

## Assignment: Assessing Significance of Vimy Ridge

Following are excerpts from two secondary sources written by two highly regarded professionals about the Battle of Vimy Ridge. They reflect very different conclusions.

First, on the Canadian War Museum’s website, historian Tim Cook offers the following comments about Vimy

*Many historians and writers consider the Canadian victory at Vimy a defining moment for Canada, when the country emerged from under the shadow of Britain and felt capable of greatness. Canadian troops also earned a reputation as formidable, effective troops because of the stunning success.<sup>34</sup>*

Second, in *The Globe and Mail* on April 7, 2007, journalist Michael Valpy wrote of the same battle, as follows.

*It [Vimy Ridge] had a negligible effect on the war’s outcome. The Canadians had equal casualties and more strategic successes in other battles, such as Amiens and Passchendaele. If French or British rather than Canadian troops had driven the German enemy off Vimy Ridge, history probably would have forgotten about it. As it is, over the years, Canadian propaganda—and there is no other word for it—has airbrushed out the participation of British officers, tacticians, and artillery, and even supporting British infantry.<sup>35</sup>*

**VOCABULARY:** **formidable**—admirable, powerful  
**propaganda**—the deliberate spreading of information—that may or may not be true—for a purpose

### The Corroboration

If you were an historian trying to figure out which interpretation is closer to the truth, you would have to consult primary sources, such as those provided for you on the following pages.

1. Think about the two interpretations above, complete the following T-chart indicating how do they differ?

| Cook | Valpy |
|------|-------|
|      |       |

2. Examine the following primary sources paying close attention to who created it and what it is saying about the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Look for any bias that may help you identify a particular point of view or message in the source.

## Sources

- A. ... the most thrilling letter I have ever written you.... I hope you will find it the same. The greatest victory of the war has been gained, and I had a small part in it. (Letter from Lieut. Clifford Wells [Canadian] to his mother, April 20, 1917)<sup>36</sup>
- B. I would not want to have the impression left that Vimy was our greatest battlefield. (General Arthur Currie, senior Canadian officer in World War I)<sup>37</sup>
- C. A more desolate scene than this battlefield could scarcely be imagined. Every foot of earth had been up heaved time and time again during the furious bombardments from both sides, until the very bowels of the Ridge had been hurled on high and spread abroad.... Amid this flood ... lay the half-submerged bodies of the dead, whose blood had coloured to rusty red the stagnant water lapping around them. (War Diary, No. 11 Canadian Field Ambulance, 4th Division)<sup>38</sup>
- D. The fierce battle over Vimy Ridge was fought to a standstill. To be able to call oneself a Vimy fighter, was from then on a high honour!... In the hearts of the fighters and their loved ones, who restlessly, with deep yearning lived through it all in the Homeland [Germany]; the memory of the days of heroic glory and deepest sorrow glows indelibly at the Battle of Vimy Ridge, that patch of earth sanctified by the rivers of noble blood and uncountable heroic graves. (Generalleutnant Alfred Dieterich, The German 79th Reserve Infantry Division in the Battle of Vimy Ridge, April, 1917).<sup>39</sup>
- E. Canadian soldiers returning from Vimy Ridge, May 1917. (Photographer: William Ivor Castle. Library and Archives Canada).<sup>40</sup>



**Figure 2.13**  
Canadian soldiers  
pictured after the  
Battle of Vimy Ridge.

**Additional Sources:** you may wish to consider these before going on to the next questions

F. *Opinion: Vimy was a triumphant battle, but it was hardly the 'birth of a nation,'* <<http://www.cbc.ca/news/opinion/vimy-birth-of-a-nation-1.4060855>> CNC News, Retrieved Apr 8th, 2017

G. Video title: *Vimy Ridge Heaven to Hell*, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaywRnWrhzI>>, Retrieved Apr 8th, 2017

## Thinking through the Sources

1. Complete the following chart identifying which of the sources supports the viewpoints of Cook or Valpy

| Source          | Viewpoint Supported | How and Why - explain your choice |
|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| A               |                     |                                   |
| B               |                     |                                   |
| C               |                     |                                   |
| D               |                     |                                   |
| E               |                     |                                   |
| F<br>(optional) |                     |                                   |

2. Do the sources confirm what you already know? If so, how? If not, does it challenge what you think you know about the Battle of Vimy Ridge? How?

3. How could you explain the differences between Cook and Valpy's views on the significance of Vimy Ridge?

4. Based on what you have learned about Vimy Ridge write a response to either Tim Cook or Michael Valpy. Your response should either support or contradict their opinion. Be sure to include as much support evidence as possible, either from your background knowledge, the sources here, or the additional sources.