

VIMY RIDGE

09 - 14 April 1917



Canadian advancing through German wire entanglements at Vimy Ridge, April 1917¹

The Battle of Vimy Ridge, Canada's most celebrated military victory, looms large in the nations' imagined history and identity.

Over six days, April 9th through April 14th, 1917, all four divisions of the 100,000-strong Canadian Corps fought together for the first time. Battalions recruited from nearly every city, town, village, and rural district across the country took the offensive against a German army dug in on the prominent seven-kilometer-long escarpment rising to 60 meters (200 feet) above the open countryside of the Douai Plains, north of the town of Arras, France. They stormed a five-to-eight-kilometers deep complex of trenches, barbed wire, concrete machine gun bunkers, fortified strong points, and underground chambers, connected by a web of communication trenches, where more than 150,000 French soldiers had been killed or wounded in 1915 when they twice tried to capture the ridge.

Fighting through sleet, mud and shellfire, the Canadian Corps forced the German army back almost five kilometers, achieving the greatest single Allied advance on the Western Front to that point in the war. In doing so the Canadian Corps and the British XVII Corps on their southern flank seized more ground, more guns, and more prisoners than any previous British Expeditionary Force (BEF) offensive. The price of the victory, however, was staggering. Capture of the ridge cost 3,598 Canadian lives and another 7,004 wounded².

Among those 10,602 casualties there were 23 young men from Perth and area. On the first day of the battle a pair of brothers died side-by-side. The fighting created three widows who had been wives for less than a year. The dead included a 17-year-old high school student and a 'British Home Boy'. Three more were simultaneously taken prisoners of war. In all, 11 were killed, nine wounded and three taken prisoner - young men who left their schoolbooks, farmyards, and small-town jobs to fight for their belief in 'God, King, Country and Empire'.

¹ Image courtesy of LAC.

² The Germans suffered 20,000 casualties with another 4,000 men taken prisoner.



Private Thomas Salem Beatty (Reg. No. 629103) was struck by shell splinters on Thursday, April 12th, while *“one of a ‘mopping up’ party in the assault and was wounded in the legs and chest. He was evacuated to No. 6 Casualty Clearing Station where he succumbed to his wounds six days later”*.³ Born at Perth in 1884, Thomas was the son of James Beatty (1824-1898) and Margaret Anne Quigley (1881-1943). In 1909 had married Margaret Jane Quigley (1881-1943). Beatty was living in Vancouver, British Columbia, where he had served with the 11th Irish Fusiliers of Canada militia regiment, and was working as an auto mechanic, when he enlisted with the 47th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) on July 8, 1915, at Vernon, BC. He was 31 years of age. Beatty had already been wounded, in January 1916, when he sustained shrapnel wounds to his right arm. After a lengthy recovery from those injuries, he rejoined his unit on February 3, 1917, in time to participate in the attack on Vimy Ridge where he was killed. He was buried in Barlin Communal Cemetery Extension, Pas-de-Calais, France (Grave I.A.45).



Private Thomas Henry Booton (Reg. No. 787086) was born in England in 1896, the son of Thomas Henry Booton and Matilda Flowers. When he enlisted at Perth with the 130th Battalion on July 4, 1916, at the age of 20, he gave his trade as ‘farmer’ and his local address as c/o George Oliver at Rideau Ferry where he was probably employed as a farm-hand. In France, Booton saw service with the 39th Battalion and was attached to the 4th Canadian Machine Gun Corps on April 9, 1917, when he sustained gunshot wounds to his left shoulder. He recovered from his injuries and survived the war to be demobilized in June 1919. Thomas Booton married Isabel May Samways at Lanark in 1925, died at Renfrew in 1985 and was buried in Elmwood Cemetery at Perth.

