



Thomas Ricketts V.C., C. de G.

Newfoundland's Reluctant War Hero:

Thomas Ricketts, V.C., C. de G.

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By

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Introduction

For the people of Newfoundland and Labrador three things about the Royal Newfoundland Regiment in World War I have etched a permanent place in their collective conscience - the Blue Puttees, the tragedy at Beaumont-Hamel, and Tommy Ricketts. Of course there is much more to Newfoundland's involvement in World War I than just these three things, but in some respects those three things sum up our collective consciousness of the Great War representing the Regiment, the Battles, and the Soldiers.

This paper will examine the life of Newfoundland's most celebrated but reluctant war hero and highest decorated soldier. Thomas Ricketts was a teenage inshore fisherman from an isolated outport community who answered the call to arms, one of many under-aged soldiers to do so. He would likely have faded into obscurity like the many soldiers he fought with except for one incident that changed his life forever and made him a celebrity in every Newfoundland household, a fact that still holds true nearly 100 years later. He was an ordinary person thrust into extraordinary circumstances. For his actions during an attack in Belgium in October 1918 he was awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest award for valour in the face of the enemy the British Empire could bestow on soldiers. Ricketts was the only member of Newfoundland Contingent in the Great War to receive this distinguished award.

When Ricketts Victoria Cross award was announced he instantly went from obscurity to celebrity and returned to Newfoundland to the adulation of his countrymen the youngest Victoria Cross recipient in the British Army. Amongst Victoria Cross winners this in itself made Ricketts VC stand out above the crowd. **1**

Thought to be shy, but most certainly reserved, he was caught up in a whirlwind of *Tommy Mania* from the time his Victoria Cross award was announced until, in later life, he tired and eventually

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came to avoid the fame of being Newfoundland's only living Victoria Cross recipient. Reserved in manners he certainly was, obstinate and steadfast he would become as he weaned himself out of the Victoria Cross limelight. In the years immediately following the war, despite his youth and modest background, he carried the weight of his Victoria Cross celebrity with dignity that defied his age, while taking advantage of the opportunities afforded him by his bronze cross to get an education and establish a career in pharmacy. Taken in by the Newfoundland elite his own legacy would not just be an act of heroism on some far distant shore, but his tenacity to change his life through education and initiative.

Thomas Ricketts VICTORIA CROSS: Early Life

Thomas Ricketts was born to John and Amelia (Cassell) Ricketts in a small isolated fishing hamlet of Middle Arm, White Bay on the western shores of the Baie Verte Peninsula. His family maintains along with other unofficial sources that his birth date was April 15, 1901, although parish records list his birthday as April, 14, 1900. **2 (see notation)** He was the youngest of three children from his father's 2nd marriage to Amelia, along with a brother George and a sister Rachel. As well he had at least three half-brothers from his father's first marriage to Elizabeth Langford.**3** His father at the time of his birth was already timeworn at the age of 60. He was an inshore fisherman, as were his sons. The village of Middle Arm was a sparsely populated isolated community of a handful of families with no post office or school. **4** It is not surprising that neither Thomas nor his brother George were able to sign their names on their attestation papers when they enlisted in the Regiment. **5**

At the age of five Tommy's life nearly came to an end. One day while playing on the shoreline he fell from a rock and was dragged out by the tide sinking to the bottom in 10 feet of water. Richard Baker, a deck hand from a visiting schooner, was in the garden talking to John Ricketts when he saw

Tommy swept away from the shore. Baker, a non-swimmer, dove in regardless and dragged the boy out nearly drowning in the process. Baker recalled: *"When we came ashore, both of us were near dead."* Baker's brother and Richard picked up the child by the legs to: *"drain the water out of him. We rolled him on the ground...he groaned a bit...and we held him up by the legs again..."* **6**

His older brother George answered the call for outport recruits to serve in the Newfoundland Regiment in the summer of 1915 and travelled to St. John's where he enlisted on July 14. He departed in a draft of soldiers for overseas service in October leaving St. John's by train bound for Quebec City where the SS Corsican, would take them to Britain for more training. George was one of the 127 soldiers of the first reinforcement draft brought into the Regiment lines on July 12, 1916 at Beaumont-Hamel to begin rebuilding the devastated battalion. **7**

Later in July 1916, Tommy Ricketts heard the devastating news of the near annihilation of the Newfoundland Regiment at Beaumont-Hamel. Lance Corporal Lilly and Private Tibbs were conducting a recruitment drive in White Bay around mid-August, returning to St. John's with fresh recruits, Ricketts among them.**8** This young fisherman was determined to enlist, despite being under age which in itself was not uncommon. Youthful he may have been, but standing at 5' 6" he could easily pass for 18, especially when providing proof of age was not required for enlistment. **9** Being a fisherman from an early age would have made him strong and fit; an ideal candidate for a man hungry regiment. There was only the fishery and his recently married sister, to keep him in Middle Arm, his mother having passed away a few years before, his father was living elsewhere and his brother George was on the Western Front. **10**

On September 2, 1916 an underage Tommy Ricketts placed an X on his enlistment papers claiming to be 18 years and 3 months, physically marking a turning point in his life that he could never have foreseen. **11**

Thomas Ricketts VC: At War

Ricketts left St. John's January 31, 1917 on the SS Florizel bound for Halifax, Nova Scotia, part of what would become known as the Windsor Draft because of a 10 week delay in going overseas caused by an outbreak of measles. The measles, a major health concern in those days, postponed the draft's departure from Halifax. The soldiers were quarantined to barracks in Windsor, Nova Scotia until the malady had run its course.

In Britain Tommy would have been reunited with his brother George, who had joined the 2nd Battalion Depot after being wounded in December, 1916. After a period of training Ricketts joined the 1st Battalion in the field July 2, 1917 along with a draft of 249 other reinforcements while the Regiment was in the Ypres sector in Belgium. George was also back on the Western Front, having returned to the 1st Battalion a few weeks prior to Tommy's arrival. **12**

Ricketts was assigned to B Company. At the time of his arrival they were building infantry tracks through the mud of Flanders. He would have passed through the devastated yet strangely populated trench infested wasteland of Ypres and its surroundings to be put to work in the filthy, rat-infested, mud pits in the killing fields known as Passchendaele. Any glamorous boyhood fantasies that Ricketts may have been harbouring would have been shattered. July, 1917 was one dreary working party after another for the boys in the Newfoundland Regiment. **13**

Tommy's first experience of going *over the top* came on August 16, 1917 at the Battle of Langemarck near a stream known as Steenbeek. This was a very successful action. The Newfoundlanders followed a creeping artillery barrage, crossing a swamp to take their 2nd objective. They also incurred remarkably few casualties during the attack. For the next couple of months the battalion remained in the Ypres sector moving in and out of the front line. Though no attacks were made during this period the battalion suffered many casualties from heavy shelling with high explosives and gas, as well as numerous strafings by low flying German aircraft. **14**

On October 9, 1917 the Battalion was involved in another attack at the Battle of Poelcapelle, better known to the Newfoundlanders as Brombeek. Though the Regiment took their objective as well as that of another battalion and kept pressing forward, they were not so fortunate when it came to casualties which were twice that of Langemarck.**15** Tommy and George came away from this engagement unscathed.

On November 20, 1917, Tommy went over the top once again during the Battle of Cambrai. Ricketts was hit early in the attack with a gunshot wound to his right thigh. Things could have been worse. He was alive after all, his wound was not life threatening. It earned him a ticket to *Blighty* (England) for treatment and recuperation. **16** The Battle of Cambrai stretched over two weeks and early success gave way to later defeat. The Newfoundland Regiment defended the line with true gallantry. On December 3 the depleted Battalion was clinging valiantly to the defensive line when the Germans unleashed a merciless barrage of trench mortars and field artillery along a small section of trench killing many Newfoundlanders. Tommy's brother George was one of those that died that day and whose body was never found or identified. **17**

A little over four months later Ricketts once again joined the Battalion in the field. He arrived two weeks **after** the Regiment played its part in stemming the last great German offensive of the war in Belgium and northern France. During a tense few days near the middle of April the Newfoundland Regiment was fighting for its very survival around Bailleul. An appeal by Field-Marshal Douglas Haig to stop the German offensive at all costs resonated with the Battalion as they manoeuvred through Bailleul in rear-guard actions for the Brigade. When the dust settled the damage inflicted on the Regiment was near complete. With no foreseeable reserves to make good their losses the Regiment was hauled out of the line in late April and withdrawn from the 29th Division. **18** The Battalion would spend a pleasant summer rebuilding its ranks on the Channel coast while providing a guard detail for headquarters of the British Expeditionary Force and Field Marshall Douglas Haig.

