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HON SECRETARY

“Christmas at
Mafeking”



Victoria Cross Online
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EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Welcome to the 15th edition of Victoria Cross Online Magazine. The feature article is by yours truly with a Christmas flavour. The closest VC actions by date to Christmas are the incidents involving the two Horaces – Ramsden and Martineau at the Siege of Mafeking in 1899.

Then there is a slightly quirky and unusual story provided by regular contributor Richard Pursehouse on “Cockerel VC” – potentially the only animal awarded the VC – read on and find out more!

There is an update on the final destination of the recently sold Arnold Loosemore VC DCM medal group, and also news on the recent auction this month of the James Gorman VC group.

My final comments this month are to wish all contributors and readers of VCO a Merry Christmas and Happy 2024!



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Christmas at Mafeking



The Siege of Mafeking was a 217 day battle which lasted between October 1899 and May 1900. The siege received considerable attention as Lord Edward Cecil, the son of the British prime minister, was in the besieged town, as also was Lady Sarah Wilson, a daughter of the Duke of Marlborough and aunt of Winston Churchill. The siege turned the British commander, Colonel Robert Baden-Powell, into a national hero. The **Relief of Mafeking** (the lifting of the siege), while of little military significance, was a morale boost for the struggling British.

The forces defending Mafeking totalled about 2,000, including the Protectorate Regiment of about 500 men, about 300 from the Bechuanaland Rifles and the Cape Police and a further 300 men from the town. The British garrison armed 300 African natives with rifles, these were nicknamed the "Black Watch" and used to guard the perimeter.

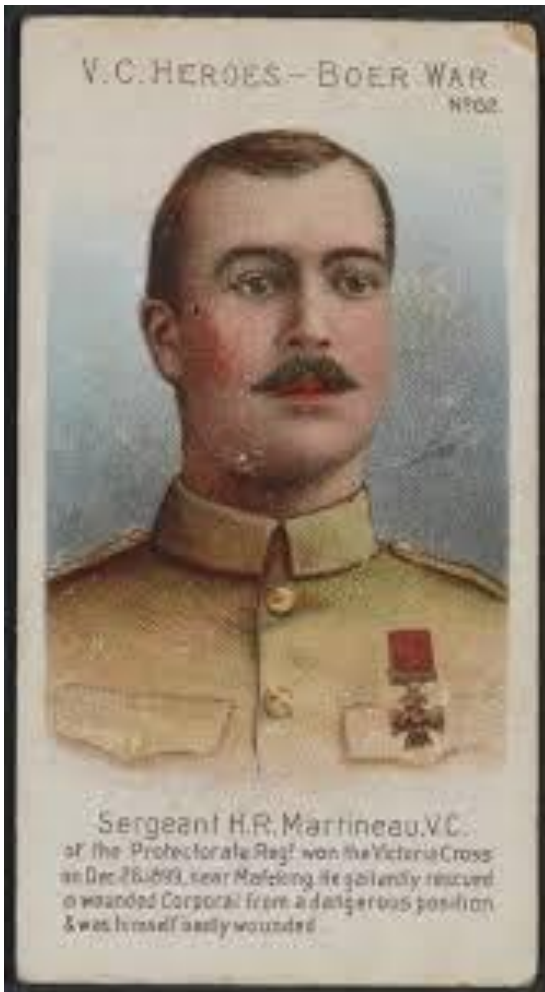
Christmas at Mafeking



On Boxing Day, 1899 during the engagement at Game Tree, two actions took place which would lead to the award of two of the three Victoria Crosses awarded for the Siege of Mafeking. The two men in question were Trooper Horace Edward Ramsden and Horace Robert Martineau, two men born four years apart in different ends of England, but both would show extreme gallantry, one indeed saving his own brother from certain death!

Horace Ramsden was born in Chester on 15th December 1878. Little is known about his early life and how he came to be serving in South Africa during the Anglo-Boer War. He was part of the Protectorate Regiment in the South African Forces at the time of the Siege of Mafeking.

