

Royal Canadian Dental Corps: 100 YEARS OF HISTORY

Canada's military dental services have looked after the oral health needs of Canada's troops in both World Wars, Korea, Afghanistan and many other peacemaking, peacekeeping, humanitarian and forensic operations. In the lead-up to the 100th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Dental Corps (RCDC) in 2015, this article is the first in a series that will bring to light the history of the RCDC over the last century, celebrating the heritage, accomplishments and dedication of the dental services personnel of the Canadian Armed Forces.



CDAessentials is honoured to publish a regular series of articles, leading up to the celebration of RCDC's 100th anniversary.



RCDC's roots can be traced back to South Africa during the Boer War from 1899 to 1902. It was here where two Canadian dental surgeons operated in a theatre of war for the first time. Dr. David Henry Baird of Ottawa served with the No. 10 Canadian Field Hospital and Dr. Eugene Lemieux of Montreal served with the 2nd Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment; both accompanied Canadian troops in operations in the Transvaal, the Orange River Colony and the Cape Colony. The great number of soldiers who presented with dental emergencies established the fact that dental services in the field were indispensable. CDA responded to this need while the Boer War was ongoing by pressing the government of Canada to form a Regular Army Dental Staff as a distinct branch of the service. CDA's efforts were successful: an establishment of 18 dental

surgeons was authorized by General Order No. 98 on July 2, 1904.

A decade later, when World War I began, many recruits were rejected for dental reasons. The 26 serving military dentists could not cope with the demand for service to make the recruits ready to deploy; therefore, civilian dentists were asked to volunteer to help with the treatment of recruits. On May 13, 1915, General Order No. 63 authorized the creation of the Canadian Army Dental Corps (CADC) as a distinct corps.

The CADC began operations overseas in July 1915 with 30 dental officers and 74 other ranks—a ratio of 1 dentist for every 1400 personnel. Canadian dental officers were attached to the field ambulances and did wonders in the forward area, treating patients close to the battle in order for them to return to combat quickly.

From July 1915, when the CADC began operations in the theatre of war, until December 1918, over 2.2 million dental treatments were performed. This included 97000 treatments for British troops and 50000 treatments for trench mouth. Another 1.4 million treatments were provided



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Allied soldiers line up in a "dental sick parade" during World War I. (c.1915).

Pictured below, the Badge of the Canadian Army Dental Corps, 1915–28.



in Canada. Considering the relatively small number of oral health care providers, this represented an immense effort.

When the war ended on November 11, 1918, the CADC had increased to 223 officers and 459 other ranks serving in stationary hospitals, field hospitals and field ambulances in Great Britain, France and Belgium. Among CADC personnel, 7 officers and 10 other ranks had died in action. In addition, 4 medals for Meritorious Service and 10 Orders of the British Empire were awarded to CADC personnel.

The demobilization of 60000 soldiers within a month following the war presented the Corps with the challenge of returning these soldiers to the state of dental fitness they had prior to embarkation. The result was a short-lived increase in the strength of the Corps. Once demobilization was completed, the CADC was disbanded.

However, it wouldn't be long before the CADC would be reformed as a corps in the Non-permanent Active Militia, authorized by Special Army Order No. 4 on January 11, 1921. In reality, from the end of the war until 1939, the Dental Corps became little more than a number of individual dental officers scattered thinly throughout the units of the Medical Corps. It was not until the start of World War II that the Dental Corps would have an opportunity to again provide support to operations. ♦

CDA is playing a central role in commemorating the 100th anniversary of the RCDC in May 2015, reflecting CDA's role in establishing a military dental service in Canada and the close partnership between CDA and RCDC since that time.