



VIMM Newsletter

Spring 2017

Vancouver Island Military Museum

100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE — APRIL 9, 1917 —

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CANADIANS AT VIMY RIDGE

*Canadian Headquarters
in France, April 10. – Via
London, April 11.*

The victory of the Canadian Forces in the battle for the Vimy ridge is much more complete than the first reports indicated. The only point which remains obscure this Tuesday morning is the position of Hill 145, for the retention of which the enemy fought with the utmost determination

Monday afternoon.

A Canadian describing his experiences said: "I received my wound just as the Canadians were moving to see what the German trenches were like, but I knew from the yells of our fellows that Fritz was getting it. It was bad luck for me, but I guess I will get into the fighting again before it is all over. I shall be disappointed if I do not. The spirit of the Canadians is great. Say, is it not good to be a Canadian when

the Canadians have taken that ridge? I am one of five brothers who left a farm in British Columbia to fight in France."





Vice President's Message

Spring 2017 looks to be a busy one for the Vancouver Island Military Museum. We are planning three events as our contribution to the Canada 150 celebrations in the City of Nanaimo, which we hope will add a military theme to the festivities.

In early March Roger and I paid a visit to the Naval dockyard in Esquimalt to view the Bofors gun which we plan to display on the concrete pad next to the Veterans' Wall of Honour. The gun became available from HMCS Nanaimo when the Navy's fleet of Mine Counter Measure Vessels (MCMV) underwent a major refit and the forward gun mounts on the ships were replaced with a more advanced weapon system. Once the gun is in place at the museum an 8x12 foot mural of HMCS Nanaimo will be painted on the wall directly behind the gun display. Jeff King, a well-known local artist has been commissioned to do the



Phil Harris is dedicated to mounting medals correctly and with great care to details. For mounting or framing services, call the VIMM at 250 753 3814.

work. Jeff has painted several murals around the city including the eight murals on the outside of the Military museum and the striking rendition on Front Street of HMCS Saskatchewan depicted as an underwater artificial reef.

May 2017 is the twentieth anniversary of the granting of the Freedom of the City to HMCS

a visit to coincide with the Canada Day celebrations on July 1st. To commemorate the event, we plan to have the ship's crew visit the museum for the unveiling of both the Bofors gun display and the ship's mural. We are also planning to upgrade the lighting and closed circuit TV system to monitor the area in and around the gun display.

With the winter weather hopefully at an end, we will be able to complete phase four of the Wall of Honour; the last batch of plaques are now with the engraver and should be delivered by the end of April.

On a different subject, I am happy to report our visitor numbers for the month of March were at an all-time high. Spring break normally brings extra visitors to the museum, however this year, for whatever reason, we have been especially busy. The growing number of visitors demonstrates that the Vancouver Island Military Museum is fast becoming a popular attraction in the city of Nanaimo.



It's ours! Our Bofors gun ready in Esquimalt for shipment to the VIMM

Brian McFadden.



BYNG'S BOYS

By Angus Scully

THE REASONS FOR SUCCESS – VIMY 1917

Until the great victory at Vimy, the Canadian Corps as a whole had varied success. Not ignoring the bravery of the Canadian soldier or the good intentions of their leaders, nonetheless, Corps operations were often disorganized and had a reputation for poor discipline and wasted lives. Then on Easter Monday 1917, a great victory. What changed?

Without doubt the credit goes to General Sir Julian Byng who took over command of the Corps in May 1916. Byng was an experienced British regular officer who had fought with success in the Boer War and then commanded a British Corps before being assigned to the Canadians. When he took over, only the First Division commanded by Arthur Currie was considered capable – the Third Division was brand new, and the Fourth was still forming in England. Byng set out to train the Corps and weed out poor leaders – officers who owed their position to political connections. Byng resisted interference by the Minister of Militia, Sam Hughes (who would soon be fired by Prime Minister Borden), and insisted merit not politics would determine who commanded at all levels. “The men are too good to be led by politicians and dollar magnates,” said Byng.

In the ten months before Vimy, Byng was responsible for replacing: 2 division commanders, 6 of 12 brigade commanders, 2 of 4 Divisions Artillery commanders, and 40 of 49 infantry battalion com-

manders – and more in other arms. Under Byng’s new broom, 84 of 118 senior command and staff appointments changed.

