

# **Chronicles of Courage**

## **Canada's Victoria Cross Winners**



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## Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
Foreword .....	4
Origin of the Victoria Cross .....	6
Victoria Cross Facts.....	10
Unusual Victoria Crosses.....	13
Introduction .....	15
Lieutenant Wallace Lloyd Algie, VC.....	16
Major William George Barker, VC, MC**, DSO* .....	18
Corporal Colin Fraser Barron, VC.....	24
Lieutenant Edward Donald Bellew, VC.....	29
Lieutenant Colonel Phillip Eric Bent, VC, DSO .....	31
Captain William Avery Bishop, VC, CB, MC, DSO*, DFC .....	33
Lieutenant Rowland Richard Louis Bourke, VC, DSO .....	37
Lieutenant Jean Baptiste Arthur Brillant, VC, MC .....	42
Private Harry W. Brown, VC.....	44
Sergeant Hugh Cairns, VC, DCM.....	46
Lieutenant Frederick William Campbell, VC .....	49
Corporal Lionel (Leo) Beaumaurice Clarke, VC .....	52
Lieutenant Hampden Zane Churchill Cockburn, VC .....	57
Lieutenant Robert Grierson Combe, VC .....	59
Corporal Frederick George Coppins, VC .....	61
Sergeant Aubrey Cosens, VC .....	63
Private John Bernard Croak, VC.....	66
Private Robert Edward Cruickshank, VC .....	68
Major David Vivian Currie, VC.....	71
Lieutenant Raymond H.L. de Montmorency, VC .....	74
2 <sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Edmund de Wind, VC .....	76
Private Thomas Dinesen, VC .....	78
Assistant Surgeon Campbell Mellis Douglas, VC.....	80
Lieutenant Alexander Roberts Dunn, VC.....	82
Lance Corporal Frederick Fisher, VC.....	86
Lieutenant Gordon Muriel Flowerdew, VC.....	89
Captain, the Reverend, John Weir Foote, VC.....	91
2nd Lieutenant Benjamin Handley Geary, VC.....	93
Corporal Herman James Good, VC.....	95
Lieutenant Robert Hampton Gray, VC, DSC, RCNVR .....	97
Lieutenant Milton Fowler Gregg, VC, CBE, MC* .....	100
Sergeant-Major Frederick William Hall, VC .....	103
Able Seaman William Hall, VC.....	105
Sergeant Major Robert Hill Hanna, VC .....	108
Lieutenant Frederick Maurice Watson Harvey, VC, MC .....	110
Sergeant Frederick Hobson, VC.....	113
Major Charles Ferguson Hoey, VC, MC.....	116
Private Thomas William Holmes, VC.....	120
Lieutenant Samuel Lewis Honey, VC, DCM, MM .....	122
Flight Lieutenant David Ernest Hornell, VC, RCAF .....	125
Captain Bellenden Seymour Hutcheson, VC, MC .....	128
Corporal Joseph Kaeble, VC, MM .....	130
Lieutenant George Fraser Kerr, VC, MC*, MM .....	133
Private John Chipman Kerr, VC .....	135
Private Cecil John Kinross, VC .....	137
Sergeant Arthur George Knight, VC .....	139
Corporal Filip Konowal, VC .....	141

<b>Major O'Kill Massey Learmonth, VC</b> .....	145
Lieutenant Graham Thomson Lyall, VC .....	147
Captain Thain Wendell MacDowell, VC, DSO .....	150
Captain John MacGregor, VC, MC*, DCM .....	153
Major John Keefer Mahony, VC .....	156
Lieutenant George Burdon McKean, VC, MC, MM .....	159
Lieutenant Hugh McDonald McKenzie, VC, DCM .....	162
Lieutenant Alan Arnett McLeod, VC, RFC .....	164
Lieutenant Colonel Charles Cecil Ingersoll Merritt, VC .....	171
Lance Corporal William Henry Metcalf, VC, MM .....	174
Private William Johnstone Milne, VC .....	176
Corporal Harry Garnet Bedford Miner, VC .....	178
Captain Coulson Norman Mitchell, VC, MC .....	180
Sergeant George Harry Mullin, VC, MM .....	183
Pilot Officer Andrew Charles Mynarski, VC, RCAF .....	185
Lieutenant William H. Snyder Nickerson, VC, CB, CMG .....	190
Private Claude Joseph Patrick Nunney, VC, DCM, MM .....	192
<b>Private Timothy O'Hea, VC</b> .....	195
<b>Captain Christopher Patrick John O'Kelly, VC, MC</b> .....	197
<b>Lance-Corporal Michael O'Leary, VC</b> .....	199
<b>Private Michael James O'Rourke, VC, MM</b> .....	203
Company Sergeant Major John Robert Osborn, VC .....	205
Private John George Pattison, VC .....	208
Major George Randolph Pearkes, VC, CB, DSO, MC, CD .....	210
Lieutenant-Colonel Cyrus Wesley Peck, VC, DSO* .....	214
Captain Frederick Thornton Peters, VC, DSO, DSC*, RN .....	217
Private Walter Leigh Rayfield, VC .....	220
Surgeon Herbert Taylor Reade, VC, CB .....	222
Sergeant Arthur Herbert Lindsay Richardson, VC .....	224
Piper James Cleland Richardson, VC .....	227
Private Thomas Ricketts, VC, DCM .....	230
Private James Peter Robertson, VC .....	233
Lieutenant Charles Smith Rutherford, VC, MC, MM .....	235
Captain Francis Alexander Caron Scrimger, VC .....	238
Lieutenant Robert Shankland, VC, DCM .....	240
Lance-Sergeant Ellis Welwood Sifton, VC .....	243
Captain John Alexander Sinton, VC, OBE .....	245
Private Ernest Alvia Smith, VC .....	248
Sergeant Robert Spall, VC .....	252
Lieutenant Harcus Strachan, VC, MC .....	254
Lieutenant James Edward Tait, VC, MC .....	256
Major Frederick Albert Tilston, VC .....	258
Corporal Frederick George Topham, VC .....	262
Captain Paul Triquet, VC .....	266
Lieutenant Richard E.W. Turner, VC, KCB, KCMG, DSO .....	269
Lieutenant Thomas Orde Lauder Wilkinson, VC .....	272
Private John Francis Young, VC .....	274
Sergeant Raphael Louis Zengel, VC, MM .....	276
Postscript .....	278
References .....	279

## Foreword

*"Death and sorrow will be the companions of our journey;  
hardship our garment; constancy and valour our only  
shield."*

*Winston Churchill, 8 October 1940*

The following pages chronicle the exploits of one hundred men who served or represented Canada in its Armed Forces or those of the British Empire and Commonwealth of Nations and who, through their actions of extreme gallantry were awarded the highest recognition of courage – the Victoria Cross.

The information contained in this document has been gathered from a variety of sources, primarily electronic. Through no fault of those sources, the motivation for these courageous men and their gallant acts remains largely unknown. Was it patriotism? Concern for their fellows? Unit pride? Simply self-**preservation? Perhaps it doesn't matter. Nothing can take** away from their heroism nor from the ultimate sacrifice that so many of them made. Thirty four of the gallant one hundred were awarded their decoration posthumously.

It is clear from even a cursory review of these pages that the acts of heroism performed by these men were frequently not isolated incidents. Many of the recipients received other medals for gallantry. Did they possess some special reserve of fortitude? Were they foolhardy or simply unlucky (or lucky depending on your point of view)?

There is little to suggest that supreme heroism was the purview of any particular age, social class, ethnic or religious background, or military rank. The one hundred recipients represent a broad cross-section of the Canadian mosaic.

Similarly, it does not seem that the award of the Victoria Cross, in itself, contributed to the later success, military or otherwise, of the surviving recipients. Perhaps the only common denominator of these men came with their deaths and the subsequent memorials – normally, a plain headstone, with their names engraved and followed by the simple, but stirring letters – VC.

It is worth remembering that many servicemen who merited the Victoria Cross did not receive it because their brave actions went unnoticed, or the

witnesses were killed, or whose self-sacrifice resulted in a lonely death in an unmarked grave.

## Origin of the Victoria Cross

The Victoria Cross was born in the carnage of the Crimean War, even though hostilities had ceased twelve months before the first award was made.

The Crimean Campaign was the first war to be covered by regular correspondents, especially by reporters as perceptive and critical as William Howard Russell of *The Times*. Under his scrutiny the errors of officers, their prejudices and rigid attitudes, did not go unnoticed. He reported the disgraceful shortages of proper clothing and equipment, and the ravages of cholera and typhoid fever, which caused the deaths of 20,000 men as compared to the 3,400 killed in battle during the war. He also reported for the first time on the courage and endurance of the ordinary British soldier. When the infantry stormed the heights above the Alma River; when the 93rd formed the '*thin red line*' at Balaklava; when the Heavy Brigade charged the Russian cavalry and the Light Brigade the guns; Russell watched and reported what he saw to the British public.

At the time, the most esteemed award for military prowess in the British Army was the Order of the Bath, but it was awarded only to senior officers. Junior officers and even NCOs might win promotion in the field - or '*brevet rank*', as this kind of promotion was called. It was also possible to win distinction by being mentioned in the general's despatches, but at the outset of the war most of these honours were given to staff officers immediately under the general's eye and very rarely to the officers actually engaged in front-line action. The common soldier might expect a campaign medal, but this would be issued to every man who took part in the war, whether he had fought bravely or not. To remedy this situation the *Distinguished Conduct Medal* was instituted for NCOs and privates in 1854. This medal carried a pension and was highly valued but there was a growing awareness of the need for a decoration which would be open to all, regardless of rank and which would more fairly reflect the individual gallantry of men in the front line.

The British sense of fair play and a genuine admiration for gallant behaviour certainly played a part in the decision to institute a new award, but there may also have been an element of cynicism. Medals are a potent incentive to courage in battle, but they are also cheap.

The French already had the *Legion d'Honneur* (first instituted by Napoleon in 1803) and the *Medaille Militaire*. The Russians and the Austrians also had awards for gallantry regardless of rank, and it was thought high time that the British should follow suit. In December 1854 an ex-naval officer

turned Liberal MP, Captain Thomas Scobell, put a motion before the House of Commons that an 'Order of Merit' should be awarded to *'persons serving in the army or navy for distinguished and prominent personal gallantry.... and to which every grade and individual from the highest to the lowest.... may be admissible'*.

The same idea had also occurred to the Secretary of State for War, the Duke of Newcastle. In January 1855 he wrote to Prince Albert (Queen Victoria's husband), reminding him of an earlier conversation. The Duke suggested *'a new decoration open to all ranks'*. *'It does not seem to me right or politic,'* he wrote, *'that such deeds of heroism as the war has produced should go unrewarded by any distinctive mark of honour because they are done by privates or officers below the rank of major.... The value attached by soldiers to a little bit of ribbon is such as to render any danger insignificant and any privation light if it can be attained.'* On 29 January the Duke followed up his letter by announcing the new award in a speech in the House of Lords. At about the same time an official memorandum on the subject was circulated within the War Office setting out the details of a cross to be awarded for *'a signal act of valour in the presence of the enemy'*.

Events might have progressed quite quickly if Newcastle had not lost his job within a few days of this speech. But interest had been aroused. Lord Panmure, the new Secretary of State for War, corresponded with Prince Albert on the subject and the Queen herself was actively involved in the proposals. In a letter to Panmure Albert made pencil alterations to the draft warrant, which arose from his discussions with the Queen. It had already been decided that the award should carry her name, but the Civil Service's proposal was clumsy and long-winded: *'the Military Order of Victoria'*, Albert put his pencil through this and suggested *'the Victoria Cross'*. Throughout the document, wherever the word 'Order' with its overtones of aristocratic fraternity occurred, Albert applied his pencil. *'Treat it as a cross granted for distinguished service,'* he noted, *'which will make it simple and intelligible.'*

Queen Victoria took a great interest in her new award, especially in the design of the Cross. When the first drawings were submitted to her, she selected one closely modelled on an existing campaign medal, the Army Gold Cross from the Peninsular War. The Queen suggested only that it should be *'a little smaller'*. She also made a significant alteration to the motto, striking out *'for the brave'* and substituting *'for valour'*, in case anyone should come to the conclusion that the only brave men in a battle were those who won the cross.

Lord Panmure took the commission for the new medal to a firm of jewellers, Hancock's of Bruton Street, who had a high reputation for silver

work. From the beginning, however, it had been decided that the new decoration would be made of base metal and the first proof which the Queen received was not at all to her taste. *'The Cross looks very well in form, but the metal is ugly; it is copper and not bronze and will look very heavy on a red coat'*.

Inspired perhaps by the Queen's remarks, someone had the happy thought that it would be fitting to take the bronze for the new medals from Russian guns captured in the Crimea. Accordingly, an engineer went off to Woolwich Barracks, where two 18-pounders were placed at his disposal. Despite the fact that these guns were clearly of antique design and inscribed with very un-Russian characters, nobody pointed out until many years had passed that the 'VC guns' were in fact Chinese, not Russian, and may or may not have been anywhere near the Crimea.

The Chinese gunmetal proved so hard that the dies which Hancock's used began to crack, so it was decided to cast the medals instead, a lucky chance which resulted in higher relief and more depth in the moulding than would have been possible with a die-stamped medal.

By the spring of 1856 the Order was in hand, but there followed months of dilly-dallying on the part of Panmure and the various departments concerned, while they sorted out who would be eligible for the new award. Boards of adjudication were set up by the Admiralty and the army, but they took a long time making up their minds. Some commanding officers seized upon the opportunity to bring distinction to their regiments by putting dozens of names forward to the selection boards. Others ignored the whole thing. So while the 77th Regiment put forward no fewer than thirty-eight candidates, six regiments offered none at all. Lord Panmure declared that awards should be limited to the present hostilities, the Crimean Campaign. A rather parsimonious pension of £10 a year to each recipient was finally agreed upon, and the slow process of adjudication ground on for a full twelve months.

The Queen made it plain to Lord Panmure that she herself wished to bestow her new award on as many of the recipients as possible. The 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1857 was chosen by the Queen as a suitable day, and she decreed that a grand parade should be laid on in Hyde Park and that she would 'herself' attend on horseback.

Preparations for the great day were made in something of a hurry. The final list of recipients was not published in the *London Gazette* until 22 June, and Hancock's had to work around the clock to engrave the names of the recipients on the Crosses. Those destined to receive the award had to be found and rushed up to London, together with detachments of the units in which they had served. Because of the earlier delays some of the

candidates for the Cross had left the services and were therefore not in uniform when they arrived for the ceremony. Nevertheless, the Queen herself was well satisfied with the arrangements.

Queen Victoria caused some consternation by electing to stay on horseback throughout the ceremony of awarding the sixty-two recipients with the Cross. There is a pleasing legend that the Queen, leaning forward from the saddle like a Cossack with a lance, stabbed one of the heroes, Commander Raby, through the chest. The commander, true to the spirit in which he had won the Cross, stood unflinching while his sovereign fastened the pin through his flesh. The other sixty-one seem to have come through the occasion uninjured. The Queen managed to pin on the whole batch in just ten minutes, which does not suggest lengthy conversation, but the whole parade went off extremely well to the rapturous applause of the public.

Prince Albert's influence was clearly expressed in the terms of the Royal Warrant for the Cross which has survived, with some alterations, to the present day. It was a medal awarded *'to those officers or men who have served us in the presence of the Enemy and shall then have performed some signal act of valour or devotion to their country'*.

## Victoria Cross Facts

- The Victoria Cross is the highest decoration that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces.
- The VC was instituted by Royal Warrant in 1856 but was made retroactive to the autumn of 1854 to cover the period of the Crimean War. There have been several amending Warrants since then.
- The Victoria Cross has been awarded 1,356 times since 1854 to 1353 individuals. 100<sup>1</sup> have been awarded to Canadians or to individuals serving in the Canadian Forces or in the direct interests of Canada.
- It was only to be bestowed for actions "*in the presence of the enemy*", although during the period 1858-1881 an amendment allowed for awards "*under circumstances of extreme danger*". Six awards were made under these conditions including the only VC awarded on Canadian soil.
- Each VC is still made by the same London jewellers, Hancocks, from the bronze of Chinese cannons captured from the Russians at the siege of Sebastopol.
- There is now a requirement for at least three witnesses, who must make sworn written statements as to the exact circumstances of the action involved.
- It was not until 1920 than an official amendment was made allowing the VC to be awarded posthumously and, until 1977, it was the only British decoration (apart from Mention in Despatches) that could be awarded posthumously.
- It is not just a British award, but also a Commonwealth one. It was extended to most of the Empire in 1867 and to the Indian Army in 1911.
- It has been estimated that the chances of surviving receipt of the VC are 1 in 10.
- The largest number of VCs won in a single day was 24 on 16 November 1857 at the second relief of Lucknow during the Indian Mutiny.

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<sup>1</sup> Includes Pte. O'Hea who won the Victoria Cross while serving with the British Army in Canada.

- Fourteen non-British subjects have won the VC while serving with British or Commonwealth forces – 5 Americans, 1 Belgian, 3 Danes, 2 Germans, 1 Swede, 1 Swiss, and 1 Ukrainian. Several are counted among the number of Canadian recipients.
- The ribbon was originally red for the Army and blue for the Navy but when the Royal Air Force was formed in 1918 it was changed to red for all services.
- The Victoria Cross is still awarded only by Royal Assent and is awarded by the Monarch.
- **On the front of the medal is inscribed "For Valour" and on the back is hand engraved the name, rank, number, unit of the recipient and the date of the action.**
- Victoria Crosses awarded posthumously are identified on British Commonwealth War Grave headstones by the inclusion of an image of the medal as shown below on the headstone of Lt. Wallace Algie, VC.



- Since the end of World War II, thirteen of the original VCs have been awarded, none to a Canadian.

- Since 1990, three Commonwealth countries, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have instituted their own versions of the VC. As a result, the original Victoria Cross is sometimes referred to as the "Commonwealth Victoria Cross" or the "Imperial Victoria Cross", to distinguish it from the newer awards.
- Canada introduced its version of the Victoria Cross in 1998. It resembles the original but has a small fleur de lys included in the **design and the inscription, "For Valour" replaced by the Latin, "Pro Valore". It has not been awarded as yet** (May 2011).
- There is a widespread, erroneous myth that it is statutory for ***"all ranks to salute a bearer of the Victoria Cross"***. There is no official requirement that appears in the official Warrant of the VC, nor in Queen's Regulations and Orders, but tradition dictates that this occurs and as such the Chiefs of Staff will salute a Private awarded a Victoria Cross or George Cross.
- The original warrant stated that NCOs and private soldiers or seamen on the Victoria Cross Register were entitled to a £10 per annum annuity. In 1898, Queen Victoria raised the pension to £50 for those that could not earn a livelihood, be it from old age or infirmity. Today holders of the Victoria Cross or George Cross are entitled to an annuity, the amount of which is determined by the awarding government. As of January 2005, under the ***Canadian Gallantry Awards Order***, members of the Canadian Forces or people who joined the British forces before 31 March 1949 while domiciled in Canada or Newfoundland receive \$3,000 per year.

## Unusual Victoria Crosses

- Three men have won the VC twice – Arthur Martin-Leake, Noel Chavasse, both officers in the Royal Army Medical Corps, and Charles Upham, a New Zealand infantry officer.
- The youngest winners were 15 years old (Andrew Fitzgibbon and Thomas Flinn). The oldest was 61 (William Raynor).
- Five civilians have been awarded the VC while under military command (James Adams, George Chicken, Thomas Cavanagh, William McDonnell and Ross Mangles).
- There are three instances of father and son winning the VC:
  - Lt Frederick S. Roberts, Indian Mutiny and Lt. Frederick H.S. Roberts, Boer War.
  - Capt. N. Congreve, Boer War and Bt. Maj William L.T. Congreve, World War I.
  - Maj. Charles J.S. Gough, Indian Mutiny and Bt Maj. John E. Gough, Somaliland.
- There are four cases of awards to brothers:
  - LCdr George N. Bradford, World War I and LCol Roland B. Bradford, World War I.
  - Maj. Charles J.S. Gough, Indian Mutiny and Lt. Hugh H. Gough, Indian Mutiny.
  - Capt. Euston H. Sartorius, Afghan War and Maj. Reginald W. Sartorius, Ashanti.
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Alexander B. Turner, World War I and LCol Victor B. Turner, World War II.
- The only ungazetted award is the VC presented to the World War I American Unknown Soldier buried at Arlington National Cemetery.
- The 1858-1881 amendment that allowed the medal to be presented "*under circumstances of extreme danger*" but not necessarily "*in the presence of the enemy*" saw the VC bestowed on six individuals under these conditions – David Bell, James Copper, Campbell Douglas, William Griffiths, Thomas Murphy, and Timothy O’Hea. The last was the only VC presented for an event occurring in Canada.

- There are 8 cases of forfeiture due to subsequent dishonourable activity by a VC recipient. Nonetheless, their names remain on the list of VC recipients. (None are among the Canadian recipients).

King George V felt very strongly that the decoration should never be forfeited and in a letter from his Private Secretary, Lord Stamfordham, on 26 July 1920, his views are forcibly expressed:

*"The King feels so strongly that, no matter the crime committed by anyone on whom the VC has been conferred, the decoration should not be forfeited. Even were a VC to be sentenced to be hanged for murder, he should be allowed to wear his VC on the scaffold."*

The power to cancel and restore awards is still included in the Victoria Cross warrant but none has been forfeited since 1908

- Fred Hall, Leo Clarke and Robert Shankland all lived on the same street, Pine Street, in Winnipeg. The City of Winnipeg renamed it Valour Road to recognise this unique coincidence.
- Charles Lucas was the first person to be awarded the medal, but Henry Raby was the first to receive it from the Queen on 26 June 1857.
- William Rhodes-Moorhouse was the first airman to receive the VC.
- William MacBean held every rank from Private to Major General.
- Stanley Hollis was the only person to receive the VC for action on D-Day, 6 June 1944.
- **Horace Ramsden was awarded the VC for saving his brother's life.**
- New Zealand Flying Officer Lloyd Trigg has the distinction of being the only serviceman ever awarded a VC on evidence provided solely by the enemy, for an action in which there were no surviving Allied witnesses. The recommendation was made by the captain of the German U-boat **U-468** sunk by Trigg's aircraft.

## Introduction

The following pages provide brief summaries of the lives and actions of one hundred **men who were awarded the British Commonwealth's** highest honour for valour – the Victoria Cross. All of these one hundred are, in some way associated with Canada.

The baseline resources for this work were the websites of the Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH) of the Department of **National Defence, and the Department of Veterans' Affairs**. Both provided lists of Canadian Victoria Cross Winners.

The former only listed those men who had served in the Armed Forces **of Canada, whereas the Veterans' Affairs site expanded the criteria** to include those persons born in Canada who had been awarded the VC in the service of the United Kingdom.

Between them, these two sites yielded ninety-six names, two more than the 94 commonly cited as the number of "**Canadian VC winners**". Other sites yielded a further three names that met the basic criteria to add them to the list.

Cruikshank, de Montmorency, and Sinton were all born in Canada, but spent most of their lives and all of their military service in the British **Army**. **O'Leary** was not born in Canada, but spent some time working or living here. His military service, however, was spent in the British Army. Geary was a Briton, serving in the British Army when he won his medal, however, he subsequently emigrated to Canada and joined the Canadian Army.

Since these gallant men had been added to the traditional list of **Canadian VC's, I have taken the liberty of adding one more that does** not meet the criteria used by the two sites above, but who, I think deserves a place in the list.

Private **Timothy O'Hea of the British Army was awarded the only** Victoria Cross won on Canadian soil and I have included him in the following pages to make up a total of one hundred "**Canadian**" recipients of this prestigious honour.

## Lieutenant Wallace Lloyd Algie, VC

Wallace Algie was born on 10 June 1891 at Alton, Ontario. He was educated at Alton Public School and later entered the banking business, working in branches in Toronto and Vancouver. Prior to enlistment, he was acting manager of the Elm Street branch of the Bank of Toronto. He graduated from the Royal Military College as a qualified officer, yet enlisted as a private in the 198th Battalion in April 1916. Before heading overseas in September 1916, he was given a commission as a lieutenant. After some time in England, he transferred to the 20th Battalion.



**VC Action:** At the time of the action leading to the award he was a 27 year old lieutenant in the 20th Battalion, 1st Central Ontario Regiment, Canadian Expeditionary Force. Algie was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions on 11 October 1918 north east of Cambrai and which led to his death.

**Citation:** *"On 11 October 1918 north east of Cambrai, France, Lieutenant Algie was with attacking troops which came under heavy enfilade machine-gun fire from a neighbouring village. Rushing forward with nine volunteers he shot the crew of an enemy machine-gun and then turned the gun on the enemy, enabling his party to reach the village. He rushed another machine-gun, killing the crew and capturing an officer and 10 men, thereby clearing the end of the village. He then went back for reinforcements but was killed while leading them forward."*

*The London Gazette*, January 31, 1919

**Gravesite:** Lieutenant Algie is buried at Niagara Cemetery, Iwuy, France. The gravesite is located 5 miles North-East of Cambrai. The headstone is located along Row C, Grave 7.



**Niagara Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** Lt. Algie's VC is presently in the Lord Ashcroft Gallery of the Imperial War Museum, London, England.

**Postscript:** Prior to the event described above, Algie had been recommended for the Victoria Cross on two other occasions, for his actions during the Battle of Hill 70 in August 1917 and the subsequent battle around Lens.

In addition to Lt. Algie, seven other Canadians were awarded the VC for their part in the fighting around the Canal du Nord in September-October, 1918 that led to the liberation of Cambrai. They were Lt. G. Lyall, Lt. S. Honey, Lt. G. Kerr, Lt. M. Gregg, Capt. J. MacGregor, Sgt. W. Merrifield, and Capt. C. Mitchell.

## Major William George Barker, VC, MC\*\*, DSO\*

Born on 3 November 1894 on a family farm in Dauphin, Manitoba, "Will" Barker grew up on the frontier of the Great Plains, riding horses, shooting, and working as youngster on his father's farm and sawmill.

He was an exceptional shot, using a lever-action Winchester that he had modified with his own peep sight. He was particularly adept at shooting on the move, even while on horseback. One biographer has suggested that he could have been a trick shooter in a circus. He was physically poised, emotionally intense, with wide-ranging interests, and had an innate flair for the dramatic act. He was a very good student in school, but had frequent absences due to farm and sawmill life; he was the hunter providing food for the workers in the sawmill while still a young teenager, and missed classes because of this obligation.



Barker fell in love with aviation after watching pioneer aviators flying Curtiss and Wright Flyer aircraft at farm exhibitions between 1910 and 1914. He was a Boy Scout at Russell, Manitoba, and a member of the 32nd Light Horse, a Non-Permanent Active Militia unit based at Roblin, Manitoba. He was in Grade 11 at Dauphin Collegiate Institute in the fall of 1914, just before his enlistment.

In December 1914, soon after the outbreak of the First World War, Barker enlisted as No **106074** Trooper William G. Barker in the 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles. The regiment went to England in June 1915 and then to



**BE-2**

France on September 22 of that year. Barker was a Colt machine gunner with the Machine Gun Section until late February/early March 1916, when he transferred as a probationary observer to 9 Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps, flying in the BE-2.

He was commissioned as a second-lieutenant in April was initially assigned to 4 Squadron but on 7 July was transferred to 15 Squadron, still flying the BE-2. On 21 July Barker claimed a Roland scout *'driven*

*down'* with his Observer's gun, and in August claimed a second Roland. He was Mentioned in Despatches around this time. He officially qualified as an observer on 27 August and on 15 September he worked for the first time with Canadian troops, including his old regiment. On 15 November Barker and his pilot, flying very low over the Ancre River, spotted a large concentration of German troops massing for a counter-attack on Beaumont Hamel. The crew sent an emergency call which brought to bear all available artillery fire onto the specified target. The force of some 4,000 German infantry was effectively broken up. He was awarded the Military Cross for this action in the concluding stages of the Battle of the Somme.

In January 1917, after spending Christmas on leave in London, he commenced pilot training, soloing after 55 minutes of dual instruction.

On 24 February 1917 he returned to serve a second tour on Corps Co-operation machines as a pilot flying BE-2s and RE-8s with No.15 Squadron. On 25 March Barker claimed another scout 'driven down'. On 25 April 1917 during the Arras Offensive, Barker, flying an RE 8 with observer Lt. Goodfellow, spotted over 1,000 German troops sheltering in support trenches. The duo directed artillery fire into the positions, thereby avoiding a counter attack.

After being awarded a bar to his MC in July, Barker was wounded in the head by anti-aircraft fire in August 1917. After a short spell in the UK as an instructor, Barker's continual requests for front line service resulted in him being given command of C Flight in the newly formed 28 Squadron flying the Sopwith Camel. Although Barker was reportedly not a highly skilled pilot - suffering several flying accidents during his career- he compensated for this deficiency with aggressiveness and highly accurate marksmanship.

The unit moved to France on 8 October 1917, and he downed an Albatros DV on his first patrol, though Barker did not claim it as the patrol was unofficial. He claimed an Albatros of **Jasta 2** on 20 October, and two more, of **Jasta 18**, on 27 October.

On 7 November, No. 28 Squadron was transferred to Italy and most of the unit, with Barker temporarily in command, travelled by train to Milan. On 29 November he downed an Austrian Albatros D.III. A **Jasta 39** pilot was shot down and killed and a balloon of **BK 10** destroyed on 3 December.



**Albatros D.III**

One of his most successful, and also most controversial raids, fictionalized by Ernest Hemingway in *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, was on 25 December

1917. Catching the Germans off guard, he and Lt. Harold Hudson, his wingman, shot up the airfield of *Fliegerabteilung* (A) 204, setting fire to one hangar and damaging four German aircraft before dropping a placard wishing their opponents a "Happy Christmas."

Lt Lang of *Jasta 1* was killed by Barker on 1 January 1918, and two balloons, two Albatros fighters and a pair of two-seaters fell to Barker during February. Awarded the DSO, in March he claimed three more Albatros and an observation balloon.

Owing to his tendency to ignore orders by flying many unofficial patrols, Barker was passed over when the post of Commanding Officer of No. 28 Squadron became vacant. Dissatisfied, he applied for a posting and joined No. 66 Squadron in April 1918, where he claimed a further 16 kills by mid-July.

On 17 April, he shot down an Albatros D.III over Vittorio. He then became Squadron commander of 139 Squadron, flying the Bristol Fighter. Barker however, took his Sopwith Camel with him and continued to fly fighter operations. He carried out an unusual sortie on the night of 9 August when he flew a Savoia Polilia SP-4 bomber to land a spy behind enemy lines.

By this time, Barker's personal Sopwith Camel (serial no. B6313) had become the most successful fighter aircraft in the history of the RAF, having been used to shoot down 46 aircraft and balloons from September 1917 to September 1918, for a total of 404 operational flying hours. It was dismantled in October 1918, Barker keeping the clock as a memento - although he was asked to return it the following day. During this time Barker trialed a series of modifications to B6313, in order to improve its combat performance. The Clerget rotary engine's cooling efficiency was poorer in the hotter Italian climate, so several supplementary cooling slots were cut into the cowling. The poor upward visibility of the Camel resulted in Barker cutting away progressively larger portions of the centre-section fabric. He also had a rifle-type, notch and bead gun-sight arrangement replace the standard gun sight fitting.



**Sopwith Camel**

Having flown more than 900 combat hours in two and one half years, Barker was transferred back to the UK in September 1918 to command the fighter training school at Hounslow. Barker ended his Italian service with 33 airplanes claimed destroyed and 9 observation balloons downed individually or with other pilots.

In London at RAF HQ, he persuaded his superiors he needed to get up to date on the latest combat techniques in France and he was granted a 10-day roving commission in France, wherein he selected the Sopwith Snipe as his personal machine and attached himself to No. 201 Squadron RAF, whose Squadron commander, Major Cyril Leman, was a pal from his days as a Corps Co-operation airman.

**VC Action:** He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions on day 10, Sunday, 27 October 1918.

While returning his Snipe to an aircraft depot, he crossed enemy lines at 21,000 feet above the Forêt de Mormal. He attacked an enemy Rumpler two-seater which broke up, its crew escaping by parachute. By his own admission, he was careless and was bounced by a formation of Fokker D.VIIs of *Jagdgruppe 12*, consisting of Jasta 24 and Jasta 44. In a descending battle against 15 or more enemy machines, Barker was wounded three times in the legs, then his left elbow was blown away, yet he managed to control his Snipe and shoot down or drive down three more enemy aircraft. The dogfight took place immediately above the lines of the Canadian Corps. Severely wounded and bleeding profusely, Barker force landed inside Allied lines, his life being saved by the men of an RAF Kite Balloon Section, who transported him to a field dressing station.

At a hospital in Rouen, France, Barker clung to life until mid-January 1919, and then was transported back to England. He was not fit enough to walk the necessary few paces for the VC investiture at Buckingham Palace until 1 March 1919.

He is officially credited with one captured, two (and seven shared) balloons destroyed, 33 (and two shared) aircraft destroyed, and five aircraft "out of control;" the highest "destroyed" ratio for any RAF, RFC or RNAS pilot during the conflict.

**Citation:** *"On the morning of the 27 October 1918, this officer observed an enemy two-seater over the Foret de Mormal. He attacked this machine and after a short burst it broke up in the air. At the same time a Fokker biplane attacked him, and he was wounded in the right thigh, but managed, despite this, to shoot down the enemy aeroplane in flames. He then found himself in the middle of a large formation of Fokkers who attacked him from all directions, and was again severely wounded in the left thigh, but succeeded in driving down two of the enemy in a spin.*

*He lost consciousness after that, and his machine fell out of control. On recovery, he found himself being again attacked heavily by a large formation, and singling out one machine he deliberately charged and drove it down in flames.*

*During this fight his left elbow was shattered and he again fainted, and on regaining consciousness he found himself still being attacked, but notwithstanding that he was now severely wounded in both legs and his left arm shattered, he dived on the nearest machine and shot it down in flames.*

*Being greatly exhausted, he dived out of the fight to regain our lines, but was met by another formation, which attacked and endeavored to cut him off, but after a hard fight he succeeded in breaking up this formation and reached our lines, where he crashed on landing.*

*This combat, in which Major Barker destroyed four enemy machines (three of them in flames), brought his total successes to fifty enemy machines destroyed, and is a notable example of the exceptional bravery and disregard of danger which this very gallant officer has always displayed throughout his distinguished career."*

*The London Gazette*, November 30, 1918

**Postwar:** Barker returned to Canada in May 1919 as the most decorated Canadian of the war, with the Victoria Cross, the Distinguished Service Order and Bar, the Military Cross and two Bars, the French Croix de Guerre and two Italian Silver Medals for Valour. He was also mentioned in dispatches three times.

Barker formed a business partnership, Bishop-Barker Aeroplanes Limited, with fellow Victoria Cross recipient and Canadian ace Billy Bishop which lasted for about three years. In 1922 he rejoined the fledgling Canadian Air Force in the rank of Wing Commander. Barker was appointed acting Director of the RCAF in early 1924 and he graduated from RAF Staff College, Andover, in 1926. One of his achievements in the RCAF was the introduction of parachutes. After leaving the RCAF he became the first president of the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey club, and involved in tobacco growing farms in southwestern Ontario.

He continued to suffer from the physical effects of his 1918 wounds, his legs were permanently damaged and he suffered severely limited movement in his left arm. He also struggled with alcoholism in the last few years of his life. He died on 12 March 1930 when he lost control of his Fairchild KR-21 biplane trainer during a demonstration flight for the RCAF, at Air Station Rockcliffe, near Ottawa, Ontario. Barker, aged 35, was at the time the President and General Manager of Fairchild Aircraft in Montreal.

**Gravesite:** William Barker is interred in his wife's family crypt in Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Toronto.

**Medal Location:** Major Barker's Victoria Cross is on display in the Canadian War Museum.



**Major Barker's Medal Set**

**Postscript:** Barker is one of three Canadian airmen<sup>2</sup> to win the VC in World War I.

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<sup>2</sup> The others are Capt. W. Bishop and Lt. A. McLeod

## Corporal Colin Fraser Barron, VC

Colin Barron was born 20 September, 1895 in Baldavie, Scotland. He emigrated to Canada with his family in 1910. He joined the 48th Highlanders, but when the war broke out he joined the 3<sup>rd</sup> (Toronto) Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Central Ontario Regiment, **Canadian Expeditionary Force**'

**VC Action:** He was 24 years old, and a Corporal in the 3rd (Toronto) Bn., Canadian Expeditionary Force during the First World War when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the VC.



On 6 November 1917 at Passchendaele, Belgium, his unit was held up by three enemy machine-guns. To break the stalemate, Colin Barron, a corporal with the 3rd Canadian Inf. Bn., inched his way forward on his stomach until he was close enough to hurl several Mills bombs into the machine-gun nest. Rushing forward he found he had killed most of the gun crew. He turned on the rest with his bayonet and took them prisoner. He then turned one of the captured guns on the fleeing enemy. This left his company free to smash its way into the house and capture the pillbox and proceed with the advance toward Goudberg. His actions earned him the VC.

**Citation:** *"For conspicuous bravery when in attack his unit was held up by three machine-guns. Corpl. Barron opened on them from a flank at point-blank range, rushed the enemy guns single-handed, killed four of the crew, and captured the remainder. He then, with remarkable initiative and skill, turned one of the captured guns on the retiring enemy, causing them severe casualties.*

*The remarkable dash and determination displayed by this N.C.O. in rushing the guns produced far-reaching results, and enabled the advance to be continued."*

*London Gazette, no.30471, 11 January 1918*

**Postwar:** After the war, Barron remained in the Army until 1931, leaving in the rank of Company Sergeant-Major. During World War II, he enlisted in the Royal Regiment of Canada and served with the Canadian force that occupied Iceland. Later he was made Provost Sergeant-Major at 1<sup>st</sup> Division Headquarters in England.

**Gravesite:** He passed away on 15 August 1959 at Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto. He is buried in Prospect Cemetery in Toronto.

**Medal Location:** Unknown

**Postscript:** In addition to Cpl. Barron, eight other CEF members were awarded the Victoria Cross during the battle of Passchendaele—Major George Randolph Peakes, **Captain Christopher Patrick John O’Kelly**, Lieutenants Hugh McKenzie and Robert Shankland, Sergeant George Harry Mullin, and Privates Thomas William Holmes, Cecil John Kinross and James Peter Robertson.

## Squadron Leader Ian W. Bazalgette, VC, DFC, RAF

Ian Willoughby Bazalgette was born in Calgary, Alberta, on 19 October 1918, son of an army pensioner. His family moved to Toronto, Ontario, in 1923 where he received his early education at Balmy Beach School. Then his family moved to England and his education was completed at Rokeby, Wimbledon and by private tutor.

In his childhood he suffered from poor health, and at 13 was diagnosed with clinical tuberculosis, which required four months of treatment at the Royal Sea-Bathing Hospital, Margate. That he was able to rise above these afflictions is an indication of a strength of character which was to show itself amply later.



In September 1940 he received a commission in the Royal Artillery and the following year he transferred to the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. In the autumn of 1942 he was posted to No. 115 Squadron, R.A.F., for flying duties. In September 1943 he went to an operational training unit as an instructor and in April 1944 he was posted to No. 635 (Pathfinder) Squadron as a flight commander with the rank of Squadron Leader. He won a Distinguished Flying Cross in Italy in July 1944.

**VC Action:** On 4 August 1944 at Trossy St. Maximin, France, Squadron Leader Bazalgette's Lancaster bomber (serial ND811) was amongst a formation spearhead on a daylight raid on German positions. When near his target, his bomber came under severe anti-aircraft fire from the ground, putting both starboard engines out of action and causing a serious fire. In spite of this, the Squadron Leader pressed on to the target, marking and bombing it accurately. He then attempted to bring the burning aircraft to safety, having ordered those members of his crew who were able to do so to bail out. Although he managed to land the plane, it immediately exploded, killing him and his remaining two wounded crew members.

**Citation:** *"On 4<sup>th</sup> August 1944, Squadron-Leader Bazalgette was master bomber of a Pathfinder squadron detailed to mark an important target at Trossy St. Maximin for the main bomber force.*

*When nearing the target his Lancaster came under heavy anti-aircraft fire. Both starboard engines were put out of action and serious fires broke out in the fuselage and the starboard main-plane. The bomb aimer was badly wounded.*

*As the deputy master bomber had already been shot down, the success of the attack depended on Squadron-Leader Bazalgette and this he knew.*

*Despite the appalling conditions in his burning aircraft, he pressed on gallantly to the target, marking and bombing it accurately. That the attack was successful was due to his magnificent effort.*

*After the bombs had been dropped the Lancaster dived, practically out of control. By expert airmanship and great exertion Squadron-Leader Bazalgette regained control. But the port inner engine then failed and the whole of the starboard main-plane became a mass of flames.*

*Squadron-Leader Bazalgette fought bravely to bring his aircraft and crew to safety. The mid-upper gunner was overcome by fumes. Squadron-Leader Bazalgette then ordered those of his crew who were able to leave by parachute to do so. He remained at the controls and attempted the almost hopeless task of landing the crippled and blazing aircraft in a last effort to save the wounded bomb aimer and helpless air gunner. With superb skill, and taking great care to avoid a small French village nearby, he brought the aircraft down safely. Unfortunately it then exploded and this gallant officer and his two comrades perished.*

*His heroic sacrifice marked the climax of a long career of operations against the enemy. He always chose the more dangerous and exacting roles. His courage and devotion to duty were beyond praise."*

*The London Gazette, 17<sup>th</sup> August 1945*

**Gravesite:** Squadron-Leader Bazalgette is buried in the military plot in Senantes Churchyard, Oise, France about twelve miles west-north-west of Beauvais.



**S/L Bazalgette's Grave**

**Medal Location:** His medal is on display at the R.A.F. Museum in Hendon, England.

**Postscript:** Bazalgette Gardens in New Malden, Surrey, where he had attended Beverley Boys School, was named in his honour during the early 1950s. A school in Calgary, Ian Bazalgette Junior High School, is also named for him. In 1949 a mountain in Jasper National Park was named after him.

At the Nanton Lancaster Society Museum (located in Nanton, Alberta, south of his hometown Calgary), after a lengthy period of reconstruction and repair, an Avro Lancaster was painted in the colours and markings of S/L Bazalgette's aircraft. A dedication ceremony was held in 1990. Mrs. Ethel Broderick, Ian Bazalgette's sister, unveiled a plaque and the markings of the Bazalgette aircraft were unveiled by two of his surviving crewmembers, Chuck Godfrey and George Turner.

## Lieutenant Edward Donald Bellew, VC

Edward Donald Bellew was born in Bombay, India on 28 October 1882. He was educated at Blundell's School (1894 to 1896) before attending Sandhurst Military Academy.

He emigrated to Canada in 1903 and worked as a construction engineer.

He enlisted in the British Columbia Regiment on the outbreak of the First World War and was 32 years old, and a Lieutenant in the 7th (1st British Columbia) Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the VC.



**VC Action:** Lieutenant Bellew received the Victoria Cross for his actions on 24 April 1915 near Keerselaere in Belgium while serving as battalion machine gun officer with the 7th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force. During a major German attack, he had two machine guns in action on a high feature overlooking the ground across which the enemy was advancing. When the German infantry were less than a hundred meters away, and with his rear also threatened, Bellew and his sergeant resolved to fight it out. Although the sergeant was killed and Bellew had been wounded, he managed to continue firing until the supply of ammunition was exhausted. Before the enemy occupied his position and took him prisoner, Lieutenant Bellew seized a rifle and smashed his machine gun, thus denying its use to the enemy

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty near Keerselaere on 24th April, 1915, during the German attack on the Ypres salient. Capt. (then Lieut.) Bellew, as Battalion Machine Gun Officer, had two guns in action on the high ground overlooking Keerselaere. The enemy's attack broke in full force on the morning of the 24th against the front and right flank of the Battalion – the latter being exposed owing to a gap in the line. The right Company was soon put out of action, but the advance was temporarily stayed by Capt. Bellew, who had sited his guns on the left of the right Company. Reinforcements were sent forward but they in turn were surrounded and destroyed. With the enemy in strength less than 100 yards from him, with no further assistance in sight, and with his rear threatened, Capt. Bellew and Serjt. Peerless, each operating a gun, decided to stay where they were and fight it out. Serjt. Peerless was killed and Capt. Bellew was wounded and fell. Nevertheless, he got*

*up and maintained his fire till ammunition failed and the enemy rushed the position. Capt. Bellew then seized a rifle, smashed his machine gun, and fighting to the last, was taken prisoner."*

*London Gazette, no.31340, 15 May 1919*

**Post war:** He remained a Prisoner of war until 1919 and subsequently returned to Canada and became a dredging inspector. He died in 1961.

**Gravesite:** He is buried in the Hillside Cemetery, Kamloops, B.C.

**Medal Location:** Edward Bellew's Victoria Cross is believed to have been stolen from the Royal Canadian Military Institute, Toronto, between January 1975 and 22 July 1977. It has never been recovered.

**Postscript:** Second cousin of Robert Bellew Adams, also a VC winner, with the British Army in India in 1897.

## Lieutenant Colonel Phillip Eric Bent, VC, DSO

Phillip Bent was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia on 3 January 1881, and moved to Britain at a young age. He initially trained as a seaman and was taking his Merchant Navy officer's tickets when the war broke out in 1914. He joined a Scottish regiment for a bit of fun as the war was anticipated to be over by Christmas. He was commissioned in the Leicestershire Regiment.

**VC Action:** He was 26 years old, and a Temporary Lieutenant Colonel in the ninth Bn., The Leicestershire Regiment, British Army during the First World War when he performed the deed for which he was awarded the VC on 1 October 1917 east of Polygon Wood, Zonnebeke, Belgium. He was killed whilst leading a charge.



LIEUT.-COL. PHILIP ERIC BENT, V.C.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery, when during a heavy hostile attack, the right of his own command and the battalion on his right were forced back. The situation was critical owing to the confusion caused by the attack and the intense artillery fire. Lt. Col. Bent personally collected a platoon that was in reserve, and together with men from other companies and various regimental details, he organised and led them forward to the counter-attack, after issuing orders to other officers as to the further defence of the line. The counter-attack was successful and the enemy were checked. The coolness and magnificent example shown to all ranks by Lt.-Col. Bent resulted in the securing of a portion of the line which was of essential importance for subsequent operations."*

*This very gallant officer was killed whilst leading a charge which he inspired with the call of "Come on the Tigers".*

The London Gazette, No. 30471, dated January 11, 1918

**Gravesite:** He has no known grave, but is commemorated on the memorial wall at Tyne Cot Cemetery. The Tyne Cot Memorial forms the northeastern boundary of Tyne Cot Cemetery, which is located 9 Km north east of Ypres town centre on the Tynecotstraat, a road leading from the Zonnebeekseweg (N332).



**Tyne Cot Cemetery Memorial Wall**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is displayed at the Museum of the Royal Leicestershire Regiment in Leicester, England.

## **Captain William Avery Bishop, VC, CB, MC, DSO\*, DFC**

William Avery Bishop was born in Owen Sound, Ontario on 8 February 1894. He was the second of three children born to William A. and Margaret Bishop. Attending Owen Sound Collegiate, Bishop earned the reputation of a fighter. He avoided team sports, preferring solitary pursuits such as swimming, horse riding, and shooting. Bishop was less successful at his studies; he would abandon any subject he could not easily master, and was often absent from class.



At 15 Bishop had his first experience with aviation; he built an airplane out of cardboard, wood crates and string, and "flew" off the roof of his three-story house. He was dug, unharmed, out of the wreckage by his sister.

In 1911, at the age of 17, Billy Bishop entered the Royal Military College of Canada (RMC) in Kingston, Ontario, from where his brother Worth had graduated in 1903. Bishop failed his first year at RMC, having been caught cheating.

When the First World War broke out in 1914, Bishop left RMC and joined the Mississauga Horse cavalry regiment. He was commissioned as an officer but was ill with pneumonia when the regiment was sent overseas. After recovering, he was transferred to the 8th Canadian Mounted Rifles, a mounted infantry unit, then stationed in London, Ontario. Bishop showed a natural ability with a gun, and excelled on the firing range. His seemingly "super-human" eyesight allowed him to put bullets in a target placed so far away others saw only a dot.

They left Canada for England on 6 June 1915 on board the requisitioned battleship *Caledonia*. On 21 June, off the coast of Ireland, the convoy came under attack by U-boats. Two ships were sunk and 300 Canadians died, but Bishop's ship remained unharmed, arriving in Plymouth on 23 June.

Bishop quickly became frustrated with the mud of the trenches and the lack of action. In July 1915, after watching an RFC aircraft return from a mission, Bishop said **"...it's clean up there! I'll bet you don't get any mud or horseshit on you up there. If you die, at least it would be a clean death."** He transferred to the Royal Flying Corps and, as there were no spots available for pilots in the flight school, he chose to be an observer.

Bishop returned to England in September 1916, and was accepted for training as a pilot at the Central Flying School at Upavon on Salisbury Plain. His first solo flight was in a Maurice Farman "Shorthorn".

