

NOW PRISONER IN REICH CECIL MERRITT IS SON OF LANGEMARCK HERO

"Forget About V.C.'s" Was Last Word to Wife, But Now
He's First Soldier of Canada's Army
to Get One

ANCESTORS NOTED IN CANADA'S HISTORY FATHER KILLED AT YPRES WAS HIS IDEAL

Canada's first winner of the Victoria Cross in the second great war is Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Cecil Ingersoll Merritt, commanding officer of the South Saskatchewan Regiment. His parting admonition from his wife, when he left for overseas, was, "Take good care of yourself and forget about V.C.'s."

Hon. J. L. Ralston, minister of national defence, today placed Lieut.-Col. Merritt's name at the head of a list of 176 Canadians who fought with gallantry which calls for distinction in the battle of Dieppe.

The citation accompanying the award, highest in the British empire, states that the decoration is for "matchless gallantry and inspiring leadership whilst commanding his battalion during the Dieppe raid, Aug. 19, 1942."

Lieutenant-Colonel Merritt is 33 years of age, and was practising law in Vancouver at the outbreak of war. He is a graduate of the Royal Military college at Kingston.

During his student years he starred in athletics, particularly boxing and football. He appeared headed for a promising political career when he dropped his civilian activities to sign for active service with the Seaforth Highlanders, the unit with which his father was fighting when he was killed in 1915 at Ypres.

He will be unable to receive his award personally, as he is a prisoner of war, believed slightly wounded as a result of his heroic action at Dieppe.

Hopes For Lets Him Know

The chief concern of his wife, Mrs. Grace Bone Merritt, who is living for the duration in her home town of Belleville, is that her husband may not be aware of the award.

"I'm so thrilled that I can't think of a thing to say," Mrs. Merritt exclaimed.

"Do you suppose the Germans will allow that information to get to my husband? I know it would make him feel so much better to know that his action had been successful. I'm pretty sure the Germans wouldn't want him to know that it was."

After Dieppe, a grizzled sergeant

of the South Saskatchewan Regiment, called on Mrs. J. A. McMillan, sister of Lieut.-Col. Merritt.

Mrs. McMillan is a member of a motorized transport corps overseas. Her husband, a doctor, is serving with a hospital unit.

"I ain't much of a prayin' man," the sergeant told her "but since the show over yonder I've sure been prayin' that my colonel is a prisoner, rather than that he has been killed."

A short time after he had assumed command of the Saskatchewan unit, Lieut.-Col. Merritt wrote to his wife, Mrs. Grace Merritt of Belleville, to tell her of the regiment.

"They're a wonderfully fine bunch of men," he said. "They have won something every year — in athletics and competitions—so I'll expect them to carry on this year."

The South Saskatchewan came through with distinction in the greatest test of all—at Dieppe.

The same hard-bitten sergeant who told of his prayers for "my colonel," described Lieut.-Col. Merritt's heroism in the great raid on the French city.

Appeared Whenever Needed

"I thought I was tough, but I couldn't have done what the colonel did," he declared. "Whenever we needed him, he seemed to appear—from God knows where. At the bridge (in Pourville) we were lying flat on our stomachs to escape enemy fire.

"The colonel, he shouted: 'Who's going with me across the bridge?' One man answered, 'Me, sir,' and right away all the others said, 'Us sir'."

Hon. J. L. Ralston, in his official statement on the Dieppe action, singled out Lieut.-Col. Merritt for particular praise.

"He acted with most distinguished gallantry throughout the operation," Col. Ralston's statement said, in part. "When his battalion was held up by very hot fire at a bridge, on which many men had fallen, Lieut.-Col. Merritt walked back and forth across the bridge, waving his helmet and calling, 'See, there is no danger here.' He then led his men across and cleared commanding enemy posts on the other side.

"After many acts of bravery dur-

ing the day, including leading detachments against strongly defended road blockades, personally disposing of snipers, and organizing and leading parties for the destruction of enemy machine-gun posts which were harassing his men, this most gallant officer was last seen collecting automatic weapons and organizing a defensive position to cover the withdrawal of the last parties of his unit from the beach."

