



Meet Will van Allen

My name is William van Allen, but my friends call me Will. My story takes place about one hundred years ago. I was a soldier in the Great War, which you may know as the First World War.

Leaving Rosetown



I was 19 years old when the war started. I lived in Calgary, Alberta. I had a job at a bank.

When Canada went to war, I knew that I wanted to be a soldier. I left my job, and went back to my hometown -- Rosetown, Saskatchewan.

In Rosetown, I said goodbye to my parents, sisters and brother, and signed up to be a soldier. The city held a parade for me and the other soldiers when we left.

Training in Valcartier



I travelled by train to Valcartier, Quebec. When I got there, I met people from across Canada. We came to Valcartier to learn how to be soldiers.

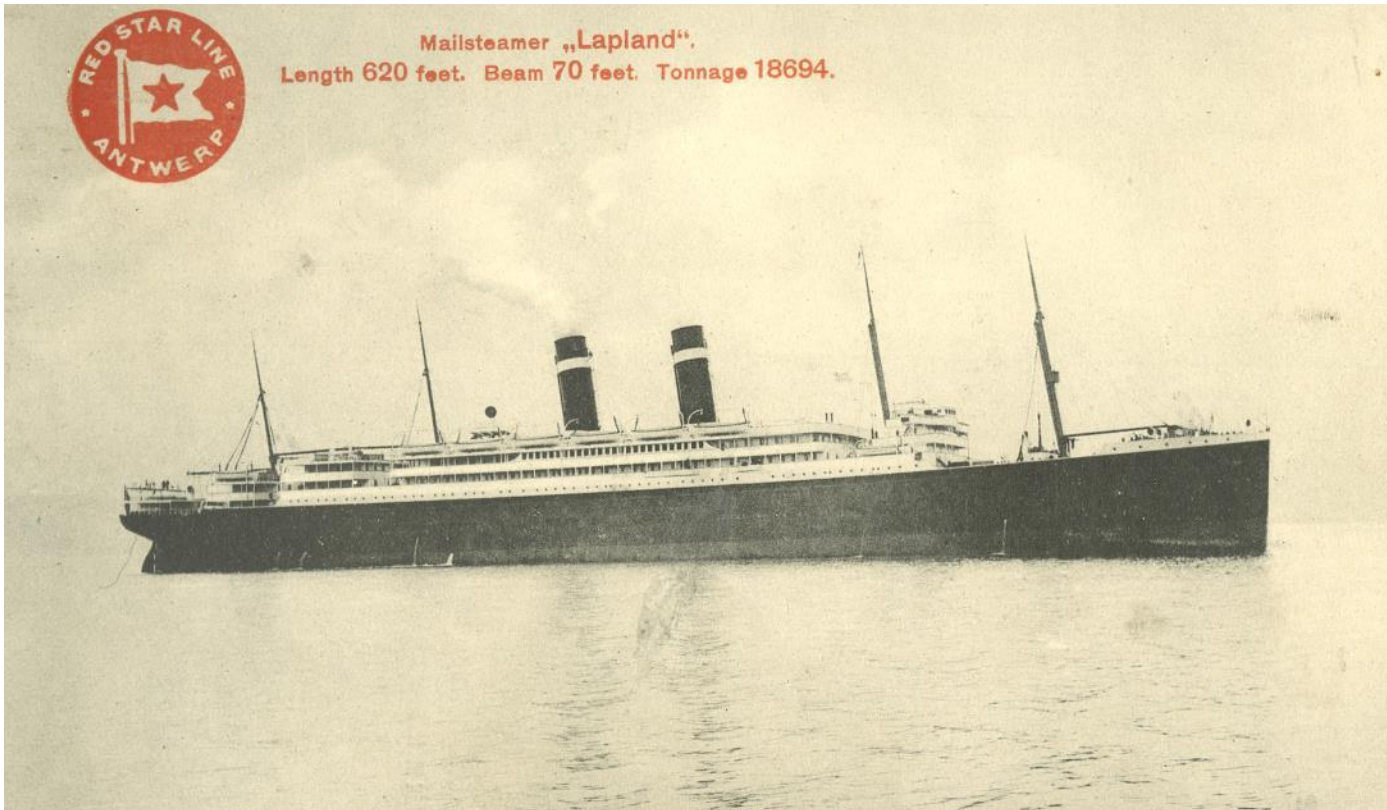
We trained every day. We did exercises to get in shape. We practised working as a team. We learned how to fire weapons and use other equipment.

We wore uniforms. My uniform was a wool jacket and pants, leather boots, wool puttees, and a cap. When my clothes got dirty, I washed them, and dried them on a clothesline. We lived in tents, and spent most of our time outdoors.

Crossing the Atlantic

After training for one month at Valcartier, it was time to leave Canada.

I crossed the Atlantic Ocean on a passenger ship called the *SS Lapland*. There were hundreds of people on the ship. It took us three weeks to cross the ocean.



