

# five of Ontario's 11 WW1 Victoria Cross winners

There was no holding this young man back.

After dark, he went out again by himself, and having located another machine gun nest, he quietly returned to his camp, picked up a few volunteers and returned to face the enemy.

This time, they captured three machine guns and more prisoners. With great skill and daring, he led what was left of his men against a strong German position.

This gallant officer died of machine gun wounds during the battle that followed.

While he never knew it, 24 year old Lewis Honey joined the ranks of those brave men who distinguished themselves in battle and were awarded the Victoria Cross. In this case, it was presented to his father, who was the minister of the local church in the village of Conn.

## PTE. TOMMY HOLMES

Leaving Conn, we continue travelling east on Highway 89 for about another 15 minutes and arrive in Shelburne, just north of Orangeville, which was where Tommy Holmes hung his hat for a time prior to W.W. I. This was the most difficult V.C. winner I had to track down since different sources had different stories about his life.



Originally a Montreal boy, Tommy's family moved to Ontario and Tommy got himself a job in the Shelburne area as a farm labourer, or as they were called in those days, the hired man. He apparently stayed on this farm for some time and his only entertainment was going into Shelburne on a Saturday night and whooping it up with the boys.

I don't know whose farm he worked on but when the war broke out, he left his job on the farm and joined the army.

While things are a little vague up until now, I am sure

his military records would be accurate and since I obtained these from the War Museum in Ottawa, I am going to use their information.

Tommy served with the Fourth Canadian Mounted Rifles and didn't waste any time getting into action. He had lied about his age in order to be accepted, for he was only 17 when he put on the uniform.

He was involved in the battle of Passchendale (Passendale) in Belgium, where over 15,000 Canadians were killed and if you haven't seen the movie yet, make sure you do.

It was on Oct. 26, 1917 that Tommy Holmes won the Victoria Cross. His act of bravery was well documented in the London Gazette on Jan. 11, 1918, and I would like you to read it,

"Can you imagine this little boy doing all that damage? Some months later, Tommy Holmes was summoned to Buckingham Palace, where King George V, grandson of Queen Victoria, pinned the Victoria Cross on Tommy's chest. To show you a little of Tommy's modesty, in letters back home to his mother, at that time living in Owen Sound, this plucky little teenager didn't even mention the fact that he had been a guest at Buckingham Palace, had lunch with the King of England, won the Victoria Cross and the presentation had been made by the King himself."

I don't know whether or not Tommy Holmes even came back to this part of the country. We seem to have lost track of him again and now ninety years later, there is no one left to ask.

I believe he died in Toronto about 1950. All I can say at this point is that he was one of the few buck privates ever to win the coveted V.C. for bravery beyond the call of duty and we should all be proud of him.

He was the youngest Canadian ever to win the V.C. As mentioned, he was only a kid at the time and a little guy at that. While standing straight up and stretching his neck, he measured five foot, nothing.

## LT. WALLACE ALGIE

Just six minutes south of Orangeville lies the village of Alton. This was the birthplace of Lieutenant Wallace Algie. He went overseas in 1916 and was deeply involved in the

battle of Cambrai in France. There were many casualties in his ranks and it looked like the enemy was bringing in more machine guns, which was bad news.

This was a situation that Lieutenant Algie was determined to prevent.

It was important that Algie and his men take control of the little village, that was at that time occupied by the



Germans. He asked for nine volunteers to move in on the enemy.

With this small contingent following up the rear, Algie led the way and tackled a machine gun crew of Germans killing all three of them and then turned the German machine gun on the German troops. He asked one of his volunteers to take over the machine gun nest and keep firing while once again, single handed, the boy from Alton surprised another machine gun crew, killing the three men who were operating the gun.

With control of the second German gun, he captured an officer and ten men. He marched his prisoners back to his own troops, handed them over and returned with more Canadians to finish the job. While leading his men across a railway bridge, Lieut. Algie was shot and killed by the enemy.

Thanks to his ability and bravery, Lieut. Algie's men were able to complete their mission and take control of the village. Lieut. Algie was killed on Oct. 11, 1918 exactly one month to the day before the war ended. Algie's family in Alton was presented with the highest military honour in British history, The Victoria Cross.

The Alton Legion branch is named after Lieutenant Algie.