Lieut.-Col. Charles Cecil Ingersoll Merritt received his Christian names from his grandfather, Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper, a son of one of the Fathers of Confederation, his father, Capt. Cecil M. Merritt, and from the St. Catharines family of Ingersoll, into which his great-grandfather had married.

The Merritts made an important contribution to Canadian development through their work in the building of the Welland canal. Merritt is named for them.

Young Cecil Merritt was just seven when his father fell at Ypres in 1915. His father was an acting major in the Seaforth Highlanders at the time. The promotion was gazetted after he had been listed as killed. Acting Major Merritt was wounded during a fierce engage-

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men with the Germans. He refused to allow stretcher-bearers to carry him back. He remained in the trench and continued to encourage his men to hold out until they could be reinforced.

Died Fighting To End

It was part of his strategy to maintain as heavy a fire as possible, in order to deceive the enemy as to the strength of his unit. While firing his revolver over the parapet, he was shot in the head and killed.

"We never found out where he was buried," his wife, Mrs. C. M. Merritt of Vancouver, now visiting her daughter-in-law at Belleville, said simply. "I always felt that my husband was my son Cecil's ideal."

When Master Cecil Merritt was graduated from the University Military School at 14 he was too young to be accepted at Royal Military college, so it was decided that he should accept employment with the Royal Bank of Canada and that he should prepare himself in the meantime for his senior matriculation. He had obtained his junior matriculation at University Military school.

The chance to attend R.M.C. came sooner than he had expected, and young Mr. Merritt was caught unprepared. With the aid of a private

tutor and by means of diligent cramming, he absorbed sufficient knowledge in a three-months period to pass the senior matriculation examinations.

His last two years at R.M.C. were provided for by the I.O.D.E. scholarship, which he had won in his second year. At R.M.C., he was a popular student. Although he participated in various branches of athletics, his specialty was boxing. On the west coast, he played rugby football. Sailing was another of his favorite pastimes.

A neat ash tray, decorated with the crest of the Royal Vancouver Yacht club, reminded his wife of her husband's love for the water. The ash tray was engraved: "R.V.Y.C. 1935—Patteran." The

"Patteran" was the name of his boat.

After his graduation from R.M.C., Lieut.-Col. Merritt returned to Vancouver and studied law. He was called to the bar and entered the legal firm of Walsh Bull, Houser and Tupper of Vancouver. The firm had been founded by his grandfather.

He gained recognition as a political speaker, and appeared on the platform as a supporter of McGregor McIntosh.

In 1935, he was the best man at his brother's wedding in Vancouver. The bridesmaid was Miss Grace Bone, blonde member of a well-known Belleville family, a close friend of the bride. On New Year's Day in 1937, the bridesmaid and the groomsmen of the 1935 ceremony

were married in Belleville. They have two children, Cecil, three and a half years of age, and Peter, a year younger.

Both the wife and the mother of the distinguished officer expressed gratitude to Frederick Griffin, of The Star, for his enlightening dispatches from overseas following the Dieppe raid.

"After reading Mr. Griffin's account, I had a clear picture, for the first time, of my husband's part in the raid," Mrs. Merritt, junior declared. "I clipped it out of the paper and sent it immediately to my husband's mother in Vancouver. I would like Mr. Griffin to have my thanks."

Both wife and mother had known for some time that Lieut.-Col. Merritt had been recommended for a decoration, although they did not

know what the decoration would be.

Major-General J. H. Roberts, officer commanding the Canadians at Dieppe, had written to describe his admiration of the bravery displayed by the commander of the South Saskatchewan.

"I never have known an officer who was thought more highly of by his men," Major-General Roberts wrote. "He fought a most gallant action and refused to come off in the ships until all his men were evacuated. I shall now quote from a report submitted to me by his battalion: 'Col. Merritt has been agreed upon by all members of his battalion as the most outstanding personality of the raid.'

"His bravery, resourcefulness and conduct at all times were of the highest order, and he never, at any time, asked a man to go where he could not himself lead. He seemed to be everywhere in the battalion area at once, and always was there when someone was held up, to help them through.

"He helped to carry wounded and made sure of the safety and well-being of all ranks except himself. He absolutely ignored enemy fire, even that of snipers who were actually after him, in the carrying out of his job, and even after he was wounded himself, he did not falter or change."

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