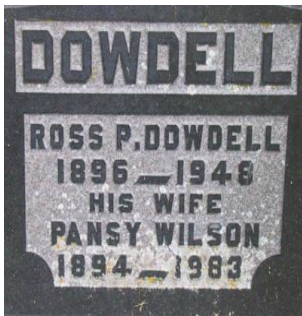


Private James Clement (Reg. No. 787088) was farming at McDonald’s Corners, Dalhousie Township, when he enlisted, aged 24 years, with the 130th Battalion at Perth on January 4, 1916. The son of Angus Clement (1842-1941) and Agnes Gilchrist (1860-1898), he was born at Mississippi Station in 1892 and had trained for two years with the 42nd (Lanark & Renfrew) Militia Regiment prior to enlisting with the CEF. Before he shipped out to Europe, Clement married Mary Philomena Christie (1889-1965) of Drummond Township, in March 1916 at Perth. In July 1916, while still in training at Valcartier, Quebec, he sustained his first wound, an unspecified injury above his left eye. Arriving in France in November 1916 he was transferred to the 5th Canadian Machine Gun Company. Although the exact date went unrecorded, at some time during the fighting on Vimy Ridge, between the 9th and 14th of April 1917, Clement suffered severe shrapnel wounds to his abdomen. He died on May 5th at No.6 Casualty Clearing Station and was buried in Barlin Communal Cemetery Extension, Pas-de-Calais, France (Grave I.A.73).

³ Canada War Grave Register - Circumstances of Casualty.



Private Russell James Dickson (Reg. No. 787020) was born in 1897, the son of Thomas James Dickson (1863-1931) and Mary Ann Martin (1871-1930), of Perth. He was just 18 years of age and unmarried when he enlisted with the 130th Battalion CEF, at Smiths Falls on October 18, 1915. A laborer before he went to war, Dickson reached France in November 1916 and joined the 3rd Canadian Infantry Battalion on March 22, 1917. At Vimy Ridge on April 11, 1917, he sustained a gunshot wound to his right thigh and died the following day at No.22 Casualty Clearing Station. He was buried in Bruay Communal Cemetery Extension, Pas-de-Calais, France (Grave E.29).



Private Ross Parker Dowdall (Reg. No. 835079) reported two months prior service with the 60th (Moose Jaw) Rifles Militia when he enlisted with the 146th Battalion CEF at Westport, Ontario, on December 14, 1915. Born in 1896 at Bolingbroke, South Sherbrooke Township, the son of Samuel Dowdall (1850-1939) and Margaret Cory (1852-1921), Dowdall was a 19 year old unmarried farmer. Upon reaching France he joined the 95th Battalion and, on November 3, 1916, transferred to the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles. At Vimy Ridge on April 11, 1917, Dowdall sustained a gunshot wound to his right side. After nearly four months treatment at hospitals in France and England he returned to duty and was promoted Lance Corporal in November 1917. Dowdall survived the war and was demobilized in January 1919. He married Pansy Pearly Wilson in 1920 at Lanark and died at Carleton Place in 1946.



Private George Smyth Earle (Reg. No. 219833) was born at Belfast, Ireland, in 1894, the son of Edward James Earle and Mary Ellen Smyth. He was unmarried, resident at the Albion Hotel, Perth⁴, and working as a machinist when he enlisted, age 21, with the 80th Battalion CEF at Barriefield (Kingston) on October 22, 1915. Fighting on the Somme in November 1916 with the 73rd Battalion, Earle was buried by a shell explosion, and lost much of his hearing. Then, on April 13, 1917, at Vimy Ridge, he sustained shrapnel wounds to his left arm and a concussion. In June 1918, suffering from those wounds, as well as nephritis and exposure, he was invalided home to Canada and discharged at Kingston as 'medically unfit'. In 1924 he married Mable Annie Philip (b.1898) at Toronto. His place and date of death are unknown.

⁴ The Albion Hotel at 136 Gore Street East was destroyed by fire in December 1916.



Private Craig William Greer (Reg. No. 787029) was taken prisoner of war (POW) during the Battle of Vimy Ridge when his section of the 75th Infantry Battalion was overrun by a German counterattack. Born at Maberly in 1895 to George Greer (1851-1941) and Mary Clark Graham (1861-1920), Private Greer was farming when he enlisted, at age 21, with the 130th Battalion CEF on November 25, 1915, at Perth.⁵ On April 9th, 1917, the opening day of the battle, Greer was listed as missing in action and it was not until May 7th that he was registered as a POW at Limburg (and later Dülmen and Heilsburg), Germany. He was taken prisoner at the same time as Privates Walter Roffey and Jack Scott of Perth (see below). On November 12, 1917, an Army Records Office cable informed his parents that he had died in captivity and was believed to be dead until he was released from detention on December 10, 1918. On his returned to Canada, he was discharged as 'medically unfit' in February 1919. In 1934 he married Florence Agnes McDougall at Perth. During WW2 he re-enlisted and served with the Home Guard. Craig Greer died in 1984 and was buried at Maberly.



