

**A COMMEMORATIVE PUBLICATION
ON THE OCCASION
OF
THE 90TH ANNIVERSARY
OF
THE BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE**

**Published by
The Friends of
The Canadian War Museum**



**Carrying
The
Torch**

National Day of Remembrance Vimy Ridge Day 90

On Easter Monday, the 9th of April 2007, the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge is being commemorated all across the country (and at Vimy in France) by military and veterans' organizations, and by the War Museum in conjunction with the Friends. This booklet is being published to remember with pride and thanksgiving the valour and endurance of the soldiers of the Canadian Corps who fought and died on Vimy Ridge so long ago.

To keep the victory fresh in the minds of Canadians, the Friends have commemorated the occasion with various activities. Ten years ago, on the 80th anniversary, the Friends published a Vimy Ridge Supplement to its Newsletter, giving details of the preparations for the battle, the infantry assault and the massive artillery bombardment which preceded it. Articles were also included on the construction of the Vimy Memorial, the pilgrimage and unveiling of the memorial by King Edward VIII in 1936, and on the four Victoria Cross winners from that battle. Also a Vimy pin in the form of a maple leaf, based on the Canadian Corps collar badge, was produced and donated by Friend Jim Tompkins, and was worn with much pride by the staff of the Canadian War Museum on the 9th of April 1997.

Veterans, including in particular Friend Bob Manuel of Elliot Lake, Ontario, had been lobbying for formal recognition of this historic Canadian victory and later, in April, 2000, Mr. Brent St. Denis, the Member of Parliament for Algoma-Manitoulin, visited the War Museum and announced that he was launching a Private Member's Bill in the House of Commons to proclaim the 9th of April each year to be Vimy Ridge Day. The Friends monitored the slow progress of the Bill through first and second readings after it was selected in the random parliamentary process. Finally, with enthusiastic support by all parties in the House of Commons and in the Senate, where it was sponsored by Senator Marie Poulin, the Bill was passed unanimously and the Vimy Ridge Day Act was given Royal Assent on 3 April 2003.

Subsequently, on the 9th of April 2003, the Canadian flag was flown at half mast on the Peace Tower, signifying the inauguration of Vimy Ridge Day. The new law proclaimed Vimy Ridge Day to be a National Day of Remembrance, recognized that important date in Canada's national history, and required that the flag on the Peace Tower of the Parliament Buildings be flown at half mast every year on that date. For their part, the Friends arranged with Mr. St Denis for all Members of Parliament and Senators to be presented with a suitably packaged Vimy memorial pin in the House and Senate Chambers to mark the significance of the occasion.

The Friends fully support the mandate of the Canadian War Museum to educate current and future generations on Canada's military heritage, and have chosen Vimy Ridge Day as one of their major special events to be observed and commemorated on this special anniversary and in all subsequent years. On this the 90th anniversary, Mr. St Denis will once again bring to the attention of our nation's parliamentarians the significance of the Battle in Canada's history, in an address to the House. He will also present to all members of parliament and senators a "Vimy 90" pin, specially prepared by the Friends, encased in a presentation folder describing this historic event.

The Battle

Vimy Ridge dominated the whole plain of Lens and Douai, and was crucial to the system of German defences on the entire front. The ridge had been occupied

since September 1914 by the Germans who had inflicted immense casualties on the British and French during earlier attempts to dislodge them. Three main defensive lines of trenches had been added to the natural dominance of the feature; extensive barbed wire had been laid and concrete machine-gun strong points, vast underground chambers and deep



The Canadian Corps Flag

shell-proof dugouts had been constructed, all connected by communication trenches and tunnels.

The newly-assembled Canadian Corps of four divisions, commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir Julian Byng, moved into the Vimy sector in late 1916 and was given the task of capturing these seemingly impregnable positions. Elaborate preparations were made. Raids were conducted (with considerable casualties); troops rehearsed the part they would play down to the smallest sub-unit; explosive mines were set under enemy trenches; aerial reconnaissance obtained intelligence of enemy positions; and an immense artillery barrage of over a million shells preceded the attack.

