

# Victoria Cross Online



Issue 31 April 2025

# EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Welcome to the 31st edition of Victoria Cross Online Magazine.

The feature article this month is kindly supplied by Ian Judson, who tells us more about the story of Jack Harrison VC MC, the former rugby league star who was awarded two gallantry awards in WWI. Thanks go to Ian for taking the time to contribute to my magazine for a second time.

There is also the last in my series of articles on the Royal Marines VCs, telling the story of Thomas Peck Hunter VC, a relative of the current Scottish First Minister John Swinney MSP.

There is also the first in my new series of articles about a subject close to my heart – the nine Worcestershire Regiment VCs – beginning with Eugene Paul Bennett VC MC.

There is also two new books on the VC featured including my own new release Arnhem VCs, and also the latest book by Kevin Brazier on the Scottish VCs, details of how to obtain copies are on the relevant pages of the magazine. .



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# Jack Harrison VC MC Charitable Trust

By Ian Judson

Some of you may be aware, but probably some of you are not aware that I started a charity named after Jack Harrison VC MC, its registered charity number with the Charities Commission is 1191212.

The aim of our charity is to educate the world, and particularly local people in Kingston Upon Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire about prominent people from our local history through different resources, such as a statue of the man himself in his hometown, and recently we have been given a bit of a leg up towards that aim.

If you look on Facebook, you will find a page dedicated to the Fort Paull Battery Heritage Site, run by The Two Nick's, one of which is an ex Royal Marines Commando, who rescued it last year after it had been closed for several years.

Thanks to their help, the Jack Harrison VC MC Charitable Trust now has its own room there, in which is displayed a massive collection of WW1 artifacts, several genuine items that were used in the trenches in 1914-1918, along with certain items such as, for instance, a special picture painted on wood of Jack Harrison in his Hull FC days, along with an incredibly detailed drawing of the British and German lines at the Battle of Oppy Wood and his Victoria Cross medal, among other items like a few books of the Great War Roll and replica Victoria Cross and Military Cross.

For those of you who are maybe not as aware of Jack's story as I am, I can certainly explain some of the highlights here and you have my express permission to email me on [ian.judson123@gmail.com](mailto:ian.judson123@gmail.com) to ask me any further questions about him, his story, our other work and our fundraising ventures.

# Jack Harrison VC MC Charitable Trust

By Ian Judson

Jack was born on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1890 at 20 Williamson Street in East Hull, he was a scholar and excellent sportsman, particularly at football, cricket and swimming at Craven Street School and his father was a staunch Hull Kingston Rovers rugby league fan and would take Jack to watch them at their home ground which was also down Craven Street where he went to school.

Unfortunately, Jack had an accident on a rugby union pitch playing for Brunswick Wesleyans (faith was very important to Jack) which we believe left him with a fractured skull, he was advised by doctors never to play any form of rugby ever again because of the catastrophic injury, his parents John and Charlotte kept a very close eye on him beyond this time.

However, in 1910 Jack earned himself a scholarship to go to St. John's College, York (now York St. John University) to train as a teacher, from where he graduated successfully in 1912.

It was while he was studying in York that Jack took up playing rugby again, completely against medical advice, and so good was he that in his final year he ended up captaining their First XV and his performances were such that it persuaded York RL to come calling and Jack turned out for them six times in 1912 scoring four tries, although one of those games was a testimonial game, in which he scored, so they are not officially recorded although we do know they definitely happened.

On his return to Hull after completing his education Jack was appointed as a teacher at Lime Street School in East Hull, just a few streets away from where he was born and, much to his father's disgust, he signed for Hull FC, rather than Rovers.

# Jack Harrison VC MC

## Charitable Trust

By Ian Judson

Jack made his debut for the Airlie Birds on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1912 against, ironically, York RL, a game which Hull won 9-3.

Over the next few years Jack wowed the crowds as he won the Challenge Cup in the 1913/14 season and then set two club records in the 1914/15 season by scoring tries in 11 consecutive games and scoring a total of 52 tries that season, however, by the time that season was finished, the world had gone to war.

