

PPCLI:

Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry

Origins

When the [Great War](#) began in the summer of 1914, Captain [Andrew Hamilton Gault](#) undertook to finance and equip a regiment for overseas duty. On 10 August 1914, the regiment's charter was signed, and within nine days its ranks were filled with veterans, many who had served in the [South African War](#); or other British imperial conflicts. The [Governor General, Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught](#), selected Lieutenant Colonel Francis D.

Farquhar, DSO, of the Coldstream Guards as the Patricias' first commander. The unit was named after the Governor General's youngest daughter, [Princess Patricia](#). The PPCLI arrived overseas for war service in October 1914.



First World War

For four years, the PPCLI fought through some of the toughest engagements of the war. It was the first Canadian battle unit to arrive in France and was soon thrown into the horrors of trench warfare. Farquhar himself died of wounds received in Belgium on 20 March 1915. The defence of Bellewaerde Ridge during the [Second Battle of Ypres](#); (April–May 1915) cost the regiment 400 casualties in one day.

The PPCLI eventually joined the 7th Canadian Brigade within the 3rd Canadian Division on 22 December 1915, and would serve as part of the Canadian Corps, which gained a reputation as the "shock troops" of the British army. During the [Battle of Vimy Ridge](#); (9–12 April 1917), the PPCLI served in the spearhead of the 3rd Division's assault on the ridge. It later endured the brutality of [Passchendaele](#); and the [100 Days](#) campaign that led to the end of the war.

Three PPCLI soldiers — Sergeant George Mullin, Sergeant Robert Spall and Lieutenant Hugh McKenzie — were awarded the ;[Victoria Cross](#) ;for bravery during the Great War. (Spall and McKenzie were awarded theirs posthumously after being killed in action.)

After the war, the regiment participated in the failed Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War. After returning home in March 1919, the PPCLI was selected as a regiment for Canada's permanent peacetime army. Companies were split up between bases in ; [Winnipeg](#) ;and [Esquimalt](#), ;[British Columbia](#). Peacetime service consisted of training, support of government action, and contributing to Canada's officer training corps at universities in Central and Western Canada.

History: <https://canadaehx.com/2021/05/09/the-princess-patricias-canadian-light-infantry/>

(More about the Princess Pat's at the foot of this file.)

Military Cross (MC)



The Military Cross (MC) was instituted by Royal Warrant on 28th December 1914. The Military Cross is a decoration for gallantry during active operations in the presence of the enemy. It can be awarded to individuals in the British Army, the Indian Army or the Colonial Forces; to Commissioned Officers of the substantive rank of Captain or below (therefore acting and temporary Majors are eligible) or Warrant Officers for distinguished and commendable services in battle. In 1920, the terms were altered to clearly state the award was for gallant and distinguished services in action and that naval and air force officers could be awarded the cross for gallant and distinguished services on the ground.

A total of 3,727 MCs have gone to Canadians, with 324 first bars and 18 second bars. The Military Cross (M.C.) is the British Army equivalent of the Distinguished Service Cross (D.S.C.) and Distinguished Flying Cross (D.F.C.).

(Level 3 Gallantry Award)

The reverse of the medal was issued plain with no engraving. Some families and individuals engraved their details at their own expense.

From August 1916 an individual could receive one or more Bars to the Military Cross. Recipients of the medal are entitled to use the letters M.C. after their name. (Each "Bar" represents a second or third award of the same medal.)

The British War Medal, 1914-18

Established on 26th July 1919.



Also known as '**Squeak**'.

The silver or bronze medal was awarded to officers and men of the British and Imperial Forces who either entered a theatre of war or entered service overseas between 5th August 1914 and 11th November 1918 inclusive. This was later extended to services in Russia, Siberia and some other areas in 1919 and 1920.

Approximately 6.5 million British War Medals were issued. Approximately 6.4 million of these were the silver versions of this medal. Around 110,000 of a bronze version were issued mainly to Chinese, Maltese and Indian Labour Corps. The front (obv or obverse) of the medal depicts the head of George V.

The recipient's service number, rank, name and unit was impressed on the rim.

The Allied Victory Medal



Also known as '**Wilfred**'

It was decided that each of the allies should each issue their own bronze victory medal with a similar design, similar equivalent wording and identical ribbon.

The British medal was designed by W. McMillan. The front depicts a winged classical figure representing victory.

Approximately 5.7 million victory medals were issued. Interestingly, eligibility for this medal was more restrictive and not everyone who received the British War Medal ('Squeak') also received the Victory Medal ('Wilfred'). However, in general, all recipients of 'Wilfred' also received 'Squeak' and all recipients of 'Pip' also received both 'Squeak' and 'Wilfred'.

The recipient's service number, rank, name and unit was impressed on the rim.

Pip, Squeak and Wilfred

Three of the British campaign medals: The 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and the Victory Medal.