By September 1918 the Battalion was back up to fighting strength. The German offensive of the spring had fizzled and the tide began to turn against them. The Regiment was back to front line duty joining the 9th (Scottish), led by the innovative General Hugh Tudor, whose forward thinking brought the surprise attack at Cambrai, predicted artillery and the use of smoke shells during assaults. The Newfoundlanders, now with the newly formed 28th Brigade under the leadership of Brigadier-General John "Mad" Jack joined the final Allied *push* of the war. **19 – 20 (see note on Tudor)**

When the regiment saw its first action in almost 6 months at the end of September more than half the men had never fired their guns in battle. Veteran soldiers like young Tommy were seasoned fighters and old hands at the routine. On September 28-29 Tommy sat out the attack on Keiberg Ridge with the 10% Reserve. The purpose of the reserve was to provide immediate replacement for casualties. **21** 'B' Company Captain Sydney Frost, who would figure prominently in Ricketts' Victoria Cross action, won a gallantry medal for his quick thinking while leading the attack on the ridge.

A couple of weeks later, in the early morning hours of October 14, the Battalion was strung out along the railway bed north of the village of Ledeghem in anticipation of another advance. They had snaked their way forward to the jump off point under heavy artillery barrage the previous night sustaining 15 casualties. **22** A scant 200 yards to their rear the forward artillery were stationed. **23** With 'loose' orders the initiative and execution for the advance would be left to the junior officers. 'D' and 'B' Companies were in the lead along the railway track waiting for the assault to begin. **24** 'B' Company was on the far right of the line and Ricketts' platoon was on 'B' Company's right. **25**

At 5:35am, after a 20 minute barrage of 2 smoke bombs to one high explosive, the Battalion moved forward on a 1000 yard front with the immediate objective to take 3 German pillboxes 500-600 yards apart. Buoyed by the recently administered rum rations the Newfoundlanders enthusiastically set about neutralizing the concrete pill boxes. Platoon commander's instructions were to deal with the pillboxes as the situation allowed. These pillboxes armed with machine guns covered a wide field of view with devastating results but were very vulnerable from the sides and rear. **26**

Just after clearing the pillboxes, a mist rose up east of Ledeghem when steam from the wet ground mixed with the smoke bombs, creating an impenetrable blanket of fog that reduced visibility to a mere yard or the length of a soldier's arm. Despite the handicap it posed to the Newfoundlanders it turned out to be fortunate as the Germans fared much worse. They were unable to bring their machine guns to bear on the Newfoundlanders. This resulted in saving many casualties during the initial assault. The Newfoundlanders continued the attack, even stumbling over German machine gun posts. Small groups of twos and threes kept in contact by shouting and using compass bearings. **27**

The British artillery at this point had halted as they could no longer see the advancing troops. At about 10:30 am as the Battalion neared the hamlet of Neerhof the dense fog and smoke began to lift

exposing the advancing troops to German gunners. **28** Just past Neerhof the Regiment halted briefly as the mist was still rising off the battlefield to reorganize before continuing the attack. **29** A German gun battery opened up a barrage on 'D' Company at close range causing many casualties including Captain Paterson who was wounded. **30** Command in the field then fell upon 'B' Company commander, a young Captain Sydney Frost. (This is important as Frost would be responsible for writing up any citations for gallantry medals awarded that day including the one for Thomas Ricketts). **31**

The Regiment was further held up 700 yards east of Neerhof, delayed by German artillery firing point blank into the Newfoundlanders crossing the Wulfdambeek stream. They took severe casualties as the troops crossed the stream in any manner they could. **32**

From there the battered Battalion fought its way up a low ridge crossing over loose wire at the crest near De Beurt Farm, a total distance of 1000 yards. Occupying a line that ran for approximately 600 yards they halted as per Brigade orders. **33** The entire Battalion came under heavy German gun, mortar and machine gun fire that covered the downward slope coming from the direction of Drie-Masten to the south-east. **34** On the right Ricketts platoon had been beat up pretty badly from the enfilading fire. Indeed the whole Battalion were now at risk of being annihilated if something was not done quickly. **35** Between two farm houses to the left of the apex of a fork in the Drie-Masten to Steenen-Stampkot road, south of a small pond, was a German strongpoint consisting of four artillery guns and four machine guns approximately 600 yards southeast of Frost's position on the crest of the ridge at De Beurt Farm. **36**

Lieutenant Stanley Newman, in consultation with Captain Frost but using his own initiative collected the remnants of his platoon and added the only two unwounded survivors (Private Ricketts and his section commander Lance Corporal Matthew Brazil) of the platoon that had been on his right to immediately move forward and then south into a valley to outflank the German strongpoint which was

on the right. **37** They crossed 300 yards of open ground and took cover in an irrigation ditch bordering a plot of farm land. **38**

Still 300-500 yards from the strongpoint Newman's twenty man platoon was pinned down by murderous machine gun fire from the guns protecting the artillery pieces that they were trying to encircle. Unable to advance any further Newman called for volunteers to continue to encircle the guns on their own. L/Cpl Matthew Brazil and Pte Thomas Ricketts willingly stepped forward **39** Taking a Lewis light machine gun and extra ammunition pans packed in special carriers they continued to move forward first attracting the attention of a sniper who fired several rounds before suddenly four machine guns and one artillery piece erupted, unleashing withering fire aimed directly at them. **40** Moving in short 10 yard rushes they sprinted ahead as Tommy fired the Lewis Gun from his hip, then they dropped, caught their breath, got up and went another 10 yards while firing the Lewis Gun. **41** By this method they moved approximately 200 yards across a ploughed field with little cover, to bring them within 300 yards of their target. **42** They must have started out with a lot of ammunition for the Lewis gun but each magazine carrying pack weighed them down heavily. After 100 yards one of them must have dropped two cartridge carriers as they were the furthest forward of all the attacking forces in this sector. There simply were no other Allied soldiers operating as far forward as Ricketts and Brazil. **43**

At this point, around noon, Brigadier-General John 'Mad' Jack briskly set out from a ridge to the north where he had been following the advance and made an impromptu frenzied appearance in the Newfoundlander's front line position inquiring why *his* advance was stalled. **44** Spying movement and wondering why the Newfoundlanders were not firing on what he mistook to be Germans retreating, Jack grabbed a Lewis gun and was about to fire when Captain Frost impetuously intervened, pointing out that the General was about to shoot his own troops. **45** At 600 yards he had little hope of actually

hitting them and so after a heated explanation of the Battalion's movements Jack grudgingly conceded and left the line as briskly as he appeared to attend other matters.

The men he saw moving across the field were none other than Newman's platoon. In a moment of reflection while writing in his diary, Jack commented: *"I am, however, too hasty in questioning the enterprise of my men, because about this time Private Ricketts of the Newfoundland is personally responsible for the capture of four field guns, four machine guns, and 8 prisoners..."* **46**

Within 300 yards of the enemy gun position Ricketts and Brazil fired on the Germans but quickly exhausted the remainder of the Lewis gun ammunition. The Germans immediately seized the opportunity to bring up their horses and wagons to remove the guns. Ricketts seeing that the Germans were moving up their gun teams made a hasty decision to double back for the dropped magazine carriers some 100 yards behind them. Ricketts told *The Evening Telegram* in 1919: *"The way it was with me was that I was determined that I would this time get them or they would get me."* **47** Ricketts was seeking revenge for the death of his brother George at Cambrai and he was determined it was now down to *me* or *them*. **48** At that moment his life hung in the balance, he was not afraid to die. Leaving Brazil in the forward position laying down sporadic covering fire along with Newman's platoon, Ricketts took flight in search of the carriers. How he managed to dodge the fire from four German machine guns and an artillery piece firing point blank, concentrating their fire solely on him was nothing short of miraculous.

Ricketts picked up two Lewis Gun magazine carriers each containing up to eight pans per carrier rig. Weighing 37.6 pounds per carrier rig Ricketts set out to return to his gun. **49** The Germans seeing Ricketts returning with more ammunition turned their attention on him once again in desperation to

save the situation. With a spray of bullets and artillery shells chasing him across the fire swept ground Ricketts repeated the miraculous 100 yard sprint for a second time carrying the extra load. (see note 49)

Ricketts safely returned to the spot he had left the Lewis gun but Brazil had moved on. 50 He loaded the gun and through accurate fire on the German gun crews drove the survivors into a nearby farmhouse. He dashed forward to the farmhouse firing the Lewis Gun from the hip in bursts, poked it in through the door and captured eight prisoners. 51

It is unknown how many casualties he inflicted on the enemy but they must have been high as German guns required many men to operate. Earlier that morning the Newfoundlanders had captured 2 machine guns and a garrison of 36 Germans attached to them. The War Diary records (in typical abbreviated style) that a German gunner in Ricketts' action at the farm was bayoneted, but says nothing else of the deed. It may be possible that this was the action of Brazil as it was unlikely Ricketts would have been carrying a Lewis Gun, which has no bayonet and a Lee Enfield rifle at the same time.

