

Friday 18 November 2005

Vimy.doc

(as delivered)

General Manson, National Defence Minister, Veterans Affairs Minister, Family, Friends and Comrades:

Tonight we remember Vimy. How that word resonates in Canadian hearts and minds! In April 1917 at Vimy we acted together and achieved together what had seemed impossible. Neither the British nor the French had managed to take that high ground, but we did, and in doing so took more ground, guns and prisoners than had yet been taken in any Allied offensive.

Canada came of age at Vimy. Honoured be the memory of the Canadian soldiers who fought there that day---sacred the memory of those who died!

I am most grateful to you, General, and to your colleagues who thought that the Vimy Award might come my way this year. It is a great honour indeed. Looking down the list of my predecessors I can say that I have known most of them, admired them all, and am abashed to find myself in their company. Abashed, and very proud.

*Les canadiens ne sont pas belliqueux. Néanmoins notre nation a été formée pendant nos guerres, surtout pendant celle de 1812 et les grandes guerres mondiales du siècle dernier. Hélas! telle qu'enseignée dans nos écoles aujourd'hui, notre histoire n'est qu'un simple récital des processus économiques et sociaux, avec le résultat que nos enfants ne connaissent pas même les noms des plus notables de nos chefs de guerre.*

*Ils ne connaissent pas grand chose, non plus, de nos guerres elles-mêmes. Lors du régime français, de la révolution américaine, et de la guerre de 1812 nous avons combattu pour notre indépendance à nous. Lors des deux guerres mondiales et la guerre de Corée, nous avons combattu pour l'indépendance des autres. Nous pouvons---et nous devons---dire à nos enfants que nous avons toujours combattu du bon côté.*

I belong to one of our war-time generations, and served overseas from 1939 to 1945. I spent the first years with an artillery militia regiment amid the pleasures of the English countryside. The real war began for me when I was sent to Italy to join that famous permanent force regiment, the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery, at Ortona at the end of 1943.

How the distant roar of artillery fire impressed me as I approached Ortona in a railway box car on that New Year's Eve! All the next year I heard that same thunder every day as 1 Cdn Div made its way from Ortona to the Po valley in passing by Monte Cassino. In my mind's eye I can still watch our Polish allies' heroic assault on that famous hill.

Without doubt my war experience did me a lot of good. Before the war came I had lived a spoiled and sheltered existence at school and university, but in the army I saw life as it really was, and lived it that way for six long years. My service overseas represented the only post-graduate degree I ever had. It seems to me to be the only one I ever needed.

*Cette expérience de guerre m'a appris à admirer nos forces armées, qu'elles soient de terre, de mer ou de l'air, et je ne les ai jamais plus admirées qu'aujourd'hui, alors qu'elles accomplissent leurs missions dangereuses en Afghanistan et ailleurs. Notre pays a un grand rôle à jouer dans le monde et très souvent ce rôle ne peut être joué---au risque de leur vie---que par nos hommes et femmes en uniforme.*

It is my long-held opinion that a year of military service should be required of our young people. Not necessarily overseas, but overseas if necessary, and at the risk of their lives if necessary. In performing that service they would learn a lot they should know about Canada, about each other, and about themselves.

They would learn something, too, about our military heroes. We have had many. As some of you may know the government, adopting a suggestion which a few of us made years ago, is putting monuments on Confederation Square next November to honour fourteen men and women, representing countless others, who displayed great valour in one or other of our wars.

All fourteen were made of the right stuff: the stuff of Vimy. How fortunate we are in Canada that such valiants come forward whenever we need them!