

Victoria Cross Online

Issue 8 May 2023



Rambahadur Limbu VC
1939-2023

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Welcome to the May edition of the Victoria Cross Online magazine. Sadly this month's edition is dedicated to the memory of Capt. Rambahadur Limbu VC who passed away on 22nd April in Nepal aged 83. The last (to date) of the Gurkha VCs will be greatly missed, and the opening article is his obituary.



Secondly, there is feature by Steve Lee on his recent VC trip to Dublin to record memorials for his fabulous website

www.memorialstovalour.co.uk

Thirdly, there is an article on the only non British or Commonwealth VC of WWII – Anders Lassen VC, MC with 2 Bars – by Richard Pursehouse with a catchy title based on a Lassen quote from an Operation Report.

Finally, a debut article in VCO for Mike Gomersall, on Castleford's sole VC recipient, Thomas Bryan. Welcome aboard to Mike and thanks for an excellent piece, which is full of extensive research of local newspapers and records.

There is also a brief update on the RAF Museum's successful rescue of the Scarf VC medal group.

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Rambahadur Limbu VC

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/rambahadur-limbu-vc/>



Captain Rambahadur Limbu VC was born in the village of Chyangthapu, Nepal on 8th July 1939. Sources have him born five years prior to this so there is some debate on his age. Limbu was a member of the Begha Clan from Eastern Nepal.

Rambahadur Limbu enlisted in the 2nd Battalion of the 10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles in November 1957. Three years later, in the December of 1960 a rebellion against the Sultan of Brunei led to a reignition of hostilities in the region.

From 1963 the 'Borneo Confrontation' between Indonesian and British and Malayan troops began. Rambahadur Limbu's battalion was heavily involved in the Confrontation, continuing to utilise their honed jungle tactics from the previous decade of service in the Malayan Emergency.

It was in the November of 1965 that the battalion was ordered to dominate a position about five thousand yards within Indonesian territory in the Bau district of Sarawak, Borneo. The aim was to attack a strong force of Indonesian soldiers positioned on a steep hill which was only approachable by a narrow ridge.

On 21st November the then Lance Corporal Limbu was in an advance party of 16 Gurkhas when they encountered of about 30 Indonesians holding a position on the top of a jungle covered hill. Limbu went forward with two men, but when they were just 10 yards from the enemy position, the sentry opened fire on them.



Rambahadur Limbu VC

FRIDAY, 22ND APRIL 1966

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

(ARMY DEPARTMENT)

Whitehall, London S.W.1.

22nd April 1966.

The QUEEN has been graciously pleased to approve the award of the VICTORIA CROSS to:

21148786 Lance Corporal RAMBAHADUR LIMBU, 10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles.

On 21st November 1965 in the Bau District of Sarawak Lance Corporal RAMBAHADUR LIMBU was with his Company when they discovered and attacked a strong enemy force located in the Border area. The enemy were strongly entrenched in Platoon strength, on top of a sheer sided hill the only approach to which was along a knife edge ridge allowing only three men to move abreast. Leading his support group in the van of the attack he could see the nearest trench and in it a sentry manning a machine gun. Determined to gain first blood he inched himself forward until, still ten yards from his enemy, he was seen and the sentry opened fire, immediately wounding a man to his right. Rushing forward he reached the enemy trench in seconds and killed the sentry, thereby gaining for the attacking force a first but firm foothold on the objective. The enemy were now fully alerted and, from their positions in depth, brought down heavy automatic fire on the attacking force, concentrating this onto the area of the trench held alone by Lance Corporal RAMBAHADUR LIMBU.

Appreciating that he could not carry out his task of supporting his platoon from this position he courageously left the comparative safety of his trench and, with a complete disregard for the hail of fire being directed at him, he got together and led his fire group to a better fire position some yards ahead. He now attempted to indicate his intentions to his Platoon Commander by shouting and hand signals but failing to do

so in the deafening noise of exploding grenades and continuous automatic fire he again moved out into the open and reported personally, despite the extreme dangers of being hit by the fire not only from the enemy but by his own comrades.

It was at the moment of reporting that he saw both men of his own group seriously wounded. Knowing that their only hope of survival was immediate first aid and that evacuation from their very exposed position so close to the enemy was vital he immediately commenced the first of his three supremely gallant attempts to rescue his comrades. Using what little ground cover he could find he crawled forward, in full view of at least two enemy machine gun posts who concentrated their fire on him and which, at this stage of the battle, could not be effectively subdued by the rest of his platoon. For three full minutes he continued to move forward but when almost able to touch the nearest casualty he was driven back by the accurate and intense weight of fire covering his line of approach. After a pause he again started to crawl forward but he soon realised that only speed would give him the cover which the ground could not.

Rushing forward he hurled himself on the ground beside one of the wounded and calling for support from two light machine guns which had now come up to his right in support he picked up the man and carried him to safety out of the line of fire. Without hesitation he immediately returned to the top of the hill determined to complete his self imposed task of saving those for whom he felt personally responsible. It was now clear from the increased weight of fire being concentrated on the approaches to and in the immediate vicinity of the remaining casualty the enemy were doing all they could to prevent any further attempts at rescue. However, despite this Lance Corporal RAMBAHADUR again moved out into the open for his final effort. In a series of short forward rushes and once being pinned down for some minutes by the intense and accurate automatic fire which could

Rambahadur Limbu VC



Undaunted, Rambahadur led the cautious advance, reaching the nearest enemy trench and quickly killing its sentry, gaining a firm foothold for a further attack. The rest of the enemy positions became alerted to the Gurkhas presence and began directing heavy fire onto the trench now held by Rambahadur.

Rambahadur now appreciated that he could not continue supporting his platoon from his now-compromised position and left the relative safety of the trench to reposition himself and his fire team to a better position a few yards further ahead. The deafening noise of gunfire and explosives had made communication between his group and his platoon commander almost impossible and so Rambahadur again left his position to return to his commander in person, despite the heavy fire, and report his situation. It was at this point that the two remaining men of Rambahadur's fire team became seriously wounded.



Rambahadur immediately attempted to return to his former position and rescue them, crawling for three minutes under heavy and accurate machine gun fire from at least 2 separate enemy machine gun posts, until he was almost able to reach the nearest wounded man.

The sheer weight of fire stopped him advancing further, and he realised that only a quick rush would allow him a chance to cover the remaining ground and reach the

Rambahadur Limbu VC



wounded men. He rushed forward and managed to reach the first wounded man and carried him back to safety. Without hesitation he then returned to rescue the remaining wounded soldier. Through an even heavier hail of fire Rambahadur again moved out in a series of short bursts, using what little cover was available. Eventually after almost twenty minutes he reached the second man and ran back carrying him through the continuous enemy fire.

After re-joining his section, Rambahadur returned to the attack and recovering a light machine gun which had previously been abandoned earlier in the combat, gave support for the latter stages of the assault, personally killing four more enemy soldiers as they attempted to escape.



Tragically at the time of the announcement of his Victoria Cross, came the news of the sudden death of his young wife, leaving him to care for his young family. Lance Corporal Rambahadur Limbu received his VC from the Queen at Buckingham Palace on 12th July 1966, accompanied by his 5 year-old son, Bhaktabahadur. Then there was the protracted ordeal of the countless press conferences, interviews and public appearances.

