Victoria Cross Online

Issue 35 September 2025

John Cruickshank VC
1920-2025

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Welcome to the 34th edition of Victoria Cross Online Magazine.

The feature article this month is a tribute to the memory of John Cruickshank VC AE who passed away in August 2025, aged 105. I will pay tribute to John.

There will then be the last two instalments of the Worcestershire Regiment VCs with the stories of William Leefe Robinson VC and Thomas Turrall VC.

There is also features on three other pieces of Victoria Cross news this month – firstly the closure of the Worcestershire Regiment Museum ready for relocation for 2028.

Secondly there is news of the memorial flight on 19th September 2025 in memory of David Lord VC DFC over Oosterbeek, Netherlands.

Finally, there is information on a new book about the Victoria Cross and the Lincolnshire Regiment which features amongst others, the Welsh VC, Lewis Pugh Evans VC.

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John Cruickshank VC AE

John Alexander Cruickshank (1920-2025) was born on 20th May 1920 in Aberdeen, Scotland, and was a pupil of Aberdeen Grammar School and later, Daniel Stewart's College, in Edinburgh; during which time he became a Boy Scout patrol leader in the 4th Edinburgh Troop. In 1938 he gained employment with the Commercial Bank of Scotland as the start of a banking career, but on 10th May 1939, a few days before his 19th birthday, he enlisted in the Royal Regiment of Artillery, Territorial Army as a gunner.

On the outbreak of war, he was called for service and continued to serve with the Royal Artillery until early 1941, when he applied for a transfer to the RAF for training as aircrew. On 30th June he officially transferred from the 129th Field Regiment, RA, to the RAF's aircrew reception centre, and on 19th July 1941 began basic training at No 11 Initial Training Wing; being promoted to Leading Aircraftman on 1st September. Posted to Toronto, Canada on 15th September, he underwent elementary pilot training and later commenced his advanced instruction on 10th December 1941 at the US Naval flying base at Pensacola, USA.

Completing his instruction, he was awarded pilot "wings" on 9th July 1942, and the following day was commissioned as a Pilot Officer, RAFVR.

John Cruickshank VC AE

John Cruickshank VC AE

Arriving in England in early October, Cruickshank was next posted to No 4 (Coastal) OTU at Invergordon for operational training and crewing; where, on 10th January 1943, he was promoted to Flying Officer. Finally, fully-qualified as a flying boat pilot and with his crew, he joined his first operational unit, 210 Squadron, on 25th March 1943.

Flying the squadron's Consolidated Catalina flying boats, Cruickshank soon adapted to the unit's routine of operations, and on 10th July 1944 was further promoted to Flight Lieutenant. By then Cruickshank had completed 24 full operational sorties, apart from many other "non-operational" flights, but – in common with many of his fellow "boat" skippers – had seen little excitement or direct offensive action against the enemy. Nevertheless, he was by now one of the most experienced aircraft captains in his squadron; recognised as an utterly dependable pilot, skilled in his duties.

On the 17th July 1944, Cruickshank began preparations for his 25th operational sortie. His aircraft was Catalina JV928, DA-Y, and for this trip he was taking a ten-man crew, including himself as captain. His second pilot was Flight Sergeant Jack Garnett, while a third pilot, Sergeant S I Fidler, was fresh to operations and included to gain experience.

At 9.45pm, their radar screen showed contact with a surface vessel five miles ahead. As they approached they realised it was a German U-Boat, and Cruickshank's response was to do a complete circuit around it, and begin a bombing run.

John Cruickshank
VC AE

FRIDAY, 1 SEPTEMBER, 1944

Air Ministry, 1st September, 1944.

The KING has been graciously pleased to confer the VICTORIA CROSS on the undermentioned officer in recognition of most conspicuous bravery:—

Flying Officer John Alexander CRUICKSHANK (126700), Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, No. 210 Squadron.

This officer was the captain and pilot of a Catalina flying boat which was recently engaged on an anti-submarine patrol over northern waters. When a U-boat was sighted on the surface, Flying Officer Cruickshank at once turned to the attack. In the face of fierce anti-aircraft fire he manoeuvred into position and ran in to release his depth charges. Unfortunately they failed to drop.

Flying Officer Cruickshank knew that the failure of this attack had deprived him of the advantage of surprise and that his aircraft offered a good target to the enemy's determined and now heartened gunners.