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Pip, Squeak and Wilfred are the affectionate names given to the three WW1 campaign medals — The 1914 Star or 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal respectively. These medals were primarily awarded to the Old Contemptibles (B.E.F.) and by convention all three medals are worn together and in the same order from left to right when viewed from the front. The set of three medals or at least the British War Medal and the Victory Medal are the most likely medals to be found among family heirlooms.



When the WW1 medals were issued in the 1920's it coincided with a popular comic strip published by the Daily Mirror newspaper. It was written by Bertram J. Lamb (Uncle Dick), and drawn by the cartoonist Austin Bowen Payne (A.B. Payne). Pip was the dog, Squeak the penguin and Wilfred the young rabbit. It is believed that A. B. Payne's batman during the war had been nicknamed "Pip-squeak" and this is where the idea for the names of the dog and penguin came from. For some reason the three names of the characters became associated with the three campaign medals being issued at that time to many thousands of returning servicemen, and they stuck.

“Mutt and Jeff”



The two British campaign medals commonly found as family heirlooms nicknamed Mutt and Jeff: the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Memorial Cross:



The Memorial Cross is an award that has been granted since 1919 to the loved ones of **Canadian** armed forces personnel who died in service or whose death was attributed to their service. It is granted by the Government of Canada and is frequently referred to as the Silver Cross. In the past it has only been given to mothers and widows. More recently eligible next of kin include: widow, eldest living child, eldest living brother or sister of the Veteran.

<https://www.cbc.ca/edmonton/interactive/princess-pats/>

The First World War

The Patricias shipped out to France in December 1915, becoming some of the first Canadian forces to enter the war directly.

Their first taste of battle came at St. Eloi, a chaotic, costly fight in the mud of northern France. The Allied forces continued through into Belgium, with the Pats taking casualties in the skirmishes along the route.

All of it was just a lead-up to the first real test of the young regiment: a battle where the PPCLI would face an overwhelming challenge. It was one that would come to define the unit and cement its reputation both back at home and abroad.

'Holding up the whole damn line' — Frezenburg, Belgium

In early May, the Patricias were set up in trenches west of Ypres, Belgium — part of a front line made up of French and Canadian soldiers. Raids and gas attacks on either flank of the regiment had forced the Allies back, making it necessary for the PPCLI to pull back or risk being exposed.



Members of the Princess Pats in a trench during the First World War. The young Regiment would make a name for itself at the battle of Frezenberg, where they suffered massive casualties (PPCLI Archive and Museum).

Over a few days, the unit secretly moved to a better position while keeping the illusion of a full force on the line. The ruse worked, although it only bought time. Once the enemy discovered that the trenches had been abandoned, they hit the line hard.

German soldiers swept forward to the PPCLI's new position and launched a punishing artillery barrage that rained down on the regiment for days — killing many, wounding more and demoralizing the entire regiment.

Both sides knew it was just a precursor to a German attack. On May 7, the night before the battle, Lt.-Col. Agar Adamson wrote a letter to his wife, explaining their dire situation.

"It seems certain that this line cannot be held and we are only making a bluff at it."

The PPCLI, weakened and weary from the artillery barrages, dug in as German forces charged the line. Starting shortly after 9 a.m., enemy forces pelted them with bullets and bombs for nearly 15 hours, causing massive casualties.

Hamilton Gault was severely wounded, forcing him to pass command of the unit off to Adamson, who himself was wounded several hours later. So much of the regiment's leadership was knocked out that a lieutenant, Hugh Niven, was forced to take command.

With other parts of the line falling back, parts of the Patricia position were left exposed to enemy fire. The soldiers were aware that if the PPCLI were forced back or overrun, it threatened the collapse of the whole line and likely the loss of the city.

In a letter written after the battle, Niven says that the officers urged the soldiers to continue despite the punishing assault.

"I heard Agar Adamson has been hit and Hammie was badly hit and only semi-conscious for the rest of the day. I attended to him

frequently and got him propped up by doubling a dead soldier up so he was lengthwise in the trench ... Hammie whispered to me 'next time they come, stand me up, face me the right away and give me my revolver.' THAT IS THE PPCLI SPIRIT, that lives to this day."

The regiment fought until just before midnight before being relieved by British soldiers. Despite the overwhelming attack, the PPCLI held Frezenberg Ridge and thwarted the German attack.

But it was a costly victory — the unit of 700 men had been whittled down to only 150 who were left in any shape to fight. As well, most of its leadership were severely wounded.

But it cemented the regiment's reputation as a capable force that succeeded in tough battles. It also drew the attention of the international press, with the New York Times and other newspapers regularly reporting on the Patricias exploits throughout the rest of the war.

The phrase "holding up the whole damn line" became one of the unofficial mottos for the regiment and is still used to this day.

The regiment was given time to recover, and was reinforced by the University Companies from McGill before returning to the battlefield. While the regiment would go on to join Canadian forces in other major battles, such as at the Somme and Passchendaele, it is the Battle of Frezenberg that is considered to be the most important and revered engagement in the PPCLI's 100-year history.

<https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/first-in-the-field-princess-patricias-canadian-light-infantry-marks-its-100th-anniversary>