In November 1916 after receiving his wings Bishop was attached to No. 37 Squadron RFC at Sutton's Farm, Essex flying the BE.2c. Bishop disliked the flying at night over London, searching for German airships, and he requested a transfer to France.

On 17 March 1917, Bishop arrived at 60 Squadron at Filescamp Farm near Arras, where he flew the Nieuport 17 fighter.

On 25 March 1917, Bishop claimed his first victory when he was one of four Nieuports that engaged three Albatros D.III Scouts near St Leger. Bishop shot down and mortally wounded a *Leutnant* Theiller.



**Bishop and a Nieuport**

On 30 March 1917 Bishop was named a flight commander and the next day he scored his second victory. On 8 April he scored his fifth victory and became an ace. To celebrate, Bishop's mechanic painted the aircraft's nose blue, the mark of an ace.

He claimed 12 aircraft in April alone, winning the Military Cross and a promotion to Captain for his participation at the Battle of Vimy Ridge. The successes of Bishop and his blue-nosed aircraft were noticed on the German side, and they began referring to him as "Hell's Handmaiden". Ernst Udet called him "the greatest English scouting ace".

On 30 April, Bishop survived an encounter with *Jasta 11* and Manfred von Richthofen, the Red Baron. In May, Bishop won the Distinguished Service Order for shooting down two aircraft while being attacked by four others.

**VC Action:** On 2 June 1917, Bishop flew a solo mission behind enemy lines to attack a German-held aerodrome, where he claimed that he shot down three aircraft that were taking off to attack him and destroyed several more on the ground. For this feat, he was awarded the Victoria Cross (VC), although it has been suggested that he may have embellished his success. His VC was one of two awarded in violation of the warrant requiring witnesses (the other being the Unknown Soldier), and since the German records have been lost and the archived papers relating to the VC were lost as well, there is no way of confirming whether there were any witnesses. It was however common practice at this time among the RFC and RNAS squadrons to submit kills claimed without requiring confirmation or verification from other witnesses.

Bishop continued air operations until August 1917 and returned to the front in June 1918. He emerged as the British Empire's second highest scoring ace, with 72 official victories.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery, determination and skill.*

*Captain Bishop, who had been sent out to work independently, flew first of all to an enemy aerodrome; finding no machine about, he flew on to another aerodrome about three miles south-east, which was at least twelve miles the other side of the line. Seven machines, some with their engines running, were on the ground. He attacked these from about fifty feet, and a mechanic, who was starting one of the engines, was seen to fall. One of the machines got off the ground, but at a height of sixty feet Captain Bishop fired fifteen rounds into it at very close range, and it crashed to the ground.*

*A second machine got off the ground, into which he fired thirty rounds at 150 yards range, and it fell into a tree.*

*Two more machines then rose from the aerodrome. One of these he engaged at the height of 1,000 feet, emptying the rest of his drum of ammunition. This machine crashed 300 yards from the aerodrome, after which Captain Bishop emptied a whole drum into the fourth hostile machine, and then flew back to his station.*

*Four hostile scouts were about 1,000 feet above him for about a mile of his return journey, but they would not attack.*

*His machine was very badly shot about by machine gun fire from the ground."*

London Gazette, no.30228, 11 August 1917

**Post War:** After the war, Bishop established a short-lived passenger air service with fellow ace William Barker, but after legal and financial problems, and a serious crash, the partnership and company was dissolved. In 1921, Bishop and his family moved to Britain, where he was quite successful. In 1928, he was the guest of honour at a gathering of German air aces in Berlin and was made an Honorary Member of the Association. However, the family's wealth was wiped out in the crash of 1929 and they had to move back to Canada. There Bishop was offered a vice-presidency of McColl Frontenac Oil Company.

In 1938, Bishop was made an Honorary Air Marshal of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and placed in charge of recruitment. He was instrumental in setting up and promoting the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, which trained over 167,000 airmen in Canada during the Second World War. In 1942, he appeared as himself in the film *Captains of the Clouds*, a Hollywood tribute to



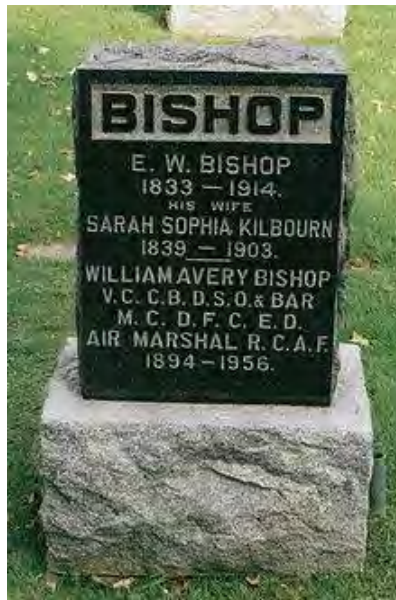
**Bishop in 1942**

the RCAF.

By 1944 the stress of the war had taken a serious toll on Bishop's health, and he resigned his post in the RCAF to return to private enterprise in Montreal, before retiring in 1952. However Bishop remained active in the aviation world, predicting the phenomenal growth of commercial aviation postwar. His efforts to bring some organization to the nascent field led to the formation of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in Montreal.

With the outbreak of the Korean War, Bishop again offered to return to his recruitment role, but he was in poor health and was politely refused by the RCAF.

**Grave Site:** He died in Palm Beach, California, on 11 September 1956, and is buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Owen Sound, Ontario.



**Medal Location:** His medals are held by the Canadian War Museum.



**Bishop's Medal Set**

## Lieutenant Rowland Richard Louis Bourke, VC, DSO

At the start of World War One, few people might have guessed that a quiet, introverted rancher from the interior of British Columbia (BC) would soon become one of only four Canadian naval Victoria Cross winners. Ironically, the late Victoria, BC resident, Commander Rowland Bourke, almost never made it to active duty.

Rowland Bourke was born in London, England in 1885. At 17, he came with his family to Nelson, BC. When World War One broke out, he left the family fruit farm and volunteered to enlist in the Canadian forces, but was rejected in all three arms of service because of defective eyesight. Undaunted, he returned to England at his own expense and successfully joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve to serve on the motor launches.



In April 1918, raids were arranged to block the Belgian harbour of Zeebrugge-Ostend, most heavily defended of all the German U-boat bases. Bourke, a Lieutenant at the time, immediately volunteered his vessel for the rescue of crews whose ships were sunk in the blockade effort. He was again rejected due to his poor eyesight. Despite being told most of the men would not make it back, Bourke persisted in offering his motor launch (ML) as a standby in case one of the chosen rescue motor launches was disabled.

**As a result, on the night of April 23, Bourke's launch picked up 38 sailors** from the sinking blockship HMS *Brilliant* and towed the crippled ML 532 out of the harbour. For this latter achievement Bourke was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO).

**VC Action:** When the second operation against Zeebrugge-Ostend was called, Bourke's motor launch was found to be too damaged for the work. But Bourke was so eager to take part that he offered to give up his command in order to participate in the operation on another vessel, ML 254. Finally, however, his own ML was accepted as a standby. Bourke had just 24 hours to completely re-fit his vessel and find a new volunteer crew.

He succeeded, and on May 9-10, Bourke's ML followed the blockship HMS *Vindictive* back into the Belgian harbour. While backing out after the raid, he heard cries from the water. Bourke made a prolonged search of the area amid very heavy gunfire at close range. He found a Lieutenant and

two ratings from the RN ship badly wounded in the water. **Bourke's own** launch was hit 55 times and two of the crew were killed. Nevertheless, he managed to bring out his vessel in one piece.

For this action, King George V decorated Bourke with the Victoria Cross. He was also presented with the French Legion of Honour. With characteristic modesty, Bourke asked his family not to inform the press of his achievements.

**Citation:** *"Volunteered for rescue work in command of M.L. 276, and followed "Vindictive" into Ostend, engaging the enemy's machine guns on both piers with Lewis guns. After M.L. 254 had backed out, Lieut. Bourke laid his vessel alongside "Vindictive" to make further search. Finding no one, he withdrew, but hearing cries in the water, he again entered the harbour, and after a prolonged search, eventually found Lieutenant Sir John Alleyne, and two ratings, all badly wounded, and in the water, clinging to an upended skiff, and he rescued them. During all this time the motor launch was under very heavy fire at close range, being hit in fifty-five places, once by a 6 in. shell – two of her small crew being killed and others wounded. The vessel was seriously damaged and speed greatly reduced. Lieut. Bourke, however, managed to bring her out and carry on until he fell in with a Monitor, which took him in tow. This episode displayed daring and skill of a very high order, and Lieut. Bourke's bravery and perseverance undoubtedly saved the lives of Lieut. Alleyne and two of the "Vindictive's" Crew."*

**Post War:** After the war the reluctant hero returned to Nelson, BC and married. In 1932 he and his wife moved to Victoria and Bourke started work at HMC Dockyard in Esquimalt as a civilian clerk.

**He was instrumental in organizing the Fishermen's Reserve, a west coast** patrolling operation, just prior to World War Two.

He also served as a recruiting officer for a time but in 1941 again became an active serviceman, this time with the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve. He served as Commander at HMCS *Givenchy*, Esquimalt, and Burrard, Vancouver.

In 1950 Bourke ended his long and dedicated career with the navy, retiring as supervisor of civilian guards.

**Gravesite:** He died on 29 August 1958 and was buried with full military honours in Royal Oak Burial Park Cemetery, Victoria, BC.

**Medal Location:** His medal is held by the National Library and Archives in Ottawa.



**Lt Bourke's Medal Set**

## Corporal Alexander Picton Brereton, VC

Alexander Picton Brereton was born in Oak River, Manitoba, on 13 November 1892. He attended school in Oak River, Hamiota and Strathclair. Prior to his enlistment with the 144th Battalion in January 1916, he worked on a farm.

**VC Action:** Brereton was serving as a corporal with the 8th Battalion (90th Winnipeg Rifles) of the Manitoba Regiment during the Battle of Amiens in an attack on a German position called Hatchet Wood, near the villages of Warvillers and Vrély, south of the town of Albert, France, on 9 August 1918. Corporal Brereton's platoon suddenly came under fire from six German machine guns while in an exposed position. Brereton immediately charged one of the machine guns on his own, shooting one member of the crew, bayoneting another, and compelling nine other enemy soldiers to surrender. The rest of the platoon, inspired by his example, assaulted and captured the five remaining machine gun positions. For his actions on this day, Corporal Brereton was awarded the Victoria Cross.



**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery during an attack, when a line of hostile machine-guns opened fire suddenly on his platoon, which was in an exposed position, and no cover available. This gallant N.C.O. at once appreciated the critical situation and realized that unless something was done at once the platoon would be annihilated. On his own initiative, without a moment's delay, and alone, he sprang forward and reached one of the hostile machine-gun posts, where he shot the man operating the machine gun and bayoneted the next one who attempted to operate it, whereupon nine others surrendered to him."*

*Cpl. Brereton's action was a splendid example of resource and bravery, and not only undoubtedly saved many of his comrades' lives, but also inspired his platoon to charge and capture the five remaining posts."*

*The London Gazette, September 27, 1918*

**Post War:** Following his discharge in 1919, Brereton returned to farming, later acquiring 640 acres of land in Elnora, Alberta. During the Second World War, he served as Quartermaster Sergeant with a unit in Red Deer. After the war, he briefly ran a butcher shop and general store, before returning to farming with his son.

**Gravesite:** Alexander Picton Brereton died at the Colonel Belcher Hospital on 11 June 1976, in Calgary, Alberta and is buried in Three Hills, Alberta.



### **Cpl Brereton's Grave**

**Medal Location:** His medal is held by his family.

**Postscript:** In addition to Cpl. Brereton, nine other members of the Canadian Corps earned Victoria Crosses between 8 and 13 August 1918 — Lieutenants Jean Baptiste Arthur Brillant and James Edward Tait, Sergeants Robert Spall and Raphael Louis Zengel, Corporals Frederick George Coppins, Herman James Good and Harry Garnet Bedford Miner and Privates John Bernard Croak and Thomas Dinesen.

## Lieutenant Jean Baptiste Arthur Brillant, VC, MC

Jean Brillant was born in Assemetquaghan, Quebec, on 15 March 1890. Having previously served with the Canadian Militia, Brillant enlisted in the 189th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) in 1915. Late in 1916, he was assigned to the 22nd Infantry Battalion, CEF. For his conduct during a raid on the night of 27 and 28 May 1918, Brillant received the Military Cross.



**VC Action:** Lieutenant Brillant was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions during the first two days of the Battle of Amiens. On 8 August 1918, near Méharicourt in France, he rushed and captured a German machine gun that was holding up the advance of the left flank of his company. **In this action, he personally killed two of the machine gun's crew and was himself wounded.** Remaining in command, later the same day Brillant led two platoons in a successful attack on enemy positions after his **company's progress was again checked by machine gun fire. Fifteen** machine guns and 150 enemy soldiers were captured as a result. While leading this assault, he suffered a second wound. The following day, August 9, Brillant led yet another attack against a German field gun. He was wounded again, this time critically, but managed to advance a further 200 meters before he collapsed from exhaustion and the loss of blood. Lieutenant Brillant died the next day.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and outstanding devotion to duty when in charge of a company which he led in attack during two days with absolute fearlessness and extraordinary ability and initiative, the extent of the advance being twelve miles.*

*On the first day of operations shortly after the attack had begun, his company left flank was held up by an enemy machine-gun. Lt. Brillant rushed and captured the machine-gun, personally killing two of the enemy crew. Whilst doing this, he was wounded, but refused to leave his command.*

*Later on the same day, his company was held up by heavy machine-gun fire. He reconnoitred the ground personally, organised a party of two platoons and rushed straight for the machine-gun nest. Here 150 enemy and fifteen machine-guns were captured, Lt. Brillant personally killing five of the enemy, and being wounded a second time. He had this wound dressed immediately, and again refused to leave his Company.*

*Subsequently this gallant officer detected a field gun firing on his men*

*over open sights. He immediately organised and led a 'rushing' party towards the gun. After progressing about 600 yards, he was again seriously wounded. In spite of this third wound, he continued to advance for some 200 yards more, when he fell unconscious from exhaustion and loss of blood.*

*Lt. Brillant's wonderful example throughout the day inspired his men with an enthusiasm and dash which largely contributed towards the success of the operations."*

*The London Gazette*, September 27, 1918

**Gravesite:** Jean Brillant is buried in the Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery, which is roughly two kilometres north of the village, and 18 kilometres east of Amiens on the straight main road to St. Quentin. This cemetery contains the Australian National Memorial, shown in the background of the picture below.



**Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** Lt. Brillant's Victoria Cross is in the Regimental Museum of the Royal 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment in Quebec City.

**Postscript:** In addition to Lt. Brillant, nine other members of the Canadian Corps earned Victoria Crosses between 8 and 13 August 1918 — Lieutenant James Edward Tait, Sergeants Robert Spall and Raphael Louis Zengel, Corporals Alexander Picton Brereton, Frederick George Coppins, Herman James Good and Harry Garnet Bedford Miner and Privates John Bernard Croak and Thomas Dinesen.

## Private Harry W. Brown, VC

Harry Brown was born in Gananoque, Ontario on 11 May 1898. He was a farmer in civilian life. During the First World War he served with the 10th Infantry Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force.



**VC Action:** By late summer 1917 the Canadian Corps had begun to push forward again, this time advancing towards the city of Lens and the heights nearby known as Hill 70. On 16 August 1917, **elements of Private Brown's battalion had advanced** to a position around Hill 70, near Lens in France.

Holding in the face of repeated German counterattacks, the force found itself with its right flank exposed and all communications to the rear cut. Brown and another soldier were given the task of breaking through enemy lines to reach battalion headquarters in the rear to request reinforcements. While **making their way to the rear through an intense barrage, Brown's arm** was shattered and his companion was killed. Nevertheless, he persevered until he arrived at the close support lines where he found an officer. Brown was so weakened that he fell down the steps to the dugout, but remained conscious long enough to communicate the message. He then passed out and was taken to a dressing station where he died a few hours later. For his actions on this occasion, Private Brown was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously. He was 19 years of age when he died.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery, courage and devotion to duty.*

*After the capture of a position, the enemy massed in force and counter-attacked. The situation became very critical, all wires being cut. It was of the utmost importance to get word back to Headquarters. This soldier and one other were given the message with orders to deliver the same at all costs. The other messenger was killed. Pte. Brown had his arm shattered, but continued on through an intense barrage until he arrived at the close support lines and found an officer.*

*He was so spent that he fell down the dugout steps, but retained consciousness long enough to hand over his message, saying, "Important message." He then became unconscious, and died in the dressing station a few hours later.*

*His devotion to duty was of the highest possible degree imaginable, and his successful delivery of the message undoubtedly saved the loss of the position for the time and prevented many casualties."*

"The London Gazette," No. 30338, dated October 16, 1917

**Gravesite:** He is buried in the Noeux-les-Mines Communal Cemetery. Noeux-les-Mines is a town 6 kilometres south of Bethune on the main road to Arras. The Communal Cemetery is on the northern side of the town, on the south-east side of the road to Labourse.

The Communal Cemetery at Noeux-les-Mines was used by the Commonwealth forces (in succession to the French) from June 1915 to August 1917. The earlier burials were carried out by units and field ambulances but in April 1917, the 7th Casualty Clearing Station began to use the cemetery. It contains 980 Commonwealth burials of the First World War. The Extension was begun in August 1917 and used until December 1918, chiefly by the 6th and 7th Casualty Clearing Stations.



**Noeux-les-Mines Communal Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** Private Brown's medal is held by the Canadian War Museum.

**Postscript:** Five other members of the Canadian Corps received the Victoria Cross for their conspicuous gallantry between 15 and 24 August 1917 – Major Okill Massey Learmonth, Company Sergeant-Major Robert Hill Hanna, Sergeant Frederick Hobson, Corporal Filip Konowal and Private Michael James O'Rourke.

## Sergeant Hugh Cairns, VC, DCM

Hugh Cairns was born in Ashington, England on 4 December 1896. He emigrated to Canada in May 1911 with his parents, and became a plumber's apprentice in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. He went overseas in June 1916 with the 65th Battalion. At the end of the month, Cairns was transferred to the 46th Battalion, and went to France in August.



Cairns took part in every battle fought from August 1916 until his death outside of the town of Valenciennes in November 1918. During the first week of June 1917, he suffered thirteen shrapnel wounds to his back, but recovered quickly and returned to his unit less than two weeks later. In the Battle of Vimy Ridge in April 1917, Cairns led his men forward, attacked and captured an enemy gun emplacement. He held up against three German counterattacks almost single-handed for 90 minutes, even though he was wounded in the process. He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for gallantry, and soon thereafter he was promoted to Lance Corporal.

Cairns had two brothers who also served with the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the war, Henry Cairns and Corporal Albert Cairns. Albert was killed on September 10, 1918, at the age of 23, during the Battle of Cambrai.

**VC Action:** The last Victoria Cross earned by a member of the CEF before the end of the war, was that belonging to Sergeant Hugh Cairns, who was awarded the decoration for his heroism on 1 November 1918, just days before the end of the fighting on the Western Front.

On 1 November 1918, while Sergeant Cairns was serving with the 46th Infantry Battalion near Valenciennes in France, a German machine gun opened fire on his platoon as it advanced. Single-handed, he attacked the enemy position and captured the gun, using a Lewis light machine gun to kill the crew. Later, when progress was blocked again, he charged another group of German positions, killing 12 of the enemy and capturing 18 others along with two machine guns. When further resistance was encountered from enemy machine guns and artillery, Cairns, though wounded, led a successful effort to outflank and eliminate the defenders. **Cairns's small party inflicted many casualties and captured about fifty of the enemy and all of their guns.** A subsequent patrol in which he participated forced 60 more enemy soldiers to surrender. It was while disarming this group of prisoners that Cairns was wounded again, this time severely. Although he still managed to open fire and kill many of his assailants, he was overwhelmed by about 20 of the other enemy

prisoners and collapsed from weakness and the loss of blood. Cairns died the following day.

Sergeant Cairns received a posthumous Victoria Cross for his exemplary conduct in these actions.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery before Valenciennes on 1st November, 1918, when a machine gun opened on his platoon. Without a moments' hesitation Serjt. Cairns seized a Lewis gun and single-handed, in the face of direct fire, rushed the post, killed the crew of five, and captured the gun. Later, when the line was held up by machine-gun fire, he again rushed forward, killing 12 enemy and capturing 18 and two guns.*

*Subsequently, when the advance was held up by machine guns and field guns, although wounded, he led a small party to outflank them, killing many, forcing about 50 to surrender, and capturing all the guns.*

*After consolidation he went with a battle patrol to exploit Marly and forced 60 enemy to surrender. Whilst disarming this party he was severely wounded. Nevertheless, he opened fire and inflicted heavy losses. Finally he was rushed by about 20 enemy and collapsed from weakness and loss of blood.*

*Throughout the operation he showed the highest degree of valour, and his leadership greatly contributed to the success of the attack. He died on the 2nd November from wounds."*

*The London Gazette*, January 31, 1919

**Gravesite:** Hugh Cairns died thirty-two days short of his 22nd birthday, and is buried in the Auberchicourt British Cemetery, seven kilometres east of Douai, France. Auberchicourt British Cemetery contains 288 Commonwealth burials and commemorations of the First World War.



**Auberchicourt British Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** Sgt. Cairns' VC is held by the Canadian War Museum.



**Sgt Cairns' Medal Set**

**Post Script:** Sgt Cairns' was the last VC won by a Canadian in World War I. Hugh Cairns was also awarded the Légion d'Honneur from France. His brother Albert is buried in the Terlincthun British Cemetery in Pas-de-Calais.

## Lieutenant Frederick William Campbell, VC

Campbell was born 15 June 1867 in Mount Forest, Ont. A year later his family moved to a farm at Glendale where he attended school. He developed a keen interest in the military and when he turned 18 joined the 30th Bn., Wellington Rifles, the local militia.



When the Boer War broke out in 1899, he joined the 2nd Bn., Royal Canadian Regt. of Infantry. As a member of a machine-gun squad he took part in **four major battles and was awarded the Queen's Medal** with clasps for Johannesburg, Paardeberg, Driefontein and Cape Colony. A particular feat during one of those actions earned him special mention. When the spokes of one of the wheels of his gun carriage were shot off, Campbell showed exceptional ingenuity by replacing the spokes with legs from a table he found in an abandoned house.

He returned home after the war—with the rank of sergeant—and bought a farm next to his parents, where he raised horses. He rejoined his old militia unit and became a school trustee and a director of the Mount Forest Agricultural Society.

At the outbreak of World War I, he was assigned to the 1st Bn. of the Western Ontario Regt. and by the time the first contingent of the Canadian Expeditionary Force sailed for England on Sept. 24, he had been appointed officer-in-command of the machine-gun section

**VC Action:** The battalion went into action for the first time during the Second Battle of Ypres, but in a reserve capacity. On 15 June 1915, the brigade took part in the Battle of Givenchy. It was an isolated but bloody engagement. In one day there were 400 casualties.

At 6:10 p.m. that evening, the brigade attacked in support of the British 7th Div. During the encounter, Campbell led two gun crews over the top in a wild dash through enemy fire across **no-man's land in which one crew** was wiped out. Only Campbell and a gunner, Harold Vincent, reached the trench that the wave ahead of them had captured.

When a German counterattack developed the survivors of the charge ran out of grenades. Campbell ordered them to retire and decided to set up **the Colt to cover their retreat. However, the gun's tripod had been shot** away and no substitute was available so Vincent volunteered to support the machine-gun on his back.

In this way they were able to ward off the enemy in which Campbell fired off 1,000 rounds. Then a bullet struck him in the right thigh near the joint and he was unable to continue. Badly burned by the machine-gun, Vincent was able to carry the gun back to his own lines. Campbell managed to crawl back and was rescued.

Two days later he was taken to the No. 7 Stationary Hospital at Boulogne. On June 19, he fell into a coma from which he never recovered. He died three hours later.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery on 15th June, 1915, during the action at Givenchy.*

*Lieutenant Campbell took two machine-guns over the parapet, arrived at the German first line with one gun, and maintained his position there, under very heavy rifle, machine-gun, and bomb fire, notwithstanding the fact that almost the whole of his detachment had then been killed or wounded.*

*When our supply of bombs had become exhausted, this Officer advanced his gun still further to an exposed position, and, by firing about 1,000 rounds, succeeded in holding back the enemy's counter-attack.*

*This very gallant Officer was subsequently wounded, and has since died."*

London Gazette, No. 29272, dated August 20, 1915

**Gravesite:** Lt Campbell is buried in Boulogne Eastern Cemetery, one of the Town Cemeteries that stands on high ground on the eastern side of Boulogne, on the road to St. Omer. The Cemetery contains 5,577 Commonwealth burials from the First World War and 224 from the Second.



**Boulogne Eastern Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** The whereabouts of Lt. Campbell's Victoria Cross are unknown.

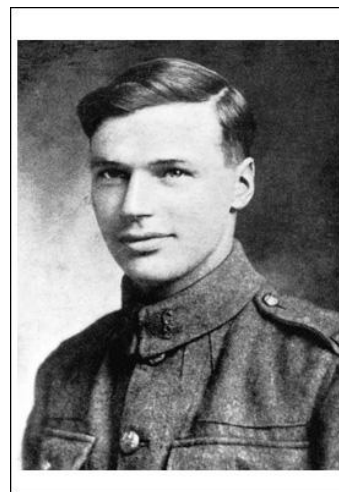
**Post Script:** Frederick William Campbell had a distinguished military inheritance - his great-grandfather had served with distinction under General Isaac Brock in the War of 1812.

At 48 years of age, Lt. Campbell was the oldest Canadian to receive the Victoria Cross during World War I.

## Corporal Lionel (Leo) Beaumaurice Clarke, VC

Clarke was born in Waterdown, Ontario. He spent his early years in England, home of his parents, but later returned to Canada and settled in Winnipeg, Manitoba in about 1903. When World War I started, he was working as a surveyor for the Canadian National Railway in the Canadian north.

He returned to Winnipeg to enlist in the 27th Battalion, and after arriving in England in June 1915, transferred to the 2nd (Eastern Ontario Regiment) Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force to be with his brother, Charles.



**VC Action:** Corporal Clarke was serving on the Somme Front in 1916 as a volunteer member of a bombing platoon — soldiers assigned to clear enemy trenches at close quarters using hand grenades. On September 9, a small group led by Clarke had captured a section of enemy trench in fighting so fierce that all his comrades were left dead or injured. Clarke hastily began assembling a barricade when about 20 enemy soldiers counter-attacked the position. Clarke opened fire with his semi-automatic pistol. When the fighting stopped, Clarke had been bayoneted in the leg, but had killed or captured all of his attackers. For his actions on this day, Corporal Clarke was awarded the Victoria Cross.

A month later, on 5 October 1916, he was fatally injured when the blast from a shell caused him to be buried in a trench.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery. He was detailed with his section of bombers to clear the continuation of a newly-captured trench and cover the construction of a "block." After most of his party had become casualties, he was building a "block" when about twenty of the enemy with two officers counter-attacked. He boldly advanced against them, emptied his revolver into them and afterwards two enemy rifles which he picked up in the trench.*

*One of the officers then attacked him with the bayonet, wounding him in the leg, but he shot him dead. The enemy then ran away, pursued by Acting Corporal Clarke, who shot four more and captured a fifth.*

*Later he was ordered to the dressing-station, but returned next day to duty."*

"The London Gazette," No. 29802, dated October 24, 1916

**Gravesite:** He is buried in Etretat Churchyard, 16 miles north of Le Havre, France. Etretat Churchyard contains 264 Commonwealth burials of the First World War and one German grave.



**Etretat Churchyard**

**Medal Location:** His medal was acquired by the Canadian War Museum in 2010.

**Post Script:** Fred Hall, Leo Clarke and Robert Shankland all lived in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. They all happened to live on the same street, Pine Street and it is believed to be the only street in the world to have three Victoria Cross winners that lived there. The city of Winnipeg later renamed it Valour Road in honour of the men. A bronze plaque is mounted on a street lamp at the corner of Portage Ave and Valour Road to tell this story.



**The memorial plaque erected by The Womens Canadian Club of Winnipeg in 1925 renaming Pine Street "Valour Road" in Winnipeg**

**Corporal Clarke's Victoria Cross was presented posthumously to his father** by the Governor General of Canada in 1917 before a crowd of 30,000 people. This was the first occasion that a Victoria Cross had been presented to a Commonwealth recipient in his own country.

## **Lieutenant-Colonel W.H. Clark-Kennedy, VC, CMG, DSO\***

William Hew Clark-Kennedy was born in Ayrshire, Scotland, on 3 March 1879. He was educated at St. Andrew's College, Southborough, Kent, and after graduation, he went to work for the Scottish Life Insurance Company. When the Boer War broke out (a.k.a. the "South African War", 1899-1902), he served with the Imperial Yeomanry and the Rhodesian Horse, rising to the rank of lieutenant.

At the end of the Boer War, Clark-Kennedy was transferred to Canada in 1903, to the Canadian office of the Company, in Montreal. When war broke out in 1914, he joined the 13th Montreal Royal Highlanders Battalion, before being transferred to the 24th Victoria Rifles Battalion which he later commanded.



Serving throughout the war, Clark-Kennedy was badly knocked out during the Second Battle of Ypres in April 1915. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order in May 1915 for his actions at Festubert, a Companionship in the Order of St. Michael and St. George in 1917 along with a Bar for his DSO, the French Croix de Guerre avec Palme, and was four times Mentioned in Dispatches.

**VC Action:** Lieutenant-Colonel Clark-Kennedy received the Victoria Cross for his conduct in the Battle of Arras on 27 and 28 August 1918. Over the course of those two days, his battalion suffered numerous casualties near Wancourt in France as it strove to advance through heavy artillery and machine gun fire. In the face of such strong enemy resistance, Clark-Kennedy led his men forward to eliminate machine gun positions preventing the progress of the offensive.

This enabled the entire brigade to reach the Fresnes-Rouvray line. Though wounded, Lieutenant-Colonel Clark-Kennedy remained in command of his battalion until its objective was consolidated.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery, initiative and skilful leading on the 27th and 28th August, 1918, when in command of his battalion.*

*On the 27th he led his battalion with great bravery and skill from Crow and Aigrette trenches in front of Wancourt to the attack on the Fresnes-Rouvroy line. From the outset the brigade, of which the 24th Battalion was a central unit, came under very heavy shell and machine-gun fire, suffering many casualties, especially amongst leaders. Units became partially disorganised and the advance was checked. Appreciating the vital importance to the brigade front of a lead by the centre, and undismayed by annihilating fire, Lt.-Col. Clark-Kennedy, by sheer personality and initiative, inspired his men and led them forward. On*

*several occasions he set an outstanding example by leading parties straight at the machine-gun nests which were holding up the advance and overcame these obstacles.*

*By controlling the direction of neighbouring units and collecting men who had lost their leaders, he rendered valuable services in strengthening the line, and enabled the whole brigade front to move forward.*

*By the afternoon, very largely due to the determined leadership of this officer and disregard for his own life, his battalion, despite heavy losses, has made good the maze of trenches west of Cherisy and Cherisy Village, had crossed the Sensee Rivert bed, and had occupied Occident Trench in front of the heavy wire of the Fresnes-Rouvroy line; under continuous fire he then went up and down his line until far into the night, improving the position, giving wonderful encouragement to his men, and sent back very clear reports.*

*On the next day he again showed valorous leadership in the attack on the Fresnes-Rouvroy line and Upton Wood. Though severely wounded soon after the start he refused aid, and dragged himself to a shell-hole, from which he could observe. Realising that his exhausted troops could advance no further he established a strong line of defence and thereby prevented the loss of most important ground. Despite intense pain and serious loss of blood he refused to be evacuated for over five hours, by which time he had established the line in a position from which it was possible for the relieving troops to continue the advance.*

*It is impossible to overestimate the results achieved by the valour and leadership of this officer."*

*The London Gazette*, December 14, 1918

**Post War:** After the war, Clark-Kennedy returned to the insurance business in Montreal, from which he retired in 1945. In 1940, he was appointed Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel of the 3rd Battalion, Black Watch.

William Hew Clark-Kennedy died 25 October 1961 in Montreal, Québec.

**Gravesite:** He is buried in the Mount Royal Cemetery in Montreal.



**Medal Location:** His medal is held privately

## Lieutenant Hampden Zane Churchill Cockburn, VC

Hampden Zane Churchill Cockburn was born in Toronto, Ontario on 19 November 1867. After studying at Upper Canada College and the University of Toronto, he became a barrister. During the South African War, Cockburn served in South Africa with the Royal Canadian Dragoons



**VC Action:** On 7 November 1900, at Lilliefontein, near the Komati River, a large force of Boer commandos sought to encircle a retreating British column whose rearguard comprised two troops of Royal Canadian Dragoons and two 12-pounder guns of "D" Battery, Royal Canadian Field Artillery.

At one point, the remnant of Lieutenant Cockburn's troop of Dragoons fought desperately against 200 Boers who were intent on capturing "D" Battery's two guns. His handful of men successfully held off the Boers, thus allowing the guns to escape, but all became casualties, including Cockburn who was slightly wounded. For his part in saving the guns, Lieutenant Cockburn received the Victoria Cross, one of three awarded for separate incidents in this action.

**Citation:** *"Lieutenant Cockburn, with a handful of men, at a most critical moment held off the Boers to allow the guns to get away; to do so he had to sacrifice himself and his party, all of whom were killed, wounded, or taken prisoners, he himself being slightly wounded."*

*London Gazette, no.27307, 23 April 1901*

**Post War:** During the war he took part in forty-five engagements, was appointed Major and earned the Queen's South African Medal with clasps. He was killed in a horse riding accident on his ranch at Maple Creek, Alberta on 12 July 1913.

**Gravesite:** Cockburn is buried at St. James Cemetery, Toronto, Ontario.



**Medal Location:** Cockburn's VC and sword were displayed in the lobby of Upper Canada College. In 1977, due to a number of thefts and "losses" of Victoria Cross medals the school replaced the VC with a top grade copy and moved the original to their bank safety deposit box. In 2006, the medal was loaned to the Canadian War Museum where it resides today.



**Lt. Cockburn's Medals**

**Post Script:** The other Canadians awarded the Victoria Cross for their part in the Battle of Lilliefontein were Lieutenant Richard Ernest William Turner and Sergeant Edward James Gibson Holland.

## Lieutenant Robert Grierson Combe, VC

Robert Grierson Combe was born in Aberdeen, Scotland on 5 August 1880. Son of James and Elizabeth Combe, of Aberdeen, Scotland and husband of Jean Traquair Donald Combe, Victoria, British Columbia. He came to Canada around 1906, having already completed his schooling and apprenticeship in pharmacies in Aberdeen and London, England. He joined the staff of a drug store in Moosomin, Saskatchewan and several years later opened his own store in Melville, Saskatchewan. Combe enlisted in 1915, was granted a commission and subsequently posted to the 53rd Battalion in Prince Albert. Initially qualified as a Major on arrival overseas and placed on the instructional staff, he later, at his own request, reverted to the rank of Lieutenant and joined the 28th Battalion in France. He was forced back to England due to illness but soon returned to the front, this time with the 27th Battalion where he served with distinction until the time of his death.



**VC Action:** On 3 May 1917, at Acheville, near Vimy in France, Combe led his company through an enemy artillery barrage, arriving close to his objective with only five men. He proceeded to engage the enemy using grenades, inflicting heavy casualties. Having collected more men, Combe **finally captured his company's objective and took eighty prisoners.** He then continued to charge the enemy, driving them back. While Combe was leading a party of his men with grenades, he was killed by a sniper. Combe earned a posthumous Victoria Cross for his exemplary leadership and conduct.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and example.*

*He steadied his Company under intense fire, and led them through the enemy barrage, reaching the objective with only five men.*

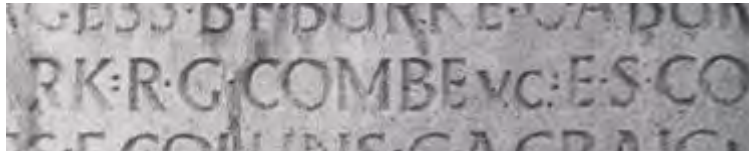
*With great coolness and courage Lt. Combe proceeded to bomb the enemy, and inflicted heavy casualties. He collected small groups of men and succeeded in capturing the Company objective, together with eighty prisoners.*

*He repeatedly charged the enemy, driving them before him, and, whilst personally leading his bombers, was killed by an enemy sniper.*

*His conduct inspired all ranks, and it was entirely due to his magnificent courage that the position was carried, secured and held."*

"The London Gazette," dated June 27, 1917

**Gravesite:** Combe was buried in a battlefield cemetery near Acheville close where he was killed, but later fighting saw the cemetery destroyed and his grave site lost. As such, R.G. Combe's name is inscribed on the Canadian National Vimy Memorial along with the names of the other Canadian soldiers who were killed in France and whose bodies were never recovered or identified or whose graves were lost. The battlefield on which Lt. Combe fell is just over seven kilometres away from the Vimy Monument, and on a clear day Acheville can be seen from the monument itself.



**Inscription on Vimy Memorial**

**Medal Location:** His medal is held in the Saskatchewan Provincial Archives in Regina and is displayed on special occasions. It is the only publicly held Victoria Cross in the province.

**Post Script:** A lake in Northern Saskatchewan has been named in his honour.

## Corporal Frederick George Coppins, VC

Frederick George Coppins was born in London, England, on 25 October 1889 and served with the Royal West Kent Regiment before emigrating to Canada. After serving for a time in the cavalry, he joined the 8th Infantry Battalion, CEF.



**VC Action:** Corporal Coppins earned the Victoria Cross on 9 August 1918 while serving with his battalion east of Amiens. When his platoon unexpectedly came under fire from several German machine guns, it was pinned down and unable to advance or retreat. With no cover available, it was imperative that the enemy machine guns be silenced if the platoon was not to be annihilated. On his own initiative, Coppins called on four men to follow him, and together they attacked the enemy positions. The other four men were killed in the charge, and Coppins was wounded. However, he persisted in the assault and, reaching the machine guns alone, killed four enemy soldiers and took four others prisoner.

**Citation:** *"For conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty when, during an attack, his platoon came unexpectedly under fire of numerous machine guns. It was not possible to advance or to retire, and no cover was available. It became apparent that the platoon would be annihilated unless the enemy machine guns were silenced immediately. Cpl. Coppins, without hesitation, and on his own initiative, called on four men to follow him and leapt forward in the face of intense machine-gun fire. With his comrades he rushed straight for the machine guns. The four men with him were killed and Cpl. Coppins wounded. Despite his wounds he reached the hostile machine guns alone, killed the operator of the first gun and three of the crew, and made prisoners of four others, who surrendered.*

*Cpl. Coppins, by this act of outstanding valour, was the means of saving many lives of the men of his platoon, and enabled the advance to be continued.*

*Despite his wound, this gallant N.C.O. continued with his platoon to the final objective, and only left the line when it had been made secure and when ordered to do so."*

*The London Gazette*, September 27, 1918

**Post War:** In 1919, Coppins enlisted as a Special Constable in Winnipeg at the time of the Winnipeg General Strike, and broke two ribs in a melee. He later moved to California and worked in construction in Oakland.

Frederick Coppins died in Livermore, California on 30 March 1963. His funeral service was attended by representatives of The Royal Canadian Legion, the Last Post Fund and Canada's consul general.

**Gravesite:** He is buried in the Chapel of Chimes Crematorium, Oakland, California.

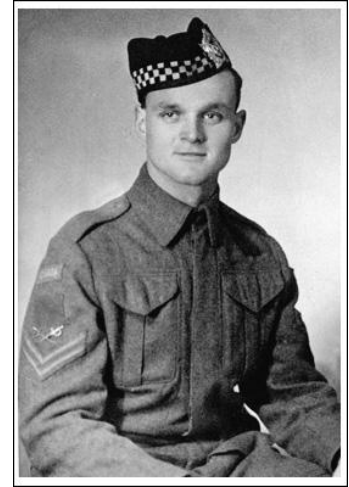
**Medal Location:** Coppins' medals are located in a collection at the Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

**Post Script:** Cpl. Coppins received his medal from King George V at Buckingham Palace on 24 October 1918. In addition to Coppins, nine other members of the Canadian Corps earned Victoria Crosses in the Battle of Amiens between 8 and 13 August, 1918—Lieutenants Jean Brillant and James Edward Tait, Sergeants Robert Spall and Raphael Louis Zengel, Corporals Alexander Picton Brereton, Herman James Good and Harry Garnet Bedford Miner and Privates John Bernard Croak and Thomas Dinesen.

Cpl. Brereton was in the same unit and earned his VC in the same action as Coppins.

## Sergeant Aubrey Cosens, VC

Aubrey Cosens was born in Latchford, Ontario, on 21 May 1921, the son of a First World War Veteran. Shortly after his birth his family moved to Porquis Junction, near Iroquois Falls, Ontario and he was educated in the Porquis Junction School. He left school in 1938 to work with his father on the railway as a section hand. He left Porquis Junction in 1939 to join the Royal Canadian Air Force but his application was rejected.



Finally, in 1940, he went to Hamilton, Ontario, and was accepted by the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada (Hamilton) Regiment. He served with them in Canada, Jamaica and England. He transferred to the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada in the summer of 1944 and was soon promoted from corporal to sergeant.

**VC Action:** Sergeant Cosens was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for his bravery and determined leadership in action at Mooshof in Germany on 25 and 26 February 1945. With two tanks in support, **Cosens's platoon twice attacked German strongpoints located in three farm buildings**, and was beaten back on both occasions. The platoon was then subjected to a fierce counterattack, during which the platoon commander was killed.

Sergeant Cosens assumed command of the platoon, now reduced to himself and four men. As the four other men provided covering fire, he ran across open ground to the remaining serviceable tank and directed its fire on the farm buildings. Having ordered the tank to ram the first building, Cosens entered it alone, killing several of the occupants and making prisoners of the rest. He then continued alone into the second and third buildings, killing or capturing what remained of the enemy.

Just after the successful reduction of the strongpoints, Sergeant Cosens was shot through the head by an enemy sniper and killed.

**Citation:** *"In Holland, on the night of 25th/26th February, 1945, the 1st Battalion, The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, launched an attack on the hamlet of Mooshof, to capture ground which was considered essential for the successful development of future operations.*

*Sergeant Cosens platoon, with two tanks in support, attacked enemy strongpoints in three farm buildings, but were twice beaten back by fanatical enemy resistance and then fiercely counter-attacked, during*

*which time the platoon suffered heavy casualties and the platoon commander was killed.*

*Sergeant Cosens at once assumed command of the only other four survivors of his platoon, whom he placed in a position to give him covering fire, while he himself ran across open ground under heavy mortar and shell fire to the one remaining tank, where, regardless of danger, he took up an exposed place in front of the turret and directed its fire.*

*After a further enemy counter-attack had been repulsed, Sergeant Cosens ordered the tank to attack the farm buildings, while the four survivors of his platoon followed in close support. After the tank had rammed the first building he entered it alone, killing several of the defenders and taking the rest prisoner.*

*Single-handed he then entered the second and third buildings and personally killed or captured all the occupants, although under intense machine gun and small arms fire.*

*Just after the successful reduction of these important enemy strongpoints, Sergeant Cosens was shot through the head by an enemy sniper and died almost instantly.*

*The outstanding gallantry, initiative and determined leadership of this brave N.C.O., who himself killed at least twenty of the enemy and took an equal number of prisoners, resulted in the capture of a position which was vital to the success of the future operations of the Brigade."*

*The London Gazette, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1945*

**Gravesite:** Sergeant Cosens is buried in Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Most of those buried in Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery are Canadians, many of whom died in the Battle of the Rhineland, when the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Divisions, and the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, took part in the drive southwards from Nijmegen to clear the territory between the Maas and the Rhine in February and March 1945. Others buried here died earlier or later in the southern part of the Netherlands and in the Rhineland.

The cemetery contains 2,610 Commonwealth burials of the Second World War, and nine war graves of other nationalities. Within the cemetery stands the Groesbeek Memorial, which commemorates by name more than 1,000 members of the Commonwealth land forces who died during the campaign in north-west Europe between the time of crossing the Seine at the end of August 1944 and the end of the war in Europe, and whose graves are not known.



### **Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is displayed at the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada Regimental Museum in Toronto.

**Post Script:** A plaque commemorating Sgt. Cosens' heroism was unveiled in the village of Mooshof in May, 2005. In addition, there is a bridge named in his honour in Latchford, Ontario and another memorial plaque in Iroquois Falls, Ontario.

## Private John Bernard Croak, VC

John Bernard Croak was born on 18 May 1892, in Little Bay, Newfoundland. With his family, he moved to Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, when he was two years old. He attended the New Aberdeen Public School, then schools in St. John, New Brunswick, before going work as a coal miner. He enlisted in the military in August 1915, with the 55th Battalion, before transferring to the 13th Battalion.



**VC Action:** On 8 August 1918, at the beginning of the Allied offensive around Amiens in France, Private Croak became separated from his platoon during the advance. When he encountered a German machine gun position, he attacked it and captured both the machine gun and its crew. Subsequently wounded, he rejoined his platoon as it arrived at another enemy strongpoint. Dashing forward alone, Croak was almost immediately followed by the rest of his platoon in a charge that resulted in the capture of three machine guns and the survivors of **the strong point's garrison. In the course of this action, Private Croak was wounded a second time, and died a short time later.**

For his actions on this occasion, Private Croak was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery in attack when having become separated from his section he encountered a machine-gun nest, which he bombed and silenced, taking the gun and crew prisoners. Shortly afterwards he was severely wounded, but refused to desist.*

*Having rejoined his platoon, a very strong point, containing several machine guns, was encountered. Private Croak, however, seeing an opportunity, dashed forward alone and was almost immediately followed by the remainder of the platoon in a brilliant charge. He was the first to arrive at the trench line, into which he led his men, capturing three machine guns and bayoneting or capturing the entire garrison.*

*The perseverance and valour of this gallant soldier, who was again severely wounded, and died of his wounds, were an inspiring example to all."*

*The London Gazette*, September 27, 1918

**Gravesite:** John Bernard Croak is buried in the Hangard Wood British Cemetery, in Hangard, France, nineteen kilometres southeast of Amiens.

In July 1918, the site of the cemetery was in German hands, but it was cleared by the Canadian Corps early on 8 August 1918. A number of graves of April 1918, as well of those of August, were brought in, and after the Armistice other graves of April 1918, were concentrated from Villers-Bretonneux, and of October 1916, from other parts of the Somme battlefield.

There are 161 Commonwealth and French soldiers buried in the cemetery, 58 are Canadian.



**Hangard Wood Military Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** Private Croak's Victoria Cross is held by the Canadian War Museum.



**Pte. Croak's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** Nine other members of the Canadian Corps earned Victoria Crosses between 8 and 13 August—Lieutenants Jean Brillant and James Edward Tait, Sergeants Robert Spall and Raphael Louis Zengel, Corporals Alexander Picton Brereton, Frederick George Coppins, Herman James Good and Harry Garnet Bedford Miner and Private Thomas Dinesen.

## Private Robert Edward Cruickshank, VC

Cruickshank was born in Winnipeg in 1888, the first born of 5 children, two younger brothers, and two sisters, all born in England. His youngest brother, John, died at the age of 10 in 1913, tripping as he alighted from a moving tram and fracturing his skull. His middle brother, Percy, also volunteered for the Army, and was killed while serving in the Royal Fusiliers on the Western Front in 1917, aged 19. He is buried in France.



Cruickshank moved to England at the age of 3; his father also called Robert originated from Aberdeen, and had worked with the Canadian Pacific Railway as an accountant. After the family arrived in England they initially lived in Islington according to the 1891 Census but by the 1901 Census had moved to Woodford. From 1903–1904 he was educated at Bancroft's School, Woodford, Essex. After leaving school, he worked as a travelling salesman, joining first Lipton, then the Lever Company. He was very interested in military matters and joined The Rough Riders, a volunteer unit 1908–1911.

His family moved to Harringay, North London, and he became involved in the Scouting movement shortly after it was established. He became an Assistant Scoutmaster. He was also involved in local politics and was noted as a good speaker

After war was declared, he initially volunteered for the Royal Flying Corps, but transferred to the London Scottish Regiment. After training he was initially posted to the 1st Battalion in France, where he was wounded at the Battle of the Somme in September 1916 at Leuze Wood.

He was evacuated to England, but after recovering, he was posted to the 2nd Battalion and joined them in Salonika prior to it embarking to Egypt.

**VC Action:** On 1 May 1918 east of the Jordan River, Palestine, Private Cruickshank volunteered to take a message to company headquarters from his platoon which was in the bottom of a wadi, with its officer and most of the men casualties.

