

# Two Unsung Heroes of VIMY RIDGE

by Daria Valkenburg

Vimy Ridge. Most of us know this is in France, and that 2017 is the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. How many of us know more than that, though? What was the battle about, and why is it important to Canadians? Did you know that the battle of Vimy Ridge was the first time in World War One that all four Canadian divisions attacked together? And did you know that it was the Canadians who managed to scale the ridge, after the British and French troops were unsuccessful?

Vimy Ridge was a 7 km ridge in northern France that the Germans had captured early in the war and turned into what they hoped was a fortress no allied troops could penetrate. 150,000 British and French casualties were expended trying to retake Vimy Ridge, with no success until the Canadians were sent in, albeit with the support of British artillery, engineers, and supply units.

They stormed the ridge on Easter Monday, April 9, 2017 in miserable weather conditions. It was cold, with a storm of sleet and snow coming from the north-west. The only advantage of a north-westerly storm was that snow blew into the faces of the defending German troops. After four long days of battle, the Germans were overrun. Although almost 3,600 Canadians died and another 7,000 were wounded in the battle, this was an enormous achievement.

Pieter Valkenburg, Branch Service Officer for Borden-Carleton Legion Branch #10 has undertaken a project to research the 46 names on the Cenotaph outside the Borden-Carleton Legion. Valkenburg notes, "This is an opportunity to learn about the service and sacrifices made. It can be difficult to remember who these brave people were after so many years. The objective is to document all the persons mentioned on the Cenotaph for an historical

record, and to make a Wall of Remembrance in the Legion with their photos."

Two men listed on the Borden-Carleton Cenotaph were in the midst of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. One was in the wrong place at the wrong time due to a name mix-up and died, the other survived the battle, only to perish a month later.

Private Patrick Raymond Arsenault, a farmer before the war, was the man in the wrong place. Born in Bedeque on October 14, 1896, the son of Joseph and Isabella Arsenault, he enlisted in 105th Battalion, C Company on April 28, 1916, and sailed from Halifax on the SS Empress of Britain on July 15, 1916, arriving in Liverpool 10 days later. He was sent to France on December 7, 1916 as part of the 14th Battalion. That's where his luck turned for the worse.

On January 15, 1917, he was transferred by error to the 13th Machine Gun Company, a unit attached to the First Canadian Division, and whose role was to support the Infantry Brigades. The person who should have been transferred to this unit was Benjamin Arsenault of Summerside, who sailed to England on the same ship on the same day. Benjamin survived the war and was among those who returned home. Not Patrick Raymond, however. He died on the first day of the battle, one of the 5 "other ranks" identified in his unit's war diary.

The war diary of the 13th Machine Gun Company recorded what happened on April 9, 1917:

"At 5:30 am (zero hour) for attack of Canadian Corps on Vimy Ridge, the two batteries of this unit opened fire, establishing a creeping barrage to cover the advance of 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade on previously advanced targets, ranging from points near enemy frontline to the final barrage 500 yards east of Lens-Arras Road. Each gun fired 3,300 rounds.

At 6:45 am our two batteries ceased fire and advanced with equipment and 3,000 rounds per gun to new positions 1200 yards SW of THELUS and 200 yards east of Arras-Lens Road. On crossing the old front system of trenches our batteries came under very heavy shell-fire with the result that 5 other ranks were killed and 11 wounded and 3 guns knocked out of action."

Arsenault's body was never recovered. Either he was buried in an unknown grave, or the shell attack scattered his body parts, making identification impossible. His name is listed on the Vimy Ridge Memorial.



John Lyman Wood shortly after enlistment in October 1915. (photo courtesy of Gene Rogerson collection)

Private John Lyman Wood was also in Vimy Ridge, and also in the 1st Canadian Division, but as part of the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade. Unlike Arsenault, Wood survived the Battle of Vimy Ridge, only to die in action a few weeks later. Born in North Tryon on July 8, 1897, the son of George William Wood and Martha Heatly, he was raised on a farm, and was in second year engineering at Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia before enlisting in the Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry 4th University Company on October 12, 1915. On November 28, 1915 he sailed for Halifax on the SS Lapland, arriving in Plymouth, England on December 7.

