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Colonel Graham Thomson Lyall, V.C. 1892-1941

On Sunday, June 5, 2005, at 11:15 a.m., the Ontario Heritage Foundation, The Lincoln and Welland Regiment and The Lincoln and Welland Regiment Foundation unveiled a provincial plaque commemorating Colonel Graham Thomson Lyall, V.C. – in the presence of Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex, Colonel-in-Chief, on the occasion of the Review of the Lincoln and Welland Regiment in St. Catharines, Ontario.

The plaque was unveiled by Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex and The Honourable Lincoln M. Alexander, Chairman of the Ontario Heritage Foundation.

The bilingual plaque reads as follows:

COLONEL GRAHAM THOMSON LYALL, V.C. 1892-1941

Graham Thomson Lyall emigrated from Britain in 1911, eventually settling in Niagara Falls where he worked for the Canadian Niagara Power Company. In 1914, at the start of the First World War, Lyall enlisted in the 19th "Lincoln" Regiment at St. Catharines. Later, he joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force and fought at the Somme in 1916, Arras and Ypres in 1917, and Amiens in 1918. On September 27 and October 1, 1918, Lyall led his platoon against the enemy at Bourlon Wood and Blécourt, displaying exceptional valour and leadership, inflicting heavy casualties, and capturing 182 prisoners, 26 machine-guns, and one field gun. "For most conspicuous and skilful leading during the operations north of Cambrai", King George V presented Lyall with the Victoria Cross, the British Empire's highest decoration for valour.

LE COLONEL GRAHAM THOMSON LYALL, V.C. 1892-1941

Graham Thomson Lyall émigra d'Angleterre en 1911, et s'installa finalement à Niagara Falls où il travailla pour la Canadian Niagara Power Company. En 1914, au début de la Première Guerre mondiale, Graham Lyall s'enrôla au 19^{ème} Régiment « Lincoln », à St. Catharines. Plus tard, il rejoignit le Corps expéditionnaire canadien et livra bataille sur la Somme en 1916, à Arras et Ypres en 1917, et à Amiens en 1918. Le 27 septembre et le 1^{er} octobre 1918, Graham Lyall conduisit son peloton à l'attaque de l'ennemi au bois de Bourlon et à Blécourt, faisant preuve d'une exceptionnelle bravoure et d'un sens aigu du commandement, infligeant de lourdes

peines et s'emparent de 182 prisonniers, de 26 mitrailleuses et d'un canon de campagne. « Pour ses qualités de commandement des plus remarquables et des plus efficaces au cours des opérations au nord de Cambrai », le roi George V décora Graham Lyall de la Croix de Victoria, la plus importante décoration de l'Empire britannique pour des actes de bravoure.

Historical background

Graham Thomson Lyall was born in Chorlton, north of Manchester, England on March 8, 1892. He was the son of the Reverend Robert Henry Lyall and Agnes Lisette Wells of Darwen, Lancashire. Lyall finished Nelson Secondary School in 1907 before enrolling in a technical school in Portsmouth. After completing his education in 1911, Lyall attempted to join the Royal Navy but failed the medical examination.

He immigrated to Canada in 1911, settling in Welland where he worked for Canadian Steel Foundries. The following year, he moved to Chippawa to work for the Canadian Niagara Power Company, which generated hydro-electric power from Niagara Falls. He then moved to Niagara Falls.

Three days after the beginning of the First World War, Lyall resigned his job at the Niagara Power Company and joined the 19th "Lincoln" Regiment at St. Catharines. He was placed on active service in the Welland Canal Force, which was responsible for defending vital points along the Welland Canal, hydro-electric facilities at Niagara, Queenston and Brock's monument, and international bridges between Canada and the United States.

On September 28, 1915, Lyall joined the 81st Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), as a private. The battalion was sent overseas, arriving in Britain in 1916. The 81st was broken up to provide reinforcements to units in France that had suffered heavy casualties. Lyall was one of 350 soldiers who joined the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles as reinforcements after that unit was decimated at Sanctuary Wood in Belgium on June 2, 1916.

Lyall fought in the Battle of the Somme in September 1916 and the Battle of Arras in 1917. He quickly rose through the ranks, successively being promoted to corporal and sergeant. He was commissioned on the battlefield and sent for officer training in Britain. After completing his training, Lyall joined the 102nd Battalion, CEF, as a lieutenant, fighting at Ypres in 1917 and the Battle of Amiens in 1918. Throughout the fighting, Lyall was wounded several times: by shrapnel at Pozieres in 1916, at Passchendale in 1917, and by mustard gas near Lens in 1918.

In September 1918, the Canadian Corps – in which Lyall served – was given the task of breaching the Hindenburg Line on Canal du Nord as part of the push to capture Cambrai. On

September 27 and October 1, 1918 at Bourslon Wood and Blécourt, Lyall led his platoon and later a weak company against the enemy, displaying exceptional valour and leadership, inflicting heavy casualties, and capturing 182 prisoners, 26 machine-guns, and one field gun. "For most conspicuous and skilful leading during the operations north of Cambrai", Lyall was awarded the Victoria Cross, the British Empire's highest decoration for valour, self-sacrifice or devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy.

The citation, published in the *London Gazette* of December 14, 1918, reads:

For most conspicuous and skilful leading during the operations north of Cambrai.

On September 27th, 1918, whilst leading his platoon against Bourslon Wood, he rendered invaluable support to the leading company, which was held up by a strong point, which he captured by a flanking movement, together with thirteen prisoners and one field gun and four machine guns. Later, his platoon, now much weakened by casualties, was held up by four machine-guns at the southern end of Bourslon Wood. Collecting any men available he led them towards the strong point, and springing forward alone rushed the position single-handed killed the officer in charge, subsequently capturing at this point forty-five prisoners and five machine-guns. Having made good his final objective, with a further capture of forty-seven prisoners, he consolidated his position and thus protected the remainder of his company.

On October 1st, in the neighbourhood of Blécourt, when in command of a weak company, by skilful dispositions, he captured a strongly defended position, which yielded eighty prisoners and seventeen machine-guns. During the two days of operations, Lieutenant Lyall captured in all three offices, 182 other ranks, twenty-six machine-guns, and one field gun, exclusive of heavy casualties inflicted. He showed throughout the utmost valour and high powers of command.

King George V presented the Victoria Cross to Lyall at Buckingham Palace on March 15, 1919.

After the First World War, Lyall returned to Britain, marrying Elizabeth (Elsie) Moffat Frew on April 24, 1919. They settled in Airdie, Scotland, where Lyall became managing director of Aerocrete (Scotland) Limited, a building construction company. While working as a civilian, Lyall continued to serve in the British Territorial Army (TA) as a captain in the Royal Engineers. In 1921, he transferred to the Territorial Army Reserve of Officers. But in 1939, at the start of the Second World War, Lyall was promoted to major, commanding the 3rd AA Division Workshop Company, Royal Army Ordnance Corps (TA). After being promoted to lieutenant-colonel, Lyall was sent to North Africa on active service. He was promoted to colonel and appointed commanding officer of the 87th Lines of Communications Sub Area of the Eighth

Army before dying of heart disease on November 28, 1941. Lyall is buried in Halfaya Sollum Cemetery, on the coastal road from Mersa Matruh, near the Libyan border.

In 2002, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Museum of Technology in Reading, England accepted Lyall's medals on long-term loan from Lyall's family. The medal grouping includes the Victoria Cross, British War Medal (1914-20), Victory Medal (1914-19), 1939-45 Star, Africa Star, War Medal (1939-45), King George V Coronation Medal (1911) and King George VI Coronation Medal 1937.

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