

Victoria Cross Online



Issue 26 November 2024

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Welcome to the 26th edition of Victoria Cross Online Magazine. The most significant news this month is the award of a posthumous VC for Australia to Richard Norden

The feature article this month is provided by Anthony Staunton and involves the story of George Albert Cairns VC.

Another interesting article this month comes from Brian Drummond regarding the misinterpretation of photographs of recipients of the Victoria Cross. The article stems from Brian's extensive research into the Royal Artillery VCs for his forthcoming books on the subject.

There is also the next four instalments in the Medical VCs series including the stories of Noel Chavasse VC and Bar, Harold Ackroyd VC MC, John Fox-Russell VC and Bellenden Hutcheson VC MC.

There are also articles about the recent addition to the Dorchester War Memorial of the name of Lionel Queripel VC and also the unveiling of a blue plaque in Bristol to Frederick Room VC.



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New VC for Australia



On 11th November 2024 at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, the Governor General of Australia Sam Mostyn and the Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross for Australia to Richard Leslie Norden.

Norden was a 19 year old member of the 1st Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment when he was originally awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his actions at the Battle of Coral-Balmoral in Binh Duong Province, Vietnam.

His platoon was ambushed by between eight and ten North Vietnamese soldiers, severely wounding the section commander and forward scout. Norden rushed forward under enemy fire, after expending his ammunition and killing one North Vietnamese soldier. Recovering the downed soldier's weapon he fired at the enemy, recovering the section commander, he then returned killing one soldier who had been using the forward scout as a shield. Discovering the scout to be dead, he then returned to his section to obtain grenades, before returning a third time to clear the area and allow the scout's body to be recovered. Nineteen-year-old Norden was severely wounded in the encounter, but survived his injuries.

Norden survived the war and joined the Australian Capital Territory Police Force based in Canberra. Tragically, on 30 October 1972, aged just 24, he was killed on active duty in a motorcycle accident. He was buried in Woden Cemetery in Canberra. His family will be presented with his posthumous Victoria Cross for Australia in lieu of the DCM at a later date.

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/richard-leslie-norden-vc/>

Lt George Cairns VC

Anthony Staunton - Fellow of the Military Historical Society of Australia



The last Victoria Cross gazetted for World War 2 was in 1949 for an action five years earlier in Burma. The published citation for the posthumous award to Lieutenant George Cairns VC stated that the action was on 13 March 1944. This paper argues that the date of action was 17 March 1944.

In the Jan-Mar 1990 issue of *Sabretache*, the Journal of the Military Historical Society of Australia, *The last 1939-1945 Victoria Cross gazetted*, which I wrote, suggested, that the Chindits reached Henu Block on 16 March and the VC action was on 18 March 1944. I was confident Henu Block was reached on 16 March but unsure whether the VC action was on 17 or 18 March.

I selected 18 March because one of the eyewitnesses later wrote the Lt Cairns died the next day, which would be 19 March, the date recorded by Commonwealth War Graves. There is now good evidence that the actual date of the VC action was 17 March 1944.

VC recommendation perished with Major General Wingate

Lt Cairns, Somerset Light Infantry, was mortar officer of the 1st South Staffs of Brigadier Mike Calvert's 77th Indian Infantry Brigade, one of Major General Orde Wingate's Chindit brigades. Lt Cairns was mortally wounded on 17 March 1944, in defence of White City and died of his wounds two days later.

Lt George Cairns VC

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Lt-Col G P Richards, Commanding Officer of the 1st South Staffs prepared the VC recommendation with the required witness statements and passed it to Brigadier Calvert, the brigade commander. On 24 March, a week after the action, the VC recommendation was personally given to Major General Orde Wingate when he visited White City on an inspection tour. If Wingate approved the recommendation, it would have been forwarded to General Bill Slim, 14th Army commander. The same afternoon, Wingate returned to Imphal in India and in the evening, on a flight to Lalaghat, the plane crashed and all aboard were killed. The VC recommendation for Lt Cairns perished in the crash and when an attempt was made to revive the award only one of the three witnesses was still living.

Chindit operations in Northern Burma

On 5 March 1944, four of the five Chindit Brigades of what was officially designated, the 3rd Indian Infantry Division, began to be airlifted behind Japanese lines into Northern Burma in support of the overland advance of General Stilwell's Chinese troops from Ledo to Myitkyina. The 77th Brigade was to be split between two landing fields, Broadway and Piccadilly. The landing fields were located north of Indaw but last-minute reconnaissance photos revealed Piccadilly was obstructed by timber spread across the entire field. It was unusable but despite the risk involved, General Slim decided to go ahead with the operation using just Broadway.

The forward elements of 77th Brigade landed by glider at Broadway before dawn on 5 March. The unavailability of Piccadilly meant the build-up was slow and it was not until the 11th that the entire brigade had landed. Before the brigade had completely landed, the 1st South Staffs and the 3/6th Gurkha Rifles commenced the forty-mile trek through dense jungle to the Indaw-Myitkyina railway line, the main Japanese line of communications in North Burma.

Lt George Cairns VC

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General Wingate (pictured centre) and Mike Calvert (3rd from left)

Lt George Cairns VC

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On 16 March, twenty miles north of Indaw, the 1st South Staffs, blocked the road and railway by establishing Henu Block, christened White City from the supply parachutes that soon draped the trees. On the first night, the Japanese dug entrenchments near Pagoda Hill.

Brigadier Calvert later wrote:

On the top of Pagoda hill, not much bigger than two tennis courts, an amazing scene developed. The small white pagoda was in the centre of the hill. Between that and the slopes which came up was a melee of South Staffords and Japanese bayoneting, fighting with each other, with some Japanese just throwing grenades from the flanks into the melee. Young, Dermody and Thompson were close around me protecting me as far as possible from the Japs. Nearby I saw Lieutenant Cairns have his arm hacked off by a Japanese officer whom at the same time he shot. He picked up the sword although his armpit was spurting with blood and carried on hacking away among the Japanese around him until he subsided on the ground. I knelt and spoke to him before he died just as the Japanese were being driven behind the pagoda.

2214

SUPPLEMENT TO THE LONDON GAZETTE, 26 APRIL, 1945

Capt. (Qr.-Mr.) T. LEACH (120425).
Capt. (temp.) C. C. STOCK (176588).
5570391 W.O. II (actg.) M. J. O'BRIEN.
782169 C.-Sergt. R. FOX.
3710133 Sergt. G. D. BARLEY.
3709630 Corpl. G. FLETCHER.
5440095 Corpl. S. RICHARDS.
4195564 Lce.-Corpl. A. T. WELLINGS.
6343896 Pte. V. W. DEAMER.
3772770 Pte. W. S. PUGH.
7010927 Pte. A. REID.

R. Fus.
5437801 W.O.II (actg.) R. A. KEEVIL (att'd Nigeria R.).

R. Norfolk R.
Maj. (temp.) W. P. A. SHUTTLEWORTH (66104).

Devon R.
Maj. R. M. S. CURRY (30671).