On the 26th December 1899, during the fight at Game Tree, near Mafeking, after the order to retire was given, Trooper H.E. Ramsden picked up his brother Trooper A.E. Ramsden, who had been shot through both legs and was lying about 10 yards from the Boer trenches, and carried him about 600 or 800 yards under a heavy fire (putting him down from time to time for a rest) till they met some men who helped to carry him to a place of safety.



Christmas at Mafeking



Ramsden was gazetted for the VC on 6th July 1900, and received his medal by Commander in Chief, South Africa, Lord Frederick Roberts VC at Pretoria on 28th October 1900. Following the conclusion of the 2nd Boer War in 1902, Horace Ramsden obtained a commission in the Johannesburg Mounted Rifles. During the First World War Ramsden served with Hartigan's Horse in South West Africa where he was taken prisoner by the Germans. At the end of the War, he was released from captivity, and remained in South Africa.

He died on 3rd August 1948 in the Avenue Hotel, Fish Hoek, near Simonstown, in the Cape Colony, aged 69. He was cremated at the Maitland Road Crematorium in Cape Town. The ashes were removed by the undertaker and presumably given to the family. His medals were sold at auction on 25th October 1999 at Stephan Welz & Co of Johannesburg. The group realised a hammer price of £52,000, and was purchased by the Ashcroft Trust the holding institution for Lord Ashcroft's VC Collection. They are now displayed in the Imperial War Museum.

Christmas at Mafeking



Horace Robert Martineau (1874-1916) was born in Bayswater, London, on 31 October 1874, the fifth son of Mr William Martineau, who came from Hornsey. He was educated at University College School, London, and enlisted in the 11th Hussars in 1891 and served with the regiment in Natal and later in India before purchasing his discharge and returning to South Africa in 1895. In 1896 he served under Colonel Sir Robert Baden-Powell in the successful campaign against the Matebele.

He then joined the Cape Police and on the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899, joined the Protectorate Regiment (North West Cape Colony) with which he served in the South African campaign of 1899-1902, taking part in the defence of Mafeking.

Christmas at Mafeking

On 26th December 1899, during the fight at Game Tree, near Mafeking, when the order to retire had been given, Sergeant Martineau stopped and picked up Corporal Le Camp, who had been struck down about ten yards from the Boer trenches, and half dragged, half carried him towards a bush about 150 yards from the trenches. In doing this Sergeant Martineau was wounded in the side, but paid no attention to it, and proceeded to staunch and bandage the wounds of his comrade, whom he afterwards assisted to retire.

The firing while they were retiring was very heavy and Sergeant Martineau was again wounded. When shot the second time he was absolutely exhausted from supporting his comrade and sank down unable to proceed farther. He received three wounds, one of which necessitated the amputation of his arm near the shoulder.

Martineau was gazetted for the award of the Victoria Cross on 6th July 1900, and was presented with his medal by the Commander-in-Chief in South Africa, Lord Frederick Roberts VC, at Cape Town, on 11th December 1900.

Horace Martineau took no further part in the South African war and took up employment with the African Boating Company, a large concern in Durban. Upon the outbreak of the First World War he was living in New Zealand and immediately joined the New Zealand Otago Regiment, serving with the Transport Service of the ANZACS seeing service in Suez and action in the Gallipoli campaign.

It was while he was in Gallipoli that he contracted a fever, fell seriously ill, and was invalided back home to New Zealand. He eventually died from the results of the fever on 8th April 1916, aged 41 years.

Christmas at Mafeking

Horace Martineau is buried in Anderson's Bay Cemetery, Dunedin. His name also appears on the family grave in Brookwood Cemetery, Surrey, England. His medals are held by the Ashcroft Trust and are displayed in the Imperial War Museum.



Cockerel VC

Richard Pursehouse and Ben Cunliffe



Of all the tales of bravery and courage from the Great War that resulted in the Victoria Cross being awarded, perhaps the strangest 'VC' tale comes from the Home Front, where the 'Victoria Cross' did not perform his duty under fire, but whose inspirational story in raising funds for the British Red Cross Society offers a fascinating insight into how those at home supported their friends, family and relatives fighting abroad.

