet, and the continual drizzling rain had an added depressing effect. The difficulties of bringing forward supplies were increasing, for railhead was still west of Valenciennes, more than a hundred miles away. On 28 November rations did not reach the 1st Division until some of the units were already on the march—breakfastless. On the 29th a repetition of the situation caused the 1st Division's march for that day to be cancelled. Only by securing additional lorries and utilizing the vehicles of the Canadian Machine Gun Corps was it possible to remedy the trouble sufficiently to permit the advance to continue on 30 November.¹²

Nevertheless despite rain, the hilly country, and short rations, the men's spirits remained remarkably high. A Special Order of the Day issued by General Currie called on the troops to remain "a close-knitted army in grim, deadly earnest", and to give German agents scattered through the country no opportunity of reporting any weakness or "evidence of disintegration of your fighting power". To that end the highest standard of discipline was insisted on, whether on the march or at the halt. "In short", the order continued, "you must continue to be, and appear to be, that powerful hitting force which has won the fear and respect of your foes and the admiration of the world."¹³ Magnificently the Canadians responded. With bayonets fixed and flags flying the leading troops crossed the German frontier at nine o'clock on the morning of 4 December, the 1st Division at Petit Thier and the 2nd at Beho. During the following days the other units entered Germany, the pipes of the Highland battalions appropriately skirling "Blue Bonnets over the Border".¹⁴

From now on much of the route lay through heavily forested country which presented the marchers with a succession of steep hills and narrow valleys. Many of the men had blistered feet as a result of footgear which was becoming badly worn, yet units continued to cover twenty or more miles a day with no one dropping out.¹⁵

The day set for crossing the Rhine by the Allies was 13 December. The occasion was considered to be of greater significance than the crossing of the German frontier, and for several preceding days the Canadians were concentrated on the left bank opposite Cologne and Bonn, as far forward as possible. In these positions all units busied themselves with traditional “spit and polish” to ensure that with brass gleaming and equipment and clothing in the best possible condition all ranks would present a faultless appearance on the important day. On the 12th the British 1st Cavalry Brigade, which had come under General Currie’s command on 1 December, crossed at Bonn to establish control posts within the bridgehead.¹⁶

The morning of the 13th dawned dark and wet, and a steady rain poured down throughout the day. The 1st Division crossed the Rhine* by South Bridge at Cologne, marching past the G.O.C. Second Army, General Sir Herbert Plumer, while crowds of Germans lining the streets of the city silently watched the steel-helmeted Canadians swing by in full battle order. At the bridge at Bonn, General Currie, “after a very comfortable night in His Majesty’s bed”,[†] witnessed the crossing and took the salute of the 2nd Division, which marched past in an impressive column that extended for eighteen miles. Here the civilian spectators were fewer in numbers, and equally undemonstrative. What was a memorable day for the Canadians could only be one of humiliation for the people whose armies they had helped to vanquish.¹⁸

Once across the Rhine the Canadian units unfixing bayonets and marched at ease to their assigned towns and villages, where comfortable billets had been arranged for them. The two divisions were disposed in depth for the defence of the southern sector of the Cologne-Bonn bridgehead, where their area of responsibility encompassed ground on the east or right bank of the Rhine, including the city of Bonn itself. Units proceeded to establish control posts on the roads and railways leading into the bridgehead, and to place guards on the various dumps of German stores. In general these duties were not arduous; the chief difficulty came in enforcing the military regulation which forbade movement of civilians between the occupied area and territory still under German control.

With military duties reduced to a minimum, efforts were made to provide opportunities for all to partake in sport. There was time also to begin preparing the men for their return to civil life. Education, in many cases interrupted by the war, received special attention. Battalions ran their own schools, finding teachers from their own ranks to instruct the men in elementary subjects. In this they were helped by text-books prepared and printed under the auspices of the Khaki University. The Khaki University of Canada, which originated as a project of the National Committee of the Canadian Y.M.C.A.,¹⁹ had begun to function in England and France in the autumn of 1917, but the German offensive of the

* The honour of leading the 1st Division over the Rhine was given to the 3rd Brigade. The toss of a coin gave the 14th Battalion the proud privilege of leading the Brigade column across the river.