Somerset L.I.
Lt. G. A. CAIRNS (198186) (killed in action).

W. York R.
Capt. (temp.) H. TRAHER. M.M. (117017).

Border R.
Lt.-Col. (temp.) A. W. THOMPSON, M.C. (44721).
Capt. (temp.) R. L. PERKINS (107111).
15001452 Sergt. W. R. Young (att'd Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps).

R. Sussex R.
Maj. (temp.) L. W. S. TAYLER (52239) (att'd Nigeria R.).
Capt. (temp.) G. H. BORROW, M.C. (228394) (killed in action).
Capt. (actg.) P. C. HARRIS (153261).
Lt. L. P. BANFIELD (265869) (att'd Nigeria R.).
Lt. J. K. T. EARLE (276359) (att'd Nigeria R.).
Lt. C. H. MERCER (265871) (att'd Nigeria R.).
6398407 W.O. II F. HILL (att'd Nigeria R.).

S. Stafford R.
Lt.-Col. (actg.) G. P. RICHARDS, M.C. (41421).
Major (temp.) E. L. BUTLER (126417).
Major (temp.) W. A. COLE (73146).
Capt. (temp.) A. S. RAILTON (126175).
Lt. R. A. FISK (324344).
Lt. E. R. JOHNSON (180224).
4037728 Lce.-Corpl. E. SCOTT (now R. Signals).
4912204 Pte. T. H. TURNER (since died).

Lt George Cairns VC

Anthony Staunton - Fellow of the Military Historical Society of Australia



Brigadier Mike Calvert

Lt George Cairns VC

Anthony Staunton - Fellow of the Military Historical Society of Australia

Another account of the action is by Lieutenant Norman Durant who commanded the 1st South Staffs machine gun platoon:

[T]he Brigadier himself came striding up our hill, rifle and bayonet in hand, took a quick look around and then said to Major Jefferies. 'How many men can you spare to attack Pagoda Hill?' 'About 20.' 'Right we'll go straight up.' George Cairns, the mortar officer and I, hearing this, picked up some grenades, got out our revolvers and prepared to go too. We had been shot at all day, and everyone felt like getting into the Japs and exacting a bit of retribution ... The first thing I saw on reaching the path was a horrible hand-to-hand struggle going on further up the hill. George Cairns and a Jap were struggling and choking on the ground, and as I picked up a Jap rifle and climbed up towards them, I saw George break free and picking up a rifle bayonet, stab the Jap again and again like a madman. It was only when I got near that I saw he himself had already been bayoneted twice through the side and that his left arm was hanging on by a few strips of muscle. How he had found the strength to fight was a miracle, but the effort had been too much and he died the next morning.

These firsthand accounts have some inconsistencies, but the essential facts are the same but neither account specifically identifies the date of the VC action.

Date of attack on Pagoda Hill

The VC citation for Lt Cairns published on 20 May 1949 states that the road and rail block at White City was established on 12 March 1944 and that the attack on Pagoda Hill for which Lt Cairns was decorated took place on 13 March 1944. It is understandable that both dates were four days earlier than the actual dates since the reconstructed recommendation in 1949 did not have ready access to official histories and war diaries

Lt George Cairns VC

Anthony Staunton - Fellow of the Military Historical Society of Australia

The *London Gazette* in 1949, the War Office *List of Recipients of the Victoria Cross* in January 1953, most books and articles on Victoria Cross recipients that include the VCs to the Chindits suggest the Chindits reached Henu Block on 12 March and the action for which Lt Cairns was awarded the VC was on 13 March 1944.

Wingate and the Chindits: Redressing the balance by David Rooney states by 8 March 'Broadway' was well established, with the airstrip in constant use, garrisoned by 3/9 Gurkhas, and with two floater Columns of the King's Regiment operating outside, ready to attack any enemy unit which approached the Stronghold. Ever one to lead from the front, Calvert therefore decided to take a strong force, including the 1st South Staffords, and the 3/6 Gurkhas, to block the main road and railway. This force, after eight days of cutting their way through the jungle, reached the village of Henu on 16 March.

Jon Diamond in *Chindit vs Japanese Infantryman 1943-44*, states that at dawn on 17 March, Japanese troops were discovered digging in on Pagoda Hill and a firefight commenced. At 11 am, there was heavy Japanese rifle and light-machine-gun fire from Pagoda Hill and another nearby hill. At 4 pm, Brigadier Calvert and six platoons of Gurkhas and many South Staffs charged up Pagoda Hill. At 4.30 pm, at the top of the hill, there was hand-to-hand fighting in which the mortally wounded Lt Cairns continued to fight until he collapsed.

The British Indian official histories indicate the Henu Block was established on 16 March and the fighting on Pagoda Hill took place on 17-18 March 1944. *Wingate and the Chindits* confirms Henu Block was established on 16 March while *Chindit vs Japanese Infantryman 1943-44* confirms the time and the date of the action. The VC action was on 17 March and the Commonwealth War Graves states that Lt Cairns died on 19 March 1944.

Lt George Cairns VC

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White City (photographed in 1944)

Lt George Cairns VC

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Lt George Cairns

George Cairns was born in London on 12 December 1913. Prior to the war, he worked in the Belgian Bank at Bishopsgate and lived with his parents at Morden, Surrey. In 1940, he joined the army and was commissioned in 1941. In July 1941, he married Ena who also worked at the Belgian Bank and thereafter he spent his leaves with her in Sidcup, Kent. In 1942, Lt Cairns was sent to India and was stationed at Deolali in Bombay province for several months. After his death, his wife received letters telling of his bravery. His batman, Private N. Coates wrote 'He died a hero, for which I am told a medal will be awarded ... A superior officer, Lieutenant Colonel P. Degg said 'I have never yet witnessed more fearless and brave actions as I saw when George was wounded.'

Lt Cairns was buried in the largest of three war cemeteries in Burma, Taukkyan War Cemetery, Rangoon where his grave is maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.



Lt George Cairns VC

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BBC Midland Radio broadcast – December 1948

On 10 December 1948, BBC Midland Radio broadcast the history of the South Staffordshire Regiment. The BBC had already asked Ena Cairns for permission to use her husband's name and listening to the radio that night she heard the narrator say:

Ah, Lieutenant Cairns! It was at the savage fighting at Henu Block. That was a scrap and no mistake. He got an explosive bullet in the arm and I don't know how many bayonet wounds: I thought he was done for but he fought like a man possessed. Wounded as he was, he went on, got a Jap officer, took his ceremonial sword from him and killed him with it. Then he saw a Jap straddling one of our wounded on the ground. He picked up a rifle and killed him with the butt! Then he starts fighting again with rifle and bayonet, giving hell to every Jap he could get at, until he dropped. unconscious and there he died.

