

The Museum Collection

No.34 Volume Two

The Victoria Cross



Stories and tributes to the members of the Order who were awarded the highest Military Medal for their bravery in the fight for Peace in the name of Crown and Country.

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Royal Antislavery Order of Buffaloes, Grand Lodge of England

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This particular Volume is a continuation of Volume One and deals with the second half of Victoria Cross Winners who were members of the Order starting with Conwyn Mansel-Jones, concluding with Charles Allix Lavington Yate.

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Our Troops preparing to go over the trenches



CONWYN MANSEL-JONES



This story about Conwyn Mansel-Jones is the first in this book of the members of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes who won the Victoria Cross before the First World War, albeit that he was not initiated into the Order until 1924. According to my records he is only one of two members who won the Victoria Cross in the Boer War, the second member is featured later in the book.

Conwyn Mansel-Jones was born at Beddington, Surrey, on 14th June, 1871, youngest son of Herbert Riversdale Mansel-Jones, Judge of County Courts, and Emilia, daughter of John Davis, of Cranbrook Park, Essex.

He was educated at Haileybury and the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, gazetted to a commission in The Prince of Wales's Own West Yorkshire Regiment 8th October 1890. He first saw active service with the 2nd Battalion in the bloodless Ashanti expedition of 1895-96, when King Prempeh was dethroned, for that action he was awarded the Bronze Star. He was selected for employment under the Colonial Office in August, 1898, and posted to the British Central Africa Rifles, serving in the expedition against Kwamba in the next year.

In March, 1899, he was promoted Captain, and after the outbreak of the South African War he re-joined his regiment, going to Natal to the 2nd Battalion, which was in Hildyard's Brigade of Buller's Force.

Captain Mansel-Jones was in the operations to relieve Ladysmith; was at Colenso, Spion Kop, Vaal Krantz, and Tugela Heights up to the end of February, 1900, when, during the Pieter's Hill operations on February 27th, The West Yorkshire Regiment was set to storm Terrace Hill. Under a heavy fire the attack seemed about to fail when the coolness and gallantry of Captain Mansel-Jones, who showed the utmost contempt of danger, provided the example which sent the whole line forward and enabled the hill to be captured. He fell, badly wounded, and his conspicuous bravery was rewarded by the award of the Victoria Cross.

(London Gazette, 27th July, 1900): His Citation reads "Conwyn Mansel-Jones, Captain, West Yorkshire Regiment. On the 27th February 1900, during the assault on Terrace Hill, north of the Tugela, in Natal, the companies of the West Yorkshire Regiment on the northern slope of the hill met with a severe shell, Vickers-Maxim and rifle fire, and their advance was for a few minutes checked. Captain Conwyn Mansel-Jones, however, by his strong initiative, restored confidence, and in spite of his falling very seriously wounded, the men took the whole ridge without further check; this officer's self sacrificing devotion to duty at a critical moment having averted what might have proved a serious check to the whole assault".

When again fit for work, after the amputation of a leg, he was appointed, in March, 1901, Deputy Assistant Adjutant General for Recruiting at the War Office, and after five years there he served for a further four years as Recruiting Staff Officer, London Area, before retiring from the Army in April, 1910. He was placed on retired pay on 9th March, 1910 on account of ill health, caused by wounds. In 1914 he was called to the Bar by Lincoln's Inn where he practised as a Barrister.

At the outbreak of World War One he was appointed Deputy Assistant Adjutant General at the Adjutant General's office (3rd Echelon) at the Base of the British Expeditionary Force. He became Assistant Adjutant General (Reinforcements) at the end of 1915, and continued so until the Armistice, receiving the brevet (*In many of the world's military establishments, a brevet was a warrant giving a commissioned officer a higher rank title as a reward for gallantry or meritorious conduct, but without receiving the authority, precedence, or pay of real rank*) of Major in September 1916, and that of Lieutenant Colonel in the following June, he served throughout the European War, being mentioned in dispatches six times.



He was created a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order on 3rd June, 1915. In 1917 he was created Officier de la Legion d'Honneur by the President of the French Republic and created Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George in 1918. In 1920 he was appointed to the Corps of Gentlemen at Arms and remained in that Corp until his death in 1942.

In 1913 he married Marion, daughter of William Barton-Wright and Janet, daughter of General Forlonge.

His Victoria Cross was presented on 20th August 1900 by Queen Victoria at Osborne House, East Cowes, Isle of Wight.

Medal entitlement of: Captain Conwyn Mansel-Jones, Prince of Wales' (West Yorkshire) Regiment:-

Victoria Cross

Companion, Order of St Michael & St George (CMG)

Distinguished Service Order (DSO)

Ashanti Star (1896)

Africa General Service Medal (1902-56) 1 clasp: "B.C.A. 1899-1900"

Queen's South Africa Medal (1899-1902) 2 clasps: "Relief of

Ladysmith" - "Tugela Heights"

1914 Star + clasp "5th Aug - 22nd Nov 1914"

British War Medal (1914-20)

Victory Medal (1914-19) + Mentioned in Despatches Oakleaf

King Edward VII Coronation Medal (1902)

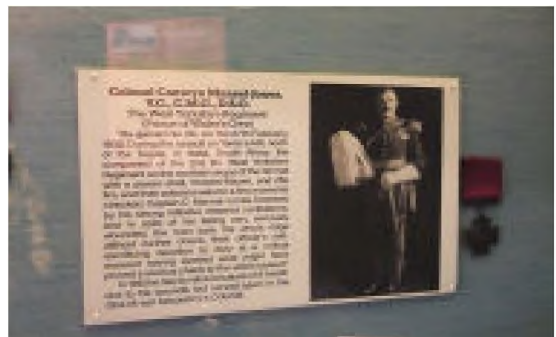
King George V Silver Jubilee Medal (1935)

King George VI Coronation Medal (1937)

Officier de la Legion d'Honneur (4th Class) (France)

At this moment in time the whereabouts of his medals are unknown. A copy of his Victoria Cross is housed in the Princess of Wales Regimental Museum, York, together with a display plaque to honour him in their main gallery.

Unfortunately an image of his medals is not available despite researching various sites.



Conwyn Mansel-Jones of Weirs End, Brockenhurst, Hampshire, England died in Lymington Hospital on Friday night 29th May 1942, aged 71. He was chairman of the hospital.

His funeral was held on Tuesday 2nd June at St. Nicholas Church, Brockenhurst and is reported in the June 1942 edition of "The Times" thus:-

The Funeral of Colonel Conwyn Mansel-Jones took place on Tuesday at Brockenhurst with military honours. The Rev W. A. Haslam and the Rev. E. W. Powell officiated. The coffin, covered with a Union Jack, was borne by six Army officers.



Relatives and others present included: — Mrs. Mansel-Jones, Mrs. Wolferstan, Major and Mrs. John Watson, Miss Mansel-Jones, Miss G. Blaker, Miss G. Davis, Mrs. Blandford. Mrs. Deverell (also representing Captain John Deverell). Field Marshal Sir Cyril Deverell (Colonel The West Yorkshire Regiment) and Lady Deverell, Brigadier General S. G. Francis, Major and Mrs. Montague Hall, Colonel Roche, Captain W. H. Pilley, Lieutenant P. E. Blackmore, Commander, and members of the Brockenhurst Platoon Home Guard.

Squadron Leader H. G. Grace (representing the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen-at-Arms), Lieutenant-Colonel Lloyd, Colonel Sir Morgan and Lady Crofton, Colonel and Mrs. J. H. Pollard, Major and Mrs. Spencer Ferguson (also representing Mrs. George Ferguson), Major P. P. Curtis (also representing the New Forest Hunt Club), Brigadier General J. Byron, Major R. Cotesworth, Captain L. H. Bennett. Captain H. Icke (also representing Mr. Mallender), Captain Cecil Sutton (New Forest Association and Brockenhurst Manor) and Mrs. Sutton, Captain A. E. Phillips (R.A.O.B. Hunt Lodge Gymkhana), Rear Admiral and Mrs. E. H. Rymer, Rear Admiral and Mrs. H. S. Currey, Captain Philip Stopford, R.N., the Honourable Mrs. Ingham Whitaker (also representing Mr. W. I. Whitaker), Mr. K. Pulteney (president), Mr. J. F. St. Q. Archdale, Miss Burgess, Miss Geddes, and nurses of Lymington Hospital.

The Hon. Mrs. Pulteney, Mrs. H. H. Nicholson (also representing the Honourable Mrs. Cecil Brownlow); Mrs. Pitt (also representing Mr. G. H. Pitt and Miss A. Cecil), Mr R. M. de Mowbray, Dr. C. W. Kay, Mrs. Sullivan, Dr. Butler, Mr. L. R. Weeks (Executive Committee, Southampton and District Hospitals Association), Mrs. Sears (also representing Dr. E. H. Sears), Major and Mrs. Nelson, Major N. C. H. Russell, Mr. Douglas Johnston, Mr. W. D. T. Fields-Clarke, Mr. F. H. Whittington, Mr. and

Mrs. Harold Christopherson, Brigadier General T. N. S. M. Howard (President Hampshire branch, British Legion) and Mrs. Howard, Mr. P. P. J. Wodehouse, Major Walker-Munro, Mrs. S. G. Francis, Mr. A. Alexander, Mrs. May (representing Brockenhurst County High School), Lieutenant Colonel Samuel, and Captain F. W. Mace (Brockenhurst A.R.P.).



He was buried in the Cemetery adjoining the Church.

His wife, of so many years, Marion M. Mansel-Jones, died on August 16th 1949. Her Funeral was held at the Old Church, Brockenhurst.

The date of Conwyn Mansel-Jones initiation is not known at this moment in time but it is known that he was a member of the Hunt Lodge 4475 of the New Forest Province, Brockenhurst, during 1924.



ALBERT MOUNTAIN



Albert Mountain was born on 19th April 1895 in Leeds, he was the son of James Mountain born in Farnley 1860 and Mary Ann Cowling born in Ripon 1865 (possibly not her maiden name). James father was William Mountain born in Tong, 1734.

He was educated in local schools where he achieved the basic education that was prevalent of the day.

Early in the First World War the City of Leeds raised the 1st (Leeds Pals) and the 2nd (Leeds Bantams) Battalions, and handed them over to the Army as the 15th (Service) and 17th (Service) Battalions of The West Yorkshire Regiment, but they continued to wear the Leeds City coat of arms as their badge.

Albert Mountain first joined the Leeds Bantams and then transferred to the Leeds Pals. However, on 7th December 1917, these two battalions had amalgamated to form the 15th/17th (Service) Battalion The West Yorkshire Regiment. The 15th/17th Battalion was part of 93rd Brigade of the 3rd Division. The great German offensive of 1918 began on March 21st, with the intention of a wholesale breakthrough, the Division moved forward from a rest area and the 15th/17th Battalion reached St. Leger on March 23rd.

On March 24th the 93rd Brigade repulsed an enemy attack, the enemy had no success against 4 Guards Brigade, but made progress to the south, reaching the western outskirts of Mory. An order was received from Sixth

Corps Headquarters to swing the 31st Divisional line back to Ervillers, but the Guards Brigade commander pointed out that it was necessary to hold the high ground halfway between St. Leger and Mory in order to protect the southern flank of the British line, since the Germans had driven a wedge between his Brigade and 40th Division. Later that night the Germans attacked Ervillers again, but were again driven out by 92 Brigade, with the consequence that 31st Division ended up holding a front of over 9,500 yards, with no contact with 40th Division on its right.

On the 25th, 31st Division received orders to withdraw to a new line running from Moyenneville to Ablainzeville, where it would link up with 42nd Division, which had relieved the badly battered 40th Division. This withdrawal was completed in the early hours of 26th March. At about 11 a.m. the 31st Divisional Commander received some disturbing news from the Guards Division — two Battalions of 93rd Brigade, the 13th York and Lancasters and the 18th Durham Light Infantry, had been seen marching further back to a new defensive line. On making enquiries the Divisional Commander found out that the Acting Brigade Major, Captain R. V. Ramsden, had been blown from his horse by an explosion of a shell, and had given the two battalions written orders to withdraw, but could not explain why. His action left the Leeds Pals completely isolated, with both flanks exposed. Meanwhile the Germans, meeting no opposition, had entered Moyenneville and established machine guns there to enfilade the British line, and had also gained control of the ridge south west of the town. After trying unsuccessfully to extend its flanks to link up with the unit on its right, the Leeds battalion counter attacked. Two companies were sent up to take the ridge, while one platoon was sent into Moyenneville. The counter attack was a great success. An entire German battalion was driven off the ridge, and then caught from the rear by fire from the platoon that had recaptured the town. After suffering heavy casualties the Germans laid down their arms and some thirty five prisoners were taken. That afternoon a large German force mounted another attack on Moyenneville, which drove the Pals to the western outskirts of the town, where they held on tenaciously. A counter attack was planned for 8.30 that evening, but the men were too exhausted and so were told to hold their positions for the night.

Early morning saw us retreating in open order, across fields of growing corn, and hitherto prosperous villages were passed in that morning retreat. Throughout the past few days we were struck by the entire absence of our own aircraft, and this, with the disappearance of our own artillery, added to the gloom which hangs over the army

Then to conform to other movements, a withdrawal began and the 15th/17th Battalion found themselves at the Cemetery at Hamelincourt, near Arras.