Improved leadership, improved training, and excellent help and training in staff planning and logistics from British regulars produced a new machine and new spirit.

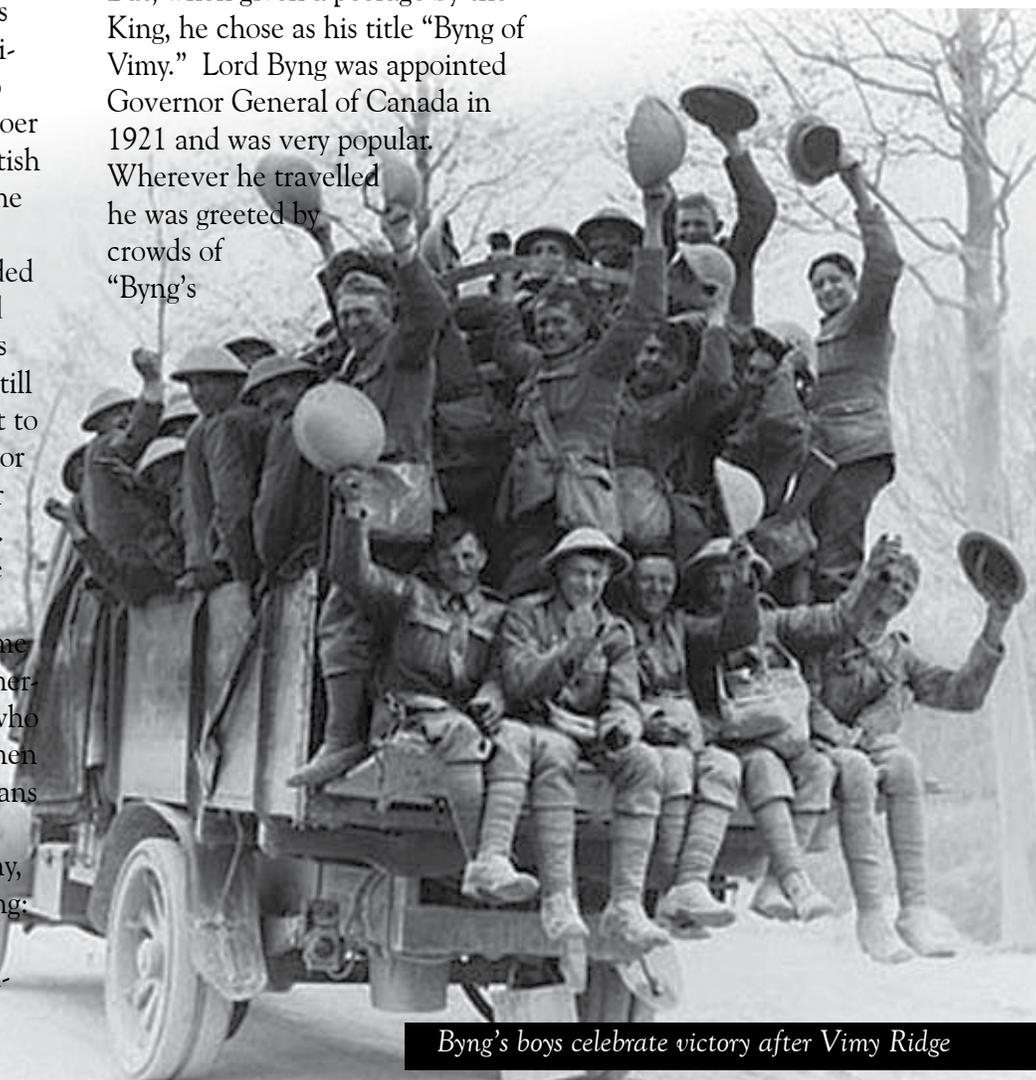
Therefore, by April 1917 the Corps was a different entity – organized, disciplined, well led, well trained and experienced. The Germans were in for a shock.

Byng was later promoted to command the Third British Army and developed early tank tactics. But, when given a peerage by the King, he chose as his title “Byng of Vimy.” Lord Byng was appointed Governor General of Canada in 1921 and was very popular. Wherever he travelled he was greeted by crowds of “Byng’s



Viscount Byng of Vimy

Boys” – as the veterans of the Canadian Corps at Vimy always thought of themselves.



