



The 15th Battalion Memorial Project Vimy Cross dedication. France & Belgium 2018.

Ian Leslie Macdonald



This work is dedicated to the memory of all the members of the 15th Battalion who never returned home and those who did and never forgot them, like my Grandpa Donald Macdonald & his brother, Angus Murray Macdonald.

Both were pipers and stretcher-bearers in the 15th Battalion and proud highlanders all their lives.

Honorary Colonel John Newman, MSM, CD. John envisioned the 15th battalion memorial project when Honorary Colonel of the 48th Highlanders of Canada. Without John's vision and a series of events that I firmly believe were orchestrated in the Upper Camp, I would not have come to be involved with the project over a decade ago.

John epitomizes the 48th's motto Dileas Gu Brath (faithful forever)

I humbly thank those individuals who helped make my trip possible.

My husband, Robert Gignac, Honorary Colonel John MacIntrye, The St. Andrew's Society of Toronto, Sherri and Dallas Bent with Carol O'Neil (Bent) in memory of Donald Bent and his father, Col. Charles Bent, Commanding Officer of The 15th Battalion CEF, Heather and Scott MacKenzie, Keith James Bartlett, Jamie Watts, Jan Scholten, Daniel Nicoletta, Sally and Paul Gignac, Jonathan Thomas and Sean Tasson, Eric Thomas, Anatol Von Hahn, Melanie Brausen, Liam Lahey, Sharlene Sandul, Geordie Beal, Pim Van Der Toorn, Liz Osmond, Kyle Smith and Dan Bickle-The Music at St. Andrews Church Toronto.





In 1917 this wooden cross marked the mass grave of men of the 15th Battalion CEF killed at Vimy Ridge near present-day Nine Elms Cemetery. The most sacred possession in the 48th Highlanders Museum, after the war, the cross was shipped to Toronto, where it has remained. It is only one of a handful of battelfield crosses that have survived.

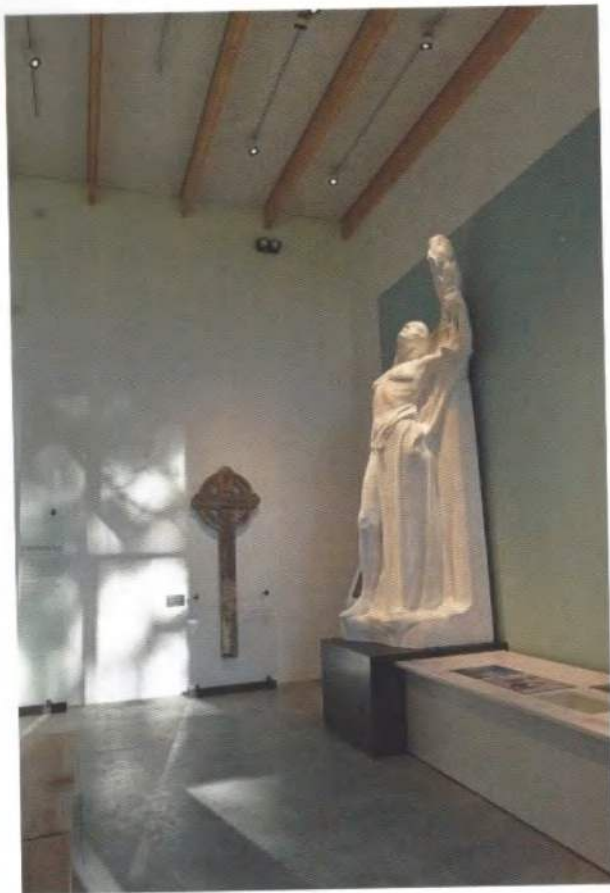
The Vimy Cross in roughly the same spot 100 years later before being displayed at the Canadian Vimy Memorial Visitor's Centre to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the battle.

While we have yet to find out who made the cross and likely will never know, a possible candidate is Pte(Piper) Alexander Sturrock (432112), a 24-year-old carpenter from Inverary, Scotland. As a piper, he would have been at the rear and able to make a cross in relative safety before it was brought to the burial site.

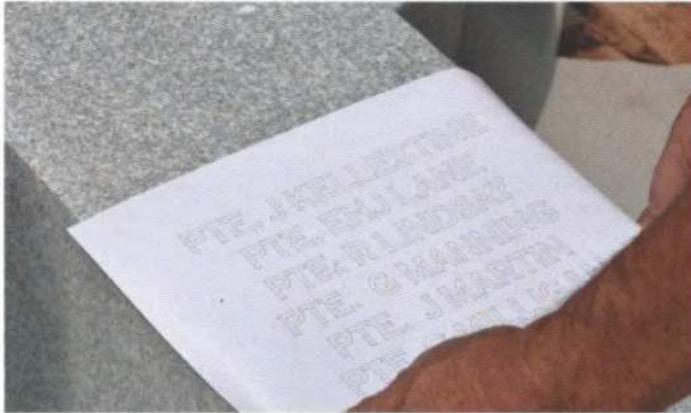




In 2017 the cross was carefully loaded at The 48th Highlanders of Canada Museum in St. Andrews Church and shipped to Vimy Ridge.



Governor General (2010-2017) David Johnston, PC CC CMM COM  
CD FRSC(hon) FRCPSC(hon) at the opening of the Canadian  
National Vimy Ridge Memorial Visitors Centre. 2017.



The idea of a monument at the site of the original Vimy Cross had been considered for some time. After many months of negotiations and planning, things slowly started to come together. While the cross was not ultimately placed in the original location as we had hoped due to beurocracy, a suitable location was found. Every detail was checked in the Ontario monument makers shop before the engraving. With the engraving finished, the cross is laid out for our final inspection before being transfered to a shipping container.