**Citation:** *"The platoon to which Private Cruickshank belonged came under very heavy rifle and machine-gun fire at short range and was led down a steep bank into a wadi, most of the men being hit before they reached the bottom. Immediately after reaching the bottom of the wadi the officer in command was shot dead, and the sergeant who then took over command sent a runner back to Company Headquarters asking for support, but was mortally wounded almost immediately after; the*

*corporal having in the meantime been killed, the only remaining N.C.O. (a lance-corporal), believing the first messenger to have been killed, called for a volunteer to take a second message back. Private Cruickshank immediately responded and rushed up the slope, but was hit and rolled back into the wadi bottom. He again rose and rushed up the slope, but, being again wounded, rolled back into the wadi. After his wounds had been dressed he rushed a third time up the slope and again fell badly wounded. Being now unable to stand he rolled himself back amid a hail of bullets. His wounds were now of such a nature as to preclude him making any further attempt and he lay all day in a dangerous position, being sniped at and again wounded where he lay. He displayed the utmost valour and endurance, and was cheerful and uncomplaining throughout."*

**Post War:** Following the First World War he married Gwendoline Mansell and moved to Southend. He had rejoined Lever Brothers, and worked for them for the next 34 years, involved with the sales of margarine. In Southend and Essex he became very involved with the British Legion, serving on several committees and acted as Chairman. In the mid-1930s work took him and Gwendoline to Glen Parva, Leicester, where they settled for the remainder of their lives.

When the Second World War was declared Cruickshank volunteered for the Home Guard and he achieved the rank of Major.

Following the war, he then served for many years on various local organisations, particularly the Glen Parva Parish Council where he served as their Chairman for 14 years, retiring only shortly before his death. He was also an active attendee at Regimental reunions, and kept close ties with former comrades.

His wife, Gwendoline, survived until the age of 103. They had no children.

**Gravesite:** Cruickshank died on 30 August 1961 where he was cremated and his ashes were interred at Glen Parva Parish Church, and his name inscribed in the Book of Remembrance.

**Medal Location:** On his death his wife presented his VC to the London Scottish, where it is now held in the Regimental Museum, 95 Horseferry Road, London, UK.

**Post Script:** Following the action he was evacuated back to England where he recovered from his wounds, and was feted as a hero. He received his VC at Buckingham Palace on 24 October 1918, his mother and fiancée attending.

In 2006, the 150th Anniversary of the Victoria Cross, Bancroft's School, unveiled plaques to both his memory and that of Lieutenant Colonel Newman VC.

**Author's Note:** This is one of those cases that makes counting the number of Canadian VC's difficult. Although he was born in Canada, Cruickshank moved to England at age 3 and subsequently served in the British Army where he won his medal, and later died in England.

## Major David Vivian Currie, VC

David Vivian Currie was born in Sutherland, Saskatchewan, on 8 July 1912. He attended King George Public School, the Central Collegiate and Moose Jaw Technical School where he learned his trade as an automobile mechanic and welder. In 1939 he joined the militia and in January 1940 he enlisted in the regular army with the rank of lieutenant. He was promoted to captain in 1941 and to major in 1944. During the campaign in France following the D-Day landings in Normandy on 6 June 1944, Currie was serving with the 29th Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (The South Alberta Regiment).



**VC Action:** Major Currie earned the Victoria Cross for his efforts on 18 August 1944 to capture and hold the village of St Lambert-sur-Dives during the fighting to block the escape route of large German forces cut off in the Falaise pocket. Leading a small force of tanks, infantry and anti-tank guns, but with no supporting field artillery fire, he organized an attack on the village and succeeded in seizing and consolidating a position half-way inside it. For 36 hours Currie's force repeatedly thwarted attempts by German tanks and infantry to force a way through the village by counterattacking the Canadians. Finally, Major Currie and his men renewed their attack and drove the enemy out of St Lambert-sur-Dives, completing the capture of the village. His force had inflicted 800 casualties on the Germans and taken 2,100 prisoners.

**Citation:** *"In Normandy on 18th August, 1944, Major Currie was in command of a small mixed force of Canadian tanks, self-propelled anti-tank guns and infantry which was ordered to cut one of the main escape routes from the Falaise pocket.*

*This force was held up by strong enemy resistance in the village of St. Lambert sur Dives and two tanks were knocked out by 88 mm guns. Major Currie immediately entered the village alone on foot at last light through the enemy outposts to reconnoitre the German defences and to extricate the crews of the disabled tanks, which he succeeded in doing in spite of heavy mortar fire.*

*Early the following morning, without any previous artillery bombardment, Major Currie personally led an attack on the village in the face of fierce opposition from enemy tanks, guns and infantry and by noon had succeeded in seizing and consolidating a position half-way inside the village.*

*During the next 36 hours the Germans hurled one counter-attack after another against the Canadian force but so skilfully had Major Currie organised his defensive position that these attacks were repulsed with severe casualties to the enemy after heavy fighting.*

*At dusk on 20th August the Germans attempted to mount a final assault on the Canadian positions, but the attacking force was routed before it could even be deployed. Seven enemy tanks, twelve 88 mm. guns and forty vehicles were destroyed, 300 Germans were killed, 500 wounded and 2,100 captured. Major Currie then promptly ordered an attack and completed the capture of the village, thus denying the Chambois-Trun escape route to the remnants of two German armies cut off in the Falaise pocket.*

*Throughout three days and nights of fierce fighting, Major Currie's gallant conduct and contempt for danger set a magnificent example to all ranks of the force under his command.*

*On one occasion he personally directed the fire of his command tank on to a Tiger tank which had been harassing his position and succeeded in knocking it out. During another attack, while the guns of his command tank were taking on other targets of longer ranges, he used a rifle from the turret to deal with individual snipers who had infiltrated to within fifty yards of his headquarters. The only time reinforcements were able to get through to his force, he himself led the forty men forward into their positions and explained the importance of their task as a part of the defence. When, during the next attack, these new reinforcements withdrew under the intense fire brought down by the enemy, he personally collected them and led them forward into position again, where, inspired by his leadership they held for the remainder of the battle. His employment of the artillery support, which became available after his original attack went in, was typical of his cool calculation of the risks involved in every situation. At one time, despite the fact that short rounds were falling within fifteen yards of his own tank, he ordered fire from medium artillery to continue because of its devastating effect upon the attacking enemy in his immediate area.*

*Throughout the operation the casualties to Major Currie's force were heavy. However, he never considered the possibility of failure or allowed it to enter the minds of his men. In the words of one of his non-commissioned officers, 'We knew at one stage that it was going to be a fight to a finish but he was so cool about it, it was impossible for us to get excited'. Since all the officers under his command were either killed or wounded during the action, Major Currie had virtually no respite from his duties and in fact obtained only one hour's sleep during the entire period. Nevertheless he did not permit his fatigue to become apparent to his troops and throughout the action took every opportunity to visit weapon pits and other defensive posts to talk to his men, to advise them as to the best use of their weapons and to cheer them with words of*

*encouragement. When his force was finally relieved and he was satisfied that the turnover was complete he fell asleep on his feet and collapsed.*

*There can be no doubt that the success of the attack on and stand against the enemy at St. Lambert sur Dives can largely be attributed to this officer's coolness, inspired leadership and skilful use of the limited weapons at his disposal.*

*The courage and devotion to duty shown by Major Currie during a prolonged period of heavy fighting were outstanding and had a far-reaching effect on the successful outcome of the battle."*

*The London Gazette, 27<sup>th</sup> November 1944*

**Post War:** After the war he spent eight years in Baie Comeau, Quebec, as equipment superintendent of a paper company. In 1953 he moved to Montréal and joined a manufacturing company where he became vice-president.

In 1959 Prime Minister John Diefenbaker appointed him Sergeant-at-Arms of the House of Commons.

**Gravesite:** Currie died in Ottawa, Ontario, on 24 June 1986, and is buried in Owen Sound, Ontario.

**Medal Location:** Currie's medals are not publicly held.

## Lieutenant Raymond H.L. de Montmorency, VC

De Montmorency was born in Montreal, on 5 February 1867, the eldest son of Major-General Reymond Hervey Frankfort de Montmorency 3rd Viscount Frankfort de Montmorency, KCB, a Representative Peer of Ireland, who served in the Crimean War, the Indian Mutiny, Abyssinia and the Mahdist War.



**VC Action:** He was 31 years old, and a Lieutenant in the 21st Lancers (Empress of India's), British Army during the Sudan Campaign when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the VC:

**Citation:** *"On 2 September 1898 at the Battle of Omdurman, Sudan, after the charge, Lieutenant De Montmorency returned to help a second lieutenant who was lying surrounded by a great many Dervishes. The lieutenant drove the Dervishes off and, finding that the officer was dead, put the body on his horse which then broke away. Another lieutenant (Paul Aloysius Kenna) and a corporal then came to his assistance and he was able to rejoin the regiment which had begun to open fire on the enemy."*

London Gazette Issue 27282, 8 February 1901

**Gravesite:** He is buried in Molteno Cemetery, Dordrecht, South Africa.



**De Montmorency's Grave, Molteno Cemetery.**

**Medal Location:** His medals are not publicly held.

**Post Script:** De Montmorency later achieved the rank of Captain. He was killed in action during the Second Boer War at the Battle of Stormberg Dordrecht, Cape Colony, South Africa, on 23 February 1900.

**Author's Note:** This is another case where inclusion of Montmorency in the list of Canadian Victoria Cross winners is somewhat tenuous, with the only basis for such a claim being his place of birth. Most of his life, his military service, and the event that led to his Victoria Cross were associated with the British Army.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Edmund de Wind, VC

De Wind was born in Comber, County Down, Ireland on 11 December 1883 to Arthur Hughes De Wind, C.E., and Margaret Jane De Wind.

De Wind was living in Canada in 1914 and working for the CIBC when the Great War broke out. He served with The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada for a period of six months prior to his enlistment as a Private on 16 November 1914 in the Canadian



Overseas Expeditionary Force. He arrived in France with 2nd Division of C.E.F. in September 1915. He saw action in the Battle of the Somme (1916) and at Vimy Ridge (1917). He earned a commission in September 1917 in the British Army.

**VC Action:** During the Second Battle of the Somme on 21 March 1918, Lieutenant Edmund De Wind of the 17th Royal Irish Battalion almost single-handedly held down a machine-gun post at the Race Course Redoubt near Grugies for seven hours, despite being twice wounded. He twice went over the top in the face of fierce machine-gun and rifle fire to assault and subdue a German trench by killing its occupants. In spite of fearful casualties to his battalion he held his post until reinforcements arrived. But by then he had died of his wounds.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and self-sacrifice on the 21st March, 1918, at the Race Course Redoubt, near Grugies. For seven hours he held this most important post, and though twice wounded and practically single-handed, he maintained his position until another section could be got to his help. On two occasions, with two N.C.O.'s only, he got out on top under heavy machine gun and rifle fire, and cleared the enemy out of the trench, killing many. He continued to repel attack after attack until he was mortally wounded and collapsed. His valour, self-sacrifice and example were of the highest order."*

"The London Gazette," dated May 13, 1919

**Gravesite:** He has no known grave and his memory is commemorated on the Pozieres Memorial to the Missing.

The Pozieres Memorial commemorates over 14,000 casualties of the United Kingdom and 300 of the South African Forces who have no known grave and who fell in France during the Fifth Army area retreat on the Somme from 21 March to 7 August 1918. The Corps and Regiments most largely represented are The Rifle Brigade with over 600 names, The Durham Light Infantry with approximately 600 names, the Machine Gun corps with over 500, The Manchester Regiment with approximately 500 and The Royal Horse and Royal Field Artillery with over 400 names.



### **Pozieres Cemetery and Memorial**

**Medal Location:** His medal is not publicly held.

**Post Script:** Mount De Wind in Alberta is named after this VC recipient. A housing estate in his home town of Comber, Northern Ireland, is also named in his honour. A plaque memorial was erected in his old school, Campbell College, Belfast. Edmund was officially remembered in Comber on Friday 14 September 2007 through the unveiling of an Ulster History Circle "Blue Plaque" in his honour. The first memorial to de Wind is a pillar his mother caused to be carved at the main entrance on the west front of St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast. The pillar bears his name and the date of his death. The west front was dedicated to the men from Northern Ireland who died in the Great War. It was dedicated in 1927.

## Private Thomas Dinesen, VC

Thomas Fasti Dinesen was born in Rungsted, Denmark, on 9 November 1892. He was educated at Rungsted State School and at the Polytechnical School of Copenhagen, from which he graduated as a civil engineer in 1916.

As Denmark was a neutral country during the war, and in light of his own desire to fight, Dinesen attempted to enlist in the British and French armies, who turned him down. He then travelled to America in 1917, where he again tried to enlist, this time with the United States forces, but was again denied. Through the Canadian Recruiting Office in New York, however, he enlisted in the Canadian forces as a private in the Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) of Canada.



Upon arrival in France, Dinesen was transferred to the 42nd Battalion, Royal Highlanders of Canada. He was in action around the town of Parvillers, France, on 12 August 1918, during the Battle of Amiens.

**VC Action:** Private Dinesen earned the Victoria Cross as a result of his actions on 12 August 1918 in the first days of the Allied offensive known as the Battle of Amiens. On that day, his exertions over ten hours resulted in the capture of more than 1.5 kilometres of stubbornly defended German trenches at Parvillers. As well as engaging in hand-to-hand fighting, Dinesen rushed forward alone five times to put hostile machine guns out of action, killing 12 of the enemy. In recognition of **Private Dinesen's achievement, the French Government awarded him the Croix de Guerre**, and he was commissioned as an officer in November 1918.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous and continuous bravery displayed during ten hours of hand-to-hand fighting, which resulted in the capture of over a mile of strongly garrisoned and stubbornly defended enemy trenches.*

*Five times in succession he rushed forward alone, and single-handed put hostile machine guns out of action, accounting for twelve of the enemy with bomb and bayonet. His sustained valour and resourcefulness inspired his comrades at a very critical stage of the action, and were an example to all."*

*The London Gazette*, October 26, 1918

**Post War:** In 1918, Thomas Dinesen moved to British East Africa to help his sister manage her coffee farm in the Ngong hills southwest of Nairobi. His sister was Karen Blixen, who wrote under the name Isak Dinesen. He designed and largely built the farm's coffee-roasting plant (which later burned down). Early in 1923, Thomas left the colonial life and returned to Denmark.

In his later years he took up writing, and wrote a number of books in Danish. The best known is *Tanne*, about his famous sister. In 1929 he published the book *No Man's Land: En Dansker Med Canadierne Ved Vestfronten*. It was translated into English in 1930 under the title *Merry Hell! A Dane with the Canadians*. The book describes his troublesome way to the Western Front as well as the events that won him the VC.

**Gravesite:** Dinesen died in Leerbaek, Denmark on 10 March 1979. He is buried in Horsholm Cemetery, Ringsted.



**Dinesen Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His medal is not in the public domain.

**Post Script:** In addition to Dinesen, nine other members of the Canadian Corps earned Victoria Crosses between 8 and 13 August—Lieutenants Jean Brillant and James Edward Tait, Sergeants Robert Spall and Raphael Louis Zengel, Corporals Alexander Picton Brereton, Frederick George Coppins, Herman James Good and Harry Garnet Bedford Miner and Private John Bernard Croak.

Dinesen is one of three Danes to win the Victoria Cross – two in World War I and the other in World War II.

## Assistant Surgeon Campbell Mellis Douglas, VC

Campbell Douglas was born in Quebec City on 5 **August 1840**, and educated at **St. John's College** and Laval University. Later he attended the Edinburgh School of Medicine, where he received his Doctor of Medicine degree and became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. He joined the British Medical Service in 1862 and was posted to the 2nd Battalion of the 24th Regt. of Foot at Rangoon. By 1867 he had attained the rank of major.



**VC Action:** Late in April, 1867, the British frigate, HMS **Assaw Valley**, put in to the island of Little Andaman in the Bay of Bengal, at the time a British protectorate of Burma. Some of the crew of the ship ventured ashore to reconnoitre the area. When they did not return after several days it was feared they might have been murdered by natives. The Burmese chief commissioner ordered an army detachment to go ashore and investigate.

**A contingent of Campbell Douglas's 2nd Bn. of the 24th Regt. of the Foot** sailed from Rangoon, arriving off the island on May 7. A small contingent landed on the island and was immediately set upon by natives. Meanwhile a heavy storm blew up, turning the surf into a boiling sea, cutting off the soldiers ashore and placing them in grave danger.

A rescue force of four troopers led by Douglas immediately went into operation. Manning the oars of a gig they plunged into the churning sea and rain. But the light little boat was no match for the raging waters which threatened to capsize it and when it filled with water they were forced to abandon the rescue, but only temporarily. After bailing the water out of the gig, an hour later they made another attempt to rescue the trapped men even though the storm had in no way abated. This time Douglas stood in the bow directing his four oarsmen, balancing the boat by shifting his weight from one leg to the other. This second attempt was successful; five of the **Assaw Valley** crewmen were rescued and brought back to the ship. The force returned to the island a second time and brought back the rest.

**Citation:** For his part in the drama, Douglas, surgeon cum seafarer, was awarded the VC for acting "*in an intrepid and seamanlike manner, cool to a degree, as if what he was doing was an ordinary act of everyday life.*"

**Post War:** He later achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel.

**Gravesite:** He died 31 December 1909 in Wells, Somerset and is buried in the Wells Cemetery.

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is held by the Canadian War Museum.

**Post Script:** This is one of only six Victoria Crosses awarded for action when no enemy was present.

In addition to the VC, Douglas was also awarded the Royal Humane Society Silver Medal for this feat.

## Lieutenant Alexander Roberts Dunn, VC

Born 15 September 1833, at York, the fifth son of the Receiver General of Upper Canada, Dunn took his early education at Upper Canada College then, when his father moved to England after his wife's death, Dunn attended Harrow School. In March 1852, at 19 years of age he purchased a commission in the 11th Hussars (Prince Albert's Own Regiment of Light Dragoons, nicknamed the Cherry Pickers.)



Tall, six-foot-three, blond-headed and handsome with a drooping moustache, Dunn not only cut a glamorous, romantic figure, he proved to be an outstanding cavalry officer as well. To accommodate his height and reach he had Wilkinson's Swords fashion a four-foot-long - several inches longer than regulation - sabre for him.

A strong disciplinarian he was nevertheless popular and respected by the men serving under him. By the time his unit sailed for Crimea in 1854, where Britain and France had gone to war to stem the Russian advance on Turkey, Dunn held the rank of full lieutenant and was in charge of F Troop.

**VC Action:** At Balaclava on 25 October 1854, the morning loomed unsettling and foreboding, an omen of what lay in store. Six hundred and thirty British cavalry were thrown into the Valley of Death flanked by slopes on either side heavily defended by Russian troops and artillery and a 12-gun battery placed wheel-to-wheel at the end of the depression.

It was suicidal, prompting a French general to proclaim: "*C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre! C'est la folie!*" It wasn't war, it was madness. Out of 110 cavalrymen making up Dunn's 11th Hussars, only 25 survived. Overall, the entire attacking force was decimated, 156 killed and missing, 134 wounded, 14 taken prisoner.

Time and again Dunn led his troop against the Russian guns. Finally the regiment was forced to withdraw when it came under withering fire from Fedouikine Hill on the right. While retiring from the scene, Dunn saw that Sergeant Robert Bentley from his troop was wrestling with his horse, which had been severely wounded, and the Russians had singled him out as a straggler. Three of them concentrated their efforts to knock him out of his saddle and were preparing to finish him off. Seeing his predicament, Dunn wheeled around and galloped through a maze of dead and dying as well as riderless horses charging about in all directions, to rescue him.

Thrusting and slashing at the assailants, he felled them all in a matter of minutes. But Bentley was still in dire straits, desperately hanging on to his horse by one of the stirrups so Dunn dismounted, lifted Bentley back into his own saddle, then belted the horse on the rump to send it galloping towards the British lines. On foot Dunn suddenly caught sight of Private Harvey Levett from his troop who had lost his mount and was in danger of being cut down by a Russian hussar. Dunn rushed to his aid and skewered the enemy to death with his giant-sized sabre. When he returned to his unit and saw how badly it had been decimated he broke down and cried.

**Citation:** *"For having in the Light Cavalry Charge on the 25th October, 1854, saved the life of Sergeant Bentley, 11th Hussars by cutting down two or three Russian Hussars, who were attacking from the rear, and afterwards cutting down a Russian Hussar, who was attacking Private Levett, 11th Hussars."*

**Post War:** After the war he sold his commission and returned to Canada after running off with the wife of a fellow officer.

When the Indian Mutiny broke out in 1857 and Britain called upon her colonies for enlistment, Dunn helped form the Prince of Wales Royal Canadian Regiment which arrived in England in 1858. However, much to the disappointment of the officers and other ranks the regiment was sent to Gibraltar as a garrison unit instead of taking part in the Indian Mutiny.

By 1864 Dunn became a full colonel, the first Canadian to command a regiment and the youngest colonel in the British army.

The future for the 30-year-old cavalry officer looked promising, but that prospect failed to satisfy his need for the excitement of battle and he transferred to the 33rd Duke of Wellington's Regiment of Foot. Dunn's regiment was sent to Malta, then India, where the mutiny had ended eight years earlier. Next it was posted to Abyssinia (since renamed Ethiopia) where it joined Napier's march on Magdalen against the Emperor Theodore. It was during this expedition--on 25 January 1868--that Dunn lost his life near Senafe, the circumstances of which still remain a mystery.

The official version of his death issued by the 33rd Regt. is that during a hunting expedition Dunn was trying to uncork a brandy flask when his rifle slipped between his legs and discharged both barrels into his chest. His last words to his manservant were: *"Run for a Doctor."* But when help arrived it was too late. Dunn was dead. This suggests that he killed himself accidentally.

Another version brought up the question of whether he committed suicide. Dunn is said to have dismounted from his horse and sent his valet to a nearby stream for some water. When the manservant returned he found his colonel dead from gunshot wounds.

Nor can murder be discounted. The dashing, handsome, VC hero was well known as a womanizer. It is possible that a jealous suitor or husband shot him or had him shot. Another possibility is that his valet killed him. It was known that he had reversed his will in favour of the manservant and the valet might have murdered him to reap the benefits.

Dunn's body was never returned to England or Canada, which sheds further speculation as to his demise. The Canadian Military Gazette dismissed the issue with these words: "*Colonel Dunn died of gun wounds in Abyssinia. It is generally supposed that his fowling-piece was accidentally discharged when he was clearing some obstruction, though some believe that his servant murdered him, a few that he committed suicide. The truth will probably never be known.*"

**Gravesite:** Until 1945 the biggest mystery of all was: what happened to Dunn's body? That was when a regular British army soldier, Reg Rimmer, who was leading a patrol of Eritrean Mounted Police along the border with Ethiopia, came upon a small cemetery near Senafe, which showed signs of having long been abandoned.

The exception was that among the plots, one grave on a grassy slope sheltered by a large rock appeared to have been given some attention-- by the Italian army during the Fascist occupation, as it turned out. A headstone read:

IN MEMORY OF  
A.R. DUNN. VC COLONEL  
WHO DIED AT SENAFE  
ON THE 25th JAN 1868

This information did not reach the British Trade Commission until 1974, 29 years later. At that time the Department of Veterans Affairs began an investigation. But due to the military activity in Ethiopia no work could be undertaken for another eight years. Restoration finally took place and the commission now monitors the grave every two years.



**Senafe Cemetery and Dunn's Grave**

**Medal Location:** In July 1894, Dunn's VC, along with other medals, was sold at auction at Sotheby's in England. Canadians in London took strong

exception to this mercenary transaction and demanded action by John Patterson, Canadian Minister of Militia.

Patterson cabled Charles Tupper, the Canadian high commissioner in London, authorizing him to buy the medals from the purchaser at the market. They arrived in Canada in time to be displayed at the Quebec Exhibition that year. Later they were transferred to Upper Canada College where Dunn took his early education. In 2006, they were loaned to the Canadian War Museum where they currently reside.



**Dunn's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** Alexander Dunn was the first Canadian born recipient of the Victoria Cross and attended the first investiture of the new award for gallantry in Hyde Park on 26 June 1857, receiving his VC personally from Queen Victoria.

Altogether 11 Victoria Crosses were awarded during the Crimean War. Dunn was the only officer in the Charge of the Light Brigade to receive the medal and the only cavalry officer in the entire campaign to whom it was awarded. (In addition he was awarded the Crimean Medal with four clasps as well the Turkish Medal).

A plaque erected in 1966 by the Archaeological and Historical Board stands at the northwest corner of Clarence Square, near the foot of Spadina Avenue, south of King Street in Toronto where Dunn spent his youth. It is headed "*Canada's First Victoria Cross.*"

## Lance Corporal Frederick Fisher, VC

Born in St Catherines, Ontario on 3 August 1895, Frederick Fisher was the son of Mr. W. H. Fisher, Westmount, Quebec. He was educated at Westmount Academy and then McGill University where he proved to be an avid sportsman, excelling in tennis, football, swimming and shooting while taking membership in the Montreal Athletic Association. He enlisted in the 5th Royal Highlanders of Canada at the young age of eighteen years.



When the war broke out Fisher became a member of the 13th Battalion, CEF, one of the numerous units forming the 1st Division. The 1st Division arrived on the continent in February 1915 and spent several weeks becoming accustomed to life in a war zone.

**VC Action:** He was 20 years old, and a Lance-Corporal in the 13th (Royal Highlanders of Canada) Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force during the First World War when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the VC.

To open the Second Battle of Ypres, on 22 April 1915 in the neighbourhood of St Julien, Belgium, the Germans unleashed the first effective poison gas attack in history. Caught by surprise, the French division to the left of the 1st Canadian Division was routed—with very heavy casualties. After a short pause to wait for the gas to clear, the Germans launched an attack into the gap, while the British and Canadians desperately tried to establish a new defence line. Thousands of German troops were moving in the open towards the hasty defence created by elements of the 14th Battalion CEF around St. Julien. As the improvised defence crumbled, the enemy was only 200 yards away and threatening to overrun a Canadian artillery battery. Lance-Corporal Fisher, along with six other men, went forward with his Colt machine-gun and, under heavy fire, covered the retreat of the battery, losing four men in the process. This action allowed for the Canadian 18 pounders to be hauled out of danger.

Later, when Lance Corporal Fisher had obtained four more men from the 14th Battalion, he went forward again into St Julien to fire on the swarming Germans, however only Fisher made it. The remainder were killed or wounded.

Meanwhile, the 13th Battalion (which was on the extreme left of the Canadian Division) was under heavy fire from three sides and suffering

heavy casualties. Fisher set up his gun at another position to attack the oncoming Germans and was subsequently killed on April 23 while yet again bringing his machine-gun into action under very heavy fire.

Like many of the other Canadian soldiers who fell in the first three days of the Second Battle of Ypres, Fisher's body was never recovered.

**Citation:** *“On 23rd April, 1915, in the neighbourhood of St. Julien, he went forward with the machine gun, of which he was in charge, under heavy fire, and most gallantly assisted in covering the retreat of a battery, losing four men of his gun team.*

*Later, after obtaining four more men, he went forward again to the firing line and was himself killed while bringing his machine gun into action under very heavy fire, in order to cover the advance of supports.”*

"The London Gazette," No. 29202, dated June 22, 1915

**Gravesite:** He is commemorated on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing in Ypres, Belgium. The Menin Gate Memorial is situated at the eastern side of the town of Ypres in the Province of West Flanders, on the road to Menin and Courtrai. It bears the names of 55,000 men who were lost without trace during the defence of the Ypres Salient in the First World War.



**Menin Gate Memorial**

**Medal Location:** His medal is held by The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) Museum, in Montreal

**Post Script:** Lance-Corporal Frederick Fisher was the first member of the CEF awarded the Victoria Cross.

Fisher was not the only Canadian awarded a Victoria Cross for his actions at Second Ypres. He was joined by Captain Francis Alexander Caron Scrimger, Lieutenant Edward Donald Bellew and Company Sergeant-Major Frederick William Hall on 24 and 25 April 1915. Two months later, on 15

June 1915, Lieutenant Frederick William Campbell earned his Victoria Cross, the last awarded to a CEF member for the next 15 months.

In 1970 a memorial plaque was dedicated in Montreal in memory of Fred Fisher.

## Lieutenant Gordon Muriel Flowerdew, VC

Gordon Flowerdew was born on the 2nd January 1885 at Billingford Hall near Scole, Norfolk, and attended Framlingham College from 1894 to 1899. Following his education, at the age of seventeen, he emigrated to Canada and took up work as a cowboy and later as a farmer. When the First World War broke out in 1914 he joined Lord Strathcona's Horse, a cavalry regiment, and was quickly commissioned a Lieutenant.



**VC Action:** On 30th March 1918, General Seely, commanding the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, and Major Connolly, commanding Lord Strathcona's Horse, were able to converse with a French general on the task to take the town of Moreuil. It appeared to the Frenchman that to take the ridge was not possible with Seely's small force against perhaps a whole German division. Seely was, however, keen to make the attempt. It was agreed between the two men that the French should take the town of Moreuil to the south of a wood, and that Seely's force should capture the wood itself.

The plan was for three mounted squadrons of the Royal Canadian Dragoons to attack initially, to be followed up by men from Lord Strathcona's Horse. The Canadian Brigade was to attack in three separate but converging thrusts. Two squadrons of Lord Strathcona's Horse were to attack the wood on foot, with C Squadron, commanded by Lieutenant Flowerdew to make a mounted attack.

The German infantry put up strong resistance and there was a lot of hand-to-hand fighting, but by late morning the northern section of the wood had been captured by the Canadians. It was at this point that Flowerdew, with sword raised, led his men to almost certain death in a suicidal attack on two lines of the enemy, each with about sixty men and three machine-guns.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and dash (NE of Bois de Moreuil, France) when in command of a squadron detailed for special service of a very important nature. On reaching the first objective, Lieutenant Flowerdew saw two lines of the enemy, each about sixty strong, with machine guns in the centre and flanks, one line being about two hundred yards behind the other.*

*Realising the critical nature of the operation and how much depended upon it, Lieutenant Flowerdew ordered a troop under Lieutenant Harvey VC, to dismount and carry out a special movement while he led the remaining three troops to the charge. The squadron (less one troop ) passed over both lines, killing many of the enemy with the sword, and wheeling about galloped at them again.*

*Although the squadron had then lost about 70 per cent of its numbers, killed and wounded, from rifle and machine gun fire directed on it from the front and both flanks, the enemy broke and retired.*

*The survivors of the squadron then established themselves in a position where they were joined, after much hand-to-hand fighting, by Lieutenant Harvey's party. Lieutenant Flowerdew was dangerously wounded through both thighs during the operation but continued to cheer on his men. There can be no doubt that this officer's great valour was the prime factor in the capture of the position."*

London Gazette, No. 30648, of April 24, 1918

**Gravesite:** He is buried in Namps-au-Val British Cemetery, 11 miles south of Amiens.



**Namps-au-Val British Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His medal is held at Framlingham College, Suffolk, England, where it was returned from the Strathcona's Museum in Calgary in 2003.

## Captain, the Reverend, John Weir Foote, VC

John Weir Foote was born in Madoc, Ontario, on 5 May 1904. He was educated at the University of Western Ontario, London; at Queen's University, Kingston; and at McGill University, Montréal. He then entered the Presbyterian Ministry, serving congregations in Fort-Coulonge, Québec and Port Hope, Ontario. In December 1939, he enlisted in the Canadian Chaplain Services and was posted to the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry.



**VC Action:** On 19 August 1942 Honorary Captain Foote was attached to the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (RHLI), one of the battalions from the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division that participated in the raid on the French port of Dieppe on that day. After landing, Padre Foote assisted the RHLI's medical officer in caring for the wounded at the regimental aid post. However, he frequently left the relative safety of that location for the open beach where he rendered first aid, and gave injections of morphine to alleviate the suffering of the many wounded who were there. Later, he carried wounded men from the regimental aid post to landing craft waiting to evacuate the survivors of the raiding force. Padre Foote declined the opportunity to embark, preferring to continue to minister to those left behind, and to share their fate as prisoners of war.

At the end of the war, Padre Foote received the Victoria Cross for his conduct at Dieppe, the first ever awarded to a Canadian chaplain.

**Citation:** "At Dieppe, on 19th August, 1942, Honorary Captain Foot, Canadian Chaplain Services, was Regimental Chaplain with the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry.

*Upon landing on the beach under heavy fire he attached himself to the Regimental Aid Post which had been set up in a slight depression on the beach, but which was only sufficient to give cover to me lying down. During the subsequent period of approximately eight hours, while the action continued, this officer not only assisted the Regimental Medical Officer in ministering to the wounded in the Regimental Aid Post, but time and again left this shelter to inject morphine, give first-aid and carry wounded personnel from the open beach to the Regimental Aid Post. On these occasions, with utter disregard for his personal safety, Honorary Captain Foote exposed himself to an inferno of fire and saved many lives by his gallant efforts. During the action, as the tide went out, the Regimental Aid Post was moved to the shelter of a stranded landing craft. Honorary Captain Foote continued tirelessly and courageously to carry wounded men from the exposed beach to the cover of the landing craft. He also removed wounded from inside the landing craft when ammunition had been set on fire by enemy shells. When landing craft appeared he*

*carried wounded from the Regimental Aid Post to the landing craft through very heavy fire.*

*On several occasions this officer had the opportunity to embark but returned to the beach as his chief concern was the care and evacuation of the wounded. He refused a final opportunity to leave the shore, choosing to suffer the fate of the men he had ministered to for over three years.*

*Honorary Captain Foote personally saved many lives by his efforts and his example inspired all around him. Those who observed him state that the calmness of this heroic officer as he walked about, collecting the wounded on the fire-swept beach will never be forgotten."*

*The London Gazette, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1946*

**Post War:** He did not accept demobilization until 1948, remaining with the Canadian Chaplain Services until that time. Then he entered the political arena and represented Durham County in the Legislature of the Province of Ontario. For some time he filled the post of Minister of Reform Institutions for Ontario. He made his home with his wife in Cobourg, Ontario, until his death on 2 May 1988.

**Gravesite:** He is buried in Union Cemetery, Cobourg, Ontario.



**Foote Grave, Union Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** Prior to his death, he donated his medals to the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry.

## 2nd Lieutenant Benjamin Handley Geary, VC

Second Lieutenant Geary was born in Marylebone, London, on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1891 and was commissioned into the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion The East Surrey Regiment on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1914, later being posted to the 1st Battalion in France.

He was 23 years old when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the VC



**VC Action:** On 20 and 21 April 1915 on Hill 60 near Ypres, Belgium, Second Lieutenant Geary led his men across exposed open ground swept by fierce enemy fire to join survivors of the Bedfordshire Regiment in a crater at the top of the hill, which he held against artillery and bomb attacks during the evening and night. Each attack was repulsed mainly owing to the fine example and personal gallantry of Second Lieutenant Geary. He deliberately exposed himself to enemy fire in order to see by the light of flares the whereabouts of the enemy. He was severely wounded early on 21 April.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and determination on Hill Sixty near Ypres on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> April 1915, when he held the left crater with his platoon, some men of The Bedfordshire Regiment and a few reinforcements who came up during the evening and the night.*

*The crater was first exposed to a very heavy artillery fire, which broke down the defences and afterwards, throughout the night, to repeated bomb attacks which filled it with dead and wounded. Each attack, however, was repulsed, mainly owing to the splendid personal gallantry and example of Second Lieutenant Geary. At one time he used a rifle with great effect, at another threw hand grenades and exposed himself with entire disregard to danger, in order to see, by the light of flares, where the enemy were coming on. In the intervals between the attacks, he spent his whole time arranging for the ammunition supply and for reinforcements. He was severely wounded just before daybreak on 21<sup>st</sup> April".*

London Gazette, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1915

**Post War:** Ordained into Holy Orders after the war, he was at one time Chaplain to the Forces, but resigned to go to Canada where he became Sergeant-at-Arms in the Canadian Legislature.

In 1939 he joined the Canadian Army as a Major.

He died 26 May 1976 in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario.

**Gravesite:** His grave and memorial are at St. Mark's Church Cemetery, Niagara-on-the-Lake.



**Lt. Geary's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is held by the Canadian War Museum.



**Lt. Geary's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** 2/Lt Geary received his Victoria Cross from King George V on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1915.

## Corporal Herman James Good, VC

Herman James Good was born in Big River, New Brunswick, on 29 November 1887. He was educated at the local public school and involved in lumber operations in the area. He enlisted on 29 June 1915, in Sussex, NB. He first served with the 5th Battalion, then the 2nd Pioneer Battalion, before being transferred to the 13th (Royal Highlanders of Canada) Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force.

Good was wounded on three occasions prior to the events of 8 August 1918.



**VC Action:** On 8 August 1918, the opening day of the attack by the Canadian Corps at Amiens, the advance of Corporal Good's company was checked by fire from three German machine guns emplaced in Hangard Wood, near Villers-Bretonneux. Good charged the position alone, killing several of the enemy and making prisoners of the remaining defenders. Later that day, when the advance had penetrated deep into the German lines, he came upon an enemy battery of 5.9-inch guns, which was in action. Collecting three men from his section, Good assaulted the battery in the face of point-blank fire and captured the crews of all three guns.

Corporal Good's actions on this occasion earned him the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and leading when in attack his company was held up by heavy fire from three machine guns, which were seriously delaying the advance. Realising the gravity of the situation, this N.C.O. dashed forward alone, killing several of the garrison and capturing the remainder."*

*Later on Cpl. Good, while alone, encountered a battery of 5.9-inch guns, which were in action at the time. Collecting three men of his section, he charged the battery under point-blank fire and captured the entire crews of three guns."*

*The London Gazette*, September 27, 1918

**Post War:** At the end of the war, Good returned to the Bathurst area, and was involved in farming and lumbering. For twenty years, he served as the district's Fish, Game and Fire Warden.

Herman James Good died on 18 April 1969, in Bathurst, New Brunswick, following a five-year illness.

**Gravesite:** His grave in St Albans Cemetery, in addition to a family stone, has a **veteran's marker** with the Victoria Cross emblazoned on it; the only one in New Brunswick and only one of five in Canada. At the cemetery entrance along the Salmon Beach Road is a cairn with a plaque outlining how Corporal Good won his Victoria Cross.

In a fitting tribute on 9 August 2006, a CWGC headstone was erected in his name at the Saint Albans Cemetery in Bathurst, replacing the simple black marker identifying his grave. Two CF-18 Hornets performed a fly-over at the ceremony, one of the pilots being the husband of Good's great granddaughter.



**Good`s Grave, St. Alban`s Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His medal is not held publicly.

**Post Script:** In addition to Good, nine other members of the Canadian Corps earned Victoria Crosses between 8 and 13 August—Lieutenants Jean Brillant and James Edward Tait, Sergeants Robert Spall and Raphael Louis Zengel, Corporals Alexander Picton Brereton, Frederick George Coppins, and Harry Garnet Bedford Miner and Privates John Bernard Croak and Thomas Dinesen.

Herman Good laid the cornerstone for Branch Number 18 of the Royal Canadian Legion, Bathurst, NB in the 1960s. A couple of years later, it was named for this Bathurst native son. A museum is located in the Legion building and contains artefacts from the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean War, the Gulf War, and has a First World War Trench Exhibit.

## Lieutenant Robert Hampton Gray, VC, DSC, RCNVR

Robert Hampton Gray was born in Trail, British Columbia, on 2 November 1917, the son of a Boer War Veteran. He received his early education in a public school and high school in Nelson, B.C., and then spent a year at the University of Alberta in Edmonton followed by two years at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.



In 1940 he was selected as one of 75 candidates for commissions in the Navy. He was one of 13 who qualified as pilots in the Fleet Air Arm. In 1944 he was a lieutenant on HMS *Formidable*. For his brilliant work during the attack on the German battleship *Tirpitz* in Alten Fjord he was Mentioned-in-Dispatches. In July 1945, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for aiding in the destruction of a destroyer in the Tokyo area.

**VC Action:** On 9 August 1945, Gray, in his Corsair aircraft, led an attack against Japanese warships in Onagawa Wan, off the island of Honshu, Japan. Gray dove to attack after spotting the vessels, his aircraft being struck by enemy anti-aircraft fire as he flew in. But Gray held his plane steady and got to within fifteen metres of the Japanese escort *Amakusa* before dropping his bombs. At least one scored a direct hit, sinking the escort. Gray's aircraft, however, was crippled and crashed into the bay.

**Citation:** *"For great bravery in leading an attack to within 50 feet of a Japanese destroyer in the face of intense anti-aircraft fire, thereby sinking the destroyer although he was hit and his own aircraft set on fire and finally himself killed. He was one of the gallant company of Naval Airmen who, from December 1944, fought and beat the Japanese from Palembang to Tokyo. The actual incident took place in the Onagawa Wan on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1945. Gray was leader of the attack which he pressed home in the face of fire from shore batteries and at least eight warships. With his aircraft in flames he nevertheless obtained at least one direct hit which sank its objective.*

*Lieut. R.H. Gray, D.S.C., R.C.N.V.R., of Nelson, B.C., flew off the Aircraft Carrier, HMS Formidable on August 9<sup>th</sup> 1945, to lead an attack on Japanese shipping in Onagawa Wan (Bay) in the Island of Honshu, Mainland of Japan. At Onagawa Bay the fliers found below a number of Japanese ships and dived into attack. Furious fire was opened on the aircraft from army batteries on the ground and from warships in the Bay.*

*Lieut. Gray selected for his target an enemy destroyer. He swept in oblivious of the concentrated fire and made straight for his target. His aircraft was hit and hit again, but he kept on. As he came close to the*

*destroyer his plane caught fire but he pressed to within 50 feet of the Japanese ship and let go his bombs. He scored at least one direct hit, possibly more. The destroyer sank almost immediately. Lieutenant Gray did not return. He had given his life at the very end of his fearless bombing run."*

*The London Gazette, 13<sup>th</sup> November 1945*

**Grave Site:** Lieutenant Gray has no known grave as neither he nor his plane were ever found.

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is on loan to the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.



**Gray's Medal Set**

**Memorials:** His name is inscribed on the Sailor's Memorial in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

A memorial to Gray also exists at Onagawa Wan, just metres away from where his plane crashed; this is the only memorial dedicated to a foreign soldier on Japanese soil.

On 12 March, 1946, the Geographic Board of Canada named a mountain in Kokanee Glacier Provincial Park, BC, after Gray and his brother, John Balfour Gray, who was also killed in WWII.

The Royal Canadian Legion hall in Nelson, British Columbia and the wardroom of HMCS *Tecumseh*, his RCNVR home unit, also bear plaques in his honour.

Gray is one of fourteen figures commemorated at the Valiants Memorial in Ottawa.



**Post Script:** He was the only member of the Royal Canadian Navy to win the Victoria Cross in World War II and his was the last Victoria Cross awarded to a Canadian.

## Lieutenant Milton Fowler Gregg, VC, CBE, MC\*

Milton Fowler Gregg was born in Mountain Dale, New Brunswick on 10 April 1892. He attended the local public school, the Provincial Normal School in Fredericton, before going on to study at Acadia University and Dalhousie University. Before enlisting, he taught school in New Brunswick. At the age of eighteen, Gregg joined the 8th New Brunswick Hussars militia regiment.



In September 1914, he enlisted as a private in the 13th Battalion (Black Watch), with whom he sailed overseas, and served as a stretcher-bearer in France. In 1916, while in hospital in England recovering from a wound, he was recruited for the Imperial Officers' Training School, received his commission as a lieutenant, and was posted with the Royal Canadian Regiment upon graduation. He was awarded the Military Cross for his actions at Lens in 1917, a Bar to his Military Cross in the Battle of Arras in 1918, and he was again wounded.

**VC Action:** Lieutenant Gregg earned the Victoria Cross for his actions from 27 September to 1 October 1918 while serving with The Royal Canadian Regiment near Cambrai in France. Gregg led his men in an advance under intense fire through uncut enemy barbed wire. When the Germans mounted a strong counterattack and his supply of grenades was exhausted, Lieutenant Gregg secured more grenades and rejoined his men. Despite suffering two wounds, he continued to lead his men against the enemy trenches, which they cleared.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and initiative during operations near Cambrai, 27th September to 1st October, 1918.*

*On 28th September, when the advance of the brigade was held up by fire from both flanks and by thick, uncut wire, he crawled forward alone and explored the wire until he found a small gap, through which he subsequently led his men, and forced an entry into the enemy trench. The enemy counter-attacked in force, and, through lack of bombs, the situation became critical. Although wounded, Lt. Gregg returned alone under terrific fire and collected a further supply. Then rejoining his party, which by this time was much reduced in numbers, and, in spite of a second wound, he reorganised his men and led them with the greatest determination against the enemy trenches, which he finally cleared.*

*He personally killed or wounded 11 of the enemy and took 25 prisoners, in addition to 12 machine guns captured in this trench. Remaining with his company in spite of wounds, he again on the 30th September led his*

*men in attack until severely wounded. The outstanding valour of this officer saved many casualties and enabled the advance to continue."*

*The London Gazette*, January 6, 1919

**Post War:** After the war, Gregg went into business for himself. He then went on to work for the Soldiers Settlement Board, as well as selling advertising for the Halifax Herald. In 1934, he was appointed Sergeant-at-Arms of the House of Commons, in Ottawa. With the outbreak of the Second World War, Gregg served with his old regiment, the Royal Canadian Regiment, in England until April 1942. He was promoted to colonel, and made commander of the Officers' Training School in Brockville, Ontario. In 1943, he was made Brigadier and commandant of the Canadian School of Infantry in Vernon, British Columbia, which he held until the end of the war.

Following the end of the Second World War, Gregg served as President of the University of New Brunswick, before being elected to Parliament in 1947. During a ten-year career as Member of Parliament, he served as Minister of Fisheries, Veterans Affairs and Labour. After losing in the 1957 election, Gregg went on to become the United Nations' representative in Iraq, the administrator of UNICEF in Indonesia, and the Canadian High Commissioner in Georgetown, British Guyana. He retired in 1968.

Gregg died in Fredericton, New Brunswick on 13 March 1978.

**Gravesite:** He is buried at Snider Mountain Baptist Church Cemetery, Snider Mountain, New Brunswick.



**Gregg's Grave, Snider Mountain Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His medal is held by the Royal Canadian Regiment Museum, Wolseley Barracks, London, Ontario.

**Post Script:** In addition to Gregg, seven other members of the Canadian Corps won the Victoria Cross in fighting around the Canal du Nord between 27 September and 9 October, 1918. They were Capt. J. MacGregor and C.N. Mitchell; Lts. G.T. Lyall, S.L. Honey, G.F. Kerr, and W.L. Algie; and, Sgt. W. Merrifield.

The University of New Brunswick opened the Brigadier Milton F. Gregg, VC, Centre for the Study of War and Society which is devoted to excellence in the study of war as a complex social phenomenon.

## Sergeant-Major Frederick William Hall, VC

Frederick William Hall was born in Kilkenny, Ireland 21 February 1885, the son of Bombardier F. Hall and Mary Hall, of 43 Union Road, Leytonstone, London. At the beginning of the First World War he was living in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and enlisted in the 8th Infantry Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force.



**VC Action:** Company Sergeant-Major (CSM) Hall was awarded the Victoria Cross on 24 April 1915 during the Second Battle of Ypres in Belgium for giving up his life to save a wounded comrade. When the wounded man, who was lying 15 metres from the trench, called for help, Hall and two other soldiers endeavoured to reach him despite being subjected to very heavy enemy gunfire. This first attempt failed, the two men accompanying Hall being wounded. CSM Hall then made a second foray alone, and was in the process of lifting up the wounded man when he was fatally struck.

**Citation:** *"On 24th April, 1915, in the neighbourhood of Ypres, when a wounded man who was lying some 15 yards from the trench called for help, Company Serjeant-Major Hall endeavoured to reach him in the face of a very heavy enfilade fire which was being poured in by the enemy. The first attempt failed, and a Non-commissioned Officer and private soldier who were attempting to give assistance were both wounded. Company Serjeant-Major Hall then made a second most gallant attempt, and was in the act of lifting up the wounded man to bring him in when he fell mortally wounded in the head."*

"The London Gazette," No. 29202, dated June 23, 1915

**Gravesite:** His body was not recovered. His name is remembered on the Menin Gate, Ypres, Belgium.



**The Menin Gate**

**Medal Location:** Hall's medals are privately held.

**Post Script:** Hall was not the only Canadian awarded a Victoria Cross for his actions at Second Ypres. He was joined by Captain Francis Alexander Caron Scrimger, Lieutenant Edward Donald Bellew and Lance Corporal Frederick Fisher on 24 and 25 April 1915.

Fred Hall, Leo Clarke and Robert Shankland all lived in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. They all happened to live on the same street, Pine Street and it is believed to be the only street in the world to have three Victoria Cross winners that lived there. The city of Winnipeg later renamed it Valour Road in honour of the men. A bronze plaque is mounted on a street lamp at the corner of Portage Avenue and Valour Road to tell this story



**The memorial plaque erected by The Women's Canadian Club of Winnipeg in 1925 renaming Pine Street "Valour Road" in Winnipeg**

## Able Seaman William Hall, VC

Hall was born at Horton Bluff, Nova Scotia, 28 April 1827, the son of Jacob and Lucy Hall, who had escaped American slave owners in Maryland and were brought to freedom in Nova Scotia by the Royal Navy. The Halls first lived in Summerville, NS where Jacob worked in a shipyard operated by Abraham Cunard until they bought a farm across the Avon River at Horton Bluff. Hall first worked in shipyards at nearby Hantsport, Nova Scotia, before going to sea at 17. He sailed first on merchant ships based out of the Minas Basin including the barque *Kent* of Kentville, Nova Scotia.



