

Be Inspired by CSM Osborn and his Daughter Patti

One of Professor Houlden's goals in his course *China: A Primer on a Global Power* is to highlight the connections between Canada and China. In his lecture on *China from 1911 to 1949* he covered the Winnipeg Grenadiers and their battle against the Japanese in Hong Kong in 1941. He shared with us the heroism of Company Sergeant-Major (CSM) John Robert Osborn who was the first Canadian soldier in WWII to be awarded a Victoria Cross, the British Commonwealth's highest honour for military valour. Professor Houlden also identified that CSM Osborn's daughter – Patti Osborn was a member of the class.



Professor Gordon Houlden with Patti Osborn at ELLA's Spring Session 2017.

CSM Osborn was one of the few experienced Canadian soldiers fighting in Hong Kong, having served with the British Navy in WWI. After WWI, Osborn immigrated to Canada, and worked with the CNR in Manitoba where he met his wife while he was rescuing people from a burning house. He was destined to save more lives. The Osborn's had five children. The youngest was Patti.

On December 19, 1941, a part of the company of the 1st Battalion of the Winnipeg Grenadiers led by Osborn captured Mount Butler, on Hong Kong island. The larger number of battle hardened Japanese soldiers made the Canadian position untenable. Osborn single-handedly engaged the enemy exposing himself to heavy fire to enable his men to retreat. He picked up and threw back several grenades. When one landed in a position where he knew he could not reach it in time, he shouted a warning, threw himself on the grenade and died instantly. He was 42 years old. His Victoria Cross citation reads: "CSM Osborn was an inspiring example to all throughout the defence which he assisted so magnificently in maintaining against an over-whelming enemy force, for eight and a half hours, and in his death he displayed the highest quality of heroism and self-sacrifice." (Source: www.forces.gc.ca. See also ELLA Spring Session 2017 handouts for *China: A Primer on a Global Power*, lecture 6).

Patti adds an extra poignancy to the heroism of her father. At the age of 5 she was badly burned in an accident just before his deployment to Hong Kong. He went from the barracks to the hospital to donate a quart of blood (double the maximum pint) for transfusion to his daughter and the next day left for Hong Kong not knowing whether she would survive her accident.

CSM Osborn VC would have been very proud of his daughter Patti. Patti is a mother of two children and is retired after teaching public school for 20 years. This is despite having bilateral optic neuropathy or optic atrophy resulting in the loss of vision. There is no cure. She is a dedicated lifelong learner who attended her first ELLA Spring Session in 2006.

In December 2009 Patti was invited to Hong Kong to speak to students about her father. She was touched when an instructor from St. Stephen's Church College remarked to her, "You are your father". Patti Osborn is a remarkable woman who every day demonstrates the courage exemplified by her heroic father.