There is some confusion as to whether Newman's platoon advanced while Ricketts brought fire on the guns or after he (and Brazil) captured the guns. His official VICTORIA CROSS citation reads:

Pte. (Later Sergeant) Ricketts, Thomas, London Gazette, January 6, 1919 Action Date, October 14, 1918 - Ledeghem-Drie Masten

For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty on October 14, 1918. During the advance from Ledeghem the attack was temporarily held up by heavy hostile fire, and the platoon to which he belonged suffered severe casualties from the fire of a battery at point blank range.

Private Ricketts at once volunteered to go forward with his Section Commander and a Lewis gun to attempt to outflank the battery. They advanced by short rushes while subject to severe fire

from enemy machine guns. When 300 yards away, their ammunition gave out. The enemy, seeing an opportunity to get their field guns away, began to bring up their gun teams. Private Ricketts at once realized the situation. He doubled back 100 yards, procured some ammunition and dashed back to the Lewis gun, and by very accurate fire drove the enemy and their gun teams into a farm. His platoon then advanced without casualties, and captured four field guns, four machine guns and eight prisoners. A fifth field gun was subsequently intercepted by fire and captured. By his presence of mind in anticipating the enemy intention and his utter disregard for personal safety, Private Ricketts secured the further supplies of ammunition which directly resulted in these important captures and undoubtedly saved many lives. 52

The citation says that the platoon advanced once the Germans retreated to the farm house and it was Newman's platoon that made the capture. The original handwritten citation by Frost also says that Newman advanced. 53 However, in the *Evening Telegram* interview, and another with the Daily News a day later, Ricketts described that he was alone and made the capture just prior to Newman's arrival. Frost himself, the officer who wrote up Ricketts original citation, in a Veteran magazine article in 1923, says that the platoon only moved forward once the capture had been made.

"- his return [to the gun], the capture of the guns and gunners, and the subsequent advance of the platoon-" 54

Even Brig-Gen Jack's description of the event can be read as contradicting the citation when he said in his diary that *"...Private Ricketts...was personally responsible for the capture of four field guns, 4 machine guns and eight prisoners..." 55*

The end result of Ricketts' action was the sparing of many lives, those of his friends, comrades, even the entire Battalion as Frost believed. Ricketts however was not finished. A fifth gun with an

ammunition wagon suddenly raced down the road in a frantic attempt to escape. Ricketts brought his Lewis Gun into action once again and drove the team into another farmhouse, thereby capturing a fifth gun with its ammunition. **56**

Where exactly was Brazil, and what role did he play during the final assault?**57 (see notation)** He may not have been alongside when Ricketts returned with the ammunition for his gun but a clue may exist in the account given in *The Fighting Newfoundlander* when Nicholson wrote that Brazil laid down covering fire for the final assault on the gun position. **58** As Ricketts charged the farm house firing the Lewis Gun, Brazil may have been covering him from another angle. **59**

By the end of the day the Regiment had captured 500 prisoners, 94 machine guns and eight field guns including the 5 at Drie-Masten. **60** In an ironic twist another Private Thomas Ricketts, Regimental # 4020, a cousin of the Victoria Cross winner, # 3102, also from White Bay was killed in action that day. The next morning, October 15, the Regiment strength was down to 300 rifles in the field. **61**

Two days after the attack Captain Frost sat down to write the recommendation for Tommy's gallantry medal, a copy of which was sent up to Brigade HQ. **62** It was written the same day that Frost had to defend himself against a still-seething Brigadier General who was paying a visit to Battalion HQ to register his discontent on how a junior officer in the field had taken him to task. It was the first of six recommendations that he eventually wrote for the Regiment's action on October 14. On the October 18 he fired off a letter to the adjutant listing the six soldiers that he was recommending in order of merit. At this time he had no other citation written up. Despite writing the first, longest and most detailed recommendation for Ricketts in his letter he placed Tommy third in order of merit, behind Lt. Stanley Newman and Matthew Brazil. **63 (see notation)**

A recent published memoir by Captain Sydney Frost sheds more light on how the Victoria Cross was awarded to Thomas Ricketts. In it Frost claims that he, along with the Adjutant, Major Arthur 'Tim' Raley and the Commanding Officer *insisted* that Ricketts should get the Victoria Cross for his action at Drie-Masten even though they were not supposed to make specific gallantry award recommendations. However, Raley in an interview in the 1960's claimed that the Regiment officers would never put forward an award higher than the Military Medal for the ranks and Military Cross for the officers in deference to the hundreds of gallant men who lost their lives on July 1, 1916. (A list of gallantry awards for the Regiment would argue that many received awards higher regardless) Raley does not corroborate Frost's story and gave no indication of any role he played in the award going to Ricketts.

One of the obstacles according to Frost that they faced was the substantiation of the action to award the Victoria Cross. Regulations required that two other officers would have to corroborate Frost's account for the Victoria Cross to be awarded. Of the three officers in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment that witnessed Ricketts' action only one survived [Newman] another, 2/Lt. Albert Taylor, was felled by a sniper bullet late in the afternoon and died three days later. Frost, who, as the author of the citation could not bear witness. A lengthy debate ensued and it is unclear who besides Lt. Stanley Newman corroborated the citation. Frost could shed no light although he had considered asking Brig. Gen. John Jack but was afraid to do so because of his previous confrontation with him. It is logical to assume that Jack was indeed the second corroborating officer needed to award the Victoria Cross to Ricketts. (And to complicate matters Frost met a former staff officer in Scotland in the 1950's who claimed that the Governor of Newfoundland, Sir Alexander Harris, had meddled into the Ricketts Victoria Cross debate insisting that he should receive the award. There has been no documentary evidence that has surfaced to date to support this claim).

After the war ended, the 9th (Scottish) Division was a part of the Army of Occupation in Germany. The Royal Newfoundland Regiment marched to the German border and on December 4 was given the honour of leading the Division into Germany (although Ricketts and the rest of B Company did not cross with them as they were assigned guard duties along the railway line leading to the border. They joined the Battalion later in December).⁶⁴ On December 23 in the German town of Hilden on the east bank of the Rhine near Dusseldorf, the Regiment was officially informed that Ricketts had won the Victoria Cross.

“One of the smartest and best-turned out soldiers in the Regiment, Ricketts, with his usual military bearing, marched to where the Commanding Officer was standing, saluted, and stood at attention. Bernard [Lt. Col A.E. Bernard] and Raley both shook his hand and congratulated him, whereupon Ricketts turned about and marched back to his place in the ranks .The Commanding Officer then brought the Battalion to attention, gave the command – “Remove Headdress” followed by – and “Three Cheers for Private Ricketts.” It was a moving scene and the troops were never known to cheer more lustily. ... I marched over to Ricketts, who was in the front rank, saluted, and congratulated him. When the Company was dismissed, all hands gathered around the only VC in the Regiment, each man clamouring to grab him by the hand, slap him on the back, and from the depth of his heart offer him congratulations and best wishes.” Frost, A Blue Puttee at War, pp 424-425

The entire battalion was turned out on parade for the announcement and then given a holiday for the rest of the day and all the next in honour of the award.⁶⁵ Along with the Victoria Cross Thomas Ricketts also received the highest honour France can award to a non-citizen, a Croix de Guerre with gold star.

In January, 1919 Tommy Ricketts while still on active service had been given permission to return to England where he would catch the first wave of soldiers returning to Newfoundland at the end of January. The first large draft to return to Newfoundland included recently returned POWs, long serving members, non-essential personnel from the 2nd Battalion, wounded ready for discharge, along with wives and children. On hearing that Tommy Ricketts was slated to return home King George V requested that he attend a private investiture at his private residence at York Cottage on the Sandringham Estate on January 19. **66** If Ricketts were to postpone his departure for a group investiture he would miss the early returning draft home and would have to wait to be repatriated to his homeland.