The idea was simple yet ingenious although not unique. At various fundraising events – whether for 'Comfort Funds' (cigarettes, warm clothes, tobacco, local newspapers) to be sent to those serving in the trenches and on the seas, or for Red Cross supplies – an auction would take place, whereby the 'prize' was the brief ownership of what was offered up for bids.

Cockerel VC

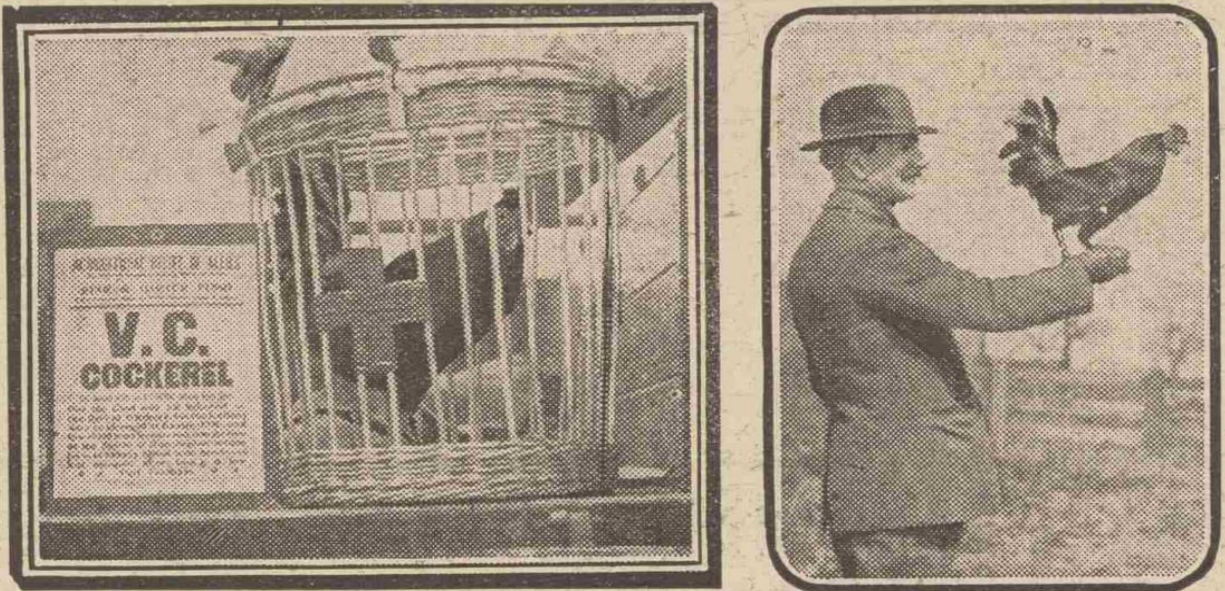
The item could be a German helmet, a regimental badge from the cap or tunic of a Victoria Cross recipient, and even pieces of metal from crashed Zeppelins. What makes this story different is that the auctioned item was very much alive.

The item auctioned was briefly owned and then auctioned again and again, that being the 'unwritten law' that all but one understood; only once was a man bold enough to claim the cockerel as his property at a sale - and he was ducked in a pond for his lack of charity.

The item offered for sale was a bantam cockerel, and the auctions raised over £14,570 (about £1.2 million today) between mid-1915 and the end of the Great War.

The cockerel was originally purchased for two shillings (about £10 today) at a Red Cross sale at Warboys, Huntingdonshire in 1915. The new owner, **Frank Child Fyson**, was too old to serve and having no children and wanting to do his bit, hoped to raise £1,000 for wounded soldiers.

THE V.C. COCKEREL IS SOLD AGAIN.



The famous bird on show.

The cockerel and its master.

This splendid cockerel has by popular sentiment been awarded "a V.C." for its excellent work on behalf of the Star and Garter Fund. It has been sold over and over again for the fund, and fetches high prices. The last sale of the V.C. cockerel took place at Ely.

