

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN: THE BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

VIMY IN LETTERS: PRIMARY SOURCES

29th Infantry Battalion advancing over "No Man's Land" through German barbed wire and heavy fire during the Battle of Vimy Ridge (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/W.I. Castle/PA-001020).

MESSAGE TO TEACHERS:

This collection of primary sources accompanies the *Think Like a Historian* series of videos and worksheets. Find the entire series at thinklikeahistorian.ca. This package accompanies the *Vimy in Letters (Francis Bathe)* video and worksheets. It includes a full transcript of the letter and a reproduction of the original. Find the classroom worksheets at education.historicacanada.ca.

FRANCIS BATHE LETTER

Francis Bathe was born in England in 1895 but moved to Oshawa, Ontario, as a boy. At the age of 20, Bathe enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Forces in March 1916. He sailed for England in July 1916, where he began training. In February 1917, he saw military action in France as part of the 116th Battalion. Francis Bathe was one of nearly 100,000 Canadians who participated in the Battle of Vimy Ridge, and was one of more than 7,000 soldiers wounded in the battle. Though he suffered a wound to his neck, Bathe recovered quickly. He returned to Canada in 1919 and married. After the war, Francis Bathe started a building supply company in Oshawa, Ontario, which is still in the Bathe family four generations later.



Portrait of Francis Bathe in uniform (courtesy of the Bathe family, The Memory Project, Historica Canada).



Back of the envelope that contained Francis Bathe's letter to his sister, 1917 (courtesy of the Bathe family, The Memory Project, Historica Canada).



Front of the envelope that contained Francis Bathe's letter to his sister, 1917 (courtesy of the Bathe family, The Memory Project, Historica Canada).



April 16, 1917.

Dear May,

I guess you will be a little surprised to hear that I am back in blighty but of course you can never tell when those shells are going to shake paws with you especially where we were last Monday on Vimy Ridge. It's just a week ago today when I got mine of course we are lucky to get such lovely blightys. There was lots of them handed over that day but by gee we made fritzy beat it I guess the papers told all the news and I have come to the conclusion that reading



No. 446104 Rank Pte Regt 116 Canadian
 Name S. P. Batters April 16th Ward L. 2.
 DONCASTER MILITARY HOSPITAL,
 BALBY, DONCASTER.

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it out of a Toronto Empire is a little safer than doing the work but there was'nt [sic] a bad time that day of course there was a few of our lads napooed but nothing like so many as they expected I don't think. The greater part of them were walking cases like myself with just small wounds, mine was a piece of shrapnel it went in about the shoulder blade + came out in my neck + made a small hole of course about 1 1/2 inches long 1 inch wide but I can't imagine why it is so painless of course I'm not kicking but I was a little surprised at the size of



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it when it doesn't hurt so much I think I will be a long while before I can carry a pack again but being a flesh wound it may heal quickly + the only thing is it made my neck a little stiff + makes me hold my bean sideways but it will get over that alright. You remember Britton who married one of the Mac girls when you were in Oshawa well he is napooed + was blew completely in two an H.E. shell got him right in the centre poor fellow. The one which got me killed two and wounded 5 of us one of the poor lads fell across my legs + I thought it was my chum but I rolled him over



he wasn't dead but I yelled for stretcher bearers + by that time he was gone his two legs were severed at the hip + poor lad was better dead, we captured about 3,500 that morning + I should judge about as many were killed or wounded besides that, I think the 1st + 2nd Divisions did equally as well by what I heard they were chiefly the Bavarians at that they are notable fighters but our lads were better of course our lads had one thing a good artillery fire be ahead of them but they said about one half of the casualties were done by our own shells of course you can't expect much else when they keep up within 25 Yds

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No. _____ Rank _____ Regt. _____
 Name _____ Ward _____

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 DONCASTER MILITARY HOSPITAL,
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would be surprised to find out what wonderful spirits our lads had that night they had a hard task but then it is a known fact the Canadians generally do the hard jobs better that the most and are allways [sic] first in the tough spots, the French lost 80,000 in capturing Vimy before then they handed it over to the Imperials + they turned round + lost it so you can imagine what a place it was. You see its a ridge + those who hold the top of the ridge can look down over a stretch of 12 miles of fritzy's territory + now they will rattle Sam Hill out of him you see if they could'nt move him from the ridge why if you look at a map they were

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almost at a standstill but they took it + now fritzy will have to hike out. The papers give a very good account of it. There was only one correspondent that I saw around where we were + he came out of a dugout about 25 or 30 ft down. By gee the germans had tunnels + dugouts + caves about 60 to 75 ft down + in most of them were electric light so they thought they would'nt [sic] have to move for a little while but their lease expired Easter Monday + he certainly left the rent on the mantelshelf + beat it. You could see Battalions of them going through



a village + they opened the liquid fire on them + poor mortals didnt like to take their own medicine they handed over to the lads a year or two ago when they had us beat but now we give it to them with their full interest + If they werint driven to it they wouldnt do a great deal of scraping but of course some will fight + it will take a few months to finish it yet but this summer will do it allright. Well I will write to you again we are away up in Yorkshire as you will see by my add. So Goodbye Yours Bros Frank

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Your Bro, Frank.

