

# CANADIAN RADIO AMATEURS OF THE YEAR FOR 2017

Through the Radio Amateur of the Year Award, Radio Amateurs of Canada recognizes the outstanding contributions made by Canadian Amateurs.

The RAC Board of Directors takes great pleasure in announcing the selection of Don Studney, VE7DS and Keith Witney, VE7KW, as co-recipients of RAC's Amateur of the Year Award for 2017 for their work that made VE100VIMY a part of Canadian Amateur Radio history.

The project was a uniquely Canadian special event station VE100VIMY, and the conception, planning, organizing and fulfillment of the project was done by Don Studney, VE7DS, Team Leader and Keith Witney, VE7KW, Deputy Team Leader and Chief Engineer of the Vimy Commemorative Station Society (ve100vimy.ca). Together, Don and Keith made the project happen, a project that involved more than 40,000 Amateurs around the world!

## Planning: Laying the Groundwork

The lead time for a project like VE100VIMY was long. The project had its beginnings in 2011 in discussions that Don Studney had at an Orca DXCC dinner in Vancouver and later at a meeting of the Delta Amateur Radio Society.

In August 2012, Don wrote the Commanding Officer (CO) of the Canadian Forces School of Communications in Kingston, Ontario setting out plans for the VE100VIMY station. The plans made their way through internal departments and finally to Major Daniel Bergeron, Branch Adjutant who is also VE3SEW and the National Manager of the Canadian Forces Affiliate Radio System (CFARS). That was as far as things went until 2014.

In the spring of 2014, Don sent a letter about the project to the Chief Executive



Officer of Parks Canada, Mr. Latourelle, as Vimy Ridge is a Canadian National Historic site under its administration. Mr. Latourelle replied to Don personally, indicating that the actual administration of the site was the responsibility of Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) and that he had forwarded the letter to Mary Chaput, the Deputy Minister, in Charlottetown Prince Edward Island.

Ms. Chaput responded indicating that Veterans Affairs would like "to learn more about our unique initiative" and passed the file to Ms Arlene King, Acting Director, European Operations in Vimy, France.

After three months it was found that the proposal had been sent back to Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. Three months later a clarifying phone conference was held with Overseas

Events at VAC. Navigating government bureaucracy was its own challenge and one that Don capably pursued!

Don traveled to Vimy in 2015 and on April 21 he met with Major Guy Turpin, the Senior Manager of the Vimy site. They looked at possible shack sites and found that the Maintenance Building of the Commonwealth War Grave Commission (CWGC) looked ideal.

Two weeks later Keith made a visit to Vimy and had a very cordial meeting with Ms. King. He had a detailed tour of the "shack", was told that two offices would be combined into one big one for the radio room, windows would be changed which

Don Studney, VE7DS (left) and Keith Witney, VE7KW – Radio Amateurs of the Year 2017

would make coax feeds easy and was given near carte blanche re antenna locations.

In 2016, Don and Keith once again visited Vimy and had a productive time with Greg Kenney, Director General for Veterans Affairs Europe, based at Vimy. They briefed him on all things to do with Amateur Radio: its sustaining popularity, Special Event stations, spotting and the Cluster. They also revisited the shack and reviewed antenna placement. At home, Don began the list of operators committed to going to Vimy. Included in his list of operators were two French Amateurs and experienced DXpeditioners: Didier Cadot, F6BCW and Serge Mazza, F6IPT. Their participation at Vimy would prove to be significant.

Meanwhile, Keith was lining up equipment to take to Vimy: two complete 500 watt Elecraft K3 stations along with two Spiderbeam antennas and wire antennas for the low bands, as well as all the other cables, keyers, filters and bits and pieces. It appeared that preparations were as complete as they could be for the activation of VE100VIMY at Vimy in April 2017.

## Organizing: On the Ground in Canada

In June 2015, Industry Canada issued the call sign VE100VIMY to the Vimy Commemorative Station Society. The web address ve100vimy.ca was registered. In early 2016 the government in Ottawa was informed of the project as Don sent a letter and article to The Honourable Kent Hehr, Minister of Veterans Affairs who was kind enough to reply: "I am delighted to hear of your ongoing efforts to share the story of the Battle of Vimy Ridge as we prepare to make the centennial of this pivotal chapter in Canadian history."

Attention now turned to the in-Canada activations of VE100VIMY. Using contacts developed during their DXpedition participations and connections through RAC, Don and Keith established a network of VE100VIMY activators from Coast to Coast to Coast. Keith created a certificate program to motivate operators worldwide to work the VE100VIMY/n activations in Canada as well as later when TM100VIMY was on the air.

