

Speeches

I never dreamed that the day would come when, after spending a lifetime in a continuous effort to promote and to preserve peace and good-will, in international as well as in industrial relations, it should fall to my lot to be the one to lead this Dominion of Canada into a great war. But that responsibility I assume with a sense of being true to the very blood that is in my veins. I assume it in the defence of freedom—the freedom of my fellow-countrymen, the freedom of those whose lives are unprotected in other countries, the freedom of mankind itself.

—W.L. Mackenzie King, House of Commons,
8 September 1939.

From the website called the Juno Beach Centre

Speeches

November 11, 2004

Remembrance Day Remarks, President Bonnie Patterson

Eighty-six years ago, on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, the armistice between Britain, France, and Germany went into effect, bringing an end to the First World War. More than 625,000 Canadian men and women had served, 154,361 had been wounded and 61,082 had lost their lives—a full 10% of those that served our country, lost their lives for our freedom.

Interesting enough, of those 625,000 brave Canadians, only eight people are alive today. This morning was particularly touching listening to the CBC interview one of those 8 living heroes. Mr. Laking who is now 105 years old and living in Ontario, reflected on those days with clarity that was uncanny.

The year 1918 and the end of the First World War—the origin of Remembrance Day—seem so long ago in the context of many of our lives here today. But at the same time, the reality of war, is only as far away as a veteran, a family member, friend or neighbour who has been touched by that war or those that have followed. Similarly, much of who and what we are as a nation, was defined by war.

And so today, we take the time to reflect, remember and honour those who fought for our freedom in the First World War, the Second World War, and the Korean War. More than a million-and-a-half Canadians served overseas and more than 100,000 died. We also remember those who stayed in Canada, and served on our soil.

- As a university community, we have come together in remembrance—a tradition re-established on our campus. For the second consecutive year, we gather to honour those who fought for our country and to remind ourselves that the freedom we unquestionably enjoy today was not without sacrifice. I am pleased to be a part of this service, and proud that the Trent University community is acknowledging the magnitude and the meaning of our past. Thank you to the students of the Religious Affairs Committee and Spiritual Affairs Co-ordinator David French for your role in organizing today's service.
- We would like to acknowledge any veterans that are with us today and their families—thank you for choosing to spend this morning with us. At the same time, we recognize the absence of veterans, not just on our campus but in our communities.
- This fall and during Veterans' Week 2004, special tribute has been paid to Canada's veterans of the Italian Campaign, which marked Canada's full participation in the Western Allies' triumphant return to the continent of Europe. This focus gives us an opportunity to recognize a pivotal Canadian contribution and again what was sacrificed by so many. While we cannot fully appreciate what we haven't experienced personally, we can honour those who fought for us, by simply opening our eyes to their experience, by pausing and remembering their words and actions.

- Some of the veterans of the Italian Campaign were honoured during a ceremony in Canada's Senate on November 5 and some commemorated the 60th anniversary of the Italian Campaign on a 10-day visit to Italy. Between the summer of 1943 and early 1945, some 100,000 young Canadian men and women served their country in Italy. Canadian casualties totaled more than 26,000, while nearly 6,000 Canadians lost their lives.
- As part of its Canada Remembers the Italian Campaign initiative, Veterans Affairs Canada summarizes the contribution like this... Soon after the Second World War began in 1939, most of Europe was under German control. In 1941, Germany began to move its military forces across Russia. By 1943 the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, asked for help from the Allied Forces to ease the pressure of this attack. The Allies agreed to help and decided to use Italy as a platform to attack German territories and resources. As they moved from the south to the north of Italy over a 20-month period, Canadians showed how determined they were to protect global peace and freedom. They faced difficult battles with some of the German army's best troops. They fought in the dust and heat of summer, the snow and cold of winter, and the rain and mud of spring.
- The thought of being involved in these types of battles is foreign to most of us, though the young men and women on the Italian battlefields in the early 40s, were not unlike our students. Wartime created circumstances that are unimaginable to many of us.
- A look back to the newspapers of the day tells us so. An article headline from September 1940 read All University Students To Get Militia Course, and the content of that article states that (and I quote) "All university students 18 years of age or more will be given compulsory military training this year and, in addition, those 21 or over will spend two weeks in camp after the academic year is ended, under a new agreement between the government and the Canadian University conference."
- Another article, published in the Globe and Mail in 1940, is headlined Compulsory Training At University To Be For Those 18 Years Or Over. It reads "The barking commands of the drill instructor will replace to some extent the rah-rah-rahs on university campuses this fall."
- Around the world, Canadians fought for almost six years in the Second World War—45,000 of them giving their lives. At home, everything changed as well, evolving in tandem with the war effort. It's difficult to imagine living in a world like that, or being a university student, staff or faculty member in times when the fight for freedom also meant sacrificing it.
- Earlier this week I was reminded of the profundity of something of which we are all currently aware. In an address by Pamela Wallin, Canadian Consul-General to New York, to more than 3,000 university students across the country, she said in the context of Canada/US Relations, we must remember, the United States is a country at war. While we, as Canadians, have discussed at length the merits of that war, and may disagree with its merits, the fact remains that many young Americans are fighting for their country and the freedom they believe is in jeopardy. For those young Americans and their families, the past has become their present.
- In this microcosm that is Trent University, we celebrate our 40-year history this year and realize that the essence of that celebration is the lasting contributions of those who came before us—the contributions that we continually benefit from. They shaped this place of higher learning and the environment of respect, tolerance and sensitivity that we strive to sustain. So whether it be the soldiers who fought for our freedom or, on our much smaller scale, the students, staff and faculty who came before us and built this university, it takes only a look at yesterday to realize our responsibility for tomorrow.
- We have been given the opportunity of freedom and the chance to become citizens of the world. We have also been given the responsibility that goes with it—to ensure that we as individuals continue to exemplify truth, integrity, tolerance, knowledge and understanding, so that as a community, a country, and a world, we move forward remembering, but not repeating, the past.