Without hesitation, he climbed and turned to come in again. The Catalina was met by intense and accurate fire and was repeatedly hit. The navigator/bomb aimer was killed. The second pilot and two other members of the crew were injured. Flying Officer Cruickshank was struck in seventy-two places, receiving two serious wounds in the lungs and ten penetrating wounds in the lower limbs. His aircraft was badly damaged and filled with the fumes of exploding shells. But he did not falter. He pressed home his attack, and released the depth charges himself, straddling the submarine perfectly. The U-boat was sunk.

He then collapsed and the second pilot took over the controls. He recovered shortly afterwards and, though bleeding profusely, insisted on resuming command and retaining it until he was satisfied that the damaged aircraft was under control, that a course had been set for base and that all the necessary signals had been sent. Only then would he consent to receive medical aid and have his wounds attended to. He refused morphia in case it might prevent him from carrying on.

During the next five and a half hours of the return flight he several times lapsed into unconsciousness owing to loss of blood. When he came to, his first thought on each occasion was for the safety of his aircraft and crew. The damaged aircraft eventually reached base but it was clear that an immediate landing would be a hazardous task for the wounded and less experienced second pilot. Although able to breathe only with the greatest difficulty, Flying Officer Cruickshank insisted on being carried forward and propped up in the second pilot's seat. For a full hour, in spite of his agony and ever-increasing weakness, he gave orders as necessary, refusing to allow the aircraft to be brought down until the conditions of light and sea made this possible without undue risk.

With his assistance the aircraft was safely landed on the water. He then directed the taxying and beaching of the aircraft so that it could easily be salvaged. When the medical officer went on board, Flying Officer Cruickshank collapsed and he had to be given a blood transfusion before he could be removed to hospital.

By pressing home the second attack in his gravely wounded condition and continuing his exertions on the return journey with his strength failing all the time, he seriously prejudiced his chance of survival even if the aircraft safely reached its base. Throughout, he set an example of determination, fortitude and devotion to duty in keeping with the highest traditions of the Service.

John Cruickshank VC AE

When passing over, the Catalina's depth charges failed to release, so he turned to port, climbing to 800 feet and continuing his turn to begin a second run. As they attacked, they were strafed by flak shells, and one of them exploded inside the Catalina. The explosion killed the Catalina's navigator and injuring four including the second pilot Flight Sergeant Jack Garnett and Cruickshank himself. Cruickshank had been hit in seventy-two places, with two serious wounds to his lungs and ten penetrating wounds to his lower limbs. Despite this he refused medical attention until he was sure that the appropriate radio signals had been sent and the aircraft was on course for its home base. Even then he refused morphine aware that it would cloud his judgement. Flying through the night it took the damaged Catalina five and a half hours to return to Sullom Voe with the injured Garnett at the controls and Cruickshank lapsing in and out of consciousness in the back.

Once there Cruickshank returned to the cockpit and took command of the aircraft again. Deciding that the light and the sea conditions for a water landing were too risky for the inexperienced Garnett to safely put the aircraft down, he kept the flying boat in the air circling for an extra hour until he considered it safer and they landed the Catalina on the water and taxied it to an area where it could be safely beached. When the RAF medical officer boarded the aircraft he had to give Cruickshank a blood transfusion before he was considered stable enough to be transferred to hospital.

On 1st September 1944, the London Gazette announced the award of a VC to John Cruickshank, and a DFM to Jack Garnett for his splendid part in the whole action; and on 21st September both men attended an investiture at Holyrood House to receive their awards from the hands of King George VI.

John Cruickshank VC AE

Cruickshank's injuries were so severe that he never returned to operational flying, being posted to HQ Coastal Command at Northwood, Middlesex on 14th December 1944; and he eventually left the RAF on 13th September 1946 to resume his "interrupted" banking career. In early 1977, after a successful career in international finance, "Jack" Cruickshank came home to Edinburgh to retire from business. Cruickshank was the last surviving recipient of the Victoria Cross from World War II, and lived in a nursing home in Scotland in his final years and was rarely seen in public due to his age. It was announced on 16th August 2025 by his family that he had passed away earlier that week, and a private funeral was planned.

