

# CHARLES SMITH RUTHERFORD

Charles Rutherford was born on January 8, 1892 near the Town of Colborne in eastern Ontario's Northumberland County. He was twenty-four when he enlisted in the Queen's Own Rifles and shortly afterwards was transferred to the 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles, a Quebec regiment.

Within months, Rutherford and his unit were serving in France. His record is one of both bravery and persistence. After two terms of duty at Ypres his unit marched to the Somme. He was wounded in the Regina Trench but returned from the hospital in England in time to take part in the battle of Vimy Ridge in March 1917. Wounded again in June, near Amiens, Rutherford was back with his unit by August of that year.

At the end of October 1917, then Sergeant Rutherford went into action at Passchendale under the command of Major George Pearkes. Major Pearkes was awarded the VC for his actions and Rutherford was awarded the Military Medal.

After being sent on course to Bexhill-on-Sea in England, Rutherford returned to his unit as a Lieutenant and was placed in charge of No. 9 Platoon. In early August his actions once again brought recognition, for which he received the Military Cross. His own words describe the action:

*On August 9th, 1918 I went into battle and with my Company we captured two towns, the first Arvillers, the German Division Headquarters where I managed to get a paymaster and a lot of German money. The Germans were clearing out as they knew we were coming. The only things that they left behind were a box of pigeons and 300 new machine guns. This was on the Amiens Front. Then we captured a little town called Bangor and that was as far as we were to go. I was given the Military Cross for capturing these two towns.*

It was later that same month that the action that earned him the Victoria Cross took place. The citation reads in part as follows:

*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 waved 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.*

*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.*

It was while he was on leave in England in November of 1918 that Rutherford learned from Colonel Pearkes VC that he was to be presented with the Victoria Cross by King George.

After the war Rutherford returned home where he met and married Helen Haig and the couple established a dairy farm in nearby Vernonville. In 1934 Rutherford was appointed by the Mitchell Hepburn Government as Sergeant-at-Arms in the Ontario Legislature and in 1939 he was made Postmaster in Colborne. In 1940 after the outbreak of WWII Rutherford joined the Veterans Guard of Canada. As well as being posted to Arvida, Quebec and Kingston, Ontario, Rutherford was also sent to the Bahamas from 1942 to 1943 where his duties included being guard to the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. He was discharged at the end of the war with the rank of Captain.

In 1955 he left his beloved Colborne to go to Keswick on Lake Simcoe, returning home to retire in 1979. Charles Smith Rutherford died on June 11, 1989 at the age of 97, the last Canadian winner of the Victoria Cross from World War I. He is buried at The Union Cemetery, Colborne.



*He walked with royalty, rubbed shoulders with the political and military leaders of our nation, yet remained a very humble, God fearing and unobtrusive person, never wanting to be elevated above his peers.*

*(The Rev. Victor Parsons of Colborne United Church, Padre to Br. 187 Royal Canadian Legion)*