



# Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918 Volume 2

*Tim Cook*

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## **Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918 Volume 2** Tim Cook

*Shock Troops* follows the Canadian fighting forces during the titanic battles of Vimy Ridge, Hill 70, Passchendaele, and the Hundred Days campaign. Through the eyes of the soldiers who fought and died in the trenches on the Western Front, and based on newly uncovered Canadian, British, and German archival sources, Cook builds on Volume I of his national bestseller, *At the Sharp End*. The Canadian fighting forces never lost a battle during the final 2 years of the war, and although they paid a terrible price in the killing fields of the Great War, they were indeed, as British Prime Minister David Lloyd George exclaimed, the shock troops of the Empire.

## **Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918 Volume 2 Details**

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Author : Tim Cook

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## From Reader Review Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918 Volume 2 for online ebook

### Caer Glas says

Volume 2 of Cook's general history of Canadian Troops. Excellent, scholarly, and very readable. Suffers from the same fault as the original, in that it sometimes treads the same ground for those that have read extensively on the subject.

Still, if you can read only these two books on the Canadians in the Great War, these are the ones to read.

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### Michael says

I won't contribute a review here, although the book is excellent and well worth the time commitment. I would rather wish the author the speediest of recoveries as he undergoes cancer treatment. Best wishes Tim!

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### Margaret Virany says

The Canadian War Museum's WWI historian Tim Cook has written a 648-page account (plus notes) that gives facts and promotes pride in Canada's WWI fighting forces' indomitable character and outstanding success. It is a good read based on National Archives data previously locked up and pictures archived in the CMC. Short sentences and direct quotes interspersed with descriptions keep the narrative going at a fast pace. Without hyperbole or sentimentality, the author uses the victims' or witnesses' own words to convey the impact of horrific settings, killing and destruction. The reader is right at the front line as shock troops of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (part of the British Expeditionary Force) spearhead every winning battle on the Allied Western Front in the last two years of the war. The enactment of the strategies, tactics and performance of battalions, groups and individuals in each battle is recalled in amazing detail. This is a valuable document for anyone wishing to know exactly what his or her relative may have gone through. My advice to readers who might get bored by so many meticulous, comprehensive accounts of successive battles, or who don't identify excitedly with battle manouvers, is to skip ahead. I was particularly interested to find out about shell shock, executions, trench community life, morale, family contacts, illnesses, leave and many other broader topics, all excellently covered. The tone of the narrative is bittersweet wherever possible and consistently proud. References to events further from Cook's topic, such as the Brest-Titovsk Treaty between Germany and Russia, should be checked out with other sources. This is a very good, competent book and I recommend it to others. But be prepared. Often it will seem like you're right there, ready to do or die, and that's not easy!

### **Don Thompson says**

Vol 11 of Tim's history of the Canadian Corps in WW1. This continues where Vol 1 left off and covers more on Vimy Ridge, Passchendale and the final push. We see the effect of battle on the troops. The evolution of the army and men. The letters and thoughts of the average soldier and how the generals and politicians saw the war.

These are great books.

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### **Nick Davey says**

The final volume in the monuments history of Canada's struggle through world war 1, Tim Cook's two part series is a must read for Canadian history lovers. Cook provides a detailed view of the battles, events, and most importantly people, while never losing fact of the tragedy of loss that defined WW1. This second volume covers the years where the Canadian Corpse truly came into its own, mastering the industrial killing fields of WW1, and defining itself as a force to be reckoned with. Cook provides an exceptional history of the Great War, with a Canadian focus that inspires pride in the character and sacrifice of the Front Liners who gave their all.

A fantastic MUST READ for any Canadian History buff, or Canadian interested in the great war...

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### **John says**

This is the 2nd of Tim Cook's 2 volume account of the Canadian experience in World War One. Together they provide an excellent view of the war and Canada's place in it. Mr. Cook provides a n outstanding history that covers the individual soldiers exoerience as well as the greater view if the war. This is a must read for anyone looking to learn about Canada's contribution to the war.

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### **Rick says**

This is an outstanding book. Like volume one, it effectively mixes military history with social history to create a fascinating story. Tim Cook's writing style is also outstanding. It is a very long book, but I really didn't want it to end. Before reading this book, I admired Canada's record in WWI; after reading this book, I am left even more impressed with what Canada's soldiers accomplished in the war. Cook managed to convey the absolute horror of battle in the WWI, and what our soldiers did in that environment was nothing short of incredible. Even the non-Canadian sources from the war that Cook uses, confirm that the Canadian Corps was the finest fighting force on the Western Front. This book is a must read for Canadians.

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## **Marc Colombina says**

An impressive feat. An impeccably researched and well-constructed study. Like many studies that aim to tell all of a war experience, this is a hybrid of military and social history. Individually, both historical approaches are well done but as a cohesive whole it suffers from this wide focus; moving from the spiritualism of men in the trenches to the daily objectives obtained by various battalions is often quite jarring to read. Fantastic for a historical overview but this book should be approached with caution by the average reader.

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## **Calvin says**

This is book 2 of a two book series. Book 1 is "At The Sharp End Canadians in the Great War, 1914-1916; Book 2 is Shock Troops Canadians fighting 1917-1918. This is not a novel, but true actual events, told by Tim Cook, the curator of the First World War Museum in Ottawa. That being said, it actually reads like a novel. Very well put together, blending personal events and historical catastrophes. If you are a war buff, or just interested in the facts about the first world war, this is an excellent book. I really did enjoy reading these two books.