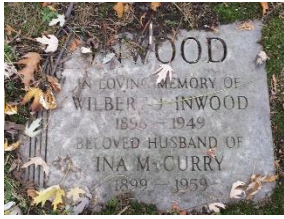
Private Gordon James Hamilton (Reg. No. 455670), born in 1897 at Perth, the son of James Hamilton (1857-1907) and Mary Thomson (1859-1903), was an 18 year old farmer until he enlisted with the 59th Battalion CEF on October 18, 1915, at Barriefield (Kingston). Serving with the 18th Battalion at the Battle of Vimy Ridge, Hamilton suffered severe injuries on April 9, 1917, when he was shot in the face, the bullet passing from right to left through his lower jaw and throat. He also sustained a more superficial wound to his left hip. He spent the remainder of the war undergoing treatment in a series of seven hospitals, until he was invalided home to Canada in April 1918 and medically discharged in July 1918. Despite the severity of his injuries, while still hospitalized in England, Hamilton married Lillian May Tait (1895-1967) on December 17, 1917. James Hamilton died, aged 76 years, on January 17, 1973, at Lanark and was buried in Pine Grove Cemetery, Lanark Township.



Sergeant Graham Howie (Reg. No. 5108) had his promotion to the rank of Sergeant confirmed on April 17, 1917, a week after he was killed in the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Born at Perth in 1894, the son of John Howie (1862-1937) and Sarah Graham (1865-1930), he was unmarried and a machinist by trade when, at age 20, he enlisted with the CEF at Valcartier on September 23, 1914. Serving in France with the 1st Field Troop, Canadian Engineers, Howie rose from the rank of Sapper to Lance Corporal in April 1916 and then to Acting Sergeant in January 1917 but did not survive to see that promotion confirmed. As reported in his hometown paper, "*he was the only surviving man of his company after the Vimy Ridge battle of the 9th, and the following day he, too, fell never to rise*". Howie was killed in action on April 10, 1917, and buried in Villers Station Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France (Grave VII.J.11).⁶

⁵ Craig Greer's brothers also served during WW1. George Steven Greer (1891-1917), 223 Battalion CEF, died of pneumonia in France and James Coleman Greer (1893-1981), 240th Battalion CEF, survived the war.

⁶ Graham Howie's brother, William George Howie (1888-1952), was for many years Town Engineer at Perth.



Private Wilbert John Inwood (Reg. No. 410826), the son of John Inwood (1858-1901) and Elizabeth Budd (1858-1920), was born in Drummond Township in 1895. He was a 20-year-old unmarried farmer and machinist, who had been active with the 42nd (Lanark & Renfrew) Militia Regiment, when he enlisted with the 38th Battalion CEF at Ottawa on March 29, 1915. Assigned to the 2nd Infantry Battalion in France, he was serving with the Stretcher Bearer Section at the Battle of Vimy Ridge on April 10, 1917, when he was struck in the groin by shrapnel, losing his left testicle. Inwood quickly recovered from his wound and, after rejoining his unit, was wounded a second time when shot in the left hip on August 17, 1918. Inwood survived the war and was discharged at Ottawa in February 1919. He married Ina May Curry (1899-1959) at Peterborough in 1921. Inwood died at Toronto on October 20, 1949, and was buried in Park Lawn Cemetery, Toronto.



Private Thomas John Irvine (Reg. No. 219816), born in 1890 at Edinburgh, Scotland, listed "*Mrs. Benjamin Kerr, 2nd Line Drummond, R.R. #1, Perth*" (Hannah Irvine-Kerr 1884-1965) as his sister and next-of-kin when he enlisted at age 25 with the 80th Battalion CEF at Brockville on September 29, 1915. Although his service file also mentions two married sisters living in Glasgow, Scotland, he appears to have been a 'British Home Child' (BHC)⁷, whose parents are unknown. He seems likely to have been the Thomas Irvine, age 13 (born 1890-1891) who sailed from Scotland on the S.S. *Corinthian* in 1904, destination Brockville, under the Quarrier Homes program. In France, Irvine served with 4th and 51st Infantry Battalions and was fighting with the 75th Battalion on April 9, 1917, when he was declared 'missing and presumed dead'. "*He went 'over the top' with his battalion during the attack at Vimy Ridge and since then no information has been received concerning him*".⁸ Many of the dead on Vimy Ridge were lost or buried where they lay, with makeshift markers. His body, entombed in the mud or shredded beyond recognition, Thomas Irvine is memorialized among the more than 11,000 missing named on the Canadian National Vimy Memorial⁹.