On the night of 25th March the 15th/17th West Yorkshire Battalion 93rd Brigade (31st Division) was withdrawn from its position close to Judas Farm (near St. Leger) to the Boyelles-Ervillers Road, the Battalion having been heavily engaged with the enemy. During the day the Brigade fought off a German attack, and suffered many casualties from artillery and machine gun fire. Sergeant Albert Mountain of the 15/17th West Yorks won an extremely well deserved VC for his courage and leadership throughout the next two days' fighting. His company had dug themselves in on a sunken road close to the village cemetery but the position was very exposed and they were forced to leave it. The enemy was advancing in large numbers and was preceded by a patrol of an estimated two hundred men. A call for volunteers was made in order to stage a counter attack, and Mountain volunteered, as did his party of ten men. They moved forward on the flank and with the use of a Lewis gun and rifle fire they enfiladed a German patrol and killed about a hundred men.

In the meantime the rest of the company made a counter attack and the remainder of the German patrol was cut up and thirty prisoners were taken. Soon the main body of the enemy appeared and bore down on the West Yorkshiremen. At the sight of such numbers Mountain's group began to waver. However, on March 26th there were many casualties. He quickly rallied his men, and securing a defensive position he was able to cover the retreat of the rest of his company, with the prisoners. After holding up six hundred Germans for half an hour Mountain and his colleagues retired and re-joined their company. The fighting was so intense that wounded men could not possibly be attended to, let alone moved. It was during this and the action on the following day, that Sergeant Mountain gained his Victoria Cross.

The citation states:

"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty during an enemy attack, when his company was in an exposed position on a sunken road, having hastily dug themselves in. Owing to the intense artillery fire, they were obliged to vacate the road and fall back. The enemy in the meantime was advancing in mass, preceded by an advanced patrol about two hundred strong. The situation was critical and volunteers for a counter attack were called for. Sergeant Mountain immediately stepped forward, and his party of ten men followed him. He then advanced on the flank with a Lewis gun and brought enfilade fire to bear on the enemy patrol, killing about one hundred. In the meantime the remainder of the company frontal attack, and the entire enemy patrol was cut up and thirty prisoners were taken.

At this time the enemy main body appeared and the men, who were numerically many times weaker than the enemy, began to waver. Sergeant Mountain rallied and organised his party and formed a defensive

position from which to cover the retirement of the rest of the company and the prisoners.

With this party of one non commissioned officer and four men, he successfully held at bay six hundred of the enemy for half an hour, eventually retiring and re-joining his company. He then took command of the flank post of the Battalion which was “in the air”, and held on there for twenty seven hours until finally surrounded by the enemy. Sergeant Mountain was one of the few who managed to fight their way back. His supreme fearlessness and initiative undoubtedly saved the whole situation”.

The description of the situation in which Sergeant Mountain gained his V.C. does not, however, reveal fully the desperate situation in which the 15th/17th West Yorkshires found themselves on March 26th and 27th, or the part they played in the Divisional battle. Firing was so intense that wounded could not be moved. On March 27th an order to withdraw failed to reach the Battalion and it was left behind when the Brigade and Division withdrew.

The Battalion covered 2,000 yards of front under heavy attack, and it counter attacked, its flanks were open, and the enemy encircled them. Only 4 officers and 31 men managed to fight their way back and re-joined the Brigade and amongst them was Sergeant Mountain.

The Narrative of Operations of Division praises this gallant stand of the 15th/17th West Yorkshires and says that by taking the weight of the enemy attack on the Divisional Front for thirty six hours before it was overwhelmed, it enabled the Division to establish its position in the rear. Sergeant Albert Mountain's deeds show how greatly he contributed to the stand made by the 15th/17th West Yorkshires.

On 28th March 1918 The Secretary of the War Office issued the following announcement:

1. During the night our troops were pressed back a short distance on both banks of the Somme, and early this morning were holding a line approximately: Rosieres-Harbonnieres-Sailly-le-Sec-Mericourt-l'Abbe — thence up to the Ancre — to the railway embankment south west of Albert. The enemy are in Albert.

- 2 At one time yesterday afternoon the enemy had crossed the Ancre near Mesnil, north of Albert, but was counter attacked and driven back across the river. North of this point there has been no change in our position.



3. This morning our troops counter attacked north of the Somme between the angle of the Ancre and the Somme, and recaptured Morlancourt (south of Albert) and Chipilly (south of Morlancourt).

At the same time our troops, immediately south of the river again advanced our line to Proyart (south of Bray).

4. The enemy has attacked in the neighbourhood of Bucquoy (east of Gommecourt), a fresh Guard Division having been brought up with this object. Up to the present this attack has made no impression.

A number of other heavy, attacks have been made today on our front both north and south of the Somme, but the latest information is that, the enemy has been repulsed with heavy loss.

5. West of Roye, the French have been heavily engaged, and have been forced to give some ground, but reinforcements are arriving.

A day of intense fighting. Enemy repulsed with heavy losses.

The following telegraphic dispatches were received from General Headquarters in France yesterday :—

11.5 a.m. As the result of the enemy's attacks yesterday afternoon and evening astride the Somme our troops on both banks were forced back a short distance in the neighbourhood of Bray.

A heavy attack made early in the night against our new line south of the Somme was repulsed after severe fighting. At one point in the neighbourhood of the river the enemy forced his way into our positions, but was thrown back by our counter attack.

Further local fighting has taken place also north and north east of Albert, but the situation on this part of the battle front remains unchanged.

8.2 p.m. The battle was renewed this morning with great violence south and north of the Somme, and intense fighting has taken place during the day from south of Rosieres to north of Ablainzeville (north east of Bucquoy).

The unsuccessful attempt made by the enemy last night to drive in our line south of the Somme was followed this morning by a series of heavy attacks in the neighbourhood of Rosieres and to the north of that place.

At Rosieres all the enemy's assaults have been beaten off by our troops, who inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy.

Farther north our line was maintained through the earlier part of the day in spite of great pressure from large hostile forces. Later in the day, fresh German attacks developed in this area, with the result that

our line was bent back a short distance to the west. Latest reports show that our counter attacks have again completely restored the situation.

During the day the enemy made a number of determined attacks against our positions between the Somme and the Ancre, and north and south of Albert. Fierce fighting has taken place in this sector also.

A part of our position south of Albert into which the enemy at one time forced his way, was regained by us by a counter attack, and a further heavy attack delivered by the enemy at this point during the afternoon was completely repulsed.

Attempts made by the enemy in the course of the day to debouch westwards from the town of Albert have been driven back in each instance with the heaviest casualties to his troops.

This afternoon also the enemy attacked in great strength in the neighbourhood of Bucquoy and Ablainzeville and gained a footing in the latter village. At all other points his infantry were beaten off with great loss.

Our troops have again fought magnificently, and, as shown in the above account, have to-day thrown back the enemy all along the British front with heavy losses, in spite of most determined attacks and his superiority in numbers. Heavy fighting still continues on the whole battle front.

The Citation for his Victoria Cross was published in the London Gazette on June 4th, 1918.

On June 10th, 1918, a parade was held in the field by the 15th/17th West Yorkshires (now reformed again by reinforcements), and the ribbon of the Victoria Cross was presented by the Commanding Officer, Major T. G. Gibson, to Sergeant Albert Mountain, to pin on his jacket. He was later, on 29th June 1918 presented with his VC by His Majesty King George V in the Quadrangle of Buckingham Palace.

Medal entitlement of: Sergeant Albert Mountain, 17th Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment

Victoria Cross

British War Medal (1914-20)

Victory Medal (1914-19)

King George VI Coronation Medal (1937)

Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal (1953)

Croix de Guerre (France)

Medaille Militaire (France)

Albert was discharged from the Army in 1919 and was for a while the Chauffeur to the Lord Mayor of Leeds. He then went on to be a

Timekeeper in Burton clothing factory, Leeds. The restructured firm of Burtons still operates from Leeds and has branches in many British towns and cities.

In the meantime, Albert Mountain had married and had a son and three daughters.



For twenty five years Mountain was the Licensee and kept the Miners Arms Public House (a Sam Smiths House, owned by the Tetly Brewery) in Garforth. There is now a blue plaque to commemorate him. In the 1920s he attended a couple of VC functions and was present on 21st March 1930 at a dinner in honour of the West Riding VCs. In November 1929 he attended the funeral of

Sergeant John Crawshaw Raynes VC and in 1950 he attended the funeral of another Leeds VC, Corporal, later Captain George Sanders. He was also a friend of Tommy Young. In 1956 he took part in the Hyde Park VC centenary.

He died at his home in Aberford Road, Garforth, Leeds on 7th January 1967 after a long illness. He left a widow, a son and three daughters. His funeral was at Garforth Parish Church. The Colonel of the Regiment and the serving members Prince of Wales Own were represented by Major W. T. A. Brooks and a bugler from the 1st Battalion sounded the Last Post. Captain W. Edwards, another Leeds VC who gained his V.C. with the 7th Battalion, The Yorkshire Light Infantry in 1917, attended the funeral. Lieutenant Colonel W. Harris, represented the West Yorkshire and Prince of Wales Own Regimental Association. Mr. W. B. Butler, V.C. attended at the Parish Church. Major J. R. Barton, T. D., was also present.

Regimental wreaths were sent on behalf of Prince of Wales Own and the Regimental Association. His body was cremated at Lawns Wood Crematorium, Leeds and his Ashes were placed in New Adel Lane Avenue Plot K2-380 in the Garden of Remembrance. No memorial was placed but there is a Plaque carrying his name outside City Art Gallery, Leeds.

Mountain's VC was presented by his son to the curator of the West Yorkshire Regiment Museum in 1967 and is now in their museum at York. At this moment in time the whereabouts of his other medals are unknown.



Bro. Albert Mountain was a member of the Order (initiation date not known) and was for a long time the Worthy Host to the Barkston Ash Lodge No.4097 in the Miners Arms, Garforth which operated under the Castleford and District Province.



The Miners Arms at the turn of the 20th century

Mountain is one of a dozen VC holders from the First World War to have strong local connections having either been born or buried in Leeds and he has name listed on a VC Memorial in the Victoria Gardens in the centre of the city on the Headrow side of Cookridge Street outside the Henry Moore Institute. The memorial was unveiled in November 1992 and the list of local VCs includes a chum of Albert Mountain, Private William Boynton Butler of the 17th a fellow VC of the Leeds Pals. His final home in Aberford Road where he had lived for fourteen years boasts a plaque to his memory which was set up by the Garforth Historical Society.



IVOR REES



Ivor Rees was born on 18th October 1893 at Union Street Felinfoel, near Llanelli, Carmarthenshire (now Dyfed), but the family moved to Pwll when he was little. He was the only son of Mr. David and Mrs. Ann (nee Bowen) Rees of 5 Stradey Hill, Pwll. His father David was an electrical engineer at Llanelli Steel Works.

He received normal young persons education in the local schools of Pwll Llanelli Rural School and Old Road School.

After leaving school he obtained work as a crane driver at Llanelli Steelworks. Rees enlisted into the South Wales Borderers (2nd Gwent) on 9th November 1914 and was posted to 11th (Service) Battalion. He went overseas with 11th Battalion on 4th December 1915 and promoted to Lance Corporal on 5th August 1915 and Corporal on 1st December 1915. He was promoted to Sergeant on 19th September 1916.

British soldiers first attacked some high ground in June that would help the battle. It was called Messines Ridge. The attack was a success and this gave everyone more confidence going into the Third Battle of Ypres. Rees survived the fighting at Mametz Wood, and moved with the Division to Ypres.

31st July 1917: After an uneventful winter in the trenches, the 38th (Welsh) Division found itself attacking the Pilckem Ridge, the opening day of the Third Battle of Ypres. The two leading Brigades were to capture as their three objectives the German line east of the Ypres Canal, the German second line on the Pilckem Ridge, and a further ridge east of Pilckem known as Iron Cross Ridge. The 115th Brigade (including the 11th Battalion The South Wales Borderers) was then to pass through, push forward another 700 yards to the Steenbeeke and secure crossings over that stream.

The main assault in the third battle of Ypres began when Units of the 38th Welsh Division, which had fought bravely in the actions at Mametz Wood a year previously, found themselves on the front line again.

Alongside the experienced troops were those who had seen action in the Battle of the Somme, some were new recruits who had been conscripted in early 1917.

Heavy rain and artillery churned up the battlefield at Ypres until it was just thick mud. Tanks, horses and soldiers sank in this bog and soldiers even drowned in it. The weather broke the battle into several phases as sometimes it was just too difficult to fight at all. Eventually the focus of the battle became the village of Passchendaele, just outside of Ypres.

The attack started at 3.50 a.m. The first two objectives were taken up to time but there was hard fighting at Iron Cross, and when the 11th Battalion reached that area about 9.00 a.m. to pass through they came under machine gun fire from German held pillboxes. In spite of this, the 11th Battalion completed the capture of the Iron Cross Ridge and swept down to the Steenbeeke, dealing with the pillboxes in a manner, which showed their training and determination. As an example, a machine gun nest was holding up the left. It was rushed and captured by a platoon, together with 50 prisoners. Another machine gun was causing heavy casualties at short range. Sergeant Ivor Rees led his platoon forward till he had worked round to the rear of the position and was within 20 yards of the gun. He rushed the post, shot one of the team, bayoneted another and silenced the gun. Then he bombed the adjacent pillbox, killed five of its garrison, and captured thirty men including two officers.



For the heroic part that Ivor Rees played in this action on the Western Front, Belgium he was awarded the Victoria Cross. The account of his action was written by James Price Lloyd of the Welsh Regiment, who served with Military Intelligence. After the war, the government destroyed all the archives relating to this propaganda. They were regarded as being too sensitive to risk being made public. Remarkably these documents have survived in the personal records of Captain Lloyd. Many of these papers are officially stamped, and one can trace the development of many individual articles from the notes based on an idea, to the pencil draft which is then followed by the hand written submission and the typescript.