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## **Michael Rymek says**

If World War I had ended last November 11, Canada would have suffered 250,000 dead and 550,000 injured, many of whom struggling with some form of physical disability, let alone post-traumatic stress syndrome. As Canadians we really have no idea what war does to a country and society and how long it takes for that society to heal. Sadly, we would be at war again in a less than three years.

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## **David says**

Outstanding conclusion to the superb two-volume history of the Canadian infantry in WWI. Required reading for anyone interested in Canadian history.

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## **Karen says**

This book was fascinating to read. The final two years of WWI were the most crucial years of the war, with some of the most famous battles taking place during that time. Those battles included Passchendale and Vimy. Throughout the book, narratives and quotes from the soldiers and historical photos help to enhance the information in the book.

At the end of the book, Tim Cook discusses the perspective of the generations of Canadians who came after the war and their views on it. The establishment of the Menin Gate and Vimy Ridge memorials to the Canadians who lost their lives in the war is also discussed. In the end, the author states his opinion that the true heroes of the First World War weren't the generals and officers who ran the headquarters on the front, but the ordinary soldiers who fought and died for Canada.

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## Jesse says

Exhaustive and impressive follow up to *At the Sharp End*, which typically covers seemingly every detail of the Canadian infantry experience on the Western Front from 1917 to Armistice in 1918 (as well as the depressing aftermath of the war, during which demobilized soldiers were repeatedly stabbed in the back by the staff, medical and pension boards, and successive waves of governments). Cook does a fine job of providing as many details as possible to frame in writing what it was like to be a human being at the centre of the anti-human atrocity of the Great War, and in doing so does a likewise fine job of convincing one how impossible it is for anyone who wasn't there to understand the human impact of one day in the trenches, let alone a year or more. He's also successful in not coming down with either the pro- or the anti-war factions and carefully outlines each's positions and its merits and failings without putting in his lot with either.

The only weak spot in the book is unfortunately a consistent one, and that's Cook's reliance on certain repeated figures of speech to describe battle. It's acceptable to hear harsh fighting described once or twice as "a storm of steel," where "little quarter was asked and little given," resulting in "the butcher's bill," but in a nearly 700-page book (and that's not even counting the notes, end-notes, acknowledgments, etc.) that chronicles so very many battles, repetition of these stock phrases in many battle descriptions becomes overwhelming. By the time you've come across the fifth or six battle in which "little quarter was asked and little given," the book has unfortunately started to parody itself. Which is a shame, because this book is so intensely researched and carefully designed to give a broad view of the infantry experience that it shouldn't be undermined by something as banal as a few clichés (repeated over and over).

That said, it's hard to write about war, particularly when war involves the same damned thing happening again and again and being impressive and depressing and horrifying every single time. I don't blame Cook for these repetitions, particularly because I've had the same trouble writing about war for my MA thesis, but it remains nonetheless troubling.

All in all, however, this is an impressive book.

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## KB says

The greatest privilege ever accorded an ordinary mortal like myself was that of serving with that devil-may-care crowd of lads who sang and chaffed and swore their way from exile in western Canada to their graves in France and Flanders.

*Shock Troops* is just as readable, informative and enjoyable as the previous volume, *At the Sharp End*. This volume seemed a bit more battle-heavy than the previous, with fewer chapters regarding life on the front. This is not a criticism, as this had been covered very well in the other book, just a note about its contents. As I've seen mentioned in other reviews, and I have to agree, the way Cook writes about battles sometimes gets to be repetitive when he over-uses certain phrases. However, his descriptions of these battles are always very clear, engaging and aided by maps.

I also liked that Cook gave credit where credit was due. Although he focuses on Canadian battles, Cook never fails to mention when the Canadians were assisted by Australian troops, or British troops, artillery and logistics. And even though I can understand it from their point of view, it was a bit disappointing to read that many front line troops did not seem to like Arthur Currie and saw him as one of those generals safe behind the lines that in many cases needlessly sent men to their deaths. While definitely not a perfect human being,

Currie seemed to genuinely care for his men and frequently argued with his superiors and fellow officers about delaying attacks, getting more guns, and keeping the Canadians together - all for the benefit of his soldiers. He also seemed like quite a competent general.

I was incredibly impressed with both volumes. Everything was covered thoroughly without being dry, which made for very enjoyable reading the whole way through, even though the two together are over 1000 pages. It was quite amazing to read about how well Canada performed during the First World War and about the individual lives of some of these soldiers. Both volumes go highly recommended.

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### **Marc Leroux says**

This is a must read for anyone interested in the Canadian involvement in the first world war. This explore the period where Canada (militarily) came of age, and led the breakthroughs of 1917 and 1918. This book explores the period where the Canadians, under the leadership of Sir Julian Byng, perfected artillery tactics that knocked out over 90% of the German heavy guns, and instituted a detailed training program that permitted the Canadian troops to take Vimy Ridge. It follows through the period where the 4 Canadian divisions were commanded by Sir Arthur Currie, the first time that Canadians were commanded by a Canadian, through the battles of Hill 70, Passchendaele (where Currie told the British command that he could take the objective, but he would incur about 16,000 casualties, a number that proved frighteningly accurate. It then takes the reader through the events leading up to the last 100 days of the war, and how the Canadians broke through the German lines at Amiens and started the rout that ended with the Canadians advancing into Mons, Belgium on the day the armistice was signed. The Canadians incurred heavy casualties through this period, but shortened the war by a year.

Tim Cook has carefully researched the content, and has written it in an easy to read fashion. A good read, that explores not just the big picture of the battles, but also the background and the lives of the individual soldiers.

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