


# REMEMBERING VIMY RIDGE

## Introduction

### Focus

This CBC *News in Review* story deals with the battle of Vimy Ridge, one of the most important military victories in Canadian history, how it was commemorated on its 90th anniversary, and its continuing significance and legacies for the country today.

 Sections marked with this symbol indicate content suitable for younger viewers.

On April 9, 2007, Easter Monday, a large group of Canadians, including Prime Minister Stephen Harper, assorted cabinet ministers, provincial premiers, and other dignitaries gathered on a narrow escarpment overlooking a wide, flat plain in northern France. They were joined by Queen Elizabeth II, French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, and thousands of ordinary citizens, including war veterans and students from across Canada totalling over 25 000 people. The group was there to rededicate what is probably the most renowned military monument to Canadian soldiers anywhere in the world, the Canadian National Vimy Memorial. Ninety years had passed since another Easter Monday in 1917, when 30 000 young Canadian soldiers stormed Vimy Ridge in the middle of a blinding snowstorm. They captured it from the German forces occupying it after a few hours of bitter fighting. The battle, which eventually involved four Canadian divisions comprising 100 000 men, has long been viewed as this country's greatest military accomplishment of the First World War. The Canadians had finally dislodged the Germans from a key strategic position, something French and British forces had previously failed to do.

But even more significantly, the capture of Vimy Ridge entered the collective Canadian mythology as a "defining moment" in our nation's history. On that day, Canadians from all parts of this large country achieved a sense of unity forged in a common struggle. Our impressive military contribution to the Allied forces during that war, in particular at Vimy, was able

to foster a degree of international recognition for Canada as an independent, sovereign state. Canada was no longer just a colony of Britain. After the war ended, Canadian diplomats sat at the Paris Peace Conference, and the country received independent admission to the newly founded League of Nations. In the years that followed, Canada continued the step-by-step, peaceful process that eventually led to full self-government and autonomy from Britain.

Ninety years later, representatives and ordinary citizens from a very different Canada gathered at Vimy to pay tribute to the almost 4 000 young soldiers who had given their lives for that victory. Their names, along with those who fell in other battles in northern France, are inscribed on the Vimy Memorial. This massive monument dominates the landscape from the top of Hill 145, where some of the fiercest fighting took place on the day of the battle. They were rededicating this magnificent memorial to the Canadian war dead. King Edward VIII had originally dedicated it in 1937, just two years before the beginning of the Second World War. In the decades that followed, the monument, described as "a dazzling vision in modernism and spiritual symbolism," began to show signs of wear and tear. As a result, after years of inaction the Canadian government launched a major restoration project for the Vimy Memorial in 2003. Four years later, it was rededicated in a ceremony that drew Canadians of all ages and from all parts of the country to take part in a solemn and impressive ceremony of remembrance and national

### Further Research

To stay informed about the actions of the Canadian Forces today, consider a visit to the official Web site of the Canadian Forces at [www.forces.gc.ca](http://www.forces.gc.ca). Why might you need to be careful when reading official accounts of military actions?

pride. They stood amazed at the sheer grandeur of the memorial whose twin, stark limestone pylons rise 40 metres into the air and admired the allegorical figures sculpted atop them. In particular, the gathering was moved by the statue of a female figure gazing mournfully at the horizon. This figure symbolizes the women of Canada grieving for their dead sons, husbands, brothers, and fathers.

Not far from the minds of those attending the ceremonies at Vimy that day was the fact that 90 years later the nation again found itself embroiled in a war. On the evening prior to the rededication, news had arrived that a roadside bomb had taken the lives of six young

Canadian soldiers serving in Afghanistan. This tragedy made the solemn observances at Vimy even more poignant. Of course the battle of Vimy Ridge and the current military campaign that Canada is waging in Afghanistan are very different struggles in many respects. But in both conflicts young Canadians fought bravely and were willing to sacrifice their lives. This added an unanticipated sense of relevance to the events that took place on a windswept plain in northern France. This was particularly true for those who were too young to remember Canada's previous participation in both World Wars.

### To Consider

1. Why was a large delegation of Canadians and dignitaries from other countries in northern France on April 9, 2007?
2. Why was the battle of Vimy Ridge such an important event in the First World War? How has it taken on the status of a "national myth" in Canada in the years since the end of that war?
3. Why is the Vimy Memorial such an impressive war monument?
4. What tragic event occurring just prior to the rededication ceremonies at Vimy gave this event a new sense of meaning and sadness?