This invitation was all the more remarkable because the day before the King's young son, Prince John, had died, and the family were in mourning. When he arrived in London it was arranged that Sgt Jim Dunphy of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment Pay and Record's Office would accompany Ricketts to the private investiture. Ricketts was treated to lunch which he took alone and then was led into an ante-room where he was introduced to the King, Princess Mary and Prince George. **67** Others present included Queen Maud and the Crown Prince of Norway as well as General Dighton Probyn, at the time the second oldest living recipient of the Victoria Cross. **68**

Ricketts described his meeting with the King as "*one of the most pleasant experiences of my life*". **69** The King, in civilian clothes, engaged Ricketts in a ten minute conversation about Newfoundland asking questions about the city and told Ricketts about magnificent Caribou antlers he once saw in a shop window on Water Street. **70** A nervous Ricketts meanwhile was more concerned that he "*made sensible replies to his questions.*" **71** After the King had pinned the medal on Ricketts he read out the teenager's citation and turned to his family in the room and said: "*this is the youngest V.C. in the Army.*" **72** An entry in the King's Dairy the next day read: "*Yesterday I gave the V. C. to Private Ricketts, Newfoundland Regiment, who is only 17 ½ now, a splendid boy.*" **73** On January 29, 1919, Private

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Thomas Ricketts was promoted to Sergeant and the next day boarded the S.S. Corsican in Liverpool for the return trip home. **74**

Thomas Ricketts V.C. Returns Home

When Tommy Ricketts stepped off the S. S. Corsican on February 8 and onto Furness-Withy Pier thousands of people were there to greet him. He tried to avoid all the commotion by separating himself from the disembarking soldiers in the 11:30am outport draft, hoping that no one would notice him. However, he was noticed. Ricketts was spotted and the crowd erupted into cheers alerting the Church Lads Brigade Band who then struck the harmonies of the rollicking Regimental quick march *The Banks of Newfoundland* (AKA *Up the Pond*). Newfoundland's war hero was home. An enthusiastic crowd hoisted Tommy into a horse drawn cab, unhooked the horses, and a few enterprising young men took over and pulled the cab with an adulating public cheering him on through the streets of St. John's. Ricketts took it all in and reacted with characteristic modesty. **75**

Unlike most outport soldiers who disembarked from the Corsican on February 8 Ricketts chose to remain in St. John's. He felt obligated to stay in the city even though according to his son, his first instinct may have been to return to fishing in the tiny and isolated hamlet of Middle Arm. **76** However, education was foremost on Ricketts mind when he told the London Daily Mirror that he wished to further his schooling when he returned home. With no school in Middle Arm there was little choice for him but to stay in St. John's. With that in mind he remained in the city, first residing at a boarding house at 53 Colonial Street before being given lodging by George House on Robinsons Hill where he lived for several years. **77** House was a school teacher at Bishop Field College and he may have been privately preparing Ricketts for entry into the school in 1920. Showing a quiet astuteness and acumen that belied

his illiteracy and youthfulness, Ricketts took full advantage of the VICTORIA CROSS hysteria that gripped Newfoundland's capital. He was the beneficiary of an outpouring of support and money. And in return he dutifully attended dinners in his honour, both private and public, toured schools in uniform, and would be the special guest at a number of remembrance gatherings and unveilings during the 1920s. After all, everyone wanted to see *our* hero in the flesh. He respectfully obliged.

Such was the admiration for Ricketts that on Bell Island he was treated like royalty. He visited schools, went down in the mines, paraded through the streets as a hero and given a purse of gold. **78** He attended a Smoker's Banquet at the Masonic Lodge in St. John's in his honour. He attended Great War Veteran Association (GWVA) meetings where he was made an honorary member. **79** He was entertained by the City Club and given a substantial gift of \$1000 and a song composed by W. W. Blackall was first sung titled: *A Cheer for Tommy Ricketts V.C.* **80** During a visit to Baird's Dry Goods Store he was feted as a hero and presented a cigarette holder and 1000 Gem cigarettes by the employees. **81** On June 3, 1920 Ricketts was presented with a \$500 cash reward donated by G.W.B. Ayre at a reception at Government House for being the highest decorated soldier of the war. **82** Being a Victoria Cross recipient had its perks.

Ricketts reserved personality was evident throughout all these engagements. At his young age this could be expected especially when the people of Newfoundland, perhaps even more so the Government, sought to confer on him super-hero status. Perhaps again, he was only doing his duty; after all he was still a soldier through all this and would remain so until his demobilization took effect on July 1, 1919.

Before he stepped off the S.S. Corsican there were at least two separate fundraising campaigns initiated to raise money for three causes in his honour. On January 18 W.W. Blackall, Church of England

Superintendent of Education began a Memorial fund in Ricketts name called *The R.T. Ricketts V.C. Monument*. When the Corsican arrived in port on February 8, the fund had already collected the initial \$1000 that Blackall asked for and had raised an additional \$804.28, and another \$24 towards Ricketts personal education fund, both funds would continue to grow. **83** By March 14 the *Monument* fund held \$1466.26 and his education fund had ballooned to \$244.10. **84** This is all the more incredible in that Blackall had stipulated he would accept no more than \$1 from any donor and the moneys raised were to build a schoolhouse and to support the services of a teacher in Ricketts hometown. The school was initially intended to be built in Middle Arm but it was decided that it would be better suited for Seal Cove, three miles north because there simply were not enough children in Middle Arm to support a school. **85**

A 10 day subscription was initiated shortly after Ricketts disembarked to raise a whopping \$10,000 for an annuity in his name. On the 9th day of the campaign the funds raised were a respectable \$5872.01 and rising. **86** At the same time, the Daily Star newspaper had also began collecting money in Tommy's name.

Ricketts continued to make appearances throughout the 1920's including a Sergeant's Mess Dinner in Donovans in September 1922. He greeted Field Marshall Earl Haig when Haig disembarked on King's Beach on June 29, 1924 and stood with the dignitaries when the National War Memorial was unveiled 2 days later. **87** Thomas Ricketts VC remained in the public eye as the years passed. In 1929 he was invited to and attended (with financial assistance of the GWVA), a reunion dinner for Victoria Cross recipients at the House of Lords in London on November 9 hosted by the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VIII. It was a dinner book-ended by the second oldest and youngest (Ricketts) living VICTORIA CROSSs in the British Empire. **88** On his return home he was given a hero's welcome at the Railway station by the mayor of St. John's, Tasker Cook. This was followed by a parade to a Government

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House reception. Then it was off to the CLB Armoury where another reception and dinner was held in his honour with an illustrious guest speaker list that included Prime Minister Sir Richard Squires, future Prime Minister F.C. Alderdice, and General Hugh Tudor who commanded of the 9th (Scottish) Division, which included the Newfoundlanders when Ricketts act of bravery led to his Victoria Cross award.⁸⁹ On February 24, 1930 Ricketts made his stage debut in the poignant and imminently successful British play *Journey's End* at the Casino Theatre, a realistic drama about officers in the trench performed exclusively by ex-servicemen. The play ran for the entire week. ⁹⁰ As late as 1939, Ricketts presented himself for honour guard duty during King George VI Royal Visit to Newfoundland. An avid stamp collector Ricketts even purchased 57 first day covers of the event and mailed them to himself. ⁹¹

Ricketts entered Bishop Field College in 1920 where he joined 14 other soldiers taking advantage of a special education fund for ex-servicemen. Getting an education had been foremost on his mind ever since he returned from the war, in his interview with the Evening Telegram before he stepped off the S.S. Corsican he referred to his schooling as simply '*backward*'. ⁹² Unable to read or write when the war ended Ricketts passed his first year Preliminary Grade in 1921. ⁹³ He graduated from Bishop Field College several years later and entered the first class of Memorial College in 1925. After one year of studies he began a pharmacy apprenticeship at T. McMurdo & Co. ⁹⁴ In the early 1930s, the thirty something pharmacist Thomas Ricketts took lodgings at 131 Penneywell Road, the home of John Edwards, an English tailor. ⁹⁵ There he met and fell in love with John's daughter, an athletic younger woman named Edna. They were wed in 1933 at St. Thomas Church and continued to live with the in-laws until he opened his own pharmacy at 100 Water Street West (later renumbered to 516 Water Street) shortly after he was married. In the 1935 they were living on the top floor of the pharmacy. Their daughter Dolda, born in 1934, went on to become a pharmacist residing in Nova Scotia.