Hall briefly served in the United States Navy from 1847 to 1849.

He volunteered for the Royal Navy in February 1852, serving at first aboard HMS *Rodney*. Hall fought in the Crimean War serving ashore in a naval brigade from *Rodney* at the battles of Inkerman and Sebastopol in 1854.

When the Indian Mutiny broke out in May 1857, Hall was in HMS *Shannon* en route to China. She was intercepted and ordered to Calcutta. A Shannon Brigade was formed of several gunners, sailors, and marines, under Captain William Peel. The ship was towed over 600 miles up the Ganges River to Allahabad. Then the force fought across country to Cawnpore and were in time to take part in the Siege of Lucknow.

**VC Action:** On 16 November 1857, at the town of Lucknow, British naval guns were brought up close to the Shah Nujeff mosque. The gun crews, of which Hall was a member, kept up a steady fire in an attempt to breach the walls of the mosque. A hail of musket balls and grenades from the mutineers inside the mosque caused heavy casualties for the gunners.

Able Seaman William Hall and Lieutenant T.J. Young, who was in charge of the gun crews, were the only survivors of the crews, all the rest having been killed or wounded, and between them they loaded and fired the last gun which won the battle.

For this act, William Hall, became the first Black person, the first Nova Scotian, and the third Canadian to be awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Later Life:** Hall remained with the Royal Navy for the rest of his career. He joined the crew of HMS *Donegal* in 1859 and on October 28, 1859, he was presented with the Victoria Cross by Rear Admiral Charles Talbot while *Donegal* was anchored at Queenstown Harbour. Hall rose to the

rating of Petty Officer First Class by the time he retired in 1876. He returned to his home village in Horton Bluff where he ran a small farm until his death in 1904.

**Grave Site:** Hall died at Avonport, Nova Scotia on 27 August 1904 and was buried in Hantsport Baptist Church Cemetery.

**Medal Location:** Hall's Victoria Cross was repatriated from Britain in 1967 by the government of Nova Scotia and is on permanent display at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Halifax.



**Hall's VC with Blue Ribbon to denote Naval Service**

**Post Script:** The Royal Canadian Legion in Hantsport is named "The Lucknow Branch" in honour of his Victoria Cross action. Hall is also featured in exhibits at the Halifax Citadel and at the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia.



Canada Post commemorated William Hall on a stamp, first issued on February 1, 2010 in Hantsport, Nova Scotia and officially launched at the Black Cultural Centre on 2 February 2010. Hall was designated a Nationally Historic Person by the Canadian Historic Sites and Monuments Board at Hantsport on 8 October 2010 and a new plaque was unveiled in his honour.



**Cairn in Hantsport**

## Sergeant Major Robert Hill Hanna, VC

Born 6 August 1887, in Kilkeel County, Ireland, he received his education and then took a job as a lumberjack before emigrating to Canada in 1905. He joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the First World War, and by the summer of 1917 was a Company Sergeant-Major (CSM) serving with the 29th Infantry Battalion.



**VC Action:** On 21 August 1917 CSM Hanna's company was attempting to overpower a German strongpoint on Hill 70, near Lens in France. In the course of three assaults on the enemy position, the company had suffered several casualties, including the loss of all of its officers. While his company continued to take casualties from the heavy machine gun fire coming from the strongpoint, Hanna calmly collected a party of men and led them in a fourth attack, rushing through the dense barbed wire protecting the position. When he arrived inside the strongpoint, CSM Hanna bayoneted three of the enemy and clubbed a fourth with his rifle, enabling the position and its machine gun to be captured.

For the bravery and leadership he demonstrated in this action, Hanna received the Victoria Cross from King George V at Buckingham Palace.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery in attack, when his company met with most severe enemy resistance and all the company officers became casualties. A strong point, heavily protected by wire and held by a machine gun, had beaten off three assaults of the company with heavy casualties. This Warrant Officer under heavy machine gun and rifle fire, coolly collected a party of men, and leading them against this strong point, rushed through the wire and personally bayoneted three of the enemy and brained the fourth, capturing the position and silencing the machine gun.*

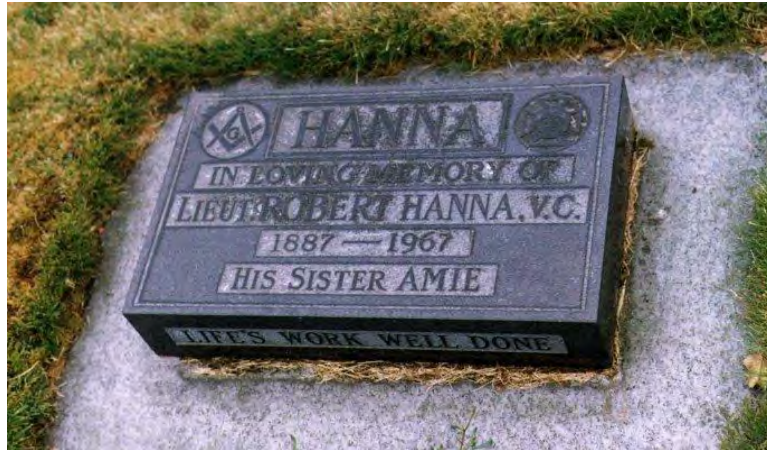
*This most courageous action, displayed courage and personal bravery of the highest order at this most critical moment of the attack, was responsible for the capture of a most important tactical point, and but for his daring action and determined handling of a desperate situation the attack would not have succeeded.*

*C.S./M. Hanna's outstanding gallantry, personal courage and determined leading of his company is deserving of the highest possible reward."*

*London Gazette, no.30372, 8 November 1917*

**Post War:** After the war he ran a logging camp and later took up his original vocation of farming. He died in Mount Lehman, British Columbia on 15 June 1967.

**Gravesite:** He is buried at the Masonic Cemetery, Burnaby, British Columbia.



**Hanna's Headstone, Masonic Cemetery, Burnaby, BC**

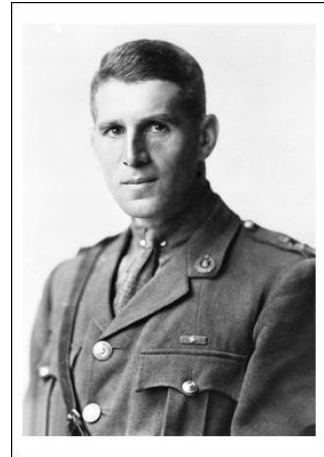
**Medal Location:** His medal is privately held.

**Post Script:** During the Battle for Hill 70 six members of the Canadian Corps, including CSM Hanna received the Victoria Cross for their conspicuous gallantry between 15 and 24 August, 1917. The others were Major Okill Massey Learmonth, Sergeant Frederick Hobson, Corporal Filip Konowal and Privates Harry Brown and Michael James O'Rourke.

## Lieutenant Frederick Maurice Watson Harvey, VC, MC

Born at Athboy, Ireland, Harvey was the son of a minister. He attended Portora Royal School and came to Canada in 1908. He settled in Fort Macleod, Alta., and when World War I started he joined the Lord Strathcona's Horse, part of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, which by 1915 was serving with the British 15th Army Corps in France.

**VC Action:** Frederick Maurice Watson Harvey was decorated with the VC for "most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty" for leading a cavalry charge on the village of Guyencourt, France, on 27 March 1917.



In March 1917, the brigade received orders to form up on a 12-mile front with Nurin as its central focal point and advance beyond the British infantry positions. By March 27, units of the brigade had occupied the villages of Logavesnes and Lieramount.

The final objective of the Fort Garry Horse and Strathconas was the high ground around the village of Guyencourt and the Grebaussart Wood. The attack was delayed until 5:15 p.m. by a heavy snowstorm, but as soon as it let up, the Fort Garry's galloped up Hill 140 where they set up a pair of machine-gun posts. They then rode around the hill in the Grebaussart Wood, Jean Copse and Chauffeur Wood, overcoming all resistance, and setting up three more machine-guns. Then, as the cavalrymen charged into the outskirts of the town of Saulcourt, the Germans fled and in the process were caught in the Canadian machine-gun crossfire.

With Guyencourt in full view, the horses charged onto the ridge on the left and in front of the town where an enemy trench protected it with three rows of barbed wire. The Germans ran forward and opened fire with rifles and machine-guns inflicting heavy casualties on the Strathconas, who were forced to seek shelter at the walls in the northwest corner of the village.

Harvey, who commanded the leading troop of the regiment, riding well ahead of his men became the prime target for a machine-gun firing from a trench protected by barbed wire which threatened to wipe out the company. Harvey dismounted, dashed forward and hurdled the triple-wire entanglement. Firing his revolver on the run he shot the German gunner dead. As a result of his action, the Strathconas were able to occupy the trench and capture the town.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty.*

*During an attack by his regiment on a village a party of the enemy ran forward to a wired trench just in front of the village and opened rapid rifle and machine gun fire at a very close range, causing heavy casualties in the leading troop.*

*At this critical moment, when the enemy showed no intention whatever of retiring and fire was still intense, Lt. Harvey, who was in command of the leading troop, ran forward well ahead of his men and dashed at the trench, still fully manned, jumped the wire, shot the machine gunner and captured the gun.*

*His most courageous act undoubtedly had a decisive effect on the success of the operation."*

*London Gazette, no.30122, 8 June 1917*

**Post War:** After the war, Harvey returned to Canada and lived in Calgary. In 1938, he assumed command of Lord Strathcona's Horse. Later he was promoted brigadier and commanded Military District 13 in Calgary. He retired from the military in 1946 and held the rank of honorary colonel of the Strathcona's from 1950-66.

Harvey died in August 1980 at age 91.

**Gravesite:** He is buried at Union Cemetery in Fort Macleod, AB



**Harvey's Grave, Union Cemetery, Fort MacLeod, AB**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is displayed at the Museum of the Regiments in Calgary. It is the only VC currently on display in the world that shows both sides of the medal.

**Post Script:** Harvey later received the Military Cross for his part in the Strathcona's charge against German positions near Moreuil Wood on 30 March 1918, the same engagement for which Gordon Flowerdew was

awarded the Victoria Cross. The French Government also conferred on Harvey, the Croix de Guerre.

## Sergeant Frederick Hobson, VC

Frederick Hobson was born on 23 September 1873 in Norwood, London, England. While in his early twenties, prior to 1897, he joined the Wiltshire Regiment in England and served with merit in the Boer War in South Africa. Soon after his marriage to Louise Moses in 1904 he emigrated to Canada, settling first in Barrie, then Simcoe and finally, in 1912, in Galt where he had accepted employment as a stores clerk. At the outbreak of World War I, and against his wife's wishes, he tried on three separate occasions to enlist. He was rejected each time because of his age. Still determined to serve, he travelled to Simcoe and, giving his age as 39 instead of his true age of 41, enlisted in the Norfolk Rifles with the rank of corporal. Immediately he travelled to Toronto where, on 10 November 1914, he signed his attestation papers with the 20th Battalion and was given the rank of Sergeant. He sailed for England on 15 May 1915 and arrived in France on 4 September 1915. He served in the trenches for two years and was wounded once before he was killed in a battle that took place between Hill 70 and the city of Lens.



**VC Action:** Frederick Hobson and his men were holding down a position called Nabob Valley, a part of the German trenches the 20th Cdn. Inf. Bn. had captured three days earlier. At 1350 on 18 August 1917, the Germans laid down an artillery barrage in an attempt to recapture the trenches they had lost.

**Most of the battalion's forward positions were wiped out, all** communications were cut and only one Lewis gun was left in the vicinity. While the gunners were attempting to put the gun into action, a shell exploded and all but one gunner was killed. The survivor was left half buried in mud.

Hobson took a shovel and dug the man out and then helped him get the weapon into position. Even though Hobson had been hit by an enemy bullet, he continued to operate the gun until it jammed. By this time the Germans were almost on top of the pair.

Hobson sprang to his feet and warded them off with his rifle. When he was out of ammunition he attacked with his bayonet and also clubbed the enemy with his rifle butt. He killed 14 in very short order. The gunner had his Lewis gun working, but Hobson was dead by the time reinforcements arrived.

**Citation:** *"During a strong enemy counter-attack a Lewis gun in a forward post in a communication trench leading to the enemy lines, was buried by a shell, and the crew, with the exception of one man, killed.*

*Sjt. Hobson, though not a gunner, grasping the great importance of the post, rushed from his trench, dug out the gun, and got it into action against the enemy who were now advancing down the trench and across the open.*

*A jam caused the gun to stop firing. Though wounded, he left the gunner to correct the stoppage, rushed forward at the advancing enemy and, with bayonet and clubbed rifle, single handed, held them back until he himself was killed by a rifle shot. By this time however, the Lewis gun was again in action and reinforcements shortly afterwards arriving, the enemy were beaten off.*

*The valour and devotion to duty displayed by this non-commissioned Officer gave the gunner the time required to again get the gun into action, and saved a most serious situation."*

"The London Gazette," dated October 16, 1917

**Gravesite:** Hobson has no known grave but his name is etched on the Vimy Memorial. Inscribed on the ramparts of the Vimy Memorial are the names of over 11,000 Canadian soldiers who were posted as *'missing, presumed dead'* in France.



Vimy Memorial, NE Face/NW, 1989

Harry Palmer © 1997

**Medal Location:** His medals are held by the Canadian War Museum. A replica of his medal and copy of his citation are also on display at the Sgt. F. Hobson, VC Armoury in Simcoe, Ontario.



**Sgt. Hobson's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** During the battle around Lens and Hill 70 six members of the Canadian Corps received the Victoria Cross for their conspicuous gallantry between 15 and 24 August – Major Okill Massey Learmonth, Company Sergeant-Major Robert Hill Hanna, Sergeant Frederick Hobson, Corporal Filip Konowal and Privates Harry Brown and Michael James O'Rourke.

A plaque in Frederick Hobson's memory has been erected at the Armoury in Cambridge, Ontario.

## Major Charles Ferguson Hoey, VC, MC

Charles Ferguson Hoey was born in Duncan, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, on 29 March 1914. He was educated at the Duncan Grammar School and at the Duncan High School.



In April 1933, he went to England with the intention of making the army his career. He first enlisted in the West Kent Regiment, won a cadetship to the Royal Military College at Sandhurst and went there in September 1935. He graduated from Sandhurst in December 1936 and, after a brief visit home to Duncan, joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, the Lincolnshire Regiment, which is now the Royal Lincolnshires following distinguished service fighting in Burma.

He transferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Lincolnshires, then in India and sailed for there in September 1937. He went to Burma with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in 1942 and served there until his death in February 1944. He was awarded the Military Cross in July 1943 for his outstanding service at Maungdaw during a raid on a Japanese position. His Victoria Cross came as a result of the action described below.

**VC Action:** On 16 February 1944 near the Ngakyedauk Pass, Arakan, Burma (now Myanmar), Major Hoey's company came under devastating machine-gun fire, but Major Hoey did not waver in his advance on the objective. Although wounded in the head and leg he went forward alone and tackled a troublesome enemy strong point, destroying it and killing all the occupants, but he was mortally wounded.

**Citation:** *"In Burma, on the 16<sup>th</sup> February 1944, Major Hoey's company formed a part of a force which was ordered to capture a position at all costs.*

*After a night march through enemy held territory the force was met at the foot of the position by heavy machine-gun fire.*

*Major Hoey personally led his company under heavy machine-gun and rifle fire right up to the objective. Although wounded at least twice in the leg and head, he seized a Bren gun from one of his men and firing from the hip, led his company on to the objective. In spite of his wounds the company had difficulty keeping up with him, and Major Hoey reached the enemy strong post first, where he killed all the occupants before being mortally wounded.*

*Major Hoey's outstanding gallantry and leadership, his total disregard of personal safety and his grim determination to reach the objective resulted in the capture of this vital position."*

**Gravesite:** Major Hoey is buried in Taukkyan Cemetery, Rangoon, Burma.



**Taukkyan Cemetery**



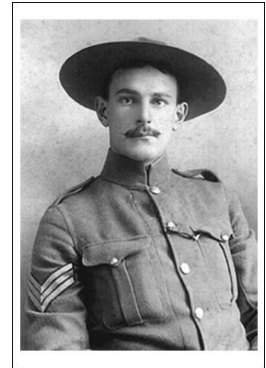
**Hoey's Headstone, Taukkyan Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is on display at the Museum of Lincolnshire Life in Lincoln, England.

**Post Script:** Major Hoey was one of only three Canadians to be awarded the Victoria Cross in the War against Japan. The others were Lt. Robert Hampton Gray and Sergeant Major John Osborn.

## Sergeant Edward J.G. Holland, VC

Edward James Gibson Holland was born in Ottawa, Ontario on 2 February 1878, and as a young man joined the 5th Princess Louise Dragoon Guards of the Militia. After the beginning of the South African War (1899-1902) he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Dragoons.



**VC Action:** On 7 November 1900, Canadian and British forces found themselves in a full-scale battle with the enemy near Leliefontein. As the withdrawal from the battle began, the Canadian rearguard consisted of cavalrymen from the Royal Canadian Dragoons and two field guns from "D" Battery, Royal Canadian Artillery. At one point about 200 mounted Boers charged the rearguard. Sergeant Holland, armed with a Colt machine gun on a horse-pulled carriage, set up his weapon to protect the Canadian guns. As the Boers advanced, Holland continued to calmly fire the Colt, seemingly taking no heed of the increasing danger of his position. Then, as the Boers closed in on him, he prepared to withdraw. **The horse pulling the gun's carriage, however, had been shot and was down.** Holland simply lifted the gun off the carriage, slid the hot barrel under his arm and rode off to safety.

**Citation:** *"Sergeant Holland did splendid work with his Colt gun, and kept the Boers off the two 12-pounded by its fire at close range. When he saw the enemy were too near for him to escape with the carriage, as the horse was blown, he calmly lifted the gun off and galloped away with it under his arm."*

*London Gazette, no.27307, 23 April 1901*

**Post War:** After he returned to Canada Holland received a commission as an officer in his old Militia unit, the 5th Princess Louise Dragoon Guards. During the First World War he achieved the rank of Major and commanded a Motor Machine Gun Battery, serving in France with the Canadian Expeditionary Force for one year. Holland died on 18 June 1948 in Cobalt, Ontario.

**Gravesite:** He was cremated at St James Crematorium, Toronto and his ashes spread on an island in Temagami.

**Medal Location:** His medal is held at the Royal Canadian Dragoon`s Museum at CFB Petawawa, Ontario.

**Post Script:** The other Canadians awarded the Victoria Cross for their part in the Battle of Leliefontein were Lieutenants Hampton Zane Churchill Cockburn and Richard Ernest William Turner.

The Department of National Defence named an armoury after Major Holland in Ottawa, Ontario.

## Private Thomas William Holmes, VC

Holmes was born in Montreal on 14 October 1898. His family moved to Owen Sound, Ont. in 1903 and he attended Ryerson School. In December 1915, he enlisted in the 147th Bn. and later transferred to the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles, eventually attaining the rank of sergeant.



**VC Action:** On 26 October 1917 the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles was taking part in the opening assault by the Canadian Corps on German defences near Passchendaele in Belgium. Heavy machine gun and rifle fire from a German "pillbox" fortification had stopped the advance by the Canadians on the right flank, and had inflicted many casualties. Alone and on his own initiative, Private Holmes ran forward and with two grenades killed and wounded the crews of two of the enemy machine guns. Returning for another grenade, he again attacked the pillbox alone and under heavy fire. Holmes threw his grenade into the entrance of the pillbox and compelled the surrender of its nineteen occupants, in so doing clearing the way for the advance to resume. For his conduct in this action Private Holmes received the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and resource when the right flank of our attack was held up by heavy machine-gun and rifle fire from a 'pill-box' strong point. Heavy casualties were producing a critical situation when Pte. Holmes, on his own initiative and single-handed, ran forward and threw two bombs, killing and wounding the crews of two machine guns. He then returned to his comrades, secured another bomb, and again rushed forward alone under heavy fire and threw the bomb into the entrance of the 'pill-box,' causing the nineteen occupants to surrender.*

*By this act of valour at a very critical moment Pte. Holmes undoubtedly cleared the way for the advance of our troops and saved the lives of many of his comrades."*

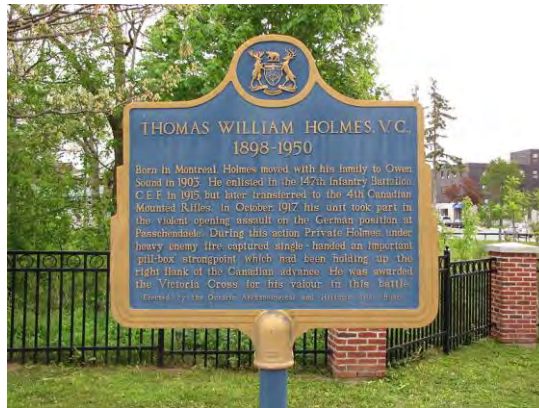
*London Gazette, no.30471, 11 January 1918*

**Post War:** After the war Holmes was a pilot for the Harbour Commission for fifteen years. In 1936 he and another officer saved the lives of three persons whose auxiliary cabin boat upset in the harbor. In 1935 his home was robbed and the Victoria Cross was stolen, but later recovered. In 1942 Holmes narrowly escaped death when his launch exploded.

**Gravesite:** Holmes died 4 January 1950 and is buried at Greenwood Cemetery in Owen Sound, Ontario. His memorial service was attended by

Victoria Cross holders Henry Howey Robson, Colin Fraser Barron and Walter Leigh Rayfield.

A plaque in his honour has been erected in Owen Sound, Ontario.



**Medal Location:** Thomas Holmes' VC medal is now on display at the Owen Sound Royal Canadian Legion Branch #6.

**Post Script:** In total, nine CEF members were awarded the Victoria Cross during the battle—Major George Randolph Pearkes, Captain Christopher Patrick John O'Kelly, Lieutenants Hugh McKenzie and Robert Shankland, Sergeant George Harry Mullin, Corporal Colin Fraser Barron and Privates Thomas William Holmes, Cecil John Kinross and James Peter Robertson.

Holmes is the youngest Canadian to ever win the Victoria Cross.<sup>3</sup> During his investiture at Buckingham Palace Holmes admitted to King George V that he had lied about his age and joined the army at age 17.

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<sup>3</sup> Pte Thomas Ricketts was younger, but he won his VC while serving with the Royal Newfoundland Regiment before Newfoundland entered Confederation.

## Lieutenant Samuel Lewis Honey, VC, DCM, MM

Samuel Lewis Honey was born in Conn, Ontario, on 9 February 1894. He attended Drayton and Princeton, and went into school teaching at the Six Nations Indian Reserve in Brantford, when he was only seventeen. He went on to graduate from the Normal School in London, Ontario, taught school in Huron County, and then attended Walkerton High School, where he won a scholarship. Honey was teaching in York County, and planning to enrol in the Arts programme at Victoria University when war broke out. He enlisted in January 1915 with the 34th Battalion as a private then, having been promoted to sergeant, went overseas in October 1915.



In August 1916, after some time as an instructor in England, Honey went to France with the 78th Battalion. He was awarded the Military Medal in January 1917 for his actions in raiding German trenches. Honey was in action during the Battle of Vimy Ridge, and earned the Distinguished Conduct Medal for leadership, after most of the officers of his company became casualties. He was immediately recommended for a commission after the battle, and was sent to Officers' Training School in England. He returned to his unit in France in October 1917 as a lieutenant.

Honey was in action on October 27-29, 1918, during the Battle of the Canal du Nord, including the operations to capture Bourslon Wood.

### **VC Action:** During his battalion's attack on Bourslon Wood on 27

September, Honey assumed command of his company after all of the other officers had become casualties. He reorganized the company, pushed it forward and gained its objective. The company then began to suffer casualties from an enemy machine gun position. Honey located it and rushed it singlehandedly, capturing the machine gun and ten prisoners. He later organized the defence of company positions against four German counter-attacks. After dark, Honey led a small party to an enemy post he had located, captured it and three machine guns, providing another example of the inspired leadership that he showed during the period. He died of wounds received on 30 September, the last day of the attack.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery during the Bourslon Wood operations, 27th September to 2nd October, 1918.*

*On 27th September, when his company commander and all other officers of his company had become casualties, Lt. Honey took command and skilfully reorganised under very severe fire. He continued the advance with great dash and gained the objective. Then finding that his company*

*was suffering casualties from enfilade machine-gun fire he located the machine-gun nest and rushed it single-handed, capturing the guns and ten prisoners.*

*Subsequently he repelled four enemy counter-attacks and after dark again went out alone, and having located an enemy post, led a party which captured the post and three guns.*

*On the 29th September he led his company against a strong enemy position with great skill and daring and continued in the succeeding days of the battle to display the same high example of valour and self-sacrifice. He died of wounds received during the last day of the attack by his battalion."*

*The London Gazette, January 6, 1919*

**Gravesite:** Samuel Lewis Honey died of his wounds on 30 September 1918, and is buried in Quéant Communal Cemetery British Extension in Quéant, France, twenty-five kilometres southeast of Arras.



**Queant Communal Cemetery – British Extension**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is on display at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, alongside his other medals.



**Lt. Honey's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** Seven other Canadians won the Victoria Cross for their actions during the Battle of the Canal du Nord – Capt. J. MacGregor; Capt. C.N. Mitchell; Lt. G.T. Lyall; Lt. G.F. Kerr; Lt. M.F. Gregg; Lt. W.L. Algie; and, Sgt. W. Merrifield.

## Flight Lieutenant David Ernest Hornell, VC, RCAF

David Ernest Hornell was born in Toronto Island, Ontario on 26 January 1910. He received his early education in Mimico and later went to the Western Technical School in Toronto. He then joined a Canadian rubber company. He enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force on 8 January 1941, receiving his pilot's wings on 25 September of the same year. After further instruction in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, he was posted to the Royal Canadian Air Force station on northern Vancouver Island.



Flight Lieutenant Hornell completed 60 operational missions, involving some 600 hours flying.

At the time of the action for which he received the Victoria Cross posthumously, Flight Lieutenant Hornell was flying as aircraft captain on Consolidated Canso amphibians with No. 162 (Bomber Reconnaissance) Squadron, RCAF from Royal Air Force (RAF) Station Wick in Northern Scotland.

**VC Action:** Late in the day on 24 June 1944, Hornell's Canso was at the end of a 12-hour patrol over the North Atlantic when the German submarine U-1225 was sighted on the surface approximately 120 miles north of the Shetland Islands. As the aircraft made its attack run, heavy and accurate anti-aircraft fire from the U-boat crippled the starboard engine and started a fire on the starboard wing. With great determination and skill, Hornell held the vibrating Canso on course and delivered his four depth charges on target, sinking the submarine. Shortly thereafter the starboard engine fell out of the wing, forcing Flight Lieutenant Hornell to ditch the aircraft, by now a flaming wreck, in the heavy seas.

With only one dinghy serviceable, for several hours the eight members of the crew had to take turns holding on to the life-raft's side while immersed in the icy water. Although the dinghy was spotted by a Consolidated Catalina flying boat from No. 333 (Norwegian) Squadron, RAF five hours after Hornell had ditched, rescue attempts were frustrated by high seas and malfunctioning equipment. Two of the crew eventually died of exposure. At one point, Flight Lieutenant Hornell had to be restrained by his comrades when, though at the end of his own strength and about to go blind, he proposed to swim to an airborne lifeboat that had been dropped. Finally, after 21 hours, a rescue launch arrived to pick up the survivors, but all attempts to revive Hornell failed, and he died of exposure.

**Citation:** *"Flight Lieutenant Hornell was captain and first pilot of a twin-engined amphibian aircraft engaged on an anti-submarine patrol in northern waters. The patrol had lasted for some hours when a fully-surfaced U-boat was sighted, travelling at high speed on the port beam. Flight Lieutenant Hornell at once turned to the attack.*

*The U-boat altered course. The aircraft had been seen and there could be no surprise. The U-boat opened up with anti-aircraft fire which became increasingly fierce and accurate.*

*At a range of 1,200 yards, the front guns of the aircraft replied; then its starboard guns jammed, leaving only one gun effective. Hits were obtained on and around the conning-tower of the U-boat, but the aircraft was itself hit, two large holes appearing in the starboard wing.*

*Ignoring the enemy's fire, Flight Lieutenant Hornell carefully manoeuvred for the attack. Oil was pouring from his starboard engine, which was, by this time, on fire, as was the starboard wing; and the petrol tanks were endangered. Meanwhile, the aircraft was hit again and again by the U-boat's guns. Holed in many places, it was vibrating violently and very difficult to control.*

*Nevertheless, the captain decided to press home his attack, knowing that with every moment the chances of escape for him and his gallant crew would grow more slender. He brought his aircraft down very low and released his depth charges in a perfect straddle. The bows of the U-boat were lifted out of the water; it sank and the crew was seen in the sea.*

*Flight Lieutenant Hornell contrived, by superhuman efforts at the controls, to gain a little height. The fire in the starboard wing had grown more intense and the vibration had increased. Then the burning engine fell off. The plight of aircraft and crew was now desperate. With the utmost coolness, the captain took his aircraft into wind and, despite the manifold dangers, brought it safely down on the heavy swell. Badly damaged and blazing furiously, the aircraft rapidly settled.*

*After ordeal by fire came ordeal by water. There was only one serviceable dinghy and this could not hold all the crew. So they took turns in the water, holding on to the sides. Once, the dinghy capsized in the rough seas and was righted only with great difficulty. Two of the crew succumbed from exposure.*

*An airborne lifeboat was dropped to them but fell some 500 yards down wind. The men struggled vainly to reach it and Flight Lieutenant Hornell, who throughout had encouraged them by his cheerfulness and inspiring leadership, proposed to swim to it, through he was nearly exhausted. He was with difficulty restrained. The survivors were finally rescued after they had been in the water for 21 hours. By this time Flight Lieutenant Hornell was blinded and completely exhausted. He died shortly after being picked up.*

*Flight Lieutenant Hornell had completed 60 operational missions, involving 600 hours' flying. He well knew the danger and difficulties attending attacks on submarines. By pressing home a skilful and successful attack against fierce opposition, with his aircraft in a precarious condition, and by fortifying and encouraging his comrades in the subsequent ordeal, this officer displayed valour and devotion to duty of the highest order."*

*The London Gazette, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1944*

**Gravesite:** He is buried in Lerwick Cemetery, Shetland Islands.



**Lerwick Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His medal is on loan to the 1 Canadian Air Division Headquarters in Winnipeg.

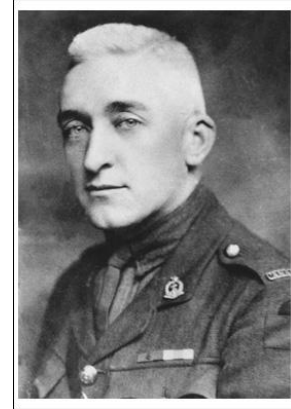
**Post Script:** Flight Lieutenant Hornell was the second member of the RCAF to be awarded the Victoria Cross.

The PBY Canso operated out of the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum in Hamilton, Ontario, was restored in the colours and markings of 162 (Bomber Reconnaissance) Squadron and dedicated to the memory of Flight Lieutenant David Hornell, VC.

There is a squadron of the Royal Canadian Air Cadets, named after him in Toronto - the 700 David Hornell V.C. Squadron. A ferry to the Toronto Island Airport is also named after Hornell.

## Captain Bellenden Seymour Hutcheson, VC, MC

Bellenden Seymour Hutcheson was born in Mount Carmel, Illinois, on 16 December 1883. He was educated at Mound City High School and graduated from Northwestern Medical School as a physician and surgeon. He renounced his American citizenship to join the Canadian Army Medical Corps in 1915, yet reclaimed it after the war.



Hutcheson went overseas as a medical officer of the 97th "American Legion" Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, with the rank of Captain. He later transferred to the 75th (Toronto Scots) Battalion and became its medical officer. He was awarded the Military Cross for his actions during the opening day of the Battle of Amiens, 8 August 1918, dressing the wounded under heavy enemy fire.

**VC Action:** On 2 September 1918 Captain Hutcheson was treating wounded soldiers under intense shelling and small arms fire in the Drocourt-Quéant line near Cagnicourt in France. After ensuring that all of the wounded men had received care, he attended to a seriously wounded officer and evacuated him to safety. Shortly after, he spotted a wounded sergeant in front of the Canadian lines and rushed forward in full view of the enemy to tend to his injuries.

For his devotion to duty on this occasion, Captain Hutcheson was awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty on September 2nd, when under most intense shell, machine-gun and rifle fire, he went through the Quéant-Drocourt Support Line with the battalion. Without hesitation and with utter disregard of personal safety he remained on the field until every wounded man had been attended to. He dressed the wounds of a seriously wounded officer under terrific machine-gun and shell fire, and, with the assistance of prisoners and of his own men, succeeded in evacuating him to safety, despite the fact that the bearer party suffered heavy casualties.*

*Immediately afterwards he rushed forward, in full view of the enemy, under heavy machine-gun and rifle fire, to tend a wounded sergeant, and, having placed him in a shell-hole, dressed his wounds. Captain Hutcheson performed many similar gallant acts, and, by his coolness and devotion to duty, many lives were saved."*

*The London Gazette*, December 14, 1918

**Post War:** After the war, Hutcheson returned to Cairo, Illinois, with his wife, a nurse from Nova Scotia, whom he met before going overseas. Apparently, his wife spent her summers in Nova Scotia, and their son was schooled in Canada. He joined the staff at St. Mary's Hospital, and acted as a surgeon for two American railroad companies.

**Gravesite:** Dr Hutcheson died in Cairo, Illinois on 9 April 1954 and is buried in Rose Hill Cemetery, Mount Carmel, Wabash County, Illinois.

**Medal Location:** His medal is held by the Toronto Scottish Regiment at the armoury in Etobicoke named in his honour.

**Post Script:** Captain Hutcheson is one of five Americans to be awarded the Victoria Cross, four of whom served with the Canadian Army. A sixth Victoria Cross was awarded to the American Unknown Soldier of the First World War.

Hutcheson was one of seven Canadians to be awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions on 2 September 1918. The other six Victoria Cross recipients were Claude Joseph Patrick Nunney, William Metcalf, John Francis Young, Walter Leigh Rayfield, Cyrus Wesley Peck and Arthur George Knight.

The 75th Battalion's lineage is today continued by the Toronto Scottish Regiment (Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother's Own), a reserve infantry regiment of the Canadian Forces. On 12 September 2009 a new armoury was opened in Etobicoke for the regiment. This facility was named in honour of Captain Hutcheson.

## Corporal Joseph Kaeble, VC, MM

Joseph Thomas Kaeble was born in St-Moise, Quebec on 5 May 1893. Before he enlisted in the 22nd Infantry Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force during the First World War, he earned his living as a mechanic.



**VC Action:** Corporal Kaeble was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously for demonstrating singular bravery on 8 and 9 June 1918. He was in charge of a machine gun section in the Canadian line near Neuville-Vitasse, near Arras in France, when an intense bombardment fell on the trenches heralding a strong enemy raid. By the time the shells stopped falling, all of his section but one were casualties. Seeing some fifty Germans advancing toward his position, Kaeble jumped over the parapet of his trench firing a Lewis machine gun at the approaching enemy. Although repeatedly struck, Corporal Kaeble continued to empty one magazine after another into the attackers until he fell back into the trench mortally wounded, dying shortly afterward. The repulse of the enemy raid at this point was due to his courage.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and extraordinary devotion to duty when in charge of a Lewis gun section in the front line trenches, on which a strong enemy raid was attempted.*

*During an intense bombardment Cpl. Kaeble remained at the parapet with his Lewis gun shouldered ready for action, the field of fire being very short. As soon as the barrage lifted from the front line, about fifty of the enemy advanced towards his post. By this time the whole of his section except one had become casualties. Cpl. Kaeble jumped over the parapet, and holding his Lewis gun at the hip, emptied one magazine after another into the advancing enemy, and, although wounded several times by fragments of shells and bombs, he continued to fire, and entirely blocked the enemy by his determined stand. Finally, firing all the time, he fell backwards into the trench, mortally wounded. While lying on his back in the trench he fired his last cartridges over the parapet at the retreating Germans, and before losing consciousness shouted to the wounded about him: 'Keep it up boys; do not let them get through! We must stop them!' The complete repulse of the enemy attack at this point was due to the remarkable personal bravery and self-sacrifice of this gallant non-commissioned officer, who died of his wounds shortly afterwards."*

London Gazette Supplement No. 30903, dated September 16, 1918

**Gravesite:** He is buried in Wanquetin Communal Cemetery Extension, Pas de Calais, France. Wanquetin is a village approximately 12 kilometres west of Arras and approximately 6 kilometres north of Beaumetz. The cemetery lies to the north-east of the village on the road to Warlus (D.59).



**Wanquetin Communal Cemetery Extension**

**Medal Location:** His medal is located in the Royal 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment Museum in the Citadel, Quebec City.



**Cpl Kaeble's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** There is a bust to Cpl. Kaeble among those in the Valiants Memorial in Ottawa. The Memorial is a collection of nine busts and five statues and a bronze wall inscription that reads, "*No day will ever erase you from the memory of time*", a line from Virgil's *Aeneid*.



**Cpl. Kaeble's bust at the Valiants Memorial**

At CFB Valcartier, honours to Kaeble include Mount Kaeble, just east of Camp Vimy, a street on the base, and the Kaeble Club for the junior ranks.

## Lieutenant George Fraser Kerr, VC, MC\*, MM

George Fraser Kerr was born in Deseronto, Ontario, on 8 June 1894. He attended Galt Collegiate, and enlisted as a private with the 3rd Battalion, The Toronto Regiment, on 22 September 1914, arriving in France the following February.

Now a corporal, Kerr was awarded the Military Medal for his actions at Mont Sorrel on 13 June 1916. After some time in hospital in England recovering from battle wounds, Kerr was appointed a Lieutenant and returned to his unit in July 1917. He was awarded the Military Cross for his actions during the Battle of Amiens on August 18, 1918, and then a Bar to his Military Cross during the Battle of the Drocourt-Quéant Line later that summer, this while recuperating from previous wounds.



By all accounts, Kerr should have been in sick bay on 27 September 1918, nursing an injured arm, and not involved in the operations at Bourslon Wood. However, when his regiment was called to an attack, Kerr was there, leading his company into battle, when he encountered a German machine-gun nest blocking the advance.

**VC Action:** On 27 September 1918 Lieutenant Kerr was in command of the support company on the left flank of his battalion advancing through Bourslon Wood, near Cambrai in France. When a German machine gun blocked the way forward, Kerr handled his company with great skill by outflanking the enemy position without delay. Later in the day, his **company's progress was again checked near the Arras-Cambrai road.** Alone and in advance of his company, Kerr attacked the German strongpoint, capturing four machine guns and 31 prisoners.

For his courage and leadership on this occasion, Lieutenant Kerr was awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and leadership during the Bourslon Wood operations on 27th September, 1918, when in command of the left support company in attack.*

*He handled his company with great skill, and gave timely support by outflanking a machine-gun which was impeding the advance.*

*Later, near the Arras-Cambrai road, the advance was again held up by a strong point. Lt. Kerr, far in advance of his company, rushed this strong*

*point single-handed and captured four machine-guns and thirty-one prisoners.*

*His valour throughout this engagement was an inspiring example to all."*

*The London Gazette, January 6, 1919*

**Post War:** Kerr later rose to the rank of captain. After the war ended, he returned home and went into business in Toronto, all the while continuing with his service in the Militia.

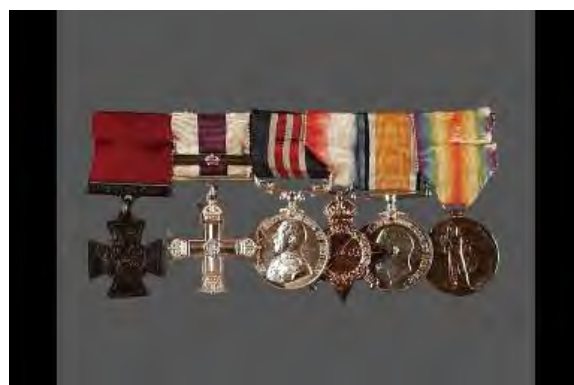
George Fraser Kerr died in a freak accident 8 December 1929, when he was overcome by carbon monoxide fumes while starting his car in his garage.

**Gravesite:** He is buried at the Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Toronto, Ontario.



**Kerr's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His medals are held by the Canadian War Museum.



**Kerr's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** In addition to Kerr, seven other members of the Canadian Corps won the Victoria Cross in fighting around the Canal du Nord between 27 September and 9 October, 1918. They were Capt. J. MacGregor and C.N. Mitchell; Lts. G.T. Lyall, S.L. Honey, M.F. Gregg, and W.L. Algie; and, Sgt. W. Merrifield.

## Private John Chipman Kerr, VC

John Chipman Kerr was born in Fox River, Nova Scotia, on 11 January 1887. In 1912, after working as a lumberjack near Kootenay, B.C. he bought a homestead in Spirit River, Alberta, where he and his brother farmed until war broke out.

Immediately they set out for Edmonton, leaving only a single note tacked to the door of their humble shed. It read: "War is Hell, but what is homesteading?"

He served with the 49th Infantry Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force in the First World War.



**VC Action:** Kerr earned the Victoria Cross near Courcellette in France on 16 September 1916 during the latter stages of the Battle of the Somme. As first bayonet man in a bombing party advancing to attack German positions with hand grenades, he was 30 metres ahead of his comrades when he found himself exchanging grenades with the enemy. Although wounded, Kerr continued forward and compelled 62 of the enemy to surrender.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery. During a bombing attack he was acting as bayonet man, and, knowing that bombs were running short, he ran along the parapets under heavy fire until he was in close contact with the enemy, when he opened fire on them at point-blank range, and inflicted heavy loss.*

*The enemy, thinking they were surrounded, surrendered. Sixty-two prisoners were taken and 250 yards of enemy trench captured.*

*Before carrying out this very plucky act one of Private Kerr's fingers had been blown off by a bomb.*

*Later, with two other men, he escorted back the prisoners under fire, and then returned to report himself for duty before having his wound dressed."*

*London Gazette, no.29802, 26 October 1916*

**Post War:** At the beginning of the Second World War, Kerr joined the Army once more, later transferring to the Royal Canadian Air Force. He died in Port Moody, British Columbia on 19 February 1963.

**Gravesite:** He is buried in Mountain View Cemetery and Crematorium in Vancouver, BC.



**Kerr's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His medal is held by the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.



**Pte. Kerr's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** Mount Kerr in Jasper National Park, Alberta was named in his honour in 1951, and in 2006 Chip Kerr Park in Port Moody, British Columbia, was dedicated.

## Private Cecil John Kinross, VC

Cecil John Kinross was born in Uxbridge, England on 17 February 1895, and, at the age of 16, came with his family to Alberta to farm. During the First World War he served with the 49th Infantry Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force. Before Kinross received the Victoria Cross he had been wounded, but was able to return to his unit within a month.



**VC Action:** On 30 October 1917 near Passchendaele in Belgium, Kinross's company came under intense

German artillery and machine gun fire. Carefully surveying the situation, he took off all of his equipment save for his rifle and a bandolier of ammunition, and set out alone over open ground in daylight. Kinross then charged the machine gun, killed the crew of six, and destroyed the gun. Inspired by his action, his company advanced some 300 metres and established itself in an important new position. For his exemplary conduct, Kinross was awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery in action during prolonged and severe operations.*

*Shortly after the attack was launched, the company to which he belonged came under intense artillery fire, and further advance was held up by a very severe fire from an enemy machine gun. Pte. Kinross, making a careful survey of the situation, deliberately divested himself of all his equipment save his rifle and bandolier and, regardless of his personal safety, advanced alone over the open ground in broad daylight, charged the enemy machine gun, killing the crew of six, and seized and destroyed the gun. His superb example and courage instilled the greatest confidence in his company, and enabled a further advance of 300 yards to be made and a highly important position to be established.*

*Throughout the day he showed marvellous coolness and courage, fighting with the utmost aggressiveness against heavy odds until seriously wounded."*

*London Gazette, no.30471, 11 January 1918*

**Post War:** On June 23, 1919, Kinross returned to the family farm at Loughheed, Alberta and several days later was given a hero's welcome in Edmonton. He took up farming, but civilian life in no way changed his nonconformist attitude. In the summer of 1934, he entered hospital to have his tonsils removed but refused to take an anaesthetic. One winter when a friend needled him as to which act showed more courage—earning

the VC or plunging into icy water—Kinross calmly stripped off his coat, walked to a hole in the ice and dived in.

In 1956, however, he was on his best ceremonial behaviour when he attended the 100th anniversary of the founding of the VC in London. By this time he had become reclusive; he gave up farming and moved into a hotel in Lougheed **where he lived by himself on his veteran’s pension. He died in his hotel room on 21 June 1957.**

Kinross was given a military funeral that included an honour guard from **Wainwright. He was buried in the Soldier’s Plot in Lougheed Cemetery.**

**Gravesite:** His grave and memorial are at Lougheed Cemetery, Alberta, Canada.



**Kinross’ Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His medal is held by his family while the miniature is on display at The Loyal Edmonton Regiment Military Museum in Edmonton, Alberta.

**Post Script:** In total, nine CEF members were awarded the Victoria Cross during the battle—Major George Randolph Pearkes, Captain Christopher **Patrick John O’Kelly, Lieutenants Hugh McKenzie and Robert Shankland,** Sergeant George Harry Mullin, Corporal Colin Fraser Barron and Privates Thomas William Holmes, Cecil John Kinross and James Peter Robertson.

Mount Kinross, in the Rocky Mountains near Jasper, Alberta, was named in his honour.

## Sergeant Arthur George Knight, VC

Arthur George Knight was born in Haywards Heath, Sussex, England, on June 26, 1886. He then moved to the Surrey area, and attended the Redhill Technical and Trade School. He was an apprentice with a building firm in Redhill, before emigrating to Canada in 1911 and obtaining work as a carpenter in Regina, Saskatchewan. When war broke out, Knight enlisted in December 1914 with the 46th Battalion. He was sent overseas the following year, and transferred to the 10th Battalion, already in France.



In November 1917, Knight was awarded the Croix de Guerre by His Majesty Leopold III, King of the Belgians.

**VC Action:** After taking part in an unsuccessful attack on German positions near Cagnicourt in France on 2 September 1918, Acting Sergeant Knight led a bombing section forward under heavy fire and engaged the enemy with hand grenades at close quarters. Seeing that the way was still blocked, he dashed forward alone, bayoneting several of the enemy, and forcing the remainder to retreat in confusion. When his platoon resumed its advance into the German trenches, Knight spotted a group of about 30 enemy soldiers retire into a deep tunnel leading off the trench. Again, he hurried forward alone to confront the enemy, killing an officer and two non-commissioned officers, and capturing 20 other ranks. Later that day, when the progress of his platoon was checked yet again, Knight single-handedly routed the German defenders. By now seriously wounded, he was taken to the rear for treatment. Knight died of his wounds the following day.

For his exemplary conduct, Acting Sergeant Knight was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery, initiative, and devotion to duty when, after an unsuccessful attack, Sjt. Knight led a bombing section forward, under very heavy fire of all descriptions, and engaged the enemy at close quarters. Seeing that his party continued to be held up, he dashed forward alone, bayoneting several of the enemy machine-gunners and trench mortar crews, and forcing the remainder to retire in confusion. He then brought forward a Lewis gun and directed his fire on the retreating enemy, inflicting many casualties.*

*In the subsequent advance of his platoon in pursuit, Sjt. Knight saw a party of about thirty of the enemy go into a deep tunnel which led off the trench. He again dashed forward alone, and, having killed one officer and two N.C.O.'s, captured twenty other ranks. Subsequently he routed,*

*single-handed, another enemy party which was opposing the advance of his platoon.*

*On each occasion he displayed the greatest valour under fire at very close range, and by his example of courage, gallantry, and initiative was a wonderful inspiration to all.*

*This very gallant N.C.O. was subsequently fatally wounded."*

*The London Gazette*, November 15, 1918

**Post Script:** Knight was one of seven Canadian to be awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions on 2 September 1918. The other six Victoria Cross recipients were Claude Joseph Patrick Nunney, William Metcalf, John Francis Young, Walter Leigh Rayfield, Bellenden Hutcheson and Cyrus Wesley Peck.

**Gravesite:** Arthur George Knight died in hospital at Hendecourt, France. He is buried in the Dominion Cemetery in Hendecourt-les-Cagnicourt, Pas-de-Calais, France. The cemetery is roughly three kilometres northeast of the village.



**Dominion Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is displayed at the Museum of the Regiments in Calgary, Alberta.