The archive "Tales of the VC" comprises 94 individual accounts of the heroism that earned the highest award for valour, the Victoria Cross. These are recounted deferentially and economically, yet they still manage to move the reader. Date stamp: 27th November 1917 and 1st January 1918.

Rees was just 23 years old when he won the Victoria Cross. The Citation, published in the London Gazette Supplement 30282 on 14th September 1917 reads:-

"For most conspicuous bravery in attack. A hostile machine gun opened fire at close range, inflicting many casualties. Leading his platoon forward by short rushes, Sergeant Rees gradually worked his way round the right flank to the rear of the gun position. When he was about twenty yards from the machine gun he rushed forward towards the team, shot one and bayoneted another. He then bombed the large concrete emplacement killing five and capturing thirty prisoners of whom two were of officers, in addition to an undamaged gun".

In the Third Battle of Ypres 310,000 British soldiers were killed, wounded or captured. They advanced just five miles. Ypres was the last of what we call the "battles of attrition". A battle of attrition means trying to wear down the enemy by causing such heavy losses that they give up. This type of battle led to huge losses on both sides.

Sergeant Rees was invalided back to the U.K. in February 1917 where he spent about 7 weeks in Cardiff Red Cross Hospital with a severe bout of Trench Fever. He returned to Flanders in 1917 to the 53rd Battalion as an instructor.

Sergeant Rees was appointed acting Company Sergeant Major on 5th September 1917 and he was Decorated with his VC by King George V at Buckingham Palace on 26th September 1917. In October 1917 Rees attended his home town where he was greeted to a hero's welcome on his return home, with around 20,000 people lining the streets of Llanelli to watch Mr Rees pass by in a cavalcade, flanked by civic dignitaries. He

was presented with an Illuminated Address, £156 Cash from public subscriptions and £150 Cash from the Steelworks. An article in the Llanelly Star Newspaper reports “Most of the Pwll and Sandy people contributed to the V.C. Fund house to house collections having been made this week. A few whose motto is “Take all and give nothing” were deaf to the monetary appeal.

It is hoped that fine weather will favour the V.C. celebrations today. Needless to say Pwll will be “en fete”. A social will be held at Bethlehem on Tuesday in honour of our gallant hero. The most conspicuous greeting that will catch the eye at Erwfach today will be one bearing the words “Pwll greets our gallant son”. This neat piece of work was executed gratis by Mr. Williamson, the local Painter. Arrangements had been made for filming today’s welcome home demonstration, and will show a fine series of pictures at the Llanelly Cinema on Monday and during the week. The arrival at the station, the triumphant procession through the streets, the meeting in front of the Town Hall, as well as the V.C.’s visit to the Sports at Stradey Park and his subsequent arrival at Pwll will be shown. Today’s proceedings will for ever be historic in the annals of Llanelly.

30th September 1917 saw him marry Miss Martha (Mattie) Jenkins of Llanelli, daughter of Evan and Sarah Jenkins in the Trinity Chapel, Llanelli. They subsequently had a family of two sons and three daughters.

The medal entitlement of Sergeant Ivor Rees:-

Victoria Cross

1914 - 15 Star

British War Medal (1914-20)

Victory Medal (1914-19)

Defence Medal (1939-45)

King George VI Coronation Medal (1937)

Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal (1953)

Victory Medal (US Issue) 3 clasps: “Meuse-Argonne” “Aisne-Marne”
“Defensive Sector”



Sergeant Ivor Rees returned to Britain on 11th February 1918 and served with the 53rd (Young Soldier) Battalion, South Wales Borderers

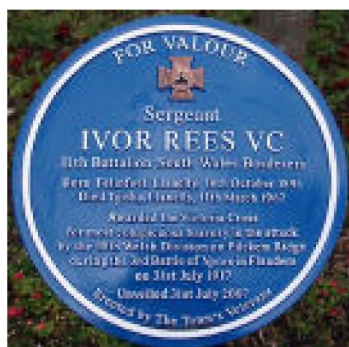
before transferring to the Reserve on 21st May 1919. He was finally discharged from the Army on 31st March 1921. Not long afterwards, Rees re-enlisted in the 4th (Carmarthenshire) Battalion, The Welsh Regiment (Territorial Force). He was discharged on 30th December 1921.

Rees was unemployed for two years after the Great War, before taking a job with the Llanelli Borough Council as a Water Inspector and Cleansing Superintendent, a post he held for 38 years until his retirement in 1959.

He attended the VC Dinner in the Royal Gallery at the House of Lords on 9th November 1929 and the VC Centenary Celebration in London 25th-28th June 1956. Rees served as a Company Sergeant Major in the 2nd Carmarthenshire Home Guard during the Second World War.

Ivor Rees died on 12th March 1967 at his home in 5 Craddock Street, Llanelli after a long illness aged 73. He was Cremated on 14th March 1967 at Swansea Crematorium, Heol Pentre Felen, Morriston, Swansea, West Glamorgan, Wales. His Ashes were placed in Garden No.5, Garden of Remembrance. Rees is remembered on memorials in Havard Chapel, Brecon Cathedral and at Llanelli Town Hall, Carmarthenshire.

On 31st July 2007, on the 90th Anniversary of Sergeant Rees act of bravery, more than 60 members of Ivor Rees family gathered to see a plaque unveiled, his son and daughter were among those paying tribute. Lieutenant Colonel David Mathias, of the Royal Naval Association in Llanelli, which helped to organise the tribute at the town hall, said it was hard to estimate how many Allied lives he saved by his actions. "I grew up a couple of streets away from him and we had Rees the baker, Rees the postman and Rees the VC", he said. "My grandfather took me to meet him once when I was a boy and he was a genial gentleman". "What we're remembering isn't what he was before the war or after the war but what he did during the war, he was a ferociously good soldier", said David Mathias.



Major Martin Everett, curator of the Royal Welsh's Regimental museum in Brecon, where the medal is now held, said he had met Sergeant Rees before his death in 1967.

Major Martin Everett, curator of the Royal Welsh's Regimental museum in Brecon, where the medal is now held, said he had met Sergeant Rees before his death in 1967.

He remained a modest man, carrying with him the memories of comrades lost. "When you read the story of Passchendaele, the battle bogged down in all that mud, you can't quite believe what those lads went through".

His initiation was under the Province of Llanelli, date unknown, but he is remembered in the Journal of 1918 in the following manner:-

Autumn 1918, Llanelli Province, Thrilling Story of Gallantry

The highest of all military distinctions, the Victoria Cross, has at last been brought to Llanelli, and it is with feelings of pride and delight that we announce that this great honour has been conferred upon Bro. Sergeant Ivor Rees, South Wales Borderers, son of Mr. and Mrs. David Rees, 5 Stradey Hill, Pwll. The splendid heroism which won for our gallant young soldier the most coveted of all war honours, even as it is told in the bald official report, is a thrilling story of British gallantry, and one which will go down with history as a fine illustration of the wonderful courage and determination of our brave lads who are today fighting our battles in France and Flanders, Salonica and Mesopotamia, as well as in other parts of the world.



JOHN THOMAS



John Thomas Born 10th May 1886 in Higher Openshaw, Manchester, England. He was the son of Edward Thomas a boot and shoe maker, his mother Elizabeth was a nurse. He received the normal education that was given during the late 1880s at St. Barnabas's School, Openshaw, Manchester.

After leaving school, he found employment at the Cunard Shipping Company, Liverpool.

In 1908 at the age of 22 he enlisted as a private in the 2/5th North Staffordshire Regiment. He moved to the Army Service Corps at Hulme Barracks on 7th June 1909. After serving for three years he became a reservist and joined the Merchant Marine ASC at Woolwich and was aboard the "Lusitania" when it was torpedoed on 7th May 1915, he was rescued and taken to Liverpool, he returned to his regiment and was sent to France as a Lance Corporal, during fierce fighting with the enemy at Cambrai he was wounded and sent to hospital.

On the return to his Regiment he found himself again engaged in fierce fighting with the enemy, this time at Bourlon Wood, Fontaine-Notre-Dame, France, where, on 17th November 1917 at 31 years of age he won the Victoria Cross.

His Citation, published in the London Gazette 13th February 1918, as follows:- "For most conspicuous bravery and initiative in action. He saw the enemy making preparations for a counter attack, and with a comrade, on his own initiative, decided to make a close reconnaissance. These two went out in broad daylight, in full view of the enemy and under heavy machine gun fire. His comrade was hit within a few yards of the trench, but undeterred, Lance Corporal Thomas went on alone. Working round a small copse he shot three enemy snipers and then pushed on to a building used by the enemy as a night post. From here he saw whence the enemy were bringing up their troops and where they were congregating. He stayed in this position for an hour, sniping the enemy the whole time and doing great execution. He returned to our lines, after being away three hours with information of the utmost value, which enabled definite plans to be made and artillery fire to be brought on the enemy's concentration, so that when the attack took place it was broken up".

Corporal Thomas, describing the incident of how he won the V.C., writes : "I wish to mention how I got so close to the enemy was by crawling on my stomach for about 800 yards of open country. I was sniped at by enemy snipers, but I bluffed them by pretending that they had hit me, but I again crawled on and gained the village of Fontaine, which was then in German occupation, and worked my way from house to house, so that I got valuable information as regards his movements, and that is how I spent the three hours away from our lines".

Within months the inspiration that won him the VC had disappeared after witnessing dozens of comrades 'blown to pieces' by shelling.



The shattered soldier told his siblings they had no idea of the terrible things the men endured in the trenches. Near to breaking point, he went on to write how he considered walking off towards the German lines to be taken prisoner just so the war would be over for him.

He said: 'You people at home don't realise the terrible things we have to go through. What, with liquid fire, boiling oil, gas, rifle and machine guns and shells bursting around us and blowing poor men to pieces. 'I have just come out of action, after some very hard fighting. There was only 35 left out of 950 men. So I have been lucky to pull through. 'It was terrible fighting. It's as hard a fighting as I have seen. I am fighting for your safety and them children at home.

'I am not the same as some men out here who are fighting for their wives and family. 'Can you tell me, why, I should be so loyal when I have no friends?

'It's just as easy for me to walk to the German lines and be taken prisoner and then, I should be sure of being out of the terrible ordeal of this warfare.' Lance Corporal Thomas wrote about his hatred of the enemy, who he described as swine. He said: 'The Huns are making their final blow to smash the British Army from the French. 'But they will never manage it, if they couldn't do it in 1914 when we only had a handful of men, I am damn sure they can't do it now. I'll stake my life that this war is over within 6 months.

Two more pushes and then the Huns are beat. We simply cut them up in thousands although we have to lose men to do it, but he loses a damn sight more than we do. 'So dear Brother and Sister...think of a lonely soldier out here fighting for civilisation and humanity, we have enough to do to fight the dirty Hun, the lowest of the low. They are worse than swine'. The letter was acquired direct from the Thomas family by a well known autograph hunter called Bill Dean.

Thomas received his Victoria Cross from His Majesty King George V at Buckingham Palace on 23rd March 1918.

He returned to the front later in 1918 and found himself in the thick of it again culminating in March 1918 with him being blown up at a place called Bullecourt.

He was promoted to Corporal on 10th November and to Sergeant on 21st March 1919.

On his return to his home town on 30th March 1918 he was publicly honoured at the Town Hall with a presentation by the Lord Mayor in the following manner:-

Corporal John Thomas of the 5th Battalion, North Staffs Regiment, who has lived at 7, Gorton Lane, Lower Openshaw, was publicly



honoured by the Lord Mayor, Corporation, and the citizens of Manchester, on Wednesday afternoon at the Town Hall, in commemoration of his winning the Victoria Cross. The Lord Mayor (Sir Alexander Porter) presided. Much enthusiasm and congratulations to the hero were displayed.

The Lord Mayor said that was the first occasion in Manchester of a V.C. winner in the war actually receiving his gifts from the citizens. The Corporal's exceptional deed of bravery was that of going forward in broad daylight in full view of the enemy, under machine gun fire, shooting several snipers, and returning after three hours' peril, with information of great value.

Continuing, the Lord Mayor said that the name of a man who so braved death would be sacred to them for ever.— (Applause) Corporal Thomas had also been in the Navy. He had conferred a great honour on the city. The spirit that had animated him animated all the British soldiers now engaged in the great struggle. He (the Lord Mayor) felt fully sure that, spite of the clouds, their army would come out into the sunshine, and victory would await them.—(Applause).

The Lord Mayor then handed to the hero a gold watch (suitably inscribed) and chain, and an illuminated address.

In handing the gifts over, he said they all hoped that he would wear his Victoria Cross with honour and dignity for the rest of his life, and that by and by it would be handed down to future generations, who would remember what their forefather had done for them in that great war.— (Applause).

Corporal Thomas, on stepping forward, was greeted with an ovation. In reply he said he had always appreciated the way in which the citizens of Manchester had come forward to help their brave heroes. On a few days leave, his heart was yet with the boys who were now facing that terrible ordeal. His own deed which gained the honour was done on November 30th last. The inspiration that led him to do it was that which would have actuated any other British soldier in his position.—(Applause) He saw there was something to be done, and he did it, never dreaming what it would bring to him. He had been out for nearly four years. A comrade of his, who had shared the rough and smooth with him, was standing near him when he was shot through the head without any warning. He (the corporal) got his own back, and some more besides.— (Laughter). His chum, who had fallen, was more to him than a brother.— (Loud applause).