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## Video Review

Watch the video and answer the questions in the spaces provided.

1. What two important figures were present at the rededication of the Vimy Memorial in France on April 9, 2007?

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2. How many Canadians died in the battle of Vimy Ridge? \_\_\_\_\_

3. a) What is the name of the architect who designed the Vimy Memorial?

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- b) How many years did it take for him to complete it? \_\_\_\_\_

4. a) How many names of dead Canadian soldiers are carved into the Vimy Memorial? \_\_\_\_\_

- b) Why are their names there? \_\_\_\_\_

5. a) What reports circulated about the monument in 1940?

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- b) How did the Nazis view this memorial?

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6. a) When did the Canadian government decide to restore the Vimy Memorial? \_\_\_\_\_

- b) When did work start on it? \_\_\_\_\_

7. How many people were present on April 9, 2007, for the rededication of the Vimy Memorial? \_\_\_\_\_

8. a) When was the memorial originally dedicated? \_\_\_\_\_

- b) Who presided at that ceremony? \_\_\_\_\_

9. What news made the rededication ceremony at Vimy even more poignant and meaningful?

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10. What two military heroes of the First World War are referred to in the video?

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11. What is the average age of the Second World War veterans still living today? \_\_\_\_\_

**Quote**

"I believe the Battle of Vimy Ridge to be one of the greatest battles of [the First World War] because Canadians won the battle by themselves, and a lot of guns, prisoners, and land were taken on that day."

— Brent Le Coure, Canadian Youth Overseas, Veterans Affairs Canada Web site ([www.vacc.gc.ca/youth](http://www.vacc.gc.ca/youth))

**For Discussion**

1. Read the following quote from Prime Minister Stephen Harper's speech at the rededication of the Vimy Memorial on April 9, 2007, and discuss what you think it means in your own words:

"There may be no place on Earth that makes us feel more Canadian because we sense all around us the presence of our ancestors. If we close our eyes, we can see them."

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2. Do you think it is important for the Canadian government to use taxpayers' money to restore military monuments like the Vimy Memorial that are not located in this country and are difficult for Canadians to visit? Explain the reasons for your opinion.

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3. Why do you think so many young Canadians who were born long after both World Wars wanted to be present at the rededication ceremonies at the Vimy Memorial? Would you have liked to attend if you had had the opportunity? Why? Why not?

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4. Do you agree with Rudyard Griffiths of the Dominion Institute ([www.dominion.ca](http://www.dominion.ca)) that "it's going to be up to us, those of us who have not known war, who have no direct memory or experience of these events, to communicate this history to the next generation of Canadians"? Explain fully.

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## REMEMBERING VIMY RIDGE

### *The Day Canada Came of Age?*

#### Quote

“Thorough preparation must lead to success. Neglect nothing.” —Major-General Arthur Currie, April 1917

“It was Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific on parade. I thought then that in those few minutes I had witnessed the birth of a nation” — Brig.-Gen. Alexander Ross, commander, 38th (Northwest) Battalion and later president of the Royal Canadian Legion

Vimy Ridge was one of the most important strategic positions on the Western Front during the First World War. The Germans had fortified it since the early days of combat and held a commanding view of Allied forces spread out along the Douai plain below. By the spring of 1917, they had succeeded in repelling a series of French and British efforts to dislodge them, the last at the cost of over 100 000 French casualties in 1916. By this time, Allied generals were determined to drive the Germans from the ridge as part of a major spring offensive they were planning in the Arras region. In order to achieve this key strategic goal, the Canadian Corps was chosen as the lead military unit, to be joined by the British 5th Infantry Division. The battle would mark the very first time the four divisions of the corps would fight together, something Canadian military and political leaders had been insisting on throughout the war. The corps commander was a British general, Sir Julian Byng, but his right-hand man and the military commander most involved in the planning and execution of the attack on Vimy was a Canadian, Major-General Sir Arthur Currie.