The Old Man recommended him for the VC and the citation was sent home by air with General Wingate. You know what happened, the plane crashed and was lost. So was the citation. And they couldn't find the three witnesses you have to have for a VC: they were all killed or lost. But even though bad luck prevented Lieutenant Cairns from being numbered among the regiment's seven VCs we shan't forget him,

Ena Cairns was still working at the Belgian Bank in Bishopsgate in December 1948 and her colleagues who also heard the broadcast advised her to follow the matter up. She wrote to her Member of Parliament, Mr G D Wallace, MP for Chislehurst who was the Government Whip. On 11 April 1949, Mr Wallace wrote on Ena Cairns' behalf to the Rt Hon. Emanuel Shinwell MP, Secretary of State for War with copies of correspondence and statements concerning the death of Lt Cairns. A reply was received from the War Office on 26 April saying that the question of recommending an award for Lt Cairns was being given very careful consideration.

On 20 May, the Secretary of State for War wrote to Mr Wallace informing him that His Majesty The King had been pleased to approve the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross to Lt Cairns.

Lt George Cairns VC

Anthony Staunton - Fellow of the Military Historical Society of Australia

Mr Wallace sent a copy of the letter to Ena Cairns who had already been informed by telegram of the award. In 1990, Mr Wallace, who had been made Lord Wallace of Coslany in 1975 wrote about what he described as a fantastic case:

It is obvious to me that my intervention as MP probably counted but what I want clearly understood is that it was the persistence of Mrs Cairns that led to a conclusion.

Ena Cairns received her husband's Victoria Cross from King George VI at Buckingham Palace on 26 July 1949. The Victoria Cross is displayed at the Staffordshire Regimental Museum.



Medal Group at Staffordshire Regiment Museum

Lt George Cairns VC

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NOTES

George Douglas Wallace, Baron Wallace of Coslany (18 April 1906 – 11 November 2003) was Labour Member of Parliament for Chislehurst in 1945-1950 and Norwich North 1964-1974. He became a life peer as Baron Wallace of Coslany, of Coslany in the City of Norwich, on 17 January 1975. In his reply dated 5 March 1990, Lord Wallace sent press clippings including the Sidcup & Kentish Times and copies of his correspondence relating to the VC award.

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<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/george-albert-cairns-vc/>

Lt George Cairns VC

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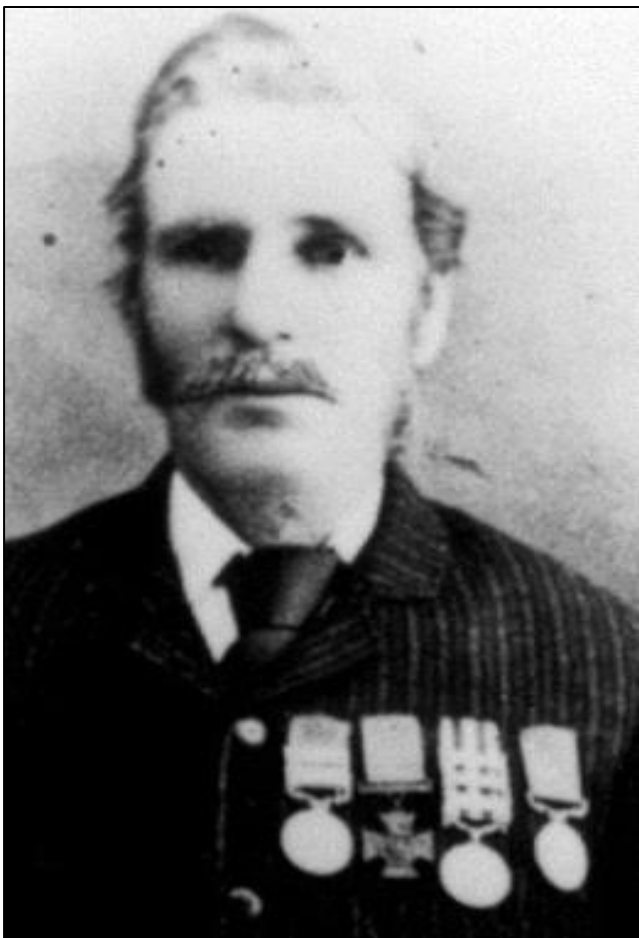


Misinterpretation of the VC

By Brian Drummond

During my research on several Royal Regiment of Artillery Victoria Cross recipients for a future series of books, I have come across photographs of certain individuals namely Bernard Diamond, Jacob Thomas and Joseph Charles Brennan including a non-RA individual William Martin Café which appears to be either using the same photograph or the photograph has been incorrectly used to identify a recipient. The first instance is that of Bernard Diamond and William Martin Café which I have explained below.

Bernard Diamond VC



Photographs of Bernard Diamond VC alongside his wife Mary

Misinterpretation of the VC

By Brian Drummond

The photograph above is used on many sites, including the Lord Belmont Northern Ireland site for Bernard Diamond VC and shows his wife, Mary sat beside him. In the photograph his medal entitlement matches his VC group currently displayed at the Queen Elizabeth II Army Memorial Museum in Waiouru, New Zealand.

(Note: his Army LS&GC ribbon appears to have been coloured blue and not maroon or dark red as is the case)

- Punjab Medal (1848-49) with two clasps 'Chillianwala' and 'Goojerat'
- Victoria Cross
- Indian Mutiny Medal (1857-58) with three clasps 'Delhi, Relief of Lucknow and Lucknow'
- Army Long Service & Good Conduct Medal Top of Form



Bernard Diamonds VC Group displayed at the Queen Elizabeth II Army Memorial Museum in Waiouru, New Zealand.

Misinterpretation of the VC

By Brian Drummond

However, whilst researching Bernard's life story for a future book I discovered his photograph being used for another VC recipient, that off William Martin Café VC. Below is the headshot photograph of William used on the VC&GC website which may have certain similarities to Bernard but the photograph on the right is clearly Bernard Diamond VC with his wife cut or blared out as you can still see the outline of her dress in the bottom left corner!

William Martin Cafe [VC](#)



Headshot of William Martin Cafe [VC](#) from the VC&GC webpage and the incorrectly published photograph of Bernard Diamond VC in various publications and web pages

Misinterpretation of the VC

By Brian Drummond

Medal entitlement for William Martin Cafe VC

- Victoria Cross
- Gwalior Campaign Star for 'Maharajpore'
- Punjab Medal (1848-49) with two clasps '*Chillianwala and Goojerat*'
- Indian Mutiny Medal (1857-58) with one clasp '*Lucknow*'

All his medals can be viewed separately at the National Army Museum site

AS previously stated the photograph above is clearly that of Bernard Diamond VC with his wife blanked or cut out and it also clearly shows Bernards VC group as there is no Gwalior Star or Indian Mutiny Medal with only one clasp shown.

This photograph has been incorrectly used in many publications and on many webpages!

Another VC recipients photograph that may have been mixed up or misused is that of Cornishman, Joseph Charles Brennan VC and Welshman, Jacob Thomas VC. During my research on both artillerymen, I have seen references stating that the photograph described in many publications as JC Brennan VC '*could actually be in fact Jacob Thomas VC*'.