Jack had married his lifelong friend Lilian Ellis on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1914, and they had a son named John (which was also Jack's actual first name) born on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1915 and of course Jack was working as a teacher, a reserved occupation.

But being Jack, he decided to volunteer on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1915, although at the time they allowed him to stay at home and continue playing for Hull FC, his final game was against Broughton Rangers on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1915, after which he was sent to Inns of Court officer training, before being commissioned as a Temporary 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the East Yorkshire Regiment.

Jack arrived on the Western Front of the Battle of the Somme in September 1916 and on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1917 he led a patrol into No Man's Land near Serre, taking no less than four German trenches, capturing a prisoner-of-war and leading his men back to British lines without so much as a single scratch on any of them where the bloodiest battle to ever involve the British Army took place.

# Jack Harrison VC MC Charitable Trust

By Ian Judson

His Military Cross was awarded on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1917 and soon after that there was another major allied victory in April saw the Canadians take control of the massive guns at Vimy Ridge, a huge vantage point for the allies near the Pas de Calais and it was at this point that Jack and his men were sent to take part in the fabled Battle of Arras, an armed push North to support French troops.

As part of the larger Battle of Arras, Jack and his men were ordered to try and take Oppy Wood, which was held by the Germans at the time, but they were not seen by the powers that be as a major threat after they were defeated at Vimy Ridge, however what they didn't realise was that the German forces in that area were being reinforced with troops who had been rested and were fresh and ready for action.

Another mistake that was made was that the raid on Oppy Wood was meant to take place at 6am on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1917, however a senior officer brought that forward to a jump-off time of 3:45am, this was a catastrophic mistake as there was a big full-moon in the sky and Jack and his comrades, along with thousands of others were silhouetted against this moon and were little more than target practice for the machine gun crews hidden inside the wood, it was frankly a slaughter, with over 2,000 men killed in a few short hours.

During the struggle, Jack and his men twice attacked the southern end of the German lines, only to be repulsed.

# Jack Harrison VC MC Charitable Trust

By Ian Judson

Finally, Jack took it upon himself to knock out a particular German gun that was slaughtering the men around him. He left his men sheltered in a bomb crater in No Man's Land and ran head-first towards the machine gun that was doing so much damage. With just his pistol and a Mill's Grenade he took out the machine gun and its crew, subsequently saving the lives of many of his men, however he was never to be seen again, being one of the 2,000+ men who fell in the early morning that day.

It was for this action that Jack was awarded the Victoria Cross, which was gazetted in June 1917 and a visit to our new installation at Fort Paull will give you a chance to read the exact citation in its original June 1917 print in the London Gazette record book of the time.

