

# Victoria Cross Online



Issue 27 December 2024

# EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Welcome to the 27th edition of Victoria Cross Online Magazine.

The feature article is courtesy of regular contributor Richard Pursehouse and has a festive angle to it. It features William Congreve VC who witnessed the Christmas Truce of 1914.

Sadly, this month will see the end of the long running Medical VCs with recipients number 37 and 38 with the stories of Harry Andrews VC and Henry Eric Harden VC, the only Medical VC of the Second World War.

There is also the story of the auction of the medals of Daniel Keighran VC which happened in Sydney, New South Wales in late November. As of going to press, the medals did not meet the valuation set by the reserve.

There is an excellent piece by Brian Drummond on the story of the reproduced William Connelly VC medal. I am greatly looking forward to the publication of Brian's first book on Royal Artillery VCs hopefully being published soon..



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# Christmas Truce 1914



Sir Walter Congreve VC



# Christmas Truce 1914

By Richard Pursehouse and Ben Cunliffe

For nearly 110 years there have been various stories of unofficial truces between the British and German soldiers on Christmas Day 1914, and similar, although less frequent, stories the following Christmas and beyond.

What did those who witnessed the spontaneous events think? There are too many letters home from ordinary soldiers and officers to dismiss the claims, many of which were published in local and national newspapers.

Bizarrely, today we would think that these stories should have been censored or suppressed, but at the time the national newspapers such as the Daily Mirror, The Times and the Daily Mail were 'informally advised' that their support for the British war effort was their patriotic duty; when the press barons such as Beaverbrook and Northcliffe complained that the provincial newspapers were not subject to the same 'advice' they were told bluntly that the government had more pressing issues to deal with than monitoring hundreds of smaller newspapers.

Friday, January 8, 1915  
**The Daily Mirror**  
CERTIFIED CIRCULATION LARGER THAN ANY OTHER DAILY NEWSPAPER IN THE WORLD

**WHY DELAY?** THE DAILY MIRROR OVERSEAS WEEKLY EDITION contains all the Latest and Best War Pictures and News, and is therefore the Best Weekly Newspaper for your friends abroad. You can obtain it from your Newsagent for 3d. per copy. Subscription rates (prepaid), post free, to Canada for six months 10.-; elsewhere abroad 15.-. Address—Manager, "Overseas Daily Mirror," 23-25, Beavaria Street, London, E.C.

**AN HISTORIC GROUP: BRITISH AND GERMAN SOLDIERS PHOTOGRAPHED TOGETHER.**



Foes became friends on Christmas Day, when the British and Germans arranged an unofficial truce. The men left the trenches to exchange cigars and cigarettes, and

were even photographed together. This is the historic picture, and shows the soldiers of the opposing Armies standing side by side.

# Christmas Truce 1914

The provincial newspaper editors were more realistic and pragmatic – negativity and lack of support for ‘our boys’ would affect circulation.

For some who woke early on Christmas Day 1914 and peered over the sandbags or through their prismatic trench periscopes, and stared out over the whited-out ‘lost horizons’ as the dawn approached, many could not initially understand what was missing – the sound of artillery and gunfire – and they felt, as one officer described it, “Strangers in a strange land.”

Within the context of the initial fighting at the start of the Great War, the story of the Christmas 1914 truces seems somewhat bizarre - some generals when advised of events reacted instinctively, ordering an increase in patrols, trench raids or artillery ‘hates’. Some generals understood that a ‘break’ in the fighting for one day or so was not overly worrying and simply ignored the reports.

Major-General Walter Norris Congreve VC, from Stowe-by-Chartley near Stafford, knew he could not stop the fraternisation, and even wrote home to his wife Lady Celia Congreve about one such event in his part of the front line. Lady Congreve was a fundraiser, organiser of ‘comfort funds’ and sandbag sewing meetings, who was eventually awarded the French Croix de Guerre when as a V.A.D. nurse she helped to evacuate wounded from a hospital in Nancy that had been bombed.

