

The Battle of Vimy Ridge
Resources: Primary Source Materials



Vimy Ridge

This work by Australian Captain William Longstaff was extremely popular and images were reproduced and sold throughout the Empire. Longstaff depicted soldiers' ghosts marching up Vimy Ridge from the Douai Plain, returning to the memorial. The Memorial's designer, Walter Allward, noted in 1921 that he had been inspired by wartime dream in which dead soldiers "rose in masses, filed silently by and entered the fight to aid the living. So vivid was this impression, that when I awoke it stayed with me for months. Without the dead we were helpless. So I have tried to show this in this monument to Canada's fallen, what we owed them and we will forever owe them."

Vimy Ridge

Print by Captain William Longstaff
Beaverbrook Collection of War Art

CWM 19890275-051

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Justice

Plaster model created by Walter Allward between 1925 and 1930 and used by stonemasons in the construction of the Vimy Memorial in France. The figure of Justice leans her forehead against a sword hilt. The Canadian War Museum has 17 of the 20 original plaster figures created by Allward as part of his design.

Justice

Sculpted by Walter Seymour Allward
Beaverbrook Collection of War Art

CWM 19770315-006

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Artillery Piece

Canadian soldiers captured this 77mm German field gun during the Battle of Vimy Ridge in April 1917. The German gunners rendered it inoperable by destroying the muzzle.

Breech Loading Rifled Artillery Piece CWM 19390002-221

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The Crest of Vimy Ridge

A solitary soldier approaches the crest of Vimy Ridge in February 1918 in this work by Gyrth Russell, one of many Canadian war artists to depict the symbolic field. After the Canadians captured the ridge in April 1917, the Germans never retook it. The few battered trees indicate the destruction caused by the fighting.

The Crest of Vimy Ridge

Painted by Gyrth Russell

Beaverbrook Collection of War Art

CWM 19710261-0617

The Battle of Vimy Ridge

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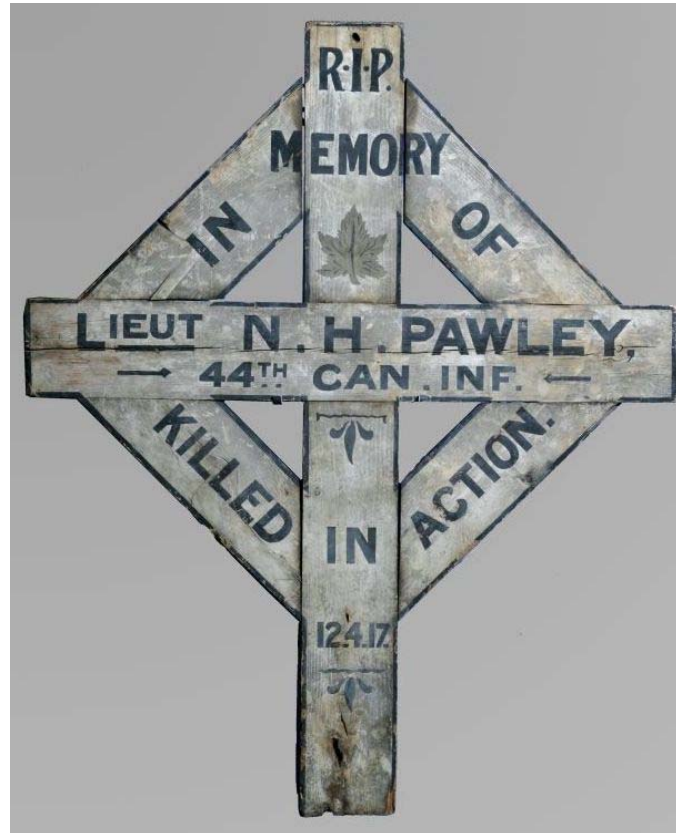
German Bayonet

This German Seitengewehr bayonet with leather frog bears the inscription 'VIMY RIDGE APRIL, 9 1917'. Captain William Murray Goodwin of the Canadian Engineers found it after the attack.