Cockerel VC

The fund raising was slow at first then someone suggested calling the bird the VC Cockerel, and Fyson and his cockerel were invited to more and more auctions and fundraising events mainly in rural areas, by the British Farmers' Red Cross Fund. Fyson did not stop at £1,000 and in fact he continued until after the Armistice was signed in November 1918.

A very good imitation of the Victoria Cross was made and hung on the bantam cockerel's cage handle. The cockerel was sold, the winning bidder given a piece of paper stating they had 'won' the cockerel and then the bird was immediately re-auctioned – sometimes as many as 60-80 times in a day and at the Oundle auction in May 1916 the VC Cockerel was sold 102 times raising over £112. By March 1917 the total realised was over £1,500.

The VC Cockerel was also nicknamed 'The Wounded Soldiers' Friend' and would interrupt the auctioneer by 'crowing' at certain moments such as when the 'sale' was ended, much to the amusement of the crowd gathered to enjoy the spectacle.

Fyson regularly travelled to country auctions in 1916 and into 1917. In June of that year £320 was realised at auction for the VC Cockerel, at the time the highest amount and just £3 higher than the amount raised at Evesham a few weeks earlier. However, the record was short-lived, as £342 was raised in August in Spalding in front of a crowd of over 7,200. Spalding also provided the highest single bid to that date – fifty guineas (over £5,000 today), bringing the total raised so far to over £5,080. Sixty-sixty 'owners' won and then re-auctioned the cockerel that afternoon.

Mr Herbert Brown (founder of the British Farmers' Red Cross Fund) made Mr. Fyson a personal present of a very handsome and massive sixty-year-old solid silver gilt Georgian Cup with the Cockerel engraved on it to celebrate surpassing £5,000 in funds raised.

Cockerel VC



Total amount to Apr 16th 1918. £7863.

*Mr. Fyson with his V.C. Cockerel at Spalding, Aug. 6. 1917.
Amount raised £330, making a total of £5,000 for the
Red +. With Cup presented by Mr. H. Brown,
Organiser of the British Farmers' Red Cross Fund.*

Cockerel VC

By November 1917 the amount of 'owners' totalled 4,571. The Spalding auction record amount remained until April 1918, when Hayward's Heath managed to raise £425 (£520 including other sales and entry tickets). However, tragedy struck Fyson the following month - his first wife died in May 1918.

A new record high of £535 was raised in Salisbury (with one bid of £100 – over £9,000 today) in October 1918. By then the VC Cockerel had travelled 18,100 miles, raised £13,200, attended 137 sales and been sold 11,310 times.

After the war the auctions continued, with the name changed to the VC Victory Cockerel.

Fyson was presented with a silver cup by the British Red Cross Society for his 'feathered fundraising' after the war and in July 1919 the Red Cross paid the final auction amount for the VC Cockerel - £100, and he was retired, his duty done.

In October 1919, Fyson was committed for trial on an attempted murder charge.

He appeared before the Cambridge Magistrates charged with attempting to murder his second wife **Ivy**, who was 24 years' old, and attempted suicide.

George Hitcham, a Cambridge general dealer, said he saw Fyson and a woman at Christ's Pieces Park, Cambridge on 6 June. The witness stated Fyson had his arm round the woman's waist, and he saw her struggle as if trying to get away. There was the sound of a shot, and after staggering out of the park entrance the woman fell backwards on the grass.

Another witness said he heard a woman squeal out and then shout 'He's shot me'. He then went to Christ's Pieces park and saw Fyson lying bleeding on the ground.

Cockerel VC



Claremont Grantham Hill, house surgeon, said Mrs Fyson had a wound in her neck, and the X-rays showed there was a bullet near the spine, which had halted its progress. The bullet had not been removed, as to do so was a difficult operation. Fyson, who reserved his defence, was committed for trial on the attempted murder charge. After evidence had been given on the tempted suicide charge, Fyson was committed for this also, again reserving his defence. An application for bail was refused.