† At Bonn, Sir Arthur occupied the Kaiser’s suite in the Palais Schaumburg, home of the German Emperor’s youngest sister.¹⁷

following spring had halted the work in France. During 1918 Khaki Colleges were established in fourteen different locations in the United Kingdom, and in September of that year the Khaki University of Canada was formally authorized as a branch of the General Staff of the O.M.F.C., with control over all existing educational organizations overseas. The Central College of the Khaki University, in Ripon, Yorkshire, offered matriculation courses and the first two years of a university arts course, and in these were enrolled the more advanced soldier students from the United Kingdom and France. In addition some 300 graduate students and undergraduates of at least two years' university standing at home were sent to various universities in Great Britain.²⁰ These were enrolled for the two academic terms commencing 1 October 1918 and 1 February 1919.²¹

While the Canadians were still in Germany, they heard official denial of a rumour that the battalions of the Corps would be broken up and individuals shipped home for demobilization following a priority based on length of overseas service and marital status. Whatever views Canadian soldiers may have held about the desirability of following a "first over, first back" policy of demobilization, General Currie considered that it was important for the troops to return to Canada as formed units. As part of the Army of Occupation the Corps had to function as a fully organized formation, and he was concerned that to withdraw men on an individual basis could result in a breakdown of the administrative services of the Corps. The Army could not carry on in a bearable fashion without its clerks and cooks; yet their relatively sheltered role—they suffered far fewer casualties than, for instance, the infantry—meant that most of these administrative personnel had long service credits which would give them high priority in any competitive scheme of individual repatriation. Above all was the value of maintaining morale by keeping the men, as long as possible, in the units in which they had fought. Currie's views had been communicated to Ottawa on 11 November, with a strong supporting recommendation from Sir Edward Kemp, the Overseas Minister.²² But the Privy Council had rejected the proposal on the grounds that it would "entail great additional expense, dislocate railway transportation, confuse administrative arrangements and throw on Militia, Re-establishment and Labour Departments an intolerable burden of work and responsibility".²³ Sir Robert Borden, who was in the United Kingdom at the time, then took up the cudgels on Currie's behalf, and asked the Acting Prime Minister, Sir Thomas White, to have the matter reconsidered.²⁴

The Canadian Cabinet was not inclined to alter its decision, and on 23 November White reiterated its views to Sir Robert, venturing the belief that General Currie would find these "convincing".²⁵ On the same day the Corps Commander held a conference at Mons, attended by all available divisional and brigade commanders and heads of services and branches. A free discussion of demobilization brought unanimous agreement that "from every point of view it was desirous to demobilise the Corps by Units and not by categories".²⁶ Borden's reply to Ottawa two days later cited the example of Australia, which was returning its troops as units under their own officers. He warned his colleagues in

the Cabinet of the bitter resentment which Canadian soldiers would feel “if units which have fought so magnificently and earned world-wide distinction in keen competition with each other are scrambled into one mass and returned to Canada”.²⁷ Upon the receipt of this message the Canadian Cabinet gave in. On 29 November the Minister of Militia notified Borden that, subject to certain conditions (e.g., limiting the sanction to combatant units of the Corps), the Privy Council had concurred in deferring to General Currie’s wishes.²⁸

Garrison Duty in Belgium

The Canadians’ occupation role in Germany lasted well into the New Year. A timely snowfall on the night of 24 December enabled all units to celebrate the white Christmas to which so many were accustomed at home. The traditional turkey and accompanying luxuries might be missing (they arrived later), but resourceful messing officers ably backed by expert battalion cooks saw to it that all enjoyed a Christmas dinner worthy of the name.