Their son, Thomas George, born in 1935, became a medical doctor eventually settling in Ontario. **96** By 1945 the family resided on Craigmiller Avenue. **97**

Ricketts withdrew further from public engagements when he settled down as a pharmacy owner and family man. He refused invitations to Princess Elizabeth's 1951 visit. **98** Nor would he present himself for the changing of the regimental colours in 1964 when the Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, Princess Mary, travelled to St. John's for the 50th Anniversary of the 1914 forming of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment. **99** This was all the more poignant as she was present at his VICTORIA CROSS investiture at Sandringham while she was grieving the loss of her younger brother Prince John. He purportedly travelled to London for a reception at Buckingham Palace on July 17, 1962 for an afternoon garden party hosted by Queen Elizabeth II for living Victoria Cross recipients (however, Rickett's son emphatically denies that he attended this event). **100**

His health may have played a part in his avoidance of public events. Having suffered a heart attack in the late 1940's Ricketts lived with severe chest pain until he died. **101** On February 10, 1967, Tommy Ricketts VC, Newfoundland's reluctant war hero, died from a heart attack in his pharmacy two months shy of his birthday. A fierce winter storm was raging and he was at work bundled up in winter cloths as the storm had knocked out the power. An hour after the last conversation with his wife, Tommy dropped dead on the floor of his pharmacy. **102**

After Ricketts death it became apparent that his wife Edna was left with very little means. The pharmacy was run down and within a few short years had to be demolished. Premier Joey Smallwood, once rebuffed by Ricketts to run as a Liberal Candidate (Ricketts was a staunch Conservative), immediately offered a state funeral for the Royal Newfoundland Regiment's only Victoria Cross recipient, not only to celebrate the man's life in death but to ease the financial burden on Edna. **103** It

was also discovered that Ricketts had not collected his annual Victoria Cross pension from the British Government for some time and arrangements were made to allow his widow to collect a lump sum owing. **104**

Thomas Ricketts' state funeral took place at 3pm on Monday, February 13, 1967 at St. Thomas Church on Military Road. **105** After an hour long ceremony inside the packed church, a lengthy funeral procession followed Ricketts' casket placed on one of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment's field gun carriages. The procession left the church on foot and proceeded down The Mall to Forest Road trailing all the prominent dignitaries of the day led by Lt Gov Fabian O'Dea and Premier Joey Smallwood along with hundreds of others. Ricketts military medals were carried by a Royal Newfoundland Regiment soldier on a satin pillow behind the Jeep drawn casket. Ricketts remains were interned in the Anglican Cemetery on Forest Road. **106** Edna passed away in St. John's in 2010 at the age of 97.

Conclusion

A lot has been written about Thomas Ricketts and his personality. Biographers and newspaper reporters have written that he was extremely shy and somewhat embarrassed by the attention that he received because of the medal. Some even question why he was not more proud of the award. In one sense he was proud of the award but his modesty, like so many soldiers of the Great War, prevented him from flaunting the Victoria Cross. He confided in his wife, that he believed that he was no more deserving of the award than any other soldier that he fought alongside. There are many soldiers' heroic

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actions that went unrecorded for the lack of an officer witness to the deed. Conversely, there are many Victoria Cross winners of the Great War whose citations for bravery are far less voluminous than Ricketts.

Many soldiers awarded the Victoria Cross were just ordinary citizens who did what they had to do as the situation demanded of them at that time.

Albert Perlin, wrote as a classmate at Bishop Field College:

"... I recall about him was his almost anonymous existence among us. I think he disliked being lionized. He went to parties in his honour but seemed surprised that he should be the centre of attraction. There was no bewilderment but just a quiet and almost reluctant acceptance of what was happening to him." **107**

Despite having benefitted from the award which allowed him to attend school after his return, he was adamant about people making money from the Victoria Cross, including himself and his family. The Lewisporte Legion before his death had asked him repeatedly to allow them to name their club room after him. For a while he out right refused, but finally conceded with one condition; that absolutely no advertising was to be associated with his name or award. **108** Ricketts advertised his pharmacy in various school yearbooks in the city, and perhaps the only instance where Victoria Cross was used after his name (to which he was entitled to use) was in the St. Bon's Adelphian, where he appears as Thomas Ricketts VC, Druggist, while in other school yearbooks he is simply Ricketts Drugs.

In the end Ricketts bore his Victoria Cross with reluctant acceptance and dignity that was evident from the very beginning. He left the security of his isolated community in White Bay to answer the call to arms after the tragic advance of the Newfoundland Regiment at Beaumont-Hamel. Like so

many young Newfoundlanders hauling up their boats, walking away from the paper machines, offices, retail stores and schools, the Great War beckoned them with adventure and a chance at living life. Experienced soldiers say they never feel more alive than when they are teetering on the brink of death. Ricketts joined the Newfoundland Regiment knowing that survival was bleak, but a chance to *even the score* for his countrymen lost at Beaumont-Hamel was worth enlistment. Indeed, Tommy's motivation on the day of his Victoria Cross award he had decided that it would be *me or them* but he was going to avenge his brother's death, if he survived.

Ricketts believed his action was just one of many made during the war for which countless others received no recognition. Fate would drop the Victoria Cross on him and he bore that burden like a true soldier. He was respected by many of his comrades, as he made no outlandish displays or pushed his Victoria Cross to curry favours. In fact once he stepped away from the limelight it was rare to see him at remembrance parades or anywhere else besides a dark corner in his pharmacy. His medals lay in a desk drawer for many years undisturbed. While he had obliged the adulating public in the early years after the war, he became more reticent and self-effacing, carefully choosing his public appearances. As each appearance made him wearier towards the attention he received, the more obstinate and reclusive he became. Those that remember Ricketts, the Druggist, say that he absolutely refused to talk about the war and if someone insisted he would abruptly end the conversation and silently walk away. Once, while in the pharmacy he became irritated with a national reporter looking for an interview exclaiming that he will get nothing out of him. What he enjoyed talking about most was salmon fishing.

He never spoke about the war to his family, friends, co-workers or the public after the two interviews he gave when he returned home from the war. His wife Edna in later years said: *"I think something happened in the war that he was carrying inside of him to his death. He was very troubled with something. I don't know and now he's gone. It's with him still."* 109

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Albert Perlin summed up his attitude:

“He... always showing a distaste for any kind of public show. He was always diffident about discussing his war services and I can imagine that it was merely an expression of his quiet sense of duty as he saw it that sent him into those desperately hazardous few moments that won him undying glory and wrote his name imperishably into the tablets of Newfoundland history.” 110

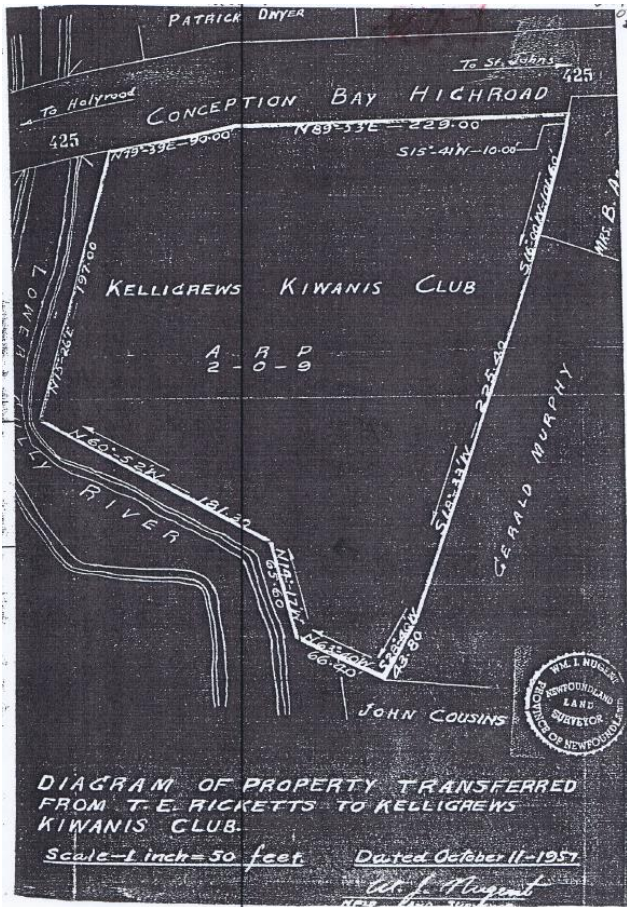
In many respects Ricketts may never really have come to terms, why him? Why did he win the Victoria Cross? Why did he survive? When he made the dash for ammunition he could have easily been killed and no one would have ever known who Ricketts was. What motivates a soldier to make a decision when death is really the only assured outcome boils down to accepting that they could die at any moment regardless and most soldiers were able to accept that. Sudden death surrounded all soldiers in the line. There was no rhyme or reason why death of one soldier was chosen over another and the fact they could not control the outcome meant they had to accept fate, as did Ricketts. Who could blame them? For many authors of heroic deeds, death was a matter of *fait accompli*. Those who survived the war were often left scratching their heads - *why me?* This is what may have bothered Ricketts so much as he grew older.