The Lord Mayor characterised the V.C. winner's reply as "a manly, straightforward speech". They would all hold very pleasant memories of the Ceremony of the afternoon.

Medal entitlement of Sergeant John Thomas 5th Battalion, North Staffordshire Regiment

Victoria Cross

1914-15 Star

British War Medal (1914-20)

Victory Medal (1914-19) + Mentioned in Despatches Oakleaf

King George VI Coronation Medal (1937)

Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal (1953).

The location of his Victoria Cross is not known at this moment in time. Thomas lost the medal at one time on a bus, but it was handed in at the lost property office, and it was returned to him safe and sound.

His military service did not stop with the award of the Victoria Cross, he returned to France to continue the fighting once again, this time he was blown up at Bullecourt, March, 1918.

He was discharged the Army in 1919 with the rank of Sergeant and returned to his home town with a partial disablement pension of nine shillings and four pence per week.

He married Amelia, eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Wood, of Hulme, Manchester on the 11th June, 1919, at the Parish Church of St. Matthew's, Douglas, Isle of Man. they went on to have a family life with two sons and three daughters.

Both of his sons saw active service in the Second World War with a tough Regiment, the S.A.S. John Thomas writes, they were not allowed to write home. The War Office wrote us every month. The youngest got wounded in the left Shoulder, but by the Grace of God, they both came home.

Thomas found employment very difficult to obtain due to the effects of shell concussion through being blow up at Bullcourt. He did manage to find employment though as a Storekeeper with Willis Overland (later Crossley Motors, Manchester) and a Bus Conductor with North West Road Car Company, Stockport.

He attended 1920 & 1929 VC Reunions and the Coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth Second in 1953. He was also a member of welcoming party for Private W. Speakman VC on his return from Korea.

After eight years of illness, Mr. John Thomas, V.C., died at his home 33 Lowfield Road, Stockport, on Sunday 28th February 1954. He was 67.

The funeral took place on Thursday 4th March, Captain Novell of the Salvation Army, Stockport, conducted a service in the home, assisted by Rev. John Bishop. A gun carriage carried the coffin, which was draped by the Union Jack, 10 men of the North Staffordshire Regiment acted as



bearers. Members of the Stockport War Veteran's Association, headed by Major Long and Mr. J. W. Gosling, lead the cartage to the Borough Cemetery, where the Rev. John Bishop officiated. At the close of the committal the "Last Post" was sounded. Captain Gibbons M.C. and two officers of the Manchester Regiment were present. Many beautiful wreaths were sent.



John Thomas was initiated into the Order in the Sir John Archdeacon Lodge Manchester Province, date unknown.



WILLIAM BERNARD TRAYNOR



William Bernard Traynor is the second of our Brothers who won the Victoria Cross in the Boer War. He was born on 31st December 1870, at 29 Moxon Street, Hull. His father, Francis Traynor, Born Hull 1839 was a Flax (hemp) Dresser from County Monaghan, Ireland, who became a Merchant Seaman. His Mother Rebecca, Born Hull 1843 was a native of Hull. He was the second of four children, his eldest Sister Mary was born in Hull 1869; Another Sister Ada was born in Hull 1878 and a Brother Robert, also born in Hull 1880. He was educated at Pryme Street (Roman Catholic) School in Hull.

After leaving school he found work as a labourer and saved enough money to have a tattoo on his left forearm.

Nine weeks before his eighteenth birthday, (November 4th 1888), he enlisted in the 2nd Battalion The West Yorkshire Regiment. He listed his next of kin as Francis Traynor, of Hull, and his religion was described as Roman Catholic.

Appointed Lance Corporal on 7th October 1896, he became a Corporal on 8th September 1897. On 16th September 1899, William Traynor became a Sergeant. He re-engaged at Aldershot a month later, to complete

his 21 years of service. He went to East India on 29th January 1891 until 21st April 1893, and to South Africa on 20th October 1899 to 9th March 1901. It was here that he gained his Victoria Cross.

Sergeant Traynor took part in the following operations in South Africa: Willow Grange (22nd and 23rd November 1899); Colenso; Spion Kop; Vaal Krantz; operations in Natal from 14th to 27th February, ending at Pieter's Hill; Northern Natal and Orange River Colony, including action at Laing's Nek East and West Transvaal.

In the build up to the action when he won his Victoria Cross, General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien writes: Lake Chrissie - Bothwell Camp. The 5th February 1901 was a more or less uneventful day, though there was considerable skirmishing, and, from some very commanding ground we had to cross, large convoys could be seen in the far distance, fifteen miles away, trekking off in the direction of Ermelo on the Amsterdam road. That night we camped at a small township called Bothwell, on the edge of Lake Chrissie. It was a lovely night, but inclined to be foggy, and I carried out my usual custom of selecting the outpost line and visiting every post before settling, myself in camp.

Bothwell was a pretty place, just a church, a store, and hotel, kept by one Campbell, and three British families, the Boer families having fled.

I was roused at 3 a.m. on the 6th February by a terrific fire; moonlight - but a dense fog had descended. Horses, and, I am ashamed to say, men too, were stampeding everywhere - many from the interior of the camp rushed in amongst the trees by my camp; two groups in groves sixty yards apart fired at each other, each thinking the others were Boers, luckily without damage. The rattle of bullets everywhere was deafening, especially on the tin roofs around us. It took Spens and me all our time to make the men round my own camp cease firing, and they actually mistook us for Boers and called "Hands up to us, luckily they shot too bad to hit us. The outposts behaved splendidly, as the attack was a very determined one by 2,000 Boers.

This does not sound a very creditable performance, but it was the rush of the horses, really most alarming, which created the temporary panic, and not the firing.

It appears that the Middleburg, Ermelo, and Knugersdorp Commandos, under Louis Botha and J. Smuts, consisting of some 2,000 men, had, under cover of the fog attacked the camp opposite the outposts, of the West Yorks. Their advanced troops had got within 100 or 200 yards before opening fire, having crossed the valley west of the camp, whilst their supports opened fire from the far side of the valley at a range of 800 or 900 yards. The first burst of fire was so close and so loud that the horses of the 5th Lancers stampeded. They circled round like mad things, at one time dashed through the outposts, and on returning afforded an

opportunity to the Boers of rushing in under cover of them - an opportunity they bravely took.

The fighting on the outpost line was of a determined nature, and although severe where the Suffolk piquets stood, the brunt of it fell on the West Yorkshires, who enhanced that night the fine reputation the Regiment already held for bravery and determination. The nerve and steadiness they showed were particularly commendable as there were amongst their picquets several drafts whose *baptême de feu* it was.



Artists impression of the chaos

Under cover of the returning horses the Boers got close to two of the West Yorkshire piquets, almost all of which were killed or wounded at their post. Spens, who had gone out through the fog to where the firing was heaviest, the sort of place he seemed to select for himself in all fights, seeing this onrush, at once sent up a support under Lieutenant Cantor. Just in time; although unfortunately Cantor was killed, and all his support killed or wounded, except Colour Sergeant Busher. However, the Boers were stopped from penetrating the outpost line, and gradually withdrew and in about three quarters of an hour their fire slackened, and in another half hour ceased altogether.

Unfortunately, thick mist still prevailed, and we could not ascertain even the direction of the Boer retirement. However, at 6.30 a.m. it cleared

slightly and I sent off Colonel Henry with all the mounted troops in Pursuit. But although they caught up to them sufficiently to harry them for many miles with shell fire, they were unable to do more as the enemy were as well mounted as themselves.

Our losses in horses were 54 killed, about the same number wounded, and over 200 lost. I am convinced that, except for this stampede of horses, our casualties would have been very light.

The Boers had a very bad time. A few days after we found a record in a farm giving 28 killed, and an unknown number wounded.

For his services in this campaign Sergeant Traynor received the Victoria Cross, his citation published in the London Gazette on 17th September 1901 reads: "Bothwell Camp, South Africa, 6 February 1901, Sergeant William Bernard Traynor, 2nd Battalion, Prince of Wales's Own (West Yorkshire) Regiment.

During the night attack on Bothwell Camp on the 6th February 1901, Sergeant Traynor jumped out of a trench and ran out under an extremely heavy fire to the assistance of a wounded man. While running out he was severely wounded, and being unable to carry the man by himself he called for assistance. Lance Corporal Lintott at once came to him and between them they carried the wounded soldier into shelter.

After this, although severely wounded, Sergeant Traynor remained in command of his section, and was most cheerful, encouraging his men till the attack failed".

Though severely wounded, with a splinter in his chest and a bullet in his thigh, Sergeant Traynor remained on duty encouraging his men.

Such were the conditions and his injuries appeared so bad, the military authorities sent a telegram to Mrs. Traynor, announcing that her husband had been killed in action. However, this was certainly not so, though he arrived at hospital on 15th February, his wounds were so serious that he had to be invalided home on 10th March 1901, where he spent a long time recuperating and under medical treatment, he was finally discharged as medically unfit for further service on 29th September 1901. His wounds meant that he could not travel to London to receive his VC from King Edward, but instead received it at the West Yorkshire Regimental Barracks, York, on the 2nd July 1902 from Colonel Edward Stevenson Browne, himself a VC winner during the Zulu war of 1879.

For his services in this campaign Sergeant Traynor received also, besides the Victoria Cross, the Queen's Medal and clasps for Tugela Heights, Relief of Ladysmith, Laing's Nek, Transvaal and Orange River Colony, and Clasp for 1901. At the end of the Great War, Traynor was mentioned in dispatches for "valuable services in connection with the war".

Corporal Lintott, who so splendidly answered his comrade's call for assistance, was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, and promoted Sergeant by Lord Kitchener.

Medal entitlement of Sergeant William Traynor, 2nd Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment

Victoria Cross

Queen's South Africa Medal (1899-1902)

6 clasps:

"Tugela Heights" – "Orange Free State" – "Relief of Ladysmith"

"Transvaal" – "Laing's Nek" – "South Africa 1901"

King George VI Coronation Medal (1937)

Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal (1953)



On 12th June, 1897 at Hunton, near Maidstone, Kent, Sergeant Traynor married Jane Elizabeth Martin, daughter of Elizabeth and James Martin. Their children are: Alice Kathleen, born 5th May 1898, died in early 1901 before she reached 2 years old; Francis Bernard Redvers, born 7th December 1899, who was to die later in 1911; Cecil Robert, born 4th May, 1903; Twins William Bothwell and Victor Charles, born 5th April, 1905 and Eileen May, born 20th July, 1910.

The Traynor's settled in Dover in 1902, Traynor becoming an Orderly Room Clerk with the Royal Artillery. In 1911 they were living at 36 Eaton Road, He applied for and was given a post as Barrack Warden, at Dover on 8th September 1902. During the First World War whilst on duty at Dover on 2nd September 1913 he earned a Mention in Dispatches for valuable services in connection with the war. He held the post of Barrack Warden for 33 years, until he retired in 1935 at the age of 65. With him were his wife and their sons. The twin boys followed in their father's footsteps and joined the Army, in the Royal Engineers. By the age of 45, both had gained the Rank of Major.

He became a member of the British Legion in Dover, and was for ten years Vice Chairman. He was also a Freemason, initiated into Military

Jubilee Lodge No 2195 in February 1919, and a founder of Snargate Street Lodge No. 6770 in November 1946. He served too on the Whitfield Parish Council.

His Masonic career is well catalogued and is recorded thus: W. B. Traynor was initiated into Military Jubilee Lodge No 2195 in February 1919, Passed in March 1919, and Raised in April 1919. He was Master in 1925 and remained a member until his death in 1954. He was a founder of Snargate Lodge No 6770 in November 1948 and also remained a member there until his death. Provincial honours came in 1935 with appointment to Provincial Grand Sword Bearer (Kent). He was the first member of Military Jubilee Lodge to be honoured with Grand Rank as Past Assistant Grand Sword Bearer in 1951.

He was exalted into the Holy Royal Arch in January 1920, at the Military Jubilee Chapter No 2195, where he was First Principal in 1927 and 1928. He gained the rank of Provincial Grand Sword Bearer (Kent) in 1934. Both of his twin boys became members of the Military Jubilee Lodge.



On Tuesday 6th February 1951 a dinner was held at the Town Hall to honour the 50th anniversary of his award of the VC. The programme reveals that the guests enjoyed soup, followed by fish, with a main course of steak pie, cream potatoes, and peas or cabbage. Trifle and coffee followed. A photograph of Bernard was placed inside the programme. The inscription beneath it reads; "Bernard. One of England's great gentlemen, a very good friend of the family, really a wonderful person".

Music was supplied by the Band of the 1st battalion of The Buffs, and there were a number of toasts. That to Sergeant Traynor was proposed by Colonel Tidmarsh, while Sergeant Traynor, after responding, proposed a toast to his own old regiment, the West Yorkshires.

It was during this celebration that he showed a letter to a newspaper correspondent, from the District Paymaster, a Lieutenant Colonel which read as follows: "Your Husband having been killed in action



February 6th 1901, you are no longer entitled to any further payments from this office. Please return your certificate of identity”.



Traynor Meets Winston Churchill in 1945

In 1953 Sergeant Traynor was one of the few non Freemen invited to a Coronation lunch at the Town Hall held by the Hereditary and Honorary Freemen. He attended every Regimental occasion that he could and visited the Regiment just a few days before he died.

He died on 20th October 1954, at Buckland Hospital of a sudden Haemorrhage, Gastric Ulcer and Myocardial

degeneration at the age of 83, having been predeceased by his wife in 1934 aged 59. He was residing at “Ca-Ira”, Sandwich Road, Whitfield, Dover at the time.