Her husband’s letter refers to the event, although he was too sensible to put himself in a position to be captured by the Germans, and remained at his headquarters. His letter still survives today in the Staffordshire Records Office, an incredible microcosm of what happened:



# Christmas Truce 1914



Lady Celia Congreve

# Christmas Truce 1914

## *Xmas Day 1914*

*Darling dear – as I cannot be with you all, the next best thing is to write to you for so I get closer.*

*We have had a “seasonable weather” day – which means sharp frost & fog & never a smitch of sun. I went to church with 2 of my battalions in an enormous factory room & after lunch took down to the N. Staffords in my old trenches at Rue du Bois, Mother’s gifts of toffee, sweets, cigarettes, pencils, handkerchiefs & writing paper.*

*There I found an extraordinary state of affairs – this a.m. a German shouted out that they wanted a day’s truce & would one come out if he did; so very cautiously one of our men lifted himself above the parapet & saw a German doing the same. Both got out, then more, & finally all day long in that particular place they have been walking about together all day giving each other cigars & singing songs. Officers as well as men were out & the German Colonel himself was talking to one of our Captains.*

*My informant, one of the men, said he had had a fine day of it & had “smoked a cigar with the best shot in the German army, then not more than 18. They say he’s killed more of our men than any other 12 together but I know now where he shoots from & I hope we down him tomorrow”.*

*I hope devoutly they will – next door the 2 battalions opposite each other were shooting away all day & so I hear it was further north, 1st R.B. (Rifle Brigade, his son Billy La Touche Congreve DSO MC was an officer in the Rifle Brigade and would be awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross in 1916.*

# Christmas Truce 1914

The Congreves were one of only two father/ son Victoria Cross pairs) playing football with the Germans opposite them - next Regiments shooting each other.

*I was invited to go & see the Germans myself but refrained as I thought they might not be able to resist a General.*



William "Billy" La Touche Congreve  
VC DSO MC



# Christmas Truce 1914

Staffordshire newspapers shortly after Christmas 1914 ran stories both general and specific. The Staffordshire Sentinel reported under the headline 'CHRISTMAS IN THE TRENCHES':

*"Our boys of the South Staffords and North Staffords spent their first Christmas in the trenches of the western front in conditions far removed from "peace on earth and goodwill towards men."*

*"The Christmas of 1914 was marked by attempts, and in some cases successful ones, at fraternisation between the hostile forces.*

*"These were not looked upon with favour by the powers that be, and were sternly forbidden a year later, and in succeeding years as that season came round. In one case in 1914 a demonstration of fraternisation was discovered to be a German trap, which, fortunately, was discovered in time.*

*"An attempt was made to tamper with two battalions during an informal suspension of arms to bury the dead of both armies. Both parties sang carols, and at several points "Auld Lang Syne" was sung. The Huns, however, spoiled the tone of the proceedings by exultingly declaring that they would win the war and take their next Christmas dinner in London and Paris."*

# Christmas Truce 1914

Christmas Day - ~~1914~~  
1914

Darling dear - as I cannot be with you all, the next best thing is to write to you for so I get closer - We have had a "Seasonable weather" day - which means sharp frost & fog & never a smuch of sun - I went to church with 2 of my batallions in an enormous factory room & after lunch took down to the N. Staffords in my old trenches at Rue du Nord. Mothers gifts of toffee, sweets, cigarettes, pencils, handkerchiefs & writing paper - There I found an extraordinary state of affairs - this a.m. a German shouted out that they wanted a days truce & would come out if he did; so very cautiously one of our men lifted himself about the parapet & saw a German doing the same - With that out there more & finally all day long in that particular place they have been walking about together all day from each other's eyes & singing songs - Officers as well as men were out & the German Colonel himself was talking to one of our captains - My informant, one of the men, said he had had a fine day



# Christmas Truce 1914

of it had "sunked a Agas with the best  
shot in the German army & there not more  
than 18 - they say he's killed more of  
our men than any other 12 together. but  
I know now that he shot from 1000 yds  
down here tomorrow". I hope devoutly  
they will - next door to 2 battalions  
opposite each other were shooting away all  
day so I hear it was further north  
1st R.I. playing football with the Germans  
opposite them - next day's shooting each  
other - I was invited to go see the  
Germans myself, but refrained as I  
thought they might not be able to resist  
a General. Frank Lyon came over then  
p.m. & brought me a note from Phil  
& the enclosed letter from Henry Wilson to  
them you can write your thanks. Tom  
Holland, looking very tall & jaunty, came  
to lunch with me yesterday - He also  
is at General Staff - He was just like his  
pleasant self 40

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# Christmas Truce 1914

The Staffordshire Advertiser dated 27 February 1915 ran a story under the headline 'PLAYED THE GERMANS AT FOOTBALL', which mentions his battalion's location at La Basse canal near Loos, and even states the final result of the game, although there was no penalty shootout in extra time:

