

## *A REMEMBRANCE DAY STORY*

### *Repatriation of Vimy Oak Trees Back to Vimy Ridge*

- 1. Vimy Ridge Battle*
- 2. My Soldier*
- 3. The Project*






THE BATTLE



## Stalemate 1915:

German advance stalled then pushed back. Both sides dug in.

Vimy Ridge is near  Arras ~ 110 Km North East of Paris

**Orange line becomes 480Km battle line for most of the War**

# 1917: the 8Km of High Ground along Vimy Ridge had to be taken

- The French and British lost over 200,000 men in previous attacks 2015-16
- The Germans believed it was impossible to take
- 19<sup>th</sup> Century strategy of the elite French and British officer corps :
  - Artillery bombards the trenches on the ridge for 48 hours
  - Stop artillery fire, command soldiers to go over the top and **CHARGE the German Trenches**
  - Germans had plenty of time to get out of their bunkers, set up machine guns and mow down the attacking force
  - All the time German artillery rained down among them

# The Generals



**Lt General Julian Byng** Cdn Corps  
Commander (British)  
**recommended Currie to lead an All  
Canadian attack on the Ridge**



**Maj General Arthur Currie**  
**Recognized** need for training, detailed plans  
for an army of mostly volunteers.  
**Studied mistakes** of previous battles

The Technology of War had changed dramatically in the previous 20 years making mass killings *so much easier*

# Machine Gun made cavalry and the *CHARGE!* futile



**German Maxim: 600 rounds/ min**



**British Vickers: 500 rounds/ min**

Artillery: larger, more accurate and powerful, responsible for  
2/3 of all deaths





# Observation Balloons and Beginnings of Air Power



# General Currie's Strategy (*"Lived and thought Outside the box"*)

- **"We must minimize casualties!"**
- Every man down to Private involved in the planning
  - Every soldier sees a concrete **scale model** of the entire ridge terrain, landmarks, barbed wire and their objective trenches
- Infantry rehearsals behind the lines
  - Platoon leaders issued wristwatches. Battle plan has detailed schedule
- **Subways** built to hide troop movements to jump off trenches
- 1,000 guns to take out German artillery, **before the attack**
- Then the 1,000 guns **creeping barrage moves up the ridge** with troops walking behind

# Locating German Artillery



- **Balloons spot the artillery flash: get the compass bearing**
- **Record the time to hear the muzzle sound: get the range.**
  - **Speed of sound: 1,125 ft/second**
- **Aircraft spot flash and locate artillery, machine gun nests, on maps**



**Major Andrew McNaughton  
engineer/ artillery specialist  
executed “TAKE OUT” plan with  
1,000 artillery guns**

**For weeks, during artillery duels, Aircraft & Balloons identify locations of enemy guns**

**For 24 hours before the attack, each artillery battery (6 Guns) fires on its identified and plotted strategic targets**

- Surgically **took out 80%** of identified German artillery, machine gun nests
- Cut planned pathways through barbed wire for infantry to follow