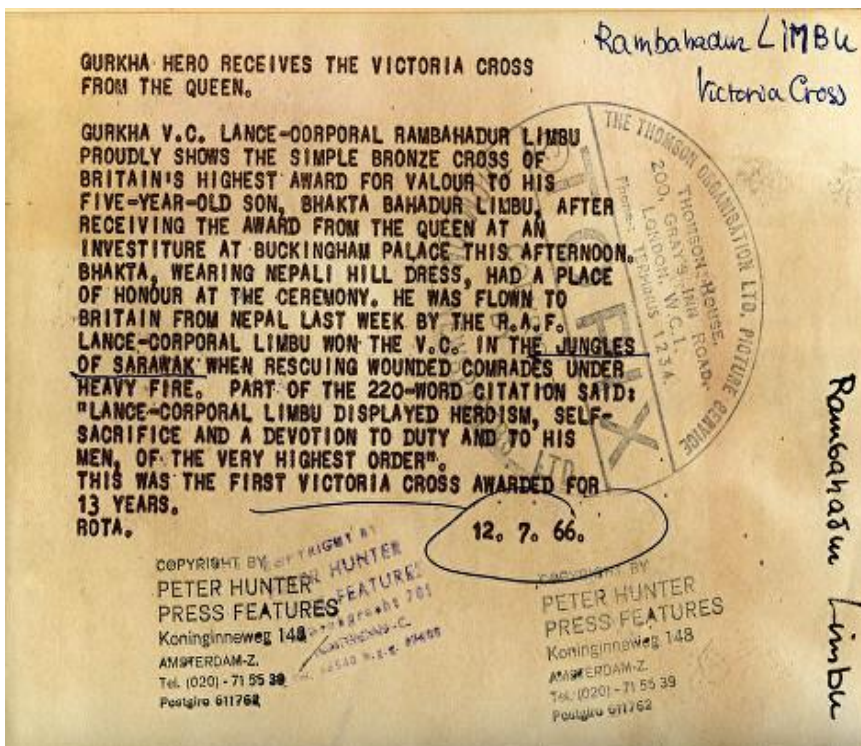
His was the only VC awarded to the 10th and only VC awarded to a Gurkha since World War II.

Rambahadur Limbu VC

Rambahadur Limbu's Victoria Cross was stolen, along with all his possessions, whilst on a train journey from India to his native Nepal in 1967. Rambahadur Limbu later received an official replacement VC. He reached the rank of Captain, as a Queen's Gurkha Officer (QGO), and was appointed Member of the Royal Victorian Order (MVO) in 1984 for his service as Queen's Gurkha Orderly Officer. He retired from the Army in 1985, and retired to his native Nepal.

He was a regular attendee of the VC and GC Association Reunions held biannually. He also made regular visits to the UK to support the Gurkha Welfare Trust. In November 2014 he visited their Head Office in Salisbury to hear about the Trust's latest developments, and he was quoted as saying "It is important to remember the sacrifice that these soldiers and many others made for us, just as we must remember the soldiers who have returned [to Nepal] and need our help today."

His last visit to England for a VC and GC Association was in 2016 as his health was beginning to fail. He did attend the Digger Day events in 2018 in Nowra, Australia alongside Keith Payne VC, Willie Apiata VC, Johnson Beharry VC, Michael Pratt GC and recipients of the Cross of Valour. In his last years, he remained largely in his native Nepal, where he passed away peacefully on 22nd April. Captain Limbu VC was commemorated at a military funeral in Kathmandu on 28th April, followed by a family funeral and burial in the grounds of his house in Damak on 30th April.



Rambahadur Limbu VC



Captain Limbu VC signing a copy of the 1956 Soldier Magazine at the Union Jack Club in 2016 when attending the VCGA Reunion in London.
Photograph courtesy of Alastair Kennedy-Rose (pictured with Capt Limbu)

Glasnevin VCs

By Steve Lee

www.memorialstovalour.co.uk

Negotiating Dublin with a US Presidential visit taking place was challenging but the visit had been planned for a while. With our continuing work to record all VC graves and memorials worldwide preparation started weeks ago setting up a visit to Glasnevin Cemetery. For those that may have visited larger cemeteries you will be aware how difficult it can be to locate specific graves, so the preparation work was vitally important. Glasnevin is the final resting place for over one and a half million people, with 200000 monuments, eight kilometres of paths covering 120 acres so not advisable to just turn up and start looking, something we've foolishly done in the past. Records show that there are five VCs buried in Glasnevin with a possible sixth which we will look at later.

From experience we've found that local knowledge can be a huge help so through family and friends I was able to meet up with two locals who would help me find my way round and locate the graves. Prior to the visit we'd identified the five VCs, located images of each headstone, most from a previous visit several years ago pre-digital cameras and found the plot references. As a backup we'd also been able to find the what3word codes for each one. For those that may not have come across what3words before it's an app you can download and every 3-metre square on earth has a unique three-word code, widely used by the emergency services to locate a specific spot and something many of us are now using to locate and record grave locations. So, with the preparation work complete I headed off to Ireland and met up with my local helpers.

Glasnevin Cemetery is very much geared up for the many people that visit so there is ample parking, visitor centre, café, museum and toilets. Before tackling the search, we first met up with the Digital and Heritage Officer who was most helpful with plotting each grave reference on a cemetery map, he would also later check the records to discover if there was a sixth VC buried in the cemetery in an unmarked grave.

Glasnevin VCs

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With our map complete we set off to find the final resting place of our first VC L/Corp. James Murray VC, 2nd Battalion Connaught Rangers who was awarded the VC for actions during the first Boer War in 1881. The second grave was that of Pte. Phillip Smith VC, 17th Regiment who was awarded the VC for actions at Sebastopol during the Crimea War in 1855 so one of the very early VCs. You'll see in the attached photos that several of the graves have additional markers so another helpful tool for locating the graves from distance.

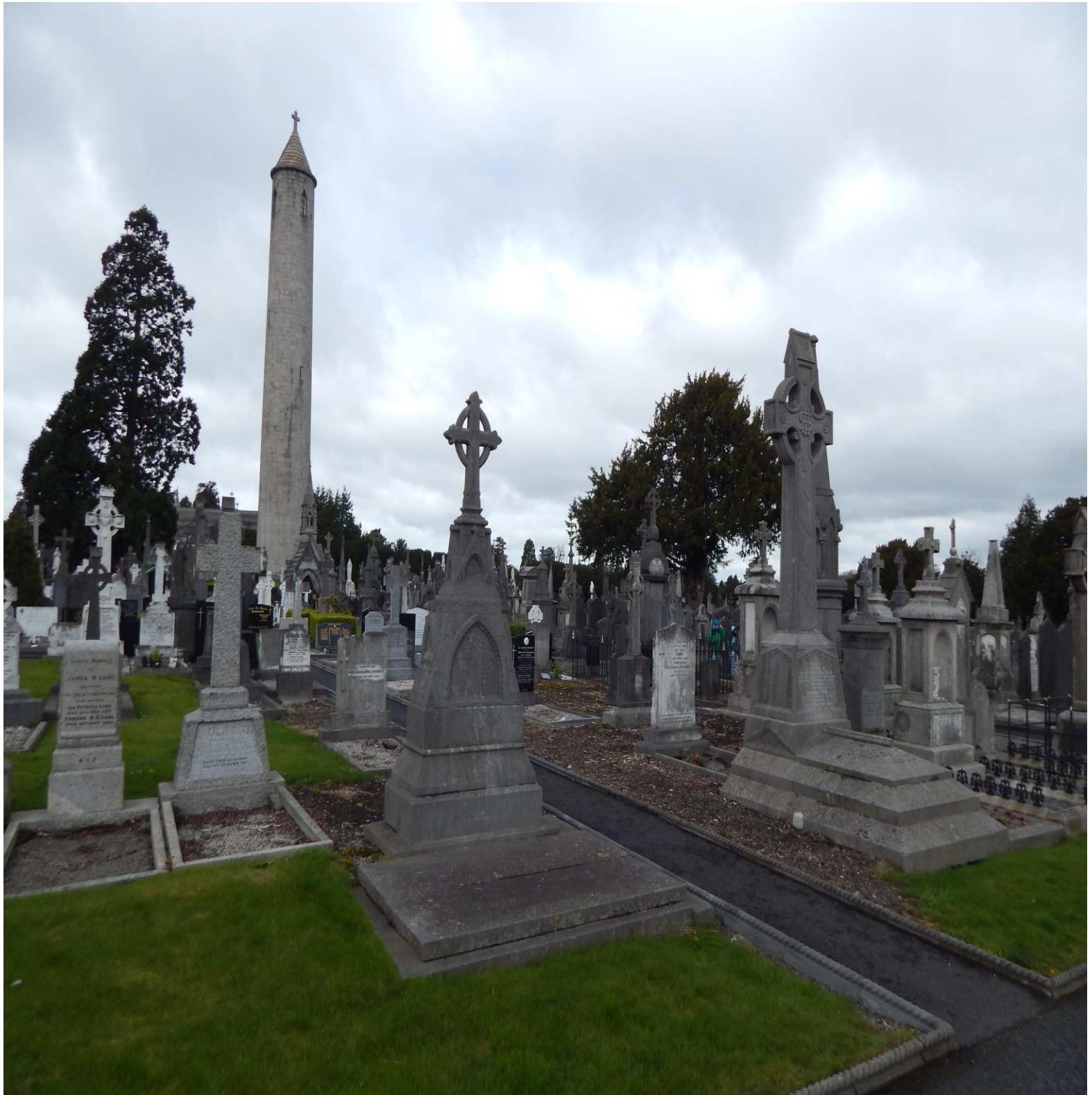
The third grave was that of Sgt. James Byrne 86th Regiment VC who was awarded the VC for action in 1872 at Jhansi during the Indian Mutiny. The fourth grave was that of Pte. Thomas Duffy 1st Madras Fusiliers who was awarded the VC for action at the Relief of Lucknow during the Indian Mutiny in 1857. The fifth VC was Pte. Patrick Donohoe VC 9th Lancers who was awarded the VC for actions during the Indian Mutiny at Bolunshadus in 1857, and his brother Timothy was awarded the US Medal of Honour during the American Civil War. It is only in recent years that it was established that he was buried in Glasnevin.