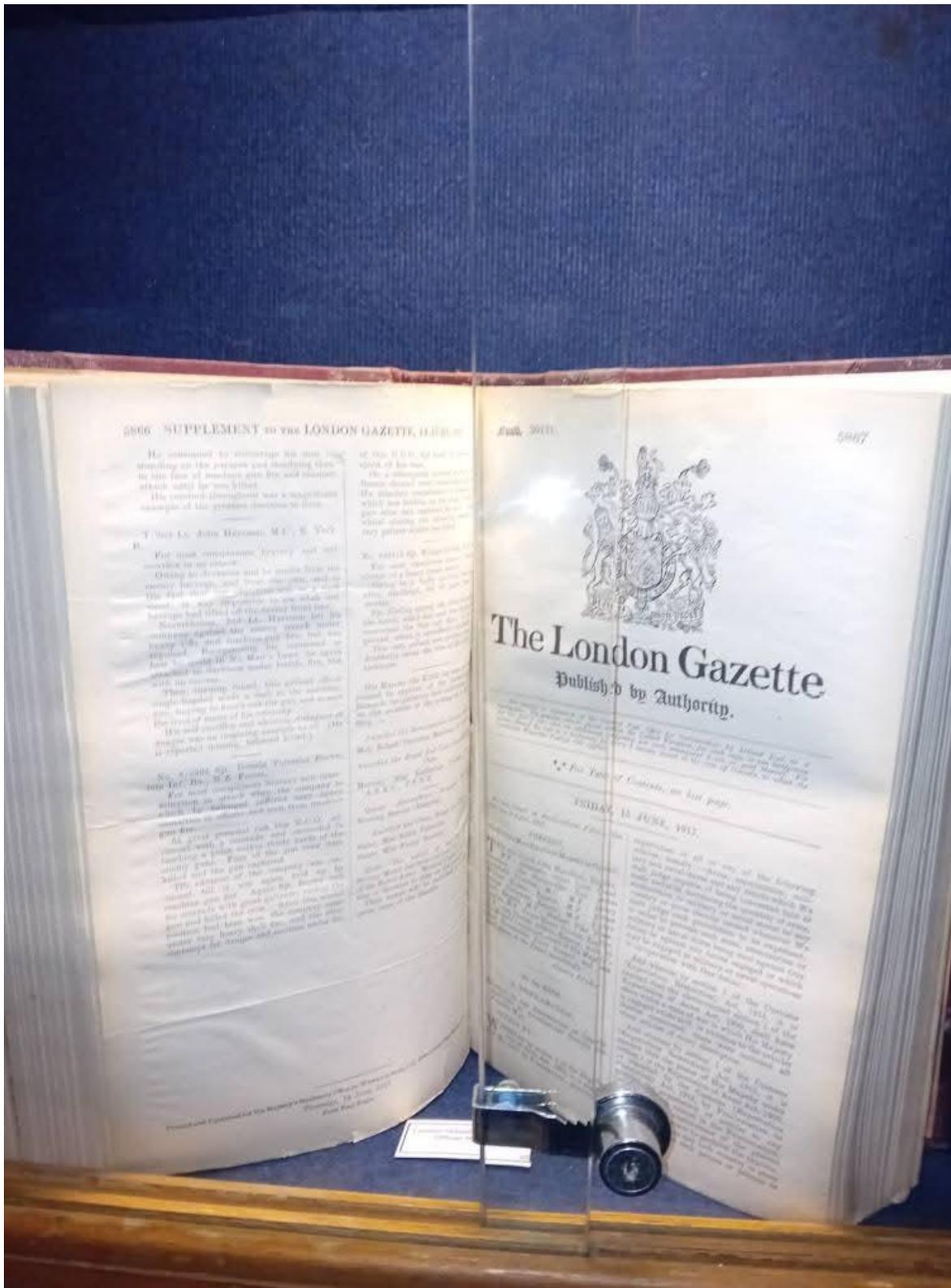
By the time you are able to read this I will also have been doing more fundraising for the Jack Harrison VC MC Charitable Trust by running from Sewell Group Craven Park to the MKM Stadium on Good Friday in time for the traditional Hull FC v Hull KR Derby Match, I am actually running something between 8 and 9 miles, visiting places like Williamson Street, Lime Street, Craven Street, and including a mural all about Jack at Wharnccliffe Street where he lived with Lilian and their son who came to be known as Jacky, before he went to war, finishing at his memorial outside the MKM Stadium where Hull FC play their home games now, however you can still donate to my JustGiving page on this link

[https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/ianpeter-judson-1?utm\\_medium=CR&utm\\_source=CL](https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/ianpeter-judson-1?utm_medium=CR&utm_source=CL)

The following slides have several images of the display to Jack Harrison VC MC – all images courtesy of Ian Judson