⁷ An estimated 10,000 young men who had arrived in Canada under the auspices of various British Home Children (BHC) programs enlisted to fight with the CEF During WW1.

⁸ Canada War Grave Register - Circumstances of Casualty.

⁹ The Vimy Memorial commemorates all of Canada's WW1 dead, not just those killed at Vimy Ridge. The 11,000 'unknowns' are those whose bodies were never recovered from all the battlefields of the conflict.



Lance Corporal William Graham Knowles (Reg. No. 219949) was born at Hopetown, Lanark Township, in 1895, the son of Hugh Knowles (1866-1930) and Jennie Baird (1868-1931). He had grown up at Balderson and was living in Merrickville when he joined the CEF. 'Willy' was a tinsmith by trade and had been active with the 56th (Grenville 'Lisgar Rifles') Militia Regiment prior to the war. He was 20 years of age and unmarried when he enlisted with the 80th (Belleville) Battalion at Barriefield (Kingston) on October 22, 1915. Promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal in December 1915, he was attached to the 74th Battalion in England in May 1916 and transferred to the 102nd Canadian Infantry Battalion in July when he reached the battlefields of France a month later. Lance Corporal Knowles was killed in action on April 9,

1917, the opening day of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. He was buried in Givenchy Road Canadian Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France (Grave A.18). On the same day and on the same battlefield, his brother Hughie also paid the supreme price.



Private Hugh Lloyd Knowles (Reg. No. 219014) intended only to visit his younger brother Willy at Barriefield and wish him well as he prepared to sail for Europe with the 80th (Belleville) Battalion of the CEF but, at the last moment, decided to enlist himself. The eldest son of Hugh Knowles Sr. (1866-1930) and Jennie Baird (1868-1931), Hughie had been born in 1888 at Poland, Dalhousie Township, and grew up at Hopetown and Balderson. He married Mable Warren (1887-1972) at Balderson in 1911 and was working as an accountant for the Percival Plow Company at Merrickville when, at age 28, he joined the 80th (Belleville) Battalion of the CEF on April 11, 1916. Like his brother, Hughie Knowles was sent to the 74th Battalion in England and then to

the 102nd Canadian Infantry Battalion when he reached France. On Easter Monday 1917, Hughie Knowles was killed in action on Vimy Ridge within hours of his brother Willy's death. He is buried near his brother in Givenchy Road Canadian Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France (Grave A.10).



Lieutenant William John McLean was born at Perth in 1890, the son of David McLean (1864-1936) and Isabella Gallagher (1869-1936) of Drummond Township. He was educated at Perth and graduated from McGill University as a dental surgeon. He had established a dental practice at Toronto shortly before he enlisted with the 130th Battalion CEF on March 31, 1916, at age 26. McLean had formerly served with the 42nd (Lanark & Renfrew) Militia Regiment. Before going overseas, he married Marguerite Myrtle Wilson (b.1895) on September 18, 1916. Three weeks later he arrived in England, was commissioned as a Lieutenant in the 130th Battalion in November and joined the 18th Infantry Battalion in

France later that month. On April 9, 1917, Lieutenant William McLean was killed in the opening hours of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. The 18th Battalion War Diary records that "*Major C.C. Gwyn ... was killed by a M.G. [machinegun] bullet, about 100 yards from the objective and Lieut. W.J. McLean was also killed while leading his men across 'No-man's-land'.*" As the fighting went on McLean was buried on the field, but his body was later exhumed and re-buried in Ecoivres Military Cemetery, Mont-Saint-Éloi, Pas-de-Calais, France (Grave V.H.1).