The funeral was held at St Andrews, Buckland, and was attended by a large congregation, including the Mayor, many representatives of the Services and of Veterans, Buffaloes and Masonic Lodges. Sergeant Traynor is buried at Charlton, in the grave of his wife, and as the coffin was lowered the Last Post and Reveille were played, and black draped standards were dipped. He was buried with full Buffalo Honours.

His headstone reads: In Fond Remembrance of Frank Traynor Who Died 12th August 1911 Aged 12 Years. Also Jane E. Traynor Who Died 6th June 1934 Aged 59 Years. Also William B. Traynor VC Husband of Jane Who Died 20th October 1954 Aged 83 Years.



His Buffalo career is the best recorded we have at this present time, it reads: 12th November 1895 Bro. Traynor became a member of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, when he was initiated into the Prince of Wales Lodge No.668, in the Rose Inn, Sandgate, Kent. This later became No 596 when the then Grand Secretary, Bro. Wilson Marsh re-numbered all the existing Lodges into the series that we have today.

He gained his 2nd Degree in his Mother Lodge the Prince of Wales No.596, His 3rd in the Royal United Services Lodge No.2291. His Third degree regalia hangs in a frame in the Dover Patrol Lodge No.3765. Where

the members were under the impression that he had not been raised to a higher degree. During my research, I found that he had in fact had the Honour of being raised to the Fourth Degree by the Provincial Grand Lodge of South East Kent and not his Minor Lodge. This in itself is an unusual occurrence. It was once said that if a Lodge had 5 Buffs like him, with his cheerfulness, attention to details and his sense of Loyalty, then that Lodge would be the Best in the Order.

He was a founder member of the Royal United Services Lodge No.2291 and The Dover Patrol Lodge No.3765. At one point in the United Services Lodge, they had Bro. W. B. Traynor V.C as Sitting Primo; Bro. J. H. Blackwell M.C. as City Marshall, and Bro. Reed D.S.M. was City Constable.

Traynor was also involved in the opening of the South East Kent Province. On the 22nd of August 1922 the South East Kent Provincial Grand Lodge was opened in a very impressive manner by Bro. H. C. Ebbutt, K.O.M. (Master of Kinloss, who was later to become Grand Registrar in 1926) who officiated on behalf of the Grand Primo of the Grand Lodge of England.



Royal United Lodge No. 2291 showing Bro. Traynor, V.C., Bro. Blackwell, M.C. and Bro. Reed, D.S.M.

Brother W.B. Traynor, V.C., C.P., having been elected the Provincial Grand Primo and after taking the obligation, was duly installed and the other officers were elected. He then accepted the Provincial Grand Lodge was constituted. Brother W. B. Traynor, V.C., C.P., Provincial Grand Primo thanked all Grand Lodge Officers for their great assistance and kind concessions which had been given, to enable the district to establish ourselves and so forward the cause of the good old Grand Lodge of England. Brother Traynor also stated "at last the ancient town of Dover can say that it has joined the ranks of the Grand Lodge of England in true style, for it has been a great pity that this old Borough could only boast of one G.L.E. Lodge, viz., The Royal United Services Lodge 2291, which has been holding out since 1917, kept going by a few really good old Buffaloes. But now we have got more young blood at work, we shall try to make things hum. With the opening of two more Lodges and a Provincial Grand Lodge to look after them, we should be able to break into the ranks of the unenlightened".

The Dover Patrol was a Royal Navy Command of the First World War probably most notable for its involvement in the Zeebrugge raid on 22nd and 23rd April 1918. The Dover Patrol formed a separate unit of the Royal Navy, based at Dover and Dunkirk for the duration of the war. Its primary task was to prevent enemy (German) shipping from entering the English Channel, en route to the Atlantic Ocean, thereby obliging the German Navy to take the much longer route around Scotland, which was itself covered by the Northern Patrol.

The Dover Patrol Lodge No.3765 was opened on 20th August 1921 and was named by its Founders after the Dover Patrol raids of World War One. Brother William Bernard Traynor VC, K.O.M. was one of those Founders and it is understood that it was his idea to name the lodge in memory of those brave men who took part in those daring raids.

In February, 1924, the Rhineland Lodge No.5131 was founded in the Stapel Haus, Cologne, the opening ceremony was conducted by Brother Traynor, V.C., K.O.M. of the Dover Patrol Lodge No.3765.

It would be remiss of me if I did not include excerpts from an article submitted by Bro. Harry Reid, Secretary Dover Patrol Lodge, in the Spring 2013 Buffalo Quarterly Journal in respect of the excellent work the Dover Patrol Lodge carried out in the restoration of Brother Traynor's Grave as follows: "In 2012 Bro. Traynor's Grandson decided to put his grandfather's medals up for sale. He reasoned that he could not give the medals to just one of his own children so it would be better to sell them and split the funds between them. On 13th December 2012, in auction, at Dix Noonan Webb of London, the medal group realised a hammer price of £160,000.

They were purchased by a British private collector.

It was during a general discussion on the subject of the sale of the medals that the Brethren of the Dover Patrol Lodge decided to visit the cemetery and locate Brother Traynor's grave. What they found dismayed them. It was in a very poor condition and overgrown, certainly not in a condition fit for the remembrance and respect of a man of such great standing in his



life time.

It was agreed that something had to be done, so three members of the lodge collected their gardening and cleaning equipment and set off

for the cemetery on Sunday 27th to see what they could do to improve the condition of their Founder's Grave. It took three or four visits to the Graveside and a great deal of elbow grease to bring it back to a respectful condition and one that was fit for a Buff of Valour".

The members of the Dover Patrol Lodge still care for his grave, even to this day, considering it to be part of their duty to this extraordinary man.

An article in a South East Kent newspaper in 1932 carries a story which is reported in the May issue of the Buffalo Quarterly Journal in the following manner.



A Buffalo VC and his pal, Stalwarts of South-East Kent.

"A gossip writer in a South East Kent paper tells the interesting story of a Buffalo V.C. He says: "On Sunday last I had the good fortune to pass the local lodges of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, and the local branch of the British Legion, marching behind the Hythe Town Band to attend divine service at the Parish Church, and the sight set me wondering what was the spirit that kept these two great brotherhoods alive, one, the great brotherhood of peace, the other the great brotherhood of arms, a spirit which drew together the man of leisure and the labourer, the officer and the private, in one common ideal.

In the ranks I noticed the Mayor of Hythe, Town Councillors and ex Town Councillors, a General and Privates, the unemployed and men in humble walks of life, marching side by side with one purpose, to give public worship and to render respect to the memory of the late Earl Haig.

I think my luck must have been 'in' on Sunday, for after the parade was dismissed I fell in with an old Buffalo and I gathered that the members of the Order were anticipating a bumper attendance at the Institute Hythe, on February 11th, when two well-known local brethren were to be honoured by being installed to the Third Degree.

My companion was very informative, and told me the Installing Officer was 'Bertie' Traynor, V.C., who won the coveted distinction on February 6th 1901, for an act of conspicuous gallantry during a night attack on Bothwell Camp (South African War).

A record of the event shows that Sergeant W. B. Traynor (of 2nd Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment) jumped out of a trench and ran out under extremely heavy fire to the assistance of a wounded comrade. Whilst running he was severely wounded and, being unable to carry on, called for assistance. Help was given him by Lance Corporal Lintott, and between them they carried the wounded soldier to shelter. Sergeant Traynor remained in command of his section, cheerful and encouraging his men, until the attack failed.

Reported Dead.

In a communication from the district Paymaster, dated February 20th 1901, Mrs Traynor was curtly informed that her husband was killed in action on February 6, 1901, and she was authorised to draw insurance on account of his supposed death. Her proudest possession is an unpresented cheque for £13 from the Insurance Company, which she would not part with for 10 times its original value.

It was not until a month later that she was informed that her husband was severely wounded and not dead.

By a curious chance the Sergeant in charge of the next section to that of Sergeant Traynor was Sergeant Duell (late Garrison Sergeant Major) of the Suffolk Regiment (now Provincial Grand Secretary of South East Kent. They were staunch friends, and after leaving the Army settled down in Dover, where they both took a very active part in establishing the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes under the Grand Lodge of England in South East Kent”.

During my two day stay at Grove House going through the card index I found that the records at Grand Lodge showed that William Traynor’s middle name was BERTRAM. Every record whilst searching the internet showed the name of BERNARD. the name shown in this book is most certainly one and the same man and as my research was through official channels I am inclined to believe that his name was Bernard and that when the records were transferred to the card system somebody with a bit of flowery imagination changed it to Bertram, I can live with that, it sounds very posh anyway.



HENRY WEALE



Henry Weale, the son of John and Sarah Weale (nee Hughes), was born in Nine Houses, Shotton, Flintshire, Wales, on 2nd October 1897. His family moved later to 33 Brook Road. His father worked as a general labourer in the John Summer's Steelworks and Henry was educated at St Ethelwald's School, Shotton. On leaving school at 14, the young man worked as a packer at the John Summer's Steelworks. He enlisted with the 5th Royal Welsh Fusiliers (Territorial Force) in November 1911.

It was most young men's dream to serve King and country, so Harry lied and joined up, aged just 15. Since soldiers had to be 16, he was sent packing back to Shotton, but undeterred he went to the bloody battlefields legally at 16.

He was discharged from the Territorial Force on 7th September 1913 and next day joined the 3rd Royal Welsh Fusiliers (Special Reserve), where he was allocated the regimental number of 5046.

Weale served overseas from 1st November to 10th December 1914, when he was wounded. He then returned to the United Kingdom before serving from 16th March 1915 to 1st October 1915, when he was wounded a second time. His third period of active service was from 14th September

to 16th January 1917, when he was gassed. He was a man with a clear sense of his own destiny. Harry 'Got a Blighty', as they termed it, when he inhaled mustard gas after a German attack on his trench. Despite people begging him to accept a medical discharge from the Army, he was determined to go back and finish what he'd started. As he left home to return to France, he told his friends, 'Don't worry about me, the next time you see me I'll have the VC' - and he did!"

He served a fourth spell abroad from 22nd August 1917 for only six days before being wounded again. He was promoted to Lance Corporal, unpaid, on 8th December 1917.

War had raged for four years, claiming the lives of countless soldiers and civilians. Soldiers, beaten by injury and fatigue, struggled to hold back the advancing Germans in the trenches of France and Belgium. A 20 year old Harry Weale of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers was stationed in Bazentin-le-Grand at the heart of the Battle of the Somme. Germans were advancing and the adjacent battalion was held up by enemy machine gun.



On the evening of 25th August 1918 the 113th Brigade, 38th (Welsh) Division was given orders to advance at 4 a.m. the next day on the village of Longueval, to the north east of Albert, with the intention of pushing the enemy out of High Wood in front of the accompanying 114th Brigade. The 13th Royal Welsh Fusiliers led the advance, with the 16th and 14th Royal Welsh Fusiliers in support. As the 13th Battalion was badly cut up during the fighting, it wasn't long before the supporting battalions joined in the fray. The advance moved from the west towards Longueval but heavy machine gun fire from Montauban and the left of High Wood took its toll. As a consequence the 13th Battalion came to a standstill and B Company of the 14th Battalion moved forward on its left flank and into Bazentin le Grand village, where, at about 9 a.m., it managed to push the enemy out of Bazentin le Grand and follow it towards the Longueval Contalmaison Road. However, they themselves were then pushed back to the village. C Company was ordered to clear the enemy from the left flank, assisted by a Battalion of the South Wales Borderers who moved up on the left of the 113th Brigade.

By now the time was about 10 a.m. and the 17th Royal Welsh Fusiliers Battalion was then ordered to move eastwards to the north of Bazentin le Petit Wood. They were instructed to avoid High Wood if possible as it was thought to be still strongly held. The Battalion, moving in artillery

formation, was very fortunate as it found the wood virtually empty. At the same time the 13th and 16th Royal Welsh Fusiliers Battalions were at a standstill and the 14th moved forward on the left of the 113th Brigade.

They found themselves on the site of the old windmill at Bazentin and moved forward towards a central ridge from the north west. The battalion managed to turn the enemy flank, succeeding in the capture of a hundred prisoners and eight machine guns. It was during this part of the fighting that Lance Corporal Henry Weale (14th Royal Welsh Fusiliers) won his VC.

The 14th Battalion, which had done well in the fighting, now found itself isolated in a position about a thousand yards in front of the 113th Brigade with its flanks in the air. Not surprisingly, they were counter attacked, and soon after 5 p.m. were forced to retreat to a point about 500 yards to the east of Bazentin le Grand. Weale's VC was gazetted on 15th November 1918 as follows:

For most conspicuous bravery and initiative in attack. The adjacent battalion having been held up by enemy machine guns, Lance Corporal Weale was ordered to deal with the hostile posts. When his Lewis gun failed him, on his own initiative he rushed the nearest post and killed the crew, then went for the others, the crews of which fled on his approach, this gallant N.C.O. pursuing them. His very dashing deed cleared the way for the advance, inspired his comrades, and resulted in the capture of all the machine guns.

By this remarkable act of courage he helped change the course of the First World War. Unlike Harry Weale, many (including VC winners) never returned to their home towns following the Great War, which claimed about 20 million lives.

On his return home thousands lined the streets to greet the young man who quickly became a local celebrity. As he stepped off the train, literally the whole of Shotton lined up to give him a hero's welcome, crowds had gathered from miles around.