Worcestershire Regiment VCs

William Leefe Robinson VC

William Leefe Robinson (1895-1918), the youngest of seven children of Horace Robinson, a coffee planter on the Kaima Betta Estate at South Coorg, India, was born at Tollideta, South Coorg on 14th July 1895. He was brought to England as a baby, he returned to India with his family at the age of seven where he received his elementary education at the Bishop Cotton School. At 14, he once more returned to England and, with his brother Harold, entered St Bees School in Cumberland in September 1909.

At St Bees, he became a popular figure, and in the course of the next five years there, became Captain of Eaglesfield House, Captain of the Rugby XV, a prefect and a Sergeant in the school's Officer Training Corps. Leaving St Bees, he enrolled at the military college at Sandhurst on 14th August 1914, and on 16th December 1914 was commissioned as Second Lieutenant in the 5th Battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment. Three months later, on 29th March 1915, he transferred to the Royal Flying Corps as an observer for flying duties.

Immediately following his transfer, he was posted to France, where he joined No 4 Squadron RFC at the St Omer depot; a BE2c army co-operation unit commanded by Major C.A.H. Longcroft. His stay with No 4 Squadron was brief, for on the 9th May, during a routine reconnaissance over Lille, he was wounded in the right arm, and invalided home to England.

Worcestershire Regiment VCs

William Leefe Robinson VC

St Bees Memorial
www.memorialstovalour.co.uk

Recovering from his injury quickly, he applied for pilot training, was accepted, and reported to South Farnborough to commence training on 19th June 1915.

Making his first solo flight on 18th July, Robinson qualified for his Royal Aero Club Certificate, No 1475, on 28th July. A further course of “advanced” instruction at the Upavon Central Flying School resulted in the award of his RFC “wings” on 15th September 1915. On 2nd February 1916 he joined his first operational unit as a pilot when he travelled to Sutton’s Farm airfield in Essex, base for 39 (Home Defence) Squadron. The airfield stationed six BE2c aircraft to undertake night missions against German Zeppelins.

Robinson’s first encounter with a German Zeppelin came on the night of 25th-26th April 1916. He was fortunate enough to sight and close in on a Zeppelin. The airship was the LZ97, flying at about 10,000 feet. Only able to climb to 8,000 feet, he caught up with the LZ97 overr Seven Kings and opened fire from below at extreme range. The airship released part of its ballast, and rose swiftly, away from Robinson.

Worcestershire Regiment VCs

William Leefe Robinson VC

The following four months were frustrating for Robinson and 39 Squadron with many attempts failing to intercept raiding airships. This would change on the night of 2nd-3rd September 1916, when a total of 16 German airships set out with one common objective – London. Over Cuffley, Hertfordshire, Lieutenant Robinson, flying a converted B.E.2c night fighter, sighted a German airship – one of 16 which had left bases in Germany for a mass raid over England. The airship was the wooden-framed Schütte-Lanz SL 11, although at the time and for many years after, it was misidentified as Zeppelin L 21. Robinson made an attack at an altitude of 11,500 ft (3,500 m) approaching from below and closing to within 500 ft (150 m) raking the airship with machine-gun fire. As he was preparing for another attack, the airship burst into flames and crashed in a field behind the Plough Inn at Cuffley, killing Commander Wilhelm Schramm and his 15-man crew.

Robinson was an instant celebrity as many had witnessed his exploits from the ground, and with it came the swift announcement, on 5th September (just three days later), of the immediate award of the Victoria Cross. In all, Robinson received over £4,200 in “prize” contributions, and used some of this cash to purchase a new Vauxhall “Prince Henry” automobile. On 8th September 1916, he attended a special investiture at Windsor Castle, where he received his VC from King George V. The constant public attention was an embarrassment to a modest man like Robinson, who pleaded with the RFC higher authorities for duties in an less public area.

Worcestershire Regiment VCs

William Leefe Robinson VC

War Office,
5th September, 1916.

His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to award the Victoria Cross to the undermentioned Officer:—

Lt. William Leefe Robinson, Worc. R. and R.F.C.

For most conspicuous bravery. He attacked an enemy airship under circumstances of great difficulty and danger, and sent it crashing to the ground as a flaming wreck.

He had been in the air for more than two hours, and had previously attacked another airship during his flight.