First to leave for Belgium were the 13th, 14th and 16th Battalions of the 1st Division, who entrained on 5 January 1919.²⁹ The 1st Division completed its move on 18 January, and next day the relief of the 2nd Division began.³⁰ Corps Troops followed and the arrival of the Canadian Corps Cyclist Battalion back in Belgium on 6 February completed the withdrawal of the Canadians from the Army of Occupation.³¹ In Belgium the 1st Division occupied an area around Huy, midway between Namur and Liege, while the 2nd Division went to the neighbourhood of Auvelais, ten miles west of Namur.³² The remaining divisions of the Corps had already moved from the Mons area to other parts of Belgium. In the middle of December the 4th Division had gone to billets in small towns and villages in the Wavre-Jodoigne district, about 25 miles south-east of Brussels. At the end of the year the 3rd Division had marched westward from Nivelles to the Tournai-Lille area, where it remained during most of January.³³

In Belgium, as in Germany, despite the natural impatience of officers and men to return to their homeland, the time passed quickly, as all were kept busy. Units continued a programme of training, principally to maintain physical fitness; there were educational classes for those who needed them; there was more opportunity for recreation, and all ranks took part in various forms of sport. Contributing tremendously to the morale of the troops were the shows staged by the Dumbells, the popular 3rd Division Concert Party.* Small groups of men were transferred from one unit to another in order to benefit individuals whose home in Canada was at some distance from the dispersal area to which the bulk

* The original Dumbells concert party was organized in 1916 from serving soldiers of the 3rd Division by Capt. Merton Plunket, a Y.M.C.A. entertainment officer. They gave their first performance near Poperinghe, and continued to entertain Canadian front—line troops until June 1919. Their repertoire included current music—hall songs, dances, impersonations, and skits based on army life. Their biggest production overseas was a full—dress presentation of H.M.S. Pinafore, which played for 32 days to packed houses in Mons after the Armistice.

of their unit would be going (see below, p. 531). The exacting task of documentation began, it being the responsibility of divisional commanders that every soldier be documented before embarking from France.

When demobilization first began it was expected in Ottawa that Canadian troops on the Continent would sail direct from a French port to Canada. Such an arrangement would allow the British authorities to utilize all transportation facilities in France and the English Channel for demobilizing British armies and repatriating liberated prisoners of war, while continuing to supply the Army of Occupation in Germany. But the great majority of the Canadians had relatives or friends in the United Kingdom whom they wished to see before returning to Canada. Because of the difficult situation regarding transportation it was wholly impracticable to grant them leave to the British Isles, for this would mean providing them with passages in both directions so that they might subsequently sail from France. Accordingly General Currie made strong representations that all Canadian troops should return to England and embark from there to Canada. It was not until 23 January, after the Corps Commander had gone to London and personally put his case before the British Adjutant General and the Secretary of State for War, that the Canadian view prevailed.³⁴

During January a Canadian Embarkation Camp, capable of accommodating 6000 men, was established at Le Havre, through which all units and formations of the Corps returned to England. As the senior division, the 1st Division would normally have been first to go, but since neither it nor the 2nd Division could be released from occupational duty, General Currie nominated the 3rd Division to head the Corps move.³⁵ Units of the division began arriving at Le Havre on 2 February, the P.P.C.L.I. and the R.C.R. being in the vanguard. Clearance was swift and smooth.³⁶ The Channel crossing took about ten hours, the troops, numbering about 1000 a day, disembarking at Weymouth, in Dorset. Transfer of the 1st Division commenced on 19 March, and the move of the 2nd and 4th Divisions followed in that order.

It was mid-April when the last of the 4th Division's units reached England. The units of the four divisions went to Concentration Camps at Bramshott on Witley. Corps troops, and troops outside the Corps, went to other Concentration Camps at Seaford, Ripon, Shorncliffe, Purfleet and Sunningdale.³⁷ Soldiers whose dependents were to accompany them back to Canada concentrated at Buxton. Kirkdale was the centre at which the Medical Services prepared invalids and convalescents for the voyage.

Demobilization

Discussion of the procedure to be followed in demobilization had begun at the end of 1916, and from then to the end of the war there had been two years of careful planning by the Department of Militia and Defence and the Overseas Military Forces of Canada to ensure that when the time came, the return to Canada should be carried out speedily, that the transportation provided should be

as comfortable as possible, and that the troops should receive a “fair deal” in the priority in which they sailed. The Canadian decision to demobilize its overseas troops was taken immediately after the signing of the Armistice, and a week later the Cabinet authorized demobilization of C.E.F. units then in Canada.³⁸