He was presented with an illuminated address by the head teacher of his former primary school, St Ethelwold's. It read: "The parish is proud to know that one of its own boys has won, by deed of valour, the highest distinction which a British soldier can win". Bosses at John Summers were so impressed with Harry's bravery, they presented him with a gold hunter pocket watch.

He was decorated with his VC by His Majesty King George V, in the Ballroom of Buckingham Palace on 1st March 1919.

He married Susannah Harrison, daughter of George Harrison, of 5 Hope Place, Rhyl, at St Ethelwald's Church in Shotton on 16th June

1919 and the couple lived in Rhyl, Wales, they had four sons, Edward Henry; Raymond Harry; Norman; Derek and one daughter, Phyllis.

During his life Weale attended various VC functions, including The Garden Party given by H.M. King George V to V.C. Recipients at Buckingham Palace, 26th June, 1920. The Dinner given by the British Legion to V.C. Recipients at the House of Lords, 9th November, 1929, the Victory Parade at Whitehall and the Dinner at the Dorchester Hotel, London, 8th June, 1945, the Annual Rally of the Distinguished Conduct Medal League at the Horse Guards, London, 28th September, 1952 and the V.C. Centenary Review held by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in Hyde Park, 26th June, 1955.

Medal entitlement of Sergeant Henry WEALE 14th Battalion, Royal Welsh Fusiliers:

Victoria Cross

1914 Star

British War Medal (1914-20)

Victory Medal (1914-19) + Mentioned in Despatches Oakleaf

Defence Medal (1939-45)

War Medal (1939-45)

King George VI Coronation Medal (1937)

Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal (1953).



After the war ended Weale was transferred to the reserve on 16th April 1919 and on 8th September he was discharged. Nearly eighteen months later he re-enlisted, on 7th February 1921, this time with the 5th Royal Welch Fusiliers (Territorial Force). He served in Ireland in 1921 and was made a Sergeant on 8th July 1921. A few months later, on 6th February 1922, he was discharged and this time enlisted in Section D Army Reserve on 12th July. Four years later he was discharged again and thirteen years later, on 25th August 1939, he re-enlisted as a member of the National Defence Corps. He was transferred to the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and was sent to Dover and later Salisbury where he became an airfield guard. On 29th January 1941 he was found to be no longer fit for active service and was discharged for the very last time. He was 43 years of age. It would appear that in the 1920's when in the employment of the Courtaulds factory in Flint, that he suffered an industrial accident

to his legs when some acid spilt onto them. Thus already handicapped by shrapnel still present in his neck, and also still suffering from the effects of frostbite, Weale was to find employment very difficult for the rest of his life.

Conditions were dreadfully hard for men returning from war. Britain was meant to be a land fit for heroes, but when many returned, many like Harry Weale found themselves on the scrapheap. Harry went from a hero, invited to receptions at Buckingham Palace, to a poorly paid council worker. Susie's mother was in poor health and Harry was forced to sell his John Summers gold watch.

Harry found work first of all as a packer at John Summers Steel Works, that as a building worker at Melvill, Dunstan & Stanley, Holywell, Flintshire and finally as a road worker with Rhyl Urban District Council.

Perhaps one of the most touching tales of Harry's life was that his former employer John Summers tracked down and bought the gold watch he was forced to part with. The firm returned the timepiece to his nephew in the 60's.

Henry Weale died on 13th January 1959 at the home of one of his sons residing at 22 Prince Edward Avenue, Rhyl and after a service in St. Thomas's Church in Rhyl he was buried in Maes Hyfryd Cemetery, Grange Road, Rhyl, the local cemetery. The grave reference is 4829. He was 62 years of age and Susannah, his wife, lived on until she died on 4th



October 1988 aged 89.



His name is commemorated by Weale Court, Hightown, Wrexham; Harry Weale Hall at Queensferry TA Centre, Clywd and finally with a memorial garden unveiled in Shotton, his home town in October 2010. His VC is in the collection of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in Caernarfon Castle and his other decorations included the 1914 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal, Defence Medal (1939-45), War Medal (1939-45) and Coronation Medals for 1937 and 1953 along with his pocket watch was added to the collection in February 2012.

Henry Weale was initiated into the Order in the Col. Cody Lodge No. 720, Rhyl Province. An article in the Buffalo Quarterly Journal of July 1952 reports that on March 21st 1952 the four sons of Bro. Henry Weale VC, Viz; Edward Henry; Norman Victor; John Francis and Derek were initiated into the Col. Cody Lodge No.720. May the sons of Bro. Harry Weale live up to their fathers' reputation.



THOMAS WILKINSON



According to my records this Brother, Thomas Wilkinson is the only member of our Order who won the Victoria Cross in the Second World War and is the only member of our Order to be awarded this highest decoration, posthumously.

Thomas Wilkinson was the youngest of five sons of Captain William and Esther Wilkinson of Widnes. He was born 1st August 1898 at 96 Mersey Road, West Bank, Widnes Lancashire.

After finishing his education at local schools he found work first as a grocers errand boy and then because he came from seafaring stock he joined his fathers sailing sloop "Irene" as a Cabin Boy then as a deckhand.

During the First World War, Wilkinson served in the Merchant Marine Service as a Quartermaster with the Blue Funnel Line on the converted troopship "Alcinous".

When the First World War finished he found further employment the Indo China Steam Navigation Company and in 1936 was in command of S.S. Hangsang on the China coast.



He was one of those larger than life figures, devilishly handsome, your typical lantern jawed *Boy's Own Paper* "Days of Empire" hero made real, and thanks to his years in the Far East, he spoke Chinese and Japanese fluently. So he knew the enemy he was dealing with, including the fact that capture was considered dishonourable in the enemy's eyes. He knew that any serious encounter with the enemy would be an all or nothing affair, literally a fight to the death.

The story of Thomas Wilkinson's award of the Victoria Cross has to be told by first telling the story of the Steam Ship "Li Wo".

Not many would have heard of H.M. Ship Li Wo, a simple patrol vessel of only 700 tons, with Temporary lieutenant Thomas Wilkinson R.N.R., in command. She was to become the most decorated small ship in the Royal Navy.

Built by the Hong Kong & Whampoa Dock Company for the Indo China Steam Navigation Company Ltd., 'Li Wo' was a 700 ton, coal burning, flat bottomed, shallow draught passenger steam ship built in 1938. She was designed with tall sides and was destined for service on the upper Yangtze river, but because of the Far East War she remained confined to the delta of the Yangtze, working out of Shanghai. She was requisitioned by the Admiralty in December 1941, after the outbreak of war against Japan, and commissioned under the White Ensign as an auxiliary patrol vessel.

She was armed with one old four inch gun, two machine guns and a depth charge thrower, and was commanded by her pre-war captain, Mr. Thomas Wilkinson, who was given the rank of Temporary Lieutenant Royal Navy Reserve.

The gallant adventure of the Li Wo begins on Friday 13th February 1942, two days before the fall of Singapore, Li Wo was ordered to Batavia on Java, and sailed from Singapore that day. She had embarked 84 officers and men, including regular Royal Navy ratings, men from the Army, Royal Air Force, and one civilian. They had on board 13 rounds of four inch ammunition, and some small arms ammunition for the machine guns.

By the afternoon of Saturday 14th February when Li Wo was in the Java Sea, she had survived four air attacks, one of them by many Japanese aircraft. Later that afternoon, two Japanese convoys were sighted, escorted by warships, including a heavy cruiser and some destroyers. These were the advance guard of the Japanese invasion fleet, heading for Sumatra.

Wilkinson had never had a day's naval training in his life, but he proved to be a natural leader. When the ships had been identified as Japanese, he called his scratch ship's company together and told them, in the presence of the enemy, that rather than try to escape he had decided to engage the convoy and fight to the last, hoping at least to inflict some damage. As recorded later in Wilkinson's citation, in words worthy of Hakluyt, this 'drew resolute support from the whole ship's company'.

One of the survivors of the epic battle of the Li Wo, Chief Petty Officer Charles Alma 'Lofty' Rogers recalls with pride the part he played during this action:-

Final action of the Li-Wo near Banka Island.

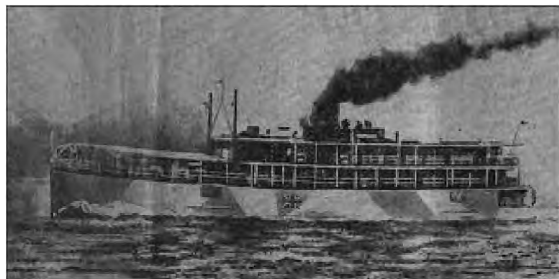
After returning from my last job in Singapore, Jahore Straits Patrol, I was detailed to join H.M.S. "Li Wo", a river boat of 700 tons and speed of 15 knots.

It had one four inch gun forward, two twin Lewis guns, one Hainan Projector and ASDIC installation procedure.

My joining orders were to report to Orange Hotel at 15.00 hours, 13th February 1942. The Japanese were occupying Singapore very quickly and the hotel was under fire from trench mortars. On reporting I was detailed to take a party of men from about 8 different branches to join the Li Wo. Having loaded the lorries with provisions we proceeded to Keppel Harbour where the ship was anchored about 1 mile off shore.

Once on board the First Lieutenant, Lieutenant Stanton, gave me my orders, which were to detail off gun crews, lookouts, and men for the engine and boiler rooms. About midnight we found we were no longer able to communicate with shore but were advised by another ship to move off. This we attempted, but the C.O. Lieutenant Wilkinson, found it extremely difficult owing to the lack of marker buoys and decided to anchor until morning. At dawn the gun crews were closed up and the ship got under way.

During the afternoon of the 14th we were bombed but luckily no hits were scored. At about 19.00 hours we anchored in a small bay on one of the islands. The next morning we were bombed again but escaped being hit. The planes were very low which gave us a chance to retaliate with



machine gun fire. The Captain then decided we would make a dash through 'bomb alley', the Banka Straits. Whilst proceeding to this area we sighted a convoy of about 30 ships, on the horizon off our starboard bow, heading in the

direction of Banka Island, but were unable identify them until we closed to about 16,000 yards. Suddenly, on the horizon, dead ahead, we sighted the tops of 3 funnels, which turned out to be a Japanese Cruiser carrying 6 inch guns. We also sighted off our port bow a Japanese Destroyer heading the convoy which was in sections of four and six ships. The Captain was certain that its mission was to support the invasion of Singapore.

Word very rapidly passed around the ship that we were going to go into action and that the leading ship in the nearest section would be our first target, Battle ensigns were hoisted, one on Gaff and one at Masthead, as we closed rapidly with the four inch gun ready to open fire.

With no sign of enemy fire we closed to 2,000 yards when the order to open fire was given. The first salvo fell short, the second crossed the bow and the third scored a direct hit just under the bridge. She appeared to be on fire and turned to port. The other ships turned to starboard, and commenced firing at us with small calibre guns.

The damaged ship was now approaching the Li Wo, still firing, so the C.O. decided to ram her. We hit her at top speed amidships, and became interlocked, our bows being buckled back, we were now really at close quarters. A machine gun duel took place which was fast and furious, with many men being killed or wounded. The Li Wo gunners eventually wiped out 2 guns which caused the Japs to abandon ship, which by this time was well on fire.

Whilst all this was happening the Japanese cruiser had circled around behind us and was heading straight for us at high speed. We eventually became disentangled from the crippled Japanese ship and set course away from the cruiser. The cruiser opened fire at a range of 18,000 yards and noticed that the enemy destroyer that had been heading for us on the opposite was turning away. No doubt she knew that we were at the mercy of the cruiser as we were out gunned and out ranged.

We zigzagged as the salvos fell, we had a poor opinion of the Japanese gunners, as her salvos of shells were falling wide, sometimes 300 yards or more off target. However, gradually they came nearer and nearer and

shrapnel was now hitting us causing many men to be killed or wounded. I personally was hit with three pieces of shrapnel in the leg, but not seriously wounded. After about the ninth salvo we were told to abandon ship, so all who were able to jumped overboard. Very soon afterwards the cordite locker at the rear of the gun and amidships was hit. The last sight I had of the Li Wo as she started on her last voyage to the bottom of the ocean was something I shall never forget, her ensigns were still flying and the Captain was standing on the bridge, and, although listing to port, she was still under way. Then, suddenly, she disappeared, the Li Wo was no more.

H.M.S. Li Wo had fought her last action and was now at rest on the bottom of the ocean. The few remaining men who had escaped were at the mercy of the sea, there was no land in sight. Eventually in the distance a lifeboat was sighted, bobbing up and down in the swell. Leading Seaman Thompson and myself struck out towards it, but just as we were approaching it, we noticed a ship from the convoy coming towards us. We swam away as fast as possible and on glancing back saw the ship ram the lifeboat. Around this area there were about 30 men struggling for their lives little realising that the worst part was yet to come, the Japs were not content to leave us to our fate, but circled around and opened up a murderous attack with machine guns, hand grenades, coal and wood. It was just plain cold blooded murder. Amidst the hell, men could be heard crying out for mercy, but still the Japs continued their 'sport'. I lay on my back with my arms outstretched and luckily no more shot came in my direction.

