

# Remembering Canadian excellence

*Dan McCaffery - November 2025*

Every November 11 we set aside a few moments to honour Canada's war dead.

It's very fitting that we do so. Well over 100,000 young Canadians gave their lives fighting for this country and they deserve to be remembered.

But although Remembrance Day is supposed to be a solemn, rather sad observance, it's also one during which I can't help but celebrate Canadian excellence.

That's because our soldiers, sailors and airmen have always been among the bravest and most skillful on the planet.

We don't make much of a fuss about it. In fact, few Canadians are even aware of it.

What very few of us know, for example, is that the Canadian Corps essentially knocked the Germans out of the First World War in late 1918.

At the time, most people expected the conflict to drag on well into 1919. During four years of trench warfare, after all, the front lines had seldom moved more than a few hundred yards at a time, if that.

But in August 1918 four Canadian divisions, totalling about 100,000 men, spearheaded an Allied offensive that became known as 'Canada's Hundred Days.' The Canucks took on no less than 47 German divisions, taking 32,000 prisoners, killing tens of thousands and hurling the rest of them back an astonishing 130 kilometres.

Of particular importance was the fact that the Canadians smashed through the formidable Hindenburg Line at Cambrai, seizing a vital rail and road juncture that the Germans depended on to resupply their army.

German General Erich Ludendorff was so distressed by the offensive that he told the Kaiser the war was lost. Had the Nazis been in charge, as was the case a generation later, the Germans would have kept fighting to the bitter end, causing everyone involved a lot of needless grief and bloodshed. But these were not the madmen of 1945. These were rational, sensible men who knew when they were beaten. As a result, the war ended suddenly – and much earlier than anyone anticipated.

British, French and American troops helped during the Hundred Days but the key army on the Allied side was the Canadian Corps. It's not much of an exaggeration to say that those young Canadians won the war.

During those three months Canadian soldiers won 30 Victoria Crosses for extraordinary gallantry (31 if you count a Newfoundlander). And Canadian General Arthur Currie, a pre-war teacher born just a few kilometres east of Lambton County, became the most respected field commander on the Allied side.

So yes, I will take a moment to remember our lost souls. But I'll also pause to remember that although other countries took most of the credit, it was the Canadians who ended the First World War with a knockout blow.