

APRIL 2017

Vimy Ridge - the making of Canada

Ontario Freemasons in War

Canada is known for its peace keeping efforts over the years, as well as its involvement in war when called upon. Freemasons are not known for their war exploits, but as citizens of a British colony and later, of Canada, their support of national priorities are very strong and freemasons have joined the colours. As peaceful as we are as Canadians and freemasons we sometimes have to make war for peace. To preserve our way of life.

April 9, 2017 is the centennial of the capture of Vimy Ridge on April 9, 1917 by the Canadian Expeditionary Force: the first major British victory in the First World War. Although the four-division Canadian Corps was then under the command of British cavalry officer, Lieutenant General Sir Julian Byng, the planning and training concepts were developed and implemented by Major General Arthur Currie (later Lieutenant General Sir Arthur Currie, commanding officer of CEF) and his staff. Canadian Freemasons were there: R.W.Bro. Arthur Currie (a member of Vancouver and Quadra Lodge No. 2 of Victoria, BC), Major Generals Richard Turner VC of the 2nd Division and David Watson of the 4th (both members of St. Andrews No. 6 of Quebec City) and Malcolm Smith Mercer (of River Park No. 356 and Victoria 474 of Toronto) to the youngest, Private Thomas Ricketts of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment who enlisted at the age of 15½ and was awarded the VC at the age of 17 (although he didn't join Freemasonry until after the war). Maj-Gen Turner had been awarded the VC for his actions at Leliefontein, South Africa, on November 7, 1900.

Our history has seen many periods of fighting on the local level (the French and Indian Wars, migration of Loyalists during and after American Independence, War of 1812, Rebellions of 1837 and 1838) as well as internationally (Crimea, South Africa, World War I and II, Korea) and the many Peacekeeping efforts. Masons and non-masons were there.

Some examples of our Freemasons in war include:

- Masons of Brigadier-General James Wolfe's army at Quebec formed a Provincial Grand Lodge under England in November 1759. It would oversee an area from Quebec city to Detroit which had added 75,000 citizens to Britain's new colony some of which were freemasons. Sixty-three masonic lodges would be formed during its existence: twelve in the area of the future Ontario. Early Freemasons would be there to begin to open up the area for settlement.

- more lodges were formed in new towns established by immigrants and settlers who came directly from Europe or as United Empire Loyalists travelling away from the new United States by the 1780s. At Newark, Upper Canada (today's Niagara-on-the-Lake), Freemason and Loyalist Colonel John Butler and those of his men who were Freemasons attended meetings of two Lodges in the 8th (Kings) Regiment at Niagara. Or New Oswegatchie Lodge which was originally at Ogdensburg, NY, removed to Elizabethtown and is an ancestor of today's Sussex No. 5 at Brockville. Colonel John Graves Simcoe, our first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, was a Freemason and one of the first stone buildings in Newark housed Simcoe's

administrative offices on the ground floor and the Masonic Hall upstairs.

- the War of 1812 would have its share of Freemasons: Laura Secord, daughter of Thomas Ingersoll, married Sergeant James Secord. Both men were Freemasons and members of St. John's Lodge of Friendship at Niagara (now St. John's No. 2) and fought in defence of Upper Canada. Indian allies such as Joseph Brant, James Brant and John Norton were also Freemasons and attended Lodge with our Loyalist and immigrant brethren. In this War, as in others, documents attest to Freemasons on each side helping each other in the midst of battle.

- during the rebellions of Upper (1837) and Lower (1838) Canada: where two future senior Freemasons were Sir Allan Napier Macnab (later Grand Master of the Antient Grand Lodge of Canada, 1857-58) who had first fought in the War of 1812 as a teenager and later fought in several engagements with Upper Canada militia against rebels, and William Mercer Wilson (the first Grand Master of the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada, today's Grand Lodge) who commanded a troop of militia cavalry in the Simcoe area where they fought rebels. And Canadian Freemasons fought in the Northwest Territories during the Riel Rebellions. During the second Rebellion a supply depot had been established on the South Saskatchewan river by Major General Wimburn Lawrie. At the time he was still Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Nova Scotia and convened "occasional lodges" for the benefit of the masonic military personnel passing through the area.

- during the Crimean War period (1853-56): where Lieutenant Alexander Roberts Dunn of York would become Canada's first recipient of the new Victoria Cross (VC) which he received from Queen Victoria for his actions in the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava (October 25, 1854). While not a Freemason at the time, he was initiated two years later in his father's lodge (Ionic 25 of Toronto).

And Canadian Freemasons would serve in South Africa (Boer War 1899-1902), through two World Wars, Korea, and many peacekeeping actions.

Masonic lodges had existed in military units from 1752 until the end of the 19th century. Their need was gradually eliminated when our military brethren found it easier to attend local, stationary, lodges in cities, towns and villages. Our Grand Lodge only ever authorized two military lodges under its authority. The first, for the masons of the Royal Artillery Garrison at Quebec, was formed in 1864 and closed in 1880. The second, Canada Lodge, was formed in 2010 for the Freemasons in Canada's military then serving in Afghanistan. It closed in 2014 when the last Canadians returned home.

Freemasons who served the colours are remembered in various ways. The Masonic Monument at Malden Park in Windsor pays tribute to the members of our fraternity who made the supreme sacrifice during times of war. It was visioned and built at the beginning of the 21st Century by the members and lodges of Erie and Windsor Districts and while its focus is local it recognizes the worldwide effort of all freemasons to preserve our way of life.

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in the Province of Ontario

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