

Major Robert Burns Cameron, 1st Field Squadron, Distinguished Service Order



Background

Robert Burns Cameron was born in New Glasgow NS and graduated from New Glasgow High School. "RB", as he was known in his beloved Pictou county, went on to attend the Royal Military College in Kingston, ON in 1937. He graduated in 1939 with a Special War Certificate for cadets who had completed only two and a half years of studies. He was commissioned into the Royal Canadian Engineers in December of that year and arrived in England in 1941.

RB rose quickly in ranks and was commanding the 1st Field Squadron of the 4th Armoured Division when they landed in Naples in November 1943 at the age of 24 years. The squadron fought its way alongside the 1st Infantry Division as they moved through Italy seeing action in the Liri Valley and Gothic Line battles with countless route maintenance and bridging tasks along the way.

On the Gothic Line, as in other actions, RB led his troops from the front while finding a way through minefields and German defences on the Foglia River "under heavy fire of all types". The squadron succeeded and RB personally found a path along a riverbed for the Irish Regiment of Canada to safely advance against the enemy. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for his outstanding bravery and leadership under enemy fire.

After the war, RB had a distinguished business career and has been called Nova Scotia's greatest industrialists, soldiers and public servants. He established a number of companies including Maritime Steel and Cameron Publications Ltd. For a time he was president of Sydney Steel and the largest shareholder of the Royal Bank of Canada. He was the first President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Sydney Nova Scotia Steel Corporation and was President and CEO of Deuterium of Canada at Glace Bay NS. He was also a member of the Order of Canada

and has an honorary Doctor of Laws degree for St. Mary's University. His division commander, Major-General Bert Hoffmeister had said of him, "It was that red hair, that straight-up cockiness. You knew he was going places..." and it appears he was correct.

Major Robert Burns Cameron, DSO, OC, LLD (Ret'd) died in New Glasgow in 1999 at the age of 80 years after a storied life in service to his community and country. A funeral was held at the First Presbyterian Kirk Church in New Glasgow where Senator Alasdair Graham delivered a stirring eulogy stated, "The lights may have been dimmed on Robert Burns Cameron, but they will never truly go out".

Citation

During the assault on the Gothic Line on the night 29/30 August 1944, 1 Canadian Field Squadron, commanded by Major Cameron, was in support of 11 Canadian Infantry Brigade. The attack was ordered in some 48 hours in advance of the original plan. Major Cameron immediately ordered his troops forward to cross the Foglia River and the anti-tank ditch and to gap the minefield. He then proceeded to the sites himself and for the next two hours, under heavy fire of all types and travelling over fields known to be mined, moved from site to site, encouraging his men and urging them forward. On one occasion when it became necessary to move the Irish Regiment of Canada from left to right front, Major Cameron personally reconnoitred a route along the river bed itself. By his determination and bravery, he set an outstanding example for his men and succeeded in establishing two routes into the Gothic Line which were absolutely vital to the divisional plan.

Source: <https://cmea-agmc.ca/award/gallantry/major-robert-burns-cameron-1st-field-squadron-distinguished-service-order> (Canadian Military Engineers Association)