Thomas Ricketts was a generous man. He never forgot the support he was given and returned the favour in many ways. Pat Leonard a pharmacist apprentice said that his generosity was shared with his employees and customers often to his own family's detriment. 111 At his pharmacy he allowed school children to read the comic books so long as they took care not to buckle them. He treated the poorest families in the neighbourhood without cost and found his greatest pleasure in treating children for colds. He liked to chat with his customers especially the children who came in to buy comics and candy. 112 His wife thought he would have made a great medical doctor.

To his family he was kind, respectful and supportive. He was a gentle man of few words or as some would say – no words. He rarely engaged in a quarrel, preferring instead to retreat to his favourite corner of his pharmacy where the lighting was dim and he could hide openly amongst the piles of accumulated business papers.

Ricketts left behind a tangible legacy and expectation that you could better yourself if you applied humility, charity and hard work through education. He rose from an illiterate fisherman to Newfoundland's greatest war hero, and turned his celebrity into an education becoming a respected pharmacist in the community. His determination to better himself through education was passed to his two children. Dolda became a pharmacist, and Thomas George became a medical Doctor. He showed by setting a goal that anyone can reach an objective no matter your humble background.

He lived an unassuming and hard-working life - there could have been no better Victoria Cross recipient. Tommy was a true hero and soldier.



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THIS INDENTURE made at St. John's in the Province of Newfoundland, this day of October, Anno Domini One thousand nine hundred and Fifty-seven BETWEEN Thomas E. Ricketts of St. John's aforesaid, Druggist, (hereinafter called the Vendor) of the one part AND Edward Nugent Jr, President, John B. Richards, First Vice-President, Ronald Clarke, Second Vice-President, George H. Haines, Secretary, Walter Hibbs, Treasurer and Edward Nugent Sr, Ralph McDrew, Alexander Holden, Kenneth Smith, Vernon Dwyer, Harold Butler, Raymond Mercer and Ruben Pennell, Directors of the Kellogggs Kiwanis Club of Kellogggs, as Trustees (hereinafter called the Purchasers) of the other part WITNESSETH as follows: that for and in consideration of the sum of Twelve hundred dollars (\$1200.00) paid by the Purchasers to the Vendor on or before the execution of these presents (the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged) the Vendor as Beneficial Owner hereby SELLS, ASSIGNS AND CONVEYS unto the Purchasers free from all or any encumbrances ALL THAT piece or parcel of land situate and being on the southerly side of the Conception Bay Highway through Kellogggs in the District of Harbour Main, and bounded and abutted as follows, that is to say: By a line commencing at a point in the Southern limit of the said Highway, this point being thirty-three feet distant from the approximate centre of the said Highway and about twenty feet Easterly from the East Bank of Lower Gully River; thence running parallel to said Highway and thirty-three feet from the centre thereof North Seventy-nine degrees thirty-nine minutes East, ninety decimal zero feet and North eighty-nine degrees fifty-three minutes East two hundred and twenty-nine decimal zero feet to the boundary of land belonging to Mrs. B. Abbott; thence turning and running South fifteen degrees forty-one minutes West, ten decimal zero feet; South sixteen degrees no minutes West One hundred and One decimal six feet; South eighteen degrees thirty-three minutes West two hundred and twenty-

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five decimal four feet and South twenty-eight degrees forty minutes West forty-three decimal eight feet by land of the said Mrs. B. Abbott and Gerald Murphy; thence turning and running North sixty-three degrees forty minutes West Sixty-six decimal four feet by land of John Cousins and Crown Land to a point about thirteen feet from the East bank of Lower Gully River; thence turning and running North fourteen degrees seventeen minutes West sixty-five decimal six feet; North sixty degrees fifty-two minutes West One hundred and eighty-one decimal three feet; and North fifteen degrees twenty-six minutes East One hundred and ninety-seven decimal zero feet approximately parallel to the East bank of said river to the point of commencement, and being more particularly described and delineated on the diagram annexed hereto, coloured red and containing by admeasurement an area of two acres, no roods and nine perches, more or less. All bearings are referred to the magnetic meridian TO HAVE and TO HOLD the same unto the Purchasers their successors and assigns forever.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the said parties to these presents have hereunto their hands and seals subscribed and set the day and year first before written.

SIGNED SEALED AND DELIVERED
By the Vendor
Thomas Ricketts

A Copy of the bill of sale from Thomas E. Ricketts to the Kellogggs Kiwanis Club. This land was originally purchased in 1943 to provide a safe evacuation point for Ricketts' children. A second piece of land acquired during this time existed in St. Catherines, Salmonier which was used by Edna's parents and her children as a war time refuge. The E referred to in the document is incorrect as Thomas Ricketts never had a middle name. This land is still occupied by the Kiwanis Club today. Ricketts may have had another piece of land in St. Vincents, St. Mary's Bay.

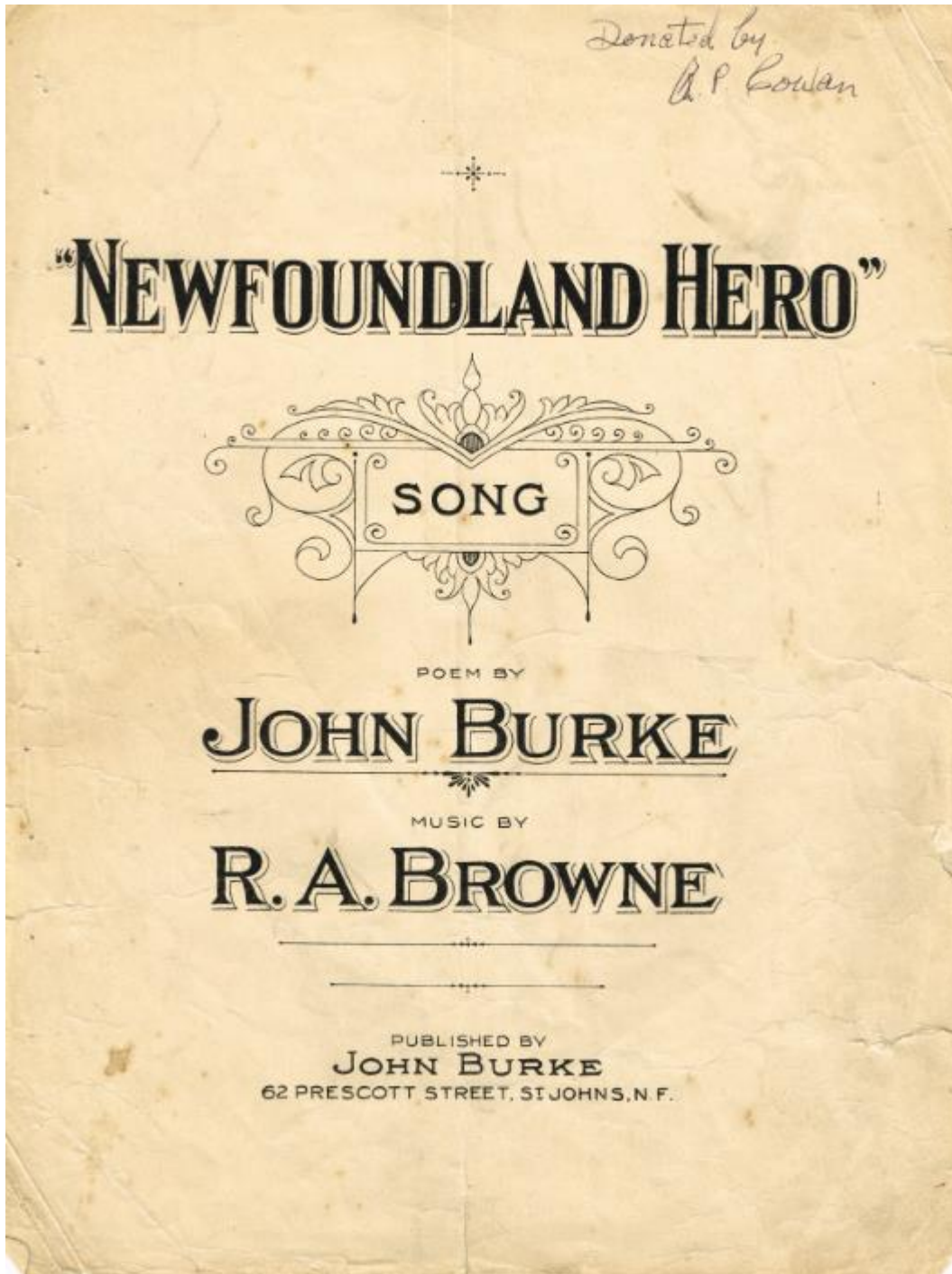
Courtesy of Clem Drake, Kellogggs Kiwanis Club