*"Drummer Arthur E. Salt, 1st North Staffordshire Regiment, has arrived at his home, Railway Cottages, Great Bridgeford, near Stafford, after being absent with his regiment since September. Interviewed by an Advertiser representative, he said he was suffering from frostbite and gastritis, the latter illness having been brought on by drinking impure water. Salt said his regiment joined the main army at Coulommiers and formed part of the contingent which turned the Germans' march to Paris into the route back across the River Marne. He was present throughout the Aisne operations, and was with the 6th Division when they marched towards the River Yser to check the enemy's attempt to reach Calais.*

*"He said – 'I can tell you we have had a lot of losses since we took over that position at La Basse canal. Of course, there have been bayonet charges, and I am pleased to say we have come out on top. We were in the trenches from Dec. 8 to the 31st, being unable to be relieved. So we had Christmas Day there. There were so many dead Germans in front of our trenches and also in them that we gave the Germans a twenty-four hours' armistice on Christmas Day to bury their dead. Of course, during the day we paid compliments, and had a sing-song. They said they would sooner be in London or anywhere except where they were. Well, we had a football contest, and England won 2-1. We parted on best of terms, and at night started on our usual game, as butchers, of killing one another.'*



# Christmas Truce 1914

*“Drummer Salt went on to speak of the great suffering that was gallantly borne by the ‘Tommies’ in the trenches. Sometimes they had been up to the waist in mud and water, ‘but it goes down with a nice sing-song every day and night, and a few ‘Jack Johnsons’ to remind you of home,’ added Salt smilingly. He has had some hairbreadth escapes, having been twice buried by shells. His only wound, however, was a slight cut, which was caused by piece of shrapnel.*

During the first day of the Battle of Loos on the 25 September 1915, Captain Arthur Forbes Gordon Kilby was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for leading an attack by the 2nd Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment along the towpath at La Bassee near Cuinchy. In May 1915 Sir Walter Congreve VC took over command of the 6th Division.

The same newspaper dated 31 December, 1914, printed a story from a different part of the front under the headline ‘CHRISTMAS IN THE TRENCHES, DAY OF INFORMAL TRUCE AND FRIENDLINESS. GERMANS AND BRITISH SHARE LUXURIES’, about an Aston Villa player who had joined up:

*“Gunner Herbert Smart, an Aston Villa football player now in France with the 5th Battery Royal Field Artillery, writes home concerning the interchange of courtesies between British and Germans on Christmas Day.*

*“The Germans had a Christmas Tree in the trenches and Chinese lanterns along the top of a parapet. ‘Come over’ said one German soldier; ‘I want to speak to you’” We didn’t know how to take it at first, but one of the nuts went over, and as no harm befell him others followed. But our commanding officer would not let more than three at a time go. I went out myself on Christmas Day and exchanged some cigarettes for cigars. The German I met had been a waiter in London, and could use our language a little. He says they do not want to fight.”*

# Christmas Truce 1914

The way in which Christmas was spent at the front in France and Belgium was discussed in other letters sent home by soldiers;

*“A rifleman of The Queen’s Westminsters says it was very funny on Christmas Eve. The Germans lit fires in the trenches and sang carols nearly all night. Of course, we did the same. We shouted over, ‘Won’t you come half-way and meet and shake hands?’ they said ‘Yes.’*”

*“We downed all arms and I went over with \_\_\_\_\_ (name deleted by censor), and met four of them (they weren't taking any risks), and had a chat, exchanged cigarettes for toffee and sweets, etc. One them told me he was an officer, and had lived at Catford, we got quite pally. Christmas Day we were all out in the daylight, some of the chaps started kicking a football about, chatting and speaking to each other half-way between the two lines of trenches, but no one was allowed to go further on either side. I smoked German cigars all day and ate German chocolate all night on guard, so I didn’t do so badly.”*





# Christmas Truce 1914

Another soldier wrote home from Ploegsteert (near Messines where today there is a football memorial) about the football game played:

GERMANS CHALLENGED TO A FOOTBALL MATCH.

*“Christmas Day in the trenches was a sort of ragtime war affair, and I think about the funniest thing I have ever seen. If you imagined by any chance we should have a rotten Christmas, I can assure you that you were very much mistaken.*

*“Up till about four o’clock on Christmas Eve our guns were shelling the German trenches, but then stopped, and little rifle fire was kept up till about five, when it became dark.*

*“We then started singing carols and songs, the Germans began doing the same. After a bit we put candles and lights on top of the trenches to cheer things up bit, and carried a sort of ‘matey’ conversation with the enemy!*

*“As things seemed to be going very well, we thought we might as well get out top, so four of us got on top of the parapet and struck matches, which was received by a cheer from the other side, they all got out and had a concert and danced in the open.*