The original estimate that at least eighteen months would be required to bring back all overseas troops proved excessive. Two-thirds of the overseas force reached home within five months, and before a year had passed repatriation was virtually completed. On 13 November 1918 the British Ministry of Shipping advised the Canadian Government that ships would be available to move 50,000 troops each month; and in spite of strikes which cancelled individual sailings, shipping was never a real problem. But during the winter of 1918-1919 Canadian railways could handle less than 25,000 troops in a month; and even when disembarkation could take place at the St. Lawrence ports, with a resulting shorter rail haul, the capacity of the vessels available considerably exceeded that of the troop trains. Wisely the Militia Department called for expert assistance from the Minister of Railways and the presidents of the three major railway systems. High officials of the companies formed a railway demobilization committee which was able to increase the monthly carrying capacity to a total of 45,000 troops.³⁹

With the exception of the Canadian Corps, which, as we have seen, was returned by units, the principle of “first in, first out” was adopted. The full duration of the war was divided into seventeen three-month periods, with two service groups assigned to each. The first seventeen consisted of married men, the last seventeen of single, the married groups having priority over the single. Thus while the guiding principle for release was the order of enlistment, men who had families dependent on them took precedence over single men.

Each soldier had the right to choose his destination in Canada. In order that each might be demobilized at a point near this destination, twenty-two Dispersal Areas were set up in Canada by subdividing the existing eleven Military Districts. At the concentration camps established in the United Kingdom troops from the continent, as well as those already in England, were regrouped and distributed among twenty-two wings, each matched to a Dispersal Area in Canada. From these camps units of the Canadian Corps entrained direct for the port of embarkation, but for troops outside the Corps a large staging camp was organized at Kinnel Park, thirty miles from Liverpool.⁴⁰ Only the 3rd Division (which headed the Corps move) and Corps Troops were not regrouped, but returned to Canada in the units in which they had fought.

At the concentration camps the soldier completed his documentation and received his final medical and dental clearances. His kit deficiencies were replaced, his pay account adjusted, and he filed his application for his war Service Gratuity. He was then granted demobilization leave of from eight days to two weeks. On his return he received his Last Pay Certificate and was posted to an embarkation company to await sailing.⁴¹ In all, the average soldier spent about a month in England. There were some cases when for compassionate reasons

individuals returned home in advance of normal sailings . Unfortunately, though these were few, they were a cause of dissatisfaction to soldiers who did not understand the circumstances involved. Furthermore, for considerations of economy and to keep ships filled, certain untrained drafts were sent back to Canada soon after their arrival in the United Kingdom.

These modifications to the policy of “first over, first back”, aggravated by disappointment brought about by the cancellation of individual sailings , were at the root of some of the rioting which occurred at several Canadian camps. Men were being brought home as fast as the available ships and trains could move them, but not as rapidly nor in the order in which some desired to come. There was resentment over the fact that the 3rd Division which included many Military Service Act men with comparatively little service was given precedence over the other divisions. Unfortunately not enough effort appears to have been given to explain the reasons for the delays, unavoidable as they were.⁴² In all, between November 1918 and June 1919, there were thirteen instances of riots or disturbances involving Canadian troops in England.

The most serious of these occurred at Kinnel Park on 4 and 5 March 1919, when dissatisfaction over delays in sailing precipitated rioting by upwards of 800 soldiers which resulted in five men being killed and 23 wounded. Seventy-eight men were arrested, of whom 25 were convicted of mutiny and given sentences varying from 90 days’ detention to ten years’ penal servitude. At Witley, on the night of 14-15 June, a small group of dissidents started trouble by trying to free some soldiers arrested for persisting in playing Crown and Anchor in defiance of previous regulations curbing widespread gambling in the camp. The disturbance spread to canteens and the civilian area. On the following night the Garrison Theatre was burned and nearly all the civilian shops in the area were destroyed. Similarly at Epsom on 17 June, the indiscipline of a small minority was to blame when a civilian police station was stormed, one policeman was killed and seven others injured.⁴³

On 20 June, 1919, Lieut.-General Sir R. E. W. Turner, V.C., Chief of the General Staff, O.M.F.C., published a Special Order of the Day warning all troops of their individual responsibility to quell such disturbances. He made clear in no uncertain terms that the incidents that had occurred were acts of mutiny, and that to remain a passive spectator in such a situation was to side with the mutineers.⁴⁴ The order appeared to have a good effect upon the troops; at any rate, there were no further disturbances. The outbreaks had been regrettable, particularly as there seems little doubt that the unrest which produced them might have been considerably lessened had more publicity been given to explaining the reasons for having to modify the plans for demobilization.