Some believe that Boatswain's Mate John Sullivan VC is also buried in the cemetery in an unmarked grave, he was awarded the VC for actions at Sebastopol during the Crimea War in 1855 and sadly committed suicide years later in Co. Cork. Back at the cemetery office the Heritage Office check the records and although there were several 'John Sullivan's', buried in Glasnevin none matched our VC, this will be one to continue searching for. The wife of James Henry Reynolds VC of Rorke's Drift is also laid to rest in a family crypt, he is named on a Celtic cross above the crypt and is buried in London. Having found the graves, we then spent some time looking at many other interesting monuments and graves to many prominent figures from Irish history. Glasnevin also has 35 VC memorial stones to VC with Irish connections and were unveiled during the 100th Anniversary years of WWI. These were part of a Government project to place VC memorial stones to all WWI VCs at relevant locations and some of you may be aware of those located near you.

Glasnevin VCs

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**Dublin
Cemeteries
Trust** Est. 1828

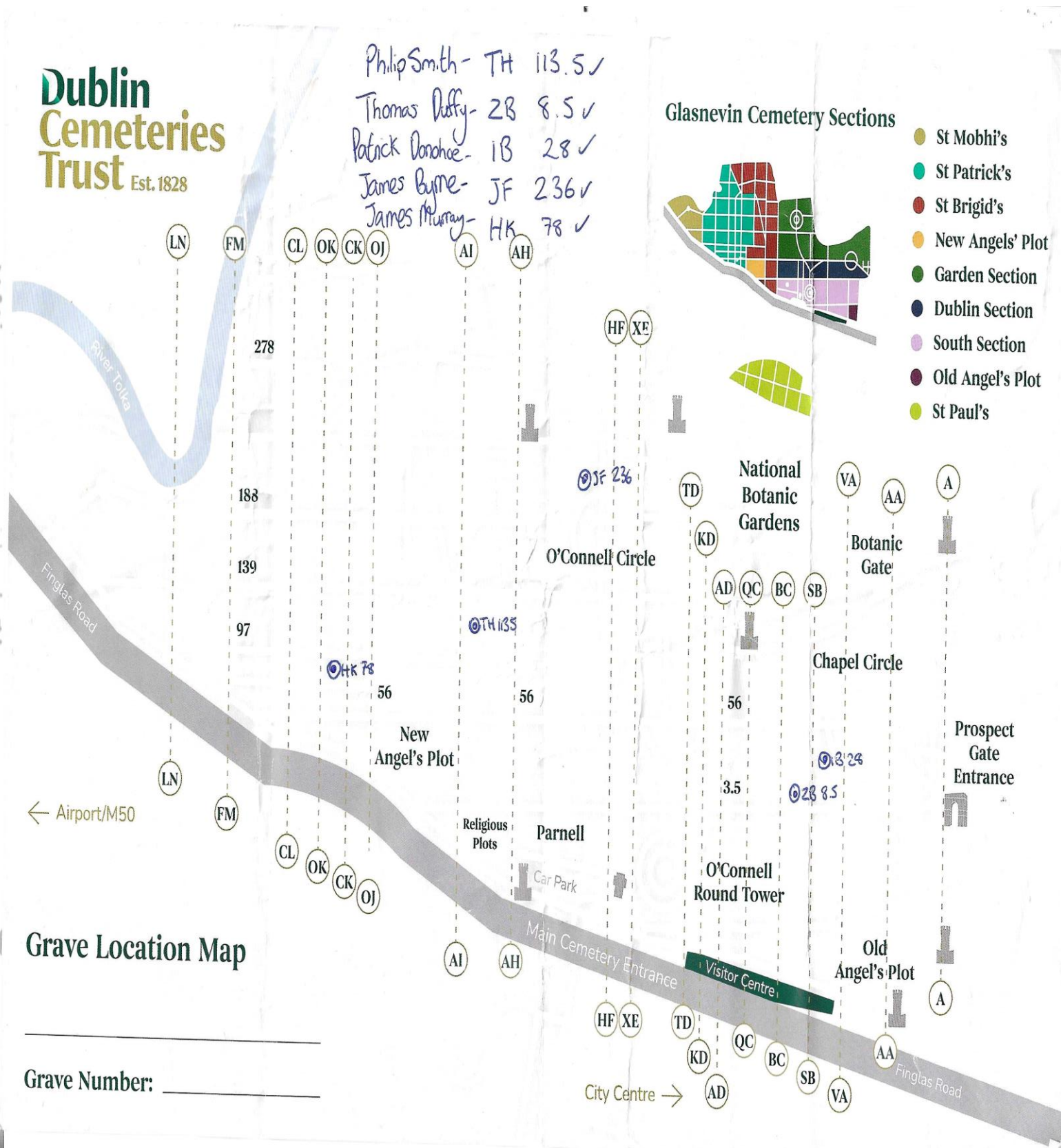
Philip Smith - TH 113.5 ✓
Thomas Duffy - ZB 8.5 ✓
Patrick Donohoe - IB 28 ✓
James Byrne - JF 236 ✓
James Murray - HK 78 ✓

Glasnevin Cemetery Sections

- St Mobhi's
- St Patrick's
- St Brigid's
- New Angels' Plot
- Garden Section
- Dublin Section
- South Section
- Old Angel's Plot
- St Paul's

Grave Location Map

Grave Number: _____



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The editor would like to thank Steve Lee, Paul Lee, Melanie Lee and the rest of the www.memorialstovalour.co.uk team whose dedication and devotion to the memory of all the recipients of the Victoria Cross is inspiring and the team's photos heavily feature on my website which I am grateful for their kind permission to use. Thanks again.

“Landed, Eliminated Germans & F*****d off!”

By Richard Pursehouse



Ranging the blue Mediterranean during the enemy occupation of many of its lonely islands was a young Dane whose exploits became a legend in World War II. He was Major Anders Lassen, the Second World War's only non-British Victoria Cross recipient (and incredibly recipient of the Military Cross and two Bars – the medal being awarded *three* times).

Modest and charming, Lassen had a vivid personality and was a true descendant of the Vikings of old.

Night after night, he would lead his men of the Special Boat Section (later the Special Boat Service) in silent, daring raids - news of which could not be released until the war was over. He sailed in a small Greek caique (traditional fishing boat), hiding behind the rocks in daytime, and prepared to strike when the shadows lengthened across the waters.

Born in 1920, Landers Frederik Emil Victor Lassen, lived a privileged life in Nyhavn. Even as a small boy, he showed how adventurous was his nature. His vacations from Herlufsholm, Denmark's foremost public school, were spent in shooting on his father's estate with his younger brother Franz.

They made their own bows and arrows, and became so expert with them that they could kill a bird in flight. The games they described innocuously as 'Snakes and Arrows', the weapons were no playthings: the arrows would pass right through a stag and penetrate a tree beyond!

