

One hundred years ago today, on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, the armistice was signed, bringing an end to more than four years fighting during the First World War. The Great War involved sixty-five million men from 30 nations, of whom at least ten million were killed and many more wounded, physically and psychologically. At the time, Canada was a nation of eight million people, and some 650,000 men and women donned a uniform during the war. More than 65,000 Canadians lost their lives during this world conflict.

The Great War was supposed to be the war to end all wars; as we know, this was not the case. But the war did forge lasting ties among many of the Allied nations, including Canada and France.

The Juno Beach Centre's temporary exhibition, "From Vimy to Juno: Remembering Canadians in France" highlights stories of Canadian and French families across the two world wars. The La Croix family from Manitoba with Samuel who served in the First World War but was killed during the Battle of Vimy Ridge. His nephew and niece, Richard and Marie, served in the Second, but only Marie returned home. Today, Richard's memory is kept alive by a Norman family who continues to pay him homage every June 6, the anniversary of his death.

There is also John Archibald MacNaughton, who enlisted in the First World War at the age of 19. He survived and returned home to New Brunswick to raise a family. When the Second World War broke out, he again enlisted voluntarily, this time at the age of 42. Major MacNaughton refused the option of retirement, choosing to join the younger men in his regiment in the fight overseas. He was killed on D-Day while leading his men out of the line of fire. These are but two of many stories connecting Canada and France through the tragedies of war.

There are also physical ties between these two countries in the form of commemorative memorials such as the Vimy Monument and the Juno Beach Centre. These tangible testaments keep the memory of the fallen alive, and the names of these battle grounds resound as, what Canadian war correspondent Matthew Halton, called, "the anthems of the doomed youth of one generation."

Our commemoration today pays homage to all generations of youth who donned a uniform or participated in the conflicts of the twentieth century. In particular, we think of that generation of youth for whom November 11, 1918 marked a temporary return to peace. While all First World War veterans have passed on, we gather to remember and reflect on the sacrifices and the contributions that they made for the world in which we live today.