# Jack Harrison VC MC Charitable Trust

By Ian Judson



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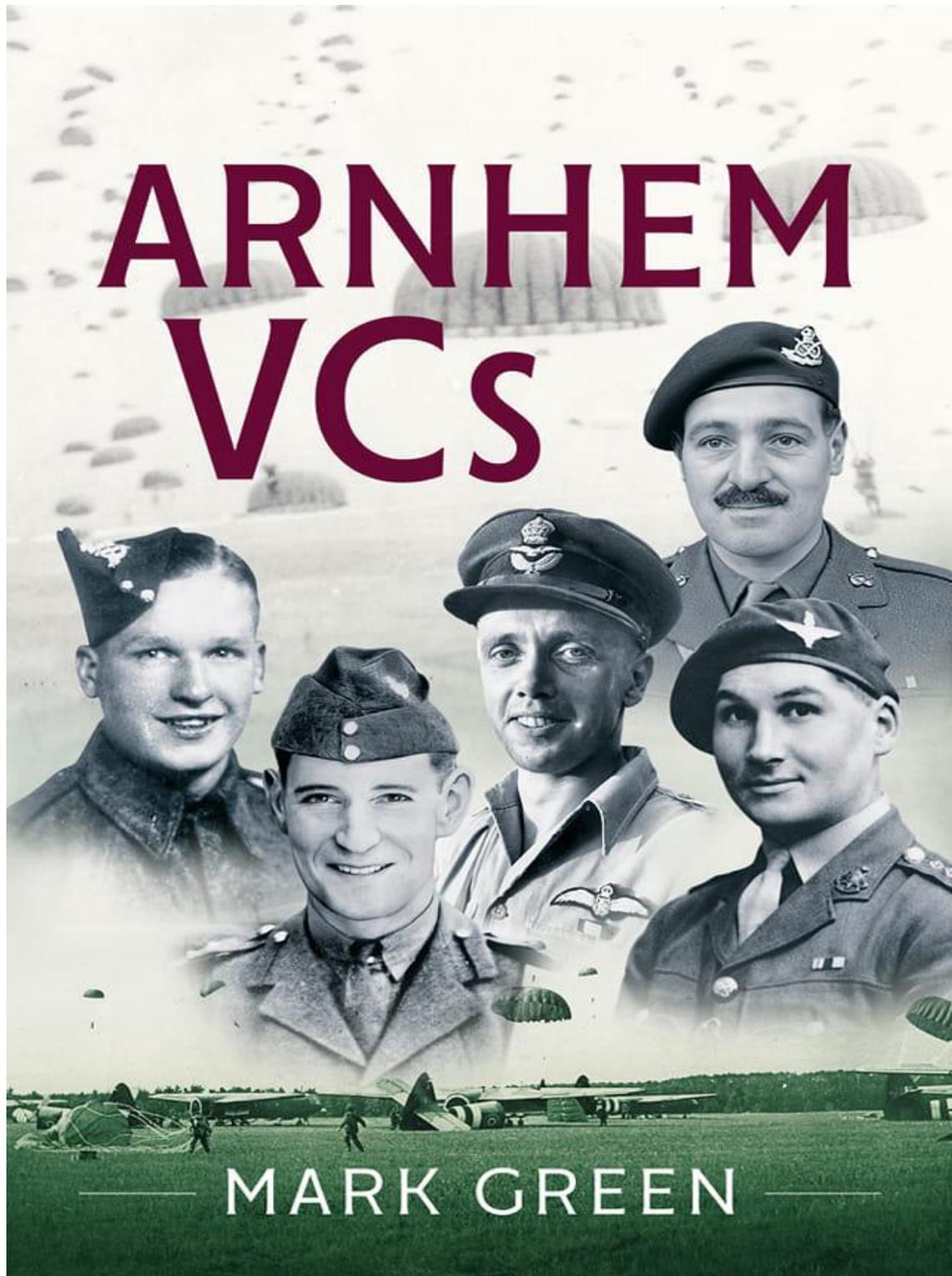