“Landed, Eliminated Germans & F*****d off!”



MAJOR A. F. E. V. S. LASSEN, V.C.

The V.C. has been posthumously awarded to Major Lassen, a Dane serving in the British Army, for his magnificent courage in a patrol action in Italy on April 8-9, 1945. While commanding a patrol on the north shore of Lake Comacchio, by his leadership and complete disregard of danger, he was responsible for wiping out three enemy positions, being finally mortally wounded himself, his last act being to hurl a grenade at the enemy.

At the age of 17, Anders decided to see the world and he joined the Danish Merchant Navy. A year later the war began and, by the spring, the Germans had occupied Denmark while the young Dane was away. He joined the British Army, and volunteered as a Royal Marine Commando, as too did his brother Franz who would rise to the rank of Captain. Their father would also fight on the side of the Allies as a Captain in the navy. Within a month or two of being commissioned, he was awarded the Military Cross *"for carrying out special duties with complete disregard for his own safety."* The citation for his actions (Operation Postmaster) referred also to his *"sound judgment and quick decision."*

With all Hell let loose around him, he carried on with his job with skill and ingenuity, and regained his ship without mishap.

In an earlier operation on 3 October 1942, Lieutenant Lassen was part of a tiny raiding party (Operation Basalt), a mission that sped across the Channel in a small motor launch named 'Little Pisser' to the Channel Island of Sark. They scaled the cliffs and captured some of the German garrison. While attempting to remove their captives as a propaganda coup, all but one of the Germans broke free, and in the dark and confusion some were shot. The bodies were left on the shore, hands tied behind their backs and the German press claimed they had been executed.

“Landed, Eliminated Germans & F*****d off!”



When Hitler was informed, he flew into a rage and a few weeks later (18 October 1942) the ‘Commando Order’ was issued stating, *“soldiers in demolition groups, armed or unarmed, are to be exterminated to the last man, either in combat or assault. If such men appear to be about to surrender, no quarter should be given to them – on general principle.”* The edict was extended after the D-Day landings in June 1944 to include parachutists.

Hitler’s ‘Commando Order’ would later lead to nearly all those who escaped from Stalag Luft III Prisoner of War camps being shot, as featured in the 1963 film *The Great Escape* featuring motor-bike riding Steve McQueen.

Lassen was an obvious choice for the Special Boat Section, formed to carry out raids in the Aegean. Before long, a stream of stories of his incredible adventures were being recounted. In July, 1943, he landed on Crete to destroy German aircraft. Accompanied by a gunner, he created a diversion on one side of Kastelli airfield, passing three groups of sentries and answering them in German, claiming he had dropped his rifle. When a fourth sentry had to be shot, the alarm was given.

The raiders were forced to withdraw in a hail of heavy machine-gun and rifle fire. Back they came, however, half an hour later. This time, they were driven into the centre of the airstrip in the glare of searchlights. Somehow, they managed to dodge the trap and escape to the mountains, where they hid for several days before getting away from the island.

“Landed, Eliminated Germans & F*****d off!”



The diversion plan succeeded, and many aircraft and tons of petrol were destroyed at Kastelli airfield (see image above). Lassen received a Bar to his Military Cross.

Barely three months later, the Dane earned a *second* Bar to the medal. In a small boat he landed at Simi, one of the Dodecanese Islands, just before the Germans arrived there. He sent a corporal to find out from the local people if the water was deep enough for the base ship to come alongside. When the peasants argued among themselves, the impatient Lassen jumped off the quayside in full kit. "All right," he shouted. "Signal her in. It's deep enough." Lassen's force was 20 strong, and equipped with a variety of weapons including an old German 20mm gun. The Germans - a hundred of them - came in caiques (sailing ships), and there was no time to build defences.

“Landed, Eliminated Germans & F*****d off!”



Although crippled by a badly burned leg and ‘internal’ trouble, Lassen stalked and killed three Germans at close range.

Throughout the battle he was an inspiration to his men and the few Italian ‘co-operators’ who joined in the fight. The Germans were finally driven from the island with the loss of 16 men killed, 35 wounded and seven taken prisoner. Allied losses were one man killed and one wounded. Next day, German Stukas dive-bombed Simi.

Lassen, deeply troubled that the peasants were suffering, was genuinely happy when an order to withdraw came two days later. He still worried about the islanders and when a big German force did occupy Simi, he made risky night trips taking food parcels to the people. Such acts of kindness by the supposed cold and callous marauder earned the undying respect of his own men and the affection of the civilian population. Men would follow him anywhere. He had escaped from so many tight corners that they began to think him indestructible.

Lassen's raids on the Aegean islands continued. The enemy never knew where to expect the next lightning swoop. Just before the Germans landed at Samos, Lassen evacuated hundreds of Greek civilians to the mainland.

“Landed, Eliminated Germans & F*****d off!”

Unfortunately, the enemy arrived before the operation could be completed. The quick-thinking Dane ordered ropes to be tied together and supported at intervals by boats. Along this life-line to the mainland many more natives escaped.

Lassen had little time to worry about his comfort or personal appearance. Mostly, he wore a shabby greatcoat, knitted scarf, and thick studded boots. The rosettes for his M.C. ribbon were cut from a cigarette tin. *"Rough and ready. But according to regulations, I am properly dressed,"* was his wry comment. Food never worried him. He lived on the land or feasted on shellfish, prised from the rocks.

Lassen's last and most gallant action came during the final stages of the war in Italy, when Commandos were given the task of dislodging the Germans from the northern shore of Lake Comacchio (Operation Roast).

Lassen was ordered to take a small patrol across the lake and attack the town to cause confusion and to simulate a major landing. The tiny force set off in canoes. Soon after it landed, the brave men in the patrol had to run the gauntlet of heavy fire. On and on they fought, until their ammunition was nearly spent.

Lassen approached to within a few yards of a German blockhouse, and called on the defenders to surrender. But a burst of fire from the left struck him down. The dying major told his men to withdraw. They wanted to take him with them, but he ordered: *"Save your own lives, and get out quickly."*

Major Lassen is buried in the cemetery at Argenta Gap Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery, beside those who fell with him.

“Landed, Eliminated Germans & F*****d off!”



When his award was announced on 8 September 1945 there was a discussion in the War Office about whether it should stand as he was Danish, although two days later the decision was upheld. A War Office official said: *“As Major Lassen held a commission in the British Army the [Victoria] Cross has been granted.”*

His family including his parents Emil and Suzanne (who published his biography *‘Sømand og Soldat’* in 1949) and sister (later Countess Bente Bernstorff- Gyldensteen) received the VC and MC and Bars from the King at Buckingham Palace in December 1945. ; these medals along with the King Christian X Memorial Medal and the Greek War Cross, are on display at the Frihedsmuseet (Museum of Danish Resistance) in Copenhagen, Denmark. There is also a memorial bust to him in Churchill Park, Copenhagen.



THE PARENTS OF THE LATE MAJOR LASSEN, A DANE WHO DIED FIGHTING WITH THE BRITISH ARMY, RECEIVE THEIR SON'S V.C

Captain and Mrs. Lassen with their daughter outside Buckingham Palace after receiving the V.C. won by their son, the late Major Anders Lassen, a Dane, who died while fighting with the special air service in Italy early this year. He was awarded the V.C. for his magnificent courage in a patrol action on April 8-9. They also received the Military Cross and two Bars won by their son.

“Landed, Eliminated Germans & F*****d off!”



The Birmingham Post newspaper ran the story of the medal ceremony on 19 December 1945 under the headline:

“Seeks Link With Dead V.C. Son”.

“SOMEWHERE in Britain is a man who may complete the last link in the chain of memories of Mrs Lassen, Danish mother of Major Anders Lassen, V.C. and treble M.C. Her son was mortally wounded winning his V.C. – the only foreigner to win it in World War II. - when he wiped out three German strongpoints in Italy early this year. Mrs Lassen, living in Nazi-occupied Denmark during the war, saw him last just before the war. Two months ago, Mrs Lassen came to this country in an endeavour to build up links with her son who had left her as a youth of seventeen and died a hero of twenty-five.

