



DEBATES OF THE SENATE

1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 150 • NUMBER 110

BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

ONE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY

Statement by:

The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Thursday, April 6, 2017

THE SENATE

Thursday, April 6, 2017

BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

ONE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Honourable senators, as we all know, Sunday, April 9, marks the one hundredth anniversary of the devastating Battle of Vimy Ridge and Canada's tremendous contribution to World War I. It is widely accepted that was the moment Canada came of age and gained independence. Canadian losses were many and horrific, yet the victory turned the tide. Time has now taken all the veterans of that conflict, and today I pay tribute to them, their families and those who have preserved the memory of their deeds.

Time has not, however, robbed their families of their personal histories. I have a little black notebook that was in my uncle's left breast pocket. A bullet hole goes three quarters of the way through, and that saved him. He gave us the booklet, but never talked about what he saw or did overseas during that war.

When war broke out first in 1914, Canada was not officially recording any of its events. The little combat photography which exists was primarily taken by the British Army. Soon, though, Canada's Defence Department became the first federal department to hire artists. Sir Max Aitken established the War Records Office to document action at home and abroad for posterity from a Canadian perspective. He commissioned Canadian artists. Some later formed the Group of Seven: A.Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, Fred Varley and Franz Johnston. Their work is compelling and horror filled. Varley's acrid greens and images of destroyed villages tell us so much. In my view, the art

done on the battlefields and of the home war effort by these Canadians is as expertly executed as that by any international war artist from any country: British, French, Dutch or others.

Winnipeg's Mary Riter Hamilton, being a woman, was not eligible to be an official war artist, despite her protestations. A widow, she used her husband's inheritance to go to France immediately after the war. For three years, she painted the desolation of the Western Front, and her watercolours and oils are poignant. They, with those by our official war artists, are in our War Museum collection. This fall, scholars Sarah McKinnon and Catherine Young, and the University of Manitoba Press, are publishing an important book, for which I was delighted to be an early reader, on the work of Hamilton and her experiences.

Canada's War Museum has opened a special Vimy anniversary exhibition. Using personal artifacts and work by our war artists, it tells the battle's stories, recreating the sounds and smells of the trenches, gas warfare and life on the front.

Senators, we can only imagine what our soldiers endured because of Max Aitken's vision and the work of our artists who recorded the heroism, loss and devastation in their art. Thanks to them, we and future generations will never forget their ultimate sacrifices.

I am proud so many Canadians of so many generations are honouring this anniversary at the iconic, highly celebrated Vimy memorial monument by Canadian architect and sculptor, Walter Seymour Allward.