

Research Notes

AGAINST: Canada came of age on the battlefield of Vimy Ridge

Sarah Chan Partner: Joanne Wong

Mr. Melnyk Period 2

Tuesday, October 15, 2002

- Vimy Ridge battle: April 9 1917, during WWI
- Rain, sleet, cold, suffering, hardship
- During battle, 3598 soldiers killed, 7004 were injured¹
- Four day battle
- “The stench of death was everywhere. There were holes and rats, I tried to erase these pictures from my memory, but I never could. War is ugly.”² (Paul Metivier, 100 yr old WWI veteran)
- Believe no specific thing that made Canada whole, takes time for country to mature
- Many more events that made Canada come of age, rather than Vimy Ridge
 - Confederation itself 1867
 - The actual act of making Canada
 - W/out it, no Canada at all
 - Trudeau’s treaty of Constitution Act
 - Allowed Canada control of their Constitution, not needing Brit. approval
 - Showed independence as nation,, gave freedom, no discrimination, offered something everyone wanted, everyone accepted it
- All battles of WWI had their individual effects, cannot say Vimy Ridge was most important
- Most of Canada’s children killed in battle, how could country come of age
- Canada was forced into war because its mother country was Britain, meaning their victory was won for British rather than for own nation
 - When Britain was involved in WWI, entire Empire (includes Canada) involved
- Some believe Canada has not become independent yet, they are dependent of US
 - When US went to war with Iraq, Canada helped US, so that they could remain dependent on the country
- “We all spent the night in a tunnel about forty feet in the earth. It was the only safe place around Vimy Ridge then for it was about as much a hell hole as one would want to be in.”³ (Private Leo Kelly; taken from his letter addressed to his father)
- “...it was horrible physically more than anything else, because if you went over the top and you got shot or killed that was the end of it.”⁴ (Private Frederick Lewis; interviewed by Tom Oates)
- Years after Vimy battle, Canada still not able to take care of themselves
 - Great depression in 1930; Canadians suffered from unemployment rate
 - October Crisis: 1970; bombing, crisis everywhere, Labour Minister and British trade commissioner kidnapped (Labour minister later murdered)

¹ “Vimy Ridge Memorial Unveiled” **CBC Archives**, <http://archives.cbc.ca/index.asp?IDLan=1> (12 Oct. 2002)

² “Canada’s Unknown Soldier Leaves World War I Killing Fields.” **POW-MIA Canada**, <http://www.martock.ca/powmia/reference/unknown1.html> (13 Oct. 2002)

³ “Private Leo Kelly’s Letter Home.” <http://www.interlog.com/~fatjack/vimy/page3.htm>. (15 Oct. 2002)

⁴ The Colonel’s Runner.” <http://www.hellfire-corner.demon.co.uk/runner.htm>. (16 Oct. 2002)

- Many more dying during Dieppe and other wars (1942-Dieppe laid sees 2700 Canadians killed/captured)

The Battle⁵

- Four Divisions of Canadian Corps attacked together for first (and last) time
- About 100000 men took part of battle
- Ridge important part of Germans' defences
- Previous attempts to capture Ridge made by Allied failed
- All thought Ridge was impossible to ever be taken over
- Much preparations for battle made, very detailed
- Built full scale version of ground for units chance to practice attack mvts
- Gathered info from aerial photos (records of German changes in defences)
- Tunnels dug under ridge (five km), lets attacking troops move closer w/safety
 - During battle, tunnels allowed wounded be brought back
 - Provide unseen and safe lines of communications
 - Dug roads and light railways, signals and supplies ready
- First had infantry attacks w/powerful artillery bombardment (last almost 3 weeks), first 2 weeks, no guns fired, so Germans could not locate them
 - Allowed Canadians familiarize with where 80% of German gun-positions were
- April 9, bad weather conditions (cold, freezing rain and sleet), muddy
- First Canadians journeyed thru no-man's land, avoiding shell-holes
- Advance behind barrage
- Middle of afternoon, three of Canadian divisions captured most of Vimy Ridge except for two spots known as 'Hill 145' and the "Pimple"
- By next day, all but few spots were in Canadian hands
- By April 12, Canadian's victory = complete
- Vimy victory came quickly, not come w/out cost, many injured and dead
- Vimy was key to German defence system⁶
 - Rose 61 metres above plain, slopes favoured defenders⁶
 - Force Canadians attack on open ground, easy targets⁶
- Had intervals of new troops to advance⁶
- Four members of Corps won Victoria Cross, Major-General Arthur Currie knighted on battlefield⁷

⁵ "Vimy Ridge – 80 years on ..." **Tom Morgan's Hellfire corner.** <http://www.fylde.demon.co.uk/vimy.htm> (12 Oct. 2002)

⁶ "The Battle of Vimy Ridge" **Veterans Affairs Canada.** <http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=history/firstwar/vimy/vimy3> (12 Oct. 2002).

⁷ "Historical Background: Vimy Ridge, France" **Canada: National Defence.** http://www.marpac.dnd.ca/new/training/BRT/historical_bground_2.htm (11 Oct. 2002)

1867-Confederation
1870-Manitoba Act; Dominion Notes Act
1871-British Columbia enters confederation
1872-Dominion Lands Act is passed
1875-construction on CPR transcontinental line begins
1876-Intercolonial Railway is completed, linking Saint John, Halifax, and Montreal
1881-Boundaries of Manitoba enlarged
1885-CPR transcontinental train finished
1899-Canada sends volunteer troops to South Africa War(Boer War)
1914-Canada and NFL enter Great War
1915-1st battle of Ypres
1917-Victory at Vimy; conscription crisis
1918-WWI ends
1925-Pacific coast hockey league folds
1930-Great Depression
1936-Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
1939-Canada declares war on Germany
1942-Dieppe raid sees 2700 Canadians killed/captured
1949-Asbestos strike –Quebec, NFL joins confederation
1950-Canada joins Korean War
1953-transmountain oil pipeline: Edmonton-Vancouver
1957-Lester B Pearson-Nobel Peace Prize, Canadian Council
1964-New Canada flag is adapted
1965-Simon Fraser University and York University opened
1967-Canada centennial York celebration new national anthem
1969-official Languages Act passed
1970-October Crisis
1976-Montreal Olympics held
1982-revised Constitution approved by British
1992-Blue Jays win world series
2002-Canadian Hockey – Female and male win Olympic Gold

Waite, Peter. Years of Struggle 1867-1896 Toronto: Goliard Limited. 1985

Bumsted, J.M. A History of the Canadian Peoples Toronto: Oxford University Press. 1995