# Jack Harrison VC MC Charitable Trust

By Ian Judson



# Arnhem VCs

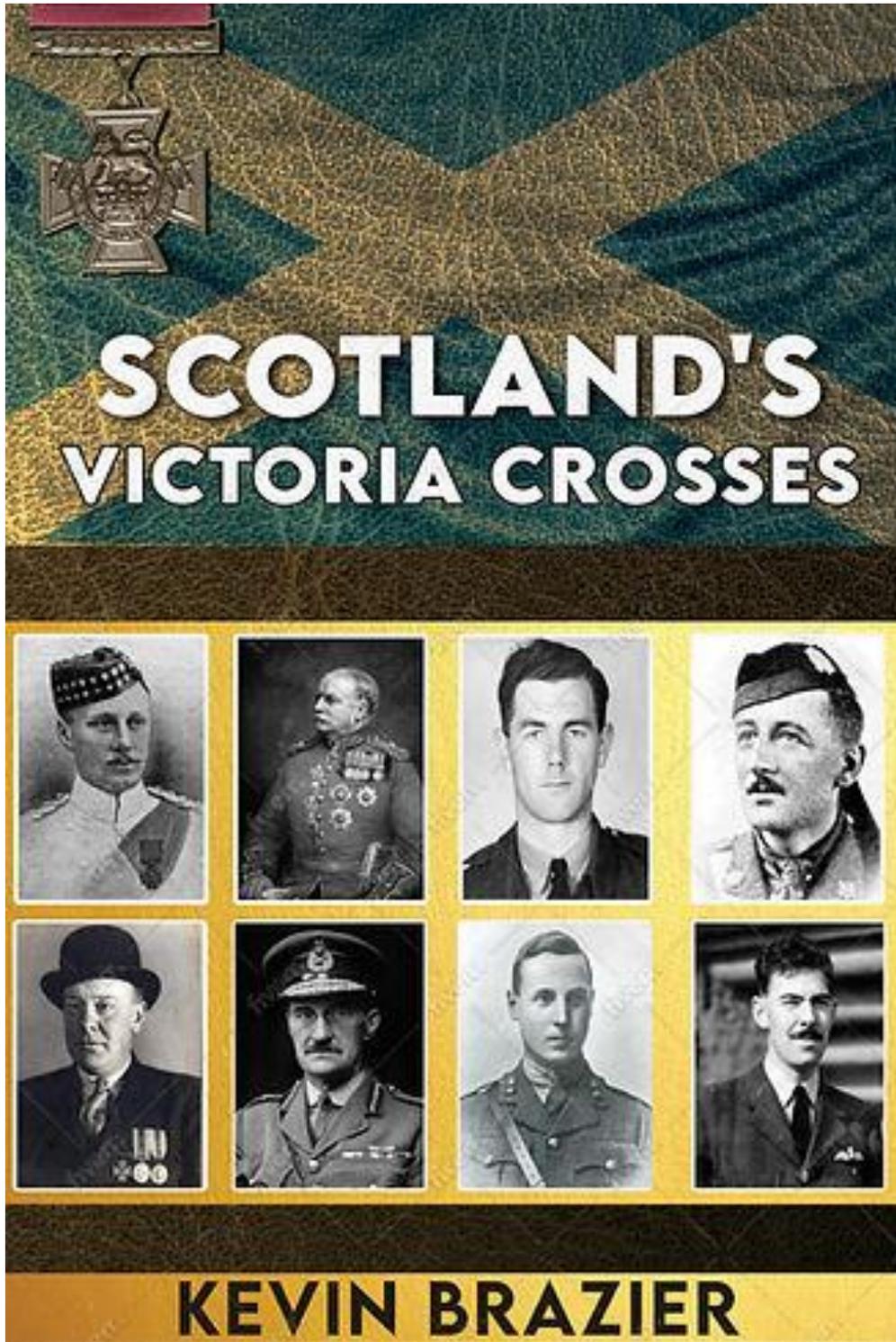


My second book “Arnhem VCs” has now been published by Barnthorn Publishing. The book covers the main aspects of Operation Market Garden and its consequences, plus the stories of the five men (four posthumously) awarded the Victoria Cross for their roles in the events.

