



Norman Bethune 1922
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Norman Bethune, Bai Qiu-En

Born in Gravenhurst, ON, serving in WWI and the Spanish Civil War, and buried in China, Dr.

Norman Bethune's legacy straddles three continents. Bethune continues to be revered in China decades after Chairman Mao made his essay "In

Memory of Norman Bethune" required reading for all school children. Mao stated, "We must all learn the spirit of absolute selflessness from him." The Chinese honour Dr. Bethune for his selfless service during the Sino-Japanese war; he conducted battlefield surgeries and transfusions—sometimes even using his own blood when no other blood was available. Exhausted from long hours of battlefield surgery, Bethune cut his finger and died of blood poisoning November 12, 1939.

In 1952 his grave in China was moved to honour Dr. Bethune with an impressive tomb, statue and the nearby Norman Bethune International Peace Hospital.

In Spain Bethune is remembered for his pioneering work on mobile blood transfusion during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The City of Malaga created the Walk of Canadians with a maple tree and an olive tree to signify their appreciation for Dr. Bethune's life-saving work there in 1937. Bethune's prototype transfusion service was used in WWII and Korea to save many lives.

In Canada, the Cold War placed Bethune's reputation in the cooler. Bethune had joined the Communist Party in 1935 and had even travelled to Russia as he was dismayed at the social inequities in Canada's health care system. That communist affiliation shaded his memory for decades. Fortunately, Dr. Bethune's place in Canadian history is finally recognized. The man

who was an early advocate for universal health care, pioneered mobile blood transfusion, performed innovative surgeries and invented or redesigned 12 surgical instruments, including the Bethune Rib Sheers, has been named a Canadian Figure of National Historic Significance. His home in Gravenhurst and his bronze statue are part of a National Historic Site.