Photo Courtesy W.G. Tilley Museum, Church Lads' Brigade

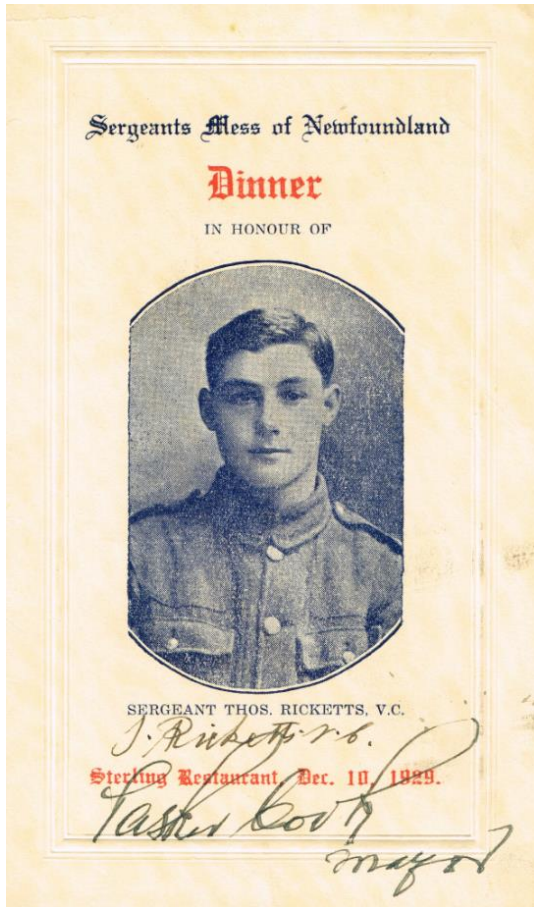
Six members of the Church Lads Brigade after the war, five of whom are wearing their service medals.

Thomas Ricketts on the right smartly presents himself for the portrait. Wearing his CLB uniform and his gallantry awards even sporting a wound stripe on his left arm acquired from his service with the Royal Newfoundland Regiment. Left to Right: Jack Andrews (RNFLDR CSM John Donald Andrews), Bert Colton (Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve), Robert Downton, Harold Rendell (Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve), Earl Best (RNFLDR), Thomas Ricketts V.C., C. de G.



Broadsheet produced by "The Bard of Prescott Street"

Courtesy of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment museum



Cover of a Sergeants Mess Dinner programme after Ricketts return from the 1929 VICTORIA CROSS dinner in London. Signed by Ricketts and St. John's Mayor

Tasker Cook

Courtesy of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment museum

One Lewis Gun ammunition carrier similar to what Ricketts would have carried.

Courtesy of www.milsurps.com





Top photo: King George VI talking to Thomas Ricketts during the Royal Visit to Newfoundland June 17, 1939. Bottom photo: First day cover commemorating the event.

Courtesy Graham Skanes Collection



Thomas Ricketts Drugstore

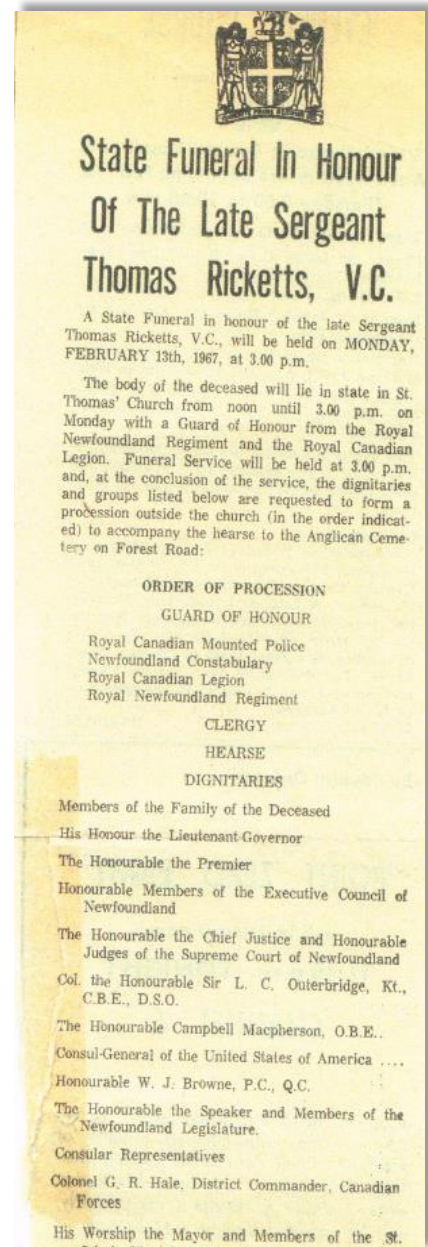
1960's

Courtesy Dr. Thomas G. Ricketts

Government announcement of Ricketts State Funeral

Courtesy Kevin Hutchings Collection,

Royal Newfoundland Regiment Museum



Thomas Ricketts Funeral





All funeral photos courtesy Kevin Hutchings Collection, Royal Newfoundland Regiment Museum

Endnotes

1. Ian Stewart - <http://www.victoriacross.org.uk/Victoria Crosscross.htm>
2. **White Bay Parish Records Ledger** - All contemporary sources claim that he was born April 15, 1901. The original source of 1901 being his birth year is unknown. In his discharge medical examination in his service file his date of birth is listed as April 15, 1901. This is an early document with this date but not the first. Newspapers reported on his return to Newfoundland that he was 15 years 6 months when he enlisted (born 1901). Parish records can be susceptible to errors in notation. But, in this case the record is in chronological order by year/month/ day and his entry does not look out of place. He was baptised on June 30, 1900 and all other entries around his are dated 1900. The records are also consistent with a parish church baptising children (and adults) once a week. As well many of the early (and some more recent) appearances of Ricketts name in public were written either with the first initial R or R was the middle initial. There is no middle name recorded in his baptismal record. Ricketts had a nephew born March 30, 1901 and died April 20, 1901. Whether this plays into the confusion on his birth year is unknown. If the Parish date is correct it will have no impact on Ricketts being the youngest VICTORIA CROSS recipient in the British Empire's armies during the war.
3. Ibid.
4. McAlpine's 1904 Directory. There were only six families, three of which were John and his two sons James and Peter, Joseph had died in 1891 at the age of 25
5. Royal Newfoundland Regiment Service Files, Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANL) – George and Thomas Ricketts
6. Don Morris, *Evening Telegram* August 16, 1963
7. George Ricketts, Service File
8. *Evening Telegram*, August 21, 1916
9. Thomas Ricketts, Service File
10. White Bay Death Register , PANL
11. Thomas Ricketts, Service File
12. Ibid and George Ricketts Service File and Royal Newfoundland Regiment War Diary 1915 -1919 PANL Frost Transcription
13. War Dairy.
14. Ibid.
15. Parsons, W. David, *Pilgrimage*, Pp 68-75
16. War diary
17. Gogos, Frank –*Cambrai*, unpublished manuscript
18. Gogos and MacDonald, *Known unto God*, PP 56-57
19. Jack, John, *General's Diary*, Page 266 – Gogos, Unpublished manuscript.
20. In a twist of fate Tudor had appeared in St. John's in the Mid 20's not through connections from the Regiment but through a prominent fish broker. After the war he was sent to Ireland to take over the Royal Irish Constabulary. The police force had been under attack from the IRA and

Tudor called in ex-servicemen to augment the Constabulary. They became known as the Black and Tans. Tudor's reputation had suffered tremendously after the Black and Tans had perpetrated a number of revenge killings on the IRA. Vilified for turning a blind eye, Tudor stayed to oversee the disbandment of the RIC and later sent to Palestine as Director of Public Safety. After two years he had had enough and resigned from his post and the military in 1924. He immigrated to Newfoundland leaving his family behind. Tudor died in St. John's in 1965 a very frail, old man. There has been a claim that he came to Newfoundland to hide from the IRA. There is little evidence that this is true especially since Tudor was well known in the St. John's community whose population was made up of half Irish descendants.

