

# Soldiers 'still live in a dangerous world': PM

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By The Canadian Press  
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Prime Minister Stephen Harper drew a direct line Sunday between Canadian soldiers dying in Afghanistan and the sacrifices of Canadians on Vimy Ridge almost a century ago.

Speaking to a group of veterans on the eve of the 90th anniversary of the historic First World War battle, the prime minister portrayed the work of Canada's military as being on a straight line continuum from 1917 to 2007.

"Canadians did not go to war then, nor will we ever, to conquer or to enslave," Harper told the dinner gathering that included Gen. Rick Hillier, Canada's chief of defence staff.

"But when the cause is just, Canada will always be there to defend our values and our fellow human beings."

Harper went on to say Canadian soldiers "still live in a dangerous world and, as prime minister, my thoughts these days are never far from Afghanistan."

The speech had been prepared in advance, but at this point a sombre and subdued Harper deviated from the text due to events that had unfolded only hours earlier.

"Sadly, today has been a difficult day in Afghanistan," he told the hushed room. "We've learned that an incident has claimed the lives of six Canadian soldiers and injured a number of others."

There was a loud, collective intake of breath before the prime minister continued.

"Our hearts ache for them and their families. And I know as we gather together on Easter Sunday, our thoughts and prayers are with them."

There could be no more poignant reminder as thousands of Canadians mustered for Monday's re-dedication of the refurbished Vimy Memorial on the site of this country's most celebrated battle of the First World War.

A parade earlier Sunday afternoon in the city of Arras, a few short kilometres from the pock-marked ridge, had lacked the emotional wallop associated with the memorial itself and the pristine military cemeteries dotting the nearby countryside.

While thousands turned out on a brilliant spring Sunday, the crowds fell far short of the advertised 35,000 that organizers had anticipated, and the locals' response to the festivities was respectful and muted.

By tradition, the "Freedom of the City" parade is regarded as the most prized honour that a community can give to a military unit. The Canadian Forces paraded on the cobble-stone square in front of city hall, and knocked at a symbolic gate to the city set in front of a viewing stand of dignitaries. The mayor of Arras reviewed the Canadian troops, and then granted them permission to enter.

Francoise Guerra, watching the parade with her teenage daughter, said the event captured the Canada-France friendship that still persists from the 1914-1918 conflict, despite the long intervening years.



Canadian war veterans John Colton, left, and Eldon McCallum attend ceremonies commemorating the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge Sunday in Arras, France. Below, Prime Minister Stephen Harper visits a First World War Canadian soldier cemetery near the Vimy War Memorial Sunday, along with his son, Ben, and daughter, Rachel. CP PHOTO

## Fort George connection

Fort George in Niagara-on-the-Lake has a unique connection with Vimy Ridge, as well as other conflicts, including the Second World War, Boer War and Korean War.

Butler's Barracks, located just west of the fort, and the large open fields bounded by John and King streets, were once a busy army reserve known as Camp Niagara.

"If the army hadn't been here up until the 1960s, this area would probably all be housing by now," said Dave Webb, manager of public programs at the national historic site.

With the start of the First World War, the fort was used as a training camp for 14,000 soldiers of the 2nd Division of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

At Fort Mississauga, located on the grounds of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Course, an archway that leads to the mouth of the Niagara River has a number of soldiers' names scratched into the brick.

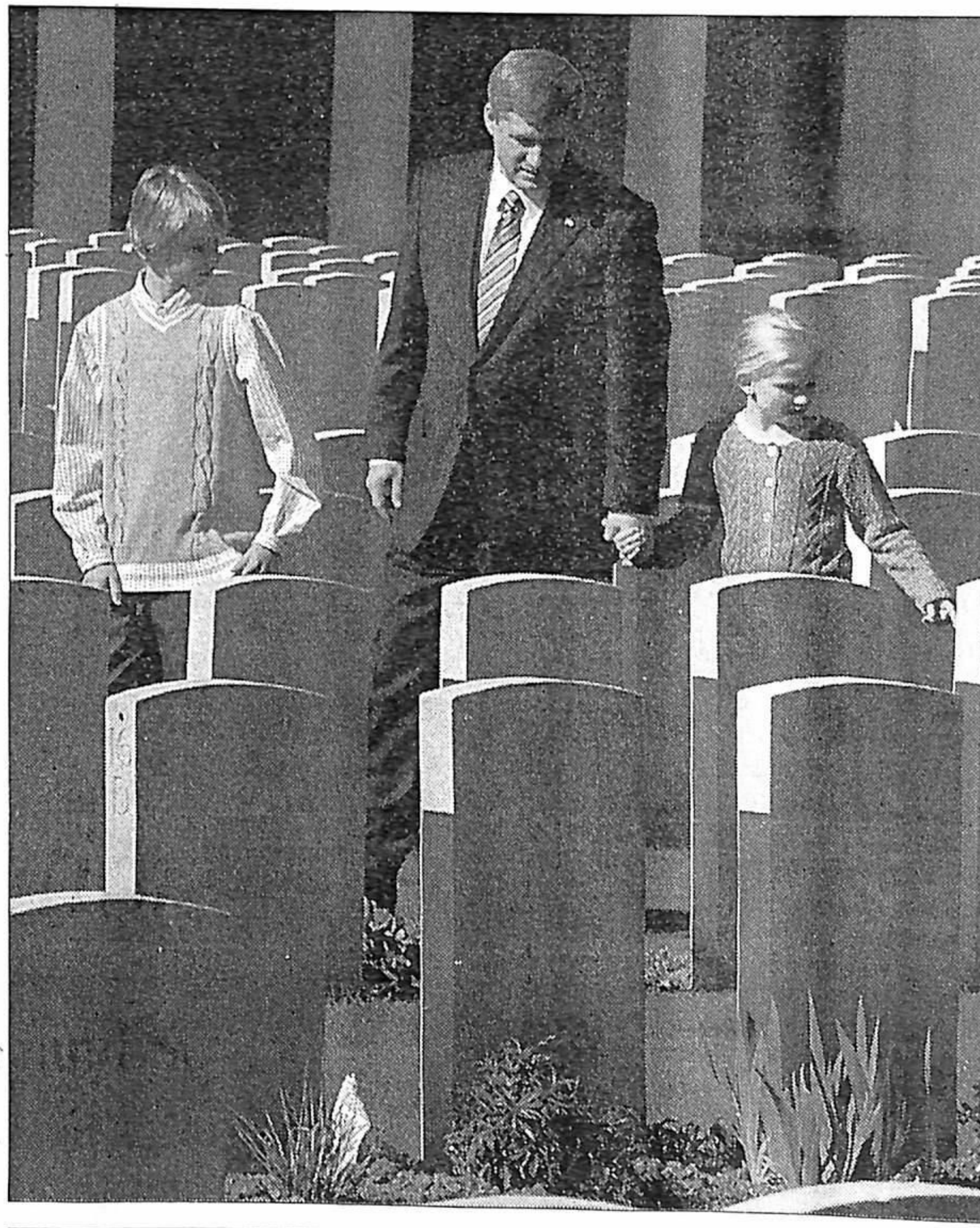
"These soldiers stood guard duty there and they were soldiers who went on to Vimy Ridge and other battles. It's local graffiti from that period," Webb said.

The fort will be open today to mark the anniversary, while an extended event is planned for the summer.

A time-lined historical weekend will be held June 14 and 15.

"We will be focusing on a range of historical time periods, with an emphasis on the First World War," Webb said.

— Osprey News Network



"I think the first war is very present in the memories of everybody because of the cemeteries, because of the presence of the soldiers who are dead here," she said. "I think it's still very real."