A double rainbow over the farmland surrounding St. Mary's Advanced Dressing Station Cemetery. A lovely peaceful spot now but a scene of unimaginable horror and sadness 100 years ago.





Through the investigative work of the project team, an "unknown officer of the 15th Battalion" was identified as Lt. Donald Wallace McDonald. His name will be added to a new headstone. Brigadier General (Ret) Greg Young, Chairman of the 15th Battalion Memorial Project, kneels at his grave. Greg cannot be thanked enough for his dedication and leadership to the 15th Memorial Project.







At the setting of the sun, BGen (Ret) Young salutes during the Last Post at a ceremony at the Saint Mary's Advance Dressing Station Cemetery with members of The Durand Group. (U.K.)

Below, former RSM of the 48th Highlanders of Canada, Vic Goldman, listens to the prayers for the many unknown buried in the cemetery.



St. Mary's A.D.S. (Advanced Dressing Station) Cemetery is located in open farmland near the town of Lens. Over two-thirds of the nearly 2,000 casualties commemorated in this Cemetery are unidentified. The Cemetery covers an area of 6,097 square metres and is enclosed by a low rubble wall.



With the local Mayor, Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel John MacIntyre of the 48th Highlanders of Canada unveils the 15th Battalion's Vimy Cross statue in Ecurie, France.





Following local and French National dedications  
BGen Greg Young (ret) places a wreath on behalf  
of the members of the Project.





With John MacIntyre, John Newman, who envisioned the 15th Memorial Project, places a wreath on behalf of The 3rd Canadian Rangers Patrol Group, of which he is the Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel .



After the unveiling, local officials with project team members and a collection of photos from death announcements of those named on the monument.



A wreath was placed on behalf of the project at the memorial to the Canadian WWII crew of a Halifax that crashed in the area.



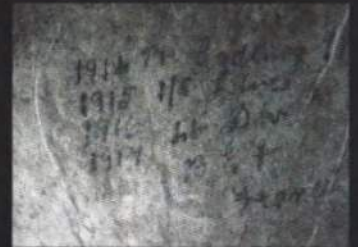
The project was invited to lay a wreath to commemorate local rench soldiers killed in both world wars before a reception at the town hall.

Our 15th group about to explore the Wellington Tunnels near Arras.





The Durand Group (U.K.) opened a tunnel in a farmer's field for a weekend, and we were able to explore it with them. From this entrance point, we walked underground to the exit behind the trees. Not for the faint of heart, and it took a few minutes to adjust to the reality of being underground in total darkness and seeing images by flashlight.







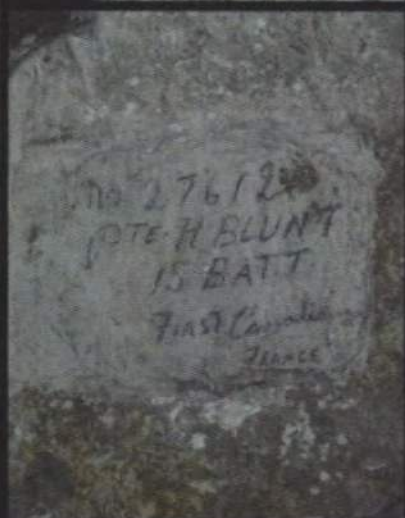
Some of the dozens of carvings in the Maison Blanche tunnels.

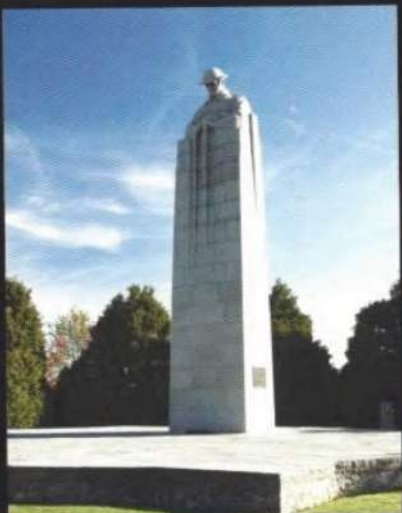
The largest collection is done by very gifted Highlanders.



We were shocked to find the vimy cross carved into the wall!







The 'Brooding Soldier' column rises from a low circular flagstone terrace and is sculpted at its top to form a Canadian soldier's bowed head and shoulders. Visible for miles around, the memorial stands 11 metres tall.

The soldier's hands resting are on the butt of his down-turned rifle in the 'arms reversed' position, a pose used as a gesture of mourning and respect for the fallen performed at funerals and services of remembrance.



At the 15th's Hill 70 memorial, unveiled in 2012, I found a photograph of Milfred Steinburg from Ontario, who died at 21. His grave is unknown, and Milfred's name is inscribed on the Vimy ridge memorial. Perhaps his family believes he died around Hill 70 or our memorial. Seeing others find our memorials a touchstone to remember loved ones is nice.



Left. Lieutenant Colonel Marshall KIA's grave and his portrait that hangs in the Officer's Mess at Moss Park Armouries.



In 2012, we were thrilled to welcome Donald Bent, son of LCol Charles E. Bent, CMG, DSO VD, to the annual Officer's Dinner along with members of his family. LCol Bent assumed command after the death of LCol Marshall. He was a beloved officer who my grandfather greatly admired.



The Pipes and Drums of the 15th Battalion with officers including LCol Bent (seated wearing glasses). My grandpa is in the back row behind Bent, with his brother Angus at the far left top row. Donald and I laughed when I told him a story grandpa used to tell about his dad while near Vimy. It's too salty to recount here. Bent saved grandpa's hide from the wrath of a British officer over the incident.



Donald Macdonald Piper 15th Bat. CEF Aged 25.  
Paris 1917.



Grandpa with his brother Angus after they both enlisted.