Upon arrival, he was sent to the 11th Reserve Battalion, stationed at St. Martin's Plain near Folkestone, for infantry training for needed reinforcements to the Canadian Corps in the field. He wasn't there long before health problems arose.

As of January 21, 1916 he was in hospital with appendicitis, then gastritis, and measles. He was discharged on April 15, 1916, to the 39th Battalion. On December 22, 1916, he arrived in France as part of the Second Infantry Battalion, which was part of the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade during the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

Wood's nephew, Gene Rogerson of Crapaud, shared a letter Wood wrote to his brother on April 17, 1917, describing the action he'd recently faced: "We were in a pretty hot little place and the mud is awful, takes a man about ten minutes to go a hundred yards, than about every ten minutes old Fritz would shell us, had several rather exciting experiences, with one or two narrow escapes from the 'Wizz Bangs' and one man was killed about a half a yard from me. The shelling is something awful, man doesn't have a chance when he gets stuck in the mud and they begin to throw shells at him."

After securing Vimy Ridge, the Canadian divisions advanced with their allies. From April 9, 1917 to May 16, 1917, they attacked German defences near the French city of Arras on the Western Front. Wood's luck ran out on May 3, 1917, when he was killed in action during the Battle of Arras, in the third battle of the Scarpe near Fresnoy.

The war diary of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Battalion described what happened:

"At 1:30 am the enemy bombarded strongly along our front as far west as the western edge of Arleux en Cohelle, apparently due from a harassing fire from our artillery during the hours of assembly, which is strongly condemned. Enemy bombardment quieted slightly at 2:00 am and practically ceases at 2:10



Borden-Carleton Branch Service Officer Pieter Valkenburg. (Credit: Daria Valkenburg)

am.  
3:00 am. Heavy hostile bombardment. The attack commenced at 3:45 am.  
9:00 am. Heavy enemy artillery on our Battalion front.  
3:07 pm. German artillery opening strongly on Arleux en Cohelle, our guns retaliating.  
11:30 pm. Estimated casualties for today: 350 and 5 officers."

Like Arsenault, Wood's body was never recovered, his only memorial in Europe being his name inscribed on the Vimy Ridge Memorial. Meanwhile, World War I continued until November 11, 1918, with many more casualties... and many more unknown stories.

Valkenburg still needs help in order to put a face and story to every name. "People have been generous with sharing photos and letters for a few names, and contacting family members outside P.E.I., but not for every name on the Cenotaph. Patrick Raymond Arsenault is one of these men for whom we have no photo or other personal information." If you recognize any of the names on the Cenotaph and have photos, letters, diaries, or stories you are willing to share, please email him at dariadv@yahoo.ca.

## The people listed on the Cenotaph

WWI  
Patrick Raymond Arsenault  
Kenneth John Bell

Charles Benjamin Buxton  
James Ambrose Cairns  
James Lymon Cameron  
Leigh Hunt Cameron  
George Albert Campbell  
William G. Campbell  
Vincent Carr  
Arthur Leigh Collett  
W. Basil Cormier  
Patrick Philip Deighan (Deegan)  
James Graham Farrow  
Percy Earl Farrow (Farrar)  
Ellis M. Hooper  
John Goodwill Howatt  
Charles H. Lowther  
Bruce Sutherland MacKay  
Arthur Clinton Robinson  
Harry Robinson  
Henry Warburton Stewart  
John Lyman Wood

## WWII

James Arthur Affleck  
Albert Eugene Arsenault  
F. Arsenault  
(no information found)  
Frank Lewis Arsenault  
Leonard Stephen Avery  
George Ashley Bartlett  
Austin Harry Boulter  
Harrison William Craig  
George Alfred Dunn  
John Daniel Ferguson  
Everett Samuel Francis  
Ernest Ramey Gallant  
Singleton Charles Jeffrey (Jeffery)  
Harold Lloyd Lefurgey  
Elmer Allister Mabey  
Elmer Bagnall Muttart  
Joseph Charles McIvor  
George Martin McMahon  
Ernest Murray Norton  
George Preston Smith  
William Douglas Sherren (WWII)  
Arnold Dudley Taylor  
William Ness (1955)

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