## Corporal Filip Konowal, VC

Of Ukranian heritage, Filip Konowal was born in Kedeski, **Ukraine** on 25 March 1887, and came to Canada about 1913. Having been trained as a bayonet instructor, he enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force in 1915, served with the 47th Infantry Battalion, and eventually was promoted to the rank of corporal.



**VC Action:** Corporal Konowal earned the Victoria Cross for his actions from 22 to 24 August 1917 while leading his section in overcoming German resistance on Hill 70, near Lens in France. During these operations, Konowal himself killed at least 16 of the enemy. Arriving at one of his battalion's objectives, he realized that a machine gun was holding up the right flank of the Canadian attack. Konowal assaulted the German position, killed the crew of the machine gun, and returned with the gun. The next day he attacked another machine gun emplacement, and killed three of the enemy before destroying the position and the gun with explosives. Corporal Konowal then continued his advance until he was severely wounded.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and leadership when in charge of a section in attack. His section had the difficult task of mopping up cellars, craters and machine-gun emplacements. Under his able direction all resistance was overcome successfully, and heavy casualties inflicted on the enemy. In one cellar he himself bayoneted three enemy and attacked single-handed seven others in a crater, killing them all.*

*On reaching the objective, a machine-gun was holding up the right flank, causing many casualties. Cpl. Konowal rushed forward and entered the emplacement, killed the crew, and brought the gun back to our lines.*

*The next day he again attacked single-handed another machine-gun emplacement, killed three of the crew, and destroyed the gun and emplacement with explosives.*

*This non-commissioned officer alone killed at least sixteen of the enemy, and during the two days' actual fighting carried on continuously his good work until severely wounded."*

*London Gazette, no.30400, 26 November 1917*

He was presented his medal by King George V who remarked, *"Your Exploit is one of the most daring and heroic in the history of my army. For this, accept my thanks."*

**Post War:** After being hospitalized in England, Konowal was officially assigned for a time as an assistant to the military attache of the Russian Embassy in London. Later he was transferred to the 1st Canadian Reserve Battalion, served with the Canadian Forestry Corps and eventually with the Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force.

He returned to Vancouver on 20 June 1919, after soldiering for three years and 357 days in the ranks of the Canadian Army, one of as many as 10,000 Ukrainian Canadians who had so served.

Honourably discharged, Konowal was subsequently troubled by medical and other problems, most thought to be a consequence of his war wounds. Nevertheless, by 1928, he had begun to rebuild his life. He enlisted in the Ottawa-based Governor General's Foot Guards. He re-married in 1934, taking for his second wife a widow, Juliette Leduc-Auger. (His first wife, Anna, and their daughter, Maria, were lost in Ukraine during the Stalinist terror.)

Thanks to the intervention of another Victoria Cross winner, and also a member of the Governor General's Foot Guards, Major Milton Fowler Gregg, Sergeant-at-Arms of the House of Commons (1934-44), Konowal found employment as a junior caretaker in the House of Commons, a humble job, but, in the years of the Great Depression, a welcome one. Spotted washing floors of the Parliament building by Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, Konowal was reassigned as the special custodian of Room No. 16, the Prime Minister's office, a post he held until his death.

Konowal was again acknowledged for his valour during the 1939 Royal Tour when His Majesty King George VI shook his hand during the dedication of the National War Memorial, in Ottawa. He also kept in touch with his wartime comrades, even attempting to fight for Canada during the Second World War, an impossibility given his age.

On 20 December 1945, Konowal joined the Hull, Quebec, branch of The Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League, recording on his application for membership that he had been born on 15 September 1888 [in Kudkiv, Ukraine], had been wounded in the war, was receiving a disability allowance and working as a cleaner in the House of Commons. Required to state why he was discharged he wrote simply, "**War was finish**".

In 1953, Toronto's Royal Canadian Legion Branch 360 voted to make Konowal its patron, which was officially confirmed during a Remembrance Day dinner held in Toronto on 7 November. Konowal received another distinction when he participated in a ceremony marking the 100th anniversary of the institution of the Victoria Cross, held in London in 1956. Too poor to travel to England on his own resources -- even though Ottawa offered to cover the actual transportation costs -- Konowal turned

to his fellow Ukrainian Canadian veterans for help. With the financial assistance of Ukrainian Canadian branches of The Royal Canadian Legion he was able to go overseas. On 17 May 1956 he wrote to the president of Branch 360, Mr. Stephen Pawluk, to thank all those who helped make that trip possible:

*Please be kind enough to extend my thanks to every Ukrainian Canadian Legion Branch ... I was very surprised and I was not expecting that much. I knew I had friends amongst the Ukrainian people but I never thought they could do so much for a poor fellow like me.*

On 25 June 1956 Konowal joined 300 other Victoria Cross winners from around the world at a formal tea party at Westminster Hall hosted by the British Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden. On 26 June he participated in a march-past at Hyde Park, reviewed by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, followed by an afternoon garden party.

Filip Konowal died on 3 June 1959, aged 72. Konowal was buried from the St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church, with full military honours by his regiment, in Lot 502, Section A, at the Notre Dame Cemetery, in Ottawa. His wife, who died at age 86, was buried beside him on 3 March 1987.

**Gravesite:** He was buried at Notre Dame de Lourdes Cemetery, Ottawa.



**Pte. Konowal's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His medals are held by the Canadian War Museum.



**Konowal's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** In the battle for Hill 70 six members of the Corps received the Victoria Cross for their conspicuous gallantry between 15 and 24 August – Major Okill Massey Learmonth, Company Sergeant-Major Robert Hill Hanna, Sergeant Frederick Hobson, Corporal Konowal and Privates **Harry Brown and Michael James O'Rourke**.

The Royal Canadian Legion Branch 360 (Konowal Branch) in Toronto made him its patron in 1953. The Legion helped established the Konowal Prize, an annual scholarship grant at the Royal Military College of Canada.

Memorial plaques have been unveiled in the Cartier Square drill hall of the Governor General's Foot Guards in Ottawa; at Legion Branch 360 (Konowal Branch) in Toronto; at the Royal Westminster Regiment's armoury in New Westminster, B.C.; on a cairn at Selo Ukraina Memorial Park, near Dauphin, Manitoba; and, in 2001, at Konowal's place of birth, Kutkivtsi, Ukraine.

## Major O'Kill Massey Learmonth, VC

O'Kill Massey Learmonth was born in Quebec City, Quebec on 20 February 1894. He enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) as a private soldier in November 1914, and was commissioned as an officer in June 1916.



**VC Action:** On 18 August 1917, Major Learmonth was serving as a company commander in the 2nd Infantry Battalion, CEF on Hill 70, near Lens in France. On that day a massive German counterattack on the Canadian positions caused his company to recoil momentarily. Learmonth threw himself into the defence by standing on the parapet of the Canadian trenches and hurling hand grenades at the enemy attackers, including German grenades that he actually caught and returned to their previous owners. Despite being seriously wounded, he maintained his exposed position on the parapet in order to personally direct the defence. When Learmonth was unable to carry on, he insisted on remaining and continued to give direction to his junior officers. Finally, he was forced to hand over his duties, and was evacuated to a hospital in the rear. Here Learmonth died of his wounds the following day.

For his bravery and leadership on this occasion, Major Learmonth was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and exceptional devotion to duty. During a determined counter-attack on our new positions, this officer, when his company was momentarily surprised, instantly charged and personally disposed of the attackers. Later, he carried on a tremendous fight with the advancing enemy. Although under intense barrage fire and mortally wounded, he stood on the parapet of the trench, bombed the enemy continuously and directed the defence in such a manner as to infuse a spirit of utmost resistance into his men.*

*On several occasions this very brave officer actually caught bombs thrown at him by the enemy and threw them back. When he was unable by reason of his wounds to carry on the fight he still refused to be carried out of the line, and continued to give instructions and invaluable advice to his junior officers, finally handing over all his duties before he was evacuated from the front line to the hospital where he died."*

"London Gazette," No. 30372, dated November 6, 1917

**Gravesite:** He is buried in the Noeux-Les-Mines Communal Cemetery. Noeux-les-Mines is a town 6 kilometres south of Bethune on the main road to Arras. The Communal Cemetery is on the northern side of the town, on the south-east side of the road to Labourse.



**Noeux-les-Mines Communal Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His medal is held with the Governor General's Foot Guards in Ottawa.

**Post Script:** In the battle for Hill 70 six members of the Corps received the Victoria Cross for their conspicuous gallantry between 15 and 24 August – Major Okill Massey Learmonth, Company Sergeant-Major Robert Hill Hanna, Sergeant Frederick Hobson, Corporal Konowal and Privates **Harry Brown and Michael James O'Rourke.**

## Lieutenant Graham Thomson Lyall, VC

Graham Thomson Lyall was born in Manchester, England, on March 8, 1892. The son of a reverend, he attended a technical school in Portsmouth. After graduation in 1911, he emigrated to Canada, first to Welland, Ontario, where he worked for the Canadian Steels Foundries, and then on to Niagara Falls, where he worked for the Canadian Niagara Power Company.



Three days after the outbreak of the First World War, Lyall joined the 19th Lincoln Regiment, St. Catharines, Ontario, now The Lincoln & Welland Regiment. In September 1915, he moved to the 81st Battalion, with whom he would sail overseas the following May. Once in England, the 81st was disbanded to supply reinforcements to depleted battalions. Lyall was transferred to the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles on 3 June 1916, the day after it had lost close to 90 per cent of its strength in the battle for Sanctuary Wood, in Belgium. By this time, he had attained the rank of corporal. He served with the battalion with distinction during the Battle of the Somme in September 1916 and during the First Battle of Arras, in 1917. He was also involved in the Battle of Vimy Ridge, and Lyall received a battlefield commission for his conduct during the operation. He was sent to Officers' Training School at Bexhill-on-Sea, England.

Upon graduating, Lyall was commissioned as a lieutenant and posted to the 102nd Battalion, 2nd Ontario Regiment, which had been in France for some time.

**VC Action:** Lieutenant Lyall earned the Victoria Cross on 27 September 1918 while leading his platoon in an advance through Bourslon Wood, near Cambrai in France. When the progress of **his battalion's leading company** was checked by a German strongpoint, Lyall and his men outflanked the position and captured 13 prisoners, a field gun and four machine guns. Later that day, as his platoon, now weakened, was delayed by another enemy position, alone he charged the emplacement and took another 45 prisoners and five machine guns. Lyall then led his men to their final objective and consolidated it for the defence of his company, in the process taking 47 more prisoners. Finally, Lyall overwhelmed another strongly defended German position, capturing 80 prisoners and 17 machine guns.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and skilful leading during the operations north of Cambrai."*

*On September 27th, 1918, whilst leading his platoon against Bournal Wood, he rendered invaluable support to the leading company, which was held up by a strong point, which he captured, by a flank movement, together with thirteen prisoners, one field gun and four machine guns.*

*Later, his platoon, now much weakened by casualties, was held up by machine guns at the southern end of Bournal Wood. Collecting any man available, he led them towards the strong point, and springing forward alone, rushed the position single-handed and killed the officer in charge, subsequently capturing at this point forty-five prisoners and five machine guns. Having made good his final objective, with a further capture of forty-seven prisoners, he consolidated his position and thus protected the remainder of the company.*

*On October 1st, in the neighbourhood of Blecourt, when in command of a weak company, by skilful dispositions he captured a strongly defended position, which yielded eighty prisoners and seventeen machine guns.*

*During two days of operations Lt. Lyall captured in all 3 officers, 182 other ranks, 26 machine guns and one field gun, exclusive of heavy casualties inflicted. He showed throughout the utmost valour and high powers of command."*

*The London Gazette*, December 14, 1918

**Post War:** After the war, Lyall married and settled in Airdrie, Scotland, where he became general manager of a construction company. He joined the British Territorial Army (similar to the Canadian Militia) and in 1939 was a Major in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

When the Second World War broke out, Lyall was placed on Active Duty, promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel, and was sent to North Africa in 1940. In October 1941, he was promoted to Colonel and appointed Commanding Officer of the 87th Lines of Communication Sub Area.

Graham Thomson Lyall died of a heart attack in his sleep on November 28, 1941.

**Gravesite:** He is buried in the Halfaya Sollum Cemetery in Egypt.



**Halfaya Sollum Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** Lyall's Victoria Cross is on display at the Corps of Royal Mechanical and Electrical Engineers Museum of Technology in Arborfield, Berkshire, England.



**Lyall's Medal Set (In reverse order!)**

**Post Script:** In this same period, four other officers and one other rank—Captain John MacGregor, Lieutenants Milton Fowler Gregg, George Fraser Kerr and Samuel Lewis Honey and Sergeant William Merrifield—joined Lieutenant Lyall in earning a Victoria Cross.

On 5 June 2005, the Ontario Heritage Foundation, The Lincoln and Welland Regiment and The Lincoln and Welland Regiment Foundation unveiled a provincial plaque commemorating Colonel Graham Thomson Lyall, V.C. – in the presence of Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex, Colonel-in-Chief, on the occasion of the Review of the Lincoln and Welland Regiment in St. Catharines, Ontario.



## Captain Thain Wendell MacDowell, VC, DSO

Thain Wendell MacDowell was born in Lachute, Quebec, on 16 September 1890. His early days were spent in the Brockville area, where he was educated at Brockville Collegiate Institute. He later attended the University of Toronto, where he joined the Canadian Officer Training Corps as an Officer Cadet of The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada. After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in 1914, he enlisted and was commissioned in the 38th (Ottawa) Canadian Infantry Battalion (now perpetuated as The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa).



During service in France in 1916, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order on the Somme, and the following year, promoted to Major.

**VC Action:** Captain MacDowell was awarded the Victoria Cross for his conduct on 9 April 1917, the day that the Canadian Corps attacked and captured Vimy Ridge in France. On that day, as they advanced, MacDowell and two runners became separated from the rest of their unit. Deciding nevertheless to continue forward, he put two German machine guns out of action using hand grenades, and then with his two runners entered a large dugout and proceeded along a tunnel. As they turned a corner, MacDowell and his two men suddenly found themselves face to face with a large group of enemy soldiers. By giving the impression that he had with him a superior force, Captain MacDowell was able to disarm and capture two officers and 75 men. His action enabled his battalion to capture its objective, Hill 145.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and indomitable resolution in face of heavy machine gun and shell fire.*

*By his initiative and courage this officer, with the assistance of two runners, was enabled in the face of great difficulties, to capture two machine guns, besides two officers and seventy-five men.*

*Although wounded in the hand, he continued for five days to hold the position gained, in spite of heavy shell fire, until eventually relieved by his battalion.*

*By his bravery and prompt action he undoubtedly succeeded in rounding up a very strong enemy machine post."*

*London Gazette, no.30122, 8 June 1917*

**Post War:** Three months after Vimy, MacDowell, then a 26-year-old captain, went on sick leave. He was sent home to Brockville, suffering from a nervous breakdown. His recovery was as much a testament to his courage as his battlefield exploits.

MacDowell's war service records at the Library and Archives of Canada show that he was diagnosed with "war neurasthenia," or shellshock, brought on by "stress of service and shell fire." One medical report describes him as "high-strung and of a nervous disposition." Another mentions his "depression, insomnia, restlessness, irritability ... sleeps only three hours a night."

The war records do not say what treatment MacDowell received in Canada. At the time, however, some doctors were encouraging their military patients to stop trying to forget the traumatic events they had witnessed. The soldiers were encouraged to spend part of every day remembering, neither brooding on the experience nor trying to pretend it never happened. After a week or two of this treatment, the nightmares usually began to be less frequent and less terrifying.

Somehow, MacDowell did get better after convalescing in Brockville General Hospital for three months, beginning in October 1917. A medical report dated 9 January 1918, says MacDowell *"shows much improvement since last examination."*

*"Has regained his emotional control -- No attacks of crying since Nov. 17. Is able to read and concentrate attention normally; speaks slowly and in normal fashion, fine tremor of fingers but not marked. Sleep practically normal."*

*In conclusion, the medical officer declared he was "pleased to report that he is medically and physically fit."*

MacDowell went back to England in February 1918 but he never returned to the front in France.

After the war, Colonel MacDowell served as an executive of several mining and chemical companies, and from 1923-1928 he acted as private secretary to the Minister of National Defence. He was placed on the retired list as a Lieutenant-Colonel. In July 1929, he married Norah Jean Hodgson, of Montreal. He and his wife, first lived in Toronto, but moved to Montreal in 1931. He had two sons, Thain H, and Angus J, who still live in Montreal (2007). His wife died on 1 November 1983.

MacDowell died in the Bahamas, at Nassau, on 29 March 1960.

**Gravesite:** Colonel MacDowell is buried at Oakland Cemetery (R.R.3, Brockville, Ontario, Canada. Anglican Section 3. Lot 112) in the Richardson family plot.



**Capt. MacDowell's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** Colonel MacDowell's Victoria Cross medal is on display at the University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario.



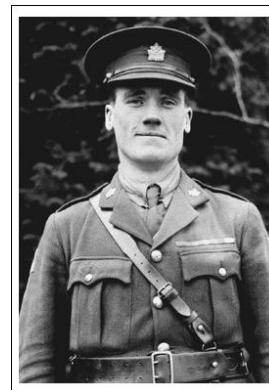
**MacDowell's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** Four Canadians received Victoria Crosses during the battle for Vimy Ridge, Captain Thain Wendell MacDowell and Private William Johnstone Milne earning theirs on 9 April and Private John George Pattison his the following day.

There is a plaque in his honour on Corner of Highway 2 and Church Street in Maitland, Ontario.

## Captain John MacGregor, VC, MC\*, DCM

John MacGregor was born in Cawdor, near Inverness, Scotland, on February 11, 1888. He emigrated to Canada in 1909 at the age of 20, and went into the contracting business in British Columbia, after training as a mason and a carpenter. In 1915, while he was trapping in northern BC, a passing ranger informed him Canada was at war. Although it was midwinter, he immediately headed to Terrace, BC - on foot, which took five days, and was more than 400 kilometers away - then caught a train to Prince Rupert.



MacGregor was initially refused for service because of his "poor physical state", but in March he joined the 11th Canadian Mounted Rifles in Vancouver, as a trooper. He then transferred to 2nd CMR before landing in France in September 1915. In 1916, MacGregor was made a sergeant, directly from private. During the Battle of Vimy Ridge, he was the first of his brigade to reach the objective at the top of the heavily defended position. For his actions in single-handedly capturing a machine gun, he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, the second highest award for bravery.

After Vimy Ridge, MacGregor was promoted to lieutenant. In January 1918, he was awarded the Military Cross for leading a successful trench raid and capturing prisoners, which led to another promotion.

In November 1918, MacGregor was awarded a Bar to his Military Cross for his actions at the Honnelle River, when he personally captured two vital bridges across the river.

**VC Action:** MacGregor was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions from 29 September to 3 October 1918. When the advance of his company was stopped by intense German machine gun fire near Cambrai in France, he continued to move forward until he had located the guns. Despite their heavy fire, MacGregor then charged the machine guns and dealt with their crews using rifle and bayonet, killing four of the enemy and taking eight prisoners. Later, he gave useful support to neighbouring troops by taking command of the leading waves of the advance and continuing forward while under heavy fire and faced with stubborn resistance. MacGregor subsequently undertook a dangerous daylight reconnaissance that allowed his company to occupy Neuville-St-Rémy.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery, leadership and self-sacrificing devotion to duty near Cambrai from 29th September to 3rd October, 1918.*

*He led his company under intense fire, and when the advance was checked by machine guns, although wounded, pushed on and located the enemy guns. He then ran forward in broad daylight, in face of heavy fire from all directions, and, with rifle and bayonet, single-handed, put the enemy crews out of action, killing four and taking eight prisoners. His prompt action saved many casualties and enabled the advance to continue.*

*After reorganising his command under heavy fire he rendered the most useful support to neighbouring troops. When the enemy were showing stubborn resistance, he went along the line regardless of danger, organised the platoons, took command of the leading waves, and continued the advance. Later, after a personal daylight reconnaissance under heavy fire, he established his company in Neuville St. Remy, thereby greatly assisting the advance into Tilloy. Throughout the operations Capt. MacGregor displayed magnificent bravery and heroic leadership."*

The London Gazette, January 6, 1919

**Post War:** Immediately after the war he received a good deal of public acclaim as a Victoria Cross winner however he retired to a private life as a fisherman in BC and married settling for a time in Powell River. Eventually he found work he enjoyed in the Okanagan working on railway trestles and bridges near Lumby in the Shuswap Falls area. His self-imposed obscurity in the Okanagan did not last though and as the 2 CMR's most decorated soldier he was enticed by his loyalty to the regiment into participating in a banquet for all VC winners hosted by the Prince of Wales in November 1929.

He made a (failed) foray into politics during the 1933 provincial election.

He returned to Powell River and his family and his next involvement with the army came when the Second World War started in 1939. He attempted to join as a private in the hope of seeing action. Found out by the army bureaucracy he served instead as a Major and then, just as the Regiment was about to be sent to Hong Kong, he was held back, promoted to lieutenant-colonel, and given command the training camp in Wainwright, Alberta. He served until 1946.

Following the war, MacGregor was awarded the Efficiency Decoration, given for his service in both World Wars. He returned to Powell River and established his own business at Cranberry Lake.

MacGregor died in Powell River, British Columbia on 9 June 1952.

**Gravesite:** He is buried at the Cranberry Lake Cemetery in Powell River.



**MacGregor's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is on display at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, Ontario, alongside his other medals.



**MacGregor's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** In this same period, four other officers and one other rank—Lieutenants Milton Fowler Gregg, George Fraser Kerr, Samuel Honey and Graham Thomson Lyall and Sergeant William Merrifield—joined Captain MacGregor in earning a Victoria Cross.

## Major John Keefer Mahony, VC

John Keefer Mahony was born in New Westminster, British Columbia, on 30 June 1911. He received his education at the Duke of Connaught High School, New Westminster and then entered the world of journalism as a reporter with the *Vancouver Province*. Prior to the outbreak of war he had been an officer in the Westminster Regiment of the militia and he was among the first to enlist for active service.



**VC Action:** On 24 May 1944 Major Mahony led his company across the Melfa River in Italy under heavy artillery fire. His task was to secure a firm bridgehead on the western side of the river, and was part of the operations by 1st Canadian Corps to break through the Adolf Hitler Line. Although threatened by vastly **superior forces, Mahony's company managed to hold the bridgehead for five hours** under continuous fire until reinforcements arrived. In two German counterattacks, his men destroyed three enemy self-propelled guns and one tank – a significant feat considering they had no anti-tank guns. Though he suffered three wounds, throughout Mahony was a constant source of inspiration and determination as he tirelessly organized the defence, visited his men in their positions, and personally directed the fire of the light anti-tank weapons on hand. For his exemplary leadership and courage in this action, Major Mahony was awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"On the 24th May, 1944, 'A' Company of the Westminster Regiment (Motor), under the command of Major Mahony, was ordered to establish the initial bridgehead across the river Melfa.*

*The enemy still had strong forces of tanks, self-propelled guns and infantry holding defensive positions on the East side of the river. Despite this, Major Mahony personally led his Company down to and across the river, being with the leading section. Although the crossing was made in full view of and under heavy fire from enemy machine-gun posts on the right rear and left front, he personally directed each section into its proper position on the West bank with the greatest coolness and confidence. The crossing was made and a small bridgehead was established on ground where it was only possible to dig shallow weapon pits. From 1530 hours the Company maintained itself in the face of enemy fire and attack until 2030 hours, when the remaining Companies and supporting weapons were able to cross the river and reinforce them.*

*The bridgehead was enclosed on three sides by an 88 mm. self-propelled gun 450 yards to the right, a battery of four 2 cm. A.A. guns 100 yards to the left, a Spandau 100 yards to the left of it, to the left of the Spandau a second 88 mm. self-propelled gun, and approximately a Company of*

*infantry with mortars and machine-guns on the left of the 88 mm. gun. From all these weapons, Major Mahony's Company was constantly under fire until it eventually succeeded in knocking out the self-propelled equipment and the infantry on the left flank.*

*Shortly after the bridgehead had been established, the enemy counter-attacked with infantry supported by tanks and self-propelled guns. The counter-attack was beaten off by the Company with its P.I.A.T.'s, 2" Mortars and Grenades, due to the skill with which Major Mahony had organised his defences. With absolute fearlessness and disregard for his own safety, Major Mahony personally directed the fire of his P.I.A.T.'s throughout this action, encouraging and exhorting his men. By this time, the Company strength had been reduced to 60 men, and all but one of the Platoon Officers had been wounded. Scarcely an hour later, enemy tanks formed up about 500 yards in front of the bridgehead and in company with about a Company of infantry, launched a second counter-attack. Major Mahony, determined to hold the position at all costs, went from section to section with words of encouragement, personally directing fire of Mortars and other weapons.*

*At one stage, a section was pinned down in the open by accurate and intense machine-gun fire. Major Mahony crawled forward to their position, and by throwing Smoke Grenades, succeeded in extricating the section from its position with the loss of only one man. This counter-attack was finally beaten off with the destruction of three enemy self-propelled guns and one Panther tank.*

*Early in the action, Major Mahony was wounded in the head and twice in the leg, but he refused medical aid and continued to direct the defence of the bridgehead, despite the fact that movement of any kind caused him extreme pain. It was only when the remaining Companies of the Regiment had crossed the river to support him that he allowed his wounds to be dressed and even then refused to be evacuated, staying instead with his Company.*

*The forming and holding of a bridgehead across the river was vital to the whole Canadian Corps action, and failure would have meant delay, a repetition of the attack, probably involving heavy losses in men, material and time, and would have given the enemy a breathing space which might have broken the impetus of the Corps advance.*

*Major Mahony, knowing this, never allowed the thought of failure or withdrawal to enter his mind, and infused his spirit and determination into all his men. At the first sign of hesitation or faltering, Major Mahony was there to encourage, by his own example, those who were feeling the strain of battle. The enemy perceived that this officer was the soul of the defence and consequently fired at him constantly with all weapons, from rifles to 88 mm. guns. Major Mahony completely ignored the enemy fire and with great courage and absolute disregard for personal danger,*

*commander his Company with such great confidence, energy and skill that the enemy's efforts to destroy the bridgehead were all defeated.*

*The great courage shown by Major Mahony in this action will forever be an inspiration to his Regiment and to the Canadian Army."*

*The London Gazette, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1944*

**Post War:** On the cessation of hostilities he remained in the army until 1962 serving successively as Commandant Cadet Officer of the Western Command, Director of Publications for the Canadian Army and Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General of the Western Ontario Area. On 5 April 1954, Lieutenant-Colonel Mahony went to Washington, *D.C.* as Canadian Army Liaison Officer. He retired to London, Ontario where he engaged in youth work. Mahony died in London, Ontario on 15 December 1990. At his own request, he was buried without a military funeral.

**Gravesite:** He was interred at the Mount Pleasant Crematorium, London, Ontario.

**Medal Location:** His medal was acquired by the Canadian War Museum 1 June 2010.

**Post Script:** Mahony received his VC from King George VI—twice. The first presentation occurred on July 31 while His Majesty was travelling in Italy, incognito as General Collingwood. Mahony, who was still recuperating from his wounds, was so unsteady on his feet that the king had difficulty pinning the medal on his tunic. Many months later he was again invested by the king at Buckingham Palace. This time Mahony apologized for his earlier behaviour. The monarch, who had seen action at the Battle of Jutland in 1916, reassured him: "*Mahony, I know what it means to be nervous.*"

The Royal Westminster Regiment unveiled a memorial plaque to Regimental VC winners, Major Mahony and Corporal Filip Konowal in New Westminster, B.C. in 1997



## Lieutenant George Burdon McKean, VC, MC, MM

George Burdon McKean was born in Wellington, England on 4 July 1888. Orphaned when young, he lived with a sister in Bishop Auckland before emigrating in 1902 to join two brothers in Canada working on a ranch near Lethbridge, Alberta. After living for a time in the Connaught area of Calgary he attended the University of Alberta prior to enlisting in 1915, having three times been turned down.



Assigned to the Royal Montreal Regiment, in 1917, as a corporal infantryman, he was awarded the Military Medal for gallantry in several operations.

In 1918, after he had been commissioned in the field, he was awarded the Military Cross for his bravery in a number of operations prior to be awarded the Victoria Cross for his action during a raid on April 27/28, 1918 at Gavrelle, France. McKean - only 5ft 6ins tall and barely 130 pounds in weight - became one of just five men to win Victoria Cross, Military Cross and Military Medal.

**VC Action:** Lieutenant McKean earned the Victoria Cross while serving with the 14th Infantry Battalion near Gavrelle in France on 27 and 28 April 1918. McKean was leading a party of scouts against a German trench that was being staunchly defended by troops using rifles and hand grenades. When his men hesitated, he ran forward alone and threw himself head first into the trench, killing two of the enemy with his revolver. **Inspired by Lieutenant McKean's action, his men advanced and swept the German defenders aside, capturing both the trench and its remaining occupants.**

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty during a raid on the enemy's trenches.*

*Lt. McKean's party, which was operating on the right flank, was held up at a block in the communication trench by most intense fire from hand grenades and machine guns. This block, which was too close to our trenches to have been engaged by the preliminary bombardment, was well protected by wire and covered by a well protected machine gun 30 yards behind it. Realising that if this block were not destroyed, the success of the whole operation might be marred, he ran into the open to the right flank of the block, and with utter disregard of danger, leaper over the block head first on top of the enemy. Whilst lying on the ground on top of one of the enemy, another rushed at him with fixed bayonet; Lt. McKean shot him through the body and then shot the enemy underneath*

*him, who was struggling violently. This very gallant action enabled the position to be captured. Lt. McKean's supply of bombs ran out at this time, and he sent back to our front line for a fresh supply. Whilst waiting for them he engaged the enemy single-handed.*

*When the bombs arrived, he fearlessly rushed the second block, killing two of the enemy, capturing four others and drove the remaining garrison, including a hostile machine-gun section, into a dug-out. The dug-out, with its occupants and machine gun, was destroyed.*

*This officer's splendid bravery and dash undoubtedly saved many lives, for had not this position been captured, the whole of the raiding party would have been exposed to dangerous enfilading fire during the withdrawal. His leadership at all times has been beyond praise."*

*London Gazette, no.30770, 28 June 1918*

**Post War:** McKean stayed in England after the war. On 28 November 1926 he was killed in an industrial accident.

**Gravesite:** He is buried at Brighton Extra-Mural Cemetery, Sussex, England.



**McKean's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is held by the Canadian War Museum.



**Capt. McKean's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** On 6 September 2003, the Church Square of Cagnicourt, France, was renamed 'La Place George Burdon McKean' in his honour.

Mount McKean in the Canadian Rockies was named in his honour.

## Lieutenant Hugh McDonald McKenzie, VC, DCM

Hugh McKenzie was born in Inverness<sup>4</sup>, Scotland on 5 December 1885 and came to Canada in 1911. He **enlisted in Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry** as a private soldier in August 1914. McKenzie rose to become a company sergeant-major, and in January 1917 was commissioned as a second lieutenant. He received the Distinguished Conduct Medal and the Croix de Guerre from the French government before he transferred from the PPCLI to the Canadian Machine Gun Corps.



**VC Action:** On 30 October 1917 near Passchendaele in Belgium, McKenzie was serving with the 7th Canadian Machine Gun Company, leading a section of four machine guns in support of the PPCLI. Seeing that one of the PPCLI companies was hesitating to advance in the face of a nest of German machine guns positioned on commanding ground, he handed over the command of his section to a non-commissioned officer, and went to rally the men of his old regiment. McKenzie organized an attack and captured the enemy position. However, he very soon realized that this position was itself swept by machine gun **fire from a nearby German "pillbox" fortification in a dominant location.** Faced with this challenge, McKenzie organized parties to capture the pillbox by attacking its flanks as well as by a frontal assault. He was killed while leading the frontal attack.

For his conduct on this occasion, McKenzie was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and leading when in charge of a section of four machine guns accompanying the infantry in an attack.*

*Seeing that all the officers and most of the non-commissioned officers of an infantry company had become casualties, and that the men were hesitating before a nest of enemy machine guns, which were on commanding ground and causing them severe casualties, he handed over command of his guns to an N.C.O., rallied the infantry, organised an attack, and captured the strong point.*

*Finding that the position was swept by machine-gun fire from a 'pill-box' which dominated all the ground over which the troops were advancing, Lt. MacKenzie made a reconnaissance and detailed flanking and frontal attacking parties which captured the 'pill-box,' he himself being killed while leading the frontal attack.*

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<sup>4</sup> Some sources show him as being born in Liverpool, England but the case for Inverness seems the more likely.

*By his valour and leadership this gallant officer ensured the capture of these strong points and so saved the lives of many men and enabled the objectives to be attained."*

"The London Gazette," No. 30523, dated February 12, 1918

**Gravesite:** He has no known grave, but his name is recorded on the Menin Gate in Ypres, Belgium.



**Menin Gate Memorial**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is displayed at the Museum of the Regiments in Calgary, Alberta.

**Post Script:** In total, nine CEF members, including Lieutenant McKenzie, were awarded the Victoria Cross during the battle for Passchendaele — the other eight were Major George Randolph Pearkes, Captain Christopher **Patrick John O'Kelly**, Lieutenant Robert Shankland, Sergeant George Harry Mullin, Corporal Colin Fraser Barron and Privates Thomas William Holmes, Cecil John Kinross and James Peter Robertson.

## **Lieutenant Alan Arnett McLeod, VC, RFC**

Alan Arnett McLeod was born in 1899 in Stonewall, Manitoba. Early on he developed an affinity for the military. He enrolled in The 34th Fort Garry Horse in 1913, at age 14. He was 4 years under age, but the officers looked the other way. It was peace time and there was little doing. Mostly he groomed horses, shovelled manure and the like.



When the First World War started in 1914, Alan tried several times to enlist in the army in Winnipeg, but he was rebuffed each time and sent back to home and school. As soon as he turned 18 he quit school and headed to Winnipeg to start his enrollment in the RFC. His imagination had been captured by stories of flying and fighting in the air. He was signed up as a pilot-in-training and sent to Long Branch just outside of Toronto for pilot training. He turned out to be a natural at it. He soloed on his fifth day of in-flight instruction with only 3 hours of experience in aircraft. He proceeded to Camp Borden for "intermediate" training and graduated with fewer than 50 hours of flying experience. On 20 August 1917 he was shipped off to France as a new 2nd Lieutenant in the Royal Flying Corps.

He was originally posted to 82 Squadron flying "scouts". When his CO found he was only 18 he decided he was too young for combat, and had Alan posted to 51 Squadron, a Home Defence squadron flying an antiquated R.A.F. BE12 "fighter" against Zeppelins at night.

By November, 1917 many pilots had been killed in the battles for Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele. He managed to convince the general in command of his group to change his age to 19 on his forms, and he was sent to the Pilot Pool at St. Omer, France. However, he still didn't get into a scout aircraft. He went to war as a two-seat bomber pilot, posted to 2 Squadron, a Corps Squadron flying the Armstrong-Whitworth FK8, two-seat bomber.

He and his gunner Lt. Comber, became famous on the front. Under attack by three Fokker Dr.I triplanes, Comber kept them off until they made it over the lines to Allied territory. The Fokkers peeled off, not willing to chase them into British airspace. McLeod wheeled around in a wide circle and managed to sneak up on the nearest German aircraft, who wasn't expecting such audacious behaviour from a bomber, and fired when the pilot filled his gun site. He was awarded a victory only after a British balloon observer corroborated his story.

Several weeks later he attacked a German observation balloon at 2,000 feet near Beauvin. He had to fly 12 miles behind German lines to get to it, and plunge through anti-aircraft fire before he could fire on it blow it into a flaming rag. He was mentioned in dispatches for this and given another victory to his credit.

McLeod got a new gunner, Lt. A.W. Hammond. McLeod and Hammond were a very strong team, and were given a roving commission when not on organised patrols. They would usually do an artillery shoot in the morning and spent the afternoons bombing anything German that looked vaguely threatening. After re-arming in the late afternoon they became a fighter and trench strafers. Sometimes they did all three in one mission.

**VC Action:** On 27 March 1918 McLeod and Hammond found a likely artillery battery to bomb. Before they could begin a bomb run a German fighter appeared out of the cloud. It was faster and much more agile than a heavily loaded bomber, but McLeod skillfully maneuvered so that Hammond could get a shot in. With three bursts from Hammond's Lewis gun the triplane flipped over and plunged to earth. Then another Fokker triplane dove down on them, followed by six more.

The German machines swarmed around them, taking turns diving, firing and pulling up. Hammond and McLeod in turn made good use of their guns, firing just enough to keep the enemy at bay and at the same time conserving their ammunition. With further skilful handling of the bomber McLeod placed Hammond so he got the chance of a sustained burst of fire at a Fokker that shattered the German aircraft so that it broke off at the pilot's seat and the wreckage fell away on fire.

Lt. Hans Kirschstein of Jasta 6, an experienced pilot and soon to be a top-scoring ace, dove under the bomber and fired up into it's belly. McLeod was wounded three times in the side and Hammond was slumped in his seat, wounded six times. To make matters worse, the fuel tank was punctured and caught the aircraft on fire. Sensing an easy kill another German cut close in. Hammond struggled up and, despite having the use of only one arm fired a volley into the Fokker. It fell away from the fight, although it likely did not crash, as the Germans did not report any losses from JG1 that day.

It seemed like the end, they were on fire, chased and surrounded by enemy aircraft behind German lines and both men were wounded. McLeod climbed out of his cockpit onto the wing to avoid the flames and yawed the aircraft to fan the flames to the right side. By now, Hammond had to lie along the rim of his cockpit as the flames had destroyed the bottom of the aircraft and his seat had fallen out. Another Fokker bore in on them, coming in for the kill, and put two more bullets into McLeod, but he side-slipped the Armstrong-Whitworth for Hammond to get a shot in. He did, and this one spun down out of control.

Kirschstein came back to the attack, putting Hammond's gun out of commission, and hitting the aircraft time and again. Finally, the bomber was obviously doomed, and heading for British airspace so he pulled away hunting for more British.

McLeod continued to side-slip the bomber over the German lines managing to crash in no-mans-land. Somehow, they were both still alive, although Hammond, with six wounds and badly burned, was unable to move. With a fire burning around their eight bombs and a load of ammunition to motivate him, McLeod struggled up and hauled Hammond towards a shell hole. The bombs blew up, wounding McLeod again and scattered burning debris all around them. German soldiers in forward positions fired at them and McLeod was hit a sixth time. They lay in a shell hole until night fall when they were rescued by soldiers of the South African Scottish Regiment. Amazingly they were still alive.

They managed to survive a three mile stretcher trip and primitive surgery to remove bullets and patch wounds at a forward aide station. They were taken to Amiens in an ambulance and to a Casualty Clearing Station where they were cleaned, and their wounds re-dressed.

McLeod was shipped back to England to the Prince of Wales's Hospital in London. He was convalescing in England when he was awarded the Victoria Cross, and Hammond received a bar to his Military Cross.

**Citation:** *"Whilst flying with his observer (Lt. A. W. Hammond, M.C.), attacking hostile formations by bombs and machine-gun fire, he was assailed at a height of 5,000 feet by eight enemy triplanes, which dived at him from all directions, firing from their front guns. By skilful manoeuvring he enabled his observer to fire bursts at each machine in turn, shooting three of them down out of control. By this time Lt. McLeod had received five wounds, and whilst continuing the engagement a bullet penetrated his petrol tank and set the machine on fire. He then climbed out on to the left bottom plane, controlling his machine from the side of the fuselage, and by side-slipping steeply kept the flames to one side, thus enabling the observer to continue firing until the ground was reached. The observer had been wounded six times when the machine crashed in "No Man's Land," and 2nd Lt. McLeod, notwithstanding his own wounds, dragged him away from the burning wreckage at great personal risk from heavy machine-gun fire from the enemy's lines. This very gallant pilot was again wounded by a bomb whilst engaged in this act of rescue, but he persevered until he had placed Lt. Hammond in comparative safety, before falling himself from exhaustion and loss of blood."*

"The London Gazette,' dated May 1, 1918

**Gravesite:** He is buried in Winnipeg, Manitoba in the Old Kildonan Presbyterian Cemetery.



**McLeod's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is held by the Canadian War Museum.



**Lt. McLeod's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** He attended the investiture at Buckingham Palace with his father, who had sailed over to tend his son. Due to weakness, he was not able to attend a luncheon that he and his father had been invited to with the King at Windsor Castle.

A few days later Alan and his father returned to Canada to continue his recuperation. Unfortunately, the highly virulent Spanish Influenza was striking Canada as well as the rest of the world, and he contracted the virus. In his weakened state he developed pneumonia and died in Winnipeg five days before the Armistice.

Dr. David Christie, of Westminster Church in Winnipeg wrote this eulogy in the Manitoba Free Press.

*"Alan McLeod was the finest flower of chivalry. The old days of knighthood are over, but for the very fairest blossoms of the spirit of knighthood the world has had to wait till the twentieth century. It is these dauntless boys who have saved civilization. The heroism of the Crusades pales before the incredible and quiet courage of such boys who gave us a new interpretation of Calvary. I saw Alan within a few hours of his death. He faced the last enemy with the same joyous confidence with which he started on what he called the very happiest part of his life. For our children's children names like Alan McLeod's will be written in letters of splendour in the annals of Canada."*

There is a street in Stonewall, Manitoba named after McLeod.

## Sergeant William Merrifield, VC. MM

William Merrifield was born in Brentwood, England, on 9 October 1890. He later emigrated with his family to Aylmer Road, Ottawa. Merrifield then moved to Sudbury and took a job as a fireman with the Canadian Pacific Railway.



On 23 September 1914 at Camp Valcartier, Québec, Merrifield enlisted and was assigned to the 2nd Battalion. He fought with this unit during the Second Battle of Ypres in 1915, before being transferred to the 4th Battalion, with which he served for the remainder of the war. He was awarded the Military Medal for his conduct during the horrendous Battle of Passchendaele in November 1917.

**VC Action:** On 1 October 1918, the advance of Sergeant Merrifield and his men near Abancourt in France was being blocked by intense fire from two German machine gun emplacements. Merrifield resolved to attack both positions alone. Running from shell-hole to shell-hole, he killed the crew of the first machine gun and, although wounded, continued to the second emplacement, where he used a hand grenade to kill all of the enemy defenders. Merrifield refused to be evacuated, and went on leading his platoon until he was wounded again, this time severely. For showing "the highest qualities of valour and leadership" in this action, Sergeant Merrifield was awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty during the attack near Abancourt on the 1st October, 1918. When his men were held up by an intense fire from two machine-gun emplacements, he attacked them both single-handed. Dashing from shell-hole to shell-hole he killed the occupants of the first post, and, although wounded, continued to attack the second post, and with a bomb killed the occupants. He refused to be evacuated, and led his platoon until again severely wounded."*

*Sjt. Merrifield has served with exceptional distinction on many former occasions, and throughout the action of the 1st October showed the highest qualities of valour and leadership."*

*The London Gazette*, January 6, 1919

**Post War:** After the war, Merrifield left Southampton, England, to travel back to Canada on board the S.S. *Olympic* on April 15, 1919, and was discharged from the service on April 24. He took a job with the Algoma Central Railway in Sault Ste. Marie.

William Merrifield suffered a stroke in 1939 from which he never recovered, and he died in hospital on 8 August 1943.

**Gravesite:** He is buried in the West Korah Cemetery in Sault Ste. Marie

**Medal Location:** At a ceremony held on Monday, 21 November 2005, at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, the Victoria Cross and campaign medals awarded to Sergeant William Merrifield were donated to the museum by his descendants, the Merrifield family of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.



**Sgt. Merrifield's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** In this same period, five other officers - Captain John MacGregor, Lieutenants Milton Fowler Gregg, George Fraser Kerr and Graham Thomson Lyall, Samuel Honey - joined Sergeant Merrifield in earning a Victoria Cross.

William Merrifield was invested with his Victoria Cross by King George V at Sandringham on 26th January 1919.

## Lieutenant Colonel Charles Cecil Ingersoll Merritt, VC

Charles Cecil Ingersoll Merritt was born in Vancouver, British Columbia, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1908, the son of a First World War hero. He was educated at Lord Roberts School, Vancouver, University School, Victoria, and Royal Military College, Kingston, Ontario. In private life he was a barrister and solicitor. Prior to the outbreak of war in 1939 he had been, since 1929, an officer in the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada. In 1942 he was transferred to the South Saskatchewan Regiment. Following his gallant action at Dieppe as described in the citation, he became a prisoner of war for the balance of the hostilities



**VC Action:** On 19 August 1942, the SSR was one of the infantry battalions from the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division that participated in the raid on the French port of Dieppe. The battalion landed on Green Beach immediately in front of Pourville, a village just to the west of Dieppe. In order to reach its objectives east of the village, the Canadians were obliged to cross a bridge over the River Scie, which flowed through Pourville to the sea. The bridge and its approaches were swept by German artillery, machine gun and mortar fire coming from the heights dominating the eastern bank of the Scie, which brought the progress of the SSR to a halt. At this point, Lieutenant-Colonel Merritt came forward and took charge, walking calmly across the bridge at least four times under a storm of fire to conduct parties of his men to the eastern side. He then organized and led uphill assaults on several of the concrete **"pillboxes" and other enemy positions that looked** down on the bridge and the village, and succeeded in clearing them. Throughout the morning, Merritt energetically led his men, exposing himself recklessly to German fire. Although twice wounded, he organized the withdrawal of his battalion from the Pourville beaches, and mounted a rear guard that ensured that the greater **part of the SSR and Queen's Own** the Cameron Highlanders of Canada were re-embarked for England. Merritt and the men of the rear guard could not be brought off, and were compelled to surrender.

For his exemplary leadership and valour, Lieutenant-Colonel Merritt was awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"For matchless gallantry and inspiring leadership whilst commanding his battalion during the Dieppe raid on the 19th August, 1942.*

*From the point of landing, his unit's advance had to be made across a bridge in Pourville which was swept by very heavy machine-gun, mortar and artillery fire: the first parties were mostly destroyed and the bridge*

*thickly covered by their bodies. A daring lead was required; waving his helmet, Lieutenant-Colonel Merritt rushed forward shouting 'Come on over! There's nothing to worry about here.'*

*He thus personally led the survivors of at least four parties in turn across the bridge. Quickly organising these, he led them forward and when held by enemy pill-boxes he again headed rushes which succeeded in clearing them. In one case he himself destroyed the occupants of the post by throwing grenades into it. After several of his runners became casualties, he himself kept contact with his different positions.*

*Although twice wounded Lieutenant-Colonel Merritt continued to direct the unit's operations with great vigour and determination and while organising the withdrawal he stalked a sniper with a Bren gun and silenced him. He then coolly gave orders for the departure and announced his intention to hold off and 'get even with' the enemy. When last seen he was collecting Bren and Tommy guns and preparing a defensive position which successfully covered the withdrawal from the beach.*

*Lieutenant-Colonel Merritt is now reported to be a Prisoner of War.*

*To this Commanding Officer's personal daring, the success of his unit's operations and the safe re-embarkation of a large portion of it were chiefly due."*

*The London Gazette, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1942*

**Post War:** In 1945 he was elected to the Federal Parliament for Vancouver-Burrard and served in that capacity until 1948. Following the loss of his seat in the General Election of that year, he returned to his law practice in Vancouver where he and his wife took up residence. In 1951 he was appointed commanding officer of the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, a post he held for three years. On July 12, 2000, Lt. Col. Merritt passed away in Vancouver, British Columbia.

**Gravesite:** He is buried at Ocean View Cemetery, Burnaby, British Columbia.



**Merritt's Grave Marker**

**Medal Location:** The Lt-Col Merritt, V.C., medal set, which consists of the Victoria Cross, the 1939–45 Star, the Defence Medal, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Overseas and Dieppe clasps, the British War Medal 1939–45 with Mentioned in Despatches (MID), the Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal 1953, the Canadian Centennial Medal 1967, the Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee Medal 1977, the Canada 125th Anniversary Medal and the Efficiency Decoration with Canada Bar, was donated to the Canadian War Museum.



**LCol Merritt's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** Merritt was sent to prison camp Oflag VII-B at Eichstätt in Bavaria. Together with 64 others, he escaped through a 120 ft tunnel during the night of June 3–4, 1943. All were recaptured after a massive manhunt. Merritt was sentenced to 14 days' solitary confinement before being transferred to Oflag IV-C at Colditz Castle. He remarked after being freed: *"My war lasted six hours. There are plenty of Canadians who went all the way from the landings in Sicily to the very end."* He was dismissive of his time as a prisoner of war with the words: *"It was an enforced idleness. It cannot be translated into virtue."*

## Lance Corporal William Henry Metcalf, VC, MM

William Henry Metcalf was born in Waite Township, Maine, on 29 January 1885. He attended grammar school in his home township. When the war began in August 1914, Metcalf ran away from home and crossed the border into Canada. He enlisted with a militia regiment, telling recruiters he was 28, and not his actual 19 years of age. He was then transferred to the 12th Battalion. It was not until the ship carrying the 12th was out to sea that his mother found out, and she then contacted Canadian and American officials to have him sent home.



