



Hansard Official Report of Debates

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

39th Parliament

JOHN YAKABUSKI, M.P.P. - RENFREW-NIPISSING-PEMBROKE

March 30, 2010

Tribute to John Babcock

Mr. John Yakabuski: I would like to begin by reading a poem entitled A Soldier Died Today by Second World War RCAF veteran Lawrence Vaincourt:

He was getting old and paunchy and his hair was falling fast.

He sat around the Legion, telling stories of the past.

Of the war that he had fought and the deeds that he had done,

Of the exploits with his buddies; they are heroes, every one.

Tho' sometimes to his neighbours his tales became a joke,

His Legion buddies listened; they knew whereof he spoke.

But we'll hear his tales no longer; he has passed away.

The world is much poorer now; a soldier died today.

He will not be mourned by many, just his children and his wife.

For he lived an ordinary, uneventful, quiet life,

Held a job, raised a family and quietly went his way;

The world won't note his passing, tho' a soldier died today.

When statesmen leave this earth, their bodies lie in state.

Thousands note their passing and proclaim that they were great.

Papers tell their stories, from the time that they were young.

The passing of a soldier tho', goes unnoticed and unsung.

It's so easy to forget them, it was so long ago,

When our young men left for battle, but this we should know.

It was not the politicians with their promises and ploys

Who won for us the freedom that our country now enjoys.

Should you find yourself in danger, with enemies at hand,

Would you want a diplomat with his every shifting stand?

Or would you prefer a soldier, who has sworn he will defend

His home, his kin, his country; he'll fight until the end?

He was just a common soldier and his ranks are growing thin,

But his presence should remind us; we may need his likes again.

For when countries are in conflict, then we find the soldiers' part

Is to clean up all the troubles that the bureaucrats did start.

If we cannot do him honour while he's here to hear the praise,

Then at least let us give him homage at the ending of his days.

Perhaps just a simple headline in a paper that would say:

Our country is in mourning, for a soldier died today.

John Babcock won no medals for the great feats of World War I. He was not in the trenches of Passchendaele, he did not storm Vimy Ridge and he did not die in battle to lie in Flanders fields. He was only one of 650,000 men and women who served the Dominion. Still, that farm boy from rural Ontario, who enlisted at 16 years old to, from the words of another poem, "take up our quarrel with the foe," holds another honour and distinction no other man, woman or child can claim. He was our last son of the First World War, the Great War, the horrible conflict, the war to end all wars, where Canada became a nation.

In the words of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, "His family mourns the passing of a great man. Canada mourns the passing of the generation that asserted our independence on the world stage and established our international reputation as an unwavering champion of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law."

But as we pay John Babcock honour, we should not forget that while he was Canada's last veteran of the First World War, he is not our last veteran and not the last soldier this

country has asked to take up arms to defend democracy, freedom and the rights we enjoy as a nation. Every time a soldier's body is carried down the Highway of Heroes, we should remember that they do not die for the glory of war; rather, they fought for the majesty of our nation. We should respect our veterans and give credence to their deeds in life, not just in death. Every soldier, whether it be John Babcock, my own father or so many of his generation who took up arms and those who continue to take up arms in defence of our nation today, deserves our respect and our thanks.

As a 16-year-old, John Babcock left the family farm to join the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Sydenham, Ontario. When they discovered his age, he was relegated to a training battalion and forced to wait until he was old enough to fight. The armistice came before that could happen, a few months short of his 18th birthday. Later in life, he expressed regrets at being a "tin soldier," a World War I veteran who never saw combat, saying he was willing to fight and, if need be, die on the fields of Belgium and France. True to that word, during the Second World War he fought on the side of the United States, his adopted country, where he was forced to give up his Canadian citizenship when he was naturalized in 1946.

He regained his citizenship in 2008, and during one of the last interviews he gave from his home in Spokane, Washington, he said, "I think it would be nice if all the different people in the world could get along together so we weren't having wars. I don't suppose that'll ever happen, though."

Sadly, John, you were probably right. But those of us who are elected to assemblies, Parliaments and councils across Canada will strive every day to promote freedom, democracy and justice. Our goal is to show that, more and more, our nation can be a beacon of light in the world—a world that endeavours to end wars. But when tyranny rears its ugly head, we will turn to soldiers like John Babcock to stand on guard for our nation and honour them by saying we shall not break faith with you and we shall not forget.

<http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=feature/week/poem/pmacd>

A Soldier Died Today

By Lawrence Vaincourt, RCAF Veteran, Second World War
(c) 1985 [A. Lawrence Vaincourt](#) (Opens a new window)

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Perhaps just a simple headline in a paper that would say:
Our country is in mourning "A Soldier Died Today".

**Please note that poem is from Veteran's Affairs and was not altered*