

We Shall **NOT** Forget

Lest we forget.

As we continue our journey over the next few days this sense of tragedy, of overwhelming loss, becomes almost too much to bear.

For days we will ride a rollercoaster of emotions: pride, despair, hope, anger. Sometimes we feel all those things at the same place, almost at the same time.

Before we achieve the city of Arras back in France itself a few hours' drive from Ypres, we will stop and remember high atop a ridge whose name is capitalized in every Canadian history text. Here at Vimy we feel an emptiness, smitten by the sight of a sculpted woman borne down beyond hope, carved into a towering memorial surrounded by rounded depressions in the land that still mar the meadow – shell craters. But we also feel a great sense of pride. Here at Vimy, writ large, is part of Canada's story.

Lonelier, though no less powerful, is our visit next morning to a place equally central to our nation's history, even though Newfoundland wasn't part of Canada at the time. Just the same, the feelings I experience here at Beaumont-Hamel (particularly given my wife's Newfoundland background) are overwhelmingly moving. That's partly due to the sad story of one attack that took place on the morn-

ing of July 1, 1916.

That morning roughly 800 Newfoundland troops scrambled out of the trenches and into No-Man's Land. By end of day more than 700 were dead, wounded or missing.

One reason emotions run rampant here at Beaumont-Hamel is because the battlefield here is little changed since the war. The trenches and shell craters here are almost intact – no other battlefield in France or Flanders is so close to its original wartime state. Rusted stakes still sprout from the ground here: strands of barbed wire once strung between them.



In the distance across No-Man's Land, I see a tree, crippled and skeletal. This is the Danger Tree. Advancing troops of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment would marshal there if they made it through the curtain of machine gun fire. Most didn't.

That evening my wife and I dine al fresco in a sprawling cobblestone piazza back in Arras, surrounded by Baroque and medieval buildings. In spite of the buzz of humanity populating the square on this summer evening, we are pensive and silent.

Back in Ypres on that first night at Menin Gate, the crowd is equally silent.

Now they lay the wreaths.



The buglers blow, haunting brass intervals.

Now the most powerful moment of silence I have ever experienced.

The buglers raise horns to lips; they blow the "Rouse".

The announcer pronounces the exhortation as evening fades into night above the gate that straddles a roadway that so many marched along: into history, unto death.

"At the going down of the sun and in the morning," pronounces this disembodied voice, crackling, echoing.

"We will remember them."



Lest we forget

Throughout our nation's history, Canada's veterans have bravely protected the rights and freedoms we enjoy today, and helped maintain peace around the world. On November 11, I encourage you to wear your poppy with pride to honour and remember their courage and sacrifice.

Gary Carr
Halton Regional Chair