# Christmas Truce 1914

*“After this a few of us thought it would be just as well to shake hands and exchange cigarettes, etc., with them; we called them, and met a few half-way between the trenches, and they were jolly good sports, too. One fellow found a top hat and frock coat, and he was dancing about in it.*

*“On Christmas Day we had a football out in front of the trenches, and asked the Germans to send a team to play us; but either they considered the ground too hard, as it had been freezing all night, and was a ploughed field, or else their officers put the bar up.*

*“Anyhow, we had a chat with each other in the afternoon, and one of them produced a camera, and had a group photograph taken, about 12 Q.W. (Queen’s Westminsters) and 12 Germans. I expect you think this is a bit of yarn. In fact, the Regulars, who were in reserve here, would not believe it, and some of them came up to see for themselves.”*

An unnamed officer in the South Staffordshire Regiment, writing home to his wife in Penn, near Wolverhampton, described a similar scene in a different part of the battlefield. He stated that on Boxing Day he and a fellow officer walked down to the trenches the regiment were about to occupy, and adds:

# Christmas Truce 1914

*“The \_\_\_\_\_ [regiment blanked out], who were occupying them, said it was very funny yesterday (Christmas Day). The Germans showed themselves over the top of their trenches, which are only fifty yards off, and held their hands up, and then got up on top of the trench and sent men out halfway towards our lines.*

*“After this a few of us thought it would be just as well to shake hands and exchange cigarettes, etc., with them; we called them, and met a few half-way between the trenches; they put down cigars on the ground and they were jolly good sports, too. One fellow found a top hat and frock coat, and he was dancing about in it.*

*“On Christmas Day we had a football out in front of the trenches, and asked the Germans to send a team to play us; but either they considered the ground too hard, as it had been freezing all night, and was a ploughed field, or else their officers put the bar up.*

*“One of our side went out, and they shook his hand and said, ‘Let us have a day off as it is Christmas, and we won’t do any shooting,’ and told our people they could go out and bury their dead and they wouldn’t shoot.”*

Depending on the positions of the trenches some of the truces continued for several days and even weeks. The final vestiges of the ‘live and let live’ ethos was eventually expunged, usually with a change of regiment in the front trenches – although there are several instances of warning messages scribbled onto boards advising that the changeover was about to happen, to keep their heads down, and nearly always a ‘best of luck Fritz’ or ‘see you in Leicester Square, Tommy.’



# Christmas Truce 1914

Many generals on both sides in the main thought it was madness to fraternise on Christmas Day and beyond. The men – and officers – who shared cigars, cigarettes, chocolate, bread, schnapps or strong navy rum also exchanged addresses and regimental buttons from their coats and tunics. They sang ‘Silent Night’ across No-Man’s-Land to each other, to the same tune but in their own languages. They reflected on where the true madness lay – behind the lines in the generals’ chateaux. The fact that Major-General Sir Walter Congreve VC wrote to his wife about the experience and that the letter survives to this day is incredible; his letter provides a fascinating insight into an existential existence, a time 110 years ago, when football briefly united those on opposing sides.



# Christmas Truce 1914



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"WEIHNACHTSZEIT," THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE—HOW BRITISH AND GERMANS FRATERNISED

Drawn from material supplied by Christopher Clark



# Keighran VC Sale?

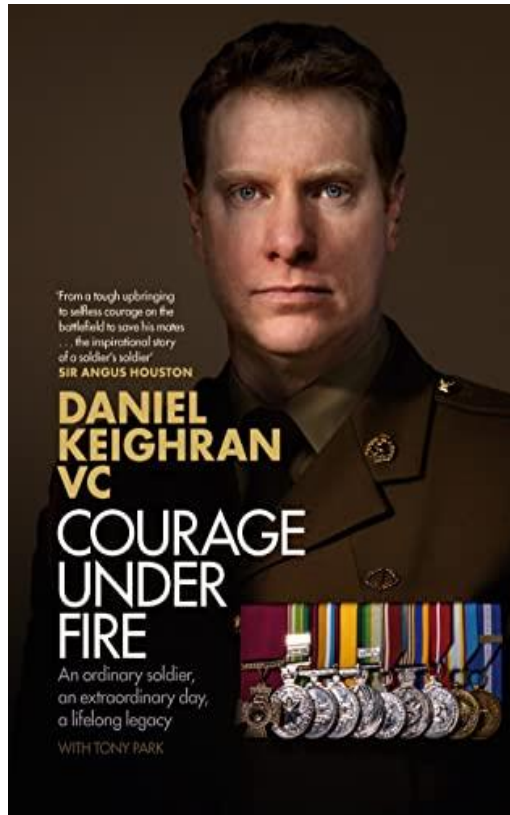


On Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2024 at the Noble Numismatics Auction House in Sydney, Australia, the Victoria Cross for Australia and other medals awarded to Daniel Alan Keighran VC were auctioned. Daniel made the difficult decision to sell his 12 medal group due to the need to support his family financially in the future.



