



Veterans Affairs  
Canada

Anciens Combattants  
Canada

*Speaking notes for  
The Honourable*

*Notes d'allocution de  
l'honorable*

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*Minister of Veterans Affairs*

*Ministre des Anciens Combattants*

Speaking Notes

National War Memorial

National War Memorial  
Ottawa, Ontario

August 15, 2015  
Start time: 11:00 a.m.

*Please check*

*Le discours*

**Canada**

Honoured Veterans / *Estimés vétérans,*  
Family members / Honourable colleagues,  
Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,  
*Mesdames et messieurs, bonjour.*

It is a privilege to stand with you today . . . in the shadow of our National War Memorial that represents the soul of our country. Our soul because it symbolizes the thousands of Canadians who served and sacrificed to make Canada the strong and free country that we have inherited from those who came before us.

**C'est un privilège d'être avec vous  
aujourd'hui, afin de nous souvenir du  
service de nombreux braves Canadiens et  
de leur rendre hommage.**

This War Memorial was constructed after the Great War, which most historians point to as the birth of modern Canada as a strong and independent nation willing to take an active role in the world. If the First World War was the birth of our nation, World War II was Canada's coming of age.

Over 1 million Canadians served in uniform during the War and even more assisted in the war effort at home. This is an incredible number when you consider the fact that Canada was a country with only 11 million at the outbreak of war.

Plus de 1 million de Canadiens ont servi pendant la guerre et encore plus aidé à l'effort de guerre à la maison. Ceci est un nombre incroyable quand on pense que le Canada était un pays avec seulement 11 millions d'habitants au début de la guerre.

Canadians served on the seas, in the air and on the ground. We grew our Army, our Royal Canadian Navy and our Royal Canadian Air Force into some of the largest and most effective forces in the world. We trained thousands more on our shores and had thousands of Canadians serve in Allied units or squadrons.

Most importantly....Canadians served in every theatre of war during the Second World War... and that brings us to this very special commemoration of the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of VJ Day.

*“At the going down of the sun and in the morning,  
We will remember them.”*

« Quand viendra l'heure du crépuscule  
et celle de l'aurore,  
nous nous souviendrons d'eux”

The English poet Laurence Binyon wrote these words amid the death and destruction of the First World War, but they have become the touchstone for Remembrance in Canada and around the world. These are familiar words to all Canadians – young and old - because this Ode of Remembrance is recited at cenotaphs large and small across the country.... From Victoria to St. John's, from, Iqualit to Edmonton, from Brandon to Bowmanville, we recite these words as our PLEDGE TO REMEMBER those who have served and sacrificed for us.

Que veut vraiment dire, nous nous souviendrons?

BUT, WHAT DOES “*WE WILL REMEMBER THEM*” mean?

Friends, Remembrance does not just mean we will think about their service and sacrifice on Remembrance Day...or on VE Day...or on VJ Day.....

*“We Will Remember Them”* means that we HAVE A DUTY to ensure Remembrance means that we strive to UNDERSTAND WHO these men and women were, WHERE they served and HOW they answered the call of service to Canada and often left the safety of Canada to support our allies and our beliefs far from our shores....

Not enough Canadians know about the tremendous service of these Veterans here with us today AND the service of their comrades who are no longer with us in the Pacific Theatre of War. The war did not end with VE-Day and more Canadians – particularly younger Canadians – need to learn about and understand the service of thousands of Canadians in Hong Kong....in Burma...and throughout the Pacific.

Many young Canadians may have seen the Hollywood movie Pearl Harbour, but likely far fewer know that the same day 2000 Canadians faced a similar overwhelming attack as they stood in defence of Hong Kong.

Two battalions - the Royal Rifles from Quebec and the Winnipeg Grenadiers faced the impossible task of defending Hong Kong in the face of an attack by the Japanese with overwhelming numbers. After 17 days of ferocious fighting, and as many people around the world paused to celebrate Christmas, Hong Kong fell and Canadian survivors would become Prisoners of War for the rest of the War.