On 16 October 1919 Frank Child Fyson was at Cambridge Assizes and brought up in custody into the courtroom, his head swathed in bandages: one of the four bullets discharged he had struck him between his eyes. He was indicted for attempting to murder his second wife Ivy, who had staggered to the entrance of Christ's Pieces Park in Cambridge, and had been found lying on the ground with a bullet wound in the neck. Both had been taken to Addenbrooke Hospital. Fyson commented at the Assizes 'I have made rather a mess of this'.

A week later, on 23 October 1919, Frank Child Fyson was found guilty but 'declared irresponsible for his actions at the time' and ordered to be detained during His Majesty's pleasure.

James Gorman VC



On 6th December 2023, the VC medal group of Captain of the Afterguard James Gorman VC was auctioned at Noonans in London. The medal group had previously been auctioned at the same auction house on 15th October 2020 where it reached a hammer price of £240,000. It was said to have been bought then by a collector of Crimean War memorabilia. He was awarded the VC for his actions alongside two other Seaman, Thomas Reeves and Mark Scholefield during the Battle of Inkerman on 5th November 1854. Two other seamen, Thomas Geoghegan and James Woods were killed in action, and would have been also been recommended for the VC. In 1863, he emigrated to Australia where he lived for the rest of his life.

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/james-gorman-vc/>

Arnold Loosemore

VC DCM



On 26th July 2023, the VC and DCM medal group of Arnold Loosemore was sold at Noonans in London for a hammer price of £220,000. At the time the identity of the purchaser of the group was not revealed. It has now been revealed that they have been purchased by the Lord Ashcroft VC Collection and will join the rest of the Collection in the Imperial War Museum in London.

Loosemore was awarded the VC for his actions south of Langemarck in Belgium on 11th August 1917, where he attacked a German machine gun position singlehanded with his Lewis Gun. Sadly, Arnold never fully recovered from his war wounds, and died on 10th April 1924 at the age of just 27. Read more about his short life at <https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/arnold-loosemore-vc-dcm/>

Book Announcement

We are delighted to announce our latest signing, Mark Green.

"Mark brings a depth of knowledge, particularly around the Victoria Cross, which gives lots of potential for Mark to write for us." - Ashley Barnett.

Barnthorn Publishing came to my attention when I saw a post by Neil and Ashley on Facebook. I had always been interested in publishing a book, particularly on the subject of the Victoria Cross. In 2018, I submitted a proposal to another publisher of a book idea that I had, but unfortunately, it was turned down, and at that point, I thought I was pre-destined not to write a book. When I saw Barnthorn's posts on Facebook, I contacted Neil, and following a long phone call, I was inspired to try again. It was Neil's passion for giving all authors a chance to realise their dreams and publish their own book.

"The Man They Couldn't Kill" is the story of Stanley Elton Hollis VC, the only recipient of the Victoria Cross for his gallantry on D-Day – 6th June 1944, of which 2024 will see the 80th anniversary. Stan's life was full of numerous acts of gallantry both whilst in the Army but also in civilian life.

The book will tell of Stan's humble beginnings in North Yorkshire, to serving in several theatres of war around the world in World War II, to his postwar life as a pub landlord, battling with the physical and mental scars of his experiences, which would ultimately, and sadly lead to his premature death aged just 59. Stan was a proud man who believed his Regiment deserved more plaudits than he did and was loyal to his principles right to the end. This is Stan's story."

Saving the Guns

Shortly before the outbreak of the war, General Sir Redvers Buller VC was dispatched to South Africa at the head of an army corps, and appointed Commander-in-Chief of British Forces in South Africa. On arrival, he found British garrisons besieged on widely separated fronts, with limited communications between the fronts.

Having detached forces under Generals Lord Methuen and Gatacre to the western and central fronts, Buller assumed command of his largest detachment and proposed to lead it to the relief of a besieged British force in Ladysmith, in Natal.

On this front, the Boers had conducted some raids and reconnaissances into the southern part of the province, but in the face of a large British army, they had retired north of the Tugela River at Colenso and dug in there, blocking the road and railway line to Ladysmith. Buller originally intended making a flank march to cross the Tugela at Potgieter's Drift 80 kilometres (50 mi) upstream of Colenso.