Misinterpretation of the VC

By Brian Drummond

Joseph Charles Brennan VC



The above photograph is believed to be that of Joseph Charles Brennan VC, however the VC medal group in this photograph is more likely that of another artilleryman, Jacob Thomas VC who apart from his VC was awarded the Indian Mutiny Medal with two clasps as in the photograph.

Misinterpretation of the VC

By Brian Drummond

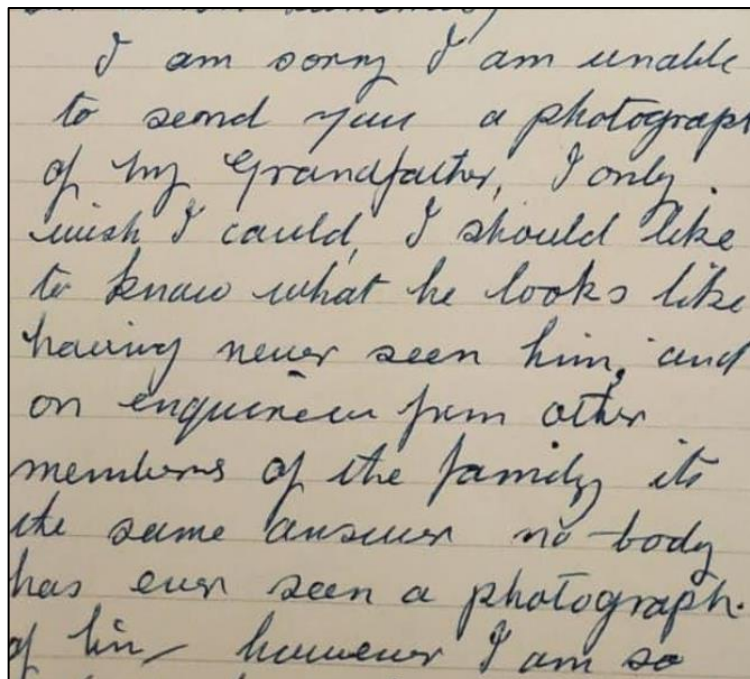
Medal entitlement for Joseph Charles Brennan VC

- Victoria Cross
- Indian Mutiny Medal (1857-58) with one clasp 'Central India'
- India General Service Medal (1854-95) with one clasp 'Bhootan'

Joseph's VC photograph mystery

During my research and as already stated above the photograph used in several books and publications of Joseph Charles Brennan VC, quote '*could be, another artilleryman Victoria Cross recipient, named 'Jacob Thomas VC'?*

In addition, during this research someone else must have requested a photograph of Joseph from the family, and a family member stated in a letter that they had never seen a photograph of him and neither have any other family member.

A photograph of a handwritten letter on lined paper. The text is written in cursive and reads: "I am sorry I am unable to send you a photograph of my grandfather, I only wish I could, I should like to know what he looks like having never seen him, and on enquire from other members of the family its the same answer no body has ever seen a photograph of him however I am so".

I am sorry I am unable to send you a photograph of my grandfather, I only wish I could, I should like to know what he looks like having never seen him, and on enquire from other members of the family its the same answer no body has ever seen a photograph of him however I am so

An extract from the letter from the family member replying to a request for a photograph of Joseph with states that no family member has ever seen a photograph of him

Misinterpretation of the VC

By Brian Drummond

It may be that the photograph that accompanied the 2008 AJ Dixon auction of Josephs VC group could have been misidentified as Joseph Charles Brennan and is in fact Jacob Thomas VC as no photograph was ever mentioned or recorded in any previous auction for the selling of Joseph's VC group. It could be the seller had come across the photograph and by mistake identified it as Joseph Brennan. The question needs to be asked if there is any notes or comments on the back of the said photograph stating who it is?

Joseph Charles Brennan VC group is currently held as part of the Lord Ashcroft Gallery at the Extraordinary Heroes Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum in London



Misinterpretation of the VC

By Brian Drummond

Jacob Thomas VC



The above photograph is believed to be that of, Jacob Thomas VC who apart from his VC was awarded the Indian Mutiny Medal with two clasps as in the photograph, however it would depend on when it was taken

Misinterpretation of the VC

By Brian Drummond

Medal entitlement for Jacob Thomas VC

- Victoria Cross
- Indian Mutiny Medal (1857-58) with two clasps "*Defence of Lucknow and Lucknow*"

The reason behind this suggestion is the Victoria Cross and Indian Mutiny medal shown on the photograph appears to be the medal entitlement that would have been held by Jacob Thomas VC (VC with the Indian Mutiny Medal with two clasps) and not that of Joseph Charles Brennan VC with three medals (VC with the Indian General Service Medal with one clasp and the Indian Mutiny Medal with two clasps).

In addition, in this photograph the individual is wearing the rank of Bombardier (in those days, one stripe) which would fit in with Jacob as he was not promoted to Corporal (two strips) on the 6th August 1858 and Sergeant on the 29th March 1859. Obviously, this would depend on the date the photograph was taken.

Family pictures or paintings of Jacob Thomas VC

During my research a source refers to a relative claiming that there are two pictures or paintings of Jacob, the first describes Jacob Thomas VC, '*taken in red regimental coat, he had a beard, just head and shoulders*' in an oil painting with a gilt frame. The second describes, '*Jacob sat by a tent*'

The fact that it states that he is sat in his 'red regimental coat' is misleading as the Royal Regiment of Artillery regiment coats are dark blue in colour. One possible explanation could be that Jacob served as a Chelsea Pensioner?

Misinterpretation of the VC

By Brian Drummond

This would fit well with the comment about his red regimental coat, however there is no evidence that he was a pensioner as he remained in India after his discharge from the army and never returned to Wales. Another possible explanation could be that the artist had painted the wrong colour as there are many cases in which this has occurred in other pictures or comics for other recipients.

Regardless we will probably never know as to date none of these pictures or paintings have been located.

Jacob Thomas VC group is currently held at the Royal Artillery Museum in Larkhill.



Medical VCs

34. Noel Godfrey Chavasse VC* MC



Noel Godfrey Chavasse (1884-1917) was born at 36 New Inn Hall Street, St Peter-le-Bailey Rectory, Oxford on 9th November 1884. He was the younger twin with Christopher. They were very frail at birth and contracted a form of typhoid fever as infants.

Their father was Francis James Chavasse, who had graduated from Corpus Christi, Oxford with a First in Law and Modern History in 1869. He was ordained in the Church of England at Manchester in 1870 and was curate at St Paul's, Preston until 1873. He was then Vicar of St Paul's, Upper Holloway until 1877, then Rector at St Peter-le-Bailey until 1889.

