

VIMY RIDGE DAY CEREMONY LOCAL NOTES

Branch 15, Abbotsford, will be holding its fifth annual Candlelight Vigil commemoration of Vimy Ridge Day on April 9 at 7:00 p.m. at the Cenotaph. From the initial ceremony in 2011, this event has established itself as an annual feature. More veterans from the First World War who were present at Vimy Ridge and other notable battles have been "discovered" from persons in our local community. This year we will be honouring the first Sikh veteran as his great grand-daughter lives in our community, and also honouring two veterans from the Stó:lō Nation, one of whom was in the 104th Regiment (now our Royal Westminster Regiment) before the war, and was one of the early group of men who signed up for the Canadian Expeditionary Force in 1914. Also one of our local historians "just happened" to have a grandfather whom, having immigrated to BC from France, signed up for the French Army and saw action at the Battle of Verdun; he then joined the XV Corps British Army Intelligence and won the Military Cross. After the war he returned and moved his family to Abbotsford.

As always our local dignitaries attend our event and place candles and we are grateful for their support and participation, as we are for the Mayor, and the City of Abbotsford, whose genuine support has made this event a successful annual affair. One of our City Councillors has been a firm supporter of the commemoration since the first year. The event is also supported by the Abbotsford Police and Abbotsford Fire & Rescue Services and the Royal Westminster Regiment. And what would we do without the support and participation of the Royal Canadian Air Force Cadets with their colour party and their band. This year the Branch 15 Legion colour party will be joined by colour parties of the other Legions in the local area.

THE BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE AND ITS SIGNICANCE TO CANADA

Candlelight vigil ceremonies were started in the Netherlands in 1995, where the local children attend the graves of Canadian servicemen and women who died liberating the Netherlands in 1944-45 near the end of World War II. Since then the idea has been taken up by the Royal Canadian Legion.

Vimy Ridge Day, April 9, was established by the Government of Canada in 2003. It commemorates April 9 1917 when the four Canadian Divisions fought together for the first time as a united Canadian Corps under Lieutenant-General Julian Byng (later our Governor-General). Major-General Arthur Currie commanded the Canadian First Division. The seemingly impenetrable enemy defences along the 9 mile (14 km) length of high ground known as Vimy Ridge had caused previous attacks by French and later French/British armies to be unsuccessful, with heavy loss of life. The camaraderie established by the Canadians' way of approaching their objective, and the thoroughness of training and preparation before the battle, led to a great victory for the Canadian

troops. Currie had studied the battle plans of the French Army and a planned a coordinated attack involving a very successful creeping artillery barrages (organized by Canadian Lt.-Colonel Andy McNaughton) followed by infantry advances, was a key factor in this particular victory.

But it also established the Canadians as a crack force and they were specially chosen in later battles when a difficult strategic objective needed to be taken. After Vimy Ridge, the promoted Lieutenant-General Currie took over as commander of the whole Canadian Corps.

What the victory at Vimy Ridge also did was to nurture a new and stronger sense of Canadian national identity. After Vimy, the Canadian Corps never looked back; it was Canadian troops who fought their way through to the town of Mons, Belgium on the morning of November 11, before the hour of the Armistice, and entered the town square full of cheering Belgians. The significance was that Mons was where the British Empire (Commonwealth) forces were stopped in their tracks in 1914 and had to retreat.

The success of the Canadian Corps raised our international stature and earned Canada a separate signature on the Treaty of Versailles that ended the war.

The Government of France granted to Canada the land around Vimy Ridge for all time. The Vimy Memorial was built in 1936 and rises above the now quiet countryside. It stands as a tribute to all who served their country in battle and paid such a price to help ensure the peace and freedom we enjoy today. The Memorial was restored and re-dedicated by the Queen in 2007, the 90th anniversary of the battle.

The Vimy Day Candlelight Vigil to be held this April 9 in Abbotsford, will be a tribute to the brave men from our community and to brave men from other communities whose descendants live in our community now.

The special candles in their red plastic housing will produce a fitting sight once dusk falls, and they will remind us of the sacrifices that have helped us to enjoy the wonderful life that we in Canada enjoy today.

Let us not forget.

see photos of Vimy Ridge Memorial on following pages.....



Canadian National Memorial at
Vimy Ridge, France

*photo courtesy of Steve
Olderoyd*

Photos taken in January 2007, Memorial under restoration, no access,
only telephoto lens pictures:





Mother Canada weeping for her lost sons