Training in England



England was cold and wet. It rained day and night, and the ground turned to mud. There was no time to complain, though. We were too busy, training to be soldiers.

We practised digging ditches, with walls higher than our heads. These ditches were called trenches. We used periscopes to see over the top of the trench walls.

Somewhere in France



We left England, and went to France and Belgium. Six months after leaving Rosetown, I was finally in the war.

Before the war, we would have been standing in farmers' fields. Now, these fields were full of zigzagging trenches. I lived in these trenches for days at a time.

Sometimes it was too hot, or too cold. Sometimes it was smelly, or muddy. And through it all, there were rats running all around.

Every day, I had to do my chores. I cleaned latrines, filled sandbags, and repaired trenches. In my free time, I read books, wrote letters home, and played cards.

Life in the trenches could be dangerous. One day, artillery fire hit my trench, causing an explosion. I was injured. I had to go to the hospital.

Will's Stay in the Hospital



When I got to the hospital, the doctors saw that my arm was too damaged to save. They amputated the arm. I went to a bigger hospital in England. I needed time to recover.

The doctors and nurses helped me get better. Some of the nurses were women who came from Canada. We called them "bluebirds" because of their blue uniforms.

In the photo, you can see my friend, Pat Murphy. Two nurses are treating his wounds at a hospital in England.

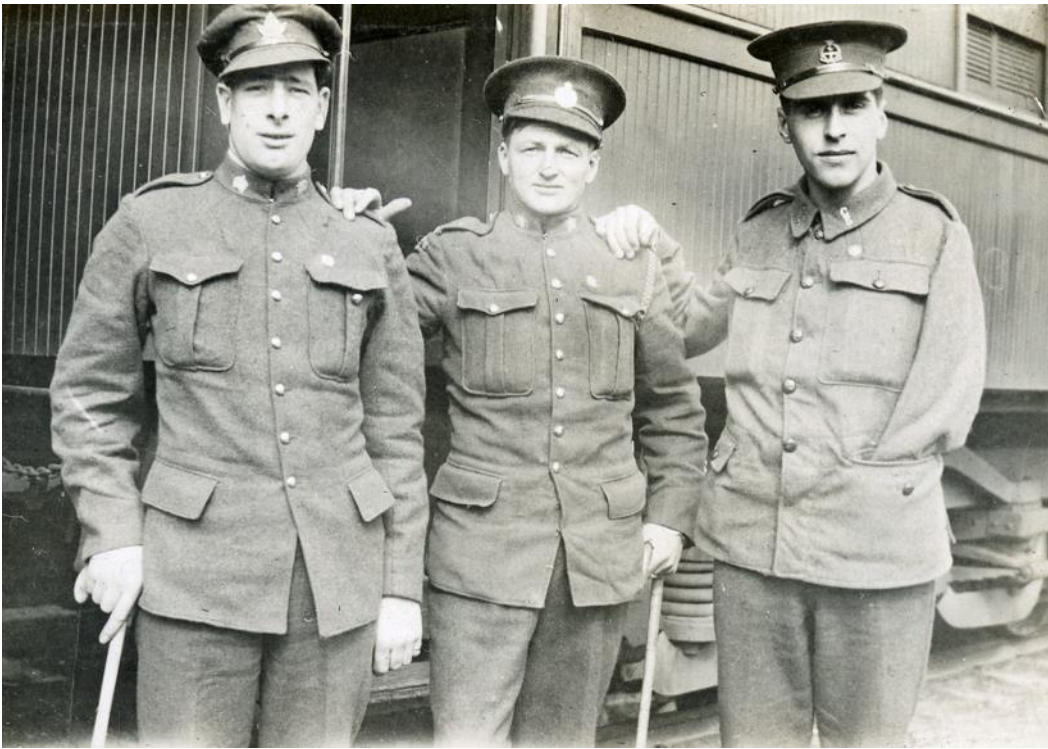
Back Across the Atlantic



What happened to a wounded soldier, after he got better? There were a few options. Some were healthy enough to fight again. They would go back to the trenches. Others were not able to fight anymore. They would go home.

With only one arm, I couldn't do my work as a soldier. When I was healthy enough, I went back to Canada. I traveled by a passenger ship called the *SS Missanabie*. There were other soldiers on board the ship. Like me, they were going home. There were also other types of people, like women and children.

The Train Back Home



In August 1916, after two years away from home, I was back in Canada. My first stop was Toronto, Ontario. There, I got an artificial arm, to replace the one I lost in the war.

Epilogue



Department of Transport Staff Publication – June-July 1960

My time as a soldier ended in 1916. The war itself ended two years later, in 1918. I married Isabelle Murray Walker in 1926. We lived in Ottawa, Ontario.

I worked as a journalist, and then worked for the government. I retired in 1960.

My family donated my wartime photo album to the Canadian War Museum in 1981.