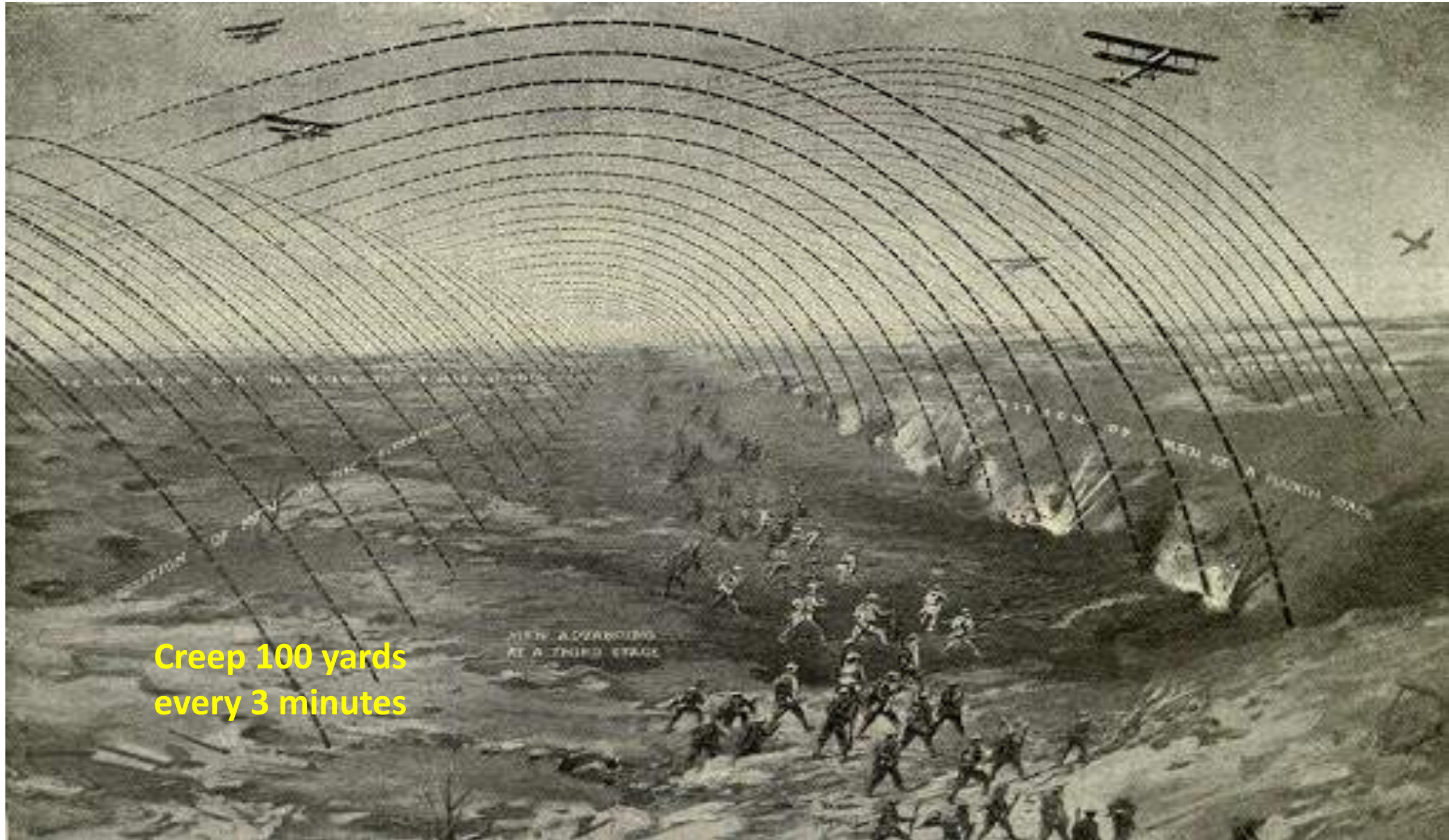
**5:30 AM April 9: then the 1,000 guns switch to the creeping barrage up the ridge, infantry follow at a walking pace**

100,000 men (4 divisions) take Subways to the jump off trenches. Go over the top into a late spring snowstorm



Troops Follow Creeping Barrage of 1,000 Guns: “don’t charge, walk 50 yards behind the descending “Wall of hot steel”





Creep 100 yards  
every 3 minutes

FIFTY ADVANCING  
AT A THIRD STAGE

Noon April 9 most of Ridge was under Canadian control  
(first enduring Imperial Victory in 30 months of war)

- Volunteer army brilliantly led by **General Arthur Currie did the impossible**
- Creeping barrage **kept most of the Germans down in their bunkers** until Canadians arrived at their trenches
- Relatively low loss of life (3,600 died that day, NOT 50,000)
- **They paid the highest price**, responsible for propelling Canada from under the colonial shadow of Great Britain
- *Into FULL NATIONHOOD*