When the ship docked in England, Walter Hines Page, the United States Ambassador to Great Britain, was waiting for him. Page asked Metcalf who he was, if he was indeed the Metcalf from Maine whose mother wanted him returned home. Metcalf denied it, saying he was from New Brunswick and, since his colonel backed up the story, the matter was dropped.

Metcalf was wounded twice and he received the Military Medal for gallantry.

**VC Action:** Lance-Corporal Metcalf earned the Victoria Cross on 2 September 1918 near Cagnicourt in France during the Second Battle of Arras. On that day, the right flank of an attack by his battalion on a German trench was being held up by heavy resistance. Having assessed the situation, Metcalf hurried forward under intense machine gun fire to contact a tank passing to his left. Using a signal flag, he walked in front of the tank and directed it along the length of the enemy trench. As the tank fired down into the German trench, the machine gun positions were eliminated and heavy casualties inflicted on the enemy defenders. Though he was wounded in this action, Lance-Corporal Metcalf continued to advance until he was ordered out of the firing line to have his wound treated.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery, initiative and devotion to duty in attack, when, the right flank of the battalion being held up, he realised the situation and rushed forward under intense machine-gun fire to a passing Tank on the left. With his signal flag he walked in front of the Tank, directing it along the trench in a perfect hail of bullets and bombs. The machine-gun strong points were overcome, very heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy, and a very critical situation was relieved.*

*Later, although wounded, he continued to advance until ordered to get into a shell hole and have his wounds dressed.*

*His valour throughout was of the highest standard."*

*The London Gazette*, November 15, 1918

**Post War:** Upon discharge, Metcalf returned to Maine, where he worked as a mechanic. He died in Lewiston, Maine on 8 August 1968. At his funeral his casket was covered with the Union Flag of Great Britain and among those in attendance were more than forty members of the Royal Canadian Legion. (On each anniversary of William Metcalf's death, the Royal Canadian Legion journeys to Eastport to lay a Union Flag over his grave).

**Gravesite:** He is buried in the Bayside Cemetery in Eastport, Maine.

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is on display at the Canadian Scottish Regiment (Princess Mary's) Regimental Museum in Victoria, British Columbia, alongside his other medals.

**Post Script:** As the Canadian Corps moved against the Drocourt-Quéant defensive line from 1 to 4 September, seven members of the Corps were awarded the Victoria Cross - Lieutenant-Colonel Cyrus Wesley Peck, Captain Bellenden Seymour Hutcheson, Sergeant Arthur George Knight, Lance-Corporal William Henry Metcalf and Privates Claude Joseph Patrick Nunney, Walter Leigh Rayfield and John Francis Young.

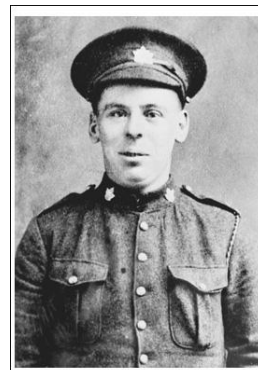
When his battalion finally occupied the trench, they discovered seventeen machine guns had been trained on the tank Metcalf was leading. The battalion historian later wrote, *"How Metcalf escaped being shot to pieces has always been a wonder to me."*

He is one of only 6 Americans to receive the Victoria Cross.

William Metcalf was invested with his Victoria Cross by King George V at Sandringham on 26 January 1919.

## Private William Johnstone Milne, VC

William Johnstone Milne was born in Cambusnethan, Scotland on 21 December 1892 and came to Canada in 1910, settling in Saskatchewan. During the First World War, he served with the 16th Infantry Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force.



**VC Action:** On 9 April 1917, the 16th Infantry Battalion took part in the successful attack by the Canadian Corps on Vimy Ridge, the strongest German defensive position in northwestern France. Early that day, the advance of Private Milne's company was checked by machine gun fire. Crawling forward, he put the crews of two machine guns out of action and captured their guns. Milne was killed a short time later, and his body was never recovered.

For his conduct in this action, Private Milne was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty in attack.*

*On approaching the first objective, Pte. Milne observed an enemy machine gun firing on our advancing troops. Crawling on hands and knees, he succeeded in reaching the gun, killing the crew with bombs, and capturing the gun.*

*On the line re-forming, he again located a machine gun in the support line, and stalking the second gun as he had done the first, he succeeded in putting the crew out of action and capturing the gun.*

*His wonderful bravery and resource on these two occasions undoubtedly saved the lives of many of his comrades.*

*Pte. Milne was killed shortly after capturing the second gun."*

The London Gazette, dated June 8, 1917

**Gravesite:** Private Milne's body was not recovered from the battlefield. He is one of the 11,285 Canadian soldiers killed in France with no known grave who have their names inscribed on the Vimy Memorial.



**Inscription on Vimy Memorial**

**Medal Location:** His medal is held by the Canadian War Museum.

**Post Script:** In addition to Milne, three other Canadians received Victoria Crosses during the battle for Vimy Ridge, Captain Thain Wendell MacDowell, Private John George Pattison, and Lance-Sergeant Ellis Wellwood Sifton.

A memorial in tribute to the fourteen men from the County of Lanarkshire who have been awarded the Victoria Cross stands in the town centre of Hamilton, Lanarkshire. Each man, including Milne, has his own marble block which gives his name and Battalion.

## Corporal Harry Garnet Bedford Miner, VC

Harry (Herbert) Garnet Bedford Miner was born in Raleigh County, near Cedar Springs, Ontario, on June 24, 1891. He was a student at Highgate School in Oxford Township, then went into farming. He enlisted with the 142nd Battalion in November 1915, then transferred to the 161st Battalion upon arriving in England. Once in France, he was taken on strength by the 58th Battalion (2nd Central Ontario Regiment) in the field in December 1916.



Miner received the Croix de Guerre from the French government in recognition of the part he played in operations near Lens in 1917.

**VC Action:** Corporal Miner was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously for his conduct on 8 August 1918, the first day of the massive Allied offensive around Amiens in France. Near Demuin, Miner charged a German machine gun position alone and, after killing the crew, turned the captured weapon on the retreating enemy. Later in the day, with the help of two comrades, he attacked another enemy machine gun emplacement and put it out of action. Again alone, Miner assaulted a German bombing post, dealt with two enemy soldiers with his bayonet, and put the other occupants of the position to flight. It was during this last action that Corporal Miner received severe grenade wounds that proved to be fatal.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty in attack, when despite severe wounds he refused to withdraw. He rushed an enemy machine-gun post single-handed, killed the entire crew and turned the gun on the enemy.*

*Later, with two others, he attacked another enemy machine-gun post, and succeeded in putting the gun out of action.*

*Cpl. Miner then rushed single-handed an enemy bombing post, bayoneting two of the garrison and putting the remainder to flight. He was mortally wounded in the performance of this gallant deed."*

*The London Gazette*, 26 October 1918

**Gravesite:** He is buried in the Crouy British Cemetery in Crouy-sur-Somme, France, a village about sixteen kilometres northwest of Amiens.



**Crouy British Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is on display at the Huron County Museum in Goderich, Ontario, alongside his other medals.

**Post Script:** Although extremely costly in terms of Canadian dead and wounded, the Battle of Amiens in early August 1918 was a complete triumph. Amazingly, ten members of the Canadian Corps, including Corporal Miner earned Victoria Crosses between 8 and 13 August. The others were Lieutenants Jean Brilliant and James Edward Tait, Sergeants Robert Spall and Raphael Louis Zengel, Corporals Alexander Picton Brereton, Frederick George Coppins, and Herman James Good and Privates John Bernard Croak and Thomas Dinesen.

The South Barracks (building M-209) in Land Force Central Area Training Centre Meaford (LFCATC Meaford) is named the Corporal H.G.B. Miner Barracks in his honour. Branch 185 of the Royal Canadian Legion in Blenheim, Ontario, is named the Harry Miner Branch.

## Captain Coulson Norman Mitchell, VC, MC

Coulson Norman Mitchell was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, on 11 December 1889. He graduated from the University of Manitoba, with a degree in engineering, and worked for a company involved in projects in Manitoba and British Columbia. In November 1914, he enlisted in the Canadian Engineers as a sapper, then transferred to a signal company. Just before going overseas in 1915, he transferred to the Canadian Railway Construction Corps.



Mitchell was promoted to sergeant in November 1915, then received his commission as a lieutenant in April 1916. In December 1916, he was awarded the Military Cross for his actions at "The Bluff", in the Ypres Salient, in Belgium. In May 1917, he was promoted to captain.

**VC Action:** In the second week of October 1918 the Canadian Corps was closing in on the city of Cambrai. The main obstacle here was crossing the **Canal de l'Escaut to pursue the rapidly retreating Germans. Captain Coulson Norman Mitchell**, with the 4th Battalion, Canadian Engineers, earned his Victoria Cross here.

On 8-9 October Mitchell, already a recipient of a Military Cross, led some engineers ahead of the infantry to examine the bridges the latter would need to cross. Upon reaching the canal they discovered one bridge had already been blown up. They crossed the collapsed bridge under heavy fire and pushed on to the main bridge over the canal. Mitchell and his men ran across the bridge in the darkness, without knowing how many Germans were on the other side. Mitchell then deployed a lookout while he and his sergeant slid under the bridge and began cutting wires leading to the demolition charges. Unfortunately, the Germans had raised the alarm and rushed the bridge in an attempt to blow the charges. Mitchell ran to his lookout, who had been wounded defending the position. Mitchell killed three Germans, captured another twelve and defended the bridgehead until reinforcements arrived. At that point Mitchell went back under the bridge and continued cutting wires and removing demolition charges until the bridge was secured.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty on the night of 8th-9th October, 1918, at the Canal de L'Escaut, north-east of Cambrai.*

*He led a small party ahead of the first wave of infantry in order to examine the various bridges on the line of approach and, if possible, to prevent their demolition.*

*On reaching the canal he found the bridge already blown up. Under a heavy barrage he crossed to the next bridge, where he cut a number of 'lead' wires. Then in total darkness, and unaware of the position or strength of the enemy at the bridgehead, he dashed across the main bridge over the canal. This bridge was found to be heavily charged for demolition, and whilst Capt. Mitchell, assisted by his N.C.O., was cutting the wires, the enemy attempted to rush the bridge in order to blow the charges, whereupon he at once dashed to the assistance of his sentry, who had been wounded, killed three of the enemy, captured 12, and maintained the bridgehead until reinforced.*

*Then under heavy fire he continued his task of cutting wires and removing charges, which he well knew might at any moment have been fired by the enemy.*

*It was entirely due to his valour and decisive action that this important bridge across the canal was saved from destruction."*

*The London Gazette*, January 31, 1919

**Post War:** After the war, Mitchell returned to Winnipeg to his electrical engineering work, specializing in developing and building steam and hydroelectric power plants. When the Second World War broke out, he served with the Royal Canadian Engineers, commanding a company of pioneers in England. He was sent back to Canada in September 1943 and, now a lieutenant-colonel, commanded the Royal Canadian Engineer Training Centre in Petawawa, Ontario. In 1944, he took command of the Royal School of Military Engineering in Chilliwack, British Columbia.

Mitchell retired from the military in September 1946, returning to his civilian work in Mount-Royal, Québec. He retired from civilian life in 1957.

Mitchell died in Montreal on 17 November 1978.

**Gravesite:** He is buried in the Field of Honour at the Lakeview Cemetery in Pointe-Claire, Québec.



**Capt. Mitchell's Grave**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is on display at the Canadian Engineers Military Museum, located in the Mitchell Building at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown in New Brunswick.

**Post Script:** Lieutenant-Colonel Norman Mitchell was the only Canadian Military Engineer to have ever won the coveted Victoria Cross.

The Canadian Military Engineers chose to honour Mitchell by naming the main building of the Canadian Forces School of Military Engineering at CFB Gagetown, New Brunswick after him.

## Sergeant George Harry Mullin, VC, MM

George Harry Mullin was born in Portland, Oregon, United States, on 15 August 1891. When he was two, his family moved to Canada, settling in Moosomin, Saskatchewan. During the First World War, Mullin served in the scout and sniper section of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, Canadian Expeditionary Force. For his conduct on the occasion of the successful attack by the Canadian Corps on Vimy Ridge in April 1917, he received the Military Medal.



**VC Action:** On 30 October 1917 near Passchendaele in Belgium, a company of the PPCLI was attempting to eliminate a German "pillbox" fortification that was blocking its advance and causing heavy casualties. While one group of Patricias led by Lieutenant Hugh McKenzie made a frontal attack on the pillbox and drew its fire, Sergeant Mullin approached from the flank and crawled onto the top of the concrete structure, disposing of an enemy sniper's position on the way. From this vantage point, Mullin shot two German machine gunners with his revolver before compelling the other ten occupants of the pillbox to surrender.

For the courage he demonstrated in this action, Sergeant Mullin was awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery in attack, when single-handed he captured a commanding 'Pill-box' which had withstood the heavy bombardment and was causing heavy casualties to our forces and holding up the attack. He rushed a sniper's post in front, destroyed the garrison with bombs, and, crawling on top of the 'Pill-box,' he shot the two machine-gunners with his revolver. Sjt. Mullin then rushed to another entrance and compelled the garrison of ten to surrender.*

*His gallantry and fearlessness were witnessed by many, and, although rapid fire was directed upon him, and his clothes riddled by bullets, he never faltered in his purpose and he not only helped to save the situation, but also indirectly saved many lives."*

*London Gazette, no.30471, 11 January 1918*

**Post War:** He finished the war as a lieutenant. In 1934 he was appointed as Sergeant at Arms of the Saskatchewan legislature. Mullin served as a captain in the Veterans Guard during World War II.

Mullin died in Regina, Saskatchewan on 5 April 1963.

**Gravesite:** He is buried at Moosomin South Side Cemetery, Moosomin, Saskatchewan.



**Sgt. Mullin's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is displayed at the Museum of the Regiments, Calgary, Alberta.

**Post Script:** In addition to Sergeant Mullin, eight other CEF members were awarded the Victoria Cross during the battle for Passchendaele - Major George Randolph Pearkes, Captain Christopher Patrick John O'Kelly, Lieutenants Hugh McKenzie and Robert Shankland, Corporal Colin Fraser Barron and Privates Thomas William Holmes, Cecil John Kinross and James Peter Robertson.

## Pilot Officer Andrew Charles Mynarski, VC, RCAF

Andrew Charles Mynarski was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1916, the son of Polish immigrants. He was educated at King Edward and Isaac Newton Elementary Schools and at St. John's Technical School. To help support his family after his father's death, he worked for four years as a leather worker in Winnipeg. Andrew Charles Mynarski was a quiet man with a good sense of humour. He enjoyed woodworking and loved to design and build furniture.



In 1940, he joined the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, a militia unit, but only served a short time before enlisting in the Royal Canadian Air Force. In September, 1941, he was posted to No. 3 Manning Depot in Edmonton. After basic training, he went to No. 2 Wireless School in Calgary but had trouble with learning Morse Code. He was then posted to No. 3 Bomb and Gunnery School at MacDonald, Manitoba, graduating just before Christmas as an air-gunner, earning his 'AG' brevet.

He was promoted to temporary Sergeant in Halifax just prior to going overseas in January 1942. After a series of transfers through operational training units, as a Warrant Officer (second class), he joined Flying Officer Art de Breyne's crew as the mid-upper gunner in 419 "Moose" Squadron, flying out of RAF Middleton St. George, Yorkshire. This squadron first flew combat operations using Vickers Wellington bombers before converting to the Handley Page Halifax bombers. After a short introduction to this four-engine heavy bomber, 419 Squadron began to receive the Avro Lancaster bomber in 1944, including examples built in Canada by the Victory Aircraft Company in Malton, Ontario. In early June, de Bryne's crew received Avro Lancaster Mk X bomber, #**KB726**, coded "VR-A" (call sign A for Able).

**VC Action:** On the night of 12 to 13 June 1944, Pilot Officer Mynarski was the mid-upper gunner in an Avro Lancaster bomber of 419 Squadron, RCAF during an attack on the railway yards at Cambrai, in France. When the aircraft was attacked by a German night fighter, both port engines failed, and fire broke out between the mid-upper and rear gun turrets, as well as in the port wing fuel tanks. Soon the flames grew to such an extent that the pilot ordered the aircraft abandoned. As Mynarski left his turret and proceeded toward the escape hatch, he saw that the rear gunner, Flying Officer G.P. Brophy, was unable to get out of his turret, which could not be moved due to the failure of both the hydraulic and manual systems. At once Mynarski made his way aft through the fire in an attempt to free Brophy. With his parachute and the clothing below his waist now on fire, Mynarski strained to move the turret and release Brophy, but to no avail.



**P/O Mynarski and his crew (DND/DHH)**

*In Brophy's own words, "Completely ignoring his own condition in the flames, he grabbed a fire axe and tried to smash the turret free. It gave slightly, but not enough. Wild with desperation and pain, he tore at the doors with his bare hands -*

*to no avail. By now he was a mass of flames below his waist. Seeing him like that, I forgot everything else. Over the roar of the wind and the whine of our two remaining engines, I screamed, 'Go back, Andy! Get out!'*

*Finally, with time running out, he realized that he could do nothing to help me. When I waved him away again, he hung his head and nodded, as though he was ashamed to leave -ashamed that sheer heart and courage hadn't been enough. As there was no way to turn around in the confined quarters, Andy had to crawl backwards through the flaming hydraulic fluid fire again, never taking his eyes off me. On his face was a look of mute anguish.*

*When Andy reached the escape hatch, he stood up. Slowly, as he'd often done before in happier times together, he came to attention. Standing there in his flaming clothes, a grimly magnificent figure, he saluted me! At the same time, just before he jumped, he said something. And even though I couldn't hear, I knew it was 'Good night, Sir.'"<sup>5</sup>*

Left alone in the rear turret, somehow Pat Brophy survived when the Lancaster crashed. Mynarski's descent was seen by the French people on the ground. Both his parachute and clothes were on fire. He was located but was so severely burned that he died of his injuries. The remainder of the crew survived, four successfully evading capture and two others becoming Prisoners of War.

In late 1945, Art de Breyne started the process of recognizing Mynarski's extraordinary deed by recommending an award for "Andy" and enquiring about the location of his grave. The recommendation worked its way up the command structure of the RCAF and RAF. On 11 October 1946, a Victoria Cross was posthumously awarded for "valour of the highest order" to Andrew Charles Mynarski, by then, also awarded the rank of Pilot Officer.

**Citation:** *"Pilot Officer Mynarski was the mid-upper gunner of a Lancaster aircraft, detailed to attack a target at Cambrai in France, on the night of 12th June, 1944. The aircraft was attacked from below and astern by an enemy fighter and ultimately came down in flames.*

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bombercommandmuseum.ca/s.mynarski.html>

*As an immediate result of the attack, both port engines failed. Fire broke out between the mid-upper turret and the rear turret, as well as in the port wing. The flames soon became fierce and the captain ordered the crew to abandon the aircraft.*

*Pilot Officer Mynarski left his turret and went towards the escape hatch. He then saw that the rear gunner was still in his turret and apparently unable to leave it. The turret was, in fact, immovable, since the hydraulic gear had been put out of action when the port engines failed, and the manual gear had been broken by the gunner in his attempts to escape.*

*Without hesitation, Pilot Officer Mynarski made his way through the flames in an endeavour to reach the rear turret and release the gunner. Whilst so doing, his parachute and his clothing, up to the waist, were set on fire. All his efforts to move the turret and free the gunner were in vain. Eventually the rear gunner clearly indicated to him that there was nothing more he could do and that he should try to save his own life. Pilot Officer Mynarski reluctantly went back through the flames to the escape hatch. There, as a last gesture to the trapper gunner, he turned towards him, stood to attention in his flaming clothing and saluted, before he jumped out of the aircraft. Pilot Officer Mynarski's descent was seen by French people on the ground. Both his parachute and clothing were on fire. He was found eventually by the French, but was so severely burnt that he died from his injuries.*

*The rear gunner had a miraculous escape when the aircraft crashed. He subsequently testified that, had Pilot Officer Mynarski not attempted to save his comrade's life, he could have left the aircraft in safety and would, doubtless, have escaped death.*

*Pilot Officer Mynarski must have been fully aware that in trying to free the rear gunner he was almost certain to lose his own life. Despite this, with outstanding courage and complete disregard for his own safety, he went to the rescue. Willingly accepting the danger, Pilot Officer Mynarski lost his life by a most conspicuous act of heroism which called for valour of the highest order."*

*The London Gazette, 11<sup>th</sup> October 1946*

**Gravesite:** He is buried in Méharicourt Cemetery, Méharicourt, France. In the north-eastern part of the cemetery, in a special British plot, are the graves of 41 airmen. Of these, 21 belonged to the Royal Air Force; 12 to the Royal Canadian Air Force; 6 to the Royal Australian Air Force and 2 to the Royal New Zealand Air Force.



**Meharcourt Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is on display at the 1 Canadian Air Division Headquarters in Winnipeg.

**Post Script:** Pilot Officer Mynarski was the first member of the RCAF to be decorated with the Victoria Cross in the Second World War.

Pilot Officer Mynarski was honoured with the erection of a 10 foot bronze statue of his likeness at Middleton St. George, England; home to the 419 Squadron's 6th Bomber Group.



**Mynarski's Statue, Middleton St George**

A Junior High school in Winnipeg; a park in Alberta; the Royal Canadian Legion "Andrew Mynarski" Branch 34; and, 573 "Andrew Mynarski" Air Cadet squadron all bear his name.

The Avro Lancaster flown out of the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum in Hamilton, Ontario, one of only two airworthy Lancasters in the world, is known as the Mynarski Memorial Lancaster in his honour and is painted in the markings of his aircraft.

Mynarski's bust has joined the other "Valiants" on the Valiants Memorial in Ottawa. This memorial site is a collection of nine busts and five statues and a large bronze wall inscription that commemorates 14 individuals celebrated for their personal contributions, but also representing critical moments in Canada's military history.

Andrew Mynarski is also remembered at the Saint George Hotel in Middleton St. George by the "Mynarski Bar", a bar dedicated to him. Images of him and a replica VC are on display.

## Lieutenant William H. Snyder Nickerson, VC, CB, CMG

Born 27 March 1875 in Dorchester, New Brunswick, his family returned to England when he was a child and he was educated at Portsmouth Grammar School, Manchester Grammar School and Owen's College, the forerunner of the University of Manchester, graduating in medicine in 1896.



Nickerson was a 25 years old lieutenant in the Royal Army Medical Corps, of the British Army, attached to the Mounted Infantry during the Second Boer War when his actions at Wakkerstroom led to the award of the Victoria Cross.

**VC Action:** on March 27, 1875, Nickerson was attached to the Mounted Infantry and awarded the medal for his part in an attack on Bwab's Hill. At nearby Wakkerstroom, a trooper from the Worcestershire Regiment had had his stomach torn open by shellfire and lay exposed to a concentration of fire from the Boers. The wounded soldier could not be moved nor could stretcher-bearers reach him until the fire abated.

That night, during an infantry assault to aid the mounted troop, Nickerson went forward and under **heavy shell and rifle fire stitched up the man's** stomach and stayed with him until he could be moved to safety. In addition to earning him the VC, the deed resulted in Nickerson receiving a Mentioned-in-Dispatches.

**Citation:** *At Wakkerstroom, on the evening of the 20th April, 1900, during the advance of the Infantry to support the Mounted Troops, Lieutenant Nickerson went, in the most gallant manner, under a heavy rifle and shell fire, to attend a wounded man, dressed his wounds, and remained with him till he had him conveyed to a place of safety.*

*London Gazette:* no. 27283, 12 February 1901

**Post War:** He later achieved the rank of major general after service in World War I and was appointed Colonel-in-Chief of the RAMC in 1933. He died 10 April 1954 at the age of 79.

**Gravesite:** His grave is in the private burial ground at his home in Cour, Kintyre, Scotland.



### **MGen Nickerson's Headstone**

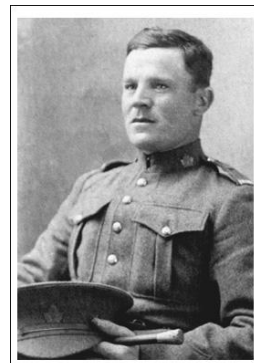
**Medal Location:** His medals are not publicly held.

**Post Script:** He was the first Boer War VC recipient with a Canadian connection.

**Author's Note:** This is one of those cases that makes counting the number of Canadian VC's difficult. Although he was born in Canada, Nickerson moved to England at an early age and subsequently served in the British Army where he won his medal, and later died in Scotland.

## **Private Claude Joseph Patrick Nunney, VC, DCM, MM**

Claude Joseph Patrick Nunney was born in Dublin, Ireland, on 24 December 1892. As his family was poor, he and a few of his siblings were sent to Canada in 1905 as Home Children, a child emigration movement between 1869 and the late 1930s, in the hopes the children would have a better life here in Canada. Nunney was first a ward of St. George's Home in Ottawa, Ontario, then he was placed in a home in North Lancaster, before his foster-mother's death in 1912. He was then placed in another home in the area, from where he enlisted in June 1913, as a private with the 59th Stormont & Glengarry Regiment.



In February 1915, Nunney enlisted for service in the Canadian Expeditionary Force with the 58th Battalion. In March 1915, he was transferred to the 38th Battalion, before sailing for England in May 1916.

Nunney was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his actions during the Battle of Vimy Ridge in April 1917, and the Military Medal for his actions at Avion later the same year.

**VC Action:** Private Nunney was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously for the dash and steadfast example he demonstrated on 1 and 2 September 1918 during the fighting at the Drocourt-Quéant Line in France. On 1 September, near Vis-en-Artois, positions recently captured by the Canadians were subjected to a heavy enemy artillery barrage and a counterattack. On his own **initiative, Nunney left his company's main line** and went forward through the barrage to its outpost line. Here he went from position to position encouraging his comrades. The next day, **Private Nunney's exemplary conduct helped to inspire his company to carry its objective.** Severely wounded on that day, Nunney died on 18 September 1918.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery during the operations against the Drocourt-Quéant line on the 1st and 2nd September, 1918.*

*On 1st September, when his battalion was in the vicinity of Vis-en-Artois, preparatory to the advance, the enemy laid down a heavy barrage and counter-attacked. Pte. Nunney, who was at this time at company headquarters, immediately on his own initiative proceeded through the barrage to the company outpost lines, going from post to post and encouraging the men by his own fearless example. The enemy were repulsed and a critical situation was saved. During the attack on 2nd September his dash continually placed him in advance of his companions,*

*and his fearless example undoubtedly helped greatly to carry the company forward to its objectives.*

*He displayed throughout the highest degree of valour until severely wounded."*

The London Gazette, December 14, 1918

**Gravesite:** He is interred at the Aubigny Communal Cemetery Extension in Aubigny-en-Artois, France, a village approximately fifteen kilometers northwest of Arras.



**Aubigny Communal Cemetery Extension**

**Medal Location:** Nunney's medals, including his VC are displayed above the fireplace at the Armoury in Cornwall, Ontario.



**Pte. Nunney's Medal Display**

**Post Script:** As the Canadian Corps moved against the Drocourt-Quéant defensive line from 1 to 4 September 1918, seven VCs were awarded to Lieutenant-Colonel Cyrus Wesley Peck, Captain Bellenden Seymour Hutcheson, Sergeant Arthur George Knight, Lance-Corporal William Henry

Metcalf and Privates Claude Joseph Patrick Nunney, Walter Leigh Rayfield and John Francis Young.

## Private Timothy O'Hea, VC

He was born in 1846 in Bantry, County Cork, Ireland. Little is known of O'Hea's early life or parentage. He joined the 1st Battalion of the Prince Consort's Own Rifle Brigade as a private before the age of 20 and was sent to Canada with his regiment in 1866.



**VC Action:** On 9 June 1866, during the Fenian uprisings, O'Hea and three other men were guarding a munitions shipment attached to a passenger train carrying 800 German immigrants; the shipment was bound from Quebec to the Lake Erie front. En route, at Danville, in the Eastern Townships, a fire was discovered in the munitions car. The car was disconnected, and before a decision had been made about further action O'Hea took the keys to the burning car from the sergeant in command, opened it, and fought the fire for nearly an hour at great peril to his life. He singlehandedly put out the blaze. On 7 Jan. 1867, at Quebec, he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"On 9 June 1866 at Danville, Quebec, Canada, a fire broke out in a railway car containing 2000 lb (900 kg) of ammunition, between Quebec and Montreal. The alarm was given and the car was disconnected at Danville Railway Station. While the sergeant in charge was considering what should be done, Private O'Hea took the keys from his hand, rushed to the car, opened it and called for water and a ladder. It was due to this man's example that the fire was suppressed."*

London Gazette 23204, 1 January 1867

**Post Event:** Shortly afterwards O'Hea left the army and joined the New Zealand Mounted Police. In June 1874 he moved to Australia where he joined Andrew Hume and Lewis Thompson in a search party looking for a reported survivor of the Ludwig Leichhardt expedition lost some 20 years earlier in the interior of the country. The party set out from Nockatunga station in November, apparently inadequately supplied, and soon met with tragedy. O'Hea and Hume died of thirst; Thompson managed to return to Nockatunga with the report of their deaths. He afterwards led a search party, which found Hume's body but not O'Hea's. O'Hea's body was recovered sometime later apparently by aborigines.

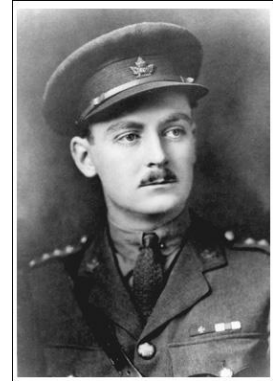
**Gravesite:** O'Hea is buried at Nockatunga station in Queensland.

**Medal Location:** His VC remained for many years in the National Art Gallery in Sydney, Australia. The gallery was to give it to Canada in 1950, but at the request of Field Marshal Lord Henry Maitland Wilson, Baron of Libya, Canada waived her claim and it was returned to the Royal Green Jackets Museum in Winchester, England.

**Post Script:** This was the only instance in which the VC was given for service within Canada and one of only six awarded for an act of valour not performed in the presence of an enemy.

## Captain Christopher Patrick John O’Kelly, VC, MC

Christopher Patrick John O’Kelly was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba on 18 November 1895. He enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) in 1915, and was commissioned as a second lieutenant. While serving with the 52nd Infantry Battalion, CEF, O’Kelly received the Military Cross.



**VC Action:** On 26 October 1917, Acting Captain O’Kelly led his company of the 52nd Battalion against German positions on Bellevue Spur, a network of defences near Passchendaele in Belgium. Previously, other units had tried to attack this feature, but had been unsuccessful while suffering considerable losses. O’Kelly and his men advanced about one kilometre into the enemy positions, and captured six “pillbox” fortifications, ten machine guns and 100 prisoners. They then dug in and held their position against repeated German counterattacks until they were relieved. Later that day, O’Kelly and his company fought off another strong enemy counterattack, taking more prisoners in the process. Alert to German activity that night, they captured a raiding party of 11 soldiers. For his exemplary leadership throughout that day, Acting Captain O’Kelly was awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery in an action in which he led his company with extraordinary skill and determination.*

*After the original attack had failed and two companies of his unit had launched a new attack, Capt. O’Kelly advanced his command over 1,000 yards under heavy fire without any artillery barrage, took the enemy positions on the crest of the hill by storm, and then personally organised and led a series of attacks against ‘Pill-boxes,’ his company alone capturing six of them with 100 prisoners and 10 machine guns.*

*Later on in the afternoon, under the leadership of this gallant officer, his company repelled a strong counter-attack, taking more prisoners, and subsequently during the night captured a hostile raiding party consisting of one officer, 10 men and a machine gun.*

*The whole of these achievements were chiefly due to the magnificent courage, daring and ability of Capt. O’Kelly."*

*London Gazette, no.30471, 11 January 1918*

**Post War:** After the war, O’Kelly became a prospector in Northwestern Ontario. On 15 November 1922, O’Kelly was drowned during a storm on Lac Seul, near Kenora, Ontario. His body was never found.

**Medal Location:** Major O’Kelly’s medals are held by the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.



**Major O’Kelly’s Medal Set**

**Post Script:** In addition to Captain O’Kelly, eight other CEF members were awarded the Victoria Cross during the battle for Passchendaele - Major George Randolph Pearkes, Lieutenants Hugh McKenzie and Robert Shankland, Sergeant George Mullin, Corporal Colin Fraser Barron and Privates Thomas William Holmes, Cecil John Kinross and James Peter Robertson.

He later achieved the rank of Major.

## Lance-Corporal Michael O'Leary, VC

O'Leary was born in 1890, one of four children of Daniel and Margaret O'Leary, who owned a farm at Inchigeela, near Macroom in County Cork, Ireland. Daniel O'Leary was a fervent Irish nationalist and keen sportsman who participated in competitive weightlifting and football. Aged 16 and unwilling to continue to work on his parent's land, Michael O'Leary joined the Royal Navy, serving at the shore establishment HMS *Vivid* at Devonport for several years until rheumatism in his knees forced his departure from the service. Within a few months however, O'Leary had again tired of the farm and joined the Irish Guards regiment of the British Army.



O'Leary served three years with the Irish Guards, leaving in August 1913 to join the Royal North-West Mounted Police (RNWMP) in Saskatchewan, Canada. Operating from Regina, Constable O'Leary was soon commended for his bravery in capturing two criminals following a two-hour gun battle, for which service he was presented with a gold ring.

At the outbreak of the First World War in Europe during August 1914, O'Leary was given permission to leave the RNWMP and return to Britain in order to rejoin the army as an active reservist. On 22 October, O'Leary was mobilized and on 23 November he joined his regiment in France, then fighting with the British Expeditionary Force, entrenched in Flanders.

During December 1914, O'Leary saw heavy fighting with the Irish Guards and was Mentioned in Despatches and subsequently promoted to Lance Corporal on 5 January 1915.

**VC Action:** On 30 January 1915, the Irish Guards were ordered to prepare for an attack on German positions near Cuinchy on the La Bassée Canal, a response to a successful German operation in the area five days before. The Germans attacked first however, and on the morning of 1 February seized a stretch of canal embankment on the western end of the 2nd Brigade line from a company of Coldstream Guards. This section, known as the Hollow, was tactically important as it defended a culvert that passed underneath a railway embankment. 4 Company of Irish Guards, originally in reserve, were tasked with joining the Coldstream Guards in retaking the position at 04:00, but the attack was met with heavy machine gun fire and most of the assault party, including all of the Irish Guards officers, were killed or wounded.

To replace these officers, Second Lieutenant Innes of 1 Company was ordered forward to gather the survivors and withdraw, forming up at a

barricade on the edge of the Hollow. Innes regrouped the survivors and, following a heavy bombardment from supporting artillery and with his own company providing covering fire, assisted the Coldstream Guards in a second attack at 10:15. Weighed down with entrenching equipment, the attacking Coldstream Guardsmen faltered and began to suffer heavy casualties. Innes too came under heavy fire from a German barricade to their front equipped with a machine gun.

Michael O'Leary had been serving as Innes's orderly, and had joined him in the operations earlier in the morning and again in the second attack. Charging past the rest of the assault party, O'Leary closed with the first German barricade at the top of the railway embankment and fired five shots, killing the gun's crew. Continuing forward, O'Leary confronted a second barricade, also armed with a machine gun 60 yards (55 m) further on and again mounted the railway embankment, to avoid the marshy ground on either side. The Germans spotted his approach, but could not bring their gun to bear on him before he opened fire, killing three soldiers and capturing two others after he ran out of ammunition. Reportedly, O'Leary had made his advance on the second barricade *"intent upon killing another German to whom he had taken a dislike"*.

Having disabled both guns and enabled the recapture of the British position, O'Leary then returned to his unit with his prisoners, apparently *"as cool as if he had been for a walk in the park."* For his actions, O'Leary received a battlefield promotion to sergeant on 4 February and was recommended for the Victoria Cross, which was gazetted on the 18 February.

**Citation:** *"For conspicuous bravery at Cuinchy on the 1st February, 1915. When forming one of the storming party which advanced against the enemy's barricades he rushed to the front and himself killed five Germans who were holding the first barricade, after which he attacked a second barricade, about 60 yards further on, which he captured, after killing three of the enemy and making prisoners of two more. Lance-Corporal O'Leary thus practically captured the enemy's position by himself and prevented the attacking party from being fired upon."*

**Post War:** Leaving his wife Greta and their two children in Britain, O'Leary returned to Canada in March 1921 with the purported intention of rejoining the RNWMP, newly renamed the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. For unknown reasons, this plan came to nothing and after some months giving lectures on his war service and working in a publishing house, O'Leary joined the Ontario Provincial Police, charged with enforcing the prohibition laws. In 1924, with his family recently arrived from England, O'Leary left the Ontario police force and became a police sergeant with the Michigan Central Railway in Bridgeburg, Ontario, receiving £33 a month.

In 1925, O'Leary was the subject of several scandals, being arrested for smuggling illegal immigrants and later for irregularities in his investigations. Although he was acquitted both times, he spent a week in prison following the second arrest and lost his job with the railway. Several months later, the municipal authorities in Hamilton, Ontario loaned him £70 to pay for him and his family to return to Ireland. Although his family sailed on the SS *Leticia*, O'Leary remained in Ontario, working with the attorney general's office.

With his health in serious decline, the British Legion arranged for O'Leary to return to Britain and work in their poppy factory. By 1932, O'Leary was living in Southborne Avenue in Colindale, had regained his health and found employment as a commissionaire at the Mayfair Hotel in London, at which he was involved in charitable events for wounded servicemen.

With the mobilisation of the British Army in 1939, O'Leary returned to military service as a captain in the Middlesex Regiment. O'Leary was sent to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force but had returned to Britain before the Battle of France due to a recurrence of his malaria.

No longer fit for full active service, O'Leary was transferred to the Pioneer Corps and took command of a prisoner of war camp in Southern England. In 1945, he was discharged from the military as unfit for duty on medical grounds as a major and found work as a building contractor, in which career he remained until his retirement in 1954.

Two of O'Leary's sons had also served in the military during the war, with both receiving Distinguished Flying Crosses for their actions. As a Victoria Cross recipient, O'Leary joined the VE day parade in 1946, but at the 1956 Centenary VC review his place was taken by an impostor travelling in a bath chair. With his health again declining, O'Leary moved to Limesdale Gardens in Edgware shortly before his death in 1961 at the Whittington Hospital in Islington.

**Gravesite:** O'Leary was buried at Paddington Cemetery in Mill Hill, London following a funeral service which was attended by an honour guard from the Irish Guards and six of his children.



**City of Westminster (Paddington) Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His medals were later presented to the Irish Guards, and are on display at the Regimental Headquarters Museum.

**Post Script:** Returning to Britain to receive his medal from King George V at Buckingham Palace on 22 June 1915, O'Leary was given a grand reception attended by thousands of Londoners in Hyde Park on 10 July. He was also the subject of much patriotic writing, including a poem in the Daily Mail and the short play *O'Flaherty VC* by George Bernard Shaw. Tributes came from numerous prominent figures of the day, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who said that *"No writer in fiction would dare to fasten such an achievement on any of his characters, but the Irish have always had a reputation of being wonderful fighters, and Lance-Corporal Michael O'Leary is clearly one of them."* and Thomas Scanlan who said: *"I heard early this week of the great achievements of the Irish Guards. All Ireland is proud of O'Leary. He fully deserves the high honour that has been conferred upon him. Ireland is grateful to him."*

His reception was repeated in Macroom when he visited Ireland, with crowds turning out to applaud him. Daniel O'Leary was interviewed in a local newspaper regarding his son's exploit but was reportedly unimpressed, commenting: *"I am surprised he didn't do more. I often laid out twenty men myself with a stick coming from Macroom Fair, and it is a bad trial of Mick that he could kill only eight, and he having a rifle and bayonet."*

O'Leary was further rewarded for his service, being advanced to a commissioned rank as a second lieutenant with the Connaught Rangers, and he was also presented with a Russian decoration, the Cross of St. George (third class). Despite his popularity with the crowds in London and Macroom, he was jeered by Ulster Volunteers at a recruitment drive in Ballaghaderin during the autumn of 1915. This treatment caused such a scandal that it was raised in the Houses of Parliament.

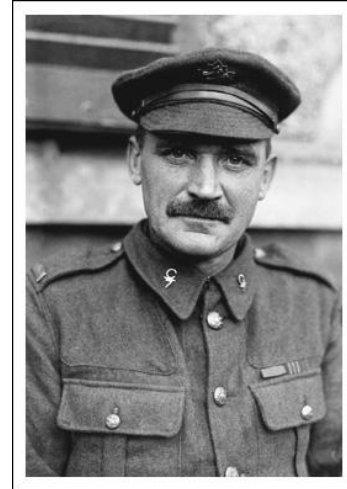
In 1916, O'Leary travelled to Salonika with the 5th battalion of the Connaught Rangers to serve in the Balkans campaign, remaining in theatre until the end of the war, following which he was stationed in Dover with the 2nd battalion until demobilised in 1921. During his service in the Balkans, O'Leary contracted malaria, which was to have severe negative effects on his health for the rest of his life.

He was in the same regiment as the famous stage and film actor Stanley Holloway and they would serve together in the trenches in France. After the war ended they remained close friends and Holloway would often stay in The Mayfair Hotel where O'Leary worked.

**Author's Note:** LCpl O'Leary's inclusion in this collection is due only to his service as a policeman in Canada. Otherwise, he was not born in Canada, nor did he serve in the Canadian forces.

## Private Michael James O'Rourke, VC, MM

Michael James O'Rourke was born on 19 March 1878 in Limerick, Ireland. After the First World War began, he enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force as a stretcher-bearer, and served with the **7th Infantry Battalion**. O'Rourke received the Military Medal for his conduct in the Battle of the Somme in 1916.



**VC Action:** O'Rourke earned the Victoria Cross for his courage and devotion to his comrades over a three-day period, from 15 to 17 August 1917, during the fighting for Hill 70, near Lens in France. Despite severe German shelling and machine gun and rifle fire, he worked unceasingly to bring the wounded to safety, to treat their injuries, and to obtain food and water for them. On several occasions, O'Rourke was knocked down and partially buried by explosions from enemy shells. At least three times he exposed himself recklessly to enemy fire in order to **retrieve wounded men**. The first time, O'Rourke jumped out of his trench in full view of German snipers to bring a soldier who had been blinded to safety. He left his trench on two other occasions in the face of heavy enemy machine gun fire and rescued two other wounded comrades.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty during prolonged operations.*

*For three days and nights Pte. O'Rourke, who is a stretcher-bearer, worked unceasingly in bringing the wounded into safety, dressing them, and getting them food and water.*

*During the whole of his period the area in which he worked was subjected to very severe shelling and swept by heavy machine gun and rifle fire. On several occasions he was knocked down and partially buried by enemy shells. Seeing a comrade who had been blinded stumbling around ahead of our trench, in full view of the enemy who were sniping him, Pte. O'Rourke jumped out of his trench and brought the man back, being himself heavily sniped at while doing so. Again he went forward about 50 yards in front of our barrage under very heavy and accurate fire from enemy machine guns and snipers, and brought in a comrade. On a subsequent occasion, when the line of advanced posts was retired to the line to be consolidated, he went forward under very heavy enemy fire of every description and brought back a wounded man who had been left behind.*

*He showed throughout an absolute disregard for his own safety, going wherever there were wounded to succour, and his magnificent courage*

*and devotion in continuing his rescue work, in spite of exhaustion and the incessant heavy enemy fire of every description, inspired all ranks and undoubtedly saved many lives."*

*London Gazette, no.30372, 8 November 1917*

**Post War:** After the war, O'Rourke eked out a meagre existence on skid road in Vancouver, British Columbia, surviving on a disability pension of 10 dollars per month and casual work on the docks. During a longshoremen's strike in 1935, he headed a protest march of about 1,000 strikers, wearing his medals and carrying the Union Flag. The marchers attempted to pass a police line guarding the waterfront and were attacked with clubs and tear gas in what came to be known as the Battle of Ballantyne Pier.

O'Rourke died in Vancouver, British Columbia on 6 December 1957.

**Gravesite:** He is buried at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada.



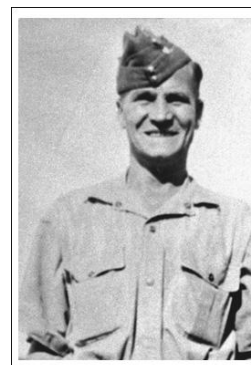
**Pte. O'Rourke's Grave**

**Medal Location:** It is believed at some time during the 1950s or 1960s Michael O'Rourke's original VC was swapped for a replica in the British Columbia Regiment Museum in Vancouver. The VC has never been recovered.

**Post Script:** During the battle for Hill 70, six members of the Corps received the Victoria Cross for their conspicuous gallantry between 15 and 24 August 1917 – Major Okill Massey Learmonth, Company Sergeant-Major Robert Hill Hanna, Sergeant Frederick Hobson, Corporal Konowal and Privates Harry Brown and Michael James O'Rourke.

## Company Sergeant Major John Robert Osborn, VC

John Robert Osborn was born in Norfolk England on the 2nd of January 1899. He served in the First World War as a seaman in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and saw action at the Battle of Jutland in May 1916. At the end of the war he moved to Saskatchewan where he farmed for two years at Wapella. He then worked with the maintenance division of the Canadian Pacific Railway in Manitoba where he married and had five children. He joined the Winnipeg Grenadiers in 1933 and when the Second World War began in September 1939, the Grenadiers went on active service and were stationed for a time in Jamaica. In October 1941, at the request of the British Government, the battalion was sent to reinforce the garrison in Hong Kong.



**VC Action:** On 8 December 1941, units of the Japanese Army moved against British defences in Hong Kong. By 18 December, three Japanese regiments had landed on the Island. Very early on the morning of 19 December, "A" Company of the Winnipeg Grenadiers was ordered to clear the enemy out of a feature named Jardine's Lookout, and then to advance on Mount Butler and recapture it. Soon after dawn, part of "A" Company led by Company Sergeant-Major Osborne mounted a bayonet charge and took the summit of Mount Butler. Three hours later, when three companies of Japanese troops counterattacked and forced his men down the western slope of the hill, Osborne calmly directed covering fire to keep the enemy at bay. At length, after Osborne's party had rejoined the rest of "A" Company, the Japanese managed to surround the whole group. By mid-afternoon, having driven off two Japanese attacks and with ammunition running low and casualties mounting, the company commander, Major A.B. Gresham, decided to surrender and stepped out into the open with a white flag. He was immediately shot dead by the Japanese, who now began to throw grenades into "A" Company's position. CSM Osborne picked up several of the grenades and returned them to the enemy. Finally, a grenade fell in a place where Osborne could not retrieve it in time. Shouting a warning as he shoved one man aside, he threw himself on the grenade, which exploded and killed him instantly.

When the story of CSM Osborn's leadership and sacrifice became known after the defeat of Japan, he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"At Hong Kong on the morning of the 19th December, 1941, a Company of the Winnipeg Grenadiers to which Company-Sergeant-Major Osborn belonged, became divided during an attack on Mount Butler, a hill rising steeply above sea level. A part of the Company led by Company-Sergeant-Major Osborn captured the hill at the point of the bayonet and held it for three hours when, owing to the superior numbers of the enemy and to fire from an unprotected flank, the position became untenable."*

*Company-Sergeant-Major Osborn and a small group covered the withdrawal and when their turn came to fall back Osborn, single-handed, engaged the enemy while the remainder successfully joined the Company. Company-Sergeant-Major Osborn had to run the gauntlet of heavy rifle and machine gun fire. With no consideration for his own safety he assisted and directed stragglers to the new Company position, exposing himself to heavy enemy fire to cover their retirement. Wherever danger threatened he was there to encourage his men.*

*During the afternoon the Company was cut off from the Battalion and completely surrounded by the enemy who were able to approach to within grenade throwing distance of the slight depression which the Company were holding. Several enemy grenades were thrown which Company-Sergeant-Major Osborn picked up and threw back. The enemy threw a grenade which landed in a position where it was impossible to pick it up and return it in time. Shouting a warning to his comrades this gallant Warrant Officer threw himself on the grenade which exploded killing him instantly. His self-sacrifice undoubtedly saved the lives of many others.*

*Company-Sergeant-Major Osborn was an inspiring example to all throughout the defence which he assisted so magnificently in maintaining against an overwhelming enemy force for over eight and a half hours, and in his death he displayed the highest qualities of heroism and self-sacrifice."*

*The London Gazette, 2nd April 1946*

**Gravesite:** Company Sergeant-Major Osborn has no known grave but his name appears on the Sai Wan Memorial in Victoria, Hong Kong. The SAI WAN MEMORIAL honours over 2,000 men of the land forces of the British Commonwealth and Empire who died in the defence of Hong Kong during the Second World War.