I mentioned earlier that WW I ended on Nov. 11, 1918, and it was called the War to End All Wars.

Unfortunately, things didn't turn out that way, for 21 years later, Germany had re-

built its Empire under Adolph Hitler and once again the British Empire was at war with Germany and depending heavily on Canada for support.

I also mentioned this resulted in 45,000 Canadian soldiers, sailors and airmen making the supreme sacrifice, never to return home again. The Orangeville list reads 24 of our young men lost their lives to the Nazis during WW II. Out of those 24, I personally knew 10 of these boys well.

Just to name a few: **Arnold Hagerman**, who joined the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders of Canada, lost his life three days after peace had been declared in 1945.

It was supposed to be all over. While driving an army truck, he hit an undiscovered land mine, destroying the truck and his life. Haggie, as we called him, was 23 years old. He is buried in a Canadian War Cemetery in Germany.

Then there was **Bert Barber**, a member of the Orangeville Rotary Club, who took a leave of absence from Rotary so that he could serve his country as a fighter pilot with the RCAF, Bert was shot down over North Africa by the Italians, who were the allies of Germany. That was in 1943. Bert was 30 years of age and is buried in a military cemetery in Tripoli.

**Bill Hackett**, better known as Snowball, lived across the street from me. He joined the Air Force, hoping to become a pilot, but that changed and he accepted the position of a tail gunner in an Anson bomber. This was the most dangerous duty to be assigned to in the Air Force.

A glass bubble was built into the tail of these huge bombers. The gunner, who had been well-trained, sat in this bubble, literally outside the plane, with the barrel of his machine gun protruding through a hole.

His job was to shoot down any enemy aircraft approaching from the rear, and it was the objective of the enemy to shoot and kill the gunner in the glass bubble before he could do his job. In this case, the German marksman found his target first and 19-year-old Billy was found dead in his glass bubble, with his body riddled with bullets. He is buried in Buxton Cemetery in England.

**Reg Robb** was a deep thinker and a bit of a philoso-

pher. He was a bomber pilot with the RCAF. Reg is best remembered as the airman who wrote the unfinished letter to his parents, Judge W.T. and Mrs. Robb, with the request to his commanding officer to mail the letter in the event that he failed to return from one of his bombing missions over Germany.

The letter, although unfinished, was emotional, yet motivating.

It was really a letter of hope. When it was received by Reg's parents, the Orangeville Banner requested permission to print it and from there it spread to newspapers throughout the free world. It appeared in a least one newspaper as far away as India.

The opening paragraph reads as follows: Dear Mom and Dad and all the Robb Family: I can give this letter no date as it is possible it may never be used, but in case anything goes wrong, this will be my last word to all of you."

I am fortunate to have a copy of Reg's letter as it appeared in the Toronto Star.

The last friend I am going to mention was probably my best friend since he was my brother, **Roy**, who served with the Royal Canadian Navy.

Of the 24 Orangeville boys who lost their lives, he was the only one who was killed here in Canada by the Nazis. This may sound strange to some of you, but you see, most Canadians think that Europe had an exclusive on war zones.

Not so. Very few Canadians realize that the St. Lawrence River was home to more than 100 German submarines and they were inland, up as far as Montreal.

Their job was to destroy our war ships.

Roy served on a Corvette named the Shawinigan, whose job it was to travel as an escort with troop and supply ships across the Atlantic. Working out of Sydney, Nova Scotia, they were asked if between trips they would escort a ferry boat, with civilians aboard, from Sydney to Port au Basque, Newfoundland, for they were also in danger with the enemy that close.

The navy agreed to this. The trip to Port Au Basque was uneventful and the Shawinigan headed back to Sydney.

Travelling eastward in the

same stormy waters, about halfway between the two ports was a German submarine number U1228, under the command of Captain Friedrich-Wilhelm Marienfeld. They were on their way back to Germany for badly needed repairs.

Marienfeld saw an opportunity for a trophy when they spotted the Shawinigan on the horizon.

He gave the command to fire and the gunners let loose with a giant torpedo. It was a direct hit. Exactly four minutes later HMCS Shawinigan disappeared into the freezing waters of the North Atlantic. The date was Nov. 24, 1944. All 91 members of the crew perished.

Along with my brother was another local, **Bob Brett**, of Shelburne.