Hill 145 (High Ground) after the Ridge was taken:  
1 Million shells landed on the ridge during the battle



Pause Currie

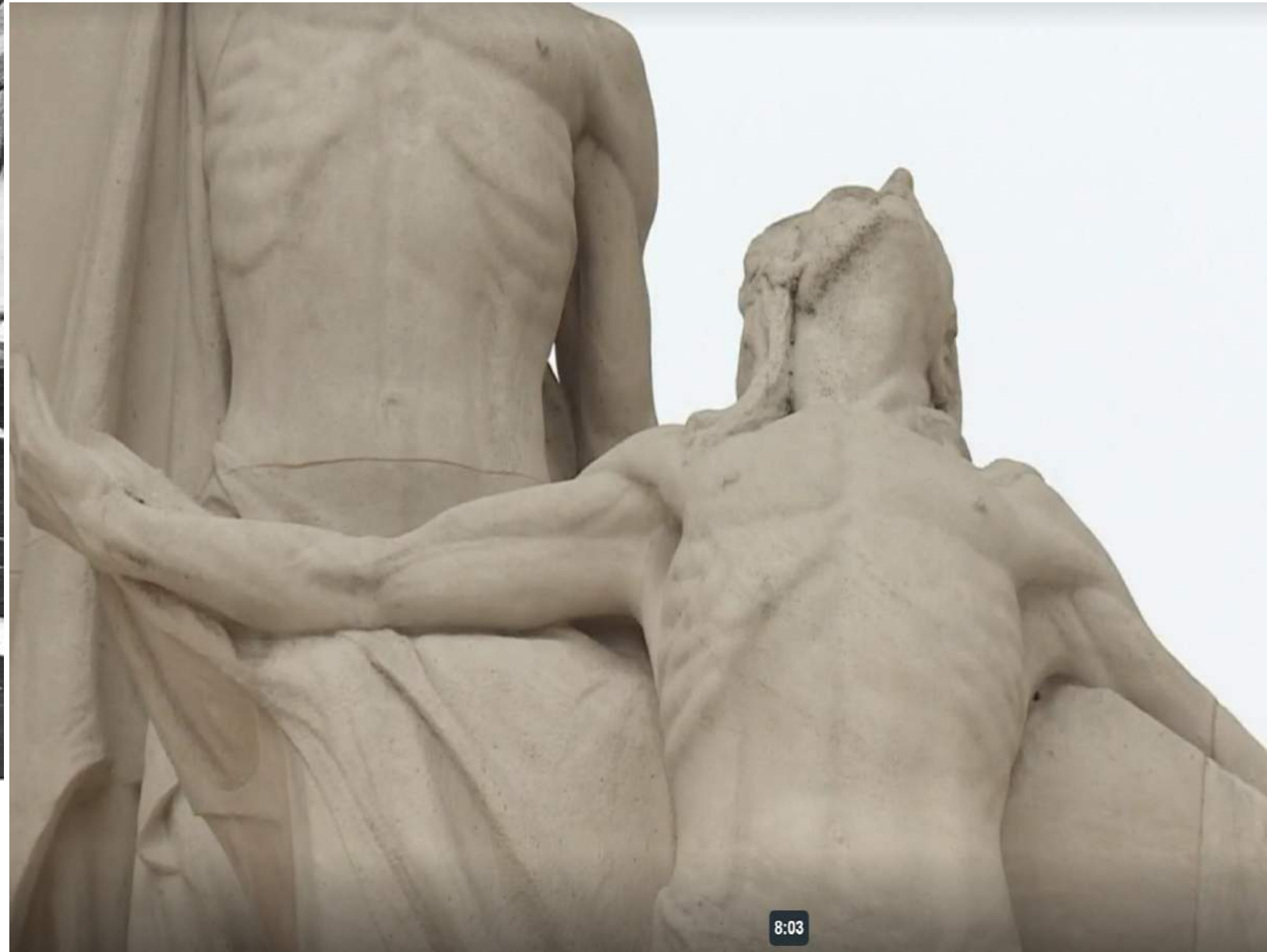
France deeded 250 acres of Vimy Ridge to Canada. Architect and Sculptor Walter Alward was selected to design the Monument on Hill 145 to honour Canada's 61,000 war Dead. Dedicated by Edward VIII in July 1936



