

# COLONEL RICHARD (DICK) BUTSON GC, OMM, CD, OST), PhD

Arthur Richard Cecil Butson was born in Hankow, China of British parents on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1922. He was educated in England at Cambridge and University College Hospital, graduating MB, BChir in 1945.



He served in the Home Guard and a Light Rescue Squad in London during the air raids and as a medical officer with the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey in the Antarctic from 1946 to 1948. During his year in the Antarctic, the expedition found a route for dog teams over the 5,000-foot high mountains of the Grahamland Peninsula and surveyed the last thousand miles of the most inaccessible coastline of the world. For distinguished service in Antarctica, Doctor Butson was awarded the Polar Medal.

Doctor Butson's citation for the Albert Medal (now the George Cross) reads:

*"On the evening of 26<sup>th</sup> July 1947, an American member of the Ronne Antarctic Research Expedition fell in the crevasse some six miles from Base. Two teams were sent*

*to the rescue but the hardship of crossing a heavily crevassed glacier were much increased by darkness and it was not until 4 o'clock in the morning of 27<sup>th</sup> July that the crevasse into which the American had fallen was located. Butson immediately volunteered to be lowered into the crevasse where he found the American tightly wedged 106 feet down and suffering from shock and exhaustion. For nearly an hour he had to chip the ice away in an extremely confined space in order to free the American who was brought to the surface and placed inside a tent. Butson then rendered the necessary medical aid and at dawn a return to the Base was made carrying the American on one of the sledges."* (LG 28<sup>th</sup> September 1948)

Curiously, the American never thanked Dr. Butson for the rescue!



Dr. Butson did post-graduate surgical studies in London until 1952, when he emigrated to Canada, settling in Hamilton in 1953, where he has practiced as a surgeon ever since. With the establishment of McMaster University Medical School in 1970, he joined the part-time faculty, ending with the appointment of Clinical Professor in the Department of Surgery. He was Chief of Staff of St. Joseph's Hospital, a 600-bed teaching hospital, for two years and Head of the Service of General Surgery for many years. He

has published about 20 papers on surgical topics. He found time to obtain a Doctorate in addition to his medical degree.

In 1956, Doctor Butson joined the Militia as Medical Officer to the RHLI until 1972. He later commanded Hamilton's 23 Medical Company, with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. He was later promoted Colonel and appointed the Area Surgeon for what is now LFCA. Dr. Butson took the Arctic winter warfare course and qualified as a parachutist at age 55! He then established a Militia Airborne surgical team.

He was President of the Defence Medical Association of Canada and represented Canada medically on the NATO Reserve Officer's Association (CIOR) for four years. For his services to the Canadian Forces, he was appointed Honorary



Polar Medal

Surgeon to Her Majesty the Queen in 1977 and was made an Officer of the Order of Military Merit of Canada in 1982.

Dr. Butson married Eileen Callon on 30 June 1967. They have two daughters, Sarah Louise and Caroline, and one son, Andrew Richard.

Doctor Butson has been active with St. John's Ambulance for many years and is a Commander of the Order of St. John.

A mountaineer, Dr. Butson has climbed extensively in the Canadian Rockies, Baffin Island, the Antarctic, the Alps and the Hindu Kush in the Western Himalaya. Butson Ridge in the Antarctic (at Lat 68°05' S, Long 66°51' W) is named after him.

In addition to the other medals mentioned above, Doctor Butson holds the Defence Medal, the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal 1977, the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal 1992 (British and Canadian versions), and the Canadian Forces Decoration with bar.

## DR. BUTSON'S STORY:

*"When I got down to Peterson, I found him so tightly wedged in the narrowing crevasse that I could not get down to his level without removing some of my clothes. His haversack was throttling him so I first had to cut the strap. He was wedged head down with his shoulders across the crevasse. I pulled his shoulders around so that freed his chest a little. I was then able to get two slings under his thighs. While doing all this there were loud cracks and booming noises from the glacier's movement and I felt the pressure on myself of the glacial movement. Those above could not hear me well so when I asked them to pull a little I could not stop them when Peterson screamed. He suddenly shot up from the wedged position like a cork out of a champagne bottle. When nearly at the top it looked as he was falling out of the slings and was going to land back on me! He was, however, pulled out by those on top. I got out after the equipment had been hauled up. The miracle of the rescue was in finding the small hole in the crevasse bridge in a glacier 6 miles by 8 miles in the dark of Antarctic night. Peterson subsequently served in the US Marines in the Korean War. He died recently of cancer. His mother was grateful and sent me food parcels and wanted me to marry her daughter – there was a problem – I was already married!"*

The George Cross (GC) is the highest civil decoration of the Commonwealth of Nations. The GC is the civilian counterpart of the Victoria Cross and the highest gallantry award for civilians as well as for military personnel in actions which are not in the face of the enemy or for which purely military honours would not normally be granted. There have been 10 crosses awarded to Canadians: eight military, one Merchant Navy, and one woman. The GC is no longer awarded to Canadians by the Queen, who awards the Cross of Valour (Canadian) instead.