Throughout the First World War, troops defending a strategic position held a huge advantage over the enemy forces launching a frontal assault on

them. The new weapons of war used in that conflict, in particular the machine gun, could cut a deadly swath through advancing soldiers across the area—known as no man’s land—separating the two trench lines of the opposing forces. From their well-dug-in position atop Vimy Ridge, the Germans could also train artillery fire on Allied troops as they moved up the ridge from the flat plain below. In addition, they had constructed an elaborate network of trenches and tunnels, reinforced by bales of barbed wire, that had so far blocked repeated efforts to capture their position. Most Allied commanders had concluded that the German hold on Vimy Ridge was unbreakable. Then the Canadians proposed a plan that might succeed in capturing it after all.

Perhaps no single Allied military operation during the First World War was as carefully and meticulously planned as the Canadian assault on Vimy Ridge. The troops chosen for this undertaking received detailed briefings in advance about their role in the coming combat. They were walked through the entire exercise with the use of a full-scale replica of the battlefield. Instead of advancing in huge human waves across no man’s land, the Canadians would move forward in small platoons, including troops armed with light machine guns and grenades to hurl at the German troops facing them. Even more importantly, the massive Canadian advance across the Douai plain and onto the imposing ridge would take place under the curtain of a continuous wave of artillery shells, known as a creeping barrage. This would rain havoc on the German lines while pro-

**Quote**

"Chaps, you shall go over exactly like a railroad train, on time, or you shall be annihilated." — Instructions to troops by Sir Julian Byng, April 1917

viding cover for the attacking Canadian troops. However, it was absolutely essential that the Canadian advance take place in a methodical, orderly, and perfectly timed manner, for if troops moved too rapidly, they would be struck by their own artillery shells.

For a week before the actual attack, a massive and continuous barrage of shells fell on the German lines at Vimy, "like water from a hose" as one Canadian soldier observed. This bombardment reached a fever pitch in the week before the assault, devastated the German trench defences, and knocked out over 80 per cent of their guns. It is estimated that over a million artillery shells fell on the Germans during this period, resulting in what their troops were to call "the week of suffering." Aerial reconnaissance by observation balloons drifting over the German lines had also made it possible to identify the positions of their artillery and destroy them with pinpoint accuracy. In preparation for the attack, Canadian military engineers had constructed a maze of underground tunnels and caverns to be used to protect the troops in the hours just prior to the attack. They would also be used to evacuate the wounded and return them behind the lines once the fighting began. These tunnels, some of which stretched for many kilometres, were among the most elaborate of the entire war and represented a major feat of military engineering. They played a key role in the ultimate Canadian success at Vimy.

Finally at 5:30 a.m. on Easter Monday, April 9, 1917, the long-awaited and well-planned attack began. The first wave of Canadian troops, totalling 15 000, stormed the advance German positions defended by over 5 000 enemy soldiers, in a blinding snow-storm. Then a second wave of 12 000

was sent to face some 3 000 German reserve forces. As they moved slowly but steadily forward, careful not to advance too far into the creeping barrage, they faced heavy machinegun fire—and many were cut down. But their comrades were under strict orders to leave the dead and wounded where they fell, so as not to slow the progress of the advancing line. Each man was carrying about 32 kilograms of equipment and weapons and was also wearing heavy, mud-caked woolen uniforms. Caught in the middle of this horrifying experience, Corporal Gus Sivertz of the 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles remembered that, "we were dancing a macabre dance as our nerves just vibrated to the noise of the thousands of shells and machine gun bullets whizzing over. I felt that if I had put my finger up, I should have touched a ceiling of sound" ([www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Vimy\\_Ridge](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Vimy_Ridge)).

By noon three of the four divisions comprising the Canadian Corps had achieved their goal of capturing part of the ridge. But Hill 145, the highest and most important position, was still in German hands. Once it fell, the Canadians would enjoy a commanding position over the Douai plain below and would be able to harass the Germans as they withdrew. But Hill 145 was well defended by trenches and dugouts on its rear slope. From a nearby dominating height nicknamed the Pimple, the Germans were directing deadly fire on the advancing Canadians. However, with fresh troops in the vanguard, the Canadians succeeded in clearing Hill 145 of German defenders on April 10. Two days later the 10th Canadian Brigade captured the Pimple itself. With the fall of these two last strategic points on Vimy Ridge, the Germans accepted that their loss of this position

## Archives

To see an audio-visual presentation of Canada's efforts in the First World War, go to the CBC Digital Archives at [www.cbc.ca/archives](http://www.cbc.ca/archives) and view the file "The First World War: Canada Remembers."

was permanent. They began a withdrawal that moved their troops more than three kilometres to the rear.