Both boys were 19 years of age. As a matter of fact, the Shawinigan had on board the youngest crew in the Canadian Navy. The average age of the 91 crewmembers was just 19. They were only kids.

I recall a few years ago watching the news on Remembrance Day and reporters asking students why they were not in school that day. Some of the answers were unbelievable and offensive.

One young girl said, "We are celebrating some kind of a war so we got a holiday."

An older boy said he had no idea, nor did he care. As long as he didn't have to go to school that day, it didn't matter what the holiday was for. Others thought it was a trick question and the answer would be some kind of a joke.

Fortunately, there were a few who knew the right answer.

I sometimes wonder if we have parents in our communities who really do not know the meaning of Remembrance Day or perhaps they just choose to ignore it.

Regardless, I think it is our duty to wear the red poppy and educate those who don't know what the red poppy represents.

And, please consider this, try to attend the service at the local cenotaph so that you **DO NOT FORGET TO REMEMBER.**

The brave men and women who died, did so that we may live in a free country.

So I say to you, this November 11th, please, **DO NOT FORGET TO REMEMBER.**



We will remember them

**NOVEMBER 11TH**  
ORANGEVILLE CENOTAPH

**10:45 A.M.**

SUNSET SERVICE

Forest Lawn Cemetery  
Hwy. 10 and 1st Street, Orangeville

**3:00 P.M.**

SHELburne

**NOVEMBER 11TH**  
LEGION 10:00 A.M.  
CENOTAPH 11:00 A.M.

## IN FLANDERS FIELDS

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe;  
To you, from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.*

LT. COL JOHN McCRAE  
1872 - 1918  
SOLDIER . POET . PHYSICIAN



ON THE 11TH MONTH OF THE  
11TH DAY AT THE 11TH HOUR  
Silence will be shared in every  
Province of Canada



"LEST WE FORGET"

Located on 2nd Line East just north of Hwy. 9  
[www.dufferinglengolf.com](http://www.dufferinglengolf.com)  
**519.942.5999**

Orangeville Insurance Services

Serving, supporting and protecting our community since 1932

"WE REMEMBER"

Box 250, 11 Mill St.  
Orangeville, On. L9W 2Z6  
Phone: 519-941-1500  
Fax: 519-941-7725  
Toll Free 1-888-647-7683



SOULYVE  
CARIBBEAN FOODS  
Take out & Casual  
dine in

Open for lunch and dinner  
\$5.00 lunch  
**19 Mill St., Orangeville**  
(just past the library)  
**519-307-LYVE (5983)**

## Rowntree Appliance Service Ltd.

Serving The Community For  
Over 30 Years  
**PARTS & REPAIRS TO ALL MAJOR  
APPLIANCE BRANDS**

235 Walsh Cres., Orangeville  
**519-941-0577**

## Posh Puppy Salon

"Bring your  
Puppy to  
Posh!"

## PET GROOMING

Tess MacLean  
By appointment ☎ 519-941-2646  
[poshpuppysalon@yahoo.com](mailto:poshpuppysalon@yahoo.com)



GAME TASTING DINNER  
Saturday, November 7th

**519.941.7583**  
Now accepting Christmas reservations  
[www.thewhitetruffle.ca](http://www.thewhitetruffle.ca)

Call your local  
Royal Canadian  
Legion For Details  
Alton 519-942-4021  
Orangeville 519-942-2077  
Shelburne 519-925-3800

Be part of it. Join co-workers,  
friends and family, and take two  
minutes to think about war,  
about peace, and about those  
who gave up everything for us.

The poppy is the symbol of Remembrance.  
All Funds are used for the following:

1. Assistance to ex-service personnel and their dependants.
2. Low rental housing and care facilities for elderly or disabled persons and their dependents.
3. Community medical appliances and medical research.
4. Drop-in centres, meals- on-wheels, transportation and related services.
5. Cost of poppies, wreaths and supplies

## Egan Funeral Home

Since 1913  
Baxter and Giles Chapel  
273 Broadway, Orangeville  
Telephone: 519-941-2630  
[www.eganfuneralhome.com](http://www.eganfuneralhome.com)

Locally owned and operated by  
the Egan Family  
Paul G. Egan  
Stephen J. Elliott • Fred J. Giles

They protected  
the freedom we  
enjoy. We owe  
them a debt of  
gratitude.  
"Lest we  
Forget"

