

Speaking Points: Tim Cook

First World War Centenary Gala, April 8, 2014

Canada and the First World War at 100 Years

Merci, Mark. And thank you all for being here this evening. It is my pleasure to be here to talk about Canada and the impact of the First World War.

Centenary

We are entering a potentially heady period of commemoration — 2014 to 2018. There will be worldwide activities and events to mark and commemorate the First World War.

- One might expect a solemn series of events to mark the cataclysm that erupted 100 years ago. The war pitted massive armies of civilian soldiers against one another and resulted in the deaths of 9 million on the battlefield. It saw another 22 million maimed. Millions of civilians died as a result of starvation, disease and genocide.
- Europe was remade. Empires were destroyed. Austria-Hungary was shattered. Russia was wracked by revolution. Germany was wrecked and vengeful. France was spent and Britain shaken forever.
- La guerre a été marquée par la montée en puissance des États-Unis et l'émergence de la Russie communiste. Le Japon a lui aussi affermi sa puissance et s'est enhardi pour étendre son influence au-delà de son royaume insulaire.
- L'échiquier a été remanié au Moyen-Orient, avec des conséquences sanglantes. De nouveaux pays ont été créés par les vainqueurs, souvent sans égard pour les territoires ancestraux et les liens tribaux.

These events are neither to be cheered nor celebrated, but they certainly can't be ignored. They should be taught, understood and commemorated. The First World

War forever changed world history. And 100 years later, we are still feeling its effects.

Canada

For Canada, the war profoundly transformed our nation. We were never again the same. This is the event that some Canadians call our War of Independence.

Others agonize over the terrible losses and the grim legacy of disunity. Just as we cannot ignore the turbulent consequences that the war had around the world, so we cannot ignore its disruptive impacts at home. To do so would be to deny who we were and who we are.

Loss

At a substantial level, we as Canadians will mark the First World War for its terrible cost to our nation. It is the war where we paid an unimaginably high price in lives. From our nation of fewer than 8 million, more than 650,000 citizen-soldiers served in uniform. Of those, more than 66,000 were killed and 170,000 wounded. Another 1,305 Newfoundlanders, then not part of Canada, were killed during the war.

- Aujourd'hui, l'équivalent pour un pays quatre fois plus grand serait de deux cent cinquante mille (250 000) morts. Six cent mille (600 000) autres personnes ont subi des blessures physiques et psychologiques. Imaginez la peine et le choc que ces épreuves ont pu causer.
- Il a fallu des années, voire des décennies, pour se remettre de cette dévastation.
- Pourtant, on ne peut pas voir la guerre uniquement à travers le prisme de la mort et de la destruction.
- Les Canadiens qui ont vécu ces événements marquants il y a un siècle ont vu la guerre comme une page tournante de l'histoire, et nous devrions les imiter.

New Identity

An equally critical strand of memory, and one that reverberates to this day, is that which saw the nation embark on a significant step forward towards full political autonomy. You will remember that Canada went to war in August 1914 because Britain was at war. We, as a dominion within the Empire, had no say over the matter. Four bloody years later, Canada was bruised and battered, but proud of its role during the war where it stood shoulder to shoulder with its allies, and was now more willing to step out from under Britain's shadow.

In this Museum, we present that evolution and the many ways it was achieved.

Critical to our emerging sense of identity were Canada's fighting forces on the ground which distinguished themselves in battle. By the mid-point of the war, the Canadian Corps, 100,000 strong — and consisting of Canadians from across the Dominion and all classes — was widely recognized as a shock formation, to be thrown into the most difficult battles.

- Les victoires de Vimy, de la cote 70 et de Passchendaele, ainsi que l'offensive des Cent Jours, ont permis à nos troupes de se tailler une réputation de troupes d'élite.
- Nos troupes étaient dirigées par deux des meilleurs commandants divisionnaires de la guerre, Sir Julian Byng, né en Grande-Bretagne, et Sir Arthur Currie, né au Canada.
- Pour appuyer les opérations au sol, nous avons excellé dans la guerre aérienne. William Barker, Raymond Collishaw et Billy Bishop figuraient parmi les as de l'aviation dans l'Empire.
- Notre réputation nous a coûté cher en vies humaines mais, à la fin de la guerre, bien des gens sentaient que le Canada avait beaucoup changé, même si la route vers l'indépendance était encore très longue.

Exertions

If there was — and remains — a justifiable pride in those terrible wartime exertions, we must also acknowledge that the war nearly tore the country apart.

It is often forgotten that Canadians supported the Allied war effort with our enormous wheat surpluses — in effect, feeding the Allied nations. We also manufactured millions of shells, to the point where one-fourth of all British shells fired from 1917 onward came from Canadian factories. Like our land army, Canada punched far above its weight in the crucial battle of food and munitions supply.

But the leaders of the day also encouraged —and then pressured — hundreds of thousands to enlist. As the war dragged on and the casualties rose, the war was transformed into a crusade. It is worth remembering that at the time, this conflict was called the Great War for Civilization. Canada, it was said by many, would pay any price in the pursuit of victory.

But other Canadians questioned the extent of the commitment. Was Canada truly threatened? Where were the Germans?

This rising tension eventually culminated in the 1917 federal election over conscription. This conflict has often been simplistically portrayed as English versus French. Yet there were tens of thousands in Ontario who opposed conscription and tens of thousands more in Quebec who supported it.

La division s'est étendue aux syndicats, qui remettaient en cause l'importance de la guerre. Pourtant, la majorité des soldats au front venaient des classes ouvrières.

Quand l'inflation en temps de guerre a fait exploser les prix des aliments, les fermiers ont été accusés par les citoyens de manquer de loyauté. En revanche, le gouvernement considérait qu'ils étaient essentiels à l'effort de guerre.

The strain of the war led to a legacy of disunity that is as important to mark as that of the war as a change-event that moved Canada towards greater independence and a new sense of national identity.

There are other wartime legacies that are with us to this day:

- This is the war that brought in income tax — temporary, it was said, but still here today.
- This is the war in which some women received the right to vote for the first time at the federal level.
- In a darker strain of fear and uncertainty, this is the war where some 8,000 suspected German and Ukrainian Canadians were interned. It remains a dark stain in Canadian history.
- It is the war where, as I mentioned, we paid a terrible price in lives. That price is evident in the memorials across this country, in the thousands of towns that carry the names of the fallen. They are there to this day — in every town where you grew up and where you make your homes today.
- C'est aussi pendant la guerre que les Autochtones et les Noirs ont été acceptés dans l'armée, alors que leurs droits étaient très limités au pays.
- Des dizaines de milliers d'anciens combattants blessés sont rentrés au pays. Les soins qu'on leur a prodigués s'inscrivent dans l'un des premiers engagements médicaux pancanadiens de notre histoire.
- Des symboles de la Première Guerre mondiale demeurent vivants aujourd'hui. Pensons, par exemple, au poème *Au champ d'honneur* de John McCrae, au coquelicot ou aux deux minutes de silence qu'on observe dans les occasions solennelles, sans oublier le jour du Souvenir.
- Pensons aussi au Monument commémoratif de guerre du Canada, près de la Colline du Parlement, au Mémorial de Vimy ou au Mémorial terre-neuvien de Beaumont-Hamel.

The First World War's history and legacy is complex. Here at the Canadian War Museum, we try to embrace that complexity and to share with all Canadians these important stories. And I thank you, tonight, for helping us do this.

History challenges us; it forces us to reconsider what we know. But it can bring great knowledge, a better sense of who we are, of what we were and what we might strive for, together.

Merci/thank you