The Achievements of Trooper Mulloy

Jack Schecter

"How fine he was: how he lavished himself on great causes"
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In the summer of 1900 Lorne Mulloy, a wounded Canadian soldier serving with the second Canadian contingent in South Africa, wrote from a military hospital in Johannesburg to his family about serious wounds to his eyes received in battle: "I have not experienced even the faintest sensation of light since that shot was fired. My left eye is totally destroyed and my right one is so badly injured that it is like a man halting between life and death undecided to advance or retreat." Although totally blind because of these wounds Mulloy went on to obtain three university degrees, and became a respected professor and speaker on political issues in Canada and Britain and a prominent figure in his local community. His life is a remarkable story of achievement in the face of adversity.

Lorne Winfield Redmond Mulloy was born on a farm on 14 April 1876 near Winchester, Dundas County, Ontario, the son of George Mulloy and Mary Redmond. His mother was a teacher before her marriage while his father, known as "Squire" Mulloy, was for many years a magistrate, justice of the peace and reeve of the township. Dundas County is United Empire Loyalist country, having been settled by members of the King's Royal Regiment of New York after the American Revolution. This unit was a provincial regiment from the Mohawk Valley led by Sir William Johnson that supported the Crown during the American Revolution. During the War of 1812 a bloody battle was fought between British regulars and Canadian militia against invading Americans at Chrysler's Farm. In 1837 local militia battled rebels at the Battle of the Windmill near Prescott, and in 1866 and 1870 the Dundas County Militia stood guard against the Fenian threat. There is a strong tradition of military service and loyalty to the Crown in this area, a tradition that would be evident in Mulloy's strong support for the British Empire during his life.

After attending Winchester School and Morrisburg High School, Mulloy worked as a teacher at a school at Navan, a village just east of Ottawa, and became a popular local figure. One newspaper described him as "a man of splendid physique and soldierly bearing. He stood over six feet in height and came of fighting stock, his father and grandfather having been on active service of Canada, one at Windmill Point and the other at Chrysler's Farm. He was a fearless rider and a crack shot." In 1899 war broke out between Britain and the Boers in South Africa. There was a great deal of agitation in English Canada for the Canadian government to provide military assistance to support British forces, and eventually the government agreed to send Canadian volunteers to serve with the British army. Mulloy was deeply disturbed by a series of British military defeats called Black Week and believed it was his patriotic duty to volunteer for Imperial service. "There was no denying the unspoken call from the mother country," he declared. "War is of course deplored by all sensible people as a great evil. It is admitted, however, that greater evils are possible, such as the destruction of any of those principles of equity, justice and liberty, which underlie civilization as we see it to-day. There are times when it is as much a man's duty to go to war as it would be his duty to protect his family in case they should be attacked. When therefore reverses threatened the continuance of an empire of which I proudly claimed citizenship, and whose influence I knew to be
always for the extension of civil liberty and higher civilization, I concluded that my duty was to offer myself.7 Mulloy sent a telegram to the Militia Department briefly stating his qualifications and, after an interview with a recruiting officer, was accepted on 28 December 1899. He joined a contingent of eleven Ottawans (including Eddie Holland, a merchant, who was later awarded the Victoria Cross at the engagement at Leliefontein) who were sent to Halifax for training. On 21 February 1900 Mulloy, who had transferred from the Princess Louise Dragoon Guards to the 1st Battalion Canadian Mounted Rifles, left Halifax on the Milwaukee. Thirty-one days later he arrived at Cape Town.4

Mulloy proceeded with his regiment to Bloemfontein and was involved in the fighting at Kromstadt, Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Diamond Hill.5 After Diamond Hill his brigade joined the flying columns in pursuit of the enemy, leaving the hard-pressed Fusiliers to maintain their position. In the late afternoon A, B and D Squadrons of the RCD were sent to the right of Witpoort to support the defenders. In command was Lieutenant Harold L. Borden of the Dragoons, a graduate of Mount Allison College and a medical student at McGill University. Known as an excellent horseman and skilled athlete, Borden was a former member of the King's Hussars in Nova Scotia who had already distinguished himself during the campaign, particularly in one incident where he swam the Sand River at the head of a small detachment and placed the Boers on the other side. When he was put in command of the Witpoort relief force, he had only just rejoined his unit after two weeks in hospital at Pretoria, and still was not in the best of health.

