

COMMUNITY

Victoria Cross medal missing from museum

By Murray Hogben
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A KINGSTON PROMOTER OF THE Ukrainian contribution to Canada wonders how the Victoria Cross won during the First World War by Ukrainian-Canadian Cpl. Filip Konowal has disappeared.

Lubomyr Luciuk, director of research for the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association and professor of political geography at Royal Military College, said Wednesday that the Canadian War Museum bought the bravery medal in 1969. Records show the medal was displayed until 1972.

Daniel Glenney, the museum's director of collections and research, said he was asked this summer for Konowal's VC and portrait for a plaque unveiling. It was only at this point that the medal was found to be missing.

POOR RECORDS

People familiar with the medal in the early 1970s are dead, Glenney said, and record keeping was not as good in the days before the museum's medal collection was catalogued on computer. The last time the medal was seen was some time between 1972 and 1974.

"I'm digging deeper and deeper to find out about it," he said.

Luciuk said Konowal was born in 1888 in the Czarist Russian-occupied part of the Ukraine and came to Canada in 1913.

This allowed him to enlist as a Russian in the Canadian infantry, unlike thousands of other Ukrainians who were from the Austro-Hungarian-occupied part and were often interned in Canada during the war as enemy aliens.

Luciuk said Konowal went overseas and served in battles in France. In August 1917, Konowal said that he got tired of standing in the water-filled trenches and led a small attack on the German positions at Hill 70, near Lens.

On two successive days he single-handedly took several machine gun posts, killing at least 16 of the enemy

and taking some prisoners, for which he was awarded Britain's Victoria Cross by King George V.

After recovering from his wounds, Konowal served in various units until 1919. Konowal is one of up to 10,000 Ukrainian-Canadians who served in the war, Luciuk and Ron Sorobey estimate in their booklet on him.

FOOT GUARD

After the war, Konowal suffered medical and other problems but later enlisted in the Governor General's Foot Guards in Ottawa and remarried. His first wife and daughter had died in the Ukraine under Stalin's regime.

He found work as a janitor in the House of Commons during the depression and later became special custodian of Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie's office until Konowal's death in 1959.

