

Georges P. Vanier

A good man, a great Canadian

Georges Philéas Vanier (1888–1967) was a man of courage, integrity and kindness, who served Canada with great distinction. A father of five, he spoke and worked passionately for youth and the family, winning the respect and admiration of all—as did his wife Pauline (1899–1991).

During the First World War, said Vanier, he felt “a deep compassion and an active desire to right, as far as it was in my power, the heinous wrong done.” Leaving his law practice, he helped organize Canada’s first French Canadian volunteer unit—the 22nd Battalion, later to become the Royal 22nd Regiment. In 1918, while leading an attack at Chérisy in France, he was wounded and lost his right leg. He was awarded the Military Cross and the Distinguished Service Order.

In 1921, he was appointed aide-de-camp to Governor General Lord Byng. In 1925, he took over command of the Royal 22nd Regiment, based at the Citadel in Québec City.

In 1928, Georges Vanier began his diplomatic career as a member of Canada’s military delegation for disarmament to the League of Nations. In 1931, he was named Secretary to the Office of the High Commissioner in London and, in 1939, Canadian Minister to France. When the Germans marched into Paris in 1940, the Vaniers fled to London; there they worked to help the thousands of refugees from the Continent. They also urged the Canadian government to take in the victims of Nazi tyranny.

Returning home in 1941, Georges Vanier was appointed commander of the military district of Quebec; in this capacity he was one of the first to introduce a policy of bilingualism in the armed forces. In 1942 he crossed the Atlantic again when he was named Canada’s Minister to the Allied Governments in Exile in London (Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, the

Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Yugoslavia), and representative to the Free French in London and Algiers. After the war, he represented Canada at the Paris Peace Conference. In 1944 he was named Canada’s first ambassador to France, where he served until his retirement in 1953.

In 1959, Georges Vanier became Canada’s first French Canadian Governor General. Five years later the viceregal couple organized the Canadian Conference of the Family, leading to the founding of the Vanier Institute of the Family.

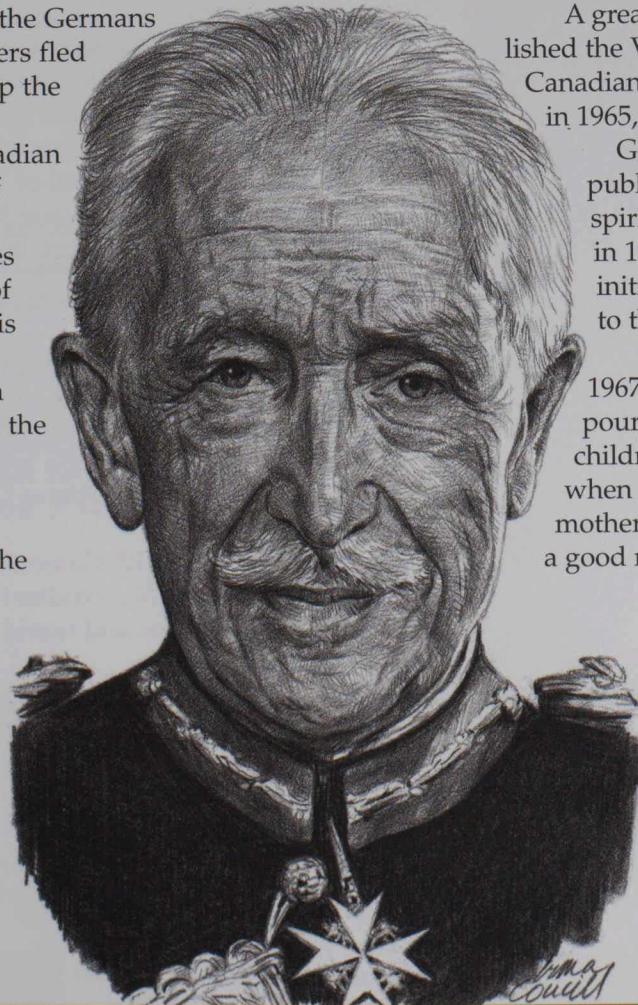
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General Vanier always encouraged young people to work hard and strive for excellence. His commitment to youth could be seen in the enjoyment he brought to his role as Canada’s Chief Scout. In 1967 he initiated the Vanier Awards for Outstanding Young Canadians. He also established the Vanier Medal of the Institute of Public Administration of Canada.

A great sports enthusiast, General Vanier established the Vanier Cup awarded to the winners of the Canadian university football championship and, in 1965, the Governor General’s Fencing Award.

Georges and Pauline Vanier brought to public life a love of humanity and a deep spirituality. In recognition of these qualities, in 1992 the Catholic Archdiocese of Ottawa initiated a process that could eventually lead to their beatification.

When Georges Vanier died on March 5, 1967, over 15 000 messages of sympathy poured into Government House, many from children. Perhaps one young boy said it best when he came home from school and told his mother, “The flags are flying low today because a good man has died. ●—



During the Second World War, Georges Vanier (left) talks with Lieutenant-General A.G.L. McNaughton, then the senior Canadian officer in Britain.



photos: CANAPRESS

On arrival in Ottawa on March 18, 1966, the Queen Mother (left) is greeted by Governor General Vanier and Madame Vanier.

To learn more about Georges and Pauline Vanier, visit the following Web sites:
http://www.gg.ca/history/bios/vanier_e.html
http://www.histori.ca/historica/eng_site/minutes/minutes_online/vanier.html