Passchendaele

Released:

Director: Paul Gross

Starring: Paul Gross, Caroline Dehavernas

Historical Impact

This film was inspired by Gross's relationship with his maternal grandfather, Michael Joseph Dunne, who served in the [56th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Calgary_Highlanders), [5th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5th_Battalion,_Canadian_Mounted_Rifles,_CEF), [14th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Governor_General%27s_Horse_Guards) and [23rd Reserve Battalions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/23rd_Reserve_Battalion,_CEF), [CEF](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Expeditionary_Force),[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passchendaele_(film)#cite_note-3) in the [First World War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_World_War). Like many veterans, he was reticent about sharing his experiences with his family. In a rare conversation on a fishing trip; Dunne told the story of [bayonetting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayonet) a young German soldier, who had eyes like water, through the head and killing him during a battle. A long time later, as Dunne lay in a hospital bed in the last days of his life, his family was mystified by Dunne's behaviour of asking for forgiveness, over and over. Only Gross knew that he was speaking to the young German he had killed.[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passchendaele_(film)#cite_note-4)

"He went completely out of his mind at the end. He started telling me about a hideous event that happened during a skirmish in a little ruined town in World War I. He'd killed someone in a miserable, horrible way and that had obviously haunted him throughout the rest of his life. As my grandfather died, in his mind he was back in that town, trying to find a German boy whom he'd bayonetted in the forehead. He'd lived with that memory all his life – and he was of a time when people kept things to themselves. When he finally told the story, it really affected me and I've not been able to get it out of my head."[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passchendaele_(film)#cite_note-5)

Named for a village located on a low rise in the Ypres Salient, the very word Passchendaele has become synonymous with suffering and waste. Strong German defences in this area, developed over the course of more than two years, gave the British extremely hard going. "The Tenth Battalion were called out of reserve to assist an attack on Hill 52, part of the same low rise Passchendaele itself was situated on. The Battalion was not scheduled to attack, but the CO wisely prepared his soldiers as if they would be making the main assault – a decision that paid dividends when the unit was called out of reserve. On 10 November 1917, the Tenth Battalion took the feature with light casualties.

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