“Yesterday when she went to Buckingham Palace to receive her dead son's V.C. from the King, she told me she had received many letters from officers and men who knew Major Lassen. She said she was anxious now to get touch with one of the men who, she believes, will able to tell her whether the letters she wrote to her son during the war reached him. The man was wounded and she thinks may still be hospital.”

"Landed, Eliminated Germans & F*****d off!"

FRIDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER, 1945

War Office, 7th September, 1945.

The KING has been graciously pleased to approve the posthumous award of the VICTORIA CROSS to:—

Major (temporary) Anders Frederik Emil Victor Schau LASSEN, M.C. (234907), General List.

In Italy, on the night of 8th/9th April, 1945, Major Lassen was ordered to take out a patrol of one officer and seventeen other ranks to raid the north shore of Lake Comacchio.

His tasks were to cause as many casualties and as much confusion as possible, to give the impression of a major landing, and to capture prisoners. No previous reconnaissance was possible, and the party found itself on a narrow road flanked on both sides by water.

Preceded by two scouts, Major Lassen led his men along the road towards the town. They were challenged after approximately 500 yards from a position on the side of the road. An attempt to allay suspicion by answering that they were fishermen returning home failed, for when moving forward again to overpower the sentry, machine-gun fire started from the position, and also from two other blockhouses to the rear.

Major Lassen himself then attacked with grenades, and annihilated the first position containing four Germans and two machine-guns. Ignoring the hail of bullets sweeping the road from three enemy positions, an additional one having come into action from 300 yards down the road, he raced forward to engage the second position under covering fire from the remainder of the force. Throwing in more grenades he silenced this position which was then overrun by his patrol. Two enemy were killed, two captured and two more machine-guns silenced.

By this time the force had suffered casualties and its fire power was very con-

siderably reduced. Still under a heavy cone of fire Major Lassen rallied and reorganised his force and brought his fire to bear on the third position. Moving forward himself he flung in more grenades which produced a cry of "Kamerad". He then went forward to within three or four yards of the position to order the enemy outside, and to take their surrender.

Whilst shouting to them to come out he was hit by a burst of spandau fire from the left of the position and he fell mortally wounded, but even whilst falling he flung a grenade, wounding some of the occupants, and enabling his patrol to dash in and capture this final position.

Major Lassen refused to be evacuated as he said it would impede the withdrawal and endanger further lives, and as ammunition was nearly exhausted the force had to withdraw.

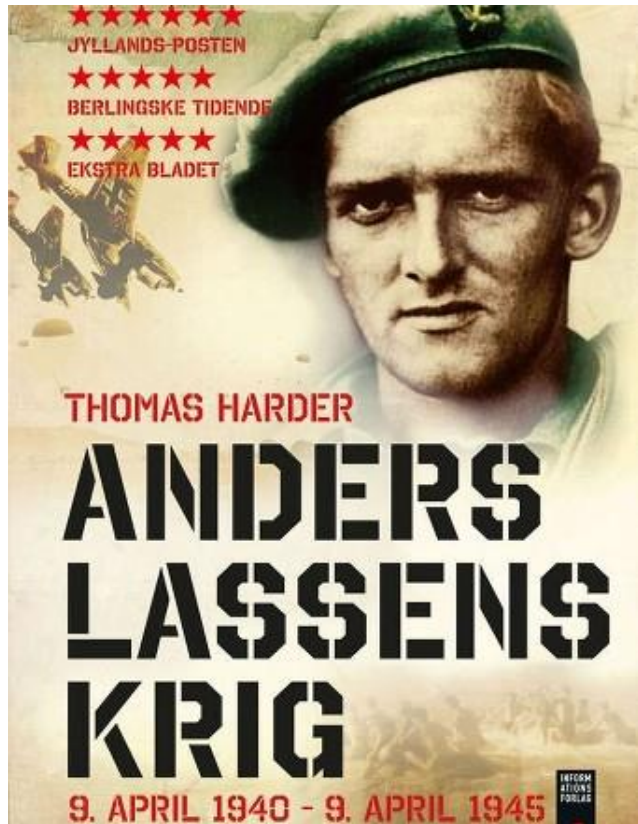
By his magnificent leadership and complete disregard for his personal safety, Major Lassen had, in the face of overwhelming superiority, achieved his objects. Three positions were wiped out, accounting for six machine guns, killing eight and wounding others of the enemy, and two prisoners were taken. The high sense of devotion to duty and the esteem in which he was held by the men he led, added to his own magnificent courage, enabled Major Lassen to carry out all the tasks he had been given with complete success.

War Office, 7th September, 1945.

Colonel (honorary Brigadier) P. J. SLATER, D.F.C., T.D. (2797), is appointed A.D.C. to The King (Additional), 27th March 1945, vice Colonel L. PARTRIDGE, D.S.O., T.D. ret. T.A., who has completed tenure of his appointment.

Colonel (acting Brigadier) T. T. J. SHEPPFIELD, O.B.E., T.D. (25731), is appointed A.D.C. to The King (Additional), 5th January 1944, vice Colonel W. ANDERSON, C.B., D.S.O., M.C., T.D., deceased.

“Landed, Eliminated Germans & F*****d off!”

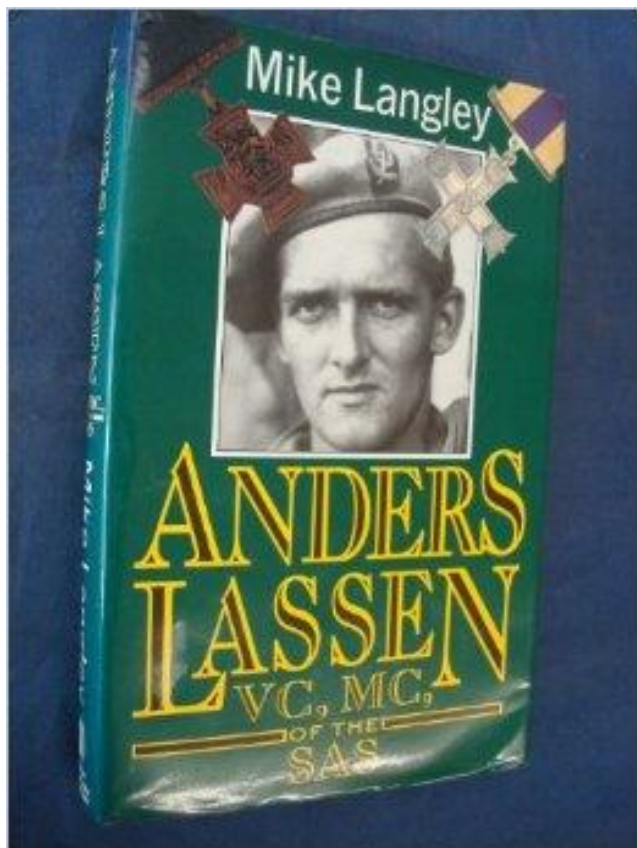


The Aberdeen Press and Journal on 27 April 1985 ran the story of a ceremony to commemorate the 40th anniversary of his death:

HONOURED: DANISH SOLDIER WHO SAVED THOUSANDS OF LIVES

“A DANISH soldier, the only member of the SAS to have been awarded the Victoria Cross, was honoured yesterday at a special ceremony at Invergowrie. The newly-extended Territorial Army Centre there, occupied by D Squadron of the 23rd Special Air Service Regiment (Volunteers), was named Lassen House in honour of Major Anders Lassen who was killed in action in April, 1945.

“A plaque was unveiled by the Danish ambassador Mr Tyge Dahlgaard, in the presence of Colonel David Stirling, who founded the SAS, members of Major Lassen's family, Colonel David Sutherland, who was Major Lassen's commanding officer, as well as members of the Danish Armed Forces and veterans of the Danish Army and resistance forces and serving members of the SAS.”



“Landed, Eliminated Germans & F*****d off!”

A man of few words, it is alleged a post-operation report by Lassen was one of the most succinct ever written –

“Landed. Eliminated Germans. Fucked off.”

A true warrior, and one who joined with Britain - “the last island of hope” - to resist the tyranny of Hitler and his henchmen, the only non-British or Commonwealth soldier awarded the highest military tribute of his adoptive country.