Hilted Knife Bayonet CWM 19750282-002

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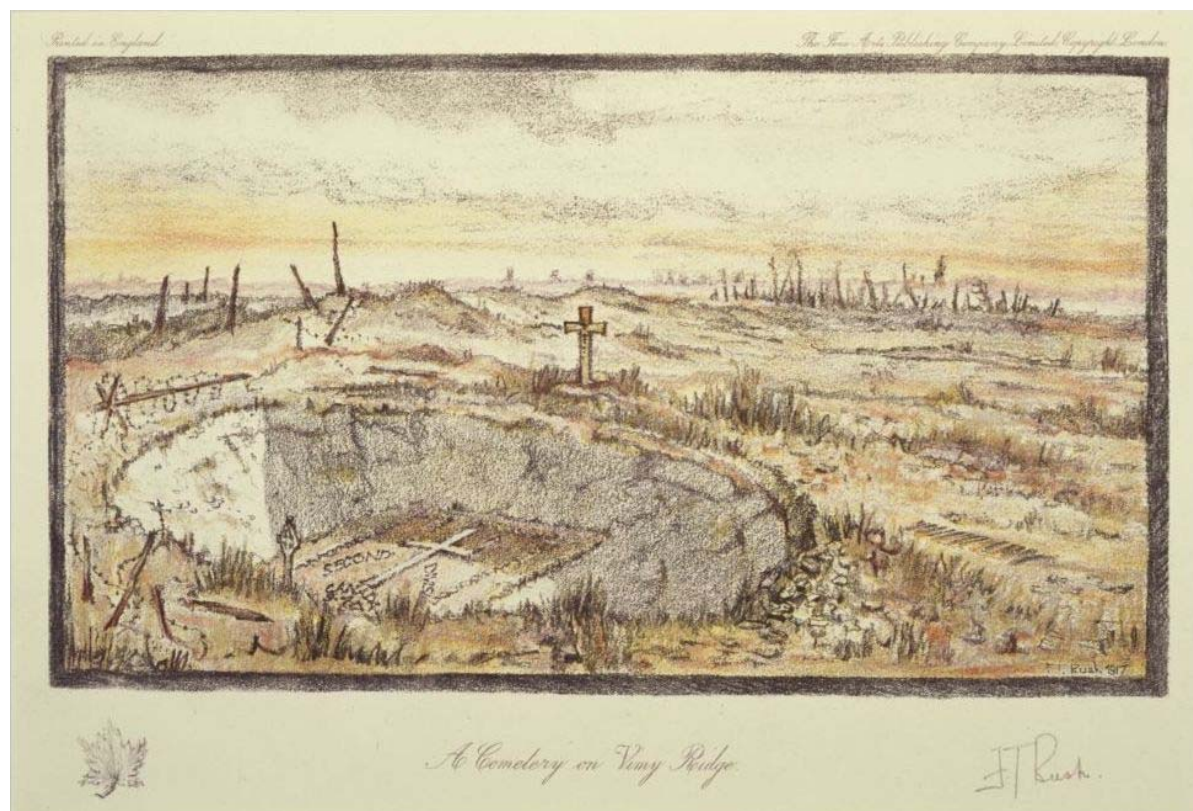


Pawley Grave Marker

This is a rare graver marker made by soldiers for a fallen leader. After the war, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission discarded unofficial grave markers as it established larger cemeteries with regulation headstones. Lieutenant Howard Pawley was killed in action on 12 April 1917 leading his soldiers in the attack on The Pimple, a rise of ground at the northern edge of Vimy Ridge.
Grave Marker CWM 20030064-001

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A Cemetery on Vimy Ridge

This sketch depicts a memorial at the bottom of a shell crater for fallen soldiers of the 2nd Canadian Division during the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

A Cemetery on Vimy Ridge

Print by Lieutenant Frederick Thwaites Bush

Beaverbrook Collection of War Art

CWM 19710261-0116

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The Pimple, Evening

Soldiers advance in line towards The Pimple, a position north of Vimy Ridge. Initially outside of the Canadian Corps' objectives for 9 April 1917, the Pimple was later added to ensure that the Germans could not counterattack and recapture the ridge. Canadian troops attacked in a snow storm on 12 April, driving the elite German defenders from dug-in positions.

The Pimple, Evening

Painted by Alexander Young Jackson

Beaverbrook Collection of War Art

CWM 19710261-0198

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The Taking of Vimy Ridge, Easter Monday 1917

Richard Jack was the first Canadian official war artist, appointed in 1916. In this painting, he depicts the crew of an 18-pounder field gun firing at German positions on Vimy Ridge. To the left, wounded soldiers move past the gun towards the rear.