He was consecrated the second Bishop of Liverpool on 25th April 1900, and the family lived at 19 Abercromby Square. Noel and Christopher's mother was Edith Jane nee Maude and she married Francis at Overton-on-Dee near Wrexham on 27th September 1881. Noel had six siblings – Dorothea (born 1883), Christopher Maude (his twin born 1884), Edith Marjorie (born 1886), Mary Laeta (Edith's twin also born 1886), Francis Bernard (born 1889) and Aidan (born 1891). Aidan would also be killed in action in 1917 and is commemorated on the Menin Gate, Ypres.

Medical VCs

34. Noel Godfrey Chavasse VC* MC



Until he was 12, Noel and his twin brother were educated by their governess and a tutor. They then went to Magdalen College School in Oxford 1896-1900, where they won numerous athletics trophies. In 1900 they moved to Liverpool College, where Noel won the Earl of Derby's History Prize in 1901 and the Routhwaite Prize for Reading and Recitation in 1902. At Trinity College, Oxford from 1904-1909 (BA 1907, MA 1909), the twins shared rooms in Kettle Hall. Noel was a member of the Oxford University Officer Training Corps from January to May 1909 as a Lance Sergeant, but gave it up due to his studies.

Medical VCs

34. Noel Godfrey Chavasse VC* MC

Noel Chavasse



London 1908

Medical VCs

34. Noel Godfrey Chavasse VC* MC

Both Noel and Christopher gained their blues for running against Cambridge. Noel gained a first in Physiology in 1909, but Christopher failed his exams. Noel was awarded a post-graduate exhibition in medicine, but deferred until his brother passed his exams. He decided to take a course at Liverpool University (Royal Southern Hospital) to be at home and help his brother.

At Liverpool University from 1910-1912, he qualified as MBChB MRCS LRCP. The placement part of his course was at the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin in the summer of 1911. On 15th March 1912 the committee of the University's Medical Faculty awarded him their premier prize, the Derby Exhibition. He was registered as a doctor with the General Medical Council on 22nd July 1912. As a talented athlete, he was invited to trials for the British team for the 1908 Olympics in London. Noel was injured and couldn't take part. His time was good enough to qualify, and they entered the 400 metres. Noel came third in his Heat, and Christopher was second in his, but neither qualified for the next round.

After university, Noel researched blood plasma at Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford, and became house physician and house surgeon to Mr Douglas Crawford at the Royal Southern Hospital in Liverpool from October 1912 to March 1913. He specialised in orthopaedics under Sir Robert Jones, the leading surgeon in his field. On 2nd June 1913, he was commissioned in the Royal Army Medical Corps (Territorial Force) and was attached to 10th King's as its medical officer.

Medical VCs

34. Noel Godfrey Chavasse VC* MC



On 2nd August 1914, the Battalion went to Hornby Camp, Lancashire for annual training camp, but Noel went to London to volunteer for immediate services overseas. He embarked with the battalion on SS Maidan on 1st November, and arrived at Le Havre on 3rd November. It arrived at St Omer on the 5th and then did two weeks training at Blendecques. The battalion moved to the front line on 27th November, and Noel's first patient was Captain Arthur Twentyman, who was hit in the chest by a bullet, and died of his wounds on 29th November.

Medical VCs

34. Noel Godfrey Chavasse VC* MC

In the early months of 1915, Noel's dressing station was in the infantry barracks in Ypres, and on 16th June, the Battalion took part in the Second Army's attack at Bellewaarde as part of 9th Brigade. Noel was very busy in scouring the ground between the lines to provide aid to the wounded. In his search for one officer he visited all hospitals in the area by bicycle in the hope of finding him. He was awarded the Military Cross for his actions during this attack at Hooge (LG 14th January 1916). Noel missing the announcement at parade of his award when he was found weeping in a wood.

The Battalion was transferred to 166th Brigade, 55th (West Lancashire) Division under Major General Jeudwine on 1st January 1916. Noel was arrested as a spy by a vigilant MP because his uniform was unusual; he was wearing a RAMC uniform with Corps insignia and Glengarry cap with the Liverpool Scottish badge, but the Battalion wore the khaki Balmoral. Early in April 1916, he was selected to receive his MC from the King, but leave was postponed. He was not decorated with the MC until 7th June, almost a year after the action.

On 9th August 1916, at Guillemont, The Somme, during an attack, Noel attended the wounded in the open throughout the day. During the night, he scoured no man's land for wounded in front of the enemy's lines for over four hours. Next day, he took a stretcher bearer to the advanced trenches, and under heavy shell fire carried a badly wounded man over 500 yards into safety, being wounded in the side by a shell splinter in the process. The same night he took twenty volunteers to rescue three wounded men from a shell hole 25 yards from the enemy's trench, buried the bodies of two Officers, and collected many identity discs, although fired upon by bombs and machine gun fire.

Medical VCs

34. Noel Godfrey Chavasse VC* MC



Medical VCs

34. Noel Godfrey Chavasse VC* MC

He was promoted to Captain, and in November 1916, transferred temporarily to a field hospital. He was granted fourteen days leave to attend his VC investiture at Buckingham Palace on 5th February 1917. The medal was taken back to Liverpool in the keeping of his sister, Marjorie. A miniature version was kept by Noel. On 20th July 1917 the Battalion left St Omer and moved by train to Poperinghe for a short rest before marching up to the lines in front of Wieltje. Up to 24th July, the Battalion suffered 145 casualties from a mustard gas attack, combined with heavy shelling.

During the period 31st July to 2nd August 1917 at Wieltje, Noel would be involved in the action that would lead to the posthumous award of a Bar to his VC. Though severely wounded early in the action whilst carrying a wounded soldier to a Dressing Station, Captain Chavasse refused to leave his post, and for two days not only continued to perform his duties, but went out repeatedly under heavy enemy fire to search for and attend to the wounded. During these searches, although without food during this period, worn with fatigue and faint with his wound, he assisted to carry in a number of badly wounded men, over heavy and difficult ground.

He was very seriously wounded by a shell exploding in his dugout at 3am on 2nd August and he was taken to No 32 Casualty Clearing Station at Brandhoek. On the way the ambulance was stopped briefly at 46th Field Ambulance, commanded by Lt Colonel Arthur Martin-Leake VC and Bar. Despite a successful operation to remove shell fragments, his condition worsened on 4th August and he died of his wounds at 1pm. He was buried the following day in Brandhoek New Military Cemetery, near Ypres. His headstone is unique in that it carried two Victoria Crosses.

Medical VCs

34. Noel Godfrey Chavasse VC* MC



Medical VCs

34. Noel Godfrey Chavasse VC* MC

The Bar to his VC was presented privately to his father by Lt General Sir William Pitcairn Campbell KCB, GOC Western District, in late 1917. He was engaged at the time of his death to his cousin, Frances Gladys Ryland Chavasse (since April 1916). She would marry after the War to Reverend James "Pud" Ferguson Colquhoun in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, with Christopher officiating the service. She would die in September 1962 when knocked over by a car in France.

