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NEWS RELEASE

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Vancouver - One of Canada's best-known and most admired war heroes has received the Order of British Columbia from British Columbia Lieutenant-Governor Iona Campagnolo.

Ernest Alvia ("Smokey") Smith, Canada's last surviving winner of the Victoria Cross was among ten distinguished British Columbians who received the honour, established in 1989 as the province's highest award for outstanding achievement, in a ceremony at Victoria's Government House on September 19.

In presenting "Smokey's OBC, Ms. Campagnolo briefly described his action in October 1944 at the Savio River in Italy, when he single-handedly forced the retreat of a German tank column and accompanying infantry thereby securing a vital bridge-head for his regiment, the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, which cleared the way for a Canadian advance into the Po River valley and northern Italy. Prior to this action "Smokey" was twice wounded and the recipient of twelve campaign medals. He subsequently re-enlisted for the Korean War, retiring in 1964 to establish a successful travel agency in Vancouver.

Ms. Campagnolo pointed out however that Smokey, now in his eighties, had earned the Order of British Columbia for his work on behalf of British Columbians following his wartime exploits.

"Since then," she said, "he selflessly continued to offer his services to his country by becoming a champion for veterans and the armed forces, and taking part in many official Canadian delegations overseas and in the Far East. He serves as a symbol and reminder of Canadians' role in all the major conflicts of the 20th Century, and is also an inspiration to students and youth in terms of fundamental Canadian values such as service to one's country, national unity and the meaning of citizenship."

Smokey's nomination for the OBC this year was spearheaded by The Royal Canadian Legion, BC/Yukon Command, supported by other organizations and individuals, notably Colonel The Honorable Garde Gardom Q.C. - also a recipient of the Order this year; the late H.P. ("Budge") Bell-Irving, OC, DSO, OBE, OBC; Colonel the Honourable John A. Fraser, P.C., O.C., OBC, C.D. LLD; (Honorable), Patrick Reid,

O.C., M.C. C.D., Honorary Lt. Colonel, Commanding Officer, British Columbia Regiment; Senator, The Honourable Pat Carney, P.C.; BC officials of Veterans Affairs Canada and Larry Murray, Vice-Admiral (Ret' d), Deputy Minister, Veterans Affairs Canada, Charlottetown.

Other recipients of the Order of British Columbia for 2002 were John (Jack) Blaney, former President of SFU; Gathie Falk, sculptor visual and performing arts; Patsy George, anti-poverty worker and immigrant and refugee supporter; Irving Allen Guttman, founder of the Vancouver Opera; H. Martin ("Mart") Kenney, musical pioneer and band leader; Norma I. Mickelson, Chancellor, University of Victoria; K. George Pederson, Chancellor of the University of Northern BC, and Gian Singh Sandhu of Williams Lake, lumber company founder and charity supporter.

Recipients of the Order of British Columbia are selected by an Advisory Council, which The Honourable Lance S.G. Finch, Chief Justice of British Columbia, chaired this year. Other members of the Advisory Council were The Honourable Claude Richmond, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and MLA for Kamloops; Dr. David H. Turpin, President and Vice Chancellor of the University of Victoria; Hans Cunningham, President, Union of BC Municipalities; Andrew Wilkinson, Deputy Minister, Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat; Judith Forst, O.C., OBC, and Beverly Nann, OBC. The Advisory Council presents its recommendations to the Lieutenant Governor, Honorary Chair of the Council, but who does not participate in the selection process.

Smokey Smith received the Order of Canada in 1995. He is a lifetime member of The Royal Canadian Legion and in 1991 was declared Honorary President of the BC/Yukon Command, The Royal Canadian Legion.

For further information about the Order of British Columbia, see website www.protocol.gov.bc.ca.

For further information about Smokey Smith or The Royal Canadian Legion, contact: -

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