The book is available via Amazon, Barnthorn or my website for signed copies

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/arnhem-vcs/>

# Scotland's Victoria Crosses



Scottish born men have been awarded the Victoria Cross in just about every conflict from the Crimea to the Second World War and their life stories are told here. There are 153 VC recipients born in Scotland, and it is these men who appear in this book. Their lives, before and after the action for which they were awarded the VC are covered, as well as the VC action itself. Also all known grave locations are listed and the whereabouts of their medals.

Kevin Brazier tells their stories in his latest book. Order now at the link below

# Royal Marines VCs

## 10. Thomas Hunter VC



Thomas Peck Hunter (1923-1945) was born in Aldershot, Hampshire on 6th October 1923, one of five children of Ramsey and Mary Hunter (a former soldier and civil servant), who moved to Edinburgh shortly after his birth. Hunter attended Tynecastle High School (where the poet Wilfred Owen had taught during recuperation in 1917) and Stenhouse School before becoming an apprentice stationer in Edinburgh.

At the outbreak of the war he served in the Home Guard and was called up on 8th May 1942 for military service. He enlisted as a hostilities-only (HO) marine on 23rd June 1942. He was promoted LCpl on 6th October 1943 and Temporary Cpl on 25th January 1945.

On 3rd April 1945, during Operation Roast, and the Battle of Lake Comacchio, Corporal Hunter of "C" Troop was in charge of a Bren group of the leading sub-section of the Commando. Having advanced to within 400 yards of the canal, he observed the enemy were holding a group of houses South of the canal. Realising that his Troop behind him were in the open, as the country there was completely devoid of cover, and that the enemy would cause heavy casualties as soon as they opened fire, Corporal Hunter seized the Bren gun and charged alone across two hundred yards of open ground. Three Spandaus from the houses, and at least six from the North bank of the canal opened fire and at the same time the enemy mortars started to fire at the Troop.

# Royal Marines VCs

## 10. Thomas Hunter VC

TUESDAY, 12 JUNE, 1945

### ADMIRALTY.

*Whitehall,*

*12th June, 1945.*

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

The late Corporal (Temporary) Thomas Peck HUNTER, CH/X.110296, Royal Marines (attached Special Service Troops) (43rd Royal Marine Commando) (Edinburgh).

In Italy during the advance by the Commando to its final objective, Corporal Hunter of "C" Troop was in charge of a Bren group of the leading sub-section of the Commando. Having advanced to within 400 yards of the canal, he observed the enemy were holding a group of houses South of the canal. Realising that his Troop behind him were in the open, as the country there was completely devoid of cover, and that the enemy would cause heavy casualties as soon as they opened fire, Corporal Hunter seized the Bren gun and charged alone across two hundred yards of open ground. Three Spandaus from the houses, and at least six from the North bank of the canal opened fire and at the same time the enemy mortars started to fire at the Troop.

Corporal Hunter attracted most of the fire, and so determined was his charge and his firing from the hip that the enemy in the houses became demoralised. Showing complete disregard for the intense enemy fire, he ran through the houses, changing magazines as he ran, and alone cleared the houses. Six Germans surrendered to him and the remainder fled across a footbridge onto the North bank of the canal.

The Troop dashing up behind Corporal Hunter now became the target for all the Spandaus on the North of the canal. Again, offering himself as a target, he lay in full view of the enemy on a heap of rubble and

fired at the concrete pillboxes on the other side. He again drew most of the fire, but by now the greater part of the Troop had made for the safety of the houses. During this period he shouted encouragement to the remainder, and called only for more Bren magazines with which he could engage the Spandaus. Firing with great accuracy up to the last, Corporal Hunter was finally hit in the head by a burst of Spandau fire and killed instantly.

There can be no doubt that Corporal Hunter offered himself as a target in order to save his Troop, and only the speed of his movement prevented him being hit earlier. The skill and accuracy with which he used his Bren gun is proved by the way he demoralised the enemy, and later did definitely silence many of the Spandaus firing on his Troop as they crossed open ground, so much so that under his covering fire elements of the Troop made their final objective before he was killed.