The medals sadly didn't meet the reserve price at the auction.

Read more of Daniel's incredible story at <https://victoriacr.ossionline.co.uk/daniel-alan-keighran-vc/>





# Medical VCs

## 37. Henry Andrews VC



Henry John Andrews (1873-1919) was born in London on 23rd March 1871. His father was the foreman in a cardboard box factory and his mother died shortly after his birth. Both his parents were members of the Salvation Army and his mother's dying wish was that baby Henry (who became known as Harry) should be cared for by Bramwell Booth, the first chief-of-staff and the second general (or head) of the Salvation Army. This wish was granted and Bramwell's sister, Emma, helped care for the young Harry.

Andrews' early care and education came at The Salvation Army Nursery at Clapton, London, when Emma Booth was the principal of the Officers' Training Home.

As a youth of 15, Harry accompanied the woman he called "mother" when having got married, Booth went with her new husband, Commissioner Booth-Tucker, to India. Andrews was destined to become The Salvation Army's first "medical man" in India, eventually serving there for almost 30 years.

His work began within months of arrival in Bombay, even though just a teenager and completely unqualified for any kind of medical work.

# Medical VCs

## 37. Henry Andrews VC

A chance meeting with an Indian boy with acute toothache led him to reading a dental manual and then using sterilised forceps to remove a decaying tooth. The grateful Indian youngster christened his young healer as “the little doctor” and, after returning to his village, word soon spread that Andrews was willing to treat those suffering from ailments at his “office”. As his workload rapidly grew, his nickname soon changed to that of “Dr Sikundar” in honour of a Sikh of that name who had, in turn, been known as “The Brave One”.

Aged just 17, he unsurprisingly became an officer in the Salvation Army and, as his amateur medical work increased, he eventually received formal training as a pharmacist. Additionally, he was appointed to assist Major William Stevens at The Salvation Army’s Indian HQ at Nagercoil and during the 1893 cholera outbreak in Travancore, India, Andrews worked tirelessly to help the sick and dying. On his return to the UK in 1896, he received more training as a dresser of injuries and wounds. However, he was keen to return to India and was soon back in his adopted homeland to assist in the establishment of the Catherine Booth Hospital in Nagercoil.

Four years later, he transferred to Anand in Gujarat, where he helped establish the Emery Hospital. In October 1899, he married Gena Smith, who had shared his childhood home in the Clapton nursery established by his “mother”. Later he underwent more medical training in the USA, graduating from the University of Chicago in 1910, before returning to India in 1912, based at Moradabad.

# Medical VCs

## 37. Henry Andrews VC

After the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, The Salvation Army placed the hospital at Moradabad under the jurisdiction of the government together with Dr Andrews and his staff. Once the war began, Andrews, now a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Salvation Army, volunteered for active service but was turned down because of his superlative work as a hospital commandant. However, in June 1917, he was finally commissioned as a Lieutenant in the Indian Medical Service and a year later promoted to Acting Captain.

In June 1918, he was awarded the MBE and soon afterwards was permitted to give up his hospital post in order to head to the North-West Frontier, where problems continued. On 21st October 1919, Andrews, by now 46, was serving at Khajuri Post, Waziristan, India (now Pakistan).

On that day, he heard that a convoy had been attacked in the vicinity of the post, and that men had been wounded. He at once took out an Aid Post to the scene of action and, approaching under heavy fire, established an Aid Post under conditions which afforded some protection to the wounded but not to himself. Subsequently he was compelled to move his Aid Post to another position, and continued most devotedly to attend to the wounded.

Finally, when a Ford van was available to remove the wounded, he showed the utmost disregard of danger in collecting the wounded under fire and in placing them in the van, and was eventually killed whilst himself stepping into the van on the completion of his task.



# Medical VCs

## 37. Henry Andrews VC

Andrews was buried in Bannu Cemetery, India (now Pakistan), and his posthumous VC was presented by King George V at Buckingham Palace to his widow on 2nd November 1920. In 2010, his VC was acquired by the Michael Ashcroft Trust, and is now displayed in the Ashcroft Gallery, Imperial War Museum. His other medals are not with his VC.



