

Heroism of World War I Victoria Cross recipient celebrated

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By John Campbell

News - Colborne - The exploits of celebrated World War I hero, Lieutenant Charles Smith Rutherford, who was awarded the Victoria Cross for his valour in singlehandedly capturing 80 German soldiers, were brought to life last weekend during Doors Open Cramahe.

Actor Barry Wood, a Lakeport resident and member of Heritage Cramahe, portrayed his wife's grandfather, Private Alan Roney, to tell the story of Rutherford, a Colborne-area farmer who joined the war effort when he was 24. He was wounded twice while a member of the 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles, seeing action at Ypres, the Somme and Vimy Ridge.

He earned the Military Medal at Passchendale, Belgium, the Military Cross at Arvillers, France, and the Victoria Cross in Monchy-le-Preux, France.

It was at Monchy-le-Preux that Rutherford achieved his greatest claim to fame. While leading an assault party across No Man's Land at 3 in the morning, they surprised a German encampment and took possession of four field guns, Wood said. He arranged for the prisoners to be taken back behind the lines while he pressed on to catch up with another company that was part of the assault.

Rutherford was unable to find them and when he returned his company had moved elsewhere. Not knowing they had retreated to higher ground to escape artillery fire, he assumed they had advanced and he went forward in pursuit.

"He sees a group of soldiers up ahead," Wood said, "just as the sun is starting to come up," and waves to them with his pistol, thinking they're Canadians.

Too late he realizes it's the enemy encamped at a pillbox armed with machine guns.

"He knows he's a dead duck—if he turns tail and runs, he's gunned down in seconds," Wood said. "So he decides his only option is to

bluff it."

Rutherford approaches a German officer and tells him he and the others are his prisoners because their unit is "surrounded by heavily armed Canadians who were ready to open fire if they didn't surrender."

Incredibly, his bluff works, the 45 Germans surrender. Rutherford persuades the officer to halt the fire of a machine gun nearby, which allows his fellow Canadians to move up and provide support.

Not done, Rutherford attacked another pillbox with a Lewis gun and captured 35 more Germans.

The citation he received in connection with the Victoria Cross praised Rutherford for being "a wonderful inspiration to all ranks in pressing home the attack on a very strong position."

The tribute to Rutherford was held at the Colborne Legion which takes its name after the decorated hero, who, when he died in 1989, was the last surviving Canadian holder of the Victoria Cross from World War I.

Twenty sites across Northumberland County took part of the themed tour that celebrated industrial heritage, town and country, and churches, along with World War I.

Cramahe Township had two other sites, in addition to the Legion; one was Veterans Monument in Victoria Square, and the other was St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, built in 1830 from local stone.

Donations were being accepted at the event for restoration of the base of the cenotaph which has deteriorated and is not safe, said Deputy-mayor Jim Williams. He's a member of the committee that was recently formed to raise funds for the project.

Application will be made to Veterans Affairs Canada this summer to cover half of the cost, which is still to be determined. The committee is to select a design this week.



Actor Barry Wood, portraying a World War I veteran, told the story of Lieutenant Charles Smith Rutherford, who was awarded the Victoria Cross for singlehandedly capturing 80 German soldiers. The presentation was held June 7 and 8 at the Colborne Legion during Doors Open Cramahe. Photo: John Campbell



Heritage Cramahe participated in the Doors Open tour that took place across Northumberland County last week. The sites included the Colborne Legion, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, and, above Veterans Monument in Victoria Square. Tribute was also paid to Eliza Padginton, Colborne's first postmistress who worked 70 years in the mail service before retiring in 1953. Among those taking part in the themed tour were, l-r, Cathy Galt, Joy Gifford, Heritage Cramahe chair Lenna Broatch, and Barbara Horscroft. Photo: John Campbell

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