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/anders-fredrik-emil-victor-schau-lassen-vc-mc/>



© 2000 Credit: Topham Picturepoint

Scarf VC Saved for the Nation

On 1st May 2023, the Royal Air Force Museum was able to announce the fantastic news, that following an intensive fund raising campaign, that they had managed to raise the £660,000 to keep the medal group in the UK.

The Scarf VC Medal group had been previously on loan to the Museum, prior to its sale at auction last year. In the auction, it had been purchased by an overseas buyer. The sale prompted a campaign to keep the medals in the country, and the UK Government placed a temporary embargo until 30th April for anyone wishing to match the auction price.

Following a widespread media campaign on social media and in the national press, the funds gradually came in from donations from the general public, and a substantial grant of £390,000 from the National Heritage Memorial Fund. On the achievement on raising the money, the CEO of the RAF Museum, Maggie Appleton stated "We will be displaying Arthur's Medal at our London site this summer and will also make short tour of our Midlands site. So come and visit and discover more about this remarkable story."



Castleford's Only VC



Thomas was born in Bott Lane, Lye, near Stourbridge in Worcestershire, and not unfortunately in Castleford as is often reported, on the 21st of January 1882. The only son of Thomas and Sarah Bryan, very little is known of the first few years of his life in Stourbridge, other than, the family weren't the wealthiest and lived in very poor conditions.

Moving to Castleford with his parents when still in his early infancy they lived at 8 Hunt Street, Whitwood Mere, Castleford. He was educated at the Potteries Council School, and was also a scholar of the United Methodist Church Sunday School, both in Whitwood Mere. Although he was a good scholar he was said to have been a "little boisterous".

His father was employed as a miner at Whitwood Colliery owned at the time by Messrs. Henry Briggs, Son and Company Limited. He joined his father after leaving school in the mining industry working at the same mine, Whitwood Colliery.



Thomas married Sarah Smart also from Whitwood Mere at Whitwood Mere Parish Church. On the 26 of December 1903, Thomas was 21 and Sarah 19. They were married in the presence of Thomas Firth and Lily Sykes, who were friends of Thomas and Sarah and they were married by the Rector J.J. Needham.

The grooms "Condition" according to the marriage certificate was put as a Bachelor and the brides as a Spinster. The grooms "Rank or Profession" was Miner, as was the bride and grooms respective fathers Thomas Bryan Snr and Alfred Smart.

Castleford's Only VC

Thomas and Sarah had five children, and not four as is widely known, Thomas Alfred born on October the 3rd 1904, Fanny born on January the 3rd 1906 but died on December the 13th 1907, (Fanny is the child that is never reported), Albert born on May the 19th 1908, Sarah born on April the 3rd 1911 and lastly Evelyn born on September the 29th 1913. I have no information or records of what happened to the children or Sarah. Sarah is not buried with Thomas at Arksey Cemetery.

Prior to the outbreak of the war Thomas was a well-known sportsman on the fields as a competitor at the sprint and 220 yards races, he was also an occasional rugby player, allegedly playing for Castleford in the old Northern Union and Rugby Football Team.

Thomas enlisted at Castleford in the Northumberland Fusiliers, on the 10th of April 1915. On the 22nd of December, 1915 he went out to France.

He returned back to Britain in the April of 1916 due to a sprained leg and ankle. After recovering from this injury he then went back to France in November 1916, seeing action around the Ypres area. Then drafted to the 25th Service Battalion (2nd Tyneside Irish) the Northumberland Fusiliers, "The Fighting Fifth" or "The Old and Bold" as it was affectionately called.

On the 26th of March In the following Year, 1917 he was promoted to Lance Corporal. Less than a month later, on the 9th of April, Thomas was to be awarded the highest honour for gallantry in the field. The action took place on the southern side of Vimy Ridge – Hill 145.

The Canadians were to the left of the 34th Division assaulting the main part of the ridge. Weather conditions were dire to say the least. Snow, sleet and freezing rain along with a head on wind coming directly from the ridge, slippery under foot with the promise of more bad weather and poor conditions to come. Thomas along with Captain J F Huntley and other troops from his section, were moving down the length of Zehmer Weg trench to try to find the machine-gun position that was causing such devastating casualties and holding up the pressing advance. The enemy machine-gun group had an excellent view of the oncoming attack, having a good 300 yards of clear sight directly in front of their position.

Castleford's Only VC

No. 22040 L./Cpl. Thomas Bryan, North'd Fus.

For most conspicuous bravery during an attack.

Although wounded, this Non-commissioned Officer went forward alone, with a view to silencing a machine gun which was inflicting much damage. He worked up most skilfully along a communication trench, approached the gun from behind, disabled it and killed two of the team as they were abandoning the gun.

As this machine gun had been a serious obstacle in the advance to the second objective, the results obtained by Lance-Corporal Bryan's gallant action were very far-reaching.

Castleford's Only VC

Captain Huntley while looking over the parapet with field glasses to try to spot the enemy gun position, was shot in the head by a German sniper, he died immediately, Thomas however continued along the trench to locate the enemy machine-gun. He encountered three German soldiers, "much to their surprise", who surrendered without much of a fight and with two of the enemy giving Thomas their watches. These soldiers he left with some of his comrades to be sent back to the rear. He carried on searching for the elusive machine-gun position teaming up with Sergeant Major Foster, of the Fifth Battalion. Further down the trench system also capturing a German officer.

Pressing on with his search for the machine-gun position Thomas encountered yet another German soldier, whom again he took prisoner. His search for the hard to pin down machine-gun position was within sight, but before he could silence the gun, he was seen by a German rifleman and fired upon hitting him in the right arm. This however didn't put the brave soldier off; he immediately returned rapid accurate fire from where he thought the shots came from. This stopped the onslaught from the rifleman and also the machine-gun position. Cautiously he made his way down the trench to the rear of the machine-gun post, he rushed the machine-gun team, shooting two dead as they tried to escape and disabling the gun that had caused many casualties and deaths. After his brave assault, it was later reported that he grabbed the machine-gun and took it back to his own lines.

Due to Thomas's very brave act he undoubtedly saved a lot more lives and casualties and ensured the certain advance of the brigade to their second objective. When he eventually left his comrades he went to a dressing station to be treated for his wounds. Captain Huntley was later buried in the Roclincourt Valley Cemetery, which is a short distance from where he was killed.

On his return home with injuries he sustained to his right arm, he was treated in a hospital in Leicester until May the 23rd. He then had ten day's leave at home. On the 3rd of June 1917 he went back into hospital at Alnwick in Northumberland to recuperate from his wounds.

Castleford's Only VC



Castleford's Only VC

Mr Bryan was in hospital when he told of his deed:

“On that glorious day, our lads were held up by a machine-gun, which was so well hidden we couldn't check its deadly work. I therefore made up my mind to put a stop to its activities, so creeping over the top; I went from shell hole to shell hole in “No Man's Land”. I crept into a communications trench, which was held by the enemy, where I came across three Germans. This was at six o'clock in the morning. These men were so surprised that they surrendered without showing any fight, and two of them presented me with their watches

I thereupon sent them down to the base with some of my men. I then went forward again, along with Sgt Major Foster, of the Fifth and ran across a German officer, who was also delighted. Not many minutes afterwards I surprised another Hun, who gave up his arms as meekly as a lamb. An hour later I was still prowling round, trying to fix the German machine-gun team, but was unable to spot it.

Whilst working my way along, I was spotted by one of the enemy, who, letting drive, caught me in the right arm. Following this bit of hard luck, I decided to try rapid fire on the place where I thought the machine-gun was placed, and on this being carried out, we found to our glee that the gun which had been spitting forth its fire of death, barked no more. Two of the gun team tried to get away under our rapid fire, but I shot both of them.

I stayed with my comrades until half past one mid-day, after which I left to have my wound dressed. With the machine-gun and its gunners destroyed, it was now an easy matter for our boys to advance.”

His Majesty King George V presented the medal to Thomas at St. James's Park, Newcastle on Sunday on the 17th of June 1917 in front of a crowd of more than 40,000 to witness the presentation of 120 war honours.