The Taking of Vimy Ridge, Easter Monday 1917

Painted by Richard Jack

Beaverbrook Collection of War Art

CWM 19710261-0160

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German Maxim 08 Machine Gun

Captain Thain W. MacDowell captured this German machine-gun on the morning of 9 April 1917 during the initial attack on Vimy Ridge. Captain MacDowell was awarded the Victoria Cross for his leadership and bravery during the battle.

Medium Machine Gun CWM 19790110-087

The Battle of Vimy Ridge

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000037

Dugout approximately Junction
Cyrus and Clutch 2 a.m.
9/4/17.

C. C. 38th Battalion, C. E. F.

Objective reached but am afraid is not fully consolidated. The mud is very bad and our machine guns are filled with mud. I have about 15 men near here and can see others around and am getting them in here slowly. Could "D" Company come up in support if they have stopped in the front line.

The runner with your message for "A" Company has just come in and says he cannot find any of the Company Officers. I don't know where my Officers or men are but am getting them together. There is not an N. C. O. here. I have one machine gunner here but he has lost his cooking piece off the gun and the gun is covered with mud. The men's rifles are a mass of mud, but they are cleaning them. My two runners and I came to what I had selected previously as my Company H. Q. We ducked a few bombs down and then came down. The dugout is 75 feet down and is very large. We explored it and sent out 75 prisoners and two officers. This is not exaggerated as I counted them myself. We had to send them out in batches of 12 so they would not see how few we were. I am afraid few of them got back as I caught one man shooting one of our men after he had given himself up. He did not last long and so am afraid we could not take any back except a few who were good dodgers as the men chased them back with rifle shots. The dugout is a very large one and will hold a couple of hundred. The men were 11th Regiment S.I.R. are severe. I cannot give an estimate of our casualties but believe they are severe. Will send back word as soon as possible. There is a field of fire of 400 yards or more and if there were a couple of Brigade Machine Guns could keep them back easily as the ground is almost impassable. Horrible mess. There are lots of dead Bosche and he evidently held well.

I can see 72nd men on our left. The 78th have gone through after we reached here. The barrage was good but the men did not keep close to it enough and held back. There are no shovels here found yet so will just get our rifles ready. No wire is here and cannot spare men to send out.

The line is obliterated, nothing but shell holes so wire would not be of much use. Men are pretty well under at present. There are no artillery officers here. His fire is very weak and suppose he is going back. This is all I can think of at present.

Please excuse writing.

Field Messages, Vimy Ridge

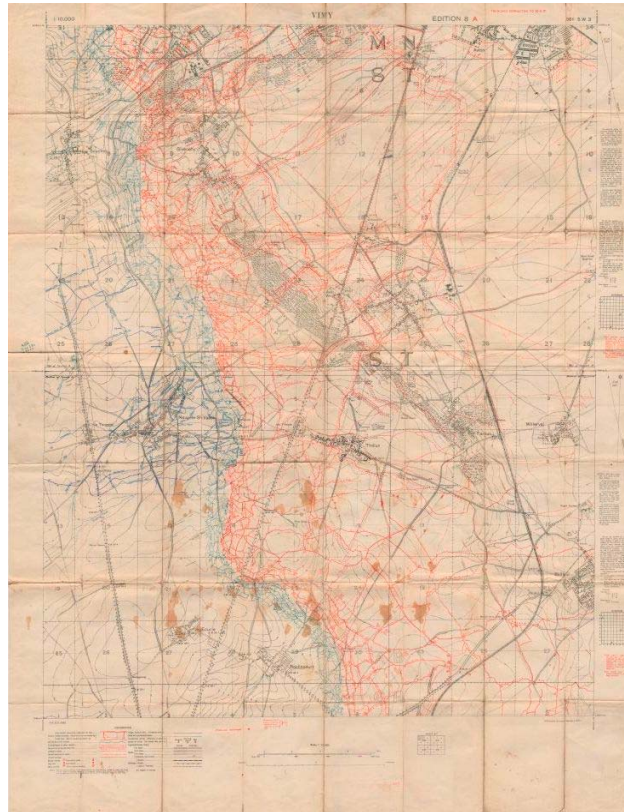
This is a typed copy of an original, hand-written field message from Captain T.W.L. MacDowell, a company commander in the 38th Battalion during the battle at Vimy Ridge, 9 April 1917. It describes part of the action for which Capt. MacDowell received the Victoria Cross, the British Empire's highest award for bravery in the presence of the enemy.