In strictly military terms, the Canadian achievement of capturing Vimy Ridge was a major accomplishment, but it had come at a very high cost. Of the 30 000 troops involved in the fighting on the first day of the assault, 3 598 were killed and another 7 104 wounded. The German defenders of the Sixth Army, under the command of General von Falkenhausen, suffered approximately 20 000 casualties.

The taking of Vimy Ridge represented the first clear-cut Allied victory in almost a year and a half, resulting in great demoralization among the Germans, who had long believed themselves to be invincible. But the wider Anglo-French Arras offensive, of which the capture of the ridge was to be a key element, did not succeed in breaking the stalemate on the Western Front, and the war dragged on for another year and a half after the battle for Vimy had ended. During this time, Canadians would see action in a number of bloody battles. These included Passchendaele in October 1917 and the period called "Canada's Hundred Days" from August to November 1918, when the backbone of the German army was finally broken. In these struggles as well, thousands of Canadians would lose their lives before the First World War finally drew to a bitter end on November 11, 1918.

When news of the great victory at Vimy Ridge reached Canada, the effect was electric. A nation that had once rallied to the colours with great enthusiasm was becoming war-weary. Enlistment rates had dropped to dangerously low levels. Prime Minister Robert Borden was wrestling with the difficult decision to impose conscription, or compulsory military service, a move he

knew would prove extremely unpopular, especially in Quebec. The capture of Vimy at least temporarily breathed new life into the Canadian war effort and raised spirits at home. But the high casualty figures that followed the news of the victory proved to be a sobering aftermath. Nonetheless, the fact that Canadians had fought together for the first time and succeeded in accomplishing an objective that British and French forces had failed to achieve was enough to instill a great sense of national pride and satisfaction in the public's mind. Upon hearing of the capture of Vimy Ridge, a French soldier is supposed to have said, "c'est impossible!" But upon learning that it was the Canadians who had achieved this goal, he replied "Ah, les canadiens! Avec eux, c'est possible!"

Along with Byng and Currie, another Canadian officer who would later rise to prominence during the First World War also played a major role in the planning and execution of the Vimy assault. This was General Andrew McNaughton, who was in charge of the counter-battery artillery activities that had destroyed the majority of German field artillery pieces in the week before the assault. He later reflected on the fact that the meticulous planning of the entire operation had led to a much lower rate of casualties than in previous actions. He noted that, "I know of no organization in the history of war in which the price paid for victory was lower in personnel." But it was a high price, nonetheless. About 619 000 Canadians served in the forces during the First World War, out of a total population of only 11 million. Of these, 66 655 were killed, and the final casualty figures, including wounded and missing, was 239 605. This meant that any soldier enlisting in the war ran a

**Did you know . . .**

Canadian troops captured 104 trench mortars, 54 artillery pieces, and 124 machine-guns. They had seized 60 square kilometres of territory from the enemy and 4 000 German soldiers when the guns fell silent. In fact, Canadian forces had seized more guns, ground, and prisoners than any previous British attack in the war.

one-in-three chance of being wounded and a one-in-10 risk of being killed. Unlike its European counterparts, the Canadian army was composed of citizen-soldiers who had volunteered to fight. But by the end of the conflict, they had won recognition as among the best military units of any country participating in the bloodbath that was the First World War. Very few veterans of that long-ago conflict are still with us—and none who fought at Vimy Ridge. But Canadians still remember their bravery and sacrifice, and the rededication of the massive Vimy Memorial on the 90th anniversary of

the battle was a moment when Canadians of today could reflect on both the valour and the horror of that terrible Easter Monday on the Douai Plain.

Sources: Veterans Affairs Canada Web site: [www.vac-acc.gc.ca](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca); "Vimy Ridge: The making of a myth," by Michael Valpy, *The Globe and Mail*, April 7, 2007; "Vimy Ridge: A watershed in Canada's history," by John Ward, [www.canoe.ca/RemembranceDay/991104\\_vimy.html](http://www.canoe.ca/RemembranceDay/991104_vimy.html); CBC News In Depth: Vimy Ridge Remembered, [www.cbc.ca/news/background/vimy/](http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/vimy/); "The Battle of Vimy Ridge, 9-12 April 1917," by Tim Cook, Canadian War Museum, [www.civilization.ca/cwm/vimy/index\\_e.html](http://www.civilization.ca/cwm/vimy/index_e.html)

**Analysis**

1. Why was it so difficult for Allied forces to dislodge the Germans from Vimy Ridge?

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2. What new military strategies did the Canadian forces utilize in their plan to capture Vimy Ridge?