Castleford's Only VC

The following article was published in the Express on Friday the 29th of June 1917. It is in it's entirety including the period spelling and grammar.

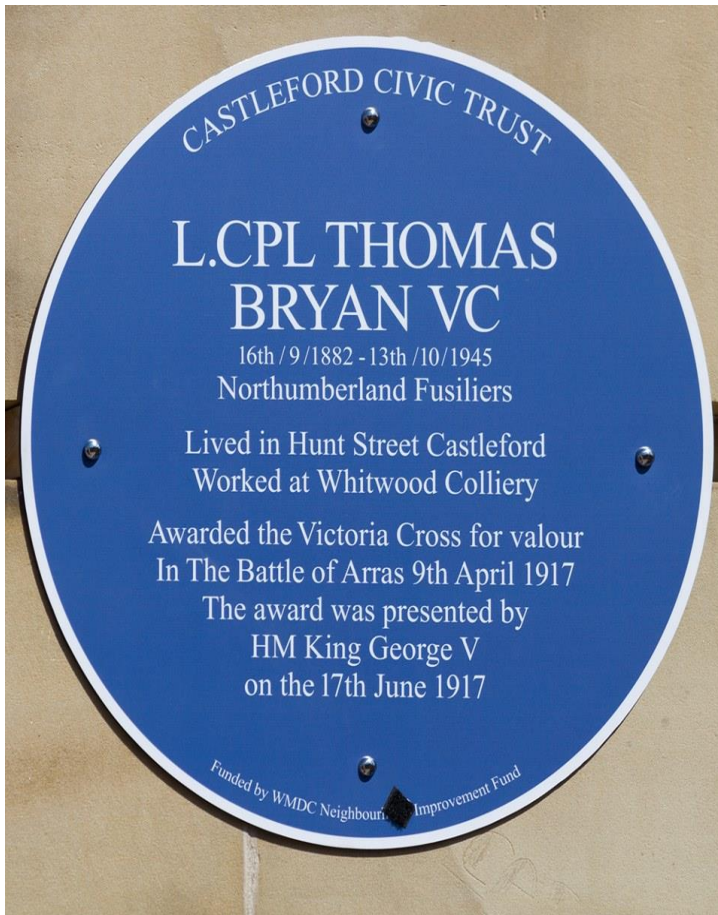
ENTHUSIASTIC RECEPTION OF LANCE-CORPL. T. BRYAN, V.C.

Saturday, June 23rd, was a day of great festivity in Whitwood and Castleford, and in the former township in particular will go down to history as a red letter day, being the occasion of the home-coming of the first Victoria Cross winner ever brought into the locality, Lce Copl. Thomas Bryan, of the Northumberland Fusiliers, though the time of the preparation to give the popular hero a great reception was so short thanks to the organization ability of Mr. T R Dawes the keen manner in which the reception committee chairmaned by Cr W Green of the Whitwood Urban Council, took the matter up, and also the great readiness and hearty goodwill, with which the inhabitants of both townships brought out their flags and decorations, a splendid display was made, and reception given to the gallant soldier was everywhere of the most enthusiastic description.

He is of course Whitwoods V.C., having always resided in the township and his home being at 29 Hunt-street, Potteries, but Castleford was almost equally interested in showing to him how proud they are of the great distinction which he has gained for himself and all his neighbours, and that he had to come to Castleford Station to reach his house gave Castleford residents a special opportunity of entering wholeheartedly into the festivities.

His wife and children had spent the week with him in the north, after being present at the investiture held by the King at Newcastle on Sunday, June 17th, and arrived with him at 3 o'clock on Saturday. On the platform he was warmly welcomed, first by Cr W Green, as representing Whitwood, and then by Cr W Bilton, JP, Chairman of the Castleford Urban Council, Mr. John Pickin, of the Whitwood Miners Branch, and Mr. Dawes secretary of the reception committee.

Castleford's Only VC



Both images above from Castleford Library courtesy of Alan Austin

He came out to Station Road to the strain of "See the Conquering. Hero Comes," played by one of three bands who were to take part in triumphal procession, and the lusty cheers of a great crowd of people. Decorated landaus were waiting to for the conveyance of himself, his father and family. Wearing the cross and looking very happy at the warmth of the reception, he responded by standing up in the carriage and waving to the crowd, which led to another outburst of cheering. In the general excitement a very pleasing little ceremony was not observed except by those close at hand, namely, the presentation of a lovely bouquet of flowers to Mrs. Bryan by Kitty Looker, of Hunt-street, who had been selected for this little duty by the residents thereof. Then the procession which had already been formed, moved off headed by the Whitwood Colliery Band and the Whitwood Miners' Branch members and officials with their banner.

Castleford's Only VC

The procession also comprised the Wheldale Glass Houghton and Allerton Bywater Miners' Branches with their banners flying in the strong breeze, the Wheler and Legiolium Lodge of Buffaloes, and the Sons of the Empire Friendly Society, all in full regalia, the Whitwood Church Lads' Brigade, the Castleford 1st and 4th, Fryston and Lock Lane Troops of the Boys Scouts, members of Whitwood and Castleford Urban Councils, the War Honours Committee, and Reception Committee in charabancs, the Castleford Old and Castleford Subscription Brass Bands, schoolchildren from Bryan's old school in the Potteries in decorated vehicles and other representatives and friends, the procession altogether being a most imposing one. Passing under evergreen arches in Station Road from which were suspended the words "Long Live Tom Bryan V.C.", "Well Played Bryan," and other felicitous expressions, the procession proceeded down Carlton-street along Aire-street and returning via Bank-street to Station Road corner turned under another festival of evergreens bearing the words, "Bravo Hunt-street", towards Whitwood which was reached through gaily decorated Wilson-street and Leeds Road. Enthusiastic as had been Bryan's welcome in Castleford by the crowds who had thronged the streets, it was even exceeded as he approached his home.

On the 27th of July 1917 he was given a civic reception in the city of Newcastle, together with Private Ernest Sykes V.C. also of the Northumberland Fusiliers, and incidentally a Yorkshireman. They were met by the Lord Mayor and presented with war loans, a clock and a wallet of treasury notes. This reception took place at the Empire Theatre.

He showed his gallantry yet again while recuperating at the Norfolk War Hospital, by rescuing a little girl from a river. This is the article that was published in the Daily News on the 1st of August 1918,

"A little girl, Phyllis Richardson, was rescued from drowning by Lance Cpl Tom Bryan V.C., at Norwich on Monday evening. Bryan is a patient at the Norfolk War Hospital. The child who is only three, was playing on the river bank at Thorpe, and fell into the water. The accident was apparently not noticed, and she disappeared when Bryan, after considerable difficulty, succeeded in discovering her. On being brought ashore she was unconscious. The gallant soldier applied first-aid treatment, and under medical care the child has recovered. Bryan, who is of the Northumberland Fusiliers, lives in Castleford, Yorkshire".

Castleford's Only VC

Thomas was discharged from the Army on the 16th of September 1918. This may have been due to his injuries, but as of yet I have no confirmation of this.

In 1920 Thomas attended the garden party at Buckingham Palace for recipients of the Victoria Cross. In the same year he was also present at the dedication ceremony at the Cenotaph in Whitehall and the burial of the Unknown Soldier in Westminster Abbey on the 11th of November.

After the war Thomas returned to the pits in Castleford, still working at Briggs and Sons Ltd, but his war wounds and obviously the effects of him being gassed took a toll on his health and at some point he stopped working at the mine. Some time after finishing at the mines a fund was set up for Thomas to buy himself a horse and cart to set him up in his own business, which he apparently did, however there is no hard information to say he definitely did. Sometime in 1926, he moved to Norton near Doncaster, living at 11 Fairfield Villas. The Villas have since been knocked down, 2003 or 2004 and the land used for new housing. In 1929 he attended the Victoria Cross Dinner in the Royal Gallery at the House of Lords on the 9th of November.