Byng’s boys celebrate victory after Vimy Ridge

VIMY RIDGE CENTENARY

By William Hampson
Museum Volunteer

the memorial commenced in 1925 and took eleven years to complete. The Imperial War Graves Commission contracted French and British veterans to carry out the necessary roadwork and site landscaping.

When the memorial was opened in 1936, veterans and

their families made a pilgrimage to the event. The Government of Canada made a special Vimy passport available to pilgrims, at no extra cost. On 16 July 1936, five trans-Atlantic liners carrying about 6400 pilgrims departed the port of Montreal for France. King Edward VIII, in his capacity as King of Canada, officially unveiled the monument on 26 July 1936. The ceremony was one of the King's few official duties before he abdicated the throne. Pilgrims were given a bronze medallion that is now highly collectible. The VIMM has two of them on display.

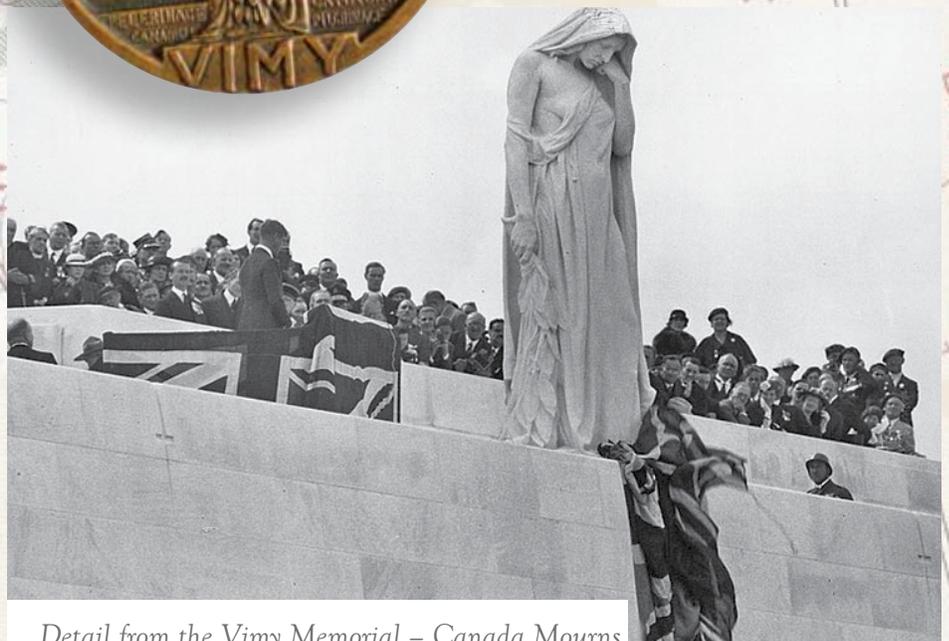
In 2005, the Vimy memorial closed for major restoration work. Veterans Affairs Canada directed the restoration of the memorial in cooperation with other Canadian departments, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, consultants and specialists in military history. Following an extensive restoration, Queen Elizabeth II rededicated the memorial on April 09, 2007 during a ceremony commemorating the 90th anniversary of the battle.



King Edward VIII addresses the crowd of 100 000, including 6400 pilgrims and veterans from Canada, before unveiling the Memorial, 1936

The Canadian National Vimy Ridge Memorial site in France is dedicated to the memory of Canada's fallen in the Great War, and especially those who have no known grave. The Vimy monument is situated on a 91 hectare (250 acre) preserve that encompasses a portion of the ground over which the Canadian Corps assaulted during the Battle of Vimy Ridge, a military engagement fought as part of the Battle of Arras.

In 1921, Walter Allward of Toronto was commissioned to design and build a Canadian war memorial. In 1925, Allward moved to Paris to supervise the construction of the monument and the carving of the sculptures. Construction of



Detail from the Vimy Memorial – Canada Mourns



THE COST OF VICTORY

The triumph of the Canadian Corps at Vimy Ridge was not without great cost. Ten thousand Canadian soldiers were killed or wounded in the four day battle.