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3. Why was the taking of Vimy Ridge a major military achievement for the Canadian forces in the First World War?

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4. Why was Canada's overall military contribution to the First World War so substantial? (Consider the size of the country and its remoteness from the actual field of combat.)

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5. From what you know of the origins of the conflict, do you think Canadians should have been involved in the First World War? Explain.

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# REMEMBERING VIMY RIDGE

## *Memories of Vimy*

### **Did you know . . .**

Young, bilingual Canadian students are still hired to serve at Vimy Ridge as student guides. If you are interested in working at Vimy, go to the official Web site of Veterans Affairs Canada for more information. To file an application go to [www.vac-acc.gc.ca/youth/sub.cfm?source=studentguide](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/youth/sub.cfm?source=studentguide).

*News in Review* writer Peter Flaherty shares his first-hand experience at the Vimy Memorial.

In the summer of 1970, along with many young people of my generation, I was touring Europe with a couple of old friends from my high school days. I had just graduated from university with a degree in history and was interested in exploring as many places as possible that held a special attraction for me. We spent most of our time in Great Britain and Ireland, but lured by the appeal of Amsterdam, then at the height of its hippie era, we also took a short side trip to the continent. On our way back to Britain, we travelled through Belgium and northern France and decided to strike out for Vimy to see the memorial to the Canadian troops who had fallen there during the epic First World War battle. One of my friends had a passionate interest in military history, having served in the army reserves during his time in high school. As I recall, it was largely as a result of his urgings that we decided to make the side trip to Vimy, something that the complicated French railway schedules at that time made a fairly challenging undertaking for us.

As we crossed the flat plains that extend from Belgium into France, under a leaden grey sky, we travelled through the major industrial city of Lille, where we changed trains for Vimy. At that time, it was a very small stop, far from the main lines that could whisk the traveller easily into Paris from a number of points in northern France. We alighted at a tiny, one-room train station and were warmly greeted by the stationmaster, who introduced us to her son, who was the local schoolteacher. He was extremely impressed that a

group of young Canadians had taken the time and trouble to come to visit the Vimy Memorial and offered to drive us to the site, which was quite a distance from the station. He also indicated to us that he would be willing to come back after we had toured the monument and the surrounding battlefield and take us into the nearby town of Arras, where we could spend the night.

As we approached the memorial by car, its sheer size and dominating position in the surrounding countryside was immediately obvious to us. Standing on the heights of what had been known as Hill 145, its white limestone surface glimmered in the narrow shafts of light that were finally breaking through the heavy cloud cover as we approached it at sunset. It was a magnificent sight, one of the most memorable things we were to experience during our trip. Once we arrived, we took the time to explore the network of tunnels and trenches that had been restored for visitors to inspect. There was a team of young Canadian volunteers of about our age working there as guides and interpreters for the summer, many of them francophones from Quebec. It was fun for us to try out our college French with them and learn about how they were spending the summer working on the site.

Inside the tunnels it was possible to gain some impression of what daily life must have been like for ordinary Canadian soldiers while they were waiting for the attack on Vimy Ridge. We learned about the appalling conditions they had to endure in the trenches, suffering from cold, dampness, and hunger, along with the constant state of anxiety caused by the continuous din of the explosion of artillery shells. They

### Further Research

To learn more about the battle, consider viewing episode 12, *Ordeal By Fire*, of *Canada: A People's History* by the CBC.

lived on a monotonous and not terribly healthy diet of corned beef, hard biscuits, bland jam, and sweetened tea, enlivened occasionally by a ration of rum. Their officers would usually serve this to them just before they went into action to fortify their courage and numb their fears. They contracted a number of diseases, such as trench fever, caused by the fleas and lice that inhabited their unwashed bodies, and trench foot, a severe rotting of the foot resulting from constant immersion in water. For us, whose idea of discomfort on our trip had been passing a few nights outdoors in sleeping bags at a rock festival, the experience of a soldier came alive in a way that no high school history class I could recall had ever captured.