Private Shirley John MacDonnell (Reg. No. 536017) was born at Almonte in 1898 but grew up at Perth where his father, Philip John Cotter MacDonnell (1862-1940), was manager of the local branch of the Bank of Montreal. His mother was Lilly Hall Smith (b.1866). Shirley MacDonnell attended Perth Public School and Perth Collegiate Institute and, on his July 6, 1916 enlistment documents, also gave 'banker' as his profession. He joined the Queen's University Field Ambulance, and at the end of November 1916 was assigned to Canadian Army Medical Corps', 5th Canadian Field Ambulance. While evacuating wounded from the battlefield at Vimy Ridge, Private MacDonnell was seriously injured by a gas attack and spent much of his time over the next year in hospitals in France and England. He survived the effects of the gas, however, and returned to duty as an orderly at Etaples Military Hospital, France, in March 1918. Then, on May 19, 1918, a German air raid destroyed the hospital and MacDonnell "... was killed instantly by concussion of a bomb and never knew what hit him".¹⁰ MacDonnell was buried in Etaples Military Cemetery, Etaples, France (Grave LXVIII.C.25)¹¹.



Private Thomas McVeigh (Reg. No. 931528) was working as a 'lumberman' at Jaffray, British Columbia, in the southeastern corner of the province, when he enlisted with the 158th (Vancouver) Battalion CEF on May 29, 1916. He was, however, a Perth native, born in 1880, the son of Joseph McVeigh (1843-1907) and Jane Paul (1842-1928). McVeigh was unmarried and 36 years of age when he was transferred to the 225th Battalion, and then to the 54th Battalion, in France. In the course of the first day's fighting at Vimy Ridge, Private McVeigh was reported missing, and it was not until May 19th that he was confirmed killed in action on April 9th. His body was recovered buried in Givenchy-en-Gohelle, Canadian Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France, where he shares a grave marker with two 'unknown' Canadian soldiers.



Private Stuart McIntyre Moodie (Reg. No. 195343), born in 1897 on the Scotch Line in North Burgess Township, was the son of Abraham B. Moodie (1864-1924) and Margaret Allan (1865-1929). He was an 18-year-old unmarried farm boy when he enlisted with the 93rd (Peterborough) Battalion CEF on November 29, 1915. When he reached England, Moodie transferred to the 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles Battalion in September 1916. On April 11, 1917, he sustained serious shrapnel wounds to the arm, abdomen and crotch "... during an attack on Vimy Ridge ... He was taken to a dressing station, from there

¹⁰ Letter dated May 27, 1928, from CAMC Officer Dr. John Ower of Smiths Falls, published in the *Perth Courier*, June 28, 1918. In all, 300 patients and staff were killed or wounded. The Etaples Hospital bombing also injured Nursing Sister E. Gallagher, of Fallbrook, while Nursing Sister Isobel Watts, of Perth, escaped injury.

¹¹ On the home front, Private Shirley MacDonnell's brother, Philip MacDonnell (1900-1918), was killed on November 30, 1917, in an explosion at the British Chemical Company's munitions plant at Trenton, Ontario. Among the six young men who died, three were from Perth - MacDonnell (17), James Bernard Smith (18), and Edwin Noonan (19).

evacuated to No.18 Casualty Clearing Station where he died two days later".¹² He was buried at Lapugnoy Military Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France (Grave II. B. 15).¹³



Private Walter Roffey (Reg. No. 787136) was a barber turned soldier when he enlisted with the 130th Battalion CEF on March 5, 1916, at Perth. He had been born in 1896 at Lanark, the son of Frederick William Roffey (1867-1937) and Lillian Hamilton (b.1873) and was unmarried. Roffey was serving with the 75th Infantry Battalion when reported missing in action on April 8, 1917, on Vimy Ridge. Six weeks later, on June 22nd, it was confirmed that he had been captured and was a prisoner of war at Limburg, Germany. Roffey had been taken prisoner at same time as Jack Scott and Craig Greer (see above & below). In October 1918 he was transferred to a POW camp at Minden (Hanover), where he remained until he was released on Christmas Eve 1918. Repatriated to Canada, Roffey received his discharge from the army on February 27, 1919. He married Hazel Pearl Eady (b.1894) in 1920. Roffey died at Perth in December 1981 and was buried in Elmwood Cemetery.