Medal group image from  
Imperial War Museum courtesy  
of Thomas Stewart

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/henry-john-andrews-vc/>

# Medical VCs

## 38. Henry Eric Harden VC



Henry Eric Harden (1912-1945), known as Eric, was born on 23rd February 1912 at Northfleet, Kent, the seventh son of a family of eight. He proved himself to be a sportsman, excelling at tennis, football and swimming. He also played the violin. Right from the age of 10, he helped out in his brother-in-law's butchers shop, taking over the shop when his brother-in-law died just as Eric was old enough to leave school. In his spare time he also developed an interest in medical matters and joined the St John's Ambulance Brigade. In 1936, he married Maud Pullen and they had a son and a daughter.

Not a natural soldier, Eric was 30 before he was conscripted into the Royal Artillery in 1942. However, his medical training and experience was noted, and he was soon transferred to the Royal Army Medical Corps, serving with a Field Ambulance section. Unhappy with his routine and inactivity of service in Britain, he volunteered for attachment to the Commandos, and was appointed a medical orderly with A Troop of 45 Royal Marine Commando.

In June 1944 45 Royal Marine Commando took part in the Normandy landings and found itself fighting its way through the Norman bocage in the Merville area, where Harden was kept busy tending the wounds of his injured colleagues.



# Medical VCs

## 38. Henry Eric Harden VC



Eventually 45 Commando was recalled to England for replacements and refitting in anticipation of a posting to the Far East. However, in January 1945 the unit instead was ordered to return to northwest Europe and Lance Corporal Harden soon found himself near the village of Brachterbeek in the Netherlands.



# Medical VCs

## 38. Henry Eric Harden VC

On 23rd January 1945 during Operation Blackcock, at Brachterbeek, Holland, three marines of the leading section of the Royal Marine Commando Troop to which Lance-Corporal Harden was attached fell, wounded. The Commando section had come under heavy machine-gun fire in the open field that morning, and the men were seriously wounded. One of the casualties was Lieutenant Corey. Under intense mortar and machine-gun fire Harden was wounded in his side as he carried one man back to the aid post, which had been set up in one of the houses along the Stationsweg in Brachterbeek. Against the orders of another Medical officer he then returned with a stretcher party for the other two wounded. Bringing in the second casualty the rescue party came under enemy fire which killed the wounded Commando. While finally bringing back the third man Lieutenant Corey, who had demanded he be recovered last, Harden was shot through the head and killed instantly.



# Medical VCs

## 38. Henry Eric Harden VC



# Medical VCs

## 38. Henry Eric Harden VC

Harden was buried in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery in Nederweet, Limburg, Netherlands. There are two stone plaques, one in English and one in Dutch, in the village of Brachterbeek to commemorate his action. An earlier bronze plaque placed in 1947 was stolen in 1965. The Victoria Cross, awarded posthumously, was presented to his widow, Maud, by King George VI on 9th April 1946 and is now on display at the Museum of Military Medicine, Mytchett, Surrey.

