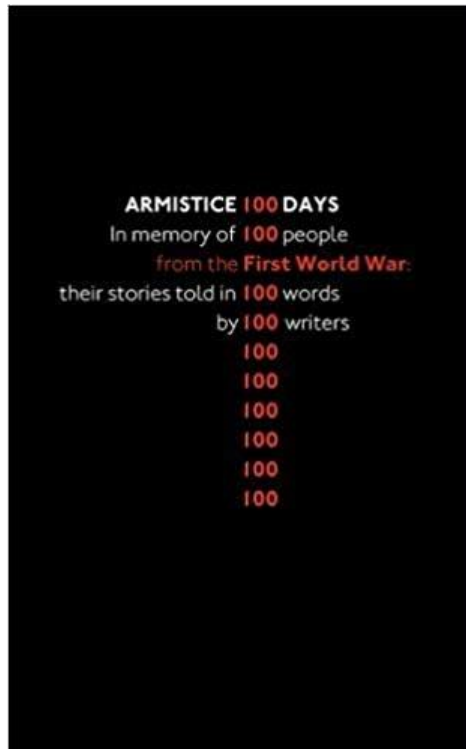


Armistice 100 Days (2018)



The 26 Armistice Project was a major collaboration between the writers' collective 26 and the First World War Centenary Partnership (led by the Imperial War Museums) to mark the Armistice Centenary.

The Brief: 100 writers were asked to each write a centena (100 words, with the first and last 3 words the same) inspired by the wartime experience of someone who was alive between 28 July 1914 (when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia) and 11 November 1918 (Armistice Day). The centena is to be supported by a description (up to 500 words) of the research behind the creation of the main piece.

My piece was inspired by my grandfather, James Mortimer Clark
Physician with the Canadian Army Medical Corps (enlisted 1917 – demobbed 1919)
Medical Missionary (sent overseas 1920 - died in China 1925)

Visit the full **26 Armistice** project at <https://26project.org.uk/26armistice/> and learn more about the **First World War Centenary Partnership** at <https://www.iwm.org.uk/partnerships/first-world-war-centenary/centenary-partnership>

The book **Armistice 100 Days** is available from <https://www.26.org.uk/shop/book/armistice-100-days>

Except ...

Not the end – the beginning!

*the beginning
of the end
of the World War wedge
all those boys' broken bodies
driven between
this Ontario farmboy
and his mission field*

*the shout that drowned out the call would be stilled
the start and the end would be stitched back together*

except ...

*it was war there too,
and the Chinese soldier,
writhing on the table,
bled and sobbed just the same*

except ...

*the stitches pulled
and what oozed out pooled
and festered in his mind
and the screams echoed*

it was not ...
it is not ...
not the end



My grandfather James Mortimer Clark, Physician, 1918
© Joan Lennon



Vera (my grandmother), Jean (my mother), Mort (my grandfather),
and Miss Dale, in China, 1923
© Joan Lennon

Research Piece

My grandfather, James Mortimer Clark, was a farmboy from Ontario who left the land to study medicine. The course in those days was compressed so that as many doctors as possible could be sent off to serve with the Canadian Army Medical Corps in Europe. Then, when the Great War was over, Mort got married and sailed for China, where he worked as a medical missionary in war-torn Szechuan Province until his death in 1925 from typhus and malaria.

My grandmother, Vera, on the other hand, lived to be over 100, and in the time that I knew her, was a disapproving and sanctimonious old woman. She didn't like me and I didn't like her and, in spite of badgering, she didn't talk much about China. I used to think I would have liked my grandfather, though. I had a picture of him in my mind. He was more than a little heroic.

When, as part of the 26 Armistice Project, the Imperial War Museum and Library and Archives Canada sent me material on Mort, I was oddly startled they found so much. Pages of army records – how strange to see his name in official documents! As if I didn't really believe he existed in the real world, the public world, that anyone could access. The Canadian War Museum website's collection of photographs and objects gave me poignant glimpses into what doctors like my grandfather would have seen, the conditions they would have worked under, the tools they had to use. The ability to improvise and make do under difficult circumstances would stand him in good stead in China.

But the main resource for my piece came from my cousin, who emailed me to say that she had been transcribing our grandmother's letters from China, and would I like a copy? Vera was clearly close to her mother, and wrote to her about periods, tennis matches between the missionaries, miscarriages, music and, endlessly, sewing and meals. And about Mort. I was getting the chance to see my grandfather through the perspective of his young wife, writing home from the far side of the world. While the Chinese generals drove the war back and forth across the countryside, the mission took wounded from both sides, and the old woman I'd disliked as a child wrote of a man it seemed she barely knew. A man who had a temper she hadn't suspected.

"I now say from experience that men are queer things. Will I ever ever understand even a bit of them? I suppose – keep on living expecting an explosion any time."

"you know I have no saint."

Every time I came across lines like these, I wondered, how much did the Great War haunt him? There are only hints, and I will never be able to ask him, or anyone who knew him. I do know the image I have of him in my mind has become less clear-cut, the more I have learned. Less simple, but not less heroic.