Worcestershire Regiment VCs

William Leefe Robinson VC

Worcestershire Regiment VCs

William Leefe Robinson VC

A piece of the Zeppelin at the Worcestershire Regiment Museum in Worcester

Worcestershire Regiment VCs

William Leefe Robinson VC

He was posted to 48 Squadron at Rendcombe, with the rank of Captain. The new unit was in the process of forming for operational service in France, and was first to equip with a new design; the Bristol F2A fighter two-seater. On 8th March 1917, the squadron moved to France and took up quarters at Bertangles. Its first operational sortie was on 5th April and met near-disaster. Led by Robinson, with Lieutenant Warburton as observer, six F2A's crossed the trench lines and were almost immediately set upon by five Albatross DIII's from Jagsdstaffel 11, led by Germany's leading fighter pilot, Manfred von Richthofen. Of the six F2A's, four were shot down within minutes; Robinson was brought down intact by Sebastian Festner near Mericourt. Robinson and Warburton, who were not wounded, were taken to Douai, there to await transportation to a regular POW camp.

For the rest of the war, Robinson suffered imprisonment in a series of POW camps. Going initially to Freiburg-in-Briesgau, he became one of a four man team attempting to dig an escape tunnel under the outer defences – despite his crippling fear of claustrophobia. The tunnel escape came to nothing, but on 18th September 1917, Robinson and a companion managed to escape in broad daylight, and set off towards the border. Four days later, they were re-captured and returned to Freiburg. Robinson was court-martialled and sentenced to 1 month's solitary confinement in the fortress at Zorndorf. He was then moved to Clausthal, then to Holzminden where he was singled out for harsh treatment. When the armistice was signed on 11th November 1918, Robinson was a very sick man, and he was finally repatriated to England on 14th December 1918.

Worcestershire Regiment VCs

William Leefe Robinson VC

Desperately ill, he became a bed patient in the home of a colleague, Captain Noel Clifton, in Stanmore, Middlesex. He then contracted the influenza virus which was sweeping the country. With his fiancée, Joan Whipple, and a sister by his bedside, he died on 31st December 1918, due to heart failure, brought on by the influenza. On 3rd January 1919, with full military honours, he was buried in a quiet corner of All Saints Churchyard Extension in Harrow Weald, Middlesex. In addition to his VC, he was awarded the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal 1914-20 and Victory Medal 1914-19 with Mentioned in Despatches oakleaf. The medals were held privately until November 1988 when at an auction at Christie's in London, Michael Ashcroft purchased the medal group for £92,000 (£99,000 including commission) and they are now part of the Ashcroft Collection in the Imperial War Museum.

William Leefe Robinson VC's medal group in the Ashcroft Gallery, Imperial War Museum, London. NB This is due to close at the end of this month.

Worcestershire Regiment VCs

William Leefe Robinson VC

Yours truly with Lt Colonel Mark Jackson OBE representing the Worcestershire Regiment at his grave in September 2016

Worcestershire Regiment VCs

Thomas George Turrall VC

Thomas George Turrall (1885-1964) was born at Speedwell Road, Hay Mills, Yardley, Birmingham on 5th July 1886. His father, William, held a variety of jobs such as a labourer in a brickworks. His mother was Ellen nee Adams, and they married in 1882. His mother died when he was ten, and his father re-married in 1896 to Louisa Adkins nee Slaytor. Louisa had three children from her first marriage. Thomas had six siblings from his father's two marriages.

Thomas was educated at Dixon Road School, Small Heath, Birmingham, before gaining employment as a decorator. He was a member of Smethwick Crescent Wheelers cycling club, as was Harold Colley, who was later a 1918 VC recipient. Thomas married Mary Lilian nee Maxwell in 1913 in Aston. They had a daughter, Lilian born in 1914. She died unmarried in 1942.

Thomas enlisted on 29th December 1914 and went to France on 2nd September 1915. On 3rd July 1916 at La Boiselle, France, during a bombing attack by a small party against the enemy, the officer in charge was badly wounded and the party was compelled eventually to retire.

Worcestershire Regiment VCs

Thomas George Turrall VC

Private Turrall remained with the wounded officer for three hours under continuous and heavy fire from machine-guns and bombs. Notwithstanding that both he and the officer were at one time completely cut off from the British troops, he held his ground with determination and finally carried the officer to the British lines after a counter-attack had made this possible.

After being gazetted for the VC on 9th September 1916, he was presented with his medal by King George V at Buckingham Palace on 30th December 1916. He was given a hero's welcome by Small Heath on his return and was presented with £250 and a gold watch. The Lord Mayor of Birmingham, the future Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, also offered his congratulations.