The SAI WAN MEMORIAL is in the form of a shelter building 24 metres long and 5.5 metres wide. It stands at the entrance to Sai Wan Bay War Cemetery, outside Victoria, the capital of Hong Kong. From the semi-circular forecourt, two wide openings lead to the interior of the building. The names are inscribed on panels of Portland stone. The dedicatory inscription reads:

*1939 - 1945 The officers and men whose memory is honoured here died in the defence of Hong Kong in December 1941 and in the ensuing years of captivity and have no known grave.*



**Sai Wan Cemetery Memorial Panels**

**Medal Location:** His medal is on display at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.



**CSM Osborn's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** Osborn was the first Canadian awarded a Victoria Cross in the Second World War. His was the only Victoria Cross awarded for the Battle of Hong Kong.

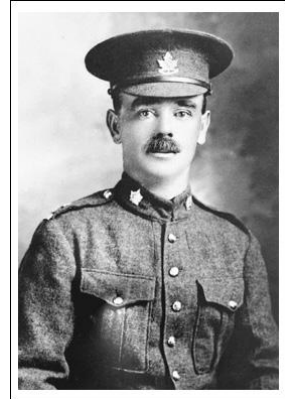
At forty-two years of age he was the second oldest VC recipient in the Second World War.

He is memorialized by a statue located in Hong Kong Park.



## Private John George Pattison, VC

John George Pattison was born on 8 September 1875 in Woolwich, England. Son of Harry and Mary Pattison; husband of Mrs. S. L. Pattison, of Calgary, Alberta. He emigrated to Canada in 1906 with his wife and four children. He worked for the Calgary Gas Company before he joined the army. In May 1916, at the age of 40, he enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, serving in the 50th Infantry Battalion.



**VC Action:** Private Pattison earned the Victoria Cross on Vimy Ridge in France on 10 April 1917, the day after the ridge was successfully attacked and captured by the Canadian Corps. After surviving the very heavy artillery bombardment and the assault of the previous day, several German units were regrouping in order to stop any further advance by the Canadians. As the 50th Battalion moved forward, its progress was checked by an enemy machine gun. Pattison hurried ahead from shell-hole to shell-hole until he was within 30 metres of the German position. In the face of heavy gunfire, he threw hand grenades into the emplacement, killing and wounding some of the enemy. Before the five remaining defenders could recover, Private Pattison charged the position and overcame them.

Just over seven weeks later, on 3 June 1917, Private Pattison was killed in an attack on a German-held generating station near Lens, in France.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery in attack. When the advance of our troops was held up by an enemy machine gun, which was inflicting severe casualties, Pte. Pattison, with utter disregard of his own safety, sprang forward and, jumping from shell-hole to shell-hole, reached cover within 30 yards of the enemy gun.*

*From this point, in face of heavy fire, he hurled bombs, killing and wounding some of the crew, then rushed forward, overcoming and bayonetting the surviving five gunners.*

*His valour and initiative undoubtedly saved the situation and made possible the further advance to the objective."*

"The London Gazette," No.30215, dated July 31, 1917

**Gravesite:** He is buried in the La Chaudiere Military Cemetery, France, approximately 3 kilometres south of Lens on the north-western outskirts of Vimy.



**La Chaudiere Military Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His medal is held by the Museum of the Regiments in Calgary, Alberta.



**Pte. Pattison's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** Four Canadians received Victoria Crosses during the battle for Vimy Ridge, Captain Thain Wendell MacDowell and Private William Johnstone Milne earning theirs on 9 April and Private John George Pattison his the following day.

Pattison Bridge in Calgary, Alberta and a mountain peak in Jasper National Park (also in Alberta) are named in his honour.

## Major George Randolph Pearkes, VC, CB, DSO, MC, CD

Born in Watford, Hertfordshire, England on 26 February 1883, the oldest child of Louise and George Pearkes, he attended Berkhamsted School. In 1906, he and his brother emigrated to Alberta where they settled near Red Deer. In 1911, George joined the North-West Mounted Police and served in Yukon until the outbreak of the First World War. In 1915, he enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, later rising to command the 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles.



**VC Action:** As well as recognizing his courage, the award of the Victoria Cross to Major Pearkes was due to his skilful handling of his troops at Passchendaele in Belgium on 30 and 31 October 1917. At a particular stage, the **progress of Pearkes's troops** was threatened by a German strongpoint. Quickly evaluating the situation, he captured the position, which enabled him to continue to advance toward his objective, and then to hold it with a small number of men, despite a wound in the thigh.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and skilful handling of the troops under his command during the capture and consolidation of considerably more than the objectives allotted to him, in an attack.*

*Just prior to the advance Maj. Pearkes was wounded in the left thigh. Regardless of his wound, he continued to lead his men with the utmost gallantry, despite many obstacles.*

*At a particular stage of the attack his further advance was threatened by a strong point which was an objective of the battalion on his left, but which they had not succeeded in capturing. Quickly appreciating the situation, he captured and held this point, thus enabling his further advance to be successfully pushed forward.*

*It was entirely due to his determination and fearless personality that he was able to maintain his objective with the small number of men at his command against repeated enemy counter-attacks, both his flanks being unprotected for a considerable depth meanwhile.*

*His appreciation of the situation throughout and the reports rendered by him were invaluable to his Commanding Officer in making dispositions of troops to hold the position captured.*

*He showed throughout a supreme contempt of danger and wonderful powers of control and leading."*

*London Gazette, no.30471, 11 January 1918*

**Post War:** Following the First World War he became a career officer in the army. He was appointed to Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. During the 1920s and early 1930s he was stationed as a staff officer in Winnipeg, Manitoba and in Calgary, Alberta. He also served as staff officer at the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston, Ontario.

In 1925 Pearkes married Constance Blytha Copeman and they had two children. In 1936, he attended the Imperial Defence College for two years.

From 1938 to 1940 he was District Officer Commanding 13th Military District in Calgary. With the opening of hostilities with Germany in the Second World War, Brigadier Pearkes was given command of the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade, The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada.

This comprised a number of units raised in western Canada. In December 1939, Pearkes and his staff left for England to join the 1st Canadian Infantry Division. In February 1940 he developed a serious case of spinal meningitis, but soon recovered.

In November 1941 Pearkes was asked to assume command of the expanding Canadian Corps, taking the place of Andrew McNaughton who was on an extended leave. Pearkes was opposed to the Dieppe Raid and was eventually removed from command of the Corps as a result.

In August 1942 Pearkes was returned to Canada and became General Officer Commanding in Chief Pacific Command, primarily a home defence organization for western Canada. He oversaw defences on Canada's West Coast.

In 1943 Pearkes was part of the planning for Operation Greenlight, retaking the Aleutian Islands from the Japanese.

During the Second World War, in 1944, Pearkes was instrumental in suppressing the Terrace Mutiny, a revolt by conscripts stationed in Terrace, British Columbia resulting from the announcement that conscripts would be deployed overseas. Although successful, Pearkes was extremely critical of the actions that led to it in the first place.

When it became clear that the government was not considering deploying troops for the fighting in the Pacific, Pearkes requested a change of command, or to be allowed to retire. The Cabinet War Committee eventually decided on the latter, and he retired from the Army in February 1945. He went into federal politics, winning the Nanaimo, British Columbia riding for the Progressive Conservative Party.

In the 1945 federal election, he was elected as a Progressive Conservative Party candidate in the riding of Nanaimo, British Columbia. He was re-elected in 1949. In the 1953 election, he was elected in the riding of Esquimalt—Saanich, British Columbia. He was re-elected in the 1957 and 1958 elections.

He was Minister of National Defence from 1957 to 1960 under Prime Minister John Diefenbaker. In 1958, Pearkes recommended that the Avro Arrow program be cancelled. He resigned from federal politics in 1960.

In 1960 he was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of B.C., and became one of the few Lieutenant Governors to agree to an extended term, serving until July 1968.

In 1962 he was appointed Honorary Colonel of his old regiment, the British Columbia Dragoons. He was appointed Honorary Commanding Officer in 1970.

In 1967, he was made a Companion of the Order of Canada.

Pearkes died on 30 May 1984 in Victoria, British Columbia.

**Gravesite:** His grave/memorial is at Holy Trinity Cemetery, West Saanich, Sidney, Victoria, British Columbia.



**MGen Pearkes' Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is displayed at the Canadian War Museum.



**MGen Pearkes' Medal Set**

**Post Script:** In total, nine CEF members were awarded the Victoria Cross during the battle of Passchendaele —Major George Randolph Pearkes, **Captain Christopher Patrick John O’Kelly, Lieutenants Hugh McKenzie and Robert Shankland**, Sergeant George Harry Mullin, Corporal Colin Fraser Barron and Privates Thomas William Holmes, Cecil John Kinross and James Peter Robertson.

Pearkes' name has been honoured in various ways, including:

- George R. Pearkes Arena in Saanich, British Columbia.
- Mount Pearkes, along the mainland British Columbia south coast.
- The George R. Pearkes Children's Foundation
- The George R. Pearkes Centre for Children, a treatment facility for children with cerebral palsy, now part of the Queen Alexandra Centre for Children's Health in Victoria, British Columbia.
- General George R. Pearkes Elementary School in Hudson's Hope, British Columbia.
- The George R. Pearkes Building which houses the Canadian Department of National Defence Headquarters, in Ottawa.
- The George R. Pearkes, VC Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion in Summerside, Prince Edward Island.
- CCGS *George R. Pearkes*, a Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker.
- There are numerous thoroughfares named for him.

## Lieutenant-Colonel Cyrus Wesley Peck, VC, DSO\*

Cyrus Wesley Peck was born in Hopewell Hill, New Brunswick, on April 26, 1871, and was educated at Hopewell Hill Superior School. In June 1887, at the age of 16, he and his family moved to New Westminster, British Columbia, then later to Skeena, BC. As a young man, he pioneered in the Klondike, and set himself up as a broker in salmon-canning, sawmills and towing operations. He was also an elected Unionist Member of Parliament for the Skeena riding.



As a member of the militia, Peck was given a captain's commission and attached to the 30th Battalion, with which he sailed to England. In April 1915, he was promoted to major and later transferred to the 16th Battalion, Canadian Scottish. He was wounded in both legs during fighting around the town of Festubert, France, May 21, 1915. In January 1916, he was given command of the regiment.

In addition to the Victoria Cross, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) twice and Mentioned in Despatches five times.

In 1917, while he was overseas, he was elected to the House of Commons as the Member of Parliament for Skeena in British Columbia.

**VC Action:** Lieutenant-Colonel Peck was awarded the Victoria Cross for his courageous leadership on 2 September 1918, during the fighting for the Drocourt-Quéant Line, near Cagnicourt in France. Seeing that the advance of his battalion had been halted by heavy German fire, Peck conducted a reconnaissance of the enemy position. He then reorganized his battalion to deal with the situation, leading it under intense fire. Ultimately, his actions paved the way for another battalion to push forward.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and skilful leading when in attack under intense fire.*

*His command quickly captured the first objective, but progress to the further objective was held up by enemy machine-gun fire on his right flank.*

*The situation being critical in the extreme, Colonel Peck pushed forward and made a personal reconnaissance under heavy machine-gun and sniping fire, across a stretch of ground which was heavily swept by fire.*

*Having reconnoitred the position he returned, reorganised his battalion, and, acting upon the knowledge personally gained, pushed them forward and arranged to protect his flanks. He then went out under the most*

*intense artillery and machine-gun fire, intercepted the Tanks, gave them the necessary directions, pointing out where they were to make for, and thus pave the way for a Canadian Infantry battalion to push forward. To this battalion he subsequently gave requisite support.*

*His magnificent display of courage and fine qualities of leadership enabled the advance to be continued, although always under heavy artillery and machine-gun fire, and contributed largely to the success of the brigade attack."*

*The London Gazette*, November 15, 1918

**Post War:** At the end of the war, Peck returned home to Skeena, and reclaimed his seat in the House of Commons, being active in veterans' rights issues. In 1924, he became a Legislative Member for British Columbia. He later acted as aide-de-camp for two of Canada's Governors-General.

Peck died in Sydney, British Columbia on 27 September 1956.

**Gravesite:** He is buried in the New Westminster Crematorium in Vancouver, BC.



**LCol Peck's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is held at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, Ontario.



**LCol Peck's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** As the Canadian Corps moved against the Drocourt-Quéant defensive line from 1 to 4 September 1918, seven VCs were awarded to Lieutenant-Colonel Cyrus Wesley Peck, Captain Bellenden Seymour Hutcheson, Sergeant Arthur George Knight, Lance-Corporal William Henry Metcalf and Privates Claude Joseph Patrick Nunney, Walter Leigh Rayfield and John Francis Young.

Peck is reputedly the only Member of Parliament in the British Empire/Commonwealth to have been awarded the Victoria Cross while in office.

## Captain Frederick Thornton Peters, VC, DSO, DSC\*, RN

Frederick Thornton Peters was born in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, on 17 September 1889, son of the Attorney General and the first Liberal Premier of that province. He was educated at St. Peter's Private School, later went to school in Victoria, British Columbia, and from there to Naval School in England. He graduated as a midshipman and three years later he received his commission as a sub-lieutenant.



During the First World War he was decorated with the Distinguished Service Order, the first ever given to a Canadian, and the Distinguished Service Cross for gallantry in action.

**VC Action:** Frederick Thornton "Fritz" Peters was 53 years old, and a captain in the Royal Navy during the Second World War when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the VC:

Operation Reservist (part of Operation Torch, the Allied landings in French North Africa) was an attempt to capture Oran Harbour, Algeria and prevent it from being sabotaged by its French garrison. The two sloops HMS *Walney* and HMS *Hartland* were packed with British Commandos, soldiers of the 6th US Armored Infantry Division and a small detachment of US Marines.

On 8 November 1942 Captain Peters, commanding in *Walney*, led his force through the boom towards the jetty in the face of point-blank fire from shore batteries, the sloop *La Surprise*, and the destroyer *Epervier*. Blinded in one eye, he alone of 11 officers and men on the bridge survived. Besides him, 13 ratings survived *Walney* sinking. The destroyer reached the jetty disabled and ablaze and went down with her colours flying. Captain Peters and a handful of men managed to reach the shore, where they were taken prisoner. *Hartland* came under fire from the French destroyer *Typhon* and blew up with the loss of half her crew. The survivors, like those of *Walney*, were taken prisoner as they reached shore.

Captain Peters was also awarded the U.S. Army Distinguished Service Cross for the same actions.

**Citation:** *"Captain Peters was in the 'suicide charge' by two little cutters at Oran. Walney and Hartland were two ex-American coastguard cutters which were lost in a gallant attempt to force the boom defences in the harbour of Oran during the landings on the North African coast. Captain Peters led his force through the boom in the face of point-blank fire from shore batteries, destroyer and a cruiser - a feat which was described as one of the great episodes of naval history. The Walney reached the jetty*

*disabled and ablaze, and went down with her colours flying. Blinded in one eye, Captain Peters was the only survivor of the seventeen men on the bridge of the Walney. He was taken prisoner but was later released when Oran was captured. On being liberated from the gaol, he was carried through the streets where the citizens hailed him with flowers. He won the D.S.O. and D.S.C. in the last war. He was born in 1889."*

*The London Gazette, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1943*

**Gravesite:** He has no known grave but his name appears on the Naval Memorial at Portsmouth, England.



**Portsmouth Naval Memorial**

**Medal Location:** Captain Peters' medals are held in the Lord Ashcroft Gallery of the Imperial War Museum, London, England.



**Capt. Peters' Medal Set**

**Post Script:** Following the action which won him the Victoria Cross, he was proceeding to England when the plane he was in crashed and he was killed.

Mount Peters near Nelson, British Columbia, where his mother lived in her last years with the family of her daughter Helen Dewdney and her husband E.E.L. Dewdney, was named in his honour in 1946.

## Private Walter Leigh Rayfield, VC

Walter Leigh Rayfield was born in Richmond-on-Thames, England, on October 7, 1881. He attended school in London, before moving to Canada. Before the outbreak of the war, he was involved in the real estate business in Vancouver.

In 1914, he tried to enlist, only to be refused twice, before being accepted by a recruiting office in Los Angeles, California. He was later transferred to the 7th Battalion, 1st British Columbia Regiment.



**VC Action:** Rayfield was awarded the Victoria Cross for three acts of bravery while he was serving near Cagnicourt in France between 2 and 4 September 1918. On the first occasion, Rayfield rushed ahead of his company to attack a German trench, bayoneting two of the enemy and taking ten others captive. Later, he located and engaged a **German sniper, finally charging the marksman's section of trench so aggressively that thirty more enemy soldiers surrendered. Rayfield's third** courageous act was to leave cover and carry a badly wounded comrade to safety through heavy machine gun fire. As well as receiving the Victoria Cross, he was made a member of the Royal Order of the Crown of Belgium by the Belgian government.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery, devotion to duty, and initiative during the operations east of Arras from 2nd to 4th September, 1918.*

*Ahead of his company, he rushed a trench occupied by a large party of the enemy, personally bayoneting two and taking ten prisoners.*

*Later, he located and engaged with great skill, under constant rifle fire, an enemy sniper who was causing many casualties. He then rushed the section of trench from which the sniper had been operating, and so demoralised the enemy by his coolness and daring that thirty others surrendered to him.*

*Again, regardless of his personal safety, he left cover under heavy machine-gun fire and carried in a badly wounded comrade.*

*His indomitable courage, cool foresight, and daring reconnaissance were invaluable to his Company Commander and an inspiration to all ranks."*

*The London Gazette*, December 14, 1918

**Post War:** After the war, Rayfield returned to Canada, spending some time in hospital in Vancouver, later becoming a farmer. He became interested in politics, even running on one occasion for member of the Federal Parliament, but lost by a slim margin. He later moved to Toronto,

where he served as Sergeant-at-Arms at Queen's Park, the seat of the provincial government of Ontario. He was later made Deputy Governor of the Toronto Jail, then became its Governor. He was also an officer of the Queen's York Rangers.

Rayfield died in Toronto, Ontario on 19 February 1949.

**Gravesite:** He is buried at Prospect Cemetery in Toronto.



**Rayfield's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is held by the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, Ontario.



**Capt. Rayfield's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** Rayfield was one of seven Canadian to be awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions on September 2, 1918. The other six Victoria Cross recipients were Claude Joseph Patrick Nunney, William Metcalf, Cyrus Wesley Peck, John Francis Young, Bellenden Hutcheson and Arthur George Knight.

## Surgeon Herbert Taylor Reade, VC, CB

He was born 2 September 1828 in Perth, Upper Canada. He entered the Army as Assistant-Surgeon in November 1850, and reached the rank of Inspector General in November 1886 and retired in December 1887. He served in the Indian Mutiny (1857-8) being present at the Ferozapore Affair, and at the siege, assault and capture of Delhi.



He was 28 years old, and a Surgeon in the 61st Regiment (later The Gloucestershire Regiment), British Army during the Indian Mutiny when the following deeds took place during the Siege of Delhi for which he was awarded the VC

**VC Action:** During the Siege, on September 14th 1857, while he was attending to the wounded at the end of one of the City's streets, a party of rebels advanced, and established themselves in a house, and began to fire on him from the roofs. The wounded were thus in great danger, and would have fallen into the hands of the rebels had not Surgeon Reade drawn his sword and ordering his few orderlies to follow, succeeded in dislodging the Sepoys from their positions on the roofs. His party consisted of about ten, of whom two were killed and five wounded. For his exertions and gallant conduct on this and other occasions, he was Mentioned in Despatches for promotion, and awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"During the siege of Delhi, on the 14th of September, 1857, while Surgeon Reade was attending to the wounded, at the end of one of the streets of the city, a party of rebels advanced from the direction of the Bank, and having established themselves in the houses in the street, commenced firing from the roofs. The wounded were thus in very great danger, and would have fallen into the hands of the enemy, had not Surgeon Reade drawn his sword, and calling upon the few soldiers who were near to follow, succeeded, under a very heavy fire, in dislodging the rebels from their position. Surgeon Reade's party consisted of about ten in all, of whom two were killed, and five or six wounded."*

*Surgeon Reade also accompanied the regiment at the assault of Delhi, and, on the morning of the 16th September, 1857, was one of the first up at the breach in the magazine, which was stormed by the 61st Regiment and Belooch Battalion, upon which occasion he, with a serjeant of the 61st Regiment, spiked one of the enemy's guns."*

*London Gazette:* no. 22477, p. 449, 5 February 1861

**Post War:** He later achieved the rank of Surgeon General. He died in Bath, England on 23 June, 1897.

**Gravesite:** He is buried in Locksbrook Cemetery, Bath.



**Surgeon General Reade's Grave**

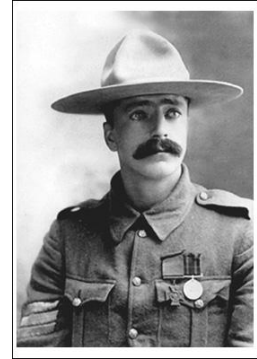
**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is displayed at The Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum, Gloucester, Gloucestershire, England.



**Surgeon General Reade's VC**

## Sergeant Arthur Herbert Lindsay Richardson, VC

Arthur H.L. Richardson was born 23 September 1872 in Southport, England. After apprenticing for a dental surgeon, he became restless and sought more adventure. He immigrated to Canada at roughly age 19 and for the first couple years he lived in Stoney Mountain, Manitoba after which he moved to Regina Saskatchewan.



On 7 May 1894, he was accepted into the North West Mounted Police and after his training was posted to Battleford, at the junction of the Battle and Saskatchewan Rivers. Here he settled as a law enforcement officer until the outbreak of the war in South Africa

When the South African War began in 1899, Richardson obtained leave from the Mounted Police to enlist in Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians), a regiment that was being raised for service in the conflict.

**VC Action:** Sergeant Richardson earned the Victoria Cross on 5 July 1900 at Wolve Spruit, near Standerton in South Africa. When he spotted a wounded Canadian trooper whose horse had been shot, he rode through heavy crossfire to within 300 metres of the enemy in order to rescue his comrade.

**Citation:** *"On the 5th July, 1900, at Wolve Spruit, about 15 miles north of Standerton, a party of Lord Strathcona's Corps, only 38 in number, came into contact, and was engaged at close quarters, with a force of 80 of the enemy."*

*When the order to retire had been given, Sergeant Richardson rode back under a very heavy cross-fire and picked up a trooper whose horse had been shot and who was wounded in two places and rode with him out of fire.*

*At the time when this act of gallantry was performed, Sergeant Richardson was within 300 yards of the enemy, and was himself riding a wounded horse."*

*London Gazette, no.27229, 14 September 1900*

**Post War:** Richardson returned to the Mounted Police after the war ended in 1902, and eventually reached the rank of sergeant-major. However, in 1907 poor health forced him to purchase his discharge and, eventually, to settle in Liverpool, England, where he became a recluse.

During this period, another man named Arthur Richardson, a corporal in The Gordon Highlanders of the British Army, began passing himself off as the winner of the Victoria Cross. He succeeded so well that, when he died, he was buried with military honours. Ironically, the real Arthur Richardson, VC was discovered marching in the funeral cortège of his impostor. As a result, Richardson rose to a certain prominence in his late middle age.

Sergeant Richardson worked as a track layer for the local tramway from the time of his return to England until his death in Liverpool on 15 December 1932.

**Gravesite:** His gravestone can be seen at the Liverpool Cathedral St. James Gardens.



**Memorial to Sgt Richardson in St James Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is displayed at Museum of the Regiments in Calgary, Alberta.



**Sgt. Richardson's Victoria Cross**

**Post Script:** Arthur Richardson was the first man to win a Victoria Cross while serving in a Canadian unit under British command.

## Piper James Cleland Richardson, VC

James Cleland Richardson was born in Bellshill, Scotland on 25 November 1895, and later became a resident of Vancouver, British Columbia, and then Chilliwack, BC. He was a Piper in the 72nd Seaforth Highlanders of Canada and he proceeded overseas as part of the large Seaforth contingent of the 16th (Canadian Scottish) Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, during the First World War when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the VC.



**VC Action:** On 8 October 1916, the 16th Battalion was attacking a German position called Regina Trench during the latter stages of the Battle of the Somme in France. When Piper Richardson's company was held up in front of the enemy trench by uncut barbed wire and intense gunfire, he strode back and forth, calmly playing his bagpipes. Inspired by his example, his company assaulted the barbed wire, made their way through it, and captured the German position.

Richardson survived the attack and was later detailed to escort a wounded comrade and some prisoners of war to the rear. Along the way he realized that he had left his bagpipes behind, and returned to retrieve them. He was never seen alive again. For his exemplary courage under fire in this action, Piper Richardson was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty when, prior to attack, he obtained permission from his Commanding Officer to play his company 'over the top.'*

*As the company approached the objective, it was held up by very strong wire and came under intense fire, which caused heavy casualties and demoralised the formation for the moment. Realising the situation, Piper Richardson strode up and down outside the wire, playing his pipes with the greatest coolness. The effect was instantaneous. Inspired by his splendid example, the company rushed the wire with such fury and determination that the obstacle was overcome and the position captured.*

*Later, after participating in bombing operations, he was detailed to take back a wounded comrade and prisoners.*

*After proceeding about 200 yards Piper Richardson remembered that he had left his pipes behind. Although strongly urged not to do so, he insisted on returning to recover his pipes. He has never been seen since, and death has been presumed accordingly owing to lapse of time."*

"The London Gazette," No. 30967, dated October 18, 1918

**Gravesite:** His remains were recovered in 1920 and he is interred in Adanac Military Cemetery, Somme, France.



**Adanac Military Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His medal is held by the Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Ontario.



**Piper Richardson's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** Richardson's bagpipes were believed to have been lost in the mud of the Somme for almost 90 years until 2002, when the Pipe Major of The Canadian Scottish Regiment (Princess Mary's) responded to an Internet posting. He discovered that Ardvreck preparatory school in Scotland had possession of a set of bagpipes with the unique Lennox tartan on them, the same tartan used by the pipers of the 16th (Canadian Scottish) Battalion. A British Army Chaplain, Major Edward Yeld Bate, had found the pipes in 1917 and brought them back home after the war to a school in Scotland where he was a teacher. The pipes were unidentified for several decades, and served as a broken, mud-caked, and blood-stained reminder of an unknown piper from the Great War.

Andrew Winstanley of The Canadian Club and Pipe Major Roger McGuire were largely responsible for the investigative work into identifying Richardson's pipes. With the support of The Canadian Club and a group of patriotic citizens, Pipe Major McGuire travelled to Scotland in January 2003 to help identify the pipes that had been displayed at Ardvreck School in Crieff, Perthshire, Scotland, for over seven decades. Tomas Christie, a parent of students there and also a piper, initiated the search for the origin of the pipes.

Their collective effort led to conclusive evidence that identified the pipes as those played by Piper Richardson on that fateful day in 1916. An anonymous donor facilitated the purchase of the pipes on behalf of the citizens of Canada. In October 2006, a party of dignitaries visited Scotland and received the pipes from the Headmaster of Ardvreck School for repatriation to Canada.

On 8 November, 2006, the bagpipes were officially repatriated when troops from The Canadian Scottish Regiment (Princess Mary's) placed them at the British Columbia Legislature as a reminder of a generation's valour. They are currently on public display.

The City of Chilliwack unveiled a life-sized bronze statue of Richardson on 11 October 1 2003, the anniversary of the action for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross (VC).

World-renowned sculptor, John Weaver, a resident of Laidlaw near Hope, was commissioned to create the statue.



**Richardson's Statue – Chilliwack, BC**

## Private Thomas Ricketts, VC, DCM

Thomas Ricketts was born in Middle Arm, White Bay, Newfoundland, on 15 April 1901. Ricketts was a fisherman by trade, but when the First World War broke out in Europe, he travelled to St. John's, where he lied about his age and enlisted in the Newfoundland Regiment on 2 September 1916. He stated he was 18 years old, when in reality he was only 15 years old.



Ricketts sailed overseas with the Regiment on 31 January 1917 and, after a training period in England, he joined the Regiment at Rouen, France on 2 July 1917. In November of the same year, he was wounded in the left leg at Cambrai, and admitted to hospital in London. He returned to action with his regiment at the end of April 1918.

**VC Action:** Private Ricketts had still not celebrated his 18th birthday when he earned the Victoria Cross on 14 October 1918 near Ledeghem in Belgium. The advance of the 1st Battalion was being delayed by a German battery firing at close range, resulting in severe casualties for the Newfoundlanders. Ricketts, who was serving in a Lewis machine gun detachment, offered to go with his section commander and a Lewis gun to outflank the battery. **The two moved forward toward the battery's flank** by short rushes, but their ammunition was exhausted while they were still about 300 metres from the German position. Under heavy machine gun fire, Ricketts doubled back 100 metres to get more ammunition, and returned with it to his Lewis gun. His accurate fire from the flank drove many of the enemy soldiers to abandon the heavy weapons in their **positions and seek the protection of a nearby farm.** Private Ricketts's platoon then advanced and captured the four field guns in the battery, four machine guns supporting the position, and eight prisoners.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty on the 14th October, 1918, during the advance from Ledeghem, when the attack was temporarily held up by heavy hostile fire and the platoon to which he belonged suffered severe casualties from the fire of a battery at point-blank range.*

*Pte. Ricketts at once volunteered to go forward with his section commander and a Lewis gun to attempt to outflank the battery. Advancing by short rushes under heavy fire from enemy machine guns with the hostile battery, their ammunition was exhausted when still 300 yards from the battery. The enemy, seeing an opportunity to get their field guns away, began to bring up their gun teams. Pte. Ricketts, at once realising the situation, doubled back 100 yards under the heaviest machine-gun fire, procured further ammunition, and dashed back again to*

*the Lewis gun, and by very accurate fire drove the enemy and the gun teams into a farm.*

*His platoon then advanced without casualties, and captured the four field guns, four machine guns, and eight prisoners.*

*A fifth field gun was subsequently intercepted by fire and captured.*

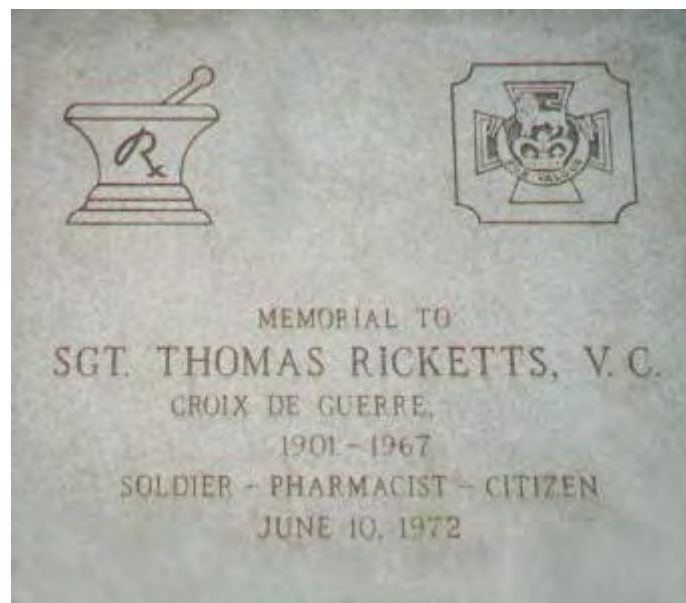
*By his presence of mind in anticipating the enemy intention and his utter disregard of personal safety, Pte. Ricketts secured the further supply of ammunition which directly resulted in these important captures and undoubtedly saved many lives."*

The London Gazette, January 6, 1919

**Post War:** On 1 June 1919, he formally left the army.

Ricketts returned to school to study pharmaceuticals, and eventually opened a pharmacy on the corner of Job and Water Streets in St. John's.

Thomas Ricketts died on 10 February 1967, in St. John's, Newfoundland. He was given a state funeral, and is commemorated by a memorial on the former site of his pharmacy.



**Sgt. Ricketts' Memorial Plaque**

**Gravesite:** He is buried at the Anglican Cemetery on Forest Road in St. John's.

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is on display at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, Ontario.



### **Sgt. Ricketts' Medal Set**

**Post Script:** Ricketts was also awarded the French Croix de Guerre avec Étoile d'Or in September 1918. He was promoted to sergeant on 29 January 1919, and the next day, he boarded a ship in Liverpool for the trip home to Newfoundland.

He is the youngest army recipient of the VC in a combatant role, the two younger recipients being 15-year-olds Hospital Apprentice Andrew Fitzgibbon and Drummer Thomas Flinn (who despite strictly being a non-combatant, received his VC for hand-to-hand combat during the Indian Mutiny). The youngest naval recipient is Jack Cornwell, who was 16.

A play based on the life of Thomas Ricketts, entitled "The Known Soldier", was written by Jeff Pitcher and first performed by Rising Tide Theatre in Newfoundland in 1982. It toured the province of Newfoundland and Labrador in 2006.

## Private James Peter Robertson, VC

Robertson was born in Albion Mines, Pictou, N.S., on Oct. 26, 1883. Four years later his family moved to Springhill, N.S., where he received his education. In 1899, the Robertsons moved to Medicine Hat, Alta. Singing Pete—as he was known—joined the Canadian Pacific Railway where he worked his way up to engineer and earned his nickname for his cheerful singing and whistling whether in the cab or at the roadhouse.



In 1915, he joined the 13th Canadian Mounted Rifles and later, while in England, transferred to the 27th Bn.

**VC Action:** Peter Robertson earned the Victoria Cross during the final assault on Passchendaele, Belgium, 6 November 1917 with the 27th Infantry Battalion. His platoon was held up by barbed wire and a German machine gun. He was able to dash round to an opening on the flank of the enemy position and rush the gun. After a desperate struggle, Robertson killed four of the crew, then turned the enemy gun on the remainder. This enabled his platoon to continue towards its objective, with Robertson still firing the captured gun at the enemy as it retreated. Later when two of his own snipers were wounded in front of their trench, he went out and carried one of them in under severe fire, but when he returned with the second man, he was killed by a bursting shell.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and outstanding devotion to duty in attack. When his platoon was held up by uncut wire and a machine gun causing many casualties, Pte. Robertson dashed to an opening on the flank, rushed the machine gun and, after a desperate struggle with the crew, killed four and then turned the gun on the remainder, who, overcome by the fierceness of his onslaught, were running towards their own lines. His gallant work enabled the platoon to advance. He inflicted many more casualties among the enemy, and then carrying the captured machine gun, he led his platoon to the final objective. He there selected an excellent position and got the gun into action, firing on the retreating enemy who by this time were quite demoralised by the fire brought to bear on them.*

*During the consolidation Pte. Robertson's most determined use of the machine gun kept down the fire of the enemy snipers; his courage and his coolness cheered his comrades and inspired them to the finest efforts.*

*Later, when two of our snipers were badly wounded in front of our trench, he went out and carried one of them in under very severe fire.*

*He was killed just as he returned with the second man."*

"The London Gazette" No. 30471, dated 8th Jan., 1918

**Gravesite:** He is buried in Tyne Cot Cemetery. The Tyne Cot Cemetery is the resting-place of nearly 12,000 soldiers of the Commonwealth Forces, the largest number of burials of any Commonwealth cemetery of either world war.



**Robertson's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His medal is not available for public viewing; it is still privately owned by his family.

**Post Script:** In total, nine CEF members were awarded the Victoria Cross during the battle of Passchendaele - Major George Randolph Pearkes, **Captain Christopher Patrick John O'Kelly, Lieutenants Hugh McKenzie and Robert Shankland**, Sergeant George Harry Mullin, Corporal Colin Fraser Barron and Privates Thomas William Holmes, Cecil John Kinross and James Peter Robertson.

The bravery that earned him the VC made him a legend among the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers the world over. During a postwar international convention in Cleveland, Ohio, 77,000 delegates rose to their feet to salute his gallantry. The delegates also voted unanimously to publish his photograph and story of sacrifice in *The Locomotive Engineering Journal*.

His Victoria Cross was presented to his mother, Mrs Janet Robertson at Medicine Hat, Alberta, by Lieutenant Governor Brett on 25th April 1918. Three of his brothers, Dave, Alex and John, also volunteered for the forces, but his brother John was turned down: unfit for military service. His brother Alex was wounded and spent nearly a year in hospital, before being returned to France. Alex and his brother Dave were still serving in France when the armistice was signed.

In Medicine Hat, the Royal Canadian Legion Branch is named after him as well as a swimming pool and a street.

## Lieutenant Charles Smith Rutherford, VC, MC, MM

Charles Smith Rutherford was born in Haldimand Township, Ontario, on 9 January 1892. He was educated at Dudley Public School and spent his early years on the farm. He enlisted in The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada on March 2, 1916, transferring shortly thereafter to the 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles.

Rutherford was serving in France by June of the same year. He had two terms of duty at Ypres, and then marched with his unit to the Somme. He was wounded in the Regina Trench, but returned from hospital in England in March 1917, in time to take part in the Battle of Vimy Ridge. He was wounded again in June 1917 near Amiens, but returned to action by August.



At the end of October 1917, the then Sgt Rutherford went into action at Passchendaele. For his actions in the Battle of Passchendaele while under the command of Major George Pearkes, who was himself awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions, Rutherford was awarded the Military Medal. After a short period of leave for a course back in England, Rutherford returned to his unit and was given command of No. 9 platoon.

While in action at Arvillers during the Battle of Amiens in August 1918, Rutherford was awarded the Military Cross. With his company, he fought in the capture of the village, when he came upon the German Division headquarters, took a paymaster prisoner - from whom Rutherford took a large sum of German money - and captured 300 new machine guns.

**VC Action:** Finding himself a considerable distance ahead of his men, he noted an enemy party standing before a pillbox ahead of him. Lieutenant Rutherford beckoned, revolver in hand, for them to come to him, and the enemy in return waved for him to come to them. This he did, and by masterly bluff, he informed them that they were surrounded. Incredibly, the entire enemy party of 45, including two officers, surrendered to him. Rutherford then persuaded one of the officers to stop the fire of an enemy machine gun nearby. This allowed his own men to advance quickly to his support. Rutherford then captured another pillbox nearby, and another 35 prisoners, as well as a machine gun.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery, initiative and devotion to duty. When in command of an assaulting party Lt. Rutherford found himself a considerable distance ahead of his men, and at the same moment observed a fully armed strong enemy party outside a 'Pill Box' ahead of him. He beckoned to them with his revolver to come to him, in return*

*they waves to him to come to them. This he boldly did, and informed them that they were prisoners. This fact an enemy officer disputed and invited Lt. Rutherford to enter the 'Pill Box,' an invitation he discreetly declined. By masterly bluff, however, he persuaded the enemy that they were surrounded, and the whole party of 45, including two officers and three machine guns, surrendered to him.*

*Subsequently he induced the enemy officer to stop the fire of an enemy machine-gun close by, and Lt. Rutherford took advantage of the opportunity to hasten the advance of his men to his support.*

*Lt. Rutherford then observed that the right assaulting party was held up by heavy machine-gun fire from another 'Pill Box.' Indicating an objective to the remainder of his party he attacked the 'Pill Box' with a Lewis gun section and captured a further 35 prisoners with machine guns, thus enabling the party to continue their advance.*

*The bold and gallant action of this officer contributed very materially to the capture of the main objective and was a wonderful inspiration to all ranks in pressing home the attack on a very strong position."*

*The London Gazette*, November 15, 1918

**Post War:** After the war Rutherford returned home to Colborne where he met and married Helen Haig in 1921. The couple established a dairy farm in Vernonville, a small hamlet close to Colborne. They had four children, Andrew, Isabella, Rosemary and Dora.

In 1934, he served as Sergeant at Arms of the Ontario Legislature when Mitchell Hepburn was Premier. According to certain accounts of his six years of service in the Legislature, Rutherford is the first Sergeant to have ejected a member of the Legislature.

In 1941, Rutherford enlisted in the Veteran Home Guard. As well as being posted to Arvida, Québec, and Kingston, Ontario, he was sent to the Bahamas from 1942 to 1943, where his duty was to guard the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. By the end of World War II, Rutherford had achieved the rank of Captain.

Throughout his military and civilian career, Rutherford distinguished himself through his actions and his contributions. He was awarded more than a dozen medals for his actions in both world wars. At the time of his passing on June 11, 1989, he was the last surviving recipient of the Victoria Cross of World War I.

Rutherford died in Ottawa, Ontario, on 11 June 1989.

**Gravesite:** He is buried at the Union Cemetery in Colbourne, Ontario.



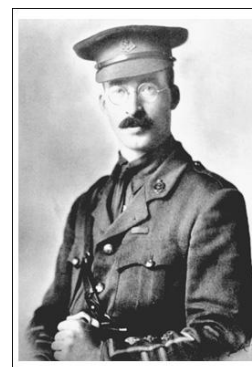
**Capt. Rutherford's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His medal is not publicly held.

**Post Script:** The Colt automatic pistol used by Charles Rutherford in August 1918 to capture those 80 enemy soldiers is on display at the Royal Canadian Military Institute in Toronto, Ontario.

## Captain Francis Alexander Caron Scrimger, VC

Francis Alexander Caron Scrimger was born in Montreal, Quebec, on 10 February 1881. He studied medicine at McGill University. At the outbreak of the war, he was a surgeon and lecturer. He joined the Canadian Army Medical Corps and served as medical officer of the 14th Infantry Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force.



**VC Action:** Captain Scrimger earned the Victoria Cross in Ypres, Belgium, 25 April 1915 for bravery in directing the evacuation of the wounded from his advanced dressing station under heavy enemy shelling. He carried a severely wounded officer to safety, and remained with him under fire until additional help could be obtained.

**Citation:** *"On the afternoon of 25th April, 1915, in the neighbourhood of Ypres, when in charge of an advanced dressing station in some farm buildings, which were being heavily shelled by the enemy, he directed under heavy fire the removal of the wounded, and he himself carried a severely wounded Officer out of a stable in search of a place of greater safety. When he was unable alone to carry this Officer further, he remained with him under fire till help could be obtained."*

*During the very heavy fighting between 22nd and 25th April, Captain Scrimger displayed continuously day and night the greatest devotion to his duty among the wounded at the front."*

*London Gazette, no.29202, 23 June 1915*

**Post War:** Following the war, he returned to Montreal as assistant surgeon at the Royal Victoria Hospital and in 1936 became surgeon-in-chief. Scrimger died in Montreal, Quebec, on 13 February 1937.

**Gravesite:** He is buried in Mount Royal Cemetery, Montreal, Quebec.



**Capt. Scrimger's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His medal is held by the Canadian War Museum.

**Post Script:** Scrimger was not the only Canadian awarded a Victoria Cross for his actions at Second Ypres. He was joined by Lieutenant Edward Donald Bellew, Company Sergeant-Major Frederick William Hall and Lance-Corporal Frederick Fisher.

After Ypres, Scrimger was wounded and invalided back to England where he later joined the staff of the Canadian Army Hospital at Ramsgate. On 21 July 1915, he received his VC from King George V at Buckingham Palace.

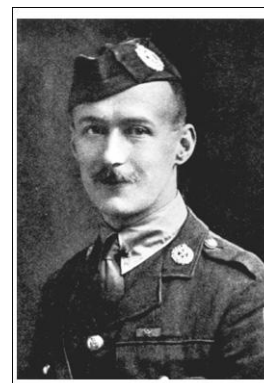
Scrimger is also purported to have convinced John McCrae to submit his poem, "In Flanders Field", to the British magazine *Punch*.

He is also credited with instructing Canadian troops to urinate on their handkerchiefs during a chlorine gas attack and to breathe through them, a practice that is credited with saving hundreds of lives.

His only son, Capt. Alexander Caron Scrimger, 29th Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment (South Alberta Regiment), Canadian Armoured Corps, was killed in action in Holland, October 28, 1944, aged 23 years.

## Lieutenant Robert Shankland, VC, DCM

Born in Ayr, Scotland, on October 10, 1887, Robert Shankland was the son of a railroad guard, and his **first job was that of a clerk in the stationmaster's** office. He moved to Canada in 1910 where he lived on Pine Street (later renamed Valour Road in honour of himself and two other Victoria Cross winners) and worked as assistant cashier for the Crescent Creamery Company in Winnipeg. When World War I broke out he joined the 43rd Battalion (Cameron Highlanders of Canada) Canadian Expeditionary Force as a private. He rose to regimental sergeant-major and earned the Distinguished Conduct Medal at Sanctuary Wood in June 1916. He was commissioned in the fall, on the Somme.



**VC Action:** Shankland earned the Victoria Cross in Passchendaele, Belgium, 26 October 1917 with the 43rd Infantry Battalion, fighting for the Bellevue Spur, one of the main lines of defence before Passchendaele. Having gained a position, he rallied the remnants of his own platoon and men from other companies, disposed them to command the ground in front, and proceeded to inflict heavy casualties upon the retreating enemy. Later, he dispersed a counter-attack, which enabled supporting troops to come up unmolested.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and resource in action under critical and adverse conditions.*

*Having gained a position he rallied the remnant of his own platoon and men of other companies, disposed them to command the ground in front, and inflicted heavy casualties upon the retreating enemy. Later, he dispersed a counter-attack, thus enabling supporting troops to come up unmolested.*

*He then personally communicated to Battalion Headquarters an accurate and valuable report as to the position on the Brigade frontage, and after doing so rejoined his command and carried on until relieved.*

*His courage and splendid example inspired all ranks and coupled with his great gallantry and skill undoubtedly saved a very critical situation."*

*London Gazette, no.30433, 18 December 1917*

**Post War:** Following the war, Shankland stayed in the Militia with the Camerons and in his civilian work served as secretary-manager for several Winnipeg firms. He eventually moved to Victoria and joined the Canadian Scottish Regiment. When the Second World War started, he returned to Winnipeg and rejoined the Camerons. Now a Major, he went

overseas with the battalion as Officer Commanding Headquarters Company. Due to his age (53) he was too old for combat duty. Promoted to lieutenant colonel, Shankland was appointed camp commandant of the Canadian Army Headquarters in England in December 1940.

According to the May/June 2005 issue of the Legion Magazine, "in 1946, Shankland took his discharge and became secretary of a leading securities firm in Vancouver. Shankland died in Vancouver, British Columbia, on 20 January 1968.

**Gravesite:** His body was cremated and his ashes scattered in the grounds of Vancouver's Mountain View Cemetery.



**Mountain View Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His medal is currently on public display at The Manitoba Museum in Winnipeg, Manitoba, on loan from the Canadian War Museum as part of a display celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada. Shankland's battledress blouse with ribbons and his miniatures are on display in The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada Museum at Mint<sub>o</sub> Armoury in Winnipeg.

The medal was placed on auction on May 25, 2009. Despite public outrage of its sale from an anonymous seller, controversy was averted when the Canadian War Museum purchased the medal at auction for \$240,000 in order to keep it in Canadian public hands forever.



**Lt. Shankland's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** In total, nine CEF members were awarded the Victoria Cross following the Battle of Passchendaele—Major George Randolph Pearkes, **Captain Christopher Patrick John O’Kelly, Lieutenants Hugh McKenzie and Robert Shankland**, Sergeant George Harry Mullin, Corporal Colin Fraser Barron and Privates Thomas William Holmes, Cecil John Kinross and James Peter Robertson.

Fred Hall, Leo Clarke and Robert Shankland all lived in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. They all happened to live on the same street, Pine Street and it is believed to be the only street in the world to have three Victoria Cross winners that lived there. The city of Winnipeg later renamed it Valour Road in honour of the men. A bronze plaque is mounted on a street lamp at the corner of Portage Ave and Valour Road to tell this story.



**The memorial plaque erected by The Womens Canadian Club of Winnipeg in 1925 renaming Pine Street “Valour Road” in Winnipeg**

## Lance-Sergeant Ellis Welwood Sifton, VC

Ellis Wellwood Sifton was born in Wallacetown, Ontario, 12 October 1891. Son of John J. Sifton, in civilian life, Lance Sergeant Sifton had been a farmer. Of Irish and Anglican background, Ellis Wellwood Sifton was a farmer when he volunteered for service in the Canadian Expeditionary Force on 23 Oct. 1914 at St Thomas, Ont. He joined the 18th Infantry Battalion, which eventually became part of the 4th Infantry Brigade of the 2nd Division of the Canadian Corps. He was appointed lance-corporal before embarking for overseas on 18 April 1915.



**Sifton's experiences in the trenches mirrored those of thousands of other young Canadians of the 2nd Division as his battalion entered the line for the first time in September 1915 (in which month he was promoted corporal) and as it engaged in its first major battle, an attempt to capture one of the craters near Saint-Eloi (Sint-Elooi), Belgium, in April 1916. Trench routine was punctuated by raids in July and August before the unit moved to the Somme front in France, where it captured its objectives in the assault on Courcellette on 15 September. Casualties were heavy, the battalion losing over 50 men killed, or about 1 in 12 of those who had participated in the attack. The following month a failed attempt to take Regina Trench led to another 25 men dying in battle. Sifton's unit then moved to the base of the ridge near Vimy, where it engaged in trench raids in December 1916 and March 1917. On 14 March 1917 Sifton was promoted lance-sergeant.**

**VC Action:** On the day of his Victoria Cross action (9 April 1917) with the 18th Infantry Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, Lance-Sergeant **Sifton's company** was suffering severely at the hands of enemy machine-gun nests. Sifton dashed through a gap in the wire, ran across open ground and charged a machine-gun emplacement with hand grenades, and attacked the gunners with his bayonet. Having cleared the nest, and with his comrades following behind, Sifton subsequently helped hold off a counter-attack with bayonet and rifle butt. Just as he was about to be relieved, however, he was fatally shot by a wounded German.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty.*

*During the attack in enemy trenches Sjt. Sifton's company was held up by machine gun fire which inflicted many casualties. Having located the gun he charged it single-handed, killing all the crew.*

*A small enemy party advanced down the trench, but he succeeded in keeping these off till our men had gained the position.*

*He was killed just as he returned with the second man. In carrying out this gallant act he was killed, but his conspicuous valour undoubtedly saved many lives and contributed largely to the success of the operation."*

The London Gazette, dated 8th June, 1917

**Gravesite:** Lance Sergeant Sifton is buried in the Lichfield Crater Cemetery near Neuville-Saint-Vaast, France.



**Lichfield Crater Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His medal is held in the Elgin County Pioneer Museum, St Thomas, Ontario.

