

President's Message

April 19, 2017

Our trip to Commemorate Vimy Ridge began with excitement on April 10. We were flying to a place of honour and pride. To visit the very place where many young Métis warriors gave their lives by defending a place and a people that they didn't even know. Our Métis Nation answered the call to fight alongside Canada in this great and terrible world war. Ironically, just 30 years earlier, we had fought valiantly against Canada at the Battle of Batoche where we were forced to stand in defense of our own homes and families. Despite this fact, it did not stop the fighting spirit of our people to stand with and defend those that cannot defend themselves. So, it was the Buffalo hunters who jumped into those ships to head overseas – first joining in the hundreds, then thousands. Our response virtually emptied many of our communities, as we volunteered to fight for Canada to defend strangers who were losing their lands, their homes, and their future. The irony of this is not lost on the Métis Nation.

At Vimy Ridge - in a battle that changed the course of the war 100 years ago - the Sons of Canada and our own Sons of the Métis Nation fought through Hell in a space no bigger than the size of two football fields. They fought through mud and rain. The trenches were infested with rats and sickness. The battlefield carried the stench of death which permeated everything. The sound of artillery was deafening as nearly a million shells fell and exploded on the ridge during this battle. In just 4 days, the casualties of our Sons numbered over 3500 dead and 7000 injured. Descriptions from the front lines recall the sounds of pain, soldiers screaming for help as they lay in water and mud dying a slow death.

The exchange of bullets was endless and the fighting was relentless. You were ordered not to stop, though you could see your brother beg for help drowning in the filthy water, mud and their own blood. Sadly, this horror was not left on the battlefield. Many of our Veterans brought it home where it remained in their minds forever. Many of these warriors could only be best described as kids. They won the Battle, but the psychological effects and the horrors would haunt them until they died.

One of my most humbling memories of visiting Vimy Ridge was seeing the grand monument that stands, forever to remind us, to never forget what was sacrificed here. This 100 Year Commemoration was very special for me to be a part of. It was with great pride that I saw our Sons, our Warriors, remembered and honoured by over 10,000 students from Canada. They were able to witness first-hand the location of this terrible battle and to hear evidence of what was lost. I'm sure this learning experience will last them a life time. I hope they will recall the stories they heard and share them with their friends.

Also in the course of this trip, I had the privilege to visit Juno Beach and commemorate a battle that happened 27 years later. Again, here during the Second World War, the loss of Canadian lives was staggering. During the Allied Invasion, the beach and water filled with our Sons lying dead or dying. The ferocious storm of bullets didn't stop our brave warriors, as again Canada proved our fearless fighters were up to the task. The casualties were great and we lost so many of our young soldiers. It is amazing to see our country, with such a small population, produce some of the greatest warriors in the world! A museum has been built, on the beach of Juno, to honour our great warriors

and the sacrifices they made. The exhibits also remind us of the sacrifices our families made. We must never forget. We must always honour our fallen warriors for the freedom they purchased for us with their own blood. Here, I took the opportunity to bring back home some sand from Juno Beach as a constant memorial. I will keep it in my office as a reminder to myself and our Métis Nation, of our Métis boys who came to the aid of Europe not once, but twice.

I want to tell our Métis families who have loved ones buried there, the graveyards we visited are kept in immaculate condition. Our time was short, as the Prime Minister's schedule was tight, but I found the grave of L. Chartrand from Camperville. I laid one of our Metis pins on his grave on behalf of Métis Nation and his family. Lennard Morin, who also represented the Métis Nation, found his Uncle, Napoleon Morin and paid his respects to him.

This trip was short, but intense. For two days we were in some of the most historic and hallowed locations of the two World Wars. As your President, I carried our Nations' presence with great honour and pride. To our Métis soldiers, some who still lie in foreign lands and graveyards of Europe, and also to those who lie in graveyards here at home, and to their families, I say "Thank You" on behalf of Métis Government. Let's all reflect the great valour and sacrifice of our heroes, our soldiers, and our warriors! WE REMEMBER THEM!

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