

# Dufferin County and its neighbours were home to

By KEITH HUNTER

Last year, about this time, Keith Hunter was asked to prepare a presentation for the Orangeville Rotary Club to be delivered at the club's Remembrance Day meeting.

Being a student of military history, Keith selected as the topic the most coveted and highly praised military medal ever awarded by the British Commonwealth – known as The Victoria Cross – and some of its recipients.

While doing his research Keith made some interesting discoveries about this highly regarded military decoration and its relationship to our area.

This resulted in several other requests for Keith to deliver his presentation to a variety of service clubs, church groups of various denominations and branches of the Royal Canadian Legion in various nearby towns.

With Keith's permission and Remembrance Day coming up, we decided this story should be shared with others in our community.

He has entitled his presentation "Do Not Forget To Remember," since it is dedicated to the brave Canadians who fought during what was known as "The Great War."



Some of our parents or grandparents may well remember the Great War. Others, like myself, remember hearing about it. I recall being told that the exact time the Great War came to an end was on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of the year 1918.

And, I think you will agree that that was a very unusual happening. That took place a few years before I was born.

This war was mistakenly called "The War To End All Wars."

Unfortunately, this was not the case. The war lasted for four years from 1914 to 1918. During that period, over a half million Canadians volunteered to fight the enemy in Europe. Over 65,000 of these brave men and boys failed to

return home. Many of their bodies rest in Flanders Field.

I would like to tell you the story of just a few of these brave Canadians who put their lives on the line and marched off to fight the enemy who were a serious threat to our way of life.

Going back in history, during the reign of Queen Victoria, which was 1837 to 1901, she decided that recognition should be given to the fighting men of the British army who had performed outstanding gallantry on the battlefield.

All who were to receive this recognition were members of the British army or the navy. The volunteer's rank or length of service in the military had no bearing on the decision. It was a matter of exhibiting extreme bravery beyond the call of duty, bravery that had been witnessed by other volunteers. Many young men had sacrificed their lives and never knew they would be honoured in this way.

A medal was struck and with her permission, and it was named after the reigning monarch, Queen Victoria.

The medal is bronze, highlighting the royal crest, and bears the simple words, "For Valour". It is suspended from a ribbon that was formerly blue for the navy and red for the army.

The ribbon is now a dull crimson colour for all three branches of the military. These medals for the most part were presented in England by a high-ranking officer, and for those who made the supreme sacrifice, it was received by their families back here in Canada.

This is the British Commonwealth's highest military decoration and the requirements are so high that very few people have qualified for it. The most recent Victoria Cross awarded was to Pte. Ernest (better known as Smoky) Smith of the Seaforth Highlanders and this took place in 1944, 68 years ago. That gives you an idea of how few have been awarded.

Because of the few presentations that have been made, I became fascinated and made a study of the Victoria Cross and its Canadian recipients. Now, keep in mind this medal has been restricted to armed forces personnel only in the various countries that made up the British Commonwealth and these

countries are spread throughout the world.

The very first Victoria Cross was won by a Canadian, Lieut. Alexander Dunn, at the Charge of the Light Brigade, during the Crimean War in 1856. Of the half million plus Canadians who fought in W.W. I, only 69 of these medals were awarded.

In my research, I learned that while no volunteers from my town had ever received a Victoria Cross, Orangeville does have a unique connection with this coveted historic medal. The question is, what did I learn?

Well, I learned that anywhere from a six-minute drive to a 60 minute drive from Orangeville, there were five young country boys, who didn't know each other and who, during W.W. I, distinguished themselves through their acts of valour and bravery to such a degree that each was awarded the Commonwealth's highest military decoration for bravery, "The Victoria Cross."

Now, think about that. Five young men, all from a rural area and living less than an hour from Orangeville, who became soldiers and all were awarded "The Victoria Cross" for bravery. To put this into perspective, Montreal, large as it is, had two Victoria Cross recipients and Toronto had none.

When I made the discovery of these five almost local boys, I searched to see if I could find any other community the size of the area I am talking about and an area that was as sparsely populated as we were at that time, that could match this record. There were none to be found across Canada.

I made an effort to document what I could about these five young men that gave them the recognition throughout the British Empire that they deserved by receiving such a fine tribute and I would like to tell you what brought this honour about. Some of the details are not very pretty, but unfortunately, that is what war is all about.

## LT. COL. BILLY BISHOP

First, and perhaps foremost, was Billy Bishop, who was born and raised just about one hour from Orangeville in the town of Owen Sound. When W.W. I

broke out in 1914, he was 20 years of age and he wanted to pilot one of those wonderful flying machines he had heard so much about.



## CAPT. FRED CAMPBELL

Then there was Capt. Fred Campbell who hailed from Mount Forest, just 45 minutes northwest of Orangeville. He held the army rank of Captain and won his Victoria Cross at Givency, France, (Gi-ven-see) on June 15, 1915, which was also his 48th birthday. A fierce battle was taking place and Captain Campbell's men were dropping like flies. Before the day ended, only Campbell and PTE. Harold Vincent, of Bracebridge, were standing.

The entire crew was either dead or wounded.

While their machine gun



was in working order and they had a good supply of ammunition, the base that held the gun was broken and badly needed.

It couldn't be used unless it was on a stand or bench. Vincent, a former lumberjack, had a strong body and a cool head. He got down on all fours while Capt. Campbell lifted the gun on to Vincent's back and commenced firing. He fired over 1,000 rounds at the enemy from Vincent's back putting the Germans on the run.

They eventually returned with reinforcements. Captain Campbell was seriously wounded.

Vincent dragged the gun away to avoid it getting into the hands of the enemy while Sgt. Major Owen himself, badly wounded, carried his commanding officer to safety. Capt. Campbell died four days later on June 19, 1915. His next of kin in Mount Forest received the Victoria Cross on his behalf at a fitting ceremony.

The branch of the Royal Canadian Legion in Mount

Forest named their branch in honour of this Victoria Cross hero and it is still known as the Capt. Frederick Campbell Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion No. 134.

## LT. LEWIS HONEY

Just about ten minutes east of Mount Forest, or a half hour from Orangeville on Highway 89, stands the little village of Conn. Even today, it still has only about a dozen houses. On one of the side streets, there is a little church and in front of the church stands an historic plaque to the memory of Lieutenant Samuel Lewis Honey, a local boy who left the children he was teaching in the one room school house in order to serve his country.

He was 24 years of age when he was awarded the Victoria Cross. It was at the battle of Bourlon Wood in France, where this young officer fought and died. His company was under heavy fire by the enemy and many of the 90 to 100 men had been either killed or wounded. This included all of his superior officers.

Young Lewis, only 24, took command, and under severe fire, he skillfully re-organized and continued the advance against the Germans. He soon found his outfit was suffering casualties from machine gun fire, which had not been the case earlier. This meant enemy re-enforcements had moved in.

Lt. Honey left his men in a safe area and went on ahead by himself and located the machine gun nest. He rushed in single handed with only his service revolver in his hand.

This was a complete surprise to the Germans and he captured the machine gun and ten prisoners by himself. After securing the captives, he and his men repelled four counter attacks with the help of the machine gun they borrowed from the bad guys.



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