NANAIMO NAMES ENGRAVED ON THE VIMY MEMORIAL



Engraved on the Vimy memorial are the names of over 11 285 Canadians killed in the Great War for whom there is no grave – their bodies were never found. VIMM records show the following men who are listed on the Nanaimo and area Cenotaph are listed on the Vimy Memorial.

Ernest Corbett of East Wellington
 John Glen, son of Mrs. Margaret Pryde of Nanaimo
 Arthur Hazel
 David Hogg, of Gabriola Island
 Percy Charles Richardson, of Fairview, Nanaimo
David William Roberts
 Frank Silva, of Gabriola Island
 James Henry Watson

NANAIMO SOLDIERS KILLED AT THE BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

VIMM records show that the following men listed on the Nanaimo and area Cenotaph were killed during the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

Joseph Beck of 1032 Victoria Road, Nanaimo
 Arthur Pomeroy Davidson of Howard Ave., Nanaimo
 William Edward Horace Thorne, son of Mrs. S. Waddington of Nanaimo
 William Lionel Wilson, son of Mr. A. R. Wilson of Chase River, BC



Vickers machine gun and trench Display at VIMM





THE STORY OF THE VIMY MEMORIAL IN WW2



Hitler visits the Vimy Memorial in June 1940. Canadians feared it would be desecrated or destroyed.

When the German Army overran France in 1940, just four years after the dedication of the Vimy Memorial, Canadians feared for the fate of the memorial at the hands of the Nazis. The Canadian Press reported its destruction and the country was outraged. Berlin denied the stories and released photos of Hitler visiting the intact site. The RAF too had photos of the still standing memorial. But, confusion reigned.

In 1942, the Legionary Magazine wrote, "Vimy Day this year was not a celebration. The Victors of Vimy did not forget that the Ridge is once again in enemy hands, that their pals who "went west" sleep in enemy-held soil. Yet they know that Vimy can be retaken. It was done before by them; it can be done again."

Quite a few RCAF pilots flew over the Memorial and confirmed its survival in the years before its liberation by the Welsh Guards in September 1944. It was undamaged, and in fact local people had laid wreathes there every November 11th – the Germans did not object. Thousands of Canadian soldiers visited before being sent home.



Field Marshal Montgomery visiting the newly liberated memorial in September 1944.

ON DISPLAY

VIMM artifacts and displays related to the Battle of Vimy Ridge, the Vimy Memorial, and the Great War.

The Great War

A letter and photos from Nanaimo's George Dorman who was wounded at the battle. His letter mentions the snow storm that hit the day before the battle.

Trench art

Souvenir handkerchiefs made by caretakers at the Vimy memorial and sold to tourists.

Bronze medallions given to the Vimy pilgrims in 1936.

Shrapnel from Vimy brought home by Nanaimo veteran.

Vickers machine gun and trench display

Nanaimo Cenotaph – soldiers' records

"Dead Man's Pennies" display

Reprint on Ghosts of Vimy painting from the House of Commons.



ON DISPLAY SIR ARTHUR CURRIE'S RIDING CROP

Sir Arthur Currie is considered one of the greatest generals of the Great War. Born in Ontario in 1875, Currie moved to British Columbia and became a teacher at Victoria High School, then had a career in real estate and insurance. He joined the militia as an officer in the 5th Field Artillery Regiment, and excelled. When the war began, Currie was offered command of a brigade in the First Division, proved his abilities at the Second Battle of Ypres (the famous gas attack) and in 1915 was promoted to command the First Division which he led in the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

Currie succeeded Byng in command of the Canadian Corps and led it successfully for the rest of the War. He was outstanding, especially in the hugely successful attacks in the final hundred days. British Prime Minister Lloyd