After wandering through the tunnels and admiring the extensive series of earthworks and other defences surrounding the monument, it was time to take in the memorial itself. We took our time walking around its circumference, all the while viewing the seemingly endless list of names of individual soldiers carved into it. Sometimes we touched them with our fingers, silently reading them and wondering just who they were and what they had been like as young men of about our age. It was an extremely moving and quiet moment for us. As our eyes shifted to the height of the monument, we could see the sculpted figures that adorn it. Perhaps the most evocative for me was the figure of Canada Bereft, the hooded woman who gazes silently at the plain below her where the blood of so many young Canadians was shed on that terrible Easter Monday in 1917. She rests her head on her left hand, while clutching the folds of her gown in her right. Later I was to learn that this sculpture was modelled after a 1905 design depicting Electra, the heroine of Greek tragedy.

Our visit to Vimy was a moment in time that we did not measure in hours, and we were surprised when the school-teacher came to retrieve us. As he drove us into Arras, he asked us about our impressions of the monument and what we knew about the First World War and the role that Canadian troops had played in it. He seemed genuinely impressed at our knowledge, and I suppose he concluded that we had “passed the test.” On entering the beautiful medieval town of Arras, we wondered where he was taking us. Our curiosity reached a very high level when he parked the car outside what appeared to be the most luxurious hotel in town, a place that was obviously well beyond our limited student-traveller’s budget. He escorted us into the lobby, where the lady who ran the establishment greeted us warmly, despite our long hair and rather informal attire! After a few minutes of conversation with our guide we learned that we were to receive a night’s lodging, dinner in the hotel’s well-appointed dining room, and breakfast the next day at an extremely moderate rate.

We could hardly believe our luck, since these accommodations were in a different universe of comfort from anything we had experienced so far in our travels. As we profusely thanked both the proprietor and the teacher, it became obvious to us why we had been given such a generous welcome. After all, we were in their words, “les jeunes canadiens” compatriots of two other groups of young Canadians from the past. The first had captured Vimy Ridge and liberated their town from the German invaders in the First World War. The second had come back to the same area over two decades later to drive the Nazis out of their country. On the walls of the lobby there were a number of old photos depicting the damage the town

had sustained during the war, prior to the arrival of the liberating Canadian troops. We spent a memorable night in that hotel, enjoyed one of the most exquisite meals we had eaten on the trip, slept in comfortable four-poster beds in rooms furnished with priceless antiques, and gathered enough pleasant memories to last us a lifetime.

We were to experience similar warm receptions in other parts of Europe during that long-ago summer vacation, including Amsterdam, and Dieppe, the sight of another famous and tragic Canadian military engagement of the First World War. We became more aware of what being Canadian meant to us in the context of the two World Wars in which our country's troops had participated. We realized that the maple leaf flags we had attached to our knapsacks before leaving for Europe actually meant something.

The three young Canadians who toured the Vimy Memorial have grown older, of course, but remain close friends and often share reminiscences of their adventures during that magic

summer holiday in 1970. When the Vimy Memorial was rededicated in April 2007, I was pleased to see that a new generation of "jeunes canadiens" had been given the opportunity to visit it and take part in the ceremonies. I hoped that the experience would mean as much to them as it had obviously meant to me. On that occasion, I recalled the words of Julian Smith, the Ottawa architect who had supervised the renovations of the monument. "It makes you think about the Great War and about modernism and about being a Canadian. About being a Canadian in the world. I mean, Vimy is remarkable because it's sitting there in France as a national monument without any regional identity. That I find fascinating, because I love the layering of identities in Canada. I think that's what makes us Canadian. But Vimy exists outside that. It exists in a kind of pure form as being a Canadian monument. Something like that could probably never be built again"(Michael Valpy, "Vimy Ridge: Setting legend in stone," *The Globe and Mail*, April 7, 2007).

## To Consider

1. Why was the visit to Vimy Ridge such a memorable event for the young Canadians who went there in 1970?

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2. How did their visit enhance their appreciation of the role that Canadian soldiers had played in the two World Wars and what it meant to be Canadian?

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3. Why do you think Canadians generally are made to feel so welcome when they travel in other countries?