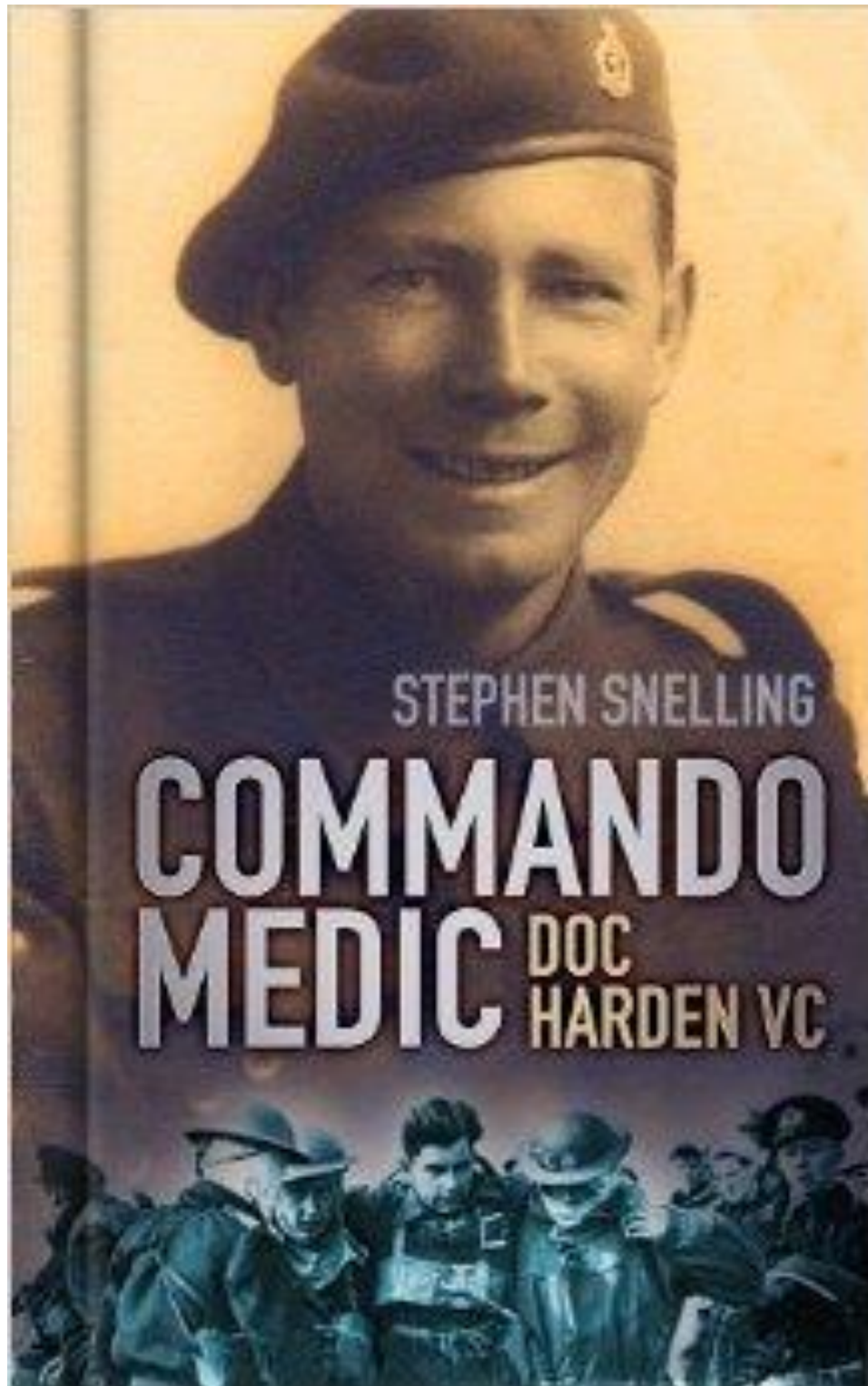


Medal group courtesy of Thomas Stewart



# Medical VCs

## 38. Henry Eric Harden VC



<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/henry-eric-harden-vc/>

# Connolly VC Mystery

Courtesy of Brian Drummond

## Up-date on the Gunner William Connolly REPRODUCED Victoria Cross

It is believed that William Connolly VC lost his Victoria Cross and four campaign medals sometimes during his later lifetime whether it was whilst still serving in India, or on his return journey to the UK or later once he had returned to Liverpool. Were they lost during his travels or in a house move, a house fire or stolen and unreported? We will probably never know what happened to them. William does not seem to have applied for a replacement from the War Office, however what we do know is that William replaced his Cross with a reproduced Victoria Cross later in his life. His campaign medals do not seem to have ever been sold at auction and like his VC remain a mystery.

### The story of his reproduced Cross

This Cross has not been seen for over a hundred years and there are only two published records of it, both of which relate to Sotheby's auction catalogues.

### The first auction

William Connolly VC sold his Victoria Cross on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 1886 which appeared in two-day auction at Sotheby's 'From the Stevens' collection under Lot 218. The original auctioneer's rostrum book survives at the British Library (Ref HLL 381-45002) and is described in the catalogue as, '*Victoria Crosses – For Valour, Riband (Army) – Red, Awarded to Gunner William Conolly, Bengal Horse Artillery*' It cites the original citation and clearly states that no other medal or medals belonging to William was included in the lot or is any mentioned elsewhere in the catalogue. The William Connolly's Cross was bought by Charles Winter, the newly appointed head of the Medals Department at Spink, a position which he held for the next forty-seven years, for the sum of £10.

# Connolly VC Mystery

Bengal Horse Artillery

Gunner William Connolly  
Date of Act of Bravery,  
7th July, 1857

This Soldier is recommended for the Victoria Cross for his gallantry in Action with the Enemy, at Jhelum, on the 7th of July, 1857. Lieutenant Cookes, Bengal Horse Artillery, reports, that "about daybreak on that day, I advanced my half Troop at a gallop, and engaged the Enemy within easy musket range. The Sponge-man of one of my Guns having been shot during the advance, Gunner Connolly assumed the duties of 2nd Sponge-man, and he had barely assisted in two discharges of his Gun, when a musket-ball, through the left thigh, felled him to the ground; nothing daunted by pain and loss of blood, he was endeavouring to resume his post, when I ordered a movement in retirement, and though severely wounded, he was mounted on his horse in the Gun-team, and rode to the next position which the Guns took up, and manfully declined going to the rear when the necessity of his so doing was represented to him.