Private John Wallace Scott (Reg. No. 787054) was a pharmacist, born in 1895 at Lanark, the son of James Gould Scott (1865-1935) and Christina Henderson Mowat (1863-1933) of McDonald's Corners. When he enlisted with the 130th Battalion CEF at Perth on November 30, 1915, he joined his father and three brothers as soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.¹⁴ Serving with the 75th Infantry Battalion in France, Private Scott was listed 'missing in action' on, April 9th, 1917, the opening day of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, but then, on April 22nd, recorded a prisoner of war at Limburg, Germany. He had been captured at the same time as Walter Roffey and Craig Greer (see above) when a German counterattack had overrun their section of the 75th Battalion. On November 13, 1917, Scott was reported to have died of wounds while a POW at Friedrichsfeld, North-Rhenish Provinces, Germany, but that proved untrue when the Red Cross determined that he had been transferred to a camp at Münster, and then to Doeberitz and Parchim. When he was released on January 6, 1919, he spent a short time as a patient at the Canadian General Hospital Etaples before being shipped home to Canada in March. He received his army discharge on April 2, 1919. Jack Scott died in 1963.

¹² Canada War Grave Register - Circumstances of Casualty.

¹³ His brother, Robert Moodie (1895-1971), enlisted with the 181st Battalion at Brandon, Manitoba.

¹⁴ Within a single year, between September 1916 and September 1917, the father was injured in the line of duty, two sons were killed, another wounded, and the fourth taken prisoner of war. See *A Story of the Great War – The Scott Family of McDonald's Corners*, elsewhere on the Perth & District Historical Society, website <https://www.perthhs.org/documents/story-of-the-great-war.pdf>



Lieutenant John Thornton (Reg. No. 222214) was a 28 year old unmarried barber, born in 1887 at Ottawa, but living at Lanark, when he enlisted at Halifax, Nova Scotia, with the 85th (Nova Scotia Highlanders) Battalion of the CEF – or at least so he claimed on his attestation papers dated December 20, 1915. That document, however, also registers his next of kin as “*Mrs. Alexander McIntyre, Lanark, (Aunt)*” while the form in his army service file registering his death 50 years later records his name as “*McIntyre, Alexander aka John Thornton*”. In fact, ‘John Thornton’ was

John Ancell Thornton McIntyre, born at Lanark on September 21, 1887, the son of John Yuill McIntyre (b.1862) and Margaret Ann Rankin (1864-1911). Why he chose to obscure his true identity when he enlisted is unknown. His brother, Roy McIntyre, enlisted under his correct name in 1914.¹⁵ Although he claimed no prior militia service, Thornton/McIntyre rose rapidly through the ranks. He was promoted Corporal in October 1916 and then Sergeant on April 2, 1917, 10 days before he sustained gunshot wounds to his scalp at Vimy Ridge on April 12th. He survived that wound, only to be shot again, through right arm and wrist, on July 11, 1917, a wound he also survived. On November 23, 1918, shortly after the war ended, Thornton/McIntyre was commissioned at the rank of Lieutenant in the 17th Reserve Battalion. He returned to Canada, was discharged on August 6, 1919, and died at London, Ontario, on March 31, 1965.



Lieutenant Coral Wesley Topping (Reg. No. 2138) was a son of the manse. His father, Rev. Dr. Nassau Bolton Topping (1844-1939), was the Methodist minister at Perth. His mother was Katherine Cooke (1850-1919). Topping was born at Fitzroy Harbour in 1890, but graduated from Perth Collegiate Institute and then completed an M.A. at Queen’s University, Kingston, where he also served in the Cadet Corps. In February 1915, he enlisted as a Private with No. 6 Field Ambulance at Montreal and upon reaching the war front was attached to the 21st Infantry Battalion. In September 1916 he was promoted Lance Corporal and then, in December, appointed Temporary Lieutenant, a promotion to commissioned rank confirmed in February 1917. Serving with the 21st Battalion at Vimy Ridge on April 11th Topping suffered a serious gunshot wound to his thigh and a broken femur. After time in hospitals in France and England he was repatriated to Canada in September 1917 for further treatment. He was discharged as medical unfit for further service in February 1918. Topping married Marjory May Ellis (1897-1972) in 1925. He died at Vancouver, aged 98 years, on February 21, 1988.

¹⁵ Roy McIntyre was killed in 1915 at the Second Battle of Ypres. See *Captain Hooper’s Farmhouse* elsewhere on the Perth & District Historical Society website at <https://www.perthhs.org/documents/captain-hooper-farmhouse.pdf>



Private Alvin Smith Wilson (Reg. No. 787169), born at Perth in 1899, was the son of Dr. Samuel Churchill Wilson (1858-1946) and Ethel Matilda Smith (1872-1920). At age 17, he was still a student at Perth Collegiate Institute when he enlisted with the 130th Battalion CEF as a bandsman, a role he had previously discharged with the 42nd (Lanark & Renfrew) Militia Regiment. Wilson arrived in France in February 1917 where he was transferred to the 75th Infantry Battalion. Less than two months later, on April 11, 1917, he suffered gunshot wounds to his left shoulder and side. He received initial treatment at No. 32 Stationary Hospital Wimereux, France, before transfer to No. 2 Australian General Hospital where he died of his wounds on April 19, 1917. Alvin Wilson was buried in Wimereaux Communal Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France (Grave II. I. I).