**Walter Alward's 30 ton sculpture of grieving Mother Canada and other figures grieve the loss of humanity and sacrifice for one's country**



## Sculptors work on site from scale models



# Lower wall of Vimy Memorial honours the 11,285 Canadians who died in WW1 with no known grave



# VIMY Memorial today: Hill 145





MY SOLDIER

## MY SOLDIER: Leslie Howard Miller

- **German Ancestors (Pennsylvania )**
  - 1792: Lt Gov Simcoe invited G.G. Grandfather to construct first Mill in Ontario ( Old Mill on Bloor Street)
- **Leslie: born 1889 on fruit farm in North Scarborough**
- **Graduated 1912 U of T in Modern Languages (French, German, Hebrew, Greek)**



He taught school in Saskatchewan.  
Enlisted in **C.E.F Oct 1914 as Private,**  
**1st Saskatchewan Border Horse**





**“He’s fluent in French and German! ,  
Transfer him to the Signals Corps”**

**There, he mastered all means of  
communications:**

- Semaphore , Morse Code, Fuller Phones , carrier pigeons
- He ran miles of cable establishing networks from HQ to trench commands
- He crawled over no man’s land to repair wire severed by artillery fire
- Late in war new **wireless technology** enabled intercepts of enemy messages

# *Leslie kept a War Diary*

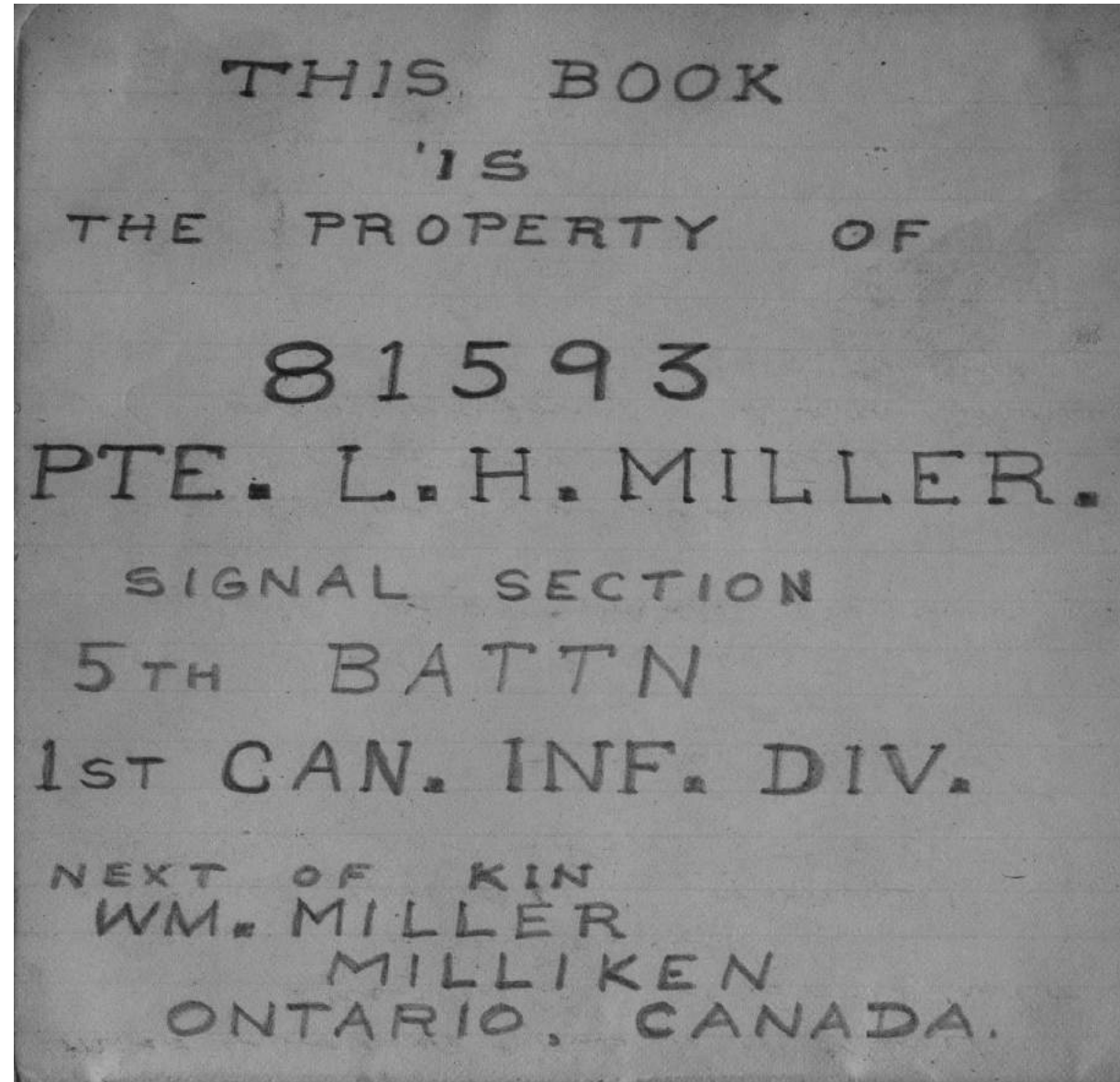
**Describes 3 1/2 years in trenches, with 1<sup>st</sup> Division**

