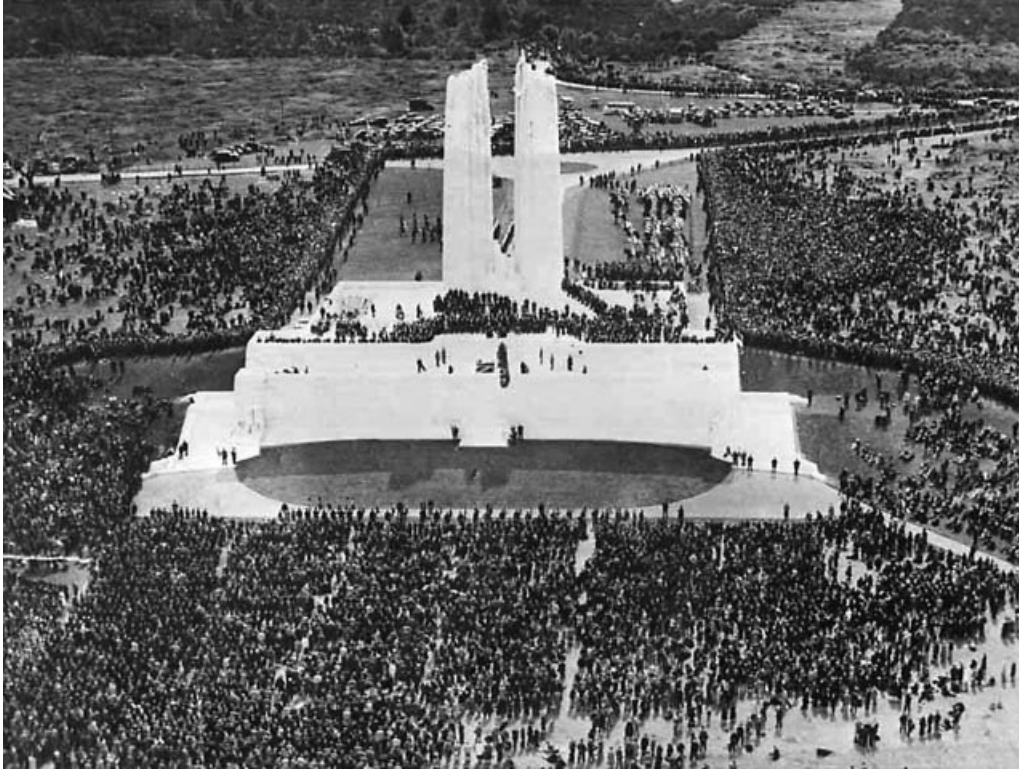


## The Unveiling of the Vimy Memorial (1936)



On 26 July 1936 Walter Allward's Vimy Memorial in France was unveiled by King Edward VIII. It was his only official engagement outside of the UK before he abdicated the throne later that year. Thousands of Canadian veterans and their families had made the trek to be there on this day 80 years ago.

It was a dreary, overcast summer day in northern France, 26 July 1936, as tens of thousands of Canadian, British, and French veterans and their families gathered for the unveiling of the newly completed memorial at Vimy Ridge. Many historians agreed that Canada's greatest victory in the war had taken place there 19 years earlier, in April 1917. Canadians from every part of the country had begun this pilgrimage to Vimy weeks earlier and now stood in awe before the magnificent monument on that sacred ground. The official party, including King Edward VIII, finally appeared, and voices rang out with God Save the King and O Canada. While Prince of Wales, the sovereign had served as a staff captain attached to the Canadian Corps in October 1918 and had admired the feats of the Canadians on the Western Front, whose veterans referred to him as 'Captain Windsor.' His visits to Canada during the 1920s had been enormous successes,<sup>1</sup> including his unveiling, with his brother Prince Albert, Duke of York (later King George VI) – of the Princes' Gates at the Canadian National Exhibition grounds in August 1927.

Just before the king spoke at Vimy, the sun, as if on cue, appeared. He was the second last of many speakers. After tumultuous applause and cheering, the crowd fell silent. Standing on that edifice – more than a decade's work by Canadian Walter Allward and his stone carvers – and clearly very moved, the monarch spoke softly and with great passion, first in French and

continuing in English:

"We raise this memorial to Canadian warriors. It is an inspired expression in stone, chiselled by a skilful Canadian hand, of Canada's salute to her fallen sons. It marks the scene of feats of arms, which history will long remember and Canada can never forget. And the ground it covers is the gift of France to Canada. All the world over there are battlefields, the names of which are indelibly on the pages of our troubled human history. It is one of the consolations which time brings that deed of valour done on those battlefields long survive the quarrels, which drove the opposing hosts to conflict. Vimy will be one such name. Already the scars of war have well-nigh vanished from the fair landscape beneath us. Around us here today, there is peace and rebuilding of hope. And so in dedicating this memorial to our fallen comrades our thoughts turn rather to the splendour of their sacrifice, and to the consecration of our love for them, than to the cannonade, which beat upon this ridge a score of years ago. In that spirit, in a spirit of thankfulness for their example, of reverence for their devotion and of pride in their comradeship, I unveil this memorial to Canada's dead."