

Pttawa Journal by David Tilson MP ? 100th anniversary of Vimy Ridge

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

It was an important battle of the First World War and many argue a defining moment for Canada as a nation. Canada's contribution to the Battle of Vimy Ridge was considerable and saw four divisions of the Canadian Corps, comprised of young men from all over Canada, fight side by side for the first time. By the end of the three-day battle, the Canadian Corps would be victorious, together with the British Corps to the south, but it would be at an immense price. It is on this occasion of the 100th anniversary of Vimy Ridge, we must stop to remember the immense courage and sacrifice made by these outstanding young Canadians.

When the First World War broke out in 1914, Canada was a young country of eight million and still finding its identity as a nation. Canada was also automatically at war when Britain declared war on Germany. Following Germany's advances early on in the war, the Western Front became a stalemate of horrible trench warfare leaving a zigzagging frontline of almost 1,000 kilometres from the coast of Belgium to the border of Switzerland. After two-and-a-half years of war, neither the Central Powers nor Allied Powers had made a critical advance. Plans by the Allied Powers began for a large-scale offensive attack that would take place in April 1917 in the area of Arras, France, where the Canadian Corps would be responsible for taking Vimy Ridge.

Early in the morning of Easter Monday, April 09, 1917, the first wave of 15,000 to 20,000 Canadian soldiers, many carrying heavy equipment, met sleet, snow and heavy machine gun fire, to advance behind a creeping barrage. The first waves of the attack resulted in considerable casualties for the Canadian battalions; however, it remained on schedule. By noon, most of the strongly defended ridge was captured. The main height on the ridge, known as Hill 145, was captured the morning of April 10, 1917 and just two days later, the Canadian Corps also captured the other important height on the ridge, which was known as The Pimple. This resulted in the German army being forced to retreat three kilometres east and the Battle of Vimy Ridge was over. Canadian soldiers demonstrated incredible valour in this battle and emerged victorious, but it was at a terrible price ? more than 10,600 casualties with nearly 3,600 of which making the ultimate sacrifice of the some 100,000 Canadian soldiers who served their country at Vimy. The Battle of Vimy Ridge holds a special place in our Canadian history because for the first time four divisions of the Canadian Corps, made up of soldiers from all regions of Canada, triumphantly fought side by side together to capture a strong German defensive position. This unified effort significantly contributed to our shared Canadian identity that we hold with great pride today. This battle, along with other Canadian successes of the First World War, increased Canada's prominence on the world stage and contributed to our country having a separate signature on the Treaty of Versailles.

I would like to recognize several schools who will be taking part in the 100th anniversary memorial events at Vimy Ridge April 9. These schools include Mayfield Secondary School, Centre Dufferin District High School, Orangeville District Secondary School, and Westside Secondary School. I commend the students of these schools on their efforts to honour and remember the thousands of Canadians who bravely served Canada.

I encourage the residents of Dufferin-Caledon and all Canadians to stop April 9 and reflect on the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. We owe it to the some 100,000 exceptional Canadians who served our country in that battle, thousands of whom made the ultimate sacrifice for Canada. We must always remember them and their service to protect the freedom and democracy we enjoy as Canadians today, as well as the contribution they made in shaping our unique Canadian identity.