On hearing that Gatacre and Methuen had been defeated at the battles of Stormberg and Magersfontein Buller felt he needed to relieve Ladysmith as soon as possible and resume overall command of the forces in South Africa,¹ and was worried that a move to Potgieter's would put him out of telegraph communications with the rest of South Africa. He also lacked wagons and draught animals, and feared that a defeat at Potgieter's Drift would leave his force isolated and trapped. He decided to make a frontal assault at Colenso after two days' artillery bombardment, beginning on 13 December.

Saving the Guns



Redvers Buller VC

Saving the Guns

Early on the morning of 15 December, Major General Hart gave his men half an hour's parade ground drill, then led them in close column towards the Bridle Drift. However, his locally recruited guide, who spoke no English, led the brigade towards the wrong ford, the Punt Drift at the end of a loop in the river at $28^{\circ}43'57''\text{S } 29^{\circ}47'16''\text{E}$. Hart was also misled by Buller's crude sketch map which showed a stream, the Doornkop, entering the Tugela east of the loop whereas it actually entered to the west.

Louis Botha, the Boer commander, had ordered his men to hold their fire until the British tried to cross the river, but Hart's brigade, jammed into the loop of the river, was too good a target to ignore. The Boers opened fire; Hart's brigade suffered over 500 casualties before they could be extricated. The battalions repeatedly tried to extend to the left and locate the Bridle Drift; on each occasion, Hart recalled them and sent them back into the loop. Hart had given Parsons no orders and Parson's supporting fire was ineffective, even hitting some of Hart's troops.

Meanwhile, as Major General Henry Hildyard moved towards Colenso, the two batteries of field guns under Colonel Charles James Long forged ahead of him, and deployed in the open well within rifle range of the nearest Boers. Once again, this was too tempting a target, and the Boers opened fire. The British gunners fought on, despite suffering heavy casualties, but ammunition could not be brought to them and they were eventually forced to take shelter in a donga (dry stream bed) behind the guns. The bullock-drawn naval guns had not been able to keep up with the field pieces, but were able to come into action 1,500 metres (1,640 yd) from the Boer trenches.