Thomas transferred to the Reserve on 9th April 1919 and was employed as a barman and later was a partner in a painting and decorating business. On 17th July 1920, he married Daisy May Dennis nee Phillips. Both of them had lost their first spouses during the previous couple of years. They didn't have any children.

Worcestershire Regiment VCs

Thomas George Turrall VC

No. 20572 Pte. Thomas George Turrall, Worc. R.

For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty. During a bombing attack by a small party against the enemy the officer in charge was badly wounded, and the party having penetrated the position to a great depth was compelled eventually to retire.

Private Turrall remained with the wounded officer for three hours, under continuous and very heavy fire from machine guns and bombs, and, notwithstanding that both himself and the officer were at one time completely cut off from our troops, he held to his ground with determination, and finally carried the officer into our lines after our counter-attacks had made this possible.

Worcestershire Regiment VCs

Thomas George Turrall VC

PTE. TURRALL, V.C., AT THE PALACE.

Private T. G. Turrall, Worcester Regiment, one of the four Birmingham V.C.s, was decorated by the King on Saturday. Private Turrall, with his father and mother, carries his baby from Buckingham Palace.

Worcestershire Regiment VCs

Thomas George Turrall VC

Thomas died at Selly Oak Hospital , Birmingham on 21st February 1964 and was buried in Robin Hood Cemetery, Solihull. In addition to his VC, he was awarded the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal 1914-20, Victory Medal 1914-19, George VI Coronation Medal 1937 and Elizabeth II Coronation Medal 1953. The medals are held by the Worcestershire Regimental Museum, Worcester.

Worcestershire Regiment VCs

Thomas George Turrall VC

Thomas Turrall's replica VC group at the Worcestershire Regiment Museum (now closed)

Worcestershire Regiment Museum Closure

Worcestershire Regiment Museum Closure

The Worcestershire Regimental Collection was housed, until 31st August 2025, within the Worcester Museum and Art Gallery, on Foregate Street, Worcester. The Regimental Museum which had been in situ there since 2003, is moving to a new home, opening sometime in 2028. The new home for the Museum's Collection will be in The Commandery Civil War Museum in Sidbury, Worcester. The majority of the collection will be held in storage, whilst the Regiment's Victoria Cross medal groups remain in a bank vault (the Museum displayed replica groups due to the high insurance costs). One of the Museum's most precious possessions, a painting of the Battle of Gheluvelt by J P Beadle from 1920, has been moved to be displayed in the Guild Hall in central Worcester.

