The Battle of Vimy Ridge

One of the greatest battles in Canadian history was the battle at Vimy Ridge, which began on 9 April 1917. Canadian bravery and valour led to the tremendous victory for the entire Allied Force and was considered the turning point of WWI.

Vimy Ridge was a formidable stronghold to breach. It was here that the Germans' heavily fortified Hindenburg Line met with their main trench lines leading north from Hill 70 near Arras, France. The German fortifications consisted of three layers of trenches, barbed wire and deep tunnels. The natural slope of the hill provided little cover for attacking Allied troops. French attempts to wrest control of the ridge throughout 1915 were rebuffed, resulting in some 150,000 French casualties. When the British army relieved French operations in March 1916, they were driven back before they could plan a major attack. The crucial goal of the battle at Vimy Ridge was to break through the impenetrable German lines.

For the first time in World War I, all four Canadian divisions fought on the same battlefield. They were led by Sir Arthur William Currie, who was the first Canadian-appointed commander of the Canadian Corps. Currie determinedly kept the Canadian divisions together rather than having them mixed in with various British units. It was the first time the Canadians fought together, and they achieved a magnificent victory, sweeping the Germans off the ridge.

Early in the morning of 9 April 1917, 20,000 soldiers attacked in the first wave of fighting. By that afternoon, the two front lines had been taken by the Canadian Corps. By 12 April, the entire ridge was under Allied control. When Hill 145, the highest feature on the ridge, fell, the operation was considered to be a resounding success. The ridge remained in Allied hands for the duration of the war.

The victory of the battle of Vimy Ridge did not come without cost: Canadian casualties reached 10,602, of which 3,598 were killed. The opposing German force sustained a further 20,000 casualties. During this single campaign, four Canadians were awarded the Victoria Cross and the entire Canadian contingent was commended for their bravery.