After what seemed like an eternity the ship moved off, leaving the ones that had cheated death again, once more to their fate. Those that were able to, made toward the lifeboat, which by now was about half submerged, there were only 3 survivors. Lieutenant Stanton had a bullet hole through the back of his head, another officer was wounded in the stomach and had part of his hand shot away, Petty Officer Huntley had his foot blown off and was in very bad condition. We helped each other into the lifeboat which was now submerged to the gunwhale, and tried to make the best of a bad situation. There were no oars, food or medical supplies, all we could do was to let the boat drift. As we drifted we saw the ship that we had crippled it was also drifting, and still on fire. We spent a very cold night, and as dawn broke, one of the officers whom I had been holding in my arms, died from his severe shrapnel wounds. I informed Lieutenant Stanton who helped me take off his lifebelt and put him over the side where he slowly sank below the surface.

After about 2 days we eventually saw our first sign of land on the horizon, about 16 miles away. We were all in rather bad shape but ignoring the sharks which had been swimming around us continuously

and yet never attacked us once, we attempted to tow the boat towards the shore, but all to no avail. A Jap destroyer came and had a sniff at us and we wondered if our earlier experiences would be repeated. However they only gave us a cursory glance and sailed away, leaving us to our fate, but we were not going to be beaten.

The boat was now getting extremely waterlogged and we expected her to go down at any time. Lieutenant Stanton decided to try to get to the Jap ship which was now about 2 miles away, and so, along with the gunnery officer they started to swim but the tides were against them and they were lucky enough to be picked up during the night. The almost, totally submerged boat now contained myself, Leading Seaman Wilden, Leading Seaman Spencer, Petty Officer Huntley, a Malay called Tel, and an unknown soldier. Petty Officer Huntley died as a result of his wounds and the soldier was lost overboard. Leading Seaman Spencer set off to swim ashore but was unsuccessful and was picked up extremely exhausted.

Only 3 of us were now left, myself, Leading Seaman Wilden and the Malayan, so we decided to let the boat drift to wherever the tide would take her. As luck would have it, another partly submerged boat drifted towards us, just before dark.

We swam towards it and found it was a Naval Whaler, split down the centre, but preferable because it had oars and sail. We boarded her, rigged her for sailing, and had just picked out a sight of land to sail for when we heard yells and shouts. They came from 2 rafts we hadn't previously seen, on one raft there were 3 men, on the other 4 men. They were also survivors from the Li Wo and we were glad to find they had a tin of biscuits with them. I could only let a few on board the whaler and then we took the rafts in tow. We were helped by a strong wind which sprang up, but the boat was submerged, up to the gunwhale so we were actually sitting in water all the time.'

During, the night a Jap patrol boat approached and shone her searchlight on us, but because we had dropped over the lee side they did not detect us.

My aim was to try to reach the land ahead which I knew to be Sumatra, but the tides were so strong that we could only drift with them. At about 2 am we sighted land straight ahead so I put 6 men on the oars and we started rowing for our lives. We were still rowing 4 hours later but I knew we were getting nearer to the shore. We went ashore several hours later on Banka Island, along with a Jap invasion party who seemed to ignore us until later when we were taken prisoner, and that's another story.

This gallant fight in which 43 year old Lieutenant Wilkinson's valour was equalled only by the skill with which he fought his ship. The Victoria Cross is bestowed upon him posthumously in recognition both of his own heroism and self sacrifice and of that of all who fought and died with him. This action, from a deliberate decision to sell his life and his ship dearly and then carried out with the utmost dash and skill by an officer with no relevant experience, must rank as high as any in the annals of the Navy.

His Majesty has approved the following awards to officers and men of H.M.S. Li Wo:

1. Victoria Cross - (Posthumously) Temporary Lieutenant Thomas Wilkinson, R.N.R.
2. Distinguished Service Order - Temporary Sub Lieutenant Ronald George Gladstone Stanton R.N.R.
3. Conspicuous Gallantry Medal - Acting Petty Officer Arthur William Thompson.
4. Distinguished Service Medal - Leading Seaman Victor Spencer.
5. Distinguished Service Medal - Able Seaman Albert Spendlove.
6. Mentioned in Despatches (Posthumously) - Temporary Lieutenant Edgar Neil Derbridge, R.N.Z.N.V.
7. Mentioned in Despatches (Posthumously) - Temporary Sub Lieut. J. G. Petherbridge, Malaya R.N.V.R.
8. Mentioned in Despatches (Posthumously) - Able Seaman Desmond Palmer.
9. Mentioned in Despatches - Acting Chief Petty Officer Charles Halma Rogers.
10. Mentioned in Despatches - Leading Seaman William Dick Wilding.
11. Mentioned in Despatches - Able Seaman John Smith.

The citation in the London Gazette of 13th December 1946 contains the following details : On 14th February, 1942, H.M.S. Li Wo, a patrol vessel of 1,000 tons, formerly a passenger steamer on the Yangtze River, was on passage from Singapore to Batavia. Her company consisted of eighty four officers and men, mainly survivors from H.M. ships and Army and Air Force units. Her armament was one 4-inch gun (with 13 practice shells) and two machine guns. Since leaving Singapore she had beaten off four air attacks and had suffered considerable damage. Late in the afternoon she sighted two enemy convoys, the larger being escorted by Japanese fleet units, including a heavy cruiser and some destroyers. Lieutenant Wilkinson, with the unanimous backing of his mixed company, decided to engage the convoy and to fight to the last, inflicting

what damage he could. He knew that his ship faced certain destruction. In the action that followed the machine guns were used effectively, and a volunteer gun crew fought the 4-inch gun to such purpose that they hit and set on fire a Japanese transport. After a little more than an hour, H.M.S. Li Wo was critically damaged and was sinking. Lieutenant Wilkinson decided to ram the damaged transport. It is known that this ship burned throughout the night and was probably sunk. Having ordered his ship to be abandoned, Lieutenant Wilkinson himself went down with her. Lieutenant Wilkinson's valour was equalled only by the skill with which he fought his ship. The Victoria Cross is bestowed upon him posthumously in recognition of the heroism and self sacrifice displayed not only by himself but by all who fought and died with him.

Wilkinson's Victoria Cross was presented to his brother William on 28th January 1947 by His Majesty King George VI at Buckingham Palace. The V.C. is privately held and the Medal only is on loan to Imperial War Museum for display.

The full medal entitlement for Temporary Lieutenant Thomas Wilkinson, Royal Naval Reserve (H.M.S. 'Li Wo')

- Victoria Cross
- Mercantile Marine War Medal (1914-18)
- 1939 - 45 Star
- Pacific Star
- War Medal (1939-45)



In a Letter given to Moyra Jones, penned by her Grandfather, Leading Seaman Thomas Henry Parsons to the Imperial War Museum about the sinking of HMS "Li Wo", puts further emphasis on the bravery of all aboard that super little ship.

The Director
Imperial War Museum
Lambeth Road
London
S.E.1
Sunday 30/8/64

Dear Sir,

On the 14th August, this year, I visited London with my Daughter and Nephew, and took them to The Imperial War Museum.

It was a surprise, and a proud moment, and a sad one, when I saw the scale Model of H.M.S. "Li Wo" (sic), as I am one of the few survivors of the

short but epic action, North of the Banka Straits, on Saturday 14th February 1942.

I feel that I must write to you, correcting much of the information about the Ship and the action that took place, between H.M.S “Li-Wo”, and a Japanese convoy and Japanese Naval Escorts.



I commented to one of the Attendants on duty, that the facts were wrong, and was advised by him, to see the Records in the Records Department, of which I did.

Which of course, after seeing them, decided to write to you, hoping most sincerely, that you will investigate most fully, the facts I intend to give.

Before I give any account, I wish to make it perfectly clear, that I seek no glory, I seek no financial gain, and I seek no publicity.

My object and reason is purely and simply this.

Ever since 5-30 P.M. Saturday 14th February 1942. I have honoured and admired the memory of the Bravest Man I ever knew. Lieutenant Wilkinson V.C. R.N.

This is the first time I have written to anyone about this action, as until that visit to the Imperial War Museum, I was always under the impression that the true real facts were fully known.

I wonder how many of the gun's crew, who composed of “Prince of Wales”, and “Repulse” survivors were interviewed? Or interrogated over this action? I also wish to add, that I was never asked for an account of the action after the war had ended, and the reason why I was unable to give an account during my 3 ½ years as a Japanese P.O.W. was simply this:-

When I was first taken P.O.W. the survivors of the “Li-Wo” were in a temporary P.O.W. Camp at Muntok, in Banka Island, with Army, Navy, R.A.F. personnel, and with many civilians, of which there were many children.

I was only at that Camp, which had no real British Military Administration for a week at the most, when I escaped with Lt. Col. Daly of Dal Force Malaya, Lt. Eno, Army, Sgt. Ken Wharton, Australian Army, only to be eventually betrayed by Natives, and handed over to the Japanese, when we landed at Java.

During my captivity, the Japs never knew that we were recaptured P.O.W.s. I deemed that discretion was the better of Valour. I could not mention the "Li-Wo" action North of the Banka Straits, without giving myself away that I was an escaped P.O.W. The punishment was death.

Also we were mixed with many Dutch, and Dutch Eurasians, many of the Eurasians were Pro-Japanese, and would give away their own Mother.

Here now is the facts as I know them, nothing added, nothing exaggerated.

After being sunk on the "Prince of Wales" I was sent up into Malaya with:- Chief Petty Officer Rogers "Repulse", Leading Seaman Adly(sic) "Repulse", Leading Seaman Bennett "Repulse", Leading Seaman Countant "Prince of Wales". I need not bother you about details, as it is non relevant to the "Li-Wo", except this.

After returning to Singapore from Malaya, we were detailed to patrol the Jahore Straits in small boats. We operated from a small village opposite Paula Ubin Island. We were recalled from there to the Orange Hotel, Thursday afternoon 12th February 1942. We were then detailed to go aboard the "Li-Wo" to sail for Java.

On arrival aboard, we were detailed as Guns Crew, being that the others were Torpedo ratings, and Chief Petty Officer Rogers, a Range taker, I was appointed Gun Layer. My Guns crew consisted of Chief Petty Officer Rogers, Leading Seaman Adley, Bennett Countant, and two stoker ratings who were with us in the Jahore Straits Patrol.

We left Singapore Harbour late Thursday night February 12th 1942 only to drop anchor outside the Harbour.

On Friday 13th February 1942 we sailed for Java with the "Fu Wo" a sister ship. We were attacked many times by aircraft, and came through.

On Saturday 14th February 1942 we dropped anchor close inshore, we were informed that we were anchoring for a while, trusting to luck that we would not be spotted by enemy aircraft, as the Captain intended to go through the 80 miles of the Banka Straits in darkness. We were spotted by a Jap seaplane just had we got under way again.

Between 4-30. 5-0 p.m. we sighted smoke on the horizon off the Port Bow. It was a convoy. Lieutenant Wilkinson asked if anyone could recognise if any of the warships were Japanese. I informed him that I had served two years on the China Station, 1936-1938 and was familiar with Japanese warships. He told me to come to the bridge, and then handed me his telescope.

I saw one Jap light cruiser and two Jap destroyers, without looking for any more, I told him they were Japanese He then asked me if I had

any doubt, I told him “none whatever”. The convoy was about 10 miles away, and I was told to report back to the gun.

Captain Wilkinson’s words to us was this:- “A Jap convoy is ahead, I am going to attack it, we will take as many of those Jap Bastards, as possible, with us. Those words I will never forget, they have always been fixed clearly in my mind.

I returned to the gun, and I checked the ammunition, and reported it from the gun, to Captain Wilkinson. My report to him was this. Six Semi-Armour Piercing Shells. Four Graze Fuze Shells and three A. A. Shells. He replied “Gunlayer, is that all the ammunition you have?” I answered “Yes Sir”, thirteen shells in all, plus three practice shells”.

How or why 13 practice shells came into it, I don’t know, all I can assume is this. Possibly, it was because for most of the crew, it was their first taste of action, and I know the effect it has on many.

Admitted there was thirteen shells, but they were 6. S.A.P. 4 GRAZE FUSE and 3 A.A. I do not class a practice shell as shell for action. Do you think that I can ever forget that moment. The hopelessness of knowing that I had only six shells that could do any damage, and realising that two shells would probably be wasted before we found the range and target. The “Li Wo’s” Gunnery Officer joined us, Captain Wilkinson’s name is the only one I remember. The Gunnery Officer was Ginger headed, I believe he was a New Zealander, I had a hurried conference with him, and said to him “Look Sir, I have only six shells that can do any damage, four that can do harm if we fire at the super structure as anti-personnel shells, then our last hope is to set the A.A. shells at Fuse 2 and hope for the best”. I also pointed out, that unless we were lucky with our first shot, as all we had was “Gunlayers Control”, “Gunlayers Firing”, with no range Finder and no Inclinator to help, we might waste two shells at least, before we were on target, should we use the practice shells as our ranging shots?” He paused for a moment, then replied: “it might be a good idea, but then again it might not, as if we can get in close enough, and we find our target, it is a wasted effort.” I received the order to load with S.A.P.

Approximately half an hour later we engaged the enemy. Our selected target was a transport of between four to five thousand tons. At an estimated range of four thousand yards, deflection six left, we opened fire. The first shell was over target. I ordered, “Fixed Sight, Rapid Salvos.” I know that at least three of our remaining five S.A.P. shells, were bang on target, as fire broke out on her immediately. Soon she was blazing furiously. In less than two minutes our ammunition was expended.

Captain Wilkinson selected another target, the ship nearest to him, about 800 tons and deliberately rammed and sank it. We were now among the Jap convoy, helpless, drifting, and no ammo. I will never forget another hero of this action, a man unknown, unsung, unpraised.

