

Every day had risks as far as I was concerned. People were shooting at you all the time. One day looks like another.

***What was going through your mind? Did you have time to be scared?***

Oh, God, yea. You go for a tank , you've gotta win, 'cause if you don't put it out of commission, the tank will eat ya. I hit part of the track and motor too. It was the only way of stopping them.

***That was the good news. The bad news was the 10 German soldiers behind it.***

That's right. They came after me with hand grenades. I kept shooting them.

***I guess you had no alternative?***

You could put your hands up and die.

***You could have surrendered, became a prisoner of war.***

No bloody way. Didn't even think of it. People who surrender, they're cowards.

***Did that battle achieve it's objective?***

That's why I got the VC. It changed the whole picture of the front, they tell me. It made it so the rest of the army got through.

***When they took you off the front to award you the medal, they locked you up before flying you to London to meet King George VI. What did they think you'd do.***

I got locked up in Naples. They just wanted Smokey to be in the right spot. When I was first locked up, I was thinking, what the hell? But then they gave me a couple of beers and I was happy.

***You've since met many VC winners. What makes these guys different?***

You get in that position where you've got to fight. Somebody's got to fight, you can't all sit around. They've got a job to do.

***Lots of people did their jobs in the war – there has to be something different?***

Crazy. They were all crazy.

***You returned to Italy in the fall of 2004 for 60th anniversary celebrations. Did it bring back memories?***

None that I care about. There really are no good memories. You're fighting every day, I mean every day.

***Do you look back at that cocky soldier with the gun and marvel it was you?***

Thank God it was me. I always say most soldiers were afraid to shoot. I killed though. That's what I was paid to do.

***Do you hold any animosity towards the people you were fighting?***

Why should I? They had a job to do, too. Hope they got more than 60 cents a day.

***You recently had a canteen named after you at your local Legion, are rare honour. Do you still like beer?***

I don't drink beer any more. I have a couple glasses of wine

***Wine is better for the heart.***

Yeah, that's what they told me. Didn't have to tell me twice.



## *Tribute To A Hero*



From top: The remains of Smokey Smith VC lie in state in the Centre Block of the Parliament Buildings; Dominion President and honorary pallbearer Mary Ann Burdett walks alongside the casket in Vancouver.

### *Ernest Alvia Smokey Smith VC* *1914-2005*

It is hard to picture a remembrance service or pilgrimage without the presence of Canadian Victoria Cross recipient Sergeant Ernest Alvia Smokey Smith. Certainly those fortunate enough to have travelled with Canada's last surviving VC on countless journeys to our war cemeteries in Europe or the Far East may in future find themselves looking over their shoulder for the dedicated, fun-loving war veteran and his wheelchair, perhaps expecting to find him parked among the rows of his heroes.

That is where he would often be because while Smokey was usually the highlight of any Veterans Affairs Canada trip, he never told anyone he was a war hero. The real heroes, he would always say, are the ones in the cemeteries, who never had the chance to come home. And it did not matter to him whether they had been killed during his time in the Italian Campaign in World War II or during some other war or conflict. Indeed, Smokey's definition of a "real hero" included all men and women who died in the service of their country. That, along with his sincerity and his devilish sense of humour, was what earned him the love and respect of thousands of Canadians before he died peacefully at his Vancouver home at the age of 91 in the early hours of Aug. 3, 2005.

To thousands, Smokey was a national treasure for one simple reason: He was an ordinary soldier who did extraordinary things under some very difficult circum-

stances. And in that regard, he reminded us of the extraordinary that exists in the average person.

To the people closer to him, he was funny and stubborn; an independent thinker with an impish smile who loved life and hated like heck to beat around the bush. He didn't have much time for military authority. In fact, he was promoted and demoted at least eight times during the war, and had to be locked up for fear he would be too busy partying or too hung over to make it to Buckingham Palace for the formal VC presentation. "You could tell at the first meeting that he never minced his words and he never took himself too seriously," Dominion President Mary Ann Burdett, who led The Royal Canadian Legion representation, told the thousand or so gathered inside the downtown Vancouver church for his Aug. 13 funeral service.

She said Smokey was "a card, but behind all those stories and asides lies a deep respect for a man who became an icon in this nation through his innate ability to shrug off the event that made him famous...." Smokey didn't need rank, "he had stature.... I know that somewhere today Smokey is asking 'What's all the fuss about?' Today I can answer, 'It's about you old friend and comrade. It's about you.'"

Smokey's comrade and close pal Bill Worton also spoke at the nationally-televised funeral service. The fellow Seaforth Highlander said it is difficult to describe the buddy he had known for more than 60 years because "Smokey was a lot of different things to a lot of different people." Worton called him a humble man who loved life and people, and especially a man who kept his great sense of humour right to the end. "In later years," said Worton, "he took great pleasure from the simple things, like a good cigar, a tasty meal, a friendly visit, a drive in the countryside, a shot of good scotch, a trip to his barber, a visit to the Legion and a silly joke...."

Defence Minister Bill Graham said Smokey Smith will be remembered as a loyal comrade in arms to his fellow veterans and as an inspiration to all Canadians.

The public's period of mourning began when flags across the country were lowered to half-mast and his flag-draped coffin--bearing his war medals and distinctive Seaforth Highlanders cap--arrived Aug. 9 on Parliament Hill for a rare lying-in-state ceremony. Smokey was only the ninth Canadian to be so honoured. Leading a solemn nation in mourning on that hot, sunny morning were Gov. Gen. Adrienne Clarkson and Prime Minister Paul Martin, who paid their respects and expressed condolences to the Smith family in the marble foyer outside the House of Commons Chamber.





Opinion Editorial  
by  
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The Royal Canadian Legion is a self-funded, a political, non-partisan organization of 400,000 members from coast to coast in Canada that has two major priorities, the care of our veterans and the perpetuation of Remembrance.

The latest movement by the government of the day to introduce legislation to the benefit of those who have served in the military forces of this nation is in danger of being lost because of the political uncertainty that surrounds us all. And it is a shame.

It means our veterans will suffer, as has been the case for years in this country as many can tell you. But let me first clarify the point of what constitutes a veteran in our eyes. And I do not mean war veteran as defined by those who took part in World War I, World War II or the Korean War.

As far as we in the Legion are concerned today, it means anyone who has volunteered for military service and has been sworn in as a service person. It simply means one who is willing to go where the government decides he or she is most needed.

Make all the arguments you wish about training, postings or whatever, but don't try to tell a mother or a father these days about who is entitled to what designation if their son or daughter has been to the Gulf, Pakistan, the Middle East, numerous African nations and places around the world of which many of our citizens have not heard. They have all earned the title they so richly deserve. But what do they get in return ?

In the past few years successive governments of Canada have tried to keep up with the changing requirements brought on by military service under the current legislation. The result has been a lack of availability of certain services because the rules in place are not in line with what is happening or what is required.

They do not take into account the differences that have come into being since the last war veteran served in Korea. But there are numerous differences as we have brought forward to the government's attention many times over the past years.

We, along with other veterans organizations, responsible government agencies and many other Canadians have worked long and hard to bring change to bear on this situation. And now that we are within arm's reach of having legislation put in place to protect those who protect us, politics rears its ugly head again and threatens to kill all of the work and sacrifice made to ensure our greatest Canadians get what they deserve.

If there is one ounce of decency in the combination of parties and people we call Parliament they all owe it to our veterans, old and new, to make every effort to pass the legislation now in play as proposed by Veterans Affairs Canada. To