

RIGHT: Paul Gross on the set of *Passchendaele*.



## Foreword

My grandfather, Michael Joseph Dunne, was born in Country Cork, southern Ireland. His family immigrated to Canada and landed in Cape Breton, where they went to work underground. Hating the mines, they came west on a harvest train, arriving in Calgary. After the harvest, my grandfather was walking down a street when he ran into an old friend, a guy he knew by the nickname of Pickle. Pickle asked, “Crook,” for that was my grandfather’s nickname, “where is it you are going?” And my grandfather answered, “Well, Pickle, I’ve got it into my head to buy a new suit.” Pickle said, “Why in hell would you want to buy a suit? King George will give you one for free.” And with that they adjourned to a tavern, drank a little whiskey and then enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force of 1914–18.

My grandfather served the duration of the war and sustained three wounds. The last at the Battle of Amiens in 1918 was severe enough to send him home. Like many veterans, he spoke little of his wartime experience. He fathered five daughters but no sons, and in that era one didn’t speak of such unpleasantness with women. He did, however, have an irritating grandson. I pestered him endlessly with questions. “Did you kill Germans? Did you run Fritz through with a bayonet?”

Ordinarily, my grandfather brushed my questions aside, but one day, while fishing, he began to talk. It was a particularly auspicious day because for the first time I was allowed to drive

the boat. His back was to me as he recounted a story of being on patrol in a village in the Arras Sector of France when his patrol encountered a German machine-gun nest. The two enemies exchanged fire for quite a while until everyone in the patrol except my grandfather was dead, and the German machine-gun nest was silent. My grandfather fixed his bayonet and leapt over the parapet to discover one German gunner still alive. My grandfather described this kid as having “eyes like water, these watery blue eyes.” The German kid raised his hand to my grandfather, smiled and said, “Kamerad.” My grandfather bayoneted in him the forehead. My grandfather carried the burden of that moment for the rest of his life.

For me, his story opened a door onto the adult world of consequence. Since then my interest in the cost and the carnage of the First World War has remained undimmed.

Over 600,000 Canadian men and boys enlisted to serve in the Great War. It’s not hyperbole to assert that what it means to be Canadian — strong, resolute, proud — was forged in the crucible of the Western Front. Sadly, with each passing year, our memory of this sacrifice diminishes. We must not let this happen. We must pay honour to the 173,000 casualties, and we must do homage to the 67,000 who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

— Paul Gross, June 2008

