

# FIREFIGHTER RECEIVES GEORGE MEDAL

Royal Canadian Air Force No. 1 Fighter Wing was stationed in Marville, France, from 1951 to 1955. The unit was committed to NATO air defence operations in Europe during the Cold War. On 10 July 1956, a rail tanker car shipment of aviation fuel ignited near Montmédy while being unloaded. The resulting fire threatened to escalate into a catastrophic explosion. As Deputy Fire Chief, Sergeant Stevenson understood the stakes immediately and took action.

The sealed tank car, superheated and pressurized, was moments away from detonating. Fully aware of the danger, Stevenson climbed onto the tank. After repeated attempts, he managed to release the manhole lock, venting the pressure and preventing an explosion which would have made the fire completely uncontrollable.

The crisis was not over. Although firefighters managed to contain the blaze, they could not extinguish it. Stevenson again took the lead. Wearing only a heat mask and shielded by a stream of water directed by his crew, he climbed atop the blazing fuel tender and forced a foam line through the manhole opening. This final act brought the fire under control and ended the emergency.



Sergeant Stevenson's courage, unselfishness, and complete disregard for his own personal safety were recognized with the award of a George Medal - one of the Commonwealth's highest awards for gallantry not in the presence of an enemy. The citation concludes by stating: "*Both these acts of bravery were carried out with the full knowledge of their necessity and of the dangers involved. The courage and unselfishness displayed by Sergeant Stevenson and the complete disregard for his own personal safety on this occasion was in the highest traditions of the Royal Canadian Air Force.*" Queen Elizabeth presented the medal in Ottawa on Dominion Day, 1959.

Sergeant Stevenson's career spanned Canada and beyond: Trenton, Calgary, Lac St. Denis, Churchill, Rockcliffe, and National Defence Headquarters, as well as key Cold War locations in England and France. He later served as Crew Chief for fire protection during the 1958 test flights of the AVRO Arrow. Stevenson continued to serve with distinction, receiving his commission as a Flying Officer in 1962. He retired in 1963.

Douglas Stevenson's contributions did not end with his uniformed service. He founded Douglas Fire Safety Systems Ltd., which installed Halon fire suppression systems in Canadian Army armoured vehicles during the early 1970s. He also championed the RCAF firefighting community, establishing the Foam Bowl Trophy for the annual firefighter curling bonspiel and assisting with the writing of "Standing Against Fire," the definitive history of the Canadian Military Fire Service.

From the Cold War flight lines of Marville to the pages of Canadian military history, Douglas Stevenson stands as a model of professionalism, technical excellence, and courage - an airman who chose action over hesitation, and whose legacy endures in the safety systems, traditions, and stories he helped build.