- Like muddy sewers: filth, lice, rats, trench foot, stench of mangled bodies
- No sewage or garbage dumps: “throw it over the parapet”
- Ceaseless Artillery raining down hell and crack of bullets overhead
- Stealth and tension never relaxed

**Time to observe birds flying through the chaos**

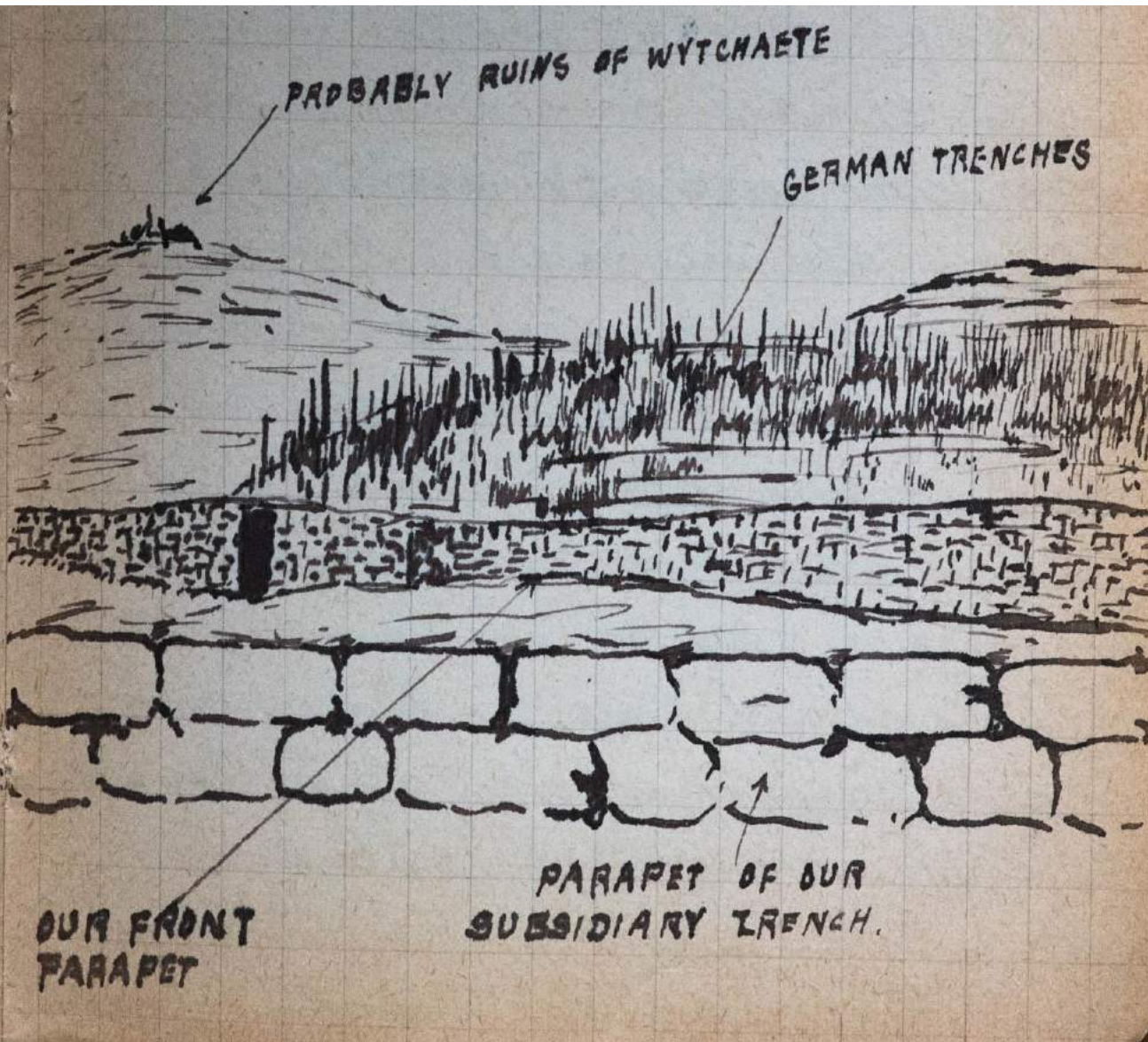
**Interrogated German prisoners**

**When on leave, he volunteered to work/ live with French farming families (PTSD relief)**





**A TRENCH DITCH**



**Diary Sketch: view from the trench**



**Shell Crater Bath Tub**

Sun. April 8, 1917 when we moved our instruments over to the cave and tunnel in preparation for the attack next morning. On the way under heavy shell fire we had to free a man stuck in the mud in the trench.

Sun. April 15, 1917.

great attack was made last Mon. morning 5:30 a.m. and Vimy Ridge taken by Canadian Corps. I was in charge of inst. to pick up power buzzer from 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Bdes. Next day I was out over the top carrying wounded and I was up as far as Yelus village. It is utterly destroyed by our shell fire. It is reported we took 12000 prisoners and 150 guns from the Germans in

Leslie's war diary relates: "next day I was out over the top evacuating wounded from Thelus village . It is utterly destroyed by our shell fire"





**After the battle Leslie set up wireless listening posts on the Ridge**

**He gathered ACORNS from a fallen oak tree**

**He sent them home to his fruit farming family**



- Leslie rose from Private through the ranks to Sergeant
- **Commendations for outstanding work on intercepts of German wireless messages**
- Awarded field commission: **1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, Royal Canadian Engineers Sept 1918**



# 1919: After 3 ½ years of hell, Lt Miller survives, tries to return to a normal life

- Alas War ravaged his health, he could not continue his teaching career
- Scarlet fever: required lots of rest, fresh air, no close study work
- Became a fruit farmer on 25 acres from father's farm
- Marries Isobel Fraser who he met teaching in Saskatchewan