Throughout the operation his magnificent courage, leadership and cheerfulness had been an inspiration to his comrades.

### CENTRAL CHANCERY OF THE ORDERS OF KNIGHTHOOD.

*St. James's Palace, S.W.1.*

*12th June, 1945.*

The KING has been graciously pleased to give orders for the following appointments to the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire:—

*To be Additional Members of the Military Division of the said Most Excellent Order:—*

Temporary Lieutenant (Special) Jean Henri COLEMAN, R.N.V.R.

Temporary Lieutenant James William JEFFREY, R.N.V.R.

for courage, skill and outstanding devotion to duty shown whilst on special services.

# Royal Marines VCs

## 10. Thomas Hunter VC

Corporal Hunter attracted most of the fire, and so determined was his charge and his firing from the hip that the enemy in the houses became demoralised. Showing complete disregard for the intense enemy fire, he ran through the houses, changing magazines as he ran, and alone cleared the houses. Six Germans surrendered to him and the remainder fled across a footbridge onto the North bank of the canal. The Troop dashing up behind Corporal Hunter now became the target for all the Spandaus on the North of the canal. Again, offering himself as a target, he lay in full view of the enemy on a heap of rubble and fired at the concrete pillboxes on the other side. He again drew most of the fire, but by now the greater part of the Troop had made for the safety of the houses. During this period he shouted encouragement to the remainder, and called only for more Bren magazines with which he could engage the Spandaus. Firing with great accuracy up to the last, Corporal Hunter was finally hit in the head by a burst of Spandau fire and killed instantly.

Hunter was buried in Argenta Gap War Cemetery. King George VI presented his parents with his Victoria Cross on 26th September 1945, at a private investiture in the Palace of Holyrood House, Edinburgh. Thomas' sister and nephew donated his medals to the Royal Marines Museum, Southsea, Hampshire in 1974 where they were displayed recently. The Museum is sadly now closed.

# Royal Marines VCs

## 10. Thomas Hunter VC



Picture Massimo Bloccati.

# Royal Marines VCs

## 10. Thomas Hunter VC



# Royal Marines VCs

## 10. Thomas Hunter VC



Thomas Stewart

# Royal Marines VCs

## 10. Thomas Hunter VC



Memorial in Italy courtesy of Danny Cesaretti

# Worcestershire Regiment VCs

## Eugene Paul Bennett VC MC



Eugene Paul Bennett (1892-1970) was born at Church School House, Cainscross, near Stroud, Gloucestershire on 4th June 1892. His father, Charles, was a railway clerk and later a schoolmaster. His mother was Florence Emma Sophia nee Ody, a barmaid in her father's public house in Bristol before her marriage. Charles and Florence married at St Werburgh, Bristol.

Charles later became Headmaster of the National School in Cainscross from 1894. Eugene had five siblings – Leonora Florence, Alexander George Amos, Harold Stanley, Leopold Charles and Theodore John. Sadly, Theodore was killed in action in Palestine in 1918, whilst Harold was killed in an accident in Penarth, near Cardiff in 1915 aged just 26. Leopold also died young, at just 23 in 1914.

# Worcestershire Regiment VCs

Eugene Paul Bennett  
VC MC



# Worcestershire Regiment VCs

## Eugene Paul Bennett VC MC

Eugene was educated at Uplands Council School, from where he won a scholarship to Marling School, Stroud from 1905-1908. He was then employed at the Bank of England as an assistant in the Accountant's Department from 1909-1914.

He enlisted in 28th London (Artists' Rifles) in October 1913 and was embodied on 4th August 1914. The Battalion guarded German prisoners at Olympia initially and moved to the Tower of London for public duties in September. The Battalion embarked from Southampton on SS Australind on 27th October and arrived the following day in Boulogne. Eugene underwent officer training in Bailleul, and was commissioned into the Worcestershire Regiment and posted to 2nd Battalion on 1st January 1915.

