

## **Cadet Taylor Hope's Speech March 24th**

At dawn on Easter morning April 9, 1917 - 20,000 Canadian troops poured out of the subway tunnels below Vimy Field where they'd spent the night, and began the assault on Vimy Ridge. At the time none of them knew that day, and that battle, would forever change the way the world viewed Canada. By sunset on the same day, April 9, 1917, at the battle of Vimy, Canada had become a nation in its own right.

Good afternoon Lt Governor, The Honourable David Onley, respected members of parliament, and citizens of Ontario. My name is Warrant Officer Taylor Hope and today I am here to speak to you about the importance of remembering the Battle of Vimy Ridge and The Great War; the war that defined our nation; and the men and women who served and sacrificed and ultimately have allowed us to gather here today as proud Canadians.

In 1914 Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden called out to Canadians to support and rally behind Great Britain. At the time the Regular Canadian Army had 3,100 enlisted men. One month later, 32,000 soldiers answered the call and gathered at Camp Valcartier outside of Quebec City. Some enlisted for the adventure, some for glory and some to defend their mother lands. The first of the Canadian Expeditionary Forces landed in France in February, 1915.

For 3 years the battle for Vimy Ridge stalled. The French and British allies suffered huge losses and gained very little ground. Military experts at the time believed Vimy was insurmountable. It couldn't be taken. In the fall of 1916 the Canadian Expeditionary Force were assigned to take the ridge.

Throughout that fall and winter the Canadian troops planned, prepared for and practiced every detail of their assault on Vimy on a full-scale replica of the battleground. This was the first time during the war that the four Canadian Divisions had been assigned to work and fight together. British and Canadian engineers repaired 40 kilometres of road and added almost another 5 km of new plank road. They also reconditioned 32 km of tramways, which transported gasoline, stores and ammunitions. In the walls of the tunnels, rooms were cut out for battalion headquarters, munitions, communications centres and dressing stations. All of these tunnels had piped water and most were lit by electricity. The tunnels, sealed off until the battle, were opened the morning of April 9, 1917. These tunnels helped shelter to the troops from enemy fire until the last possible moment and reduce Canadian casualties substantially.

When the tunnels and roads weren't being built, the soldiers practiced and trained for the battle. Every soldier knew what they had to do to down to the smallest detail. Three weeks before the battle began, the Canadians started to fire at the enemy fortifications. Almost 250 heavy guns and 600 pieces of field artillery were fired, accompanied by another 234 British artillery machines. It was a non-stop bombardment. On April 2, the bombardment was stepped up. From this attack, more than 80% of the German gun locations had been identified. The enemy referred to this as "the week of suffering". At last, at dawn on April 9th 1917, the Canadians streamed out of their trenches and attacked the Germans. The creeping barrage worked to perfection and by mid-afternoon, the German's remained on only two features; Hill 145 and The Pimple. By the 12th of April, the Canadians had permanently secured Vimy Ridge. It was a great victory for the Canadians and the turning point in our international reputation.

These facts are important and are a matter of public record, but what I think describes the Battle of Vimy even better are the words of Lt. Donald McPherson, a man from my hometown who served in the First World War. I'd like to quote from the journal entry he made on that evening, following the first day of the Vimy Battle:

' April 9/1917: This has been a great day. Last night was spent half-reclining in a narrow offshoot of the tunnel with the 13th Battalion men who were to go over in the first wave. Sleep was, of course, out of the question. As dawn approached, the infantrymen lined up quietly along the main corridor and filed silently up the steps into the frontline trench. At precisely 5:30 a.m. our artillery fire, which up till then had been only spasmodic, broke out in a terrific roar. Almost immediately the infantry went over the top, following closely on the curtain of artillery fire which gradually lifted farther and farther forward. The first wave of the attack carried the first and second German lines, where the most determined opposition was met, and then pushed on towards the enemy supporting troops, while the second wave, advancing overland from our support lines, followed on in the rear, ready to go through the second objective. At about 7 o'clock, just as the third wave was preparing to advance, Mr Evans and his trusty henchmen clambered over the parapet with heavy reels of wire and pushed forward into enemy country. Nothing could equal the scene of destruction and desolation wrought by the terrific concentration of our gunfire and by the fury of the infantry attack. German artillery fire was still intense but poorly directed; after the first resistance the Germans appeared to be giving way on all sides and our casualties were remarkably light. Prisoners picked their way in groups towards our rear or aided in the removal of our wounded from the battlefield. Our party soon had telephone communication established up to the Black Line, and Fallis and I went on with Lt. Evans to a point well forward, from which we could follow the events and signal back by flag.

