



## *Message from Queen's Park*



**Monthly Column by MPP John Yakabuski**

Monthly Column – April 2017

April 9th, 1917 is without question one of the most important dates in Canadian history. Most Canadians have no trouble remembering that on Easter Monday, April 9th, 1917 Canadian soldiers began their assault on a strategic piece of land in Northern France known as Vimy Ridge. In 1914 Canada—whose external affairs were governed by the United Kingdom—became a participant in the First World War. The war was a result of political tensions and very complex European military alliances at the time.

By the spring of 1917, the war had raged on for more than two-and-a-half years and had resulted in what amounted to a virtual stalemate. Previous attempts by the Allies to take Vimy had failed; the ridge was a long, high hill that afforded excellent viewing of the surrounding landscape. Germany had captured it early in the war and had held it during those earlier Allied assaults which had resulted in hundreds of thousands of casualties.

The Canadians had been preparing for this attack since the autumn of 1916 and the battle would be the first time all four divisions of the Canadian Corps fought together as one army. Preparation for the attack included extensive mining operations whereby tunnels were dug beneath German lines and stacked with explosives to be set off at the appropriate times. Prior to the attack, the Germans were subjected to a massive artillery barrage which started over a week before the ground assault. During what the Germans would come to call the 'Week of Suffering' the Allies would fire over one million shells at German positions.

The attack began at approximately 5:30 a.m. Canadian forces made tremendous progress early in the assault, but it would take four long days of heavy fighting to finally take control of the ridge. Many believed that with four separate lines of defence, the Germans had created an impenetrable wall that could not be broken. While there have been many Canadian victories since, the Battle of Vimy Ridge continues to stand as one of our proudest moments as a military force. The taking of Vimy Ridge by Canadian heroes, marked the emergence of the Canada we are so proud to call home a century later. In the words of Brigadier-General Alexander Ross: "It was Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific on parade. I thought then, and I think today, that in those few minutes I witnessed the birth of a nation."

Canada's contribution to what was termed The Great War and the War to End All Wars was most significant. With a population of less than eight million people, more than 650,000 would answer the call. At war's end more than 66,000 had made the ultimate sacrifice and over 170,000 were wounded. We are ever grateful to our heroes of 100 years ago, those who followed them in military service, and all those who serve for us today. Lest We Forget.

I would like to take this opportunity—on behalf of Vicky and our family—to wish you and yours a very Happy Easter. As Christians, it is one of our most important feasts when we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without His Resurrection, our faith would be without purpose. Please enjoy the celebration with family and friends and reflect on the many blessings we have received.