Then, at 5:30 on the morning of April 9th, Easter Monday, 20,000 soldiers of the first attacking wave advanced behind



a creeping artillery barrage into a strong north-west wind, sleet and snow. After crossing the devastation of No-man's land the main resistance and heavy losses came from the strongly-emplaced machine guns in the German intermediate line. Three of the four divisions captured their objective by midday. In a matter of hours, Canadian soldiers were gazing on the Douai Plain and German commanders were issuing orders for a general withdrawal. Hill 145 and a small feature on the left flank, called the Pimple, caused some trouble but with reinforcements held for this very eventuality, the Canadians took Hill 145 by the next day and the Pimple was cleared by the early hours of 12 April.

The Battle of Vimy Ridge quickly passed into legend. Men from all four divisions of the Canadian Corps fought together for the first time and the battle lines included men from all parts of the Dominion. But 3,598 soldiers would not live to



celebrate the victory. By their valour and sacrifice, and through their meticulous preparation and training, the triumphant Canadian Corps had signalled the beginning of Canada's march to

nationhood.

The Pilgrimage

On July 16th 1936, five great liners steamed out of the Port of Montreal and down the St Lawrence heading for ports in France and Belgium. Cheering crowds lined the docks, guns boomed, airplanes dipped their wings in salute, and a fleet of small craft swarmed around as the ships, dressed overall, made their way down the river escorted by two warships of the Royal Canadian Navy. The SS Montrose, Montcalm, Antonia, Ascania and Duchess of Bedford were carrying some 6,000 Canadian ex-servicemen and families on a momentous pilgrimage to Vimy. After nine glorious days at sea the liners docked at Le Havre and Antwerp - the Canadian Corps had returned to Europe.

Today, although none of the survivors of the Battle are still alive, some members of the Friends have recollections of their parents traveling in that unique pilgrimage back to the battlefields of the Great War, which had ended just eighteen years

earlier. As a twelve-year old boy James MackKendrick, of Saanich, BC, recalls helping his father register Pilgrims at a Canadian Legion recruiting booth at the Canadian

The Pilgrimage sails from Montreal ^(VAC)



National Exhibition Grounds in Toronto. Garry Kemp, a Friend from Ottawa, also remembers his father and his mother being part of the 525-strong contingent from Quebec.

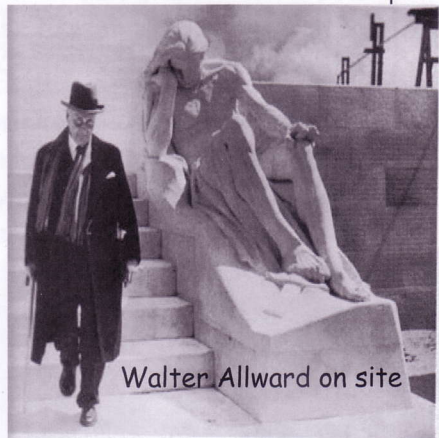
On their way to Vimy, the Pilgrims made battlefield tours and took part in services at Arras, Lille, Cambrai, Lorette, Mons and Valenciennes where extensive preparations had been made for their reception, remembrance and rejoicing. Then it was on to Vimy itself to the unveiling of the magnificent memorial which had been constructed on Hill 145 in a Memorial Park ceded to Canada in perpetuity by the French Nation. The Memorial was unveiled on 26th July, 1936 by King Edward VIII in the presence of the President of the Republic of France, Monsieur Albert Lebrun, and comrades and family members of the Canadian soldiers who had died in the taking of the Ridge.

The Memorial

Erected on 250 acres of land granted by the French Government to the Government of Canada, freely and for all time, the Canadian War Memorial on Vimy Ridge records in stone the perpetual gratitude of the Canadian people to those who fell on the field of battle in the Great War.

Designed by Toronto sculptor Walter Allward, the two pylons of the Memorial, together with a score of double-life-size sculptured figures, were carved in-situ from blocks of durable Yugoslavian limestone. They rest on a bed of 11,000 tonnes of concrete and masonry, reinforced by hundreds of tonnes of steel.