Despite attempts by the Canadian Government to discourage the discharge of soldiers in the United Kingdom, 15,182 men signed away their right to free transportation home and remained in England. This total, added to 7136 who had already been discharged there before the Armistice, meant that in all some 22,000 Canadian soldiers entered civil life in the United Kingdom.⁴⁵

In Canada demobilization proceeded smoothly and expeditiously. On the arrival of a troopship at a port of disembarkation, the Clearing Services* welcomed the soldiers and their dependents—an estimated 54,000 relatives accompanied the returning troops—and arranged for their transportation inland to the Dispersal Areas. Immigration officers worked closely with the military authorities, so that an average train, carrying about five hundred troops, could be loaded in thirty minutes. Spirits were high as the trains rolled rapidly westward; those with only one night on board found in the excitement of nearing home little time for sleep. The heartwarming reception given by cheering crowds as the train drew into its destination was repeated in cities all across Canada. In many cases the returning unit would form up outside the railway station for its last march—a proud parade through thronged streets to the place of dismissal. Then came the last order by the Commanding Officer. The men turned right and broke off and another unit of the Canadian Expeditionary Force passed into history.⁴⁷

The final stages of demobilization were quickly effected. The soldier turned in his arms and equipment (retaining his clothing and steel helmet), had his medical history sheet signed, and received his war badge, his cheque and his discharge certificate. The careful documentation carried out in England and on the ships now paid off, as men passed through the dispersal station at the rate of about six every minute.⁴⁸ Every soldier who had been overseas for six months and every one who had served in Canada for a full year received a gratuity based on his length of service and the rate of pay of his rank. (For overseas service, single privates received payments which varied from \$420—for three years' service or more—to \$210 for service of less than a year.)⁴⁹

Those veterans who wanted to establish themselves on the land were assisted with long-term loans; in this way the Soldier Settlement Board withdrew more than 30,000 soldiers from the general labour market and directed them into agriculture. For the disabled, there were pensions and medical treatment and opportunities for vocational training. Up to the end of 1919, a total of 91,521 pensions had been granted, amounting to some \$22,500,000 annually. At the same time 8000 soldiers were receiving medical treatment, while more than 23,000 were enrolled for vocational training.⁵⁰ In such manner did a grateful country attempt in some measure to repay its debt to those who had served and survived.

Conclusion

We have tried in these pages to tell something of the part played by Canadian soldiers in what came to be known as the first of the total wars. The narrative has been made as factual as possible, recording without embellishment or excessive detail their achievements and their disappointments. Yet if the reader finds

* The Clearing Services, organized as a separate command in July 1918, had control of the Clearing Depots (which replaced the earlier Discharge Depots) at Halifax, Quebec, Saint John and Montreal.⁴⁶

nothing to inspire him in this story of as gallant a band as ever bore arms in the service of their country, the fault is the author's alone.

In their four years away from their homeland Canadian troops earned the reputation of being tough, resourceful fighters, well trained and well commanded. There has not been lacking testimony from senior Allied commanders that in the latter part of the war no other formation on the Western Front surpassed the Canadian Corps as a superb fighting machine. "Whenever the Germans found the Canadian Corps coming into the line", wrote Lloyd George in his war Memoirs, "they prepared for the worst".⁵¹ Much of its success the Corps owed to the fact that while other British corps headquarters saw divisions frequently enter and leave their command, the Canadian Corps was in the unique position of being able to preserve its composition unchanged. The effect was more than an esprit arising from a sense of national pride. The men who made up its units were heartened by the comradeship that comes from shared experiences in the face of difficulty and danger, whether the result be reverse or triumph. Their morale was high, and they endured grievous hardships and bitter setbacks with a dogged optimism and irrepressible cheerfulness. They were further strengthened by the confidence which they had in their leaders—a confidence that they would not suffer needless sacrifice through being committed in unsound tactics that had already been tested and found wanting. Added to these various contributing factors was a careful coordination at the staff level under the Corps Commander's personal direction, the result of which was a unity and sense of mutual reliability in the Corps which enabled it to function as an efficient and well-balanced team.