In addition to his VC & Bar, and MC, he was awarded the 1914 Star with "Mons" clasp, British War Medal 1914-20, and Victory Medal 1914-19 with Mentioned in Despatches oak leaf. The VC passed to his brother, Christopher, who left it in his will to the trustees of St Peter's College, Oxford in the 1930s. It was displayed on the main staircase, but insurance concerns led to a replica replacing the original on display. They were presented on a permanent loan to the Imperial War Museum on 22nd February 1990 in the presence of Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother. In November 2009, the medals were purchased by Michael Ashcroft for a reputed £1.5 million. They are now held by the Ashcroft Trust and displayed in the Ashcroft Gallery, Imperial War Museum. They were, until January 5th 2018, on a short term loan to the Museum of Liverpool.

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/noel-godfrey-chavasse-vc-and-bar-mc/>

Medical VCs

34. Noel Godfrey Chavasse VC* MC



<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/noel-godfrey-chavasse-vc-and-bar-mc/>

Medical VCs

35. Harold Ackroyd

VC MC



Harold Ackroyd (1877-1917) was born at 26 Roe Lane, Southport, Lancashire on 18th July 1877. His father, Edward, was a tailor and outfitter, and lived originally in Bolton. He married Ellen nee Holden, a bleacher, at Birkdale, Lancashire in June 1866. Edward later became the Chairman of Southport and Cheshire Lines Extension Railway Company. Harold was one of six children.

Harold was educated at Shrewsbury School in Chance's House and was a member of the Officer Training Corps. He was later educated at Mr Clough's School, Southport. He then entered Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge from October 1896 (BA Natural Sciences 1899 & MA 1904).

He then decided on a medical career and studied at Guy's Hospital, London from October 1900 to April 1903 (MB BCh 1904 & MD 1910). Harold married Mabel Robina Smythe on 1st August 1908 at St Luke's, Southport. She was from Newport, Shropshire. She was previously working as a governess in London, and at the time of her marriage was the matron of Strangeways Hospital, Cambridge. They settled into married life at Brooklands, 46 Kneesworth Road, Royston, Hertfordshire. They had three children: Ursula (born 1909), Stephen (born 1912) and Anthony (born 1914).

Medical VCs

35. Harold Ackroyd VC MC



Photo courtesy of Ned Malet de Carteret

Medical VCs

35. Harold Ackroyd VC MC

Harold was appointed House Surgeon at Queen's Hospital, Birmingham and then at David Lewis Northern Hospital, Liverpool. He received a BMA research scholarship for Dixon's Laboratory, Downing Street, Cambridge in 1909, pioneering research into vitamins and human metabolism. Initially he was attached to the Department of Pharmacology and later transferred to the School of Agriculture, where he accepted a post in the newly formed Institute for the Study of Animal Nutrition. Harold received the Thurston Medal and Medical Scholarship in 1911 for his scientific research work. In all, he had six papers published in the Biochemical Journal.

He was commissioned in the Royal Army Medical Corps as a Lieutenant on 15th February 1915 and attached to 6th Royal Berkshire as the Regimental Medical Officer. The Battalion trained at Colchester and Codford St Mary in Wiltshire. Harold was not popular with the troops during training due to his intolerance of malingerers, who he could spot by instinct. The Battalion was posted to France on 25th July 1915 and he was promoted to Captain on 15th February 1916.



Caius College,
Cambridge
(courtesy of
Ned Malet de
Carteret

Medical VCs

35. Harold Ackroyd VC MC

He was awarded the Military Cross for his actions between 19th-21st July 1916 at Delville Wood, Somme, when he tended the wounded in clearing the entire wood of more than 700 British and German wounded, which was fraught with difficulty due to the conditions and the confused nature of the fighting. He was once blown up, and under constant sniper and shellfire, and eleven officers in other units recommended him for the VC. He was awarded the MC instead.

His tireless efforts caused him to spend hours in no man's land at night. The mental strain took its toll and he suffered a nervous breakdown and nervous exhaustion, compounded by blindness brought on by shellshock. He was invalided home for six weeks leave on 11th August. A medical board passed him fit in October, and he returned to France to rejoin the Battalion.

On 31st July to 1st August 1917, at Ypres, Belgium, he worked continuously for many hours up and down and in front of the line tending the wounded and saving the lives of officers and men. In so doing he had to move across the open under heavy machine-gun, rifle and shell fire. He carried a wounded officer to a place of safety under very heavy fire. On another occasion he went some way in front of our advanced line and brought in a wounded man under continuous sniping and machine-gun fire. His heroism was the means of saving many lives, and provided a magnificent example of courage, cheerfulness, and determination to the fighting men in whose midst he was carrying out his splendid work.

Medical VCs

35. Harold Ackroyd VC MC

On 11th August, following a repulse of an enemy attack at Jargon Trench, Glencorse Wood, he set about locating casualties behind the firing line, moving from shell hole to shell hole alone. Having dressed the wounds of one man he had found in a forward crater, he got up to fetch the stretcher-bearers and was shot and killed. His body was discovered in the shell hole with six others by his batman, Private Scriven, and was brought back for burial. Harold is believed to be buried in Birr Cross Roads Cemetery.

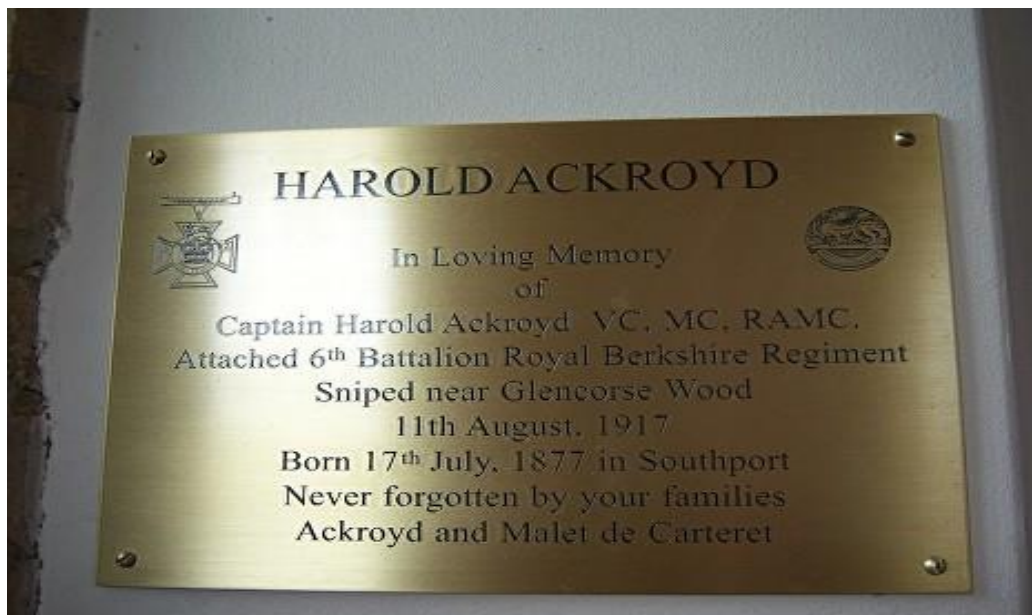


Medical VCs

35. Harold Ackroyd VC MC

The VC and MC were presented to his wife and son, Stephen, by King George V outside Buckingham Palace on 26th September 1917. His widow later lived in Malvern, Worcestershire in the 1930s and later lived on the island of Jersey.