The best description of the Memorial is that by Mr. Allward himself: "At the base of the strong impregnable walls of defence are the Defenders, one group showing the Breaking of the Sword, the other the Sympathy of the Canadians for the Helpless. Above these are the



mouths of guns covered with olive and laurels. On the wall stands an heroic figure of Canada brooding over the graves of her valiant dead: below is suggested a grave with a helmet, laurels, etc. Behind her stand two pylons symbolizing the two forces - Canadian and French - while between, at the base of these is the Spirit of Sacrifice, who, giving all, throws the torch to his Comrades. Looking up they see the figures of Peace, Justice, Truth and Knowledge, etc., for which they fought, chanting the hymn of Peace. Around these figures are the shields of Britain, Canada and France. On the outside of the pylons is the Cross."

The sculptures record and illuminate the sacrifice of all who served in the war and, in particular, the more than 66,000 men who lost their lives. The names of the 11,285 Canadian soldiers who died in France but who have no known grave are recorded on the memorial.



Der Hüter am 2. Juni auf der Höhe
 Das Foto zeigt den 2. Juni auf der Höhe
 Die Soldaten des 2. Bataillon des 1. Canadian Infantry Division, die nach
 einer Schlacht bei Arras im August 1918. Die Soldaten sind eine der 11,285
 Namen der 11,285 Soldaten der 1. Canadian Infantry Division, die nach
 dem 2. Juni auf der Höhe des 2. Bataillon des 1. Canadian Infantry Division
 die 11,285 Namen der 11,285 Soldaten der 1. Canadian Infantry Division

During the Second World War, Vimy Ridge fell once again into the hands of the Germans and, on the 2nd of June, 1940, shortly after the capitulation of France, Adolf Hitler paid a triumphant visit to the Memorial. On his orders the monument was left intact and remained so throughout the rest of the war.

The Rededication of the Memorial

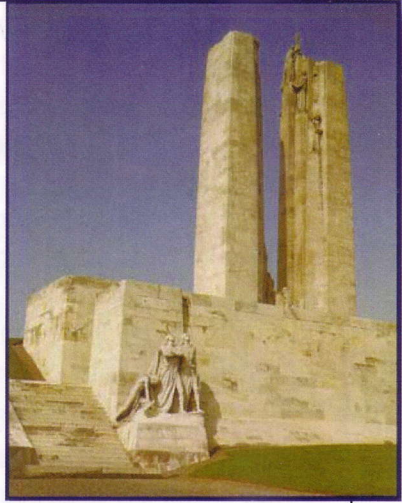
Over the years, severe weather conditions, erosion and water damage have caused damage to the stone, walkways, walls, stairs, terraces and platforms of the Vimy Monument. A major restoration project, begun in 2004, included rebuilding stone structures, replacing and engraving damaged stone, repointing the two massive pylons and cleaning the twenty statues. The project is on schedule for completion in 2007 in time for the 90th anniversary commemoration ceremonies, which will take place at the memorial from 6 to 10 April.

These ceremonies are being organized by Veterans Affairs Canada and it is expected that accompanying the large official group from Canada there will be several thousand Canadian students.

90th Anniversary Commemorative Events

At the time of issue of this publication, arrangements being made by the Friends centre upon displays of Great War uniforms and equipment, 3D models of the Ridge, and artifacts from Vimy Ridge. The Essex and Kent Scottish Pipes and Drums will play throughout the day and the Thomas Braun Trio will perform popular music from the First World War. Details of these events, and those planned by the Canadian War Museum itself, will be shown on our respective web-sites.

The Department of National Defence, Veterans Affairs Canada, Parks Canada, the Royal Canadian Legion and other agencies are also preparing major events in commemoration of the 90th Anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, and details will be found on their respective web-sites as they become available.



The Friends of the Canadian War Museum is a non-profit, charitable organization dedicated to providing support to the museum.

For more details on how you can help us, visit our web site at www.friends-amis.org.