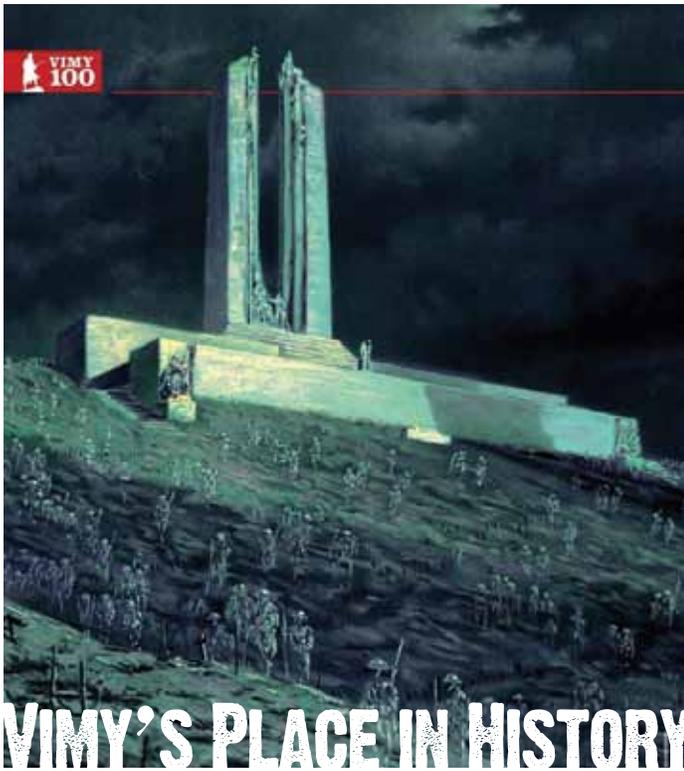
Sir Arthur Currie commanded the First Division at Vimy Ridge

Sir Arthur Currie's riding crop (below)



George, discouraged by the failures of British generals, is said to have considered Currie or Australian Corps commander John Monash to replace Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig as overall British commander.

Sir Arthur Currie's riding crop is on display at the VIMM. Currie's batman, Mr. Sommers was from Nanaimo.



VIMY'S PLACE IN HISTORY

"The Ghosts of Vimy Ridge" is the work of an Australian Captain William Longstaff and it depicts Canadian soldiers' ghosts marching up Vimy Ridge from the Douai Plain. House of Commons Canada.

The Battle of Vimy Ridge has become the most famous Canadian battle of the Great War. However, historians might point out that on August 8, 1918, the Canadian Corps won an even greater battle – one that broke the German defences. The German commander called it the black day for the German Army and lost faith in being able to win the war.

Throughout August 1918 the Canadian and Australian Corps kept up the pressure and by November the Germans agreed to an armistice. But Vimy gets the attention today. Why?

- The first battle won by the full Canadian Corps.
- The French and British armies had been unable to take the Ridge in previous battles.
- The Ridge was chosen as the site of Canada's main memorial for the Great War.
- The dedication of the Memorial became a focus for Canadian remembrance and pride.
- Journalist Pierre Berton, and others, created a legend that the battle had forged a new Canadian identity separate from that of the British Empire.

Today the Battle of Vimy Ridge and the Vimy Memorial have come to represent a statement of Canadian remembrance, pride, and nationalism.



RARE FIREARM WITH AN HISTORIC WEST COAST HISTORY

Museum President Roger Bird and museum Armourer Pat Murphy examine a Winchester Model 94, 30/30 Carbine that at one time saw service with the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers. These Winchester carbines were issued to members of the Militia that patrolled the West Coast and Vancouver Island during the dark period after Pearl Harbour. Over 100,000 British Columbians spent hundreds of hours training and patrolling the back woods to help defend against a Japanese attack. At the end of the War in the Pacific, the Carbines were offered to the militia members for a cost of \$5.00. The museum has two of these rare firearms in its collection.

15 year old Cameron Klaholz (standing) and his 11 year old brother Shonn Klaholz (sitting) from Nanaimo get a close look at the museums vast firearm collection. Their cousins from Port Alberni, Kohen Theus (right) and younger brother Erik Theus (left) spent part of the spring break getting a close up look at the museum's collection. All 4 boys were also given a safety lesson by museum armourer Pat Murphy.



A close look at the museum's firearms collection and a safety lesson!



Museum Volunteers (L to R) Alan Surgin, Ralf Clark, Alf Hackary. This trio is always a hit with visitors.

VANCOUVER ISLAND MILITARY MUSEUM DIRECTORS AND STAFF

Roger Bird, President
Brian McFadden, Vice President
Phil Harris, Secretary/Treasurer
Pat Murphy, Armourer

Jack Ziebart, Computer/Archives
Gord Buch & Bruce Davidson, Volunteer Coordinators
Bill Brayshaw, Acquisitions
Angus Scully, Newsletter Editor