In addition to the VC and MC, he was awarded the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal 1914-20 and Victory Medal 1914-19. Mabel bequeathed the VC and 1914-15 Star to her son Stephen and the MC, British War Medal, Victory Medal and Thurston Medal to her son Anthony in her will. After Stephen died the medals were owned by Anthony and passed to his son, Dr Christopher Ackroyd in 1988. All the medals were loaned to the Army Medical Services (now Museum of Military Medicine) Museum, until being returned to the family in April 1994. They were sold for £110,000 in October 2003 to the Ashcroft Trust and the proceeds of the sale were donated to fund four annual scholarships for medicine at Gonville and Caius College. The medals are displayed in the Imperial War Museum.



Medical VCs

35. Harold Ackroyd VC MC



Harold Ackroyd VC

1917, Belgium, Royal Army Medical Corps

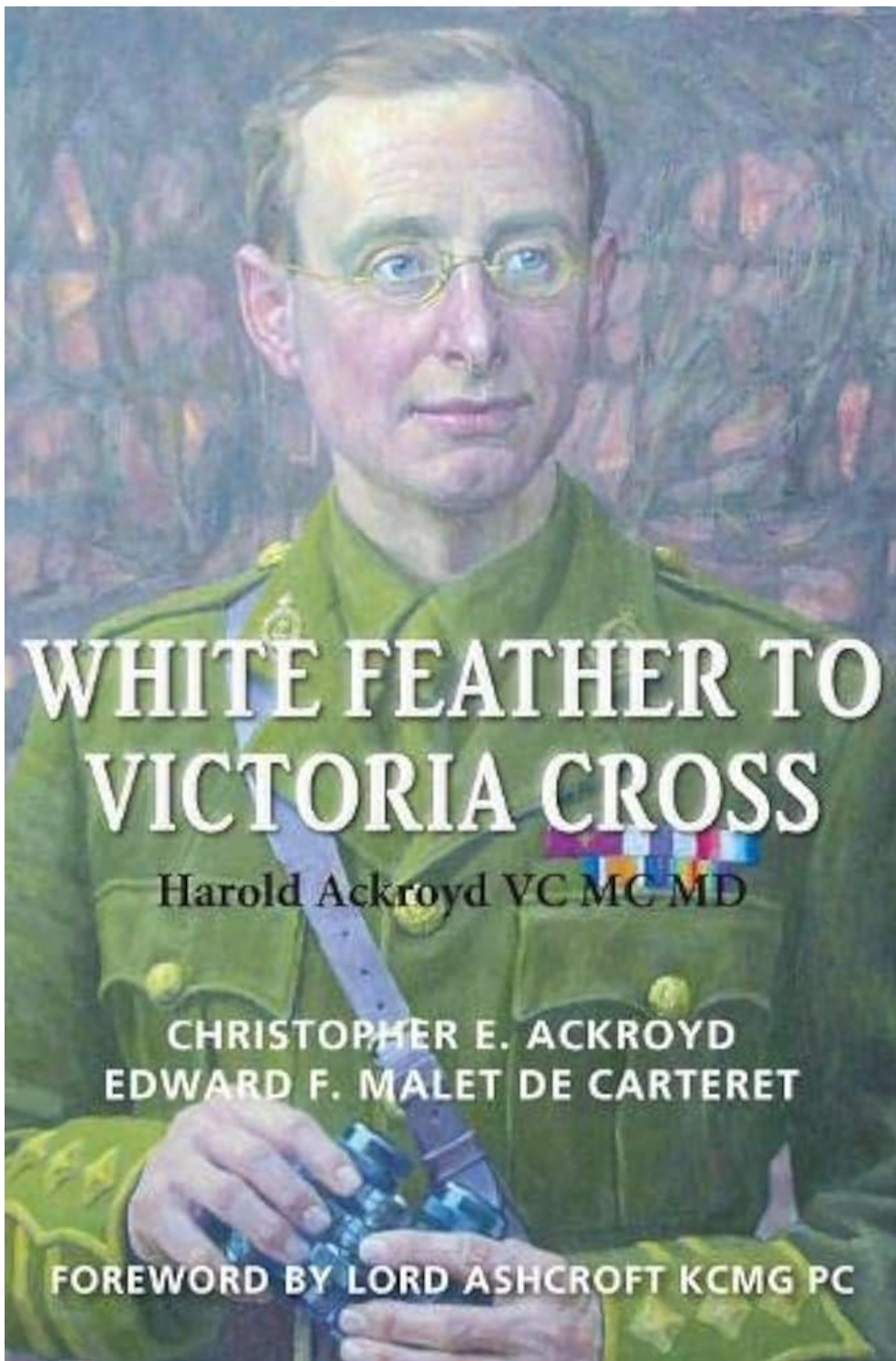
For over 24 hours, as the battalion's doctor, Captain Ackroyd faced great danger to tend the wounded and bring back injured soldiers from the battlefield. He worked unceasingly in the open under heavy fire and saved many lives. Days later, he was killed.

Lord Ainscough Collection



Medical VCs

35. Harold Ackroyd VC MC



If you wish to read more about the life of Harold Ackroyd VC MC then don't hesitate to get a copy of "White Feather to Victoria Cross" by Ned Malet de Carteret and Christopher Ackroyd. It is a fabulous read!

Medical VCs

36. John Fox-Russell VC



John Fox Russell (1893-1917), eldest of seven sons of Dr William and Mrs Ethel Maria Fox Russell (nee Thornbury), was born at Plas Tanalltran, Holyhead, Anglesey, on 27th January 1893. There was also a daughter and the children were brought up by a governess. His father was a GP. For a short time John attended the local National and County Schools, and after taking a chorister examination he attended Magdalen College School, Oxford (1904-1907).

When his voice broke, he left for St Bees' School, Cumberland (1908-09), where he sat the entrance examination to the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. He also served in the school's Officer Training Corps. However, instead of studying in Dublin, he began his medical studies at the London School of Medicine from October 1909. At the same time, he joined the London University Officer Training Corps.

John became associated with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers (TF) when he was commissioned on 5th December 1913. In August the following year, he attended a camp at Aberystwyth, during which his battalion was mobilised and he was put in command of H Company of the 6th Battalion.

Medical VCs

36. John Fox-Russell VC



Medical VCs

36. John Fox-Russell VC

Henry, one of his younger brothers, was a Lieutenant in the Company and also his deputy. John was soon promoted to Lieutenant and then Temporary Captain by January 1915.