The Canadian Corps was fortunate in its leaders. To Sir Julian Byng must go much of the credit for laying the foundations of the Corps' esprit and its splendid fighting efficiency. The Corps reached the peak of its performance under the command of Sir Arthur Currie, whose organizing genius and unflagging efforts were constantly directed towards improving and maintaining the standard of his troops' performance. Currie was particularly determined that Canadians should be spared unnecessary casualties, and it was ever his object to exploit gun power to the limit for the purpose of saving infantrymen's lives.⁵² The Somme had brought home to the British General Staff the need for reorganizing the artillery of the British armies, and the work begun along these lines by General Byng, then commander of the Canadian Corps, had been amplified and extended by his successor. By 1917 the organization of the Canadian Corps Artillery and its ancillary services had reached an advanced stage that artilleries of other formations on the Western Front were unable to match to the end of the War. In awarding Currie much of the credit for this, the former Commander of the Corps Heavy Artillery points to the Corps Commander's sympathetic attitude towards the Canadian gunners, to whom he "gave the necessary means and encouragement to surmount the difficulties which from time to time faced us".⁵³ There developed a close and comprehensive system of cooperation between the artillery and the infantry. Living up to their motto to shoot the "ultimate round", Canadian gunners were unsparing in their

expenditure of ammunition to provide adequate assistance to the assaulting infantry. "I know of no organization in the history of War", wrote General McNaughton in 1929, "which was able to produce such a high ratio in shell to troops, nor any in which the price paid for victory was lower in personnel".⁵⁴

As the war progressed, the sense of national unity which permeated the Canadian Corps became stronger and stronger. At the unit level there was manifested a strong regimental spirit—a determination on the part of the individual not to let the Battalion or one's comrades down which contributed tremendously to the fighting efficiency and high state of discipline of the Corps. Yet more binding than the narrow loyalty to regiment or geographical locality, this broader patriotism, fostered by comradeship, confidence and pride of accomplishment, grew with each successive achievement by Canadian arms. The men of the various units from every province in Canada who fought at Vimy Ridge and at Passchendaele and in the battles of the Hundred Days, fought not as Maritimers, or British Columbians, or representatives of Quebec or Ontario or the Prairie Provinces. They fought as Canadians, and those who returned brought back with them a pride of nationhood that they had not known before.

What was the extent of the national military effort, and the price of the Canadian achievement? The records show that 619,636 Canadian men and women served with Canada's army in the First World War. (Canadian naval forces numbered some ten thousand; and about 24,000, many of whom came from the Canadian Expeditionary Force, fought with the British air forces.) The sacrifice in lives was heavy. Of those who did not return 51,748 Canadian soldiers and nursing sisters were killed in action or died of their wounds. The addition of 7796 who died of disease or injury, or who were accidentally killed, brings the total of fatal army casualties to 59,544 all ranks. For all services the total was 60,661, or 9.28 per cent of all who enlisted.* The total number of Canadian army casualties of all categories in all theatres was 232,494 (see Appendix "C").

Nearly one of every ten Canadians who fought in the First World War did not return to the homeland. More than fifty thousand sleep in the war cemeteries of France and Belgium. Others found their final earthly resting place in graves in the United Kingdom, in the Near East, in North Russia and Siberia, or on native Canadian soil. Some were lost at sea. Few members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force were soldiers by profession; the Force was largely an army of citizen soldiers. From every walk of life they came to render their service, and those who did not return left their country the poorer from their loss.

Yet the contribution of these men and women was great, for they gave of their best—they gave all that they had. In the post-war years, on the November day set apart to honour them, their comrades in arms—a diminishing band as the passage of time took its toil—would gather in communities large and small across

* In the Second World War fatal casualties numbered 41,992, or 3.86 per cent of the total enlisted.

the land to relive together well-remembered experiences of those adventurous days, and to renew the solemn pledge to their fallen brethren:

“They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.”