With the help of Attila Holop, HA2NA, certificate issuing was done online for the more than 4400 Amateurs worldwide who made the requisite contacts.

Procedures were in place to centralize logging as well as issuing of QSLs. Keith managed the logging, gathering logs from the 179 VE100VIMY operators. In late 2016, clubs and individuals applied for VE100VIMY activator status and by December 2016 selections had been made and a VE100VIMY/n operating schedule was online at [ve100vimy.ca](http://ve100vimy.ca).

On January 1, the bells ringing in 2017 had not calmed before the first QSOs with VE100VIMY/VE1 and VE100VIMY/VY2 were in the log. Three months later, at the end of March all 13 Canadian call areas had experienced a one-week VE100VIMY/n activation and more than 38,000 QSOs had been made with all six continents and more than 125 countries.

Later in January, Don sent a letter to VAC Deputy Minister General Natynczyk informing him of the plans and progress of the project.

Local newspapers from coast to coast gave Canadian Amateur Radio positive coverage in articles about their local Amateurs. RAC and TCA were supportive and effective in publicizing the project in the Canadian Amateur community. Don and Keith's VE100VIMY had become more than a special event station. It was a national Amateur Radio event of historic proportions spreading awareness of the Canadian Battle of Vimy Ridge around the world. And, there was more to come!

## Organizing: On the Ground in Vimy

### The best laid plans...

It had long been hoped that the VE100VIMY call could be used in France as the Vimy Memorial is located on land ceded to Canada – in effect Canadian soil. After representations at the highest intergovernmental level, this was not to be as it was found that France still controlled the airwaves! Thus TM100VIMY was the project's French call sign.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) controlled the Vimy site and on February 27, 2017 they emailed to say that the maintenance



building offices were no longer available for use as a location for the stations. With just a month to go new shack arrangements had to be made. The planner's wisdom of including French Amateurs as part of the project became immediately apparent. By March 3, Didier, F6BCW, had made arrangements with a local

From then on, four teams of operators worked eight-hour shifts using a schedule drawn up by Don and Keith. Transportation to and from Arras was provided by operators with rented cars. In addition to his operating shift, Keith dealt with station maintenance and repair issues as they arose. Outreach to the local community was arranged by Don. A presentation about Canada and the Battle of Vimy Ridge was made to a gathering of over 200 local veterans and high school students in nearby Lillers. On another occasion, Don made a presentation (in French) to a gathering of local Amateurs in Souchez.

For the first seven days on the air operations were routine with only scheduling changes to accommodate individual's timetables. As the April 9 Centennial Commemoration Day approached another aspect loomed large.



supplier to have "un bungalow de chantier" in place at Vimy by the end of the month. Problem solved!

By March 31, 16 of the 17 operators along with three additional helpers had arrived in northern France at Arras near Vimy and had settled in at the Holiday Inn where reservations had been made more than a year earlier. At the time the reservations were made the Hotel didn't realize what was coming its way in April 2017! Again, good planning. At Vimy, starting on March 29, Don, Keith and others had assembled the two stations in the "bungalow de chantier" and erected the antennas on the surrounding grounds. During setup, Director General Kenny, showing his interest in the project, dropped by to check on progress. After training sessions for some of the operators with Don and Keith, TM100VIMY was ready to go.

## Fulfilment: On the Air in Vimy

On March 31, 11 hours ahead of schedule TM100VIMY was on the air, the fulfilment of more than five years of planning. Don made the first QSO on CW with 9A2AA in Croatia.

Security! French "Sécurité" would only permit four operators on site during April 8 and 9! Don was in regular contact with Sécurité to get the necessary permissions and permits and Keith was one of the four operators standing by. The permits arrived and the four operators completed the remaining on-air shifts at TM100VIMY.

On April 9 as the commemoration ceremonies commenced and after more than 9,200 QSOs, TM100VIMY shut down!

The smiles on all the faces that night testified to the spirit and camaraderie that had been built within the group of operators and to the satisfaction of all in a job well done. The smiles were especially broad on the faces of Don and Keith. Their years of work on the VE100VIMY project had truly made Canadian Amateur Radio history.

*Special thanks to Don and Keith for preparing and sending this great article. The RAC Board considers nominations for this award and presents it if and when the nomination demonstrates the exceptional contribution made. If there are several nominations the best for that year is approved. Only three Canadian Radio Amateurs have received the award since 2010. For more information visit <http://wp.rac.ca/rac-amateur-of-the-year/>*