Lieutenant Herbert John Wilson, no relation to Private Alvin Wilson, was the son of John Wilson (1848-1919) and Jane Bowie (1856-1930), born at Perth in 1883. He was a clerk employed by the CPR and a veteran of the 42nd (Lanark & Renfrew) Militia Regiment when he enlisted with the 130th Battalion CEF at Ottawa on February 21, 1916. Wilson was serving with the 19th Infantry Battalion when, on April 9, 1917, at Vimy Ridge, he sustained a serious gunshot wound to his right side and upper back, including a broken rib. Recovery was slow and complicated by a diagnosis of Trench Fever¹⁶. He was granted sick leave in Canada from July through November 1917, but when he returned to England he was immediately re-admitted to hospital with fever and a poorly healed wound. The bullet was finally removed that December. Wilson was invalided home to Canada in March 1918 and received his army discharge in September 1919. In 1921 he married Isabel Mary Henderson (1875-1941). He died at Perth on June 12, 1931.

Perhaps to help assuage the grief, and to invest 10,602 dead and wounded with a significance equal to the sacrifice, the victory at Vimy Ridge was much celebrated back in Canada and soon became fraught with symbolism. In April 1917, battalions from every part of Canada had fought together in common cause, and in the post war years their brotherhood of arms came to represent the emergence of a new nation, born in blood, and the focus of growing national pride and awareness.

In a religious age the huge loss of life at Vimy Ridge also acquired spiritual significance because the battle began on an Easter Monday. As historian Jonathan Vance observed, "*Once the battle was identified with the rebirth of Christ, it was only a small step to connect Vimy with the birth of a nation*".¹⁷ The battle became emblematic of Canada's overall experience in the First World War as the country looked for meaning, not just in the dead on Vimy Ridge, but in the 60,000 Canadians who died in those four years of blood-letting.

¹⁶ 'Trench fever' (*febris quintana*), is a moderately serious disease transmitted by body lice, caused by the bacterium Bartonella Quintana. Between 1915 and 1918 between one-fifth and one-third of all British troops reported sick with trench fever. Affected soldiers were unfit for duty for at least 60 days and sometimes much longer.

¹⁷ *Battle Verse: Poetry and Nationalism After Vimy Ridge*, by Jonathan Vance (2007).

The nationalist interpretation of Vimy Ridge gave the Canadian Government confidence to insist upon separate representation for Canada and the other Dominions at the Paris peace talks after the war (and in later decades to push for autonomy from Britain on the world's stage).

The reputation and impact of Vimy Ridge was, however, largely the result of nationalist mythmaking. In truth, the battle was just one element of the much larger Battle of Arras and was never an exclusively Canadian victory. Canada did not, in fact, stand apart from Britain and her empire at Vimy. The Canadian Corps was still acting under command of British General Sir Julian Byng (1862-1935) and other senior officers of the British high command.¹⁸ British artillery support, engineers and supply units were essential to Canadian success.

Moreover, despite more than 10,000 casualties, Vimy Ridge contributed nothing to the eventual outcome of WW1. The French offensive of 1917 (of which Vimy was intended as a tactical diversion) failed. No significant Allied breakthrough followed either the assault on the ridge or the wider battle. Canadian victories at Hill 70 in August 1917, and at Amiens and Cambrai in 1918, had far greater impact on the course of the war.

Nevertheless, although the Battle of Vimy Ridge was just one more WW1 battle that achieved little or nothing of strategic or tactical importance, from the mythmaking that came to surround it, a Canadian national consciousness emerged - something that had not existed before those Perth boys and their comrades went 'over the top' at 5:30 a.m. on Easter Monday April 9, 1917.

- *Ron W. Shaw (2022)*

¹⁸ Canadian General Sir William Arthur Currier (1875-1933) only assumed command of the Canadian Corps in June 1917 after the Battle of Vimy Ridge.