

# HERITAGE LEGEND NOMINATION

## Major Wallace Bruce Matthews CARRUTHERS

Founder of the Canadian Signalling Corps (1903)

1. **RMC (1879-1883).** Bruce Carruthers entered RMC in 1879. He graduated in 1883, distinguishing himself as a topographical draughtsman and achieving Honours in Conduct and Military Exercises, with Special Mention for fluency in French.
4. **Military Service After Graduation.** Upon graduation, he was offered one of the four commissions in the British Regular Army available to select cadets of the graduating class. He accepted his commission as a Lieutenant with the 21st Regiment of Hussars, remaining with the unit for four years and qualifying as an instructor in signalling. Not coincidentally, the colours of the future Canadian Signalling Corps would be based upon those of the 21st Regiment of Hussars.
5. **South Africa.** Upon his return to Canada in 1892, he accepted a commission with Kingston's own militia infantry unit, The Princess of Wales' Own Regiment, rising to the rank of Captain. However, with the outbreak of war in South Africa, he enlisted as a sergeant in the First Canadian contingent to go to South Africa in 1899. There, he formed the unit signal section from scratch despite the unit having brought no signalling equipment. After serving the compulsory year, Carruthers returned home only to return to South Africa in 1901 as a Lieutenant in the 2nd Regiment, Canadian Mounted Rifles. On March 31, 1902 he was involved in the action at Harts River where he was leading some 21 men of 3rd and 4th Troops 'E' Squadron to screen the main body of a British Column as they prepared a defensive position. Faced with several hundred charging Boers and no cover, Lieutenant Carruthers dismounted his men to meet the attack. They fought until they exhausted their ammunition by which time 17 had been killed or wounded,

including Carruthers. At the end of the war in 1902, he again returned home to Kingston. As a result of his service, he was promoted and awarded a Mentioned-in-Despatches as well as the Queen's South Africa Medal with five clasps: Paardeberg, Driefontein, Johannesburg, Cape Colony, SA 1902.

6. **Canadian Signalling Corps.** Carruthers' "Baptism under Fire" in South Africa forged his vision of the need for an army to have a dedicated and reliable communications system that is, above all else, comprised of and operated by trained soldiers with the appropriate skills, knowledge, equipment, experience and above all else an "esprit de corps". He captured the essence of his ideas in a paper titled "Methods of Communicating and Signalling in the Field" which he presented at a meeting of the RMC Club of Canada.

In his own words, written 118 years ago: *“Steps should at once be taken to organise Signalling Corps throughout the Canadian Militia, insisting upon every unit having its staff of Signallers. Inspectors of Signalling should be appointed in different districts, responsible that instruction is given in accordance with regulations. Later on, I should like to see a School of Signalling organized with power to grant Certificates, and in this way we would soon have a capable lot of Instructors throughout the Militia and an efficient and highly trained body of Signallers.”*

The concepts presented in that paper eventually caught the attention of Lord Dundonald, General Officer Commanding the Canadian Army. In due course, General Order 167, issued on 24 October 1903, established the Canadian Signalling Corps (CSC), the first in the British Empire.

7. **Closing Remarks.** It is a credit to Carruthers' vision and determination, forged by his experiences in South Africa, that the groundwork was laid for the acceptance by the military establishment of the day for the need of a new branch of service dedicated to the operation and maintenance of communications in support of the command and control of a modern army.

8. **Untimely End.** Major Carruthers died at 5 o'clock on October 21, 1910 at the age of 47 as a result of tuberculosis he contracted during his service in South Africa. He was given a military funeral at Chalmers Presbyterian Church in Kingston and is buried in the Cataraqui Cemetery.

9. **Legacy.** One hundred and seventeen years from the initial formation of the CSC, Maj Carruthers' vision and tireless pursuit of professionalism lives on in the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals as part of the Canadian Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Branch.

10. **Recognition.**



Every year, on the 24th of October, a simple service is conducted at Major Carruthers grave. In this 2013 service, the ceremony was especially poignant in that it recognized the 110th anniversary of the founding of the Canadian Signaling Corps, based on the vision, strength and determination of Major Carruthers to form the first such service in the British Commonwealth.