- **1926 built his own house**
- Vimy ACORN seedlings planted in the woodlot
- Named his farm ***“The VIMY OAKS”***
- **No children** but he mentored many young people working on his farm
  
- **Remembrance days**, he spoke at local schools
  
- Post WW2: Offered garden plots to new Canadians
- **“FIRST COMMUNITY GARDEN IN THE GTA”**

**1950:** Family drive: my father **Sandy** saw the **Vimy Oaks sign**, we drove in. He and **Leslie** soon became close friends. Both Renaissance Men: teachers, scholars, distinguished themselves in the wars. Dad loved helping out on farm most weekends.





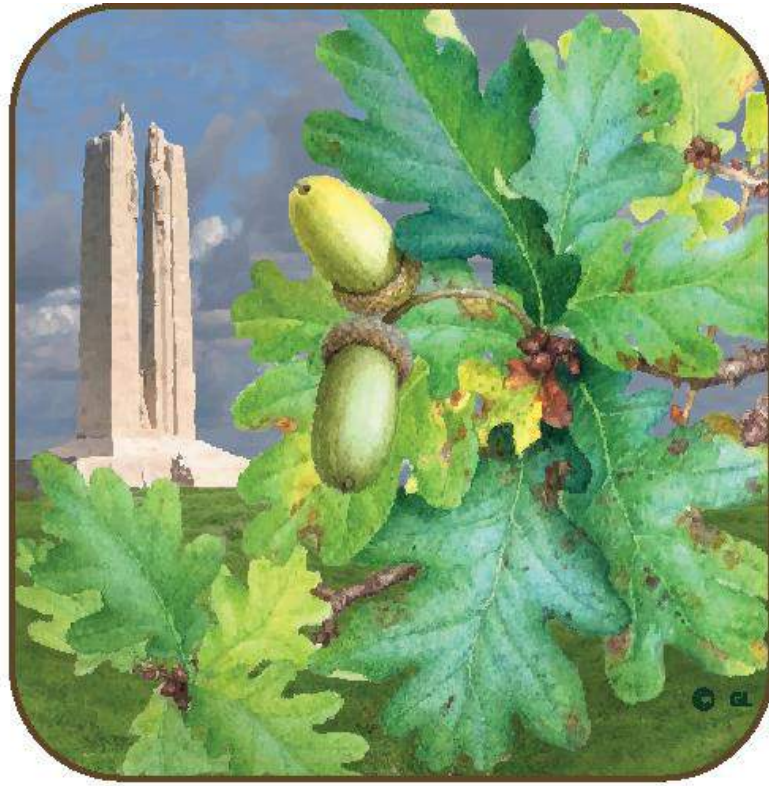
- My brother and I tagged along, loved to drive his horses
- Soon we were working too
- Leslie taught us nature study (I'm a lifelong birder)
  
- French immersion farming on summer vacation
- Was like a grandfather to us Especially after our father died young
- Insisted we do every job well: **Good prep for engineering school**

- **Leslie sold the farm in 1968**
- It sat vacant until 2005 when **Scarborough Chinese Baptist Church outbid Walmart**
- Leslie spent final years in **K Wing Sunnybrook**, had all his faculties when **he passed at age 90**
- **He wanted his ashes spread among Vimy Oaks**
  
- On hearing the history of the site, **the church** views the land as **sacred ground** and are dedicated to its preservation.
- They later became **1<sup>st</sup> partner with Vimy Oaks Legacy**



A red banner with a white border and rounded corners, featuring the text "THE PROJECT" in white, uppercase letters. The banner has a vertical tab on the left side and a small circular detail on the top right corner.

# THE PROJECT



## VIMY OAKS LEGACY LEGS des CHÊNES de VIMY

**VOLC , a not-for-profit corporation made up of 40 volunteers promoting the memory and legacy of Canadians who fought in the First World War through the planting of “Vimy Oak” saplings on Vimy Ridge and at commemorative places across Canada**