We were all continuously under quite a heavy counter-barrage, but during the entire day none of our party was hurt. By early afternoon practically all our objectives were attained all along the line. On the left we could see the troops swarming up and over the highest points on Vimy Ridge; on the right the attack was likewise pushed home. Prisoners, guns and ammunition fell into our hands in large numbers and quantity. AT night our party established a L.O. H.Q in the Red Line and we had the satisfaction of sleeping in a deep, comfortable Fritzie dug-out, perfectly content with the day's work and humbly thankful for being still alive and unhurt when so many had paid the price. ..." (p56-58).

Canadians are quiet heroes but their staggering success at Vimy Ridge made them legends. Both the allies and the enemy started to refer to them as storm troopers, a term which inspired awe and fear in the hearts of the enemy and boosted the moral of the allies. Their triumph at Vimy determined the outcome of the Great War. But more than that, our victory at Vimy distinguished and defined Canadians to the rest of the world. The 3,600 lives lost and the 7,000 men wounded between April 9th and the 12th, 1917 at Vimy became the glue that bound Canada together as a nation. Citizens from the Atlantic to Pacific Oceans celebrated a common victory and this forged the collective identity of Canada. Canada was geographically defined and legislated at Confederation in 1867 but our true genesis came at Vimy Ridge fifty years later from the mud, blood and artillery smoke of the battle. Throughout the world Canadians are still known and respected for their courage, sacrifice, discipline and humility. They

accomplish what are often thought to be impossible tasks, like most recently, the rescue of the Chilean miners. And find solutions where none were thought to exist like the Suez Canal crisis.

After the First World War there were 69 Victoria Cross Medals awarded to Canadians. The Victoria Cross could only be awarded to British or Commonwealth citizens for "gallantry of the highest order". Four Victoria Crosses were earned at Vimy Ridge. In Ontario there were 11 Victoria Cross Medals awarded and probably the most famous recipient was Billy Bishop who claimed Owen Sound as his home town.

The Army Cadet Organization, originally formed between 1861 and 1865 in response to the Fenian raids and the American Civil War, also played a role in WW1. It sent approximately 40,000 Army Cadets to serve between 1914 and 1918. By the end of the war there were 64,000 cadets enrolled in the Army Cadet Program across Canada. I stand before you today as a part of that same program.

In April of last year I boarded a train at Union Station, bound for Ottawa. I never dreamed that a year later I would still be on that journey. My original destination was the EWC program, Vimy: Canada's Coming of Age, but it has turned into so much more. I opened a file in the Canadian archives that hadn't been touched since 1917 and learned the story of Lt Sheffield who died of the wounds he sustained fighting at Vimy on his second tour during WW1. More recently I wrote an essay and had the privilege and honour to read two firsthand accounts of WW1 - the diaries of Lt. Donald Macpherson (M.M.) and his brother Lt. Douglas Macpherson, (M.C.). I met the nieces of the 4 Macpherson brothers that served in the Great War. Only 3 of them came home; Captain Ross Macpherson was killed in action and awarded the D.S.O. medal. I have become acquainted with heroes.

I invite you to join me on my journey, even if just for a short while. I don't just want to leave you with the echo of my words but I want to leave you with a challenge; not just to remember the Battle of Vimy but to revive the memory of those who served there. Go to your Cenotaph, legion, local museum or library. Look for long forgotten plaques on the walls of schools, churches and public buildings; they are reminders that we walk by everyday without seeing. Find out about them. Learn the name of just one WW1 Veteran from your home town and tell their story; make their contribution part of your family conversations and share it with your children and grandchildren. These men and women defined our nation and they deserve to be remembered.

The Lorne Scots Peel, Dufferin and Halton Regiment, the regiment my cadet corps is affiliated with, has a motto, and I believe that this motto remains true to this day, not only for the Battle of Vimy Ridge and the First World War, but for all the Canadian engagements past and present. Their motto, "Air-Son-Ar-Duthchais" means "For our heritage". Please remember the Battle of Vimy and the significant and defining role it played in the creation of our Nation. Honour those who fought and fell by upholding the values characterized on April 9, 1917, that Canada continues to represent and be celebrated for today.

Air-Son-Ar-Duthchais; for our heritage. Lest We Forget.

Thank you.