Nous nous souvenons du brave John Osborn de Winnipeg qui sauta sur une grenade pour sauver la vie de ses soldats.

Remembrance means we should remember these brave Canadians fighting against insurmountable odds and remember the conspicuous bravery of John Osborn from Winnipeg. Osborn, a WWI veteran and 42 year-old Company Sergeant-Major in the Winnipeg Grenadiers led his men in the defence of a hill for several hours despite being outnumbered by the hundreds. Before the defence ended, Osborn threw himself on a grenade to save his comrades. Osborn was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously. It was the only VC awarded for the Battle of Hong Kong and it was Canada's first VC of the war.

Canada's last Victoria Cross of the Second World War was also the result of bravery in the Pacific theatre of war. Robert Hampton Gray – a Canadian pilot from Nelson, British Columbia – was flying with the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm. Gray had already been Mentioned in Dispatches for his gallantry fighting against the Germans and awarded a Distinguished Service Cross for helping sink a Japanese destroyer. On August 9, 1945 – 70 Days ago this past week – Gray was leading an attack against Japanese warships and even after his aircraft was hit and in flames, he continued his attack and helped sink a destroyer before crashing into the ocean. Gray was not only Canada's last VC of the war, he was also one of Canada's last casualties of the Second World War. His

statute is one in the Valiants Memorial just to my left.

To the Veterans here today, I want you to know that your service has served....and continues to serve as an inspiration to the young men and women who join the Canadian Armed Forces. We join a proud institution that you built and we inherit the goodwill and respect it has around the world as a result of your service.

As an 18-year old Officer Cadet, I still remember meeting one of our Pacific heroes like it was yesterday.... Sir Winston Churchill named Leonard Birchall the “Saviour of Ceylon” because this young RCAF pilot from St. Catherine’s Ontario helped warn the Allied fleet in Sri Lanka of a looming Japanese attack and almost lost his life in the process. On only his second day in the Pacific theatre, Birchall and his crew located the Japanese fleet and radio’d back their position before being shot down. 3 of his crew died in the crash or in the ocean and the survivors spent the remainder of the war as POWs in the most brutal of conditions. In fact, Birchall likely saved as many lives as the senior Allied officer in four POW camps as he did in his flying duties. Birchall’s speech at my first Mess Dinner on leadership, determination and

the principles of truth, duty and valour inspire me as much today as they did in 1991.

Quand j'étais élève officier au collège militaire, j'ai eu le privilège d'entendre Leonard Birchall, un pilote qui a vécu dans un camp de prisonniers de guerre au Japon. Son discours parlait de leadership et détermination et l'importance de la vérité, devoir, vaillance continue de m'inspirer à ce jour.

From the beginning of the Second World War to the final days of this global struggle against tyranny, Canada's contribution in the Pacific was profound... and lasting. More Canadians need to learn about the service of thousands of Canadians in the Pacific theatre, so that we can live up to the pledge we make to Remember.

While Canadians are familiar with the two lines I read from the Ode of Remembrance from Remembrance services across our country, few people, even hear the next two lines of the poem about the fallen....

*“They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;*

*They sit no more at familiar tables of home”*

To the distinguished Veterans of the Pacific Theatre here with us today and to the Families...YOU...are the “laughing comrades” ... YOU...are the families who had an empty place at your table. YOU...have lived with Remembrance for 70 years.

Aujourd'hui, marque le soixante-dixième anniversaire de la fin de la guerre dans le Pacifique, le Canada renouvelle notre engagement envers vous - nos anciens combattants et les familles ...

Today, on the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the end of the war in the Pacific, Canada renews our pledge to YOU – our Veterans & families...

We will tell the stories of gallant service on the sea, in the air and on land.

We will educate our young people and those who come after us of the brave service and sacrifice of Canadians in the Pacific.

We will strive to live up to the pledge we make on Remembrance Day and on days like this throughout the year and in the years to come...

*“At the going down of the sun and in the morning,  
We will remember them.”*

Thank you.

– 30 –