

# Canada Weekly

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## Canada mourns John Diefenbaker — rare man, unforgettable politician

Tributes from round the world and across the country poured in at the news of the death of John G. Diefenbaker, Canada's thirteenth prime minister.

Mr. Diefenbaker, who would have been 84 in September, died of a heart attack at his home in Ottawa, August 16. In his hands were papers he was using to prepare for the next session of Parliament beginning October 9. In May, Mr. Diefenbaker had been elected to the House of Commons for the thirteenth time.

The former prime minister lay in state in the Hall of Honour in the House of Commons for three days. His casket was draped in two flags — the red ensign with its union jack in the corner, which he fought unsuccessfully to preserve and the maple leaf flag that replaced it. Governor-General Edward Schreyer and his family were the first to officially pay their respects, then Bora Laskin, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court followed by

members of the Cabinet, diplomats and other dignitaries. More than 10,000 members of the general public paid their respects before the state funeral held August 20.

After the funeral, a train carried Mr. Diefenbaker back to his home province of Saskatchewan to be buried beside the John G. Diefenbaker Centre at the University of Saskatchewan. His second wife, Olive, who died in 1976, was removed from an Ottawa cemetery and taken to Saskatoon to be buried with her husband. Mr. Diefenbaker's first wife Edna died in 1951. He is survived by his step-daughter Carolyn Weir.

During his 39 turbulent years in Parliament, Mr. Diefenbaker, an intense orator, rose from the back benches to lead the Progressive Conservatives into office in 1957, after his party had been in opposition for 22 years. For the former prime minister, it was "the average Canadian — the little fellow" who propelled him to power.

### Early years

Born in Neustadt, Ontario of Dutch-Scottish ancestry, John Diefenbaker changed addresses frequently as his schoolteacher father changed jobs. In 1903, William T. Diefenbaker settled his family near Fort Carlton, a military post commanding the North Saskatchewan River area near Prince Albert. When John was 14 his father moved to Saskatoon where he and his younger brother, Elmer, could receive better schooling.

In 1916, John Diefenbaker was awarded his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees from the University of Saskatchewan and shortly afterwards, at the age of 20, he went overseas as a lieutenant in the 196th Western University Battalion. The next year Mr. Diefenbaker — the first veteran to become a Canadian prime minister — was injured in France and sent back to Canada. He received his law degree from his alma mater in 1918 and subsequently acquired



John Diefenbaker in front of a portrait of John A. MacDonal, Canada's first prime minister.

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One hundred-and-ninety-nine years ago this week...

All British possessions in North America and adjacent islands, except Newfoundland and its dependencies, were annexed to Canada by an Imperial Order in Council.

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