Arthur William Currie, Sir Biography

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Biography

Sir Arthur William Currie (1875-1933) was the leader of the Canadian Corps during World War I, the first native Canadian to head his country's forces in France and Flanders.

Arthur Currie was born at Napperton, Ontario, on Dec. 5, 1875, and he was educated in the public schools of Strathroy. In 1894 he moved to British Columbia and taught in the public schools of Sidney and Victoria for 5 years. He then became involved with insurance and real estate, businesses which he practiced with little success and through which he became heavily indebted.

Currie's metier, however, was soldiering. He joined the 5th Regiment of Canadian Garrison Artillery in 1897 and received his commission in 1900. His rise through the ranks was swift, and in 1909 he was given command of the regiment. His command was one of the most efficient in Canada, and Currie's personal reputation was high with the minister of militia in Ottawa.

As a result, when war broke out in 1914, Currie was offered the command of a brigade in the 1st Canadian Division. After training in England, Currie led his troops to France in February 1915. Very shortly thereafter he and his untried men faced the first German gas attack at Ypres but stood their ground with incredible fortitude. In September 1915 Currie took charge of the 1st Canadian Division, and he led the troops through a series of terrific battles--Mont-Sorrel, the Somme, Fresnoy, and Vimy.

As a commander, Currie was not a brilliant strategist. But he was an excellent tactician, skillful in the use of artillery, meticulous in his planning. Most important, he was careful of the lives of his men, something for which World War I generals were not renowned. When the command of the Canadian Corps fell vacant in June 1917, Currie was the logical choice for the post. As with his previous commands, he did extraordinarily well, and he led the corps through the horror of Passchendaele and through Arras and Amiens. The record of the corps was second to none, and Currie received and merited enormous praise.

After the war Currie was made general and named the inspector general of the military forces of Canada, a position he held until 1920, when he resigned to become principal of McGill University in Montreal. Often mentioned as a possible leader of the Conservative party, Currie decided to remain in academic life. He died on Nov. 30, 1933.