21. Sydney Frost Field Notes – Archives and Special Collections MUN
22. JACK, p. 281
23. Frost, Sydney *Veteran Magazine*, July, 1923 p. 41
24. Ibid.
25. London Gazette Ricketts VICTORIA CROSS Citation and War Dairy
26. Frost, Veteran, P 42
27. Ibid.
28. War Dairy
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Sydney Frost Field Notes, original citation.
32. Frost, Veteran Pp. 43-44
33. War Diary
34. Ibid.
35. Frost, Veteran P. 43
36. Nicholson, *The Fighting Newfoundlander*, P. 491 and Evening Telegram Feb 8, 1919 and Department of Militia Files, National Archives of Canada
37. Frost, Veteran p. 44 and Frost Field Notes original citation
38. Evening Telegram Feb 8, 1919 – Daily News Feb 10, 1919
39. Frost Field Notes original citation
40. Ibid.
41. Evening Telegram Feb 8, 1919 – Frost Field Notes
42. Ibid.
43. There are no contemporary accounts of Ricketts returning to Newman's Platoon. Certain commentators have made the assumption that he returned to Newman's platoon to get more ammunition or that there were more soldiers with Ricketts and Brazil during this encirclement, however, by examining Frost's award write ups and interviews given by Ricketts himself – there is no indication that there were any other soldiers attempting to encircle the guns. The plausible conclusion is that either Ricketts or Brazil dropped the ammunition deliberately or by accident in the chaos of the rush.
44. Cave P. 50 - Jack P. 283

45. Ibid.
46. Jack P. 283
47. Evening Telegram Feb 8, 1919
48. Ibid.
49. Frost Field Notes – Military Surplus Collectors Forum
<http://www.milsurps.com/content.php?r=448-Lewis-Gun-Love-Affair-%28By-Graeme-broadarrow303-Barber> Lewis Gun for the infantry was a very effective killing machine. It had a carrying weight of 33lbs with a 47 round .303 cartridge pan. Each loaded pan weighed 4.7 lbs. With a range of 600 yards it could provide a sweeping killing field. It took the Lewis Section only 4 seconds to swap magazines. Its versatility in action was unsurpassed and even though one gun was designed for 9 man section, one man could operate it in desperation. On Oct 14 no less than 3 soldiers (Ricketts included) were awarded gallantry medals for operating Lewis guns, two single handed. The two others in separate incidents charged and overcame concrete German Pill Boxes while firing their guns from the hip and shoulder. To fire at a high rate required a support team, while this can be accomplished with just two men a Lewis Gun team normally had a compliment of 8 men and an NCO. A typical British army section. By October 1918, every man was trained in the operation and loading of the gun. During engagement every man had a job to do and were ready to take over the gun should the firer become a casualty. Number 1 fired the gun; number 2 changed the magazine, whilst the others carried spare magazines in special ammunition carriers and extra parts. As well they acted as scouts and were the gun team's protection while engaged providing bombing and rifle support. The extra ammunition pouches carried up to 8 loaded magazines at a time weighing up to 37.6 lbs a piece. (Mallet Ross, MA(Hons) Thesis, November 1998 *The Interplay Between Technology, Tactics and Organization in the First AIF*)
It is unclear as to whether Ricketts picked up 2 carriers or 2 carrier rigs. A carrier is 2 pouches, one front and back, that holds two pans each. A carrier rig is 2 carriers joined in the middle using webbing straps. To a soldier a carrier may actually be a carrier rig as the rig was the most common way to carry the ammunition for a distributed load. This question was put to WWI expert who felt that Ricketts may have actually picked up two carrier rigs containing 16 ammunition pans. (Andy Robertshaw)
50. Evening Telegram Feb 8, 1919 – Daily News February 10, 1919. It is unknown of Brazil's whereabouts other than he may have seen an opportunity to move forward as no one questions his bravery and tenacity. Perhaps unsure if Ricketts survived the sprint decided to press on. By this time in the war the Germans were trained to count the number of rounds fired from a Lewis machine gun. If the gunner emptied a pan the Germans would charge the gun before the gun could be reloaded. British soldiers were trained to ease up on the last of the ammunition keeping a few bullets in the pan. By all accounts the magazine was empty and Brazil knowing that the Germans may make a charge may have moved to safer ground or a better advantage point in case this should happen. (Andy Robertshaw)
51. Ibid. Telegram

52. The London Gazette, Issue 31108, published January 3, 1919 supplement January 6, 1919 p. 309
53. Frost Field Notes
54. Frost Veteran P. 44
55. Jack p 283
56. Frost Field Notes – Daily News February 10, 1919 – Interestingly in Stanley Newman's Military Cross citation he is credited with capturing the fifth gun (again written by Frost), but in Frosts original recommendation it was Ricketts' initiative that led to the capture of the gun.
57. Some of Brazil's descendants and others in the Spaniard's Bay community have held the firm belief that he should have been also awarded the Victoria Cross for his action that day. According to people interviewed for a newspaper article Matthew Brazil was a quiet man who never really talked about the war and seemed most humble about his war time experience. In 2011, Mike Brazil (Matthew's son) was interviewed for the Conception Bay North Compass where he said that when he was teaching in Corner Brook in 1960, 2 years after Matthew's death, Bert Butler came to see him. (Butler is the second most decorated survivor of the Great War) Butler told Mike that his father should have won the VICTORIA CROSS. Mike Brazil said there was a debate then ongoing whether his father should have received the VICTORIA CROSS. Butler's statement made it clear in his mind that his father did indeed deserve the award as well. Butler would have known Brazil as he was B Company Captain prior to Sydney Frost. However, he was nowhere near the action on Oct 14, 1918 as he was back in St. John's recuperating from several wounds he received while leading a frontal attack on a machine gun post at the Battle of Cambrai 11 months prior. Butler may also have been unaware that the authorities would not award more than one VICTORIA CROSS per action. Nowhere does anyone say that Ricketts should not have been awarded the VICTORIA CROSS. There is no indication that Matthew Brazil claimed that he should have been the recipient of the award. People that knew him described him as not being much different in attitude about gallantry awards as Ricketts. In 1983 the French Government presented a Croix de Guerre to Brazil's family 61 years after the fact mostly due to Mike Brazil's lobbying and that on paper he had been awarded the gallantry award along with Ricketts for which he may have never received. **This debate about whether Brazil deserved the VICTORIA CROSS should in no way diminish Ricketts' award of the Victoria Cross for that action.**
58. Nicholson. P. 493
59. Ibid and Daily News Feb 10, 1919
60. Nicholson. P.492
61. War Diary
62. Frost Field Notes
63. Ibid. There is some debate amongst Regiment researchers as to the significance of the order of merit in which Frost made the recommendations for awards. The action that led to Ricketts VICTORIA CROSS was initiated by Newman as the platoon's commander. But Brazil who is listed second did not play as big a role in the action as Ricketts, nor was he singled out for the Victoria Cross as Frost claims. The first citation to be written up was Ricketts. It is also the longest and in

Frost's own word's "worthy of the highest praise", so why the order? One explanation could be simply the action, then rank. The first three soldiers were all recommended for the same action while the last three on the list are for other actions. If the attack on the four field guns at Drie-Masten was the most heroic action of the day, literally saving the entire Battalion from destruction, then all three should be recommended for gallantry awards. Because Lt. Newman initiated the attack as platoon commander then he may have been at the top of the list of merit followed by the Lance Corporal (Brazil) and then the Private (Ricketts). All in order of rank, highest to lowest. However, this action was worthy of a Victoria Cross and only one soldier could be chosen, not all three. The unwritten rule at the time was to draw a ballot to see who gets the award for the action. However, in this case Ricketts had been singled out for the Victoria Cross prior to the letter of merit. Other commentators believe (along with the Brazil family) that more than one Victoria Cross should have been awarded and that this letter provides the proof. Frost wrote: *"It will be noted that the awards to Newman, Ricketts, and Brazil were for bravery and leadership in the same action and in wording the recommendations I attempted to avoid conflicting statements in describing the relative deeds of valour."* The fact that he claims to have recommended Ricketts for the Victoria Cross and that leadership was also an important factor in the successful action that led to the capture of five field guns and four machine guns, can there be any doubt that this letter is more or less based on merit in order of rank and not for award.

64. War Dairy
65. Ibid.
66. London Daily Mirror January 20, 1919
67. Ibid. and Service Record
68. Cave P. 75
69. London Daily Mirror January 20, 1919
70. Cave P. 75
71. London Daily Mirror January 20, 1919
72. Ibid.
73. Cave P.76
74. Service File
75. Daily Star, Feb 8, 1919
76. The Telegram, November 11, 2008, Terry Roberts in an interview with his son Dr. Thomas George Ricketts
77. Service File
78. Cave, p.77 – Evening Telegram, February 28, 1919
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