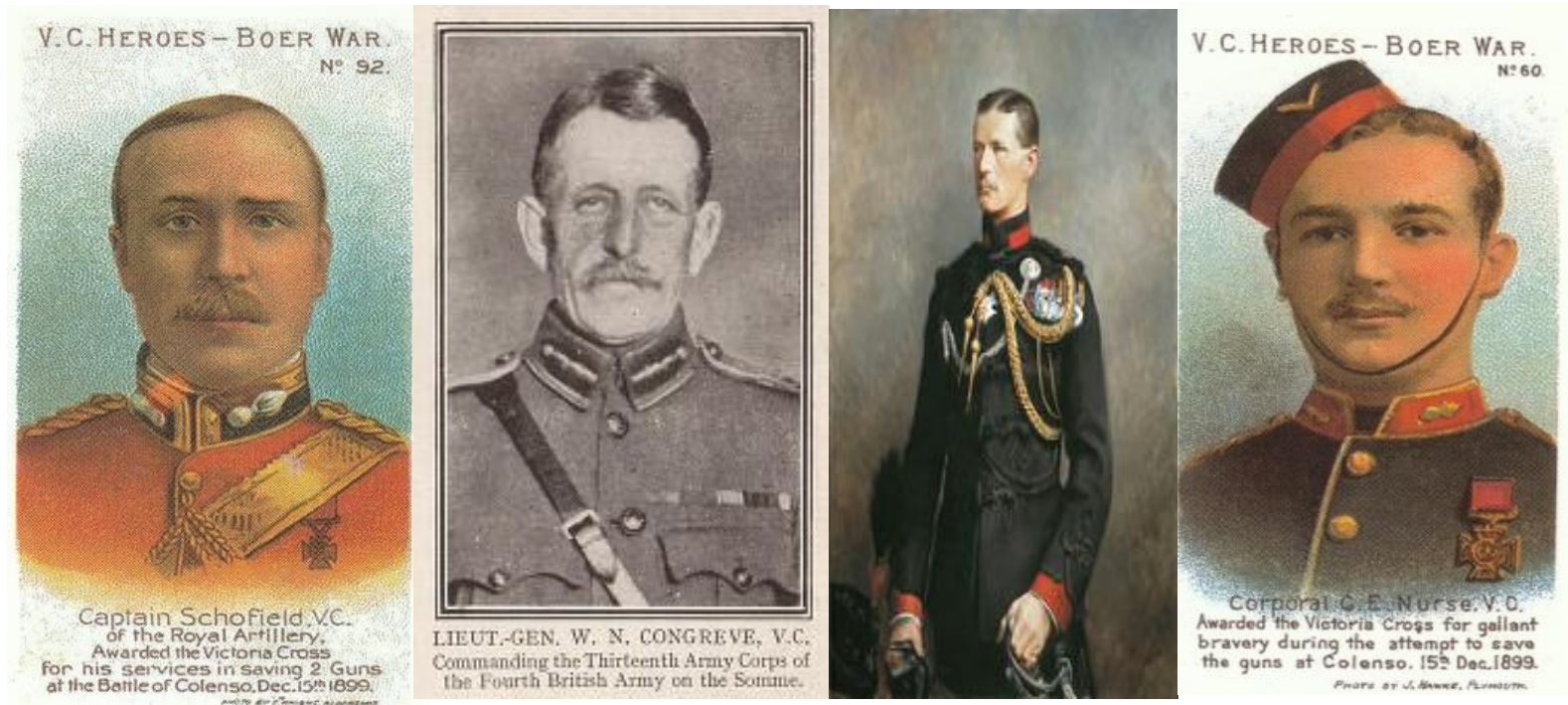
Saving the Guns



Buller, who had also heard that his light horse units were pinned down at the foot of Hlangwane and unable to advance, asserted command and took direct control of the battle from Clery. Buller decided to call the battle off at this point, even though Hildyard's men, advancing in open order, had just occupied Colenso. He went forward (being slightly wounded himself) and called for volunteers to recover Long's guns. Two teams approached them, hooked up and brought away two weapons. A second attempt to recover the rest of guns failed when horses and volunteers were shot down by Boer rifle fire.

During the afternoon, the British fell back to their camp, leaving ten guns, many wounded gunners and some of Hildyard's men behind to be captured during the night.

Saving the Guns



Although Buller had committed few of his reserves, he reasoned that a full day under a boiling sun would have sapped their morale and strength. Lyttelton committed some of his troops to help Hart's brigade withdraw, but the cautious Major General Barton refused to support Dundonald's or Hildyard's hard-pressed troops. The British lost 143 killed, 756 wounded, and 220 captured. Boer casualties were eight killed and 30 wounded.

A week after the battle Buller was replaced as Commander-in-Chief in South Africa by Field Marshal Lord Roberts; however he remained in command in Natal. The brigades were dispersed into new divisional commands, and the 2nd Division reduced to two brigades. Over the next month, Buller made his original intended flank march to Potgieter's Drift, but this ended with the disastrous Battle of Spion Kop, and he then failed again at the Battle of Vaal Krantz. Eventually he returned to Colenso, and forced his way over the Tugela in the Battle of the Tugela Heights by laboriously outflanking and capturing Hlangwane, which dominated the Boer left.

Saving the Guns

Even so, another ten days' fighting were necessary, but eventually Botha's forces were broken and forced to retreat, temporarily demoralised. Ladysmith was relieved on 28 February 1900.

After the battle of Colenso, four soldiers were awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest decoration for gallantry that can be awarded to British (and Commonwealth) forces. All crossed an exposed area of intense Boer fire and rescued two of the twelve guns of the 14th and 66th Batteries when their crews had become casualties or were driven from their weapons. They were Captain Walter Congreve, Captain Harry Norton Schofield, Corporal George Nurse, and Lieutenant Frederick Roberts (the only son of Field Marshal Lord Roberts), who died of his wounds two days later.



<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/harry-norton-schofield-vc/>

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