

CANADIAN HERO'S VICTORIA CROSS TO BE OFFERED AT SPINK

**100 YEARS AFTER SERGEANT COLIN BARRON CHARGED
MACHINE GUNS AT THE BATTLE OF PASSCHENDALE**

Auction: 5 December 2017, London



London – Spink are to offer the Victoria Cross (V.C.) – and related medals - awarded to the Scots-born Canadian Corporal Colin Barron (1893-1959) for his heroics at Passchendaele on 6 November 1917 during the Third Battle of Ypres, one of the most infamous and devastating campaigns of the First World War. The collection will be offered at auction at Spink in London on 5 December 2017 with an estimate of £150,000-180,000 (CAN \$250,000 to 300,000).

Corporal Barron's brave actions at 'Vine Cottage' produced far-reaching results, saved countless allied lives, and enabled the advance to Passchendaele to continue ahead of its capture later that day. In recognition of his efforts he was awarded the V.C., the highest and most prestigious award for gallantry that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces.

His daughter Majory once recalled that *'As a young man, he was a bit of the devil. And he was a fighter, too. He could be quite fearsome when his temper was up.'* That 'temper' was ignited in spectacular fashion by the terrible casualties suffered by his comrades in the 3rd Canadian Infantry (1st Central Ontario Regiment), as they attempted to capture a German strongpoint known as 'Vine Cottage' on Goudberg Spur near Passchendaele Ridge on the morning of 6 November 1917. The strongpoint boasted 18-inch walls of reinforced concrete and no fewer than six machine guns, commanding every approach.

As the Canadians drew near they extended and attacked the position from three sides, but their advance was slowed by the muddy ground and heavy casualties. Sergeant Barron took the initiative and worked his way around a flank of three of the enemy machine gun posts with his Lewis gun. Then, in the words of *The London Gazette*, he *'opened on them from point-blank range, rushed the guns single-handed, killed four of the crew, and captured the remainder. He then, with remarkable initiative and skill, turned on of the captured guns on the retiring enemy, causing them severe casualties.'*

Evidence for Barron's temper being up is to be found in an eye-witness account of his actions on reaching the knocked out enemy guns: *'there was a wild melee in the confined space ... with Barron using the bayonet and clubbed butt of an old rifle he had picked up, with terrible effect.'*

The operations at Vimy Ridge in April 1917 aside, the battle of Passchendaele must surely rank as one of the most important episodes in Canadian military history.

David Erskine-Hill, Medal specialist at Spink: *"We are honoured to be able to handle this Victoria Cross which was awarded for an extraordinary act of gallantry during one of the most notorious battles of the 20th century. For those acquainted with Paul Gross' film 'Passchendaele', the striking images of Canadian gallantry amidst a swamp of mud and filth leave an indelible memory. No wonder one young Canadian soldier who took part in the battle later described how he had never prayed so hard in his life.'*

Biographical note:

Colin Fraser Barron was born in Banffshire, Scotland in 1893. He emigrated to Canada in 1910 and found work as a teamster, in addition to joining a militia unit. Having enlisted in the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force at Toronto, he arrived in France as a soldier in the 3rd Canadian Infantry (1st Ontario Regiment) in July 1915. Following his gallant deeds at Passchendaele, he was promoted to Sergeant and served as a Lewis Gun Instructor. Discharged at Toronto in April 1919, he re-joined the Militia and rose to the rank of Company Sergeant-Major prior to his retirement in May 1931.

In common with many veterans of the Great War, Barron suffered periods of unemployment in the 'Depression'. He did found work with the Ontario Provincial Police and the Ontario Department of Highways, and worked as a security guard at Don Jail. On the outbreak of the Second World War, he joined the Royal Regiment of Canada, when he was described as 'still powerful and built for hand-to-hand fighting'. He subsequently served in Iceland and as a Provost Sergeant-Major at 1st Division H.Q., England.

Back in Toronto at the war's end, he returned to his job as a security guard at Don Jail. He later joined the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires, for whom he worked at the public broadcaster CBC, Hester How School and Sunnybrook, Hospital. Married with two daughters, Barron died in Toronto in 1958, aged 64 years and is buried in the Veterans' Section 7, Prospect Cemetery, Toronto.

The full list of medals:

- (i) Victoria Cross (404017 Cpl. C. Barron, 3rd Bn. Can. R. (1st Cen. Ontario); 6 Nov. 1917)
- (ii) 1914-15 Star (404017 Pte. C. Barron, 3/Can. Inf.)
- (iii) British War Medal 1914-20 (404017 Sjt. C. Barron, 3-Can. Inf.)
- (iv) Victory Medal 1914-19 (404017 Sjt. C. Barron, 3-Can. Inf.)
- (v) Defence Medal 1939-45, silver
- (vi) Canadian Voluntary Service Medal 1939-45, overseas clasp
- (vii) War Medal 1939-45, silver
- (viii) Coronation 1937
- (ix) Coronation 1953
- (x) Colonial Auxiliary Forces Long Service, G.V.R. (C.S.M. - W.O. Cl. 2 C. Barron, V.C., 48th Highrs. of C.)

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