Although he volunteered for overseas service, his battalion was not sent aboard and he requested that the War Office relieve him so he could continue his medical studies at Middlesex Hospital in early 1915, as his studies still had 18 months to run. In March 1916 he was awarded his diploma and transferred to the Royal Army Medical Corps on 22nd May 1916 with the rank of Captain. He was then attached to a battery of the Royal Field Artillery in France on 10th October 1916. Wishing to return to the Royal Welsh Fusiliers he arranged for a transfer to the 4th Royal Welsh Fusiliers, then in Egypt, and having arrived in December 1915, became their Medical Officer.

John married Alma Taylor at St Mark's Church, Tunbridge Wells on 23rd September 1916, and they set up home in Tunbridge Wells. Soon after the marriage, he had embarked for the Middle East. He saw service in Palestine and took part in the First Battle of Gaza. Captain Russell tended to the wounded under heavy fire and was later awarded the Military Cross (16th August 1917). The inconclusive Second Battle of Gaza took place on 17th April when the Division fought at Samsons Ridge, to the south-west of the town, although it was mostly a 54th (East Anglian) Division affair with the 53rd playing a secondary role.

Medical VCs

36. John Fox-Russell VC



Medical VCs

36. John Fox-Russell VC

On 6th November 1917, at Tel-el-Khuweilfeh, north-west of Beersheba, Captain Russell showed conspicuous bravery displayed in action until he was killed. Captain Russell repeatedly went out to attend the wounded under murderous fire from snipers and machine-guns, and in many cases, when no other means were at hand, carried them in himself, although almost exhausted. He showed the greatest possible degree of valour.

He was buried in Beersheba War Cemetery, Palestine, near to the graves of two other VCs, Alexander Lafone and Leslie Maygar. His wife was presented with the VC by King George V at Buckingham Palace on 2nd March 1918. His wife would remarry in 1919, and eventually emigrate to New Zealand with her third husband. In 1956, she returned to London for the VC Centenary Celebrations representing John. As well as the VC and MC, he was awarded the British War Medal 1914-20, Victory Medal 1914-19 with Mentioned in Despatches oakleaf, and Territorial Force War Medal 1914-19. They were donated to the Royal Army Medical Corps Museum (now Museum of Military Medicine) by his wife Alma, who died in 1990.



Medical VCs

36. John Fox-Russell VC



Medical VCs

36. John Fox-Russell VC



Medal Group courtesy of Thomas Stewart

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/john-fox-russell-vc-mc/>

Medical VCs

37. Bellenden Seymour Hutcheson VC MC



Bellenden Seymour Hutcheson (1883-1954) was born in the United States at Mount Carmel, Illinois on 16th December 1883. A graduate of the Northwestern University Medical School, Dr Hutcheson practised for several years in the American West. He renounced his citizenship in order to fight in the Canadian army during the First World War.

After he enlisted at Exhibition Camp, Toronto on 14th December 1915, Hutcheson became a captain in the Canadian Army Medical Corps, which was attached to the 75th (Mississauga) Battalion. In 1917 he was diagnosed with pleurisy and was hospitalized at Perkins Bull Convalescent Hospital in Putney Heath, England. He was later treated at Ravenscroft Military Hospital in Seaford, England.

On 2nd September 1918 Captain Hutcheson was treating wounded soldiers under intense shelling and small arms fire in the Drocourt-Quéant line near Cagnicourt in France. After ensuring that all of the wounded men had received care, he attended to a seriously wounded officer and evacuated him to safety. Shortly after, he spotted a wounded sergeant in front of the Canadian lines and rushed forward in full view of the enemy to tend to his injuries. He was gazetted for the VC on 13th December 1918.

Medical VCs

37. Bellenden Seymour Hutcheson VC MC

Nine days previously, he had been gazetted for the Military Cross for “for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. Before the battalion reached its jumping off position the enemy put down a heavy barrage and many casualties were sustained. This officer worked unceasingly in attending to and dressing the wounded under heavy fire in open ground. During the mopping up of a village he passed through the streets several times attending to the wounded. He also voluntarily dressed nearly 100 enemy wounded who had been left behind.”

Following being demobbed in 1919, he returned to the US and resumed his medical practice in Illinois. He died on 9th April 1954 in Cairo, Illinois and was buried in Rose Hill Cemetery, Mount Carmel. His medals are not publicly held.



Courtesy of
Bill Mullen

Medical VCs

37. Bellenden Seymour Hutcheson VC MC



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<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/bellenden-seymour-hutcheson-vc-mc/>

Queripel VC Memorial



On Friday 8th November 2024, a service was held at the Dorchester War Memorial to unveil the addition of the name of Lionel Queripel VC.

Lionel was born just outside Dorchester in the village of Winterbourne Monkton, and served in both the Royal Sussex Regiment and later the 10th Parachute Battalion.



Lionel was a posthumous recipient of the Victoria Cross awarded for his actions on 19th September 1944 during the Battle of Arnhem. Having already been wounded in carrying in a wounded sergeant under heavy fire, and capturing a machine gun position single-handed, he was later killed when covering his men's withdrawal from a German assault on their position.

Lionel is buried in Arnhem-Oosterbeek CWGC Cemetery. His medals are held by the Airborne Forces Museum at Duxford.

Pictures – www.memorialstovalour.co.uk

Room VC Blue Plaque



Room VC Blue Plaque

In November 2024, a blue plaque was unveiled on behalf of the Bristol Civic Society in Bristol on the side of the building where Frederick George Room VC lived between 1914-1919.

On 16th August 1917 at Frezenberg, Belgium, when the company which was holding a line of shell-holes and short trenches had many casualties, Lance-Corporal Room was in charge of the stretcher-bearers. He worked continuously under intense fire, dressing the wounded and helping to evacuate them. Throughout this period, with complete disregard for his own life, he showed unremitting devotion to his duties.

He was granted ten days' leave in October and appointed unpaid acting Corporal on 30th October. On 4th November he was granted one month's special leave, during which he was presented with his VC by King George V at Durdham Down, Bristol on 8th November. Following the investiture he was given a civic reception even though he wanted to avoid the fuss. He repeatedly refused to do any interviews.

Frederick began to suffer from heart palpitations and in October 1918 suffered shock from an aeroplane bomb that caused a recurrence of the heart issues. He also contracted influenza on 24th October.

On 14th January 1919, Frederick was assessed as 20% disabled, which was likely to persist for 12 months, and was transferred to a military hospital in Bath. He was one of five Bristol VCs presented with inscribed gold watches and illuminated addresses at Colston Hall on 15th February. He was discharged to the Class Z Reserve on 5th March 1919. He was employed by Thrissell Engineering Co, Bristol. He married Ellen Elizabeth Sargent on 2nd August 1919 at St Michael's Church, Tiverton, Bath. They had no children.

Frederick had to give up work in the early 1930s due to failing health. His lungs were badly affected by his war experiences and he was hospitalised with acute pneumonia. Ellen refused all offers of help and took a job while nursing him at their home. He continued to deteriorate and was admitted to Ham Green Sanatorium in Bristol at the end of 1931, and he died there on 19th January 1932. He was buried in Greenbank Cemetery.