

# NEVER FORGET



## WHEN CANADA WENT TO

war in 1914, many young men signed up thinking it would all be over by Christmas. No-one expected four long, miserable years of trench warfare, or realized how many would never come home. By 1918, out of a population of 8 million, about 595,000 Canadians had enlisted, 418,000 went overseas and more than 60,000 died, not even mentioning the enormous contribution from farms and factories.

Four hundred and fifty men and seven women from Westminster Church, and over 300 from Young, signed up. Westminster opened up its facilities for soldiers in training. All Saints dedicated a new pipe organ as a memorial to the members of the congregation who “had made the supreme sacrifice” – to mention only a fraction of the war effort.

Today the “War to End All Wars” has faded from our memory. One battle is commemorated at Vimy Ridge Park. We owe this memorial to the persistence and dedication of one man, Ed Russenholt, who would not let the memory of the 44<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division – Six Thousand Canadian Men – die.

Vimy Ridge was a German-held, heavily-fortified ridge in northeastern France which had frustrated British and French troops for two years. In a four-day assault starting on Easter Monday, April 9, 1917, four Canadian divisions, 40,000 in all, took the ridge, with the 44<sup>th</sup> Battalion taking the highest point, a heavily fortified outcropping called The Pimple. The capture of Vimy Ridge cost 3,600 killed and 7000 wounded.

Many of the young men who served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force were recent immigrants. When they joined up, they may not have thought of themselves as Canadians, but as British subjects, or perhaps as Manitobans or Nova Scotians or Torontonians. Serving together as Canadians forged a sense of national identity, reinforced by the reputation Canadian troops earned in war. Vimy Ridge was a battle that helped to turn a colony into a nation.

The soldiers of the 44<sup>th</sup> raised a memorial to their comrades on the crest of the Pimple in 1917. It was later dismantled and sent to St. James Park where it was dedicated in 1926. In 1963, Veterans Affairs decided to abandon the memorial. Edgar Russenholt, who had served with the 44<sup>th</sup> and served as secretary-treasurer of the Battalion association ever since the war, rallied the survivors in a passionate appeal to preserve the memorial. On June 15, 1967, the restored monument was dedicated in a park now renamed **VIMY RIDGE MEMORIAL PARK**.

The 44<sup>th</sup> Battalion merged with Royal Winnipeg Rifles (the Little Black Devils) in the 1960s. Edgar Russenholt died in 1991 at the remarkable age of 100. Besides his long-time dedication to the memory of the 44<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Mr. Russenholt was a local historian and advocate of many community issues, including the preservation of Omand's Creek for recreation.

## OTHER MEMORIES

The Cameron Highlanders Memorial Chapel  
First Presbyterian Church  
near Vimy Park  
The 79<sup>th</sup> Cameron Highlanders (“Ralph Connor’s” unit) also distinguished themselves at Vimy.

Wesley Unions of Young Church was wounded at Vimy Ridge.  
“If it hadn’t been that his parents had given him a little testament, and he’d put it in his left pocket, he’d have been killed – it had the nose cap of the bullet right in it – embedded in it.”  
– Kathleen Runions  
(Our Church is Not a Building)

The 19<sup>th</sup> Winnipeg Troop Boy Scouts, St. James Park Congregational Church, was temporarily disbanded when Scoutmaster Percy T. Cox and several patrol leaders enlisted in the 90<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Royal Winnipeg Rifles). Lieut. Cox was killed in action in France.