

SECOND WORLD WAR VICTORIA CROSS WINNERS

**INTRODUCTION**

The Victoria Cross is the highest award for military valour that can be won by a Canadian. It was introduced by Queen Victoria in 1856 as the premier award for military gallantry for a subject of the British Empire (and later for citizens in the British Commonwealth). Over the years, 94 Canadians have been awarded this very prestigious medal, 16 of them during the Second World War.

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VICTORIA CROSS WINNERS**

These Canadian Victoria Cross winners represent members of the navy, army and the air force and earned the medals in theatres of war ranging from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, from Europe to Africa to the Far East.

Squadron Leader Ian W. Bazalgette - Royal Air Force. Born in Calgary, Alberta. Won the Victoria Cross on August 4, 1944 at St. Maximin, France.

Sergeant Aubrey Cosens - Queen's Own Rifles of Canada. Born in Latchford, Ontario. Won the Victoria Cross on February 25-26, 1945 at Mooshof, Germany.

Major David Vivian Currie - The South Alberta Regiment. Born in Sutherland, Saskatchewan. Won the Victoria Cross on August 18, 1944 at St. Lambert-sur-Dives, France.

Reverend John Weir Foote - Canadian Chaplain Services, The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry. Born in Madoc, Ontario. Won the Victoria Cross on August 19, 1942 at Dieppe, France.

Lieutenant Robert Hampton Gray - Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve. Born in Trail, British Columbia. Won the Victoria Cross August 9, 1945 at Onagawa Wan, Japan.

Major Charles Ferguson Hoey - 1st Battalion, The Lincolnshire Regiment. Born in Duncan, British Columbia. Won the Victoria Cross February 16, 1944 at Maungdaw, Burma.

Flight Lieutenant David Ernest Hornell - Royal Canadian Air Force. Born in Mimico, Ontario. Won the Victoria Cross June 24, 1944 in the Shetland Islands, United Kingdom.

Major John Keefer Mahony - The Westminster Regiment. Born in New Westminster, British Columbia. Won the Victoria Cross May 24, 1944 at the Melfa River, Italy.

Lieutenant Colonel Charles Cecil Ingersoll Merritt - The South Saskatchewan Regiment. Born in Vancouver, British Columbia. Won the Victoria Cross August 19, 1942 at Dieppe, France.

Pilot Officer Andrew Charles Mynarski - Royal Canadian Air Force. Born in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Won the Victoria Cross June 12, 1944 at Cambrai, France.

Sergeant Major John Robert Osborn - The Winnipeg Grenadiers. Born in Norfolk, England (later emigrating to Saskatchewan). Won the Victoria Cross December 19, 1941 in Hong Kong.

Captain Frederick Thornton Peters - Royal Navy. Born in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. Won the Victoria Cross November 8, 1942 at Oran, North Africa.

Private Ernest 'Smoky' Smith - The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada. Born in New Westminster, British Columbia. Won the Victoria Cross October 21-22, 1944 at the Savio River, Italy.

Major Frederick Albert Tilston - The Essex Scottish Regiment. Born in Toronto, Ontario. Won the Victoria Cross March 1, 1945 in the Hochwald forest, Germany.

Corporal Frederick George Topham - 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion. Born in Toronto, Ontario. Won the Victoria Cross March 24, 1945 east of the Rhine in Germany.

Captain Paul Triquet - Le Royal 22^e Régiment. Born in Cabano, Quebec. Won the Victoria Cross December 14, 1943 at Casa Berardi, Italy.

STORIES OF VALOUR

Here are some of the accounts of the heroics of Canadians who won the Victoria Cross during the Second World War.

- While holding out against the enemy in a bridgehead over the Savio River of Italy in 1944, Private Ernest 'Smoky' Smith single-handedly fought off enemy tanks and infantry, while protecting his wounded comrade. According to his citation: "The Germans thought an entire company did the work of this one man."
- Captain Paul Triquet planned and carried out a daring raid that resulted in the capture of an important junction on the main road to Ortona, which would prove to be the site of a key Allied victory. When his troops were surrounded on all sides, Triquet was heard to yell, "...There is only one safe place - that is on the objective!"
- Reverend Major John Foote, a chaplain with the troops landing in the Dieppe raid of August 1942, risked enemy fire time and again to help rescue wounded soldiers from the bloody beach. He helped treat them medically and evacuate some to landing craft but in the end, rather than leave on a boat himself, he chose to stay with the Canadian soldiers who had to be left behind to be captured by the Germans.
- Lieutenant Robert Gray was a member of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve serving on a British aircraft carrier in the Pacific Ocean. In August of 1945, he led a courageous bombing mission against a Japanese destroyer in which he successfully hit his target but lost his life in the heroic effort. His was the last Canadian combat death of the Second World War and the last time a Canadian has won the Victoria Cross.
- Captain Frederick Peters braved fierce fire in taking part in a heroic ship assault on harbour defences during Allied landings in Algeria in 1942. His ship reached the enemy jetty disabled and ablaze and went down with its colours still flying. Captain Peters was the only officer to survive the attack and was taken prisoner.
- During the Battle of Hong Kong, the unit that Company Sergeant Major John Osborn was leading became

surrounded by the enemy. The Japanese began to throw grenades into the Canadians' defensive positions but Osborn caught several of them and threw them back. Finally one fell where he could not retrieve it in time. Shouting a warning, he threw himself upon the grenade as it exploded, giving his life for his comrades.

- Sergeant Aubrey Cosens won the Victoria Cross for his actions in a battle to push the enemy from a small village in the Hochwald forest of western Germany. Cosens assumed command of his battered platoon and personally cleared the German defenders from three buildings in the midst of intense enemy fire, killing or taking prisoner at least 40 Germans before he himself was killed by a sniper.
- Major David Currie was leading a force that was tasked with cutting off the retreating Germans in the Falaise pocket of France during the Battle of Normandy. At an enemy-held village, he personally led an attack that allowed the Canadians to gain a position there and then. With much personal heroism, he helped the unit hold on against fierce German counter-attacks for three days (combat that saw 800 Germans killed or wounded and 2,100 captured). He then led his men in securing the rest of the village and helped seal off the Falaise pocket.

THE LEGACY

There are many acts of heroism in times of war but the reality is that only a fraction of these ever result in medals for bravery. Heroes are everyday Canadians who do extraordinary things. The 16 Canadians who won the Victoria Cross during the Second World War set a sterling example of the kind of effort put forth by the more than one million Canadians who served their country and the world during the struggles of the Second World War. To learn more about Canada's role in the Second World War; please visit the Veterans Affairs Canada Web site at www.vac-acc.gc.ca or call 1-877-604-8469 toll-free.

