



The 100th anniversary of the battle of Vimy Ridge is an important part of Canada 150 and a defining event in the history of our nation. The Canadian success at Vimy has long been recognized as the point at which Canada came of age as a nation. On April 9, 2017 Canadians will commemorate the uncommon service and sacrifice of the soldiers, sailors, and airmen who left their families and occupations to serve in WWI generally and at Vimy in particular. This year, for the first time, the Chief Justice of Canada and the Judge Advocate General of Canada will join the official party at the Cenotaph in Ottawa in recognition of the remarkable service and leadership of Canada's legal profession throughout our military history. Law students and lawyers in every part of Canada have good reason to be inspired by the service of our profession and to proudly attend their local Vimy 100 commemoration.

The most senior Canadian military officer ever to die in combat is Malcolm Mercer, a lawyer from Toronto who set aside his successful law practice in 1914 to serve Canada in the early days of WWI. Major-General Mercer commanded the 3rd Canadian Division through the 2nd battle of Ypres and was later killed in action at Mount Sorrel. Mercer's 3rd Division went on to write history at the battle of Vimy Ridge in April of 1917.

Mercer was not alone in his commitment to service and leadership. Charles Holland Locke, a lawyer from Winnipeg, Manitoba, served as a Captain in the artillery at Vimy Ridge. After the war, Locke returned to practice law in British Columbia and in 1947, was appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada. Service and leadership are inter-generational principles. Mr. Justice Locke's son, Charles Conrad Locke, became a lawyer in British Columbia. Locke the younger served as an artillery officer in WWII and went on to become a Justice of the Supreme Court of British Columbia and later, a Justice of the Court of Appeal of British Columbia. He also served as President of the British Columbia Law Society and President of the Federation of Law Societies of Canada.

John Robert Cartwright completed his legal studies at Osgoode Hall in Toronto and had started his articles at a local law firm when he was called away to war. Although he enlisted as a private in the infantry, he was quickly promoted to lieutenant and then Captain. Cartwright was twice wounded and awarded the Military Cross for "courage in the face of the enemy". When the war ended, he returned to complete his legal studies and to practice law. Captain Cartwright was appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada in 1949 and became the 12th Chief Justice of Canada in 1967. Mr. Justice Locke and Chief Justice Cartwright are not the only soldiers to serve on the Supreme Court of Canada.

Douglas Charles Abbott left his legal studies at McGill to serve with the McGill Battery of Siege Artillery, including at Vimy Ridge. After the war he completed his legal studies and was called to the bar in 1921. In 1940 he was elected to Parliament and towards the end of WWII he served as Minister of National Defence. In 1954, he was appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Henry Grattan Nolan graduated from the University of Alberta and deferred a Rhodes Scholarship to serve in WWI. He was wounded at Cambrai and awarded the Military Cross. After the War, he earned a degree at Oxford and was called to both the English and Alberta bars. During WWII, he acted as deputy to the Judge Advocate General of Canada and later, he was the Canadian prosecutor before the International Military Tribunal trying war criminals in the Far East. In 1957 he became the first Albertan to be appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada.

There are as many more remarkable accounts as there are law students, lawyers, and judges who joined thousands of others citizens and placed service to Canada above their own interests and personal safety. I hope that in this important centennial year you will attend a cenotaph ceremony near you and feel a little proud of your profession, and maybe a little inspired, while honouring the selfless service and passionate leadership of those who came before us.

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