"About eleven o'clock, a.m., when the Guns were still in Action, the same Gunner, whilst sponging, was again knocked down by a musket-ball striking him on the hip, thereby causing great faintness and partial unconsciousness, for the pain appeared excessive, and the blood flowed fast. On seeing this, I gave directions for his removal out of Action; but this brave man hearing me, staggered to his feet, and said, 'No, Sir, I'll not go there, whilst I can work here,' and shortly afterwards he again resumed his post as Sponge-man.

"Late in the afternoon of the same day, my three Guns were engaged at one hundred yards from the Walls of a Village with the defenders, viz., the 14th Native Infantry—Mutineers—amidst a storm of bullets which did great execution. Gunner Connolly, though suffering severely from his two previous wounds, was wielding his sponge with an energy and courage which attracted the admiration of his comrades, and while cheerfully encouraging a wounded man to hasten in bringing up the ammunition, a musket-

Bengal Horse Artillery

Gunner William Connolly—  
(continued)

"ball tore through the muscles of his right leg; but with the most undaunted bravery he struggled on; and not till he had loaded six times, did this man give way, when, through loss of blood, he fell in my arms, and I placed him on a waggon, which shortly afterwards bore him in a state of unconsciousness from the fight."



# Connolly VC Mystery

## The second auction

On the 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> November 1894 again at a Sotheby's auction William Connolly's Cross was put up for auction under Lot 87 (1-124 lots in total) under '*the Collections of Greek, Roman, English and Foreign Coins and Medals, the property of the late M Hodgkinson Bobart Esq*' It was described as the same item that was sold in the 1886 and which had been purchased by Charles Winter from Spink. On the 13<sup>th</sup> November 1894 the William Connolly Victoria Cross was recorded as being unsold under Lot 87 which was described as, '*The Victoria Cross, bronze, awarded to Gunner William Conolly, Bengal Horse Artillery...From the Stevens; collection (lot 218)*', it was endorsed 'passed' (not sold) by the auctioneer. There were no estimates in the catalogue, and it can be assumed that Bobart had purchased it from Spink between 1886 and his death in 1894, so it could have had a reserve price placed upon it.

It was retained by Adolphus Grimwood-Taylor, the joint executor of Mr Bobart's will and joint guardian (being his best friend) of Bobart's only child, Dorothy Margaret Bobart, her mother having died before her father. Dorothy was brought up by the Grimwood-Taylor family in Derby in the 1890's becoming known as 'Aunt Dorrie'. It remained with the family until 1984. The family descendants eventually made the connections to Bobart but by then Aunt Dorrie had passed away in 1980.

In 1998 Adolphus Grimwood-Taylor's great-grandson James Grimwood-Taylor, the Chairman at the time, of Cavendish Philatelic Auctions Limited, took William Connolly's Victoria Cross to Hancock's who declared it a reproduction and not the original however it was unlike any other copy, reproduction, or forgery of any Victoria Cross in existence. The medal and ribbon were well over eighty years old and no pre-1939 forgeries of Victoria Crosses were known. Experts at the National Army Museum and John Hayward of Spink later agreed that it is an old, probably Victorian copy supplied when William lost his original and this was the Cross that was sold at the first auction in 1886.

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It is believed by the Grimwood-Taylor family that Adolphus, an avid collector of curios, kept the Cross when it was unsold in 1894 as a souvenir to his friend Bobart. He may have insisted on a high reserve in the 1894 auction and kept it when no other buyers came forward. It must be remembered that at the time of auction, Victoria Crosses were not too collectable!

## November 2024

On the 21<sup>st</sup> November 2024 James Grimwood-Taylor sold his great grandfathers reproduced VC at a Dominic Winter Auction at South Cerney, Cirencester in Gloucestershire under Lot 155 for £3,400 to a private collector. It was described as, *'Victoria Cross. An intriguing copy of the Indian Mutiny VC to sponge-man Gunner William Connolly of the Bengal Horse Artillery who, although severely wounded by several musket balls, causing him great "faintness and partial unconsciousness'*



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## His campaign medals

If his campaign medals had survived and been found, they may have later been sold as a group or separately and are currently in someone's private or museum collection (these will be named along the rim with the details of his unit or in the case of his Gwalior Star on the reverse side). If by chance there are any avid medals collectors out there and in possession of any of William Connolly's campaign medals then please let us know so that we can update our records for future reference.

