

## As MEN and as MASONS

*The distinguishing characteristics of every Free and Accepted Mason are*

***Virtue, Honour and Mercy.*** *The writers of history identify certain events as defining points, crucial episodes upon which the future depends and from which the future evolves. One such landmark in Canadian military history and milestone in our political history is the **Battle of Vimy**, the heavily-fortified ridge in north-eastern France, that began at dawn on Easter Monday morning, 9 April 1917. It was the first time that all four divisions of the Canadian Expeditionary Force were brought together. 27,000 Canadian soldiers advanced through driving rain, sleet and snow. Volunteers all, they came from all nine Provinces in the Dominion and Newfoundland. Within two hours, three of the four Canadian divisions had taken their objective, but it would take three days of deadly combat by the Fourth Division to take Hill 145, the highest point of the ridge. 3,598 men were killed, and 7,104 were wounded. Four Canadian soldiers were awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest military honour “For Valour.” “In Canada’s history, one of the great days, a day of glory to furnish inspiration to her sons for generations*

*New York Times, 1917*

*Donald Creighton: “In a battle which was more generally successful than any which the British armies had yet fought in the west, the capture of the Vimy Ridge was at once the most dramatic and the most important episode.” (Dominion of the North, 1957)*

*Military historians agree that innovative tactics, careful planning, meticulous attention to detail, and constant practice under the command of General Sir Arthur Currie, led to the unexpected triumph and brilliant conquest of Vimy Ridge - universally hailed as the first Allied success of the war.*

*W. L. Morton: “... the storming of Vimy Ridge on Easter Day, 1917, a landmark in the course of Canadian history because it was the first major victory of the war was won by Canadians alone,” (The Kingdom of Canada, 1963)*

*“In those few minutes I witnessed the birth of a nation.”*

*Brigadier-General Alexander E. Ross - Commander 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion at Vimy*

*“The fierce fighting on this French hill enabled a young Canada to emerge from the British shadow.”*

*Canadian War Museum*

*“The events here 90 years ago were for our country, a coming of age.”*

*Right Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister - 9 April 2007*

*Before the Great War began in 1914, Canada was an overseas colony in the shadow of Mother England. When the war ended in 1918, Canada was a nation. The limestone ridge of Vimy was ‘the anvil on which the country’s identity as a nation was forged.’ “Those who seek the foundation of Canada’s distinction would do well to begin here at Vimy.”*

*H.M. Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Canada, 9 April 2007*

## ***The Heroes of Vimy***

*Ralph Waldo Emerson (1802-1882) reminds us that, "There is properly no History; only Biography. All history resolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons."*

*Many of the men in command were Freemasons, and countless brethren served in the rank and file. There is documented evidence of lodge meetings held behind the lines.*

*General Sir Arthur William Currie (1875-1933), Commander of the Canadian Corps. Prior to the war, Currie had been a teacher and an insurance broker and real estate agent. Born in Strathroy, Ontario, he moved to British Columbia in 1894. He was initiated in Vancouver & Quadra Lodge No. 2, Victoria, in 1898 and served as Worshipful Master in 1904. He subsequently served as District Deputy Grand Master for Victoria District. Bro. Currie affiliated with Zetland Lodge No. 326, Toronto. His Masonic regalia is deposited in the Canadian War Museum, Ottawa. Knighted by King George V in 1917, and in 1920 Sir Arthur Currie was appointed Principal and Vice-Chancellor of McGill University, Montreal, a position held until his death in 1933.*

*Major-General Sir David Watson (1871-1922) Commander of the Fourth Division that took Hill 145, was a Freemason.*

*Sir Robert L. Borden (1854-1937), the Conservative Prime Minister (1911-1920), was a member of St. Andrew's Lodge No. 1, Halifax, Nova Scotia.*

*Sir Sam Hughes (1853-1921), the Minister of Militia and Defence in Borden's Cabinet, was initiated in St. Andrew's Lodge No. 16, Toronto, in 1883.*

### ***TWIN PYLONS ~ TWO GREAT PILLARS***

*France and Canada 'A gate leading to a better world'*

*"The Great War for Civilization" - The War to end War*

*Canadian sculptor, Walter Seymour Allward (1876-1955) created the spectacular Monument unveiled in 1936 by M.W. Bro. King Edward VIII (Household Brigade Lodge No. 2614, Grand Master UGLE 1936). The King said: "We raise this memorial to Canadian warriors. It is an inspired expression in stone, chiselled by a skilful Canadian hand. It marks the scene of feats of arms which history will long remember and Canada will never forget."*

*Twenty sculptured allegorical figures represent the universal virtues: Faith, Justice, Peace, Honour, Charity, Truth, Knowledge, and Hope. The largest figure represents Canada, mourning her fallen sons, depicted as a woman, draped, eyes cast downward - an attitude of overwhelming sorrow and inconsolable grief. A standing figure entitled 'The Spirit of Sacrifice' holds a burning torch. Allward wrote: "I have tried to show in the monument to Canada's fallen, what we owed them and we will forever owe them."*

*The rich allegory of this greatest of all Canadian War Memorials resonates with Masonic symbolism. We are tempted to wonder if this brilliant artist in stone was influenced by Freemasonry?*

*A place made sacred by sacrifice*

*The names of 11,285 young Canadian men who died in the war, missing in action with no known graves, are engraved in stone on the base of the memorial. There is no place on earth that makes us feel more Canadian.*

*Right Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister - 9 April 2007*

### ***Comrades in Arms ~ Brothers in Freemasonry***

*Every Mason is charged to 'fulfill the duties of a good citizen.' The Canadian Maple Leaf Flag is displayed in every Masonic Lodge in Ontario as a symbol of Patriotism. In every conflict in which Canadian troops have been involved, up to and including the present day, our Brethren have voluntarily answered that call of duty - fought and died for liberty - for family, for comrades, and for country. Memorial plaques recording the names of the fallen Brethren are often found on the walls of the anteroom. Services of Remembrance are regularly held during the November meeting in most lodges.*

*The words of R. W. Bro. Sir Arthur Currie delivered in an Address to the Canadian Corps, March 1918, express our thoughts: "To those who fall I say: You will not die but step into immortality. Your mothers will not lament your fate but will be proud to have borne such sons. Your names will be revered forever and ever by your grateful country, and God will take you unto himself."*

---

*We gratefully acknowledge as the inspiration for this Bulletin the research done by **W. Bro. Daniel Glenney, PM, Hazeldean Lodge No. 517, Kanata, former Director of Special Projects at the Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.** W. Bro. Glenney recently presented a paper to Heritage Lodge No. 730 documenting the involvement of Masonic Brethren in World War I that will be published in the Proceedings of the lodge.*

### ***FURTHER READING ...***

*Barris, Ted. **Victory At Vimy: Canada Comes of Age, April 9 - 12, 1917.** Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2007.*

*La Giorgia, Giancarlo. **Canadian War Heroes: Ten Profiles in Courage.** (Great Canadian Stories) Folklore Publishing, 2005.*

By R. W. Bro. Raymond S. J. Daniels, F.C.F.  
for The Curriculum Group  
The Committee on Masonic Education

2007.04.12