He lived at Fairfield Villas until 1934 when he moved again to 44 Askern Road, Campsall near Bentley, Doncaster. He started working at Askern Colliery. But only after a short while, some time after 1935, he had to give up his job in the mining industry, due to his war wounds, and the effects of being gassed in the trenches, possibly in the Ypres sector. He unfortunately spent some six weeks in a sanatorium (a Medical Hospital not mental institute).

From some of my research I found that Thomas at one time did take up another job as a greengrocer, with his own shop at Askern, but after only a year or so he had to sell the business due to financial difficulties. Thomas died on Saturday the 13th of October 1945 at his home, 44 Askern Road, Bentley. The service was conducted on Wednesday the 17th of October 1945 at St Peter's Church, Bentley, with full military honours. He was buried at Arksey Cemetery, Arksey. His grave plot number is Section J Grave No 237. In 2013, the Victoria Cross Trust completed a restoration of Thomas' grave as their first project.

Castleford's Only VC



There are four Memorials to Thomas in Castleford, a memorial plaque at the Castleford Civic Centre in the foyer. Bryan Close at Whitwood Mere, a series of flats and houses on the site where Thomas lived and an Oak Memorial Plaque to the memory of 150 Castleford men erected in their honour for being distinguished during the Great War. Thomas's name is in the top centre of the memorial. The memorial plaque can be seen on the left hand wall in the entrance between the outer and inner doors at Castleford Library. There is also a Blue Plaque on the outside entrance to the library, Carlton Street, Castleford.

The Oak Memorial Plaque was commissioned by a new committee that took over from the Castleford and District War Honours Fund after June 1920. They were instructed to use the money that was left to make a presentation to Thomas Bryan.

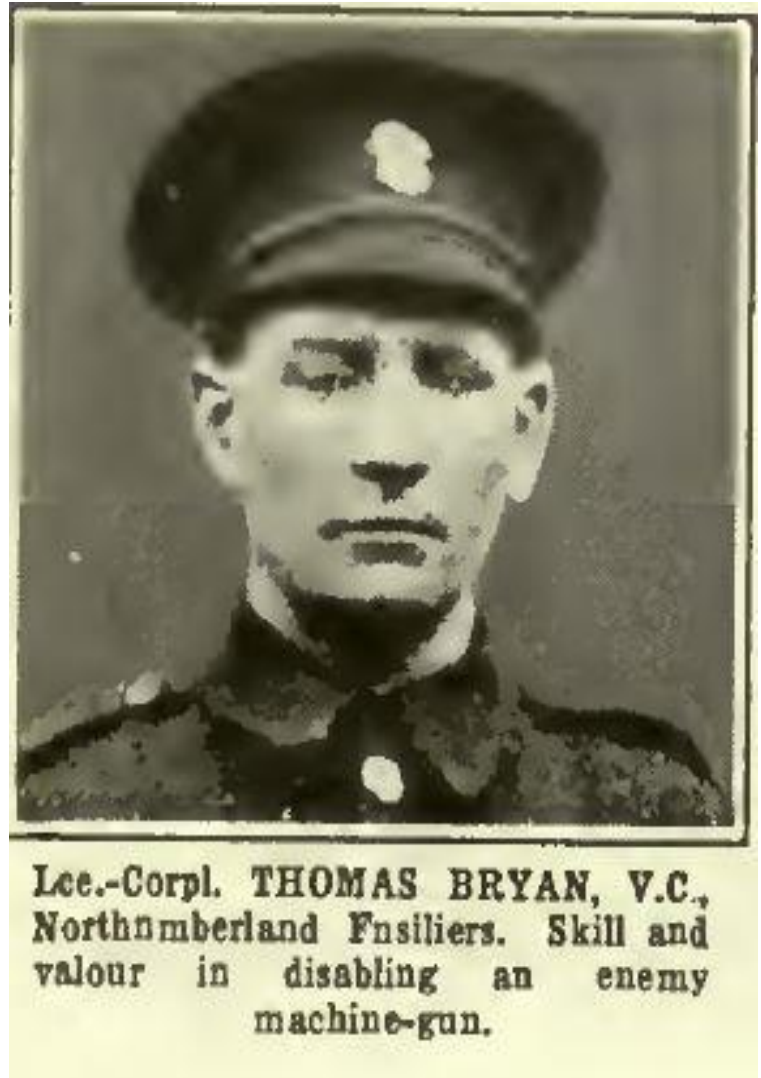
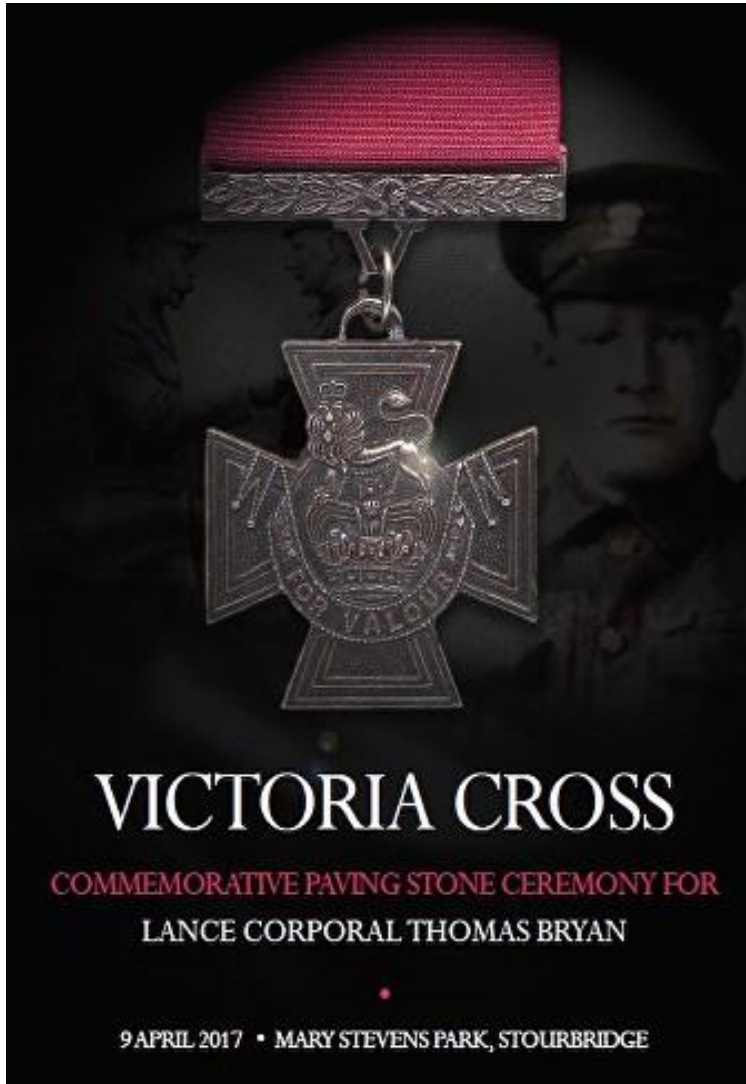
Castleford's Only VC

A list of the 150 men of the Castleford and District had been compiled and their names had been put and illuminated onto the plaque. Mr R Dalby who lived at the time in Liverpool but was a former pupil of Castleford Secondary School had been commissioned to make the plaque. The plaque, which was framed in solid oak, was then handed over to Castleford Library for permanent display. The money from the fund that was left to honour Thomas totalled approximately 150 pounds, which included 50 pounds from Henry Briggs, Sons & Co. Ltd. (his old employer). The fund money was given to Thomas on the 6th of January 1921 by Dr. G B Hillman, M.B.E. President of the War Honours Fund and a former Captain in the R.A.M.C.

Thomas's Victoria Cross and other medals were first are currently owned by Lord Michael Ashcroft. His medals were purchased at auction at Dix Noonan Webb in London in 2000. They are currently displayed on rotation at, The Lord Ashcroft Gallery: Extraordinary Heroes exhibition, Imperial War Museum.



Castleford's Only VC



The image of the new VC plaque for Thomas Bryan in the Lakeside Centre in Doncaster, is courtesy of Keith Lumley, Victoria Cross Trust.

Many thanks again to Mike Gomersall for this fabulous tribute to Thomas Bryan VC, and if you wish to find out more about Thomas' life please go to

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/thomas-bryan-vc/>