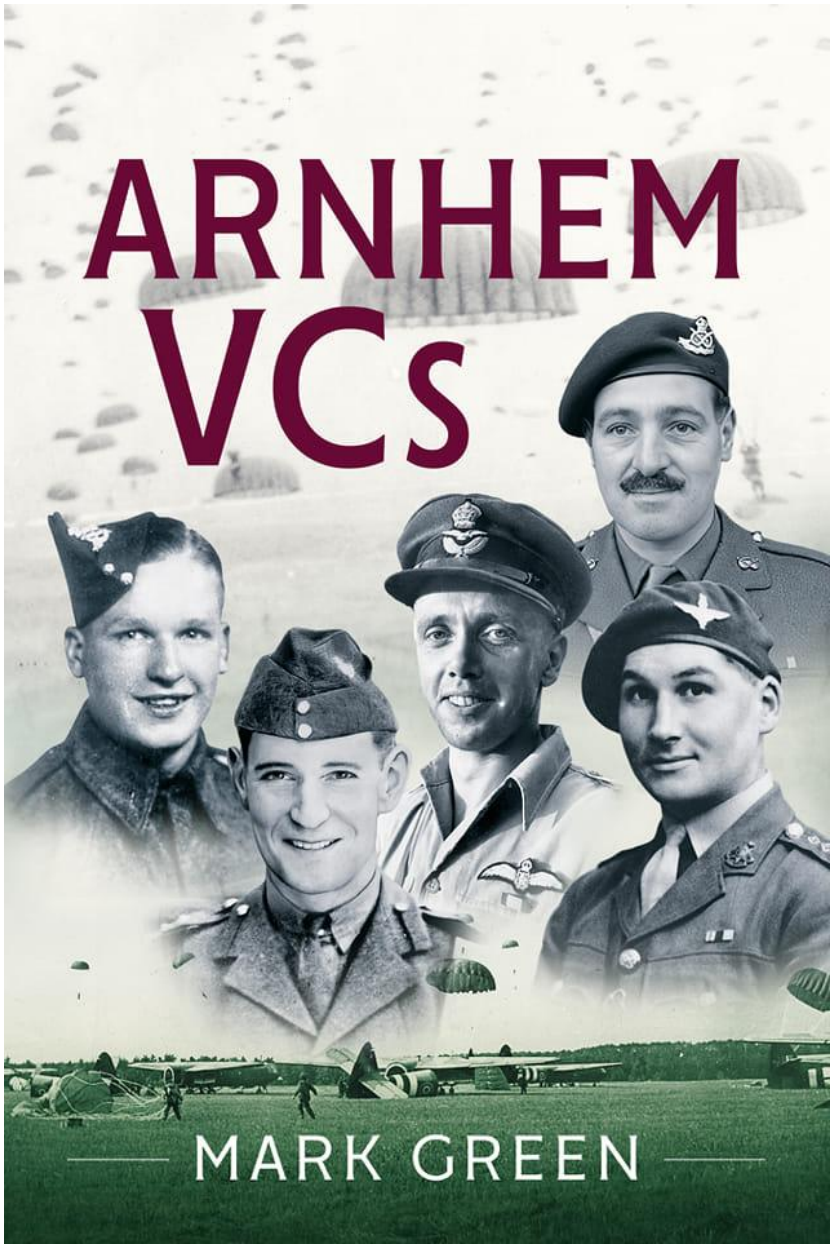
Memorial Flight to David Lord VC DFC

On Friday, September 19, 2025, UK-based aviation organization Aero Legends will conduct a special memorial flight over Oosterbeek and Wolfheze in tribute to Flight Lieutenant David S.A. Lord VC, DFC.

The Aero Legends Dakota aircraft, now known as Pegasus – The Ghost of Arnhem, will complete two tribute laps over Oosterbeek, followed by a flyover of the crash site on Duitsekampweg in Wolfheze, where David Lord and his crew lost their lives. The flight will take place on Friday, September 19, exactly 81 years after his original 1944 mission, and is scheduled for 09:00 or 11:00 AM, depending on weather and airspace conditions.

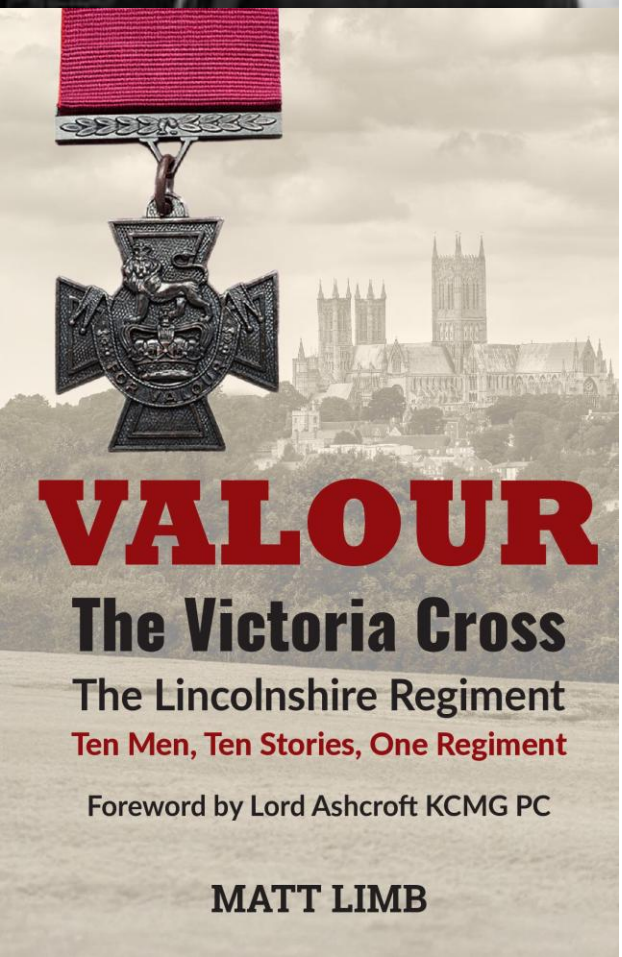
Myrthe Pas, a young woman from Oosterbeek and former “flower child,” painted the nose art on the aircraft in 2024 and designed a special commemorative mission patch in 2025 in honor of David Lord and his crew. The patch features the Dakota aircraft and seven poppies, symbolizing each crew member lost in the crash

