

# The V. C. Centennial — 1,347 Awards

By J. A. B.

(Written for The Times-Journal)

One hundred years ago (January 29th) the Victoria Cross came into being. Since that day 1,347 men have been awarded the medal. Since that day 93 Canadians have merited the honor. Because of that day Elgin County can proudly boast and humbly remember a member of the world's most gallant band.

The Victoria Cross is a simple medal, 1½ inches square, made from Russian cannon captured at Sebastopol. Near the top of the cross is a British lion standing over a crown, below is a scroll bearing only two words FOR VALOUR. On the back is the name of the hero and his unit.

It is a completely democratic award. It is open to anyone, regardless of color, creed or rank. Its only requisite—valour.

The warrant for the cross reads: "Neither rank, nor long service, nor wounds, nor any other circumstance or condition whatsoever, save the merit of conspicuous bravery shall be held to establish a sufficient claim to the honour."

A holder of the Victoria Cross must also keep himself worthy. The warrant again reads "In order to make such additional provision as shall effectively preserve pure this most honorable distinction, it is ordained that if any person be convicted of treason, cowardice, felony or other infamous crimes, or if he is accused of any such offence, and does not after a reasonable time surrender himself to be tried, his name shall forthwith be erased from the registry of individuals upon whom the decoration shall have been bestowed.

Some have won the Victoria Cross through one moment of sublime courage. For others its attainment has been a slow, cumulative accomplishment spread over hours, days or months.

To some it has come in the tender years—as young as 16. To some it came when well past the flush of youth.

Some, as a price for winning the award, will bear their scars for the rest of their lives. Some, in winning, gave their gift of life itself.

For three men since its inception it has come twice.

In three instances it has been won by both father and son.

Once it was given to a man



**ELGIN'S V. C. HERO.** — Of the 93 Canadians who have been awarded the Victoria Cross, only one Elgin County native or resident has been so honored. Sergeant Ellis Wellwood Sifton (shown above) was awarded this greatest of all military honors for "conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty" during the battle of Vimy Ridge in France in World War I on April 9, 1917, as noted in the accompanying article written for The Times-Journal by "J.A.B." of Dutton. Sergt. Sifton, a son of the late Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Sifton, of Wallacetown, later of Dutton, was a member of the 18th Battalion, which was raised and trained in this district. The Cross to Sergt. Sifton was awarded posthumously and was proudly received by his father. It is now in the possession of his sisters, Misses Ella and Millie Sifton, respected residents of Dutton. A large granite shaft, or monument, to the memory of Sergt. Sifton, stands on the Sifton family plot near the entrance to Fairview Cemetery at Dutton.

who fought for another country—the Unknown Soldier of the United States who lies buried at Arlington, Virginia.

In the famous and tragic "Charge of the Light Brigade" Queen Victoria could not decide on which of the brave to confer her cross; so she awarded it to the 11th Hussars and asked them to choose their bravest.

And it went by unanimous consent to a young Toronto man. The Queen herself, two years later, presented it to Lieutenant Alexander Robert Dunn who was then only 23.

### Gave Life For Others

Twenty-nine Canadians did not live to know of their award.

Such a one was Elgin County's honored Victoria Cross holder. Sergeant Ellis Wellwood Sifton suffered mortal wounds in becoming one of the immortal 29. Here is his citation: "For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty. During the attack in enemy trenches Sergt. Sifton's company was held up by machine gun fire which inflicted many casualties. Having located the gun he charged it single-handed, killing all the crew. A small enemy party advanced down the trench, but he succeeded keeping these off until our men had gained the position. In carrying out this gallant act he was killed, but his conspicuous valour undoubtedly saved many lives and contributed largely to the success of the operation."

On this day one hundred years later let us pause and remember again the world's most gallant band. Let us pay our respects to the 93 Canadians. Let us cherish the memory of Sergeant Ellis Sifton. And let us ever keep a quiet place in our hearts for the one entitled to wear the badge "For Valour."

### Idea Originated During Crimea War

The idea for the Victoria Cross originated during the Crimean War which began in April, 1854. The British public was stirred by the heroism and horrors of the Russian campaign and one of the earliest and greatest of war correspondents, W. H. Russell of the Legion Times, undoubtedly reflected public opinion when he suggested that a special medal for all ranks should be struck for bravery and that it should be named for the Queen. Probably Queen Victoria and her consort, Prince Albert, had already grasped the need for a decoration for gallantry open to all ranks. In any case, the Prince laid down the main principles in a memorandum written by himself and embodied in the first V.C. warrant signed by the Queen on January 29, 1856.