**Post Script:** Four Canadians received Victoria Crosses during the battle for Vimy Ridge, Captain Thain Wendell MacDowell, Lance-Sergeant Ellis Wellwood Sifton, and Privates William Johnstone Milne and John George Pattison.

A Memorial Plaque in his honour has been erected in Tyrconnell, Ontario by the Ontario Archaeological and Historic Sites Board.

## Captain John Alexander Sinton, VC, OBE

Sinton was born in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, the third of the seven children of Walter Lyon Sinton (1860–1930) and his wife, Isabella Mary, née Pringle (1860–1924), a family of Quaker linen manufacturers from north of Ireland. In 1890 they returned to Ulster where he was educated and lived for the rest of his life. He studied at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution and read medicine at the Queen's University, Belfast, where he graduated in 1908 as first in his year. He went on to attain degrees from the University of Cambridge (1910) and the University of Liverpool (1911).



He joined the Indian Medical Service in 1911, coming first in the entrance examinations, but before being posted to India was seconded as the Queen's University research scholar to the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine where his contact with Sir Ronald Ross may have influenced his later career as a malariologist.

**VC Action:** He was 31 years old and a Captain in the Indian Medical Service (IMS), Indian Army, during the First World War. On 21 January 1916 at the Orah Ruins, Mesopotamia, Captain Sinton attended to the wounded under very heavy fire.

**Citation:** *For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty. Although shot through both arms and through the side, he refused to go to hospital, and remained as long as daylight lasted, attending to his duties under very heavy fire. In three previous actions Captain Sinton displayed the utmost bravery."*

**Post War:** In July 1921 he was put in charge of the quinine and malaria inquiry under the newly formed Central Malaria Bureau. He was appointed the first director of the malaria survey of India at Kasauli in 1925.

At Kasauli, Sinton met Eadith Seymour Steuart-Martin (1894–1977), daughter of Edwin Steuart-Martin and Ada May Martin (née Martin), whom he married on 19 September 1923. Their daughter, Eleanor Isabel Mary Sinton, was born at Kasauli on 9 December 1924.

He became Manson fellow at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and at the malaria laboratory of the Ministry of Health at Horton Hospital, near Epsom. He also became adviser on malaria to the Ministry of Health. With the outbreak of the Second World War, Sinton was recalled as an IMS reservist and commanded a hospital in India. At the age of fifty-five he was again retired, but was appointed consultant

malariologist to the east African force and later to Middle East command, retiring with the honorary rank of brigadier in August 1943.

He then worked as consultant malariologist to the War Office, travelling widely to Assam, Australia, Burma, Ceylon, India, New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands, where his expertise in malaria was invaluable. Further military decorations resulted from this period, after which Sinton returned to Northern Ireland and retired to Cookstown. He was elected Fellow of the Royal Society in 1946.

He died at his home at Slaghtfreedan Lodge, Cookstown, County Tyrone, on 25 March 1956.

**Gravesite:** He was buried with full military honours on 28 March at Claggan Presbyterian cemetery in Cookstown.



**BGen Sinton's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is displayed at the Army Medical Services Museum at Aldershot.



**Sinton's Victoria Cross**

**Post Script:** He later achieved the rank of Brigadier (1943), was awarded the Russian Order of St George and Mentioned in Dispatches six times.

He is the only person to have had the letters *VC, FRS* following their name. In his retirement he served as Deputy Lieutenant for County Tyrone, Northern Ireland.

His name is remembered in Sinton Halls, a student housing block at the Queen's University, Belfast, here he sat on the senate and was a Pro-Chancellor. Others honoured Sinton by naming three mosquito species, *Aedes sintoni*, *Anopheles sintoni*, and *Anopheles sintonoides*, one sandfly species, *Sergentomyia sintoni*, and one subgenus *Sintonius* of the genus *Phlebotomus*, after him.

**Author's Note:** Despite being born in Canada, he moved back to the United Kingdom as a boy and lived out the rest of his life, including winning the Victoria Cross in the service of the United Kingdom.

## Private Ernest Alvia Smith, VC

Ernest Alvia "Smokey" Smith was born in New Westminster, British Columbia, on 3 May 1914. He was educated at the Herbert Spencer Elementary School and the T.J. Trapp Technical High School. Before enlisting in the army he engaged in contracting work. He enlisted in the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada and served with that unit until 13 April 1945.



**VC Action:** The action occurred in Savio, Italy, on 21 and 22 October 1944 as a forward company of the Seaforths Highlanders on the German side of the Savio River attempted to consolidate the bridgehead. It was suddenly counter-attacked by three German tanks, two self-propelled guns and about thirty infantry. Despite heavy fire, Smith led his PIAT (anti-tank projector) group across an open field to a suitable defensive position. His men then found themselves face to face with one of the German tanks coming down the road, its machine guns blazing. Smith held his ground, and at ten metres range fired the PIAT and disabled the tank. The group then moved out onto the roadway, firing tommy guns and forced the enemy to withdraw in disorder.

**Citation:** *"In Italy on the night of 21st/22nd October, 1944, a Canadian Infantry Brigade was ordered to establish a bridgehead across the Savio River.*

*The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada were selected as the spearhead of the attack and in weather most unfavourable to the operation they crossed the river and captured their objectives in spite of strong opposition from the enemy.*

*Torrential rain had caused the Savio River to rise six feet in five hours and as the soft vertical banks made it impossible to bridge the river no tanks or anti-tank guns could be taken across the raging stream to the support of the rifle companies.*

*As the right forward company was consolidating its objective it was suddenly counter-attacked by a troop of three Mark V Panther tanks supported by two self-propelled guns and about thirty infantry and the situation appeared almost hopeless.*

*Under heavy fire from the approaching enemy tanks, Private Smith, showing great initiative and inspiring leadership, led his Piat Group of two men across an open field to a position from which the Piat could best be employed. Leaving one man on the weapon, Private Smith crossed the road with a companion, and obtained another Piat. Almost immediately an enemy tank came down the road firing its machine guns along the line of the ditches. Private Smith's comrade was wounded. At a range of thirty*

*feet and having to expose himself to the full view of the enemy, Private Smith fired the Piat and hit the tank, putting it out of action. Ten German infantry immediately jumped off the back of the tank and charged him with Schmeissers and grenades. Without hesitation Private Smith moved out onto the road and with his Tommy gun at point blank range, killed four Germans and drove the remainder back. Almost immediately another tank opened fire and more enemy infantry closed in on Smith's position. Obtaining some abandoned Tommy gun magazines from a ditch, he steadfastly held his position, protecting his comrade and fighting the enemy with his Tommy gun until they finally gave up and withdrew in disorder.*

*One tank and both self-propelled guns had been destroyed by this time, but yet another tank swept the area with fire from a longer range. Private Smith, still showing utter contempt for enemy fire, helped his wounded friend to cover and obtained medical aid for him behind a nearby building. He then returned to his position beside the road to await the possibility of a further enemy attack.*

*No further immediate attack developed, and as a result the battalion was able to consolidate the bridgehead position so vital to the success of the whole operation, which led to the eventual capture of San Giorgio Di Cesena and a further advance to the Ronco River.*

*Thus, by the dogged determination, outstanding devotion to duty and superb gallantry of this private soldier, his comrades were so inspired that the bridgehead was held firm against all enemy attacks, pending the arrival of tanks and anti-tank guns some hours later."*

London Gazette, no.36849, 20 December 1944

**Post War:** For some time following demobilization Ernest "Smokey" Smith worked in a photographic studio in New Westminster. In 1947, Smith wed Esther Weston and subsequently sired two children, David and Norma-Jean. In 1951 he re-enlisted in the Permanent Force during the Korean War. Because of his iconic status, he was not put into combat. He retired from service again in 1964, having served for some time in Vancouver as a recruiting sergeant. As a result of his extended service, he received the Canadian Forces Decoration for 12 years of service.

After his retirement from the military, Smith opened a travel agency with his wife, "Smith Travel", which was in operation from 1969 to 1992. During these years, Smith regularly visited sites related to World War II with clients. The couple retired in 1992, and Smith's wife died four years later, in 1996.

He was appointed a member of the Order of Canada in November 1995.

**Sergeant Ernest Alvia "Smokey" Smith, VC, CM, OBC, CD, died peacefully in his Vancouver home on 3 August 2005 at the age of ninety-one.**

**Gravesite:** **Smokey Smith's last** wishes concerning his final resting place were carried out the day after the funeral service. He had asked to have his cremated remains buried at sea, specifically to have his ashes scattered over the Pacific Ocean. **This duty fell to the ship's company of HMCS *Ottawa***, a Canadian destroyer stationed in nearby Esquimalt. **On the morning of the 14th Smith's immediate family and his remains** embarked onboard *Ottawa* for the brief journey. At a little after 1030 **hours, Smokey Smith's remains were scattered over** the water off Point Atkinson, near Howe Sound.

**Medal Location:** Smith donated his VC to the Seaforth Highlanders in his will. The medal is on display at the Seaforth Armoury, located at the foot of the Burrard Street Bridge in Vancouver, British Columbia.



### **Pte. Smith's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** He was the only Canadian private soldier to earn the Victoria Cross in the Second World War.

He was the last living Canadian recipient of the Victoria Cross.

He was made an honorary member of the Royal Military College of Canada, student # S132.

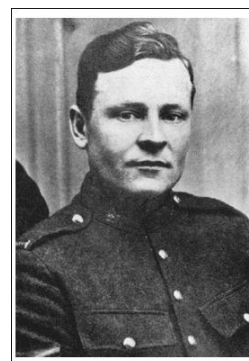
After a few preliminary ceremonies in Vancouver immediately following **his death, Sergeant Smith's cremated remains were flown to Ottawa to** allow them to lie-in-state in the foyer of the House of Commons in the Centre Block of the national Parliament Building. The honour of lying-in-state in the Parliament Building had previously only been granted to a handful of prominent Canadians – former governors-general, prime ministers, or members of parliament – with the notable exception of the Unknown Soldier in 2000. Sergeant Smith received the honour, appropriately enough, in the Year of the Veteran. As the bearer party carried the casket into the building the bell in the Peace Tower was rung, ninety-one times in total. Flags across the national capital, across Canada and on Canadian buildings abroad were lowered to half-mast.

Four days later, on 13 August, a military funeral was held in Vancouver. The procession, including hundreds of men and women in uniform, slowly moved along Burrard Street, the same route that the combat veterans of The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada – **Smith's wartime regiment** – had followed when they returned to Canada in the fall of 1945. When the casket crossed the Burrard Street Bridge four CF-18 fighter jets appeared overhead, grouping themselves in the missing man formation to signify **the "loss of a comrade"**.

After a two kilometre journey, the funeral procession reached St. **Andrew's Wesley United Church, the site of the funeral service.** Eight pallbearers, all Seaforths, removed the casket from the gun carriage and carried Sergeant Smith into the church.

## Sergeant Robert Spall, VC

Robert Spall was born in Ealing, England, on 5 March 1890. At the age of two, he moved with his parents to Canada and lived in Winnipeg. In August 1915 he joined the 90th Infantry Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, and later was posted to Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in which he became a sergeant.



**VC Action:** Spall earned the Victoria Cross in Parvillers, France, 12 and 13 August 1918 during an enemy counter-attack, when his platoon became isolated. Taking a Lewis gun, he inflicted numerous casualties, then descended into the trench and directed his men into a sap seventy-five metres from the enemy. He again mounted the parapet of the trench and resumed his fire in order to further hold up the enemy. It was at this point that he was killed; Spall sacrificed his life in order to extricate his platoon from a difficult situation, and his bravery allowed his men to be saved.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and self-sacrifice when, during an enemy counter-attack, his platoon was isolated. Thereupon Sjt. Spall took a Lewis gun and, standing on the parapet, fired upon the advancing enemy, inflicting very severe casualties. He then came down the trench directing the men into a sap seventy-five yards from the enemy. Picking up another Lewis gun, this gallant N.C.O. again climbed the parapet, and by his fire held up the enemy. It was while holding up the enemy at this point that he was killed.*

*Sjt. Spall deliberately gave his life in order to extricate his platoon from a most difficult situation, and it was owing to his bravery that the platoon was saved."*

*London Gazette, no.30975, 26 October 1918*

**Gravesite:** Robert Spall, like many soldiers of the Great War, has no known grave, possibly due in part to the fact the German counterattack happened during the night of August 12-13, and to the nature of the battle in which he was engaged when he was killed. He is commemorated on the Canadian National Vimy Memorial, at Vimy Ridge, France. Canada's most impressive tribute overseas to those Canadians who fought and gave their lives in the First World War is the majestic and inspiring Vimy Memorial, which overlooks the Douai Plain from the highest point of Vimy Ridge, about eight kilometres northeast of Arras on the N17 towards Lens. The Memorial is signposted from this road to the left, just before you enter the village of Vimy from the south. At the base of the memorial, these words appear in French and in English:

TO THE VALOUR OF THEIR COUNTRYMEN IN THE GREAT WAR AND IN  
MEMORY OF THEIR SIXTY THOUSAND DEAD THIS MONUMENT IS RAISED  
BY THE PEOPLE OF CANADA

Inscribed on the ramparts of the Vimy Memorial are the names of over 11,000 Canadian soldiers who were posted as *'missing, presumed dead'* in France.



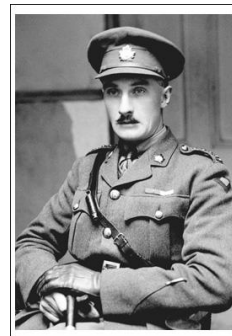
**Vimy Memorial**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is displayed at the Museum of the Regiments in Calgary, Alberta.

**Post Script:** Ten members of the Canadian Corps earned Victoria Crosses between 8 and 13 August—Lieutenants Jean Brillant and James Edward Tait, Sergeants Robert Spall and Raphael Louis Zengel, Corporals Alexander Picton Brereton, Frederick George Coppins, Herman James Good and Harry Garnet Bedford Miner and Privates John Bernard Croak and Thomas Dinesen.

## Lieutenant Marcus Strachan, VC, MC

Harcus Strachan was born in Borrowstounness, Scotland, on 7 November 1887. He immigrated to Canada in 1908 and enlisted in the Fort Garry Horse in 1915. He was commissioned the following year. In May 1917 Strachan was awarded the Military Cross after a raid near St. Quentin.



**VC Action:** Six months later, he earned the Victoria Cross in Masnières, France, 20 November 1917 in a similar action.

He took command of his squadron when the squadron leader was killed. Lieutenant Strachan led the squadron through the enemy line of machine-gun posts, and then, with the surviving men, led the charge on the enemy battery, killing seven of the gunners with his sword. With the German battery silenced, Strachan went on to cut telephone communications three kilometres behind the enemy line. He then rallied his men and fought his way back at night to his own lines, safely bringing in all his unwounded men, in addition to fifteen prisoners.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and leadership during operations.*

*He took command of the squadron of his regiment when the squadron leader, approaching the enemy front line at a gallop, was killed. Lt. Strachan led the squadron through the enemy line of machine-gun posts, and then, with the surviving men, led the charge on the enemy battery, killing seven of the gunners with his sword. All the gunners having been killed and the battery silenced, he rallied his men and fought his way back at night through the enemy's line, bringing all unwounded men safely in, together with 15 prisoners.*

*The operation – which resulted in the silencing of an enemy battery, the killing of the whole battery personnel and many infantry, and the cutting of three main lines of telephone communication two miles in rear of the enemy's front line – was only rendered possible by the outstanding gallantry and fearless leading of this officer."*

*London Gazette, no.30433, 18 December 1917*

**Post War:** After the war, he farmed in Edmonton before going into banking.

Strachan later commanded the 1st Battalion, Edmonton Fusiliers during the Second World War. After the war he retired and moved to Vancouver.

Strachan died in Vancouver, British Columbia, on 1 May 1982.

**Gravesite:** Strachan's ashes were scattered near the Rose Garden Columbarium at Boal Chapel Memorial Gardens in North Vancouver, BC on 5 May 1982.

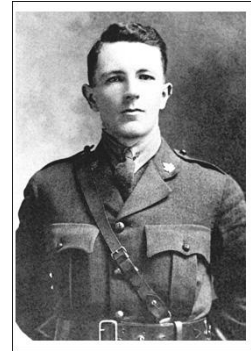
**Medal Location:** His medal is not held publicly.

**Post Script:** Strachan, having been promoted to captain, received his VC from King George V on January 6, 1918.

Mount Strachan, on the Alberta/British Columbia was named in his honour.

## Lieutenant James Edward Tait, VC, MC

James Edward Tait was born in Kirkcudbrightshire, Dumfries, Scotland, May 27, 1886. He later moved to Canada, and was employed by a government survey party in the Kettle River area, Northwest Territories. It took some time for news of the outbreak of the war to reach him, but as soon as he heard, he enlisted in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with the 100th Battalion, in February 1916. In February 1917, after sailing overseas, he transferred to the 78th Battalion, Manitoba Regiment (Winnipeg Grenadiers).



At the beginning of April 1917, Tait was wounded, but was able to take part in the Battle of Vimy Ridge, where he was again wounded, this time a gunshot to his left leg. His actions at Vimy earned him the Military Cross. He was wounded in September 1917, but remained in action, before being wounded again in April 1918.

**VC Action:** Lieutenant Tait earned the Victoria Cross posthumously for his actions while serving with the 78th Infantry Battalion, CEF during the first four days of the Battle of Amiens, 8 to 11 August 1918. When the progress of his company was checked by German machine guns in Beaucourt Wood in France, Tait rallied his men and led them forward despite the intense fire. However, a concealed enemy machine gun continued to cause heavy casualties until Tait charged the gun position alone, and killed the machine gunner. Inspired by his action, his men attacked the main German position, capturing 20 prisoners and 12 machine guns. This enabled the 78th Battalion to resume its advance. On another occasion, when the enemy counterattacked, Tait, although wounded mortally by an exploding shell, continued to direct his men in the defence until he died.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and initiative in attack. The advance having been checked by intense machine-gun fire, Lt. Tait rallied his company and led it forward with consummate skill and dash under a hail of bullets. A concealed machine-gun, however, continued to cause many casualties. Taking a rifle and bayonet, Lt. Tait dashed forward alone and killed the enemy gunner. Inspired by his example his men rushed the position, capturing twelve machine-guns and twenty prisoners. His valorous action cleared the way for his battalion to advance.*

*Later when the enemy counter-attacked our positions under intense artillery bombardment, this gallant officer displayed outstanding courage and leadership, and though mortally wounded by a shell, continued to direct and aid his men until his death."*

*London Gazette, no.30922, 27 September 1918*

**Gravesite:** He has no known grave, and is commemorated on a special memorial at the Fouquescourt British Cemetery, in Fouquescourt, France, roughly forty kilometres southeast of Amiens.



**Fouquescourt British Cemetery**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is on display at the Museum of the Regiments in Calgary, Alberta.

**Post Script:** Ten members of the Canadian Corps earned Victoria Crosses during the Battle of Amiens between 8 and 13 August—Lieutenants Jean Brilliant and James Edward Tait, Sergeants Robert Spall and Raphael Louis Zengel, Corporals Alexander Picton Brereton, Frederick George Coppins, Herman James Good and Harry Garnet Bedford Miner and Privates John Bernard Croak and Thomas Dinesen.

## Major Frederick Albert Tilston, VC

Frederick Albert Tilston was born in Toronto, Ontario, on 11 June 1906. He was educated at De La Salle High School, the Ontario College of Pharmacy and the University of Toronto. Prior to his enlistment in 1940 he was sales manager of a drug manufacturing company. He enlisted as a private but because of his age, education and experience, he was quickly promoted to sergeant and then to officer. He served with The Essex Scottish Regiment in the Second World War. Before he was awarded the Victoria Cross, Tilston had been wounded twice: the first time while in training, and the second time by a land mine during the fighting around Falaise in France in the summer of 1944.



**VC Action:** In late-February and early-March 1945, the First Canadian Army was striving to eliminate enemy resistance in the Hochwald forest, **Germany's last defensive position on the west bank of the Rhine River.** In fact, the defences in the Hochwald protected a vital escape route for German ground forces seeking to withdraw across the river. Early in the morning on 1 March 1945, supported by artillery fire and a troop of tanks from the Sherbrooke Fusiliers, The Essex Scottish Regiment attacked the northern part of the forest.

**On the left flank of the attack, Major Tilston led his "C" Company across 500 metres of open ground and through three metres of barbed wire to the first line of enemy trenches at the edge of the woods.** The advance was made in the face of intense gunfire and without the supporting tanks due to the soft ground. Although wounded in the head, Tilston was first into the German trenches, using a hand grenade to silence a machine gun delaying the progress of one of his platoons. He continued with his company to **assault and clear the second line of the enemy's defences,** suffering a second wound in the thigh.

**In the course of occupying this second objective, Major Tilston's men overran the headquarters positions of two companies of the German parachute troops defending the forest.** However, before the remnants of **"C" Company could consolidate their gains, the Germans counterattacked,** heavily supported by machine guns and mortars. Tilston calmly moved in the open through the heavy enemy fire from platoon to platoon organizing the defence. Six more times he braved the intense fire to carry badly needed ammunition and grenades to his men from a neighbouring Essex company. By now having suffered more serious wounds to his legs, Tilston refused medical aid until he was able to brief his one remaining officer on the plan of defence, and to impress upon him the absolute

necessity of holding the position. Only when that was done did he relinquish command.

The position was held, and for his valour and exemplary leadership in this action, Major Tilston earned the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"The 2nd Canadian Division had been given the task of breaking through the strongly fortified Hochwald Forest defence line which covered Xanten the last German bastion West of the Rhine protecting the vital Wesel Bridge escape route.*

*The Essex Scottish Regiment was ordered to breach the defence line North-east of Udem and to clear the Northern half of the forest, through which the balance of the Brigade would pass.*

*At 0715 hours on 1st March, 1945, the attack was launched but due to the softness of the ground it was found impossible to support the attack by tanks as had been planned.*

*Across approximately 500 yards of flat open country, in face of intense enemy fire, Major Tilston personally led his Company in the attack, keeping dangerously close to our own bursting shells in order to get the maximum cover from the barrage. Though wounded in the head he continued to lead his men forward, through a belt of wire ten feet in depth to the enemy trenches shouting orders and encouragement and using his Sten gun with great effect. When the platoon on the left came under heavy fire from an enemy machine gun post he dashed forward personally and silenced it with a grenade; he was first to reach the enemy position and took the first prisoner.*

*Determined to maintain the momentum of the attack he ordered the reserve platoon to mop up these positions and with outstanding gallantry, pressed on with his main force to the second line of enemy defences which were on the edge of the woods.*

*As he approached the woods he was severely wounded in the hip and fell to the ground. Shouting to his men to carry on without him and urging them to get into the wood, he struggled to his feet and rejoined them as they reached the trenches on their objective. Here an elaborate system of underground dugouts and trenches was manned in considerable strength and vicious hand-to-hand fighting followed. Despite his wounds, Major Tilston's unyielding will to close with the enemy was a magnificent inspiration to his men as he led them in, systematically clearing the trenches of the fiercely resisting enemy. In this fighting two German Company Headquarters were overrun and many casualties were inflicted on the fanatical defenders.*

*Such had been the grimness of the fighting and so savage the enemy resistance that the Company was now reduced to only 26 men, one quarter of its original strength. Before consolidation could be completed*

*the enemy counter-attacked repeatedly, supported by a hail of mortar and machine gun fire from the open flank. Major Tilston moved in the open from platoon to platoon quickly organising their defence and directing fire against the advancing enemy. The enemy attacks penetrated so close to the positions that grenades were thrown into the trenches held by his troops, but this officer by personal contact, unshakeable confidence and unquenchable enthusiasm so inspired his men that they held firm against great odds.*

*When the supply of ammunition became a serious problem he repeatedly crossed the bullet swept ground to the Company on his right flank to carry grenades, rifle and Bren ammunition to his troops and replace a damaged wireless set to re-establish communications with Battalion Headquarters. He made at least six of these hazardous trips, each time crossing a road which was dominated by intense fire from numerous, well-sited enemy machine gun posts.*

*On his last trip he was wounded for the third time, this time in the leg. He was found in a shell crater beside the road. Although very seriously wounded and barely conscious, he would not submit to medical attention until he had given complete instructions as to the defence plan, had emphasised the absolute necessity of holding the position, and had ordered his one remaining officer to take over.*

*By his calm courage, gallant conduct and total disregard for his own safety, he fired his men with grim determination and their firm stand enabled the Regiment to accomplish its object of furnishing the Brigade with a solid base through which to launch further successful attacks to clear the forest, thus enabling the Division to accomplish its task."*

*London Gazette, no.37086, 22 May 1945*

**Post War:** The wounds received in the action described in the citation necessitated the amputation of both legs, but exactly one year later from the date of his injuries he returned to work for his former company in the capacity of vice-president in charge of sales. He later became president and then chairman of the board for that company. In 1963 he became Honorary Colonel of his old regiment which had been renamed the Essex and Kent Regiment. Tilston died in Toronto, Ontario on 23 September 1992.

**Gravesite:** He is buried at Mount Hope Cemetery, Erskine Avenue, Toronto, Ontario.



### **Tilston's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His family presented his Victoria Cross to the Royal Canadian Military Institute in Toronto.

**Post Script:** Even into retirement Tilston was active throughout York County where a number of honours and memorials bear his name:

- The Aurora Canadian Legion Branch 385 is named Colonel Fred Tilston, VC in his honour.
- The Cenotaph in Sharon, Ontario was unveiled by Tilston and bears his name.
- St. Andrew's College (Aurora, Ontario) gives out Tilston Awards each year, one in every grade, to students who have "shown courage in the face of adversity".
- The De La Salle Cadet Corps at De La Salle College in Toronto, Ontario has named its primary body of cadets the 'Tilston Platoon'.

A joint training facility for the Essex Kent Scottish Regiment and the Windsor Police Service at 4007 Sandwich Street, Windsor, Ontario, is a first-of-its-kind in Canada partnership with the federal government Department of National Defence (DND). In recognition of his service to the Essex Kent Scottish Regiment, the training centre is named the Major F. Tilston Armoury and Police Training Centre.

## Corporal Frederick George Topham, VC

Frederick George Topham was born in Toronto, Ontario, on 10 August 1917. He was educated at King George Public School and Runnymede High School. Prior to his enlistment he was employed in the mines at Kirkland Lake. In March 1945, Corporal Topham was serving as a medical orderly in the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion. At that time, the battalion was part of the 3rd Parachute Brigade of the **British Army's 6th Airborne Division**.



**VC Action:** On the morning of 24 March 1945, parachute and glider-borne troops of the 6th Airborne Division landed on the east bank of the Rhine River, not far from the city of Wesel in Germany. These landings were carried out in support of assault operations begun the night before by the 1st Canadian and 2nd British Armies to cross to the East bank of the river.

After the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion landed just north of Diersfordt Wood, Corporal Topham heard a cry for help from a wounded man who was in the open. Two medical orderlies who went out in succession to treat the wounded man were killed. Immediately afterward and on his own initiative, Topham went forward through intense German fire to assist the casualty. As he treated the wounded man, Topham was himself shot through the nose, but continued to give first aid despite the severe bleeding and pain of his own injury. He was then able to carry the wounded man to shelter through continuous fire.

Refusing treatment for his wound, Corporal Topham continued to assist the wounded for two more hours, by which time all casualties had been evacuated to safety. Although he finally consented to have his nose dressed, he refused to be evacuated with the other wounded. Later, alone and again under enemy fire, Topham rescued three soldiers from a burning machine gun carrier that threatened to explode, brought them to safety, and arranged for the evacuation of the two men who survived.

For his courageous and selfless devotion to his comrades, Corporal Topham was awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"On 24th March 1945, Corporal Topham, a medical orderly, parachuted with his Battalion on to a strongly defended area east of the Rhine. At about 1100 hours, whilst treating casualties sustained in the drop, a cry for help came from a wounded man in the open. Two medical orderlies from a field ambulance went out to this man in succession but both were killed as they knelt beside the casualty.*

*Without hesitation and on his own initiative, Corporal Topham went forward through intense fire to replace the orderlies who had been killed*

*before his eyes. As he worked on the wounded man, he was himself shot through the nose. In spite of severe bleeding and intense pain, he never faltered in his task. Having completed immediate first aid, he carried the wounded man steadily and slowly back through continuous fire to the shelter of a wood.*

*During the next two hours Corporal Topham refused all offers of medical help for his own wound. He worked most devotedly throughout this period to bring in wounded, showing complete disregard for the heavy and accurate enemy fire. It was only when all casualties had been cleared that he consented to his own wound being treated.*

*His immediate evacuation was ordered, but he interceded so earnestly on his own behalf that he was eventually allowed to return to duty.*

*On his way back to his company he came across a carrier, which had received a direct hit. Enemy mortar bombs were still dropping around, the carrier itself was burning fiercely and its own mortar ammunition was exploding. An experienced officer on the spot had warned all not to approach the carrier.*

*Corporal Topham, however, immediately went out alone in spite of the blasting ammunition and enemy fire, and rescued the three occupants of the carrier. He brought these men back across the open and, although one died almost immediately afterwards, he arranged for the evacuation of the other two, who undoubtedly owe their lives to him.*

*This N.C.O. showed sustained gallantry of the highest order. For six hours, most of the time in great pain, he performed a series of acts of outstanding bravery and his magnificent and selfless courage inspired all those who witnessed it."*

*London Gazette, no.37205, 3 August 1945*

**Post War:** Topham's heroism was acknowledged publicly with a parade and civic reception in Toronto on 8 August 1945; one hundred members of the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion served as a guard of honour. After the war, Topham took little part in military affairs. On 10 November 1945 he laid the cornerstone of the new Sunnybrook Memorial Hospital for Veterans. Topham served briefly as a Constable with the Toronto Police Department before moving onto a career with Toronto Hydro.

Topham died on 31 May 1974 as a result of an electrical accident.

**Gravesite:** He is buried at Sanctuary Park Cemetery, Etobicoke, Ontario.



**Cpl. Topham's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** Topham's medals were on loan to the Canadian War Museum, but were not permanently on display. His widow declared in her will that the medals should be sold.

The Corporal Fred Topham, VC Fundraising Project was formed by members of The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada to retain the medal in Canada. Topham's medals were eventually acquired from his family for \$300,000 after a large fundraising campaign. On March 24, 2005, on the 60th anniversary of Corporal Topham's VC action, the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion Association presented Topham's medals to the Canadian War Museum, where they are on permanent display.



**Cpl Topham's Medal Set**

**Post Script:** A plaque in his honour was raised in the City of Etobicoke.



## Captain Paul Triquet, VC

Paul Triquet was born in Cabano, Quebec, on 2 April 1910. He attended Cabano Academy and later took six years of night school in Québec City. While at school he was a member of the Cabano Cadet Corps which his father organized and trained, so he was keenly interested in military training from an early age. He enlisted as a private in the *Royal 22e Régiment* on 3 November 1927 and received rapid promotion.



In December 1943, Captain Triquet was a company commander with the regiment's battalion serving in Italy with the Canadian Army's 1st Infantry Division.

**VC Action:** On 13 December 1943, plans were made by the 1st Infantry Division to get around the western end of the German defences running inland from the Adriatic Sea just south of the small coastal city of Ortona. By "turning" the enemy line, the 1st Division hoped to open the way to Ortona, its objective, and to capture the city. The key to the success of the plan was an advance by the Royal 22e Régiment north-eastward along the road to Ortona to seize an important road junction.

At 10:30 on the morning of 14 December "C" and "D" Companies of the "Van Doos", supported by tanks from "C" Squadron of The Ontario Regiment, began moving up both sides of the road. The force had already met and destroyed two German tanks. On the left, about half-way to the hamlet of Casa Berardi, Captain Triquet's "C" Company began to encounter fierce resistance from enemy machine guns and infantry sheltered in wrecked buildings and in terrain favourable to the defenders, all backed up by tanks and self-propelled guns. On the right, "D" Company became lost and took no further part in the action that day. "C" Company and the Ontario tanks proceeded to fight their way through the opposition, knocking out three more tanks and eliminating the Germans' defensive positions. At this stage, the company had been reduced to fifty men and one officer – Triquet. Although ammunition was running low, Triquet, his men and their supporting tanks persevered in the attack, capturing Casa Berardi late in the afternoon and driving on nearly to the crossroads. Here the survivors, now only fifteen strong with four tanks, were stopped by mortar fire, and retired to Casa Berardi to prepare for counterattacks. As darkness fell, "B" Company of the Royal 22e arrived to reinforce Triquet, and by the early hours of 15 December the battalion's remaining two companies had reached Casa Berardi. The western flank of the German line had been turned. For his courageous and determined leadership resulting in the capture and retention of Casa Berardi, Captain Triquet received the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"For determined leadership and example.*

*The capture of the key road junction on the main Ortona-Orsogna lateral was entirely dependent on securing the hamlet of Casa Berardi. Both this and a gully in front of it had been turned by the Germans into formidable strong points defended by infantry and tanks.*

*On 14th December, 1943, Captain Triquet's company of the Royal 22e Regiment with the support of a squadron of a Canadian Armoured Regiment was given the task of crossing the gully and securing Casa Berardi. Difficulties were encountered from the outset. The gully was held in strength and on approaching it the force came under extremely heavy fire from machine guns and mortars. All the company officers and 50 per cent of the men were killed or wounded. Showing superb contempt for the enemy Captain Triquet went round reorganizing the remainder and encouraging them with the words 'Never mind them, they can't shoot'. Finally when enemy infiltration was observed on all sides shouting 'There are enemy in front of us, behind us and on our flanks, there is only one safe place - that is on the objective' he dashed forward and with his men following him, broke through the enemy resistance. In this action four tanks were destroyed and several enemy machine gun posts silenced.*

*Against the most bitter and determined defence and under heavy fire Captain Triquet and his company, in close co-operation with the tanks forced their way on until a position was reached on the outskirts of Casa Berardi. By this time the strength of the company was reduced to 2 sergeants and 15 men. In expectation of a counter-attack Captain Triquet at once set about organizing his handful of men into a defensive perimeter around the remaining tanks and passed the 'mot d'ordre. Ils ne passeront pas'.*

*A fierce German counter-attack supported by tanks developed almost immediately. Captain Triquet, ignoring the heavy fire, was everywhere encouraging his men and directing the defence and by using whatever weapons were to hand personally accounted for several of the enemy. This and subsequent attacks were beaten off with heavy losses and Captain Triquet and his small force held out against overwhelming odds until the remainder of the battalion took Casa Berardi and relieved them the next day.*

*Throughout the whole of this engagement Captain Triquet showed the most magnificent courage and cheerfulness under heavy fire. Wherever the action was hottest he was to be seen shouting encouragement to his men and organizing the defence. His utter disregard of danger, his cheerfulness and tireless devotion to duty were a constant source of inspiration to them. His tactical skill and superb leadership enabled them, although reduced by casualties to a mere handful, to continue their advance against bitter resistance and to hold their gains against*

*determined counter-attacks. It was due to him that Casa Berardi was captured and the way opened for the attack on the vital road junction."*

*London Gazette, no.36408, 6 March 1944*

**Post War:** In 1947 he retired from the active army after 22 years and became a district sales manager for a forest products company in Quebec until 1951, when he joined the Reserve Army as Commanding Officer of the *Régiment de Lévis (R.F.)*. In 1954 he became Colonel Paul Triquet, commanding the 8<sup>th</sup> Militia Group. Mr. Triquet retired in Florida. He died in Quebec City, Quebec on 4 August 1980.

**Gravesite:** There is a Plaque in his honour at Mount Royal Crematorium, Montreal, Quebec, and his ashes are interred in the regimental memorial of the Royal 22<sup>e</sup> Régiment, The Citadel, Quebec.

**Medal Location:** His medals can be seen at the Citadelle de Québec, but the actual Victoria Cross on display is a copy

**Post Script:** The action which won him the Victoria Cross has been described as a "magnificent flash of greatness." He was also awarded a French decoration - Chevalier of the Legion of Honour - for the same action.

A plaque in his memory was affixed to a side of the house where he earned his VC.

Triquet is one of fourteen figures commemorated at the Valiants Memorial in Ottawa.



## Lieutenant Richard E.W. Turner, VC, KCB, KCMG, DSO

Richard Ernest William Turner was born on 25 July 1871 in Quebec City, the son of Richard Turner, and worked at his father's grocery and lumber business before turning to the military.

When the South African War began in 1899, he was a second lieutenant in the Militia and immediately joined The Royal Canadian Dragoons. As well as the Victoria Cross, Turner received the Distinguished Service Order for his service during the conflict.



**VC Action:** On 7 November 1900, at Lilliefontein, near the Komati River, a large force of Boer commandos sought to encircle a retreating British column whose rearguard comprised two troops of Royal Canadian Dragoons and two 12-pounder guns of "D" Battery, Royal Canadian Field Artillery. While commanding one of the troops of the Dragoons, Turner had already been wounded, and was retiring in front of the strong Boer assault when he received word that "D" Battery's guns were in danger of being captured. He positioned a dozen of his troopers to ambush the attacking enemy. The successful execution of the ambush saved the guns and earned the Victoria Cross for Turner.

**Citation:** *"Later in the day when the Boers again seriously threatened to capture the guns, Lieutenant Turner, although twice previously wounded, dismounted and deployed his men at close quarters and drove off the Boers, thus saving the guns."*

*London Gazette, no.27307, 23 April 1901*

**Post War:** Promoted to brigadier-general just after the outbreak of World War I, Turner was given command of the 3rd Brigade in the 1st Division of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

Although Turner demonstrated great personal bravery he seemed unable to adequately cope with the new type of mechanized warfare nor with the demands of brigade-sized tactics.

He was replaced as brigade commander and his subsequent promotion to divisional command was opposed by his superior Edwin Alderson, who considered him to be incompetent. However the well-connected Turner had the support of Sam Hughes and other Canadian politicians, and Alderson was over-ruled.

Turner was subsequently appointed a Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB) in the King's Birthday Honours of June 1915, and promoted to major-general in September 1915, and given command of the 2nd

Division when it arrived in France. However, the division suffered heavy losses during the battle of St. Eloi in September 1916 when Turner lost communication with his division and did not form a clear picture of where they were on the confused battlefield. In addition, due to a miscommunication, his men were decimated by their own artillery, suffering 1,600 casualties. Turner was subsequently relieved of field command on 5 December 1916 and shunted into administrative duties, becoming commander of Canadian forces operating in Britain and the Canadian government's chief military adviser.

He was appointed a Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (KCMG) in the King's Birthday Honours of June 1917, and promoted to lieutenant-general on 9 June 1917. On 18 May 1918, he became the Chief of the General Staff, Overseas Military Forces of Canada. In addition, he was awarded the Croix de Guerre-avec Palme and the Legion d'Honneur from the French government, and the Russian Order of the White Eagle with Swords.

Turner died in Quebec City, on 19 June 1961.

**Gravesite:** He is buried in Mount Hermon Cemetery, Sillery, Quebec.



**Turner's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is currently stored as part of the Royal Canadian Dragoon Archives and Collection at CFB Petawawa, Ontario.



**Turner's VC**

**Post Script:** Turner's VC was one of three awarded to Canadians for separate incidents in the action at Lilliefontein.

## Lieutenant Thomas Orde Lauder Wilkinson, VC

Wilkinson was born on 29 June 1894 and raised in his early years in Bridgnorth, Shropshire, England and attended Wellington College where he showed both academic and athletic prowess. The family moved to Canada prior to the war, and at the outbreak of the war in 1914 Wilkinson joined the 16th Battalion, Canadian Scottish. After the regiment arrived in England he transferred as a temporary Lieutenant to the 7th Battalion of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment as Gunnery Officer. He was in this role with the regiment during the opening days of the Battle of the Somme when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross at the age of 22.



**VC Action:** On 5 July 1916 at La Boisselle, France, during an attack, when a party of men from another unit were retiring without their machine-gun, Lieutenant Wilkinson with two of his men, got the gun into action and held up the enemy until relieved. Later he forced his way forward during a bombing attack and found four or five men from different units stopped by a wall of earth over which the enemy was throwing bombs. He at once mounted the machine-gun on top of the parapet and dispersed the bombers. Subsequently, in trying to bring in a wounded man, he was killed.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery. During an attack, when a party of another unit was retiring without their machine-gun, Lieut. Wilkinson rushed forward, and, with two of his men, got the gun into action, and held up the enemy till they were relieved. Later, when the advance was checked during a bombing attack, he forced his way forward and found four or five men of different units stopped by a solid block of earth, over which the enemy was throwing bombs. With great pluck and promptness he mounted a machine-gun on the top of the parapet and dispersed the enemy bombers. Subsequently he made two most gallant attempts to bring in a wounded man, but at the second attempt he was shot through the heart just before reaching the man. Throughout the day he set a magnificent example of courage and self-sacrifice."*

"The London Gazette," dated September 26, 1916

**Gravesite:** His body was never recovered and his name is recorded on the British Memorial to the Missing at Thiepval.



**Thiepval Memorial**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is displayed at the Imperial War Museum, London, England.

**Post Script:** The Battle of the Somme produced four Canadian Victoria Crosses, awarded to Thomas Orde Lawder Wilkinson, Lionel Beaumaurice Clarke, John Chipman Kerr and James Cleland Richardson.

## Private John Francis Young, VC

Private Young was awarded the Victoria Cross for his conduct on 2 September 1918 during the fighting for the Drocourt-Quéant Line, near Dury in France. On that day, his company suffered heavy casualties from German shell- and machine gun fire. Young went out to treat the wounded despite the complete absence of any cover. When he ran out of dressings, he went back to his company headquarters for more medical supplies and then returned to his task, all the while under enemy fire. Later, when the German fire had slackened somewhat, Young organized and led stretcher parties to bring in the wounded men he had treated. Private Young's courage throughout this action resulted in many lives being saved.



**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty in attack at Dury-Arras sector on the 2nd September, 1918, when acting as a stretcher-bearer attached to 'D' Company of the 87th Bn., Quebec Regiment.*

*This company in the advance over the ridge suffered heavy casualties from shell and machine-gun fire.*

*Pte. Young, in spite of the complete absence of cover, without the least hesitation went out, and in the open fire-swept ground dressed the wounded. Having exhausted his stock of dressings, on more than one occasion he returned, under intense fire, to his company headquarters for a further supply. This work he continued for over an hour, displaying throughout the most absolute fearlessness.*

*To his courageous conduct must be ascribed the saving of the lives of many of his comrades.*

*Later, when the fire had somewhat slackened, he organised and led stretcher parties to bring in the wounded whom he had dressed.*

*All through the operations of 2nd, 3rd, and 4th September Pte. Young continued to show the greatest valour and devotion to duty."*

*London Gazette, no.31067, 14 December 1918*

**Post War:** Young returned to Montreal after the war, even taking up his previous position at the tobacco company. He continued to serve in the regiment, rising to the rank of sergeant. Some years later, however, he developed tuberculosis, and spent a lengthy period in hospital. Young died in Ste-Agathe, Quebec, on 7 November 1929.

**Gravesite:** He is buried in the Mount-Royal Cemetery in Montreal.



**Pte. Young's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** The medal is not on public display. It is said to be locked in a vault, in the possession of one of Young's grandsons.

**Post Script:** As the Canadian Corps moved against the Drocourt-Quéant defensive line from 1 to 4 September 1918, seven Victoria Crosses were awarded to Lieutenant-Colonel Cyrus Wesley Peck, Captain Bellenden Seymour Hutcheson, Sergeant Arthur George Knight, Lance-Corporal William Henry Metcalf and Privates Claude Joseph Patrick Nunney, Walter Leigh Rayfield and John Francis Young.

He received his Victoria Cross from King George V at Buckingham Palace on April 30, 1919.

The Junior Ranks mess hall of the Canadian Grenadier Guards, which perpetuates the 87th Battalion, was renamed the "John Francis Young Club" in his honour and still bears his name. A memorial plaque in his memory is on permanent display in the mess, as well. He is remembered and honoured as one of the outstanding heroes of the Regiment's history.

## Sergeant Raphael Louis Zengel, VC, MM

Raphael Louis Zengel was born in Faribault, Minnesota, on 11 November 1894. When he was still very young, he emigrated with his widowed mother to a homestead in Burr, a small town south of Humboldt, Saskatchewan, in 1906. In December 1914, he moved to Manitoba, where he worked on a farm in Virden.



He enlisted in the 45th Battalion in December 1914, but once in France in 1915, he was drafted to the 5th (Western Cavalry) Battalion where he took part in several raids on German trenches. For his role in one of these raids, near Passchendaele in Belgium in 1917, Zengel received the Military Medal.

**VC Action:** On 9 August 1918, Sergeant Zengel was leading his platoon forward during the second day of the massive Allied offensive against the German lines around Amiens, in France. When he noticed a gap on the flank of his platoon and an enemy machine gun firing on the advancing Canadians at close range, he quickly decided to deal with the machine gun position himself. Rushing 200 metres ahead of his platoon, Zengel **charged the German emplacement, killing two of the machine gun's crew** and compelling the rest to flee. Later that day, when the progress of the 5th Battalion was blocked by heavy machine gun fire, he demonstrated great tactical skill in directing the fire of his platoon to eliminate the **enemy resistance. Sergeant Zengel's courage, leadership and disregard** for his own safety inspired his men, and were important factors in enabling the advance to continue. For his conduct on this day, he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Citation:** *"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty when protecting the battalion right flank. He was leading his platoon gallantly forward to the attack, but had not gone far when he realised that a gap had occurred on his flank, and that an enemy machine gun was firing at close range into the advancing line. Grasping the situation, he rushed forward some 200 yards ahead of the platoon, tacked the machine-gun emplacement, killed the officer and operator of the gun, and dispersed the crew. By his boldness and prompt action he undoubtedly saved the lives of many of his comrades.*

*Later, when the battalion was held up by very heavy machine-gun fire, he displayed much tactical skill and directed his fire with destructive results. Shortly afterwards he was rendered unconscious for a few minutes by an enemy shell, but on recovering consciousness he at once continued to direct harassing fire on the enemy.*

*Sgt. Zengel's work throughout the attack was excellent, and his utter disregard for personal safety, and the confidence he inspired in all ranks, greatly assisted in bringing the attack to a successful end."*

*London Gazette, no.30922, 27 September 1918*

**Post War:** After the war, Zengel returned to Canada and spent most of the rest of his life at Rocky Mountain House, Alberta. He died in Vancouver, British Columbia on 27 February 1977.

**Gravesite:** He is buried in Pine Cemetery at Rocky Mountain House.



**Sgt. Zengel's Headstone**

**Medal Location:** His Victoria Cross is on display at the Legion branch in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta. The Branch is named in his honour.

**Post Script:** Ten members of the Canadian Corps earned Victoria Crosses between 8 and 13 August 1918, during the Battle of Amiens — Lieutenants Jean Brillant and James Edward Tait, Sergeants Robert Spall and Raphael Louis Zengel, Corporals Alexander Picton Brereton, Frederick George Coppins, Herman James Good and Harry Garnet Bedford Miner and Privates John Bernard Croak and Thomas Dinesen.

In 1936 the government of Canada chose to name a lake in northeastern Saskatchewan in Zengel's honour. Inexplicably, the feature became Zengle Lake and so it remains today.

In 1951, one of the mountains of the Victoria Cross Range, in Jasper National Park, was named in his honour. Mount Zengel is visible from highway 16, east of Jasper, Alberta.

Zengel is one of five American-born recipients of the Victoria Cross.

## Postscript

### On Passing the New Menin Gate

Who will remember, passing through this Gate,  
The unheroic Dead who fed the guns?  
Who shall absolve the foulness of their fate,—  
Those doomed, conscripted, unvictorious ones?

Crudely renewed, the Salient holds its own.  
Paid are its dim defenders by this pomp;  
Paid, with a pile of peace-complacent stone,  
The armies who endured that sullen swamp.

**Here was the world's worst wound. And here with pride  
'Their name liveth for ever,' the Gateway claims.**  
Was ever an immolation so belied  
As these intolerably nameless names?  
Well might the Dead who struggled in the slime  
Rise and deride this sepulchre of crime.

*Siegfried Sassoon, 1928*



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