The Canadians were ordered to mount and, riding at full gallop, headed for a ridge while shells and bullets flew through the air around them. The troops arrived at the ridge, dismounted and swam up the steep slope, reaching the summit as the enemy took cover among various boulders. The Canadians attacked under heavy fire, and rushed forward to secure the top of the ridge. Lieutenant J.E. Burch of the 2nd RCD, whose father was in the same unit, and four soldiers including Mulloy found themselves cut off from their comrades and heavily outnumbered by the enemy. Sergeant A.E. Rose described the engagement: "The part of the kopje which Lieut. Borden went over was about 12 feet high, with front almost perpendicular. Before reaching the steepest part of the hill Trooper Brown fell, shot through the lung. Lieut. Borden and the remainder of his troop climbed the steep hill and found themselves face to face with the Boers. Lieut. Burch and his men were advancing along the side and near the foot of the kopje. The Boers and Canadians now held peculiar positions. Some of the Boers managed to get behind part of the Canadians placing the last named in a critical position. Soon after mounting the kopje, poor Borden fell, a Mauser bullet piercing his heart. Lieut. Burch and four troopers found themselves in advance of the other Canadians with the Boers in front and behind them. The Boers called on them to surrender, but the five plucky Canadians refused to surrender, and kept the Boers at bay. Two rifles choked, yet the remaining three continued to keep the Boers off. Then Lieut. Burch received a wound in the left knee. He continued to fire and was in the act of raising his rifle when a Mauser bullet hit him in the side, causing a fatal wound. But the Boer who committed the deed also fired his last shot, as he was knocked over at the same time. One of the remaining four men - Mulloy of Ottawa - raised his head and immediately a bullet carried of his nose. Poor fellow! He may lose the sight of both eyes. Corp. Price was just an instant too late in firing at the Boer who caused Mulloy's wound but he prevented him from ever firing again. We turned him and his chum side by side, monuments to Canadian pluck and valor."6 Mulloy had left the cover of a boulder to take the rifle of a wounded Boer; his own weapon had jammed while Mulloy was giving his hand to Corporal Price, who was running towards the Boers, but they had run short of ammunition. Two Boers fired at him from about forty feet away; one bullet grazed his forehead and the other struck him in the left eye. Mulloy dropped to his knees and did not lose consciousness but attempted to find cover. His comrades fired on the enemy who surrendered or fled. This engagement became famous in Canada, not only because of the bravery of the soldiers, but because of the deaths of the two officers, notably Lieutenant Borden, the only son of the Minister of Militia.

Later, Colonel John Reeves, commander of the 2nd Battalion of the Princess Victoria's Royal Irish Fusiliers, wrote to the Canadian commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel F.L. Lenoard, to praise the courage of the Dragoons: "In the few words I spoke to you to-night at the funeral of your two very gallant officers I am afraid I failed to convey the deep gratitude my regiment owes to the 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles (RCD) for their gallantry in going so nobly and fearlessly to the succor of our beleaguered detachment at Witpoort yesterday. The counter attack your regiment made occurred at a most critical moment, and it doubtless saved many of the lives of our detachment. We deplore greatly the losses you have sustained and shall ever bear in grateful memory the gallantry and self-sacrifice of the 1st C.M.R. on this occasion. I shall deem it a great honour if you will kindly convey to your officers, N.C. officers and men the purport of this letter."7

Initial reports suggested that Mulloy had died on the battlefield of his wounds. According to a comrade, Alfred E. Ault, whose correspondence was published in an eastern Ontario newspaper, "Last Monday we lost two officers killed and two privates wounded fatally, one of the latter being a young man named Mulloy. He comes from somewhere near Bouck's Hill. At one time he attended the Morrisburg C. I. He was shot
just as true, has been deemed to go through the world in darkness. There were few dry eyes in while poor Mulloy, just as willing, just as brave, escaped unscathed to wear the emblem of his of Lieutenant Ed Holland, V.C., leading blind touch. The cover to the sheet music of the “Trooper Mulloy March,” a tribute written by his wife.

On 21 September 1901 the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall visited Ottawa to unveil the statue of Queen Victoria on Parliament Hill and present medals to about one hundred veterans of the South African war. One by one the soldiers formed up to receive their medals from the royal hands. Mulloy’s was presented with his Victoria Cross, and the last soldier to receive his decoration was Lorne Mulloy, with his good friend Holland at his side. The Duke gave the medal to Mulloy, shook his hands, and conversed briefly with the trooper about the engagement which had cost him his eyesight. The scene motivated the Matters Military column in the Ottawa Journal to reflect on the fortunes of war: “Perhaps the most important thing that has come out of the battle of Hill, Die Hard, the war has been the landing of Lieutenant Ed Holland, who presented with his Victoria Cross, and the last soldier to receive his decoration was Lorne Mulloy, with his good friend Holland at his side. 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Lorne Mulloy is an inspiration to all Canadians. He is an example to our citizens, the returning veteran and the disabled soldier. Mulloy served his country on the battlegrounds of South Africa, the political arena in Britain and Canada, and the legal and municipal affairs of his community. Among the many tributes paid to Mulloy, none put it better than a local newspaper. *He proved himself a hero in everyday life as well as in war time... Notwithstanding the handicap of loss of sight* ‘Trooper’ Mulloy played a large part in the affairs of his country in politics and law. He passed quietly away leaving behind him a record seldom attained by men who have the sight of both eyes.”

**Notes**


4. National Archives of Canada, Department of Veterans Affairs, South African War records, reel T-7078, p.01798.


6. Ottawa Evening Citizen, 4 September 1900, p.3.

7. Sentinel Papers, vol. 12, 1901, p.89.

8. Cornwall Standard, 21 September 1900, p.3.


10. Rebelo Record (Smiths Falls, ON), 20 December 1900, p.1.

11. Ottawa Evening Citizen, 12 December 1900, p.5.


15. Daily British Whig, 17 December 1900, p.4.


18. Ottawa Evening Citizen, 4 September 1900, p.3.


20. Ibid., p.113.

21. Ibid., p.112.


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