

Tuesday, 4 May 1920

Evidence of General Sir Arthur Currie, given to the Parliamentary Battlefields Memorials Committee

The Battlefields Memorials Committee met at 3.30 p.m., the Chairmon Hon. S. C. Mewburn, presiding.

The Chairman: We had the first meeting the other day in connection with these memorials, and it was through desirable to get some information in connection with the whole matter.

General Currie, can you give us some information about the sites for these proposed memorials? We wanted to get some information from you as to what you thought would be best for the Government to do in regard to locating permanent and perpetual memorials on these eight sites which have been selected. {...} Would you be good enough to give us any views that you may have on this matter and any other information that you think would be of advantage to the Committee?

General Sir Arthur Currie: Mr. Chairman, there is no necessity for me to say anything about the desirability of erecting memorials. I think you are justified in having taken it for granted that it is the desire of the people of Canada to see memorials of some sort erected.

I discussed the situation with the Prime Minister at the time of the Peace Conference, and he agreed that something should be done. We looked over the locations to see where the memorials might be erected, and those we finally selected were picked out after consultation with a good many officers. The eight sites so selected are in the vicinity of the eight outstanding battles of the war. {...}

Beginning at the northern part, there is a site in the vicinity of St. Julien, commemorating the first hard fighting of the Canadians at Ypres.

Then, in the vicinity of Passchendaele, a site was finally selected at Crest Farm, on a very high piece of ground about three or four hundred yards from the centre of the village of Passchendaele.

Next, going south, is the one at Observatory Ridge. A great deal of fighting took place in that area, and from that memorial you could look over to Maple Copse, Sanctuary Wood, Stirling Castle, St. Eloi, Hill "60," the Snouth, down into the valley and across to Mount Kemmel further south. A monument there will take in all that area.

Then there is the monument at Vimy where one of the first battles was fought by the Corps when it all went "over the top" together. This position the French had

attacked and failed to hold, and then the British had been driven a little further back; so it was the scene of many bloody battles and a monument there would commemorate some of the greatest fighting which the Corps did. It would overlook Arleaux, Avion, Fresnoy, Hill "70," and several other places.

There the memorial should be erected at Hill "145." From thence you can see Lens and all those places. You can see a very long distance. I believe you can see Bournon Wood, and you might even look down into Cambrai itself.

Vimy is the place where the Corps was for eighteen months; it was the scene of a great deal of very creditable fighting.

Then going a little further south, there is a monument to be erected at Dury Cross Roads. That is the last ridge of Hindenburg system. It is right at the Quéant-Drocourt Line. From there you can look back on Arras and Monchy, and the large ridge to the south of it – Wancourt Ridge. You can overlook the Quéant-Drocourt Line and on to the other heights which formed the objective of the battle of September 27th. To commemorate that engagement they propose erecting a monument at Bournon Wood from which one can see across the plains into Cambrai and beyond.

Then going further South, I think there should be a memorial on the Somme battlefield. The Battle Honours Committee to call the Somme fighting the Flers-Courcelette battle; and it is proposed to erect that memorial in the vicinity of Courcelette, near the Sugar Refinery, right on the main Albert-Bapaume Road. Thence you will be able to look back to Pozières, and you will see where the first Canadian troops went into line at the Somme. It is right in the middle of the Battles of September 15th, and you can also see the objectives of the battles of September 26th-27th, and October 1st-8th, and the trenches to the North.

Then at Amiens (a battle I think which had a much greater material result and a far greater moral effect than Vimy) the site, as far as my recollection goes, is quite clear. There is a high road there, it is practically right in the centre of the Amiens battlefield; and somewhere in the vicinity a memorial might be erected.

{...}

I do not think, if you should decide to erect more than one monument, that you can do anything else than erect eight. The sites selected are sites of battles of first importance and decisiveness; I think they cover the ground pretty well; and no part of the line would be neglected if on these eight sites memorials were erected.

I am not in favour of making one distinctive monument and seven other monuments. The Australians in selecting sites for their monuments were governed by the following policy: There were five Australian divisions; each division picked out the battlefield which marked its outstanding exploit and erected a monument thereon. They decided to erect, in addition to these, one

monument for which they called for competitive designs, and for which they chose a site at Villers-Bretonneux. I would not be in favour of such a policy. As far as Canada and the Canadians are concerned it would not be satisfactory for each division to erect a monument on its most famous battlefield or one monument in commemoration of all the greatest events of the war. If however, you decided to erect one monument alone, I think I would erect it at Vimy; although I do not think it was the most outstanding battle, or had the greatest material or moral effect on the winning of the war...

{...}

The Chairman: If the Government were to erect but one monument, Vimy would be your choice?

Gen. Sir Arthur Currie: I would think so. I would not want to have the impression left, however, that Vimy was our greatest battlefield. [In my judgement, I would prefer to see eight memorials erected.] ...all of the same kind; no one more outstanding than the others.