

Horticulturalist received Military Cross

Leslie Hancock, one of Canada's leading horticulturalists, has died after distinguished careers as a soldier, university lecturer, consultant and businessman. He was 85.

Hancock, who founded Woodland Nurseries on Camilla Road, was born in Brabourne, Kent, England on March 10, 1892. He came to Canada in 1914 and enrolled in the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph.

In 1915, he joined the Second University Company and was sent overseas with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. After front-line service in the trenches of France, he was selected for officer training and sent back to England. In August, 1917, he returned to his regiment and suffered shrapnel wounds in the siege of Sanctuary Wood during the Battle of the Somme in the period

known as the The First Hundred Days.

Later he was decorated with the Military Cross for bravery in the capture of Mons, Belgium.

Hancock returned to Canada in 1919 and re-entered the Ontario Agricultural College as a sophomore. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture degree in 1922 and joined the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Bell, Maryland.

In August, 1923, he travelled to Nanking, China to take a position on the staff of the College of Agriculture at the University of Nanking. The following year, he married Dorothy Daisy Macklin, the daughter of the doctor who headed the local hospital. The couple had a son, Macklin.

In 1927, the Chinese revolutionary forces of the Kuomintang, headed by General Chiang Kai-Shek,

captured Nanking and ordered the expulsion of all foreigners.

Hancock was taken prisoner by the revolutionaries, but managed to send his wife and child out of the country to Britain. Several of his colleagues at the university were shot and Hancock's home was burned to the ground.

With the help of some of his former students, Hancock escaped his captors and made his way to Harbin, Manchuria. In April, 1927 he travelled back to England (to rejoin his family) on the Trans-Siberian Railway which passed through Moscow and Berlin.

A second son, Donald, was born in England that same year and the family returned to Canada. In 1930, Hancock purchased 10 acres on Camilla Road and worked in landscape design and construction.

As that 10-acre field developed to become Woodland Nurseries, Hancock retained four acres of the original farm woodlot as Woodland Gardens.

In August, 1943, Hancock was elected to the Ontario Legislature for Wellington South, emphasizing the need for conservation and concern for the environment in his maiden speech at Queen's Park.

Hancock was one the founders of Lakeshore Landscape Associates in Mississauga in 1952.

In 1966, Hancock was appointed an agricultural consultant to the Republic of Somalia and worked for several months in that African country on a project commissioned by the World Bank.

He is survived by his wife Dorothy, sons Macklin and Donald, daughter Marjorie, 11 grandchildren, and two great grandchildren. The family intends to maintain the garden and nursery he created.