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## REMEMBERING VIMY RIDGE

### *Canadian Students at Vimy*

For 42 students from Silverthorn Collegiate in the Toronto suburb of Etobicoke, it was the experience of a lifetime. Accompanied by Mitchell Bubelj and Emily Drennan, their history teachers, this group had the privilege of participating in the rededication ceremonies of the Vimy Memorial on the 90th anniversary of that epic battle in April 2007. Here are some of their impressions of the event:

“Being at Vimy was an honour and I am glad that I was given the chance to experience something so great.” — Nevena Vicic

“After the long and winding walk up to the ridge, I finally beheld the monument, and it was one of the most immense and beautiful structures I have ever seen.” — Jonathan Lees

“Although I feel more alive as a result of our visit to Vimy, I am saddened by the sheer number of dead soldiers and the destruction that took place there 90 years ago.” — Matt Woodcock

“I was excited about being part of history. No one else besides the thousands of mostly Canadians who were there can say, ‘I was at the rededication of the Vimy memorial.’” — Laura Hill

“Vimy Ridge was a beautiful place. I was amazed to see the hilly plains and remember why they were like that.” — Cameron Hare

“Incredible . . . I’ve never seen anything like it, nor felt anything remotely that amazing . . . I’ve never felt so Canadian in my life.” — Jelena Perovic

“The monument was beautiful and our Canadian spirit was seen and especially heard during the ceremony.” — Lori Purchase

“It’s almost indescribable, the grass and craters all around us . . . I felt like I was on the surface of the moon.” — Samantha O’Sullivan

“Canada is an amazing country full of happy and free people. The Canadians who went to war in 1914 and who died at Vimy Ridge fought to protect that.” — Owen Lacey

“Vimy was a beautiful, perfect day weather-wise, with the grass glowing bright green . . . to see the craters left by the war was indescribable.” — Megan Haliburton

“I had a grandfather and great-grandfather who fought at Vimy. I’ve taught Vimy for 21 years and I’ve read Pierre Berton’s eponymous text, but being there it all made sense. The strategic advantages and beauty of the ridge surely were good reasons for the imperial Germans to want to keep it at all costs. On the other hand, what is senseless is the death and destruction that ensued back in April 1917. There were so many good and young men, Canadian and German, who died there. The craters left behind by the artillery barrage are eerily beautiful today but attest to the fact that the battle for Vimy Ridge was bloody, destructive, and ugly. Walter Allward’s monument is a fitting reminder of the sacrifice made by so many Canadians 90 years ago.” — Mitchell Bubelj, history teacher



# REMEMBERING VIMY RIDGE

## *Activity: Was it Worth It?*

As a class, debate whether or not the sacrifice of so many young Canadian soldiers to capture Vimy Ridge was really worth it. Consider the question in both strictly military terms and also with regard to what the taking of Vimy Ridge meant for Canada's sense of national identity and international recognition as an independent state after the war was over.

Here are some sources that can help you in preparing both the affirmative and negative positions in the debate:

"Building a nation with body bags," by Linda McQuaig, *Toronto Star*, April 13, 2007

"A call to arms for peace," by Gen. Romeo Dallaire, *Toronto Star*, April 20, 2007

"Paying the price at Vimy, Kandahar," by James Travers, *Toronto Star*, April 10, 2007

"Vimy Ridge: The making of a myth," by Michael Valpy, *The Globe and Mail*, April 7, 2007

*Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment*, ed. Geoffrey Hayes, Anthony Iarocci, and Mike Bechtold. Waterloo ON: WLU Press. 2007.

"A nation forged in crucible of war," *Toronto Star* editorial, April 7, 2007

"As a country at war, we're in the mood for Vimy," by Lawrence Martin, *The Globe and Mail*, April 6, 2007

"Canada must not allow Vimy to fade away," by Rudyard Griffiths, *Toronto Star*, April 8, 2007

"Vimy: Was it worth it," by Rick Salutin, *The Globe and Mail*, April 6, 2007

"An epic battle, but signifying very little," by Thomas Walkom, *Toronto Star*, March 31, 2007

You may wish to use this table to organize your thoughts.

### Question: Vimy Ridge: Was it worth it?

Criteria	Yes	No
For Military Reasons		
For Canada's Identity and International Recognition		