It is an urgent report of his situation at 8 a.m., some hours after the attack had started. While his company, of 100 or so troops has reached its objective, he reports the likelihood that his unit has had severe casualties, and that he has only 15 men with him in the "horrible mess" that is their new position. He asks for another company and machine-guns to come up in support. "There are lots of dead Bosche [Germans] and he evidently held well." The original message would have been hand-delivered to battalion headquarters by a 'runner', a dangerous trek back over an active battlefield still under enemy observation and fire.

George Metcalf Archival Collection

CWM 19610015-002

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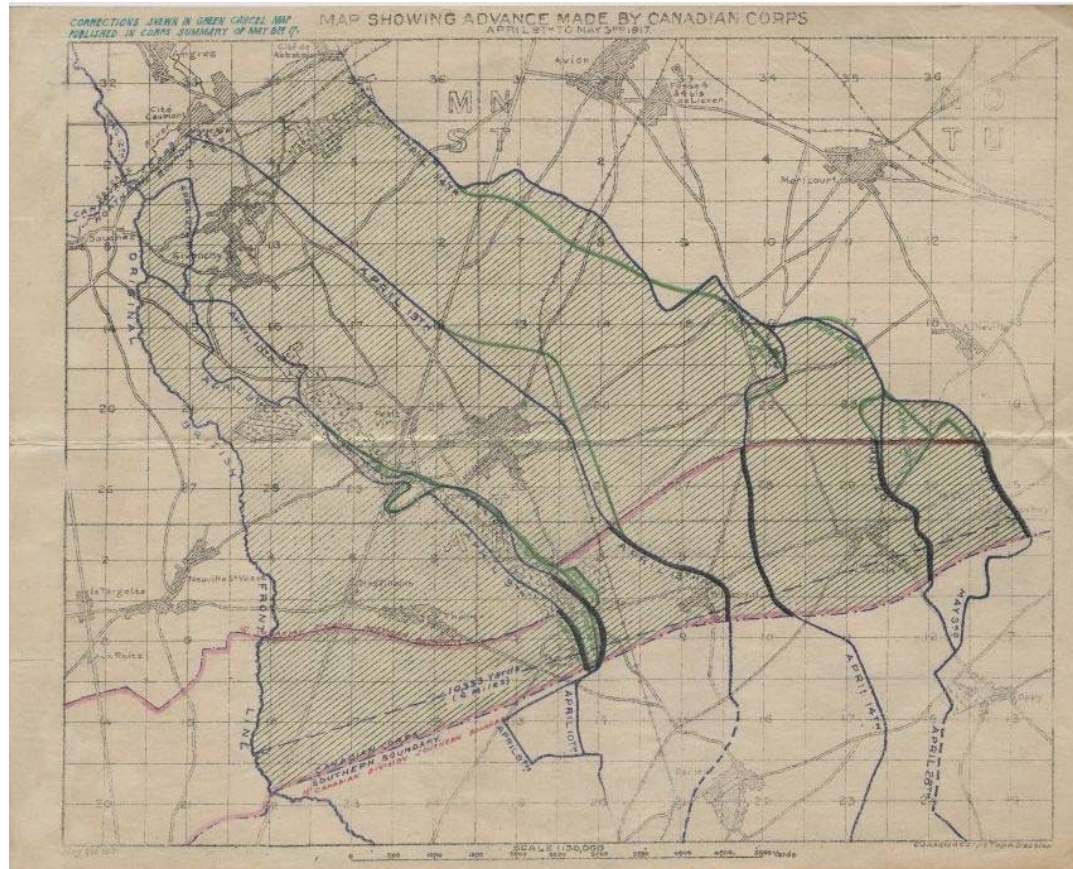
Vimy-Roclincourt Map

This map shows Vimy Ridge and surrounding areas in January-February 1917, with British trenches in blue and German trenches in red. Note the complexity of the trench systems by this point in the war, and the density of opposing lines around Givenchy to the north.

George Metcalf Archival Collection

CWM 19890227-021

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Map of Canadian Advance at Vimy

The Canadian offensive at Vimy Ridge is shown here, as well as the advance across the Douai Plain and the battles of Arleux and Fresnoy in late April and early May. The blue lines mark the progress of the advance and the dates Allied forces reached them. Pink lines mark divisional boundaries. Green lines illustrate old advances.

George Metcalf Archival Collection

CWM 19750215-030