He was involved in the Battle of Neuve Chapelle in March 1915 and was the only officer in his company to survive. He was wounded at Festubert in May when his trench was mined and he had to be dug out. He was promoted to Lieutenant in August 1915. For his actions on the night of 10th-11th November 1915 near Cambrin, France, he was awarded the Military Cross. The Battalion had just taken over the line when the Germans exploded a mine, destroying 60 metres of trench held by D Company. He led rescue parties over the debris and set about digging out those trapped. The enemy were firing from only 30 metres away, but work continued until the survivors were rescued. The Military Cross was presented by King George V at Buckingham Palace on 10th May 1916.

# Worcestershire Regiment VCs

## Eugene Paul Bennett VC MC

On 5th November 1916 at Le Transloy, France, Temporary Lieutenant Bennett, of the Worcestershire Regiment, when in command of the second wave of the attack, found that the first wave had suffered heavy casualties. Its commander had been killed and the second line was wavering. Lieutenant Bennett advanced at the head of the second wave and by his personal example of valour and resolution reached his objective with but sixty men. Isolated with his small party, he at once took steps to consolidate his position, under heavy rifle and machine gun fire from both flanks, and although wounded, he remained in command, directing and controlling. He set an example of cheerfulness and resolution beyond all praise, and there is little doubt that, but for his personal example of courage, the attack would have been checked at the outset.

He was evacuated to England due to his wounds. The VC was presented by King George V at Buckingham Palace on 5th February 1917. He was then attached to the War Office in September and was at Aldershot before returning to France. He sustained severe shell splinter wounds on 18th October 1918 and was treated at No 8 Stationary Hospital, Wimereux, near Boulogne. He was in hospital until October 1919 and relinquished his commission due to ill health on 11th June 1920. He was a member of the VC Guard at the interment of the Unknown Warrior on 11th November 1920.

# Worcestershire Regiment VCs

## Eugene Paul Bennett VC MC

Temp. Lt. Eugene Paul Bennett, Worc. R.

For most conspicuous bravery in action when in command of the second wave of the attack. Finding that the first wave had suffered heavy casualties, its commander killed and the line wavering, Lt. Bennett advanced at the head of the second wave, and by his personal example of valour and resolution reached his objective with but sixty men.

Isolated with his small party, he at once took steps to consolidate his position under heavy rifle and machine gun fire from both flanks, and although wounded, he remained in command directing and controlling.

He set an example of cheerfulness and resolution beyond all praise, and there is little doubt that but for his personal example of courage, the attack would have been checked at the outset.

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# Worcestershire Regiment VCs

## Eugene Paul Bennett VC MC

On 26th July 1922, he married Violet Regina nee Fuerst at Kingston, Surrey. The family name was changed by deed poll in 1916 to Forster due to their Germanic surname. She was a songwriter. Violet and Eugene had two children – Anne and Jonathan. Eugene returned to work with the Bank of England until 1921 and then studied law. He was called to the Bar in October 1923. In April 1930, he appeared at Southwark County Court as opposing barrister to Brett Cloutman VC. He served in the Air Training Corps as an Acting Pilot Officer in the RAFVR from September 1941.

Eugene retired in 1961 and he and his wife moved to Vicenza, Italy and lived at “Villa Violetta”. He died at his home on 4th April 1970 and was cremated at Vicenza, where his ashes were interred in Niche 116 of the Mausoleum. In addition to the VC and MC, he was awarded the 1914 Star with “Mons” clasp, British War Medal 1914-20, Victory Medal 1914-19 with Mentioned in Despatches oakleaf, George VI Coronation Medal 1937, and Elizabeth II Coronation Medal 1953. His medals are held by the Worcestershire Regiment Museum, Worcester.

# Worcestershire Regiment VCs

Eugene Paul Bennett  
VC MC



# Worcestershire Regiment VCs

## Eugene Paul Bennett VC MC

