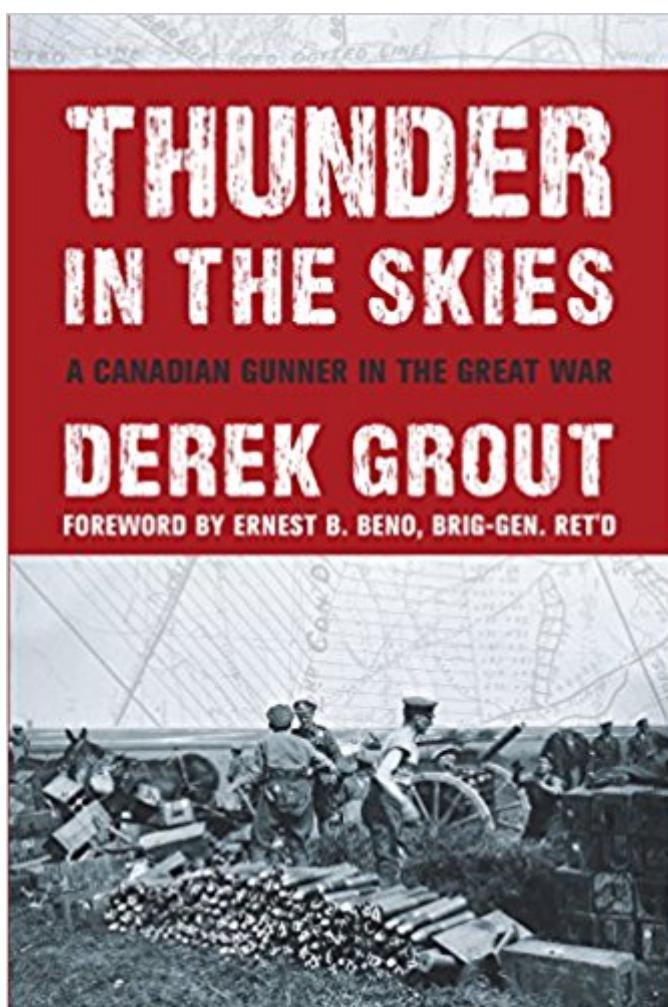


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# Thunder In The Skies: A Canadian Gunner In The Great War



## Synopsis

An extraordinary, newly discovered account from an ordinary Canadian on the ground in the crucial battles of the First World War. What was it like to be a field gunner in the Great War? Drawing on the unpublished letters and diary of field gunner Lt. Bert Sargent and his fellow soldiers, Thunder in the Skies takes the reader from enlistment in late 1914, through training camp, to the Somme, Vimy Ridge, Passchendaele, the Hundred Days Offensive, and home again with peace. Posted just behind the front lines, Sargent and field gunners like him spent gruelling months supporting the infantry in the trenches. Theirs was a very different war, as dangerous or more at times as the one on the front lines. As an ordinary Canadian writing letters home to ordinary people, Sargent gives a wrenching, insightful account of a tight-knit band of soldiers swept up in some of the most important battles of the war that shaped the twentieth century. Thunder in the Skies details the daily life of artillerymen fighting in the First World War in a way no other book has before.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Grout's volume is the product of considerable effort that enhances the value of an otherwise important addition to Canada's national collection of eyewitness soldier accounts from the First World War. (Ontario History) Author Derek Grout has done a remarkable job in painting a picture of the daily life of Canadian gunners in World War I. It is a very well-written, very readable book that should be on every Canadian gunner's bookshelf.

(Sheldrake's Log)

General Ernest Beno is Honorary Colonel, 7th Toronto Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery. He retired from the Canadian Armed Forces in 1997, after thirty-seven years of service, at the rank of Brigadier-General. Derek Grout is a historian who has written extensively on shipwrecks and scuba diving in Canada and the United States. His book, RMS Empress of Ireland, was praised on both sides of the Atlantic. He lives in Pointe Claire, Quebec.

One of the finest books written about the Great War. One of the challenges about writing about the Great War, 100 years later is the lack of consistent personal evidence. There are unit war diaries, official histories but few personal records that follow the entire war. There are very few personal photographs as cameras were banned. Another challenge is of course to be a fine writer. Here we find Derek Grout, who is a very fine writer, who has had the great fortune to find Bert Sargent as a subject. Bert had an extensive diary that covers his entire experience, he took many illegal photographs, he co authored an impressive unit war diary and he wrote the official history of his brigade in 1918 when all was fresh. It's the perfect foundation for a book that tells a complete story of the war. Thunder in the Skies makes Bert and the Canadian Field Artillery and his eventual Battery, the 23rd, the focus. But, by being so focused, the book is also universal. For all who served had the same overall experience of leaving home, learning to become a professional soldier, losing friends, being under fire and so on. Bert had more experience than most with 818 days at the front and 1,649 days in uniform. He survived the war unhurt and returned to Canada with his English Wife, Rosalie. The rich detail of his experience helps all of us obtain a sense of what life in uniform was like then. Bert is the stand-in for all who served. The book is also full of personal details of the men close to Bert. In my own case, my own grandfather served in the 23rd in 1917 and 1918. I know more now about his experiences than ever before. It is Bert, and Derek Grout, that have helped him become real to me. I think any reader will feel the same. Your relative's war will come alive in this book. The context for Bert's story is the Canadian Corps and Montreal. Many Canadians may not know, but the CEF was by 1917, the most professional and capable unit in the British Army. We see this capability grow as the book progresses to the last few months when the CEF can literally work miracles. Any Canadian can be proud to witness how this expertise came about. Any person who has an interest in the war will learn something new from this. We also get a sense of what a small town Montreal was then. Many of the Canadian units were like the Pals battalions in the new army of the UK. They were filled by men who were related, who had been at school with each other, lived on the same streets and worked in the same places. We get this strong sense of "family" and "connection" throughout the book. While the Great War was a machine war, for many it

was also very human and personal where men were attached very strongly by their peacetime connections. Grout brings out this sense of belonging so well. Finally a word about Derek Grout. I could not put this book down. He is a natural story teller. We begin with innocence and progress to battle hardened experience and we end with resolution. Bert himself has an unquenchable sense of humour and Grout gives this full voice. Bert is also surrounded by all sorts of characters and, like a Dickens novel, we become attached to the supporting characters as well. Grout marshals an immense amount of data in an elegant way and so, while the research is always there, it is not in our faces. This is my Christmas book for this year and the book I want my children to read it so that they understand where they came from.

This book an excellent account of the life and struggles of the Canadians who fought in the Great War from their initial signup in Montreal, to training in England and finally on the front line in France. This book has been excellently researched and the story has been punctuated by actual letters sent home from the servicemen abroad. This book is a "must read" especially as the Great War is in its centennial and must be remembered.

This is a history book that reads like a novel. There is nothing dry and technical about it. It is a people focused drama. What is hard to accept is that it all really happened to very ordinary people. Derek Grout has brought the past to life and truly honored the Canadian soldiers of World War I. Thank you Derek for reminding us that those names on monuments were very real people.

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