Memorial Flight to David Lord VC DFC



Reminder that you can read about the story of David Lord VC DFC in my book “Arnhem VCs” which is available from Amazon, Barnthorn or for signed copy direct from me. For all links to get the book go to
www.victoriacrossonline.co.uk/Arnhem-vcs

New Book on Welsh VC



A new book written by Matt Limb has been published by Wild Tweed entitled “Valour: The Victoria Cross: The Lincolnshire Regiment. The book with its foreword by Lord Michael Ashcroft KCMG PC features the stories of the ten recipients of the Victoria Cross with connections to the Lincolnshire Regiment. One such recipient is Lewis Pugh Evans VC CB CMG DSO and Bar, who hailed from Abermadd, Ceredigion, Wales.

On 4th October 1917 near Reutel, Belgium, Lt.-Col. Evans took his battalion in perfect order through a terrific enemy barrage, personally formed up all units, and led them to the assault. While a strong machine gun emplacement was causing casualties, and the troops were working round the flank, Lt.-Col. Evans rushed at it himself and by firing his revolver through the loophole forced the garrison to capitulate. After capturing the first objective he was severely wounded in the shoulder, but refused to be bandaged, and re-formed the troops, pointed out all future objectives, and again led his battalion forward.

New Book on Welsh VC

Again badly wounded, he nevertheless continued to command until the second objective was won, and, after consolidation, collapsed from loss of blood. As there were numerous casualties, he refused assistance, and by his own efforts ultimately reached the Dressing Station.

On 10th October 1918 he married Dorothea Margaret Segrave Pryse-Rice at Holy Trinity Church, Sloane Square, London. She had served as a nurse in the Red Cross from 1914-19. Tragically, she died of influenza at St Thomas, Devon on 5th December 1921. They had a son, Griffith Eric Carberry Vaughan-Pryse-Rice Evans in February 1920, born in Chelsea. Lewis then was an instructor at Senior Officers School from 1920-1921, then was GSO2 Scottish Command until April 1925. He was then CO 2nd Black Watch from 1926-1930. He was then Assistant Adjutant General, Eastern Command on 15th May 1931 and commanded 159th (Welsh Border) Infantry Brigade TA on promotion to Brigadier from May 1933 to May 1937. In January 1936, he was a pall-bearer at the funeral of King George V. He retired in January 1938 as honorary Brigadier. On retirement he was awarded the Companion of Bath.

Lewis retired back to Wales and took an active role in the local community around the Lovesgrove Estate. He was Chairman of the British Legion at Llanbadarn Fawr, and President of the Aberystwyth British Legion for 25 years. He was also County Commissioner of St John's Ambulance (awarded the Order of St John in 1941 and Commander of St John in 1947). He was appointed Honorary Colonel of the 16th (Welsh) Parachute Battalion from 1947 and Honorary Colonel Cardiganshire Cadet Force. He attended a number of VC Reunions including the 1956 Centenary at Hyde Park and the 3rd VCGCA Reunion at the Café Royal, London in July 1962.

New Book on Welsh VC

On 30th November 1962, Lewis left Aberystwyth to attend his grandson's confirmation and died of a heart attack after stepping off the train at Paddington Station, London. He was buried in St Padarn's Churchyard, Llanbadarn Fawr, Ceredigion in the family plot.

In addition to the VC, he was awarded the CB, CMG, DSO and Bar, Commander of the Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem, Queen's South Africa Medal 1899-1902 with five clasps, King's South Africa Medal 1901-1902 with two clasps, 1914 Star with "Mons" clasp, British War Medal 1914-20, Victory Medal 1914-19 with Mentioned in Despatches oakleaf, Defence Medal 1939-45, George V Delhi Durbar Medal 1911, George V Silver Jubilee Medal 1935, George VI Coronation Medal 1937, Elizabeth II Coronation Medal 1953, Belgian Order of Leopold and Belgian Croix de Guerre 1914-18. The VC group was acquired by the Ashcroft Trust in 2009 and is displayed in the Imperial War Museum.