



## On Remembrance Day, Honouring the Military Service of Canadians

Dr. Tomkins on Juno Beach in Normandy, France, to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy

As our nation commemorates our veterans of war on the anniversary of the armistice that ended WWI, I reflect, with solemn gratitude, on how military service and peacekeeping have shaped the Canadian experience.

When the First World War (WWI) began, the population of Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador was only 8 million, yet 650,000 of our soldiers fought in Europe. More than 66,000 never made it home. A few years ago, I travelled to Vimy Ridge, where over three days of bloody battle in April 1917, Canadian forces seized a heavily fortified German-held position. This was the first time all four Canadian divisions attacked together, men from all regions of Canada. After the war, Brigadier-General A.E. Ross said, “in those few minutes I witnessed the birth of a nation.”

During the Second World War (WWII), 1.1 million Canadians served in theatres of war across the globe, including the landings in Normandy and Sicily that laid the foundations for the Allied victory. I visited Juno Beach where Canadian assault companies, including the Royal Winnipeg Rifles and the Queen’s Own Rifles of Canada, were the first wave of forces to arrive early in the morning of June 6, 1944.

Like many Canadians, I had several family members who served in the military in both World Wars, and some who never returned home. My great uncle Dr. Preston Andrew “Pat” Beattie served in WWI, indeed he fought at Vimy Ridge, and became a dentist when he returned. Then he served in the Canadian Dental Corps during WWII. He was my childhood dentist and my mentor. He risked his life in the service of his country, putting aside his individual hopes for the collective good. I am awed by this altruism.

War is horrible, and even reading about the suffering it has caused makes me sad and furious. It also makes me appreciate even more the selflessness, grit, valour, camaraderie, resilience, and mercy shown by those who served in wars.

Dentistry has long been part of the Canadian military. Canadian dental surgeons accompanied Canadian troops during the Boer War in South Africa. At a CDA meeting at McGill University in 1902, one of the dentists who’d treated many soldiers in South Africa, Dr. Ira Bower of Ottawa argued for the creation of regular dental staff for the army, which CDA then advocated for with the federal government.

In May 1915, the Canadian Army Dental Corps was formed as a separate corps within the Canadian Army. During WWI, the corps had provided 2.2 million dental treatments for Canadian and British troops overseas, including 50,000 for “trench mouth.”

Between the wars, the dental corps numbers declined, but in 1938, CDA successfully lobbied the government for its re-establishment, under the command of Chief Dental Officer Lieutenant Colonel Dr. Frank Lott. During WWII, the dental

corps grew to 5,000, half of whom were deployed overseas. In recognition of its outstanding service, in 1947, His Majesty King George VI granted the Royal Warrant to the corps and it became the Royal Canadian Dental Corps (RCDC).

Since then, dentists in the corps have been deployed to every major Canadian expeditionary force from Korea to Afghanistan, where the corps and CDA facilitated the creation of the Afghanistan Dentists Association. Member of the corps were in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake and helped after the 1998 ice storm in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick.

During the pandemic, the RCDC contributed to CDA COVID-19 Response Team and shared their research into aerosols in the dental operator setting. Their officers provided support to the public health system in Ontario by conducting contact tracing and wellness check phone calls. Others were deployed to long-term care facilities to provide general care to aging Canadians.

I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the war in Eastern Ukraine. Members of the Canadian Armed Forces are in the United Kingdom training Ukrainian forces to fight the Russian invaders and defend the sovereignty of Ukraine.

In 2018, I became an associate member of the Senate of the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, one of the first companies to land on D-Day. It is my small way of saying thank you. It's part of how I remember and honour the significant contributions that Canadians have made in international conflicts and peacekeeping.

In memory of those we've lost, in honour of those who have served, and in gratitude to current service members, our dental community can express its highest appreciation by being of service—we can offer care to veterans in our communities and support to our fellow dentists in the military. We can value peace and work to maintain it in our own communities and around the world.

Sincerely,

**Dr. Lynn Tomkins**  
**CDA President**



Dr. Tomkins at the Canadian National Vimy Memorial in Givenchy-en-Gohelle, Pas de Calais, France.