An R.A.F. sergeant who manned the Vickers Lewis Gun, from the time the ship left Singapore, to when the "Li Wo" sank. It was his deadly accurate fire that wiped out the four man gun's crew aboard the Jap transport we rammed. The enemy's gun was about 30 to 40 Millimetre. It was this gun that caused our first casualties. I myself was wounded in the chest. The R.A.F. Sergeant then swept the bridge and decks with his deadly fire, killing many. He then opened up on another transport about 200 yards away. The Jap convoy cleared away from us, and we came under fire from the Jap warships.

It was a fearful experience as it took the Japs five to ten minutes to find our range, their gunnery was lousy, and the noise of their shells whistling overhead, always expecting the next one to land inboard, knowing that we had to just sit there and take it, and the helplessness of not being able to do anything about it. When they eventually found our range, it was all over. The "Li-Wo" listed to Starboard and sank stern first.

When we survivors were swimming in the water, the Japs transports closed in. I myself was on one of two rafts which for safety we had tied together. The transports came towards us, and picked up their own survivors, we were then under the impression when they came slowly at us that they were going to pick us up as well. But we were in for a shock. They came right at us and deliberately rammed us but we realise just before, what their intentions were, and hastily dived into the sea.

With my own eyes, and there are times when the memory of it is most vivid, I saw that transport go among a group of survivors, and manoeuvre amongst them with churning screws, killing at least a dozen. It was only the sudden darkness that saved us.

We succeeded in regaining the rafts, and all night we could see the transport we set on fire blazing fiercely.

The following afternoon, Sunday 15th February we were picked up by other survivors who were in a boat, with a sail and oars. It was badly holed, and the gunwales were four inches above the water. It was only its buoyancy tanks keeping it afloat.

Just after sunrise on Monday 16th February 1942, we were washed ashore. My shipmate Chief Petty Officer Rogers was in the sailing boat. We seemed to separate in groups, just aimlessly walking around the Island, there were four of us in the group I was in, Chief Petty Officer Rogers was one of them.

Late that afternoon we ran into a Jap patrol and were taken prisoner. A few days later I met Leading Seaman Adley, and Bennett, they also had run into a Jap patrol, but were not so fortunate as we were. The Jap patrol opened fire on them, Leading Seaman Adley was shot in the arm, and Leading Seaman Bennett was bayoneted.

That is my story, nothing added, nothing exaggerated. My one intention, and the only reason why I have written this down, is that the facts should be known, in fact must be known to all, the courage and bravery, and the great achievement accomplished by Lieutenant Wilkinson V.C. of H.M.S Li-Wo, on Saturday 14th February 1942, against tremendous odds. I was on the gun deck, during the short journey from Singapore to the end of the "Li-Wo". I was the Gun layer. I will state most emphatically, that to the best of my knowledge, there was no member of the "Li-Wo's" original crew, a member of that gun's crew.

How can a practise shell cause a transport vessel to burst into flames? Sunday afternoon we could see her, an abandoned, floating, blackened wreck, smoking slightly. Do you think it possible?

I will willingly travel to London and undergo any interrogation you wish to put me through. But please, I beg of you, please see that "Lt. Wilkinson V.C. gets the credit that is due to him.

Is this too much to ask, for a man who made the Supreme Sacrifice, and who won the Highest Award that his Country could bestow upon him?

It was my intention after seeing the model of the "Li-Wo" to get in touch with Chief Petty Officer Rogers. I believe that he resides at Bristol, but for the time being, I have decided against it, so that you can have the opportunity to check my story, without any collusion between Chief Petty Officer Rogers or anyone else, with me. I swear to you on oath, that since the war ended, I have not seen or communicated with any of the "Li-Wo" survivors.

There is a lot more details, small ones, that I can give you, but, my aim is, as I have stated previously, Let "Lieutenant Wilkinson V.C. have the just credit due to him, and the facts put right.

Yours sincerely,

T.H. Parsons

Chace Guildhouse, London Rd, Coventry.

Late Leading Seaman T.H.PARSONS D/JX. 143539

P.S. After reading my story would you please pass on to Naval Records.

* * * * *

Follow up.

House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

From:

The Rt Hon. James Callaghan, M.P.

8th January 1986

Dear Mr Parsons,

Thank you for your letter with the account of your service in the Far East during the last war. First, allow me to congratulate you on the determination and courage you showed throughout the period.

I will readily take up the matter up with the Ministry of Defence in order to secure a statement from the Admiralty that you took part in the "Li-Wo" action but will not do so until you have been to see me in Cardiff on 18th January, at the offices of the GMBATU, 17 Newport Road, between 10.00 and 11.00 a.m.

I shall look forward to seeing you then, when we can discuss any additional points that need to be put forward.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed Jim Callaghan)

This is to certify that LEADING SEAMAN THOMAS HENRY PARSONS D/JX 143539 On the 14th February 1942 took part in the action when his Majesty's Patrol Ship Li Wo whilst on patrol duty off Singapore, gallantly engaged the superior forces of the enemy, inflicting significant damage on a convoy of troopships before being sunk by a Japanese cruiser. The heroism and self sacrifice of the many who died and the few who survived were in the highest traditions of the Royal Navy.

George Younger

20th February 1986

Secretary of State for Defence.

* * * * *

This letter sets out exactly what happened to the Ship and Crew of the Li Wo and brings to an end this story of the actions taken during that heroic battle. It is not the only ship that was engaged in the many battles of the Second World War but it is the only one who's Commanding Officer was awarded the Victoria Cross who was a member of our Order.



Unfortunately no images of his medals are available at this moment in time.

The date of initiation of Thomas Wilkinson is not known to me at the time of writing, but it is well known that his father and his 4 brothers were also members of the Order.



Thomas Wilkinson's name is remembered on Widnes War Memorial, Liverpool Naval Memorial and on a family headstone in Widnes Cemetery. He also has streets named after him in Widnes and Plymouth. A picture of the action by Robert Banks hangs in the Royal Naval Association in Swindon. He shares a triple headstone in Runcorn

Memorial Gardens with another member of the Order, "Todger Jones" who's story appears earlier in this publication.



JOHN HENRY WILLIAMS



He was to become the most decorated Welsh Non-Commissioned Officer of all time, his name was John Henry (Jack) Williams.

He was born on 29th September 1886 in Monmouthshire, in the village of Nantyglo, a son of Henry and Elizabeth Williams. His father worked as a boiler smith at the Ebbw Vale Steelworks, and his mother was a schoolteacher. John attended the Briery School in Ebbw Vale until he was 12 and then began work at the Ebbw Vale Iron & Coal Company Limited as an apprentice Blacksmith in the smith's shop at Marine Colliery.

In 1906 he was working at the Cwm Colliery as a blacksmith, and in the same year enlisted as a regular soldier in the South Wales Borderers with the service number 20408, but soon bought his discharge.

In the Valleys you'll often hear people ask, 'Are you belonging?' meaning are you related to a person or a place. Links to family, community and work are very strong. And nowhere is this demonstrated more heroically than by the men from the Valleys who served with the South Wales Borderers and looked out for their comrades in time of war.

From his discharge to the beginning of the war in 1914 he worked as a Blacksmith at the Cwm Colliery. When World War One broke out, the Ebbw Vale Steel, Iron and Coal Company (EVSIC) was the first large employer in South Wales to give an allowance to the dependants of men who joined up. The allowance was paid and the promise kept, that every man should have his job back on his return.

Williams was one of the first men to enlist with a Battalion formed solely from Ebbw Vale. It was to be a unit formed as part of Lloyd George's Welsh Army Corps. However, it was not until 12th November 1914 that the swearing-in took place and, after initial training, the 631 men who formed the Battalion left Ebbw Vale as part of the 10th South Wales Borderers, bound for Colwyn Bay on 29th December. *(The South Wales Borderers were originally known as the 24th Regiment of Foot of The British Army, and at the battle of Rorke's Drift in the Zulu War was awarded no fewer than 16 Victoria Crosses).*

Promotion was not long in coming, for he was recognised for his leadership qualities and on 1st January 1915 Williams was promoted to sergeant.

He soon found himself in the front line with the 10th South Wales Borderers in France, and in July 1916 during the battle of the Somme, came face to face with the enemy as the 10th were part of the 38th (Welsh) Division sent to clear the Mametz Wood between July 10th and 12th. The 38th managed, after sustaining some 4000 casualties, to capture the wood and it was during this action that Williams won the Distinguished Conduct Medal for "conspicuous gallantry in action".

Williams won a Military Medal for bravery at Pilkem Ridge when the 38th Division was again victorious in capturing the ridge on 31st July 1917 on the opening day of the Third Battle of Ypres. Two months later, on 2nd October he was promoted to Company Sergeant Major. At Armentieres on 30th October 1917 John Williams was to perform another deed of heroism when he ignored bullets and shrapnel to bring in a wounded comrade. For this act he had a Bar added to his Military Medal as well as the Medaille Militaire and Croix de Guerre.

By early October 1918 the Third Army had already captured most of the German Hindenburg defences, but the 38th (Welsh) Division had not been used in this action. However, it still had a role to play, as orders for it to advance were received on 3rd October. It was to capture the village of Villers-Outreaux, to the east of the Beaurevoir Line and north-east of the village of that name. The 115th Brigade of the 38th (Welsh) Division left the village of Sorel-le-Grand on the morning of 4th October, and the 10th South Wales Borderers, who were part of the same brigade, reached Bony by noon. Later in the day, the 10th South Wales Borderers

were to take over from the 2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers, in order to be ready to advance on the morning of 5th October. They were then to move in a northerly direction, before later moving to the right and swinging eastwards. The brigade duly moved northwards, but, on reaching Aubencheuil-aux-Bois on 6th October, they found that the enemy had already left. Two platoons from the 10th South Wales Borderers were sent out eastwards towards Villers-Outreaux: one managed to seize a quarry, while the other took up positions in a sunken road to the south-west of Villers-Outreaux. During the night, patrols found that the enemy defences were strongly held, with machine gun positions protected by a thick belt of uncut wire. It was now abundantly clear that the enemy would not give up its hold on Villers-Outreaux without a strong fight and, through 7th October, the Borderers were under heavy fire and pinned down on the exposed ground. The enemy held Mortho Wood, together with a building called Pierre Mill, which caused particular problems for the attackers.

Despite this hold up, the division was to continue its advance against Villers-Outreaux with an attack at 1 a.m. on 8th October. The role of the Borderers would involve a move in a north easterly direction, to the east of Villers-Outreaux, the idea being to cut the village off. To the left the 17th Royal Welsh Fusiliers were also to move past the village, so that once it had been isolated the 2nd Royal Welsh Fusiliers, with the assistance of two tanks, could take control of it. The final objective was Walincourt, along the Premont-Esnes road.

Though the plan looked sensible on paper, the reality turned out to be something quite different, as almost at once the Borderers got caught up in the uncut wire and at the same time machine gun fire opened up on the trapped men. The darkness simply added to the confusion. However, one section of the battalion, under Major Monteith, was able to reach its objective. That it succeeded was due mainly to the extreme gallantry of Company Sergeant Major John Henry Williams. For a time the rest of the 115th Brigade was held up, although eventually the 2nd Royal Welsh Fusiliers, duly assisted by three tanks, managed to enter the village by 11 a.m., which by then had fallen. At the end of the day the Borderers, who by then had been reorganised, dug in for the night to the south east of Walincourt. Their losses had been very high, but they had accomplished their task. Few displayed the consistent gallantry of John Henry Williams and on that night, suffering heavy casualties from an enemy machine gun, Jack had ordered his company to engage it with a Lewis gun. He went forward under heavy fire to the enemy post, which he rushed, capturing 15 enemy soldiers. The prisoners, realising that Jack was alone, turned on him, but he succeeded in breaking away, bayoneting five so that the remainder, doing the wise thing surrendered.

By this gallant action and total disregard of personal danger, he was the means of enabling not only his own company but also those on the flanks to advance. For this act of bravery Company Sergeant Major John Henry Williams was awarded the Victoria Cross.

The citation, published in the London Gazette on 14th December 1918 reads: "For most conspicuous bravery, initiative and devotion to duty on the night of October 7th - 8th 1918, during an attack on Villers Outreaux, when, observing that his company was suffering heavy casualties from an enemy machine gun, he ordered a Lewis gun to engage it, and went forward, under heavy fire, to the flank of the enemy post which he rushed single-handed, capturing fifteen of the enemy. These prisoners, realising that Williams was alone, turned on him and one of them gripped his rifle. He succeeded in breaking away and bayonetting five enemy, whereupon the remainder again surrendered. By this gallant action and total disregard of personal danger, he was the means of enabling not only his own company but also those on the flanks to advance".

When Williams won his VC in October 1918, he received a letter of congratulation from the Lieutenant Colonel in command of the 10th South Wales Borderers, in which he wrote the following:

I am writing to wish you my most heartiest congratulations on your being awarded the V.C. All ranks of the battalion are delighted and send their heartiest congratulations. I thank you also for bringing to know you know full well how much you deserved winning the Victoria Cross. I hope you are recovering from your wound, and will have a long and happy life to enjoy your well deserved honour. Again wishing you all the best and many congratulations. Other officers of the regiment also sent letters of congratulation.



Williams, who had been severely wounded by shrapnel in his right arm and leg, was sent home and discharged on medical grounds nine days later on 17th October.

At Buckingham Palace during the Investiture in 1919 Company Sergeant Major Williams was the first Soldier to be presented four times on the same day to King George V, to receive four different Medals for Bravery namely, The Victoria Cross; Distinguished Conduct Medal; Military Medal and Bar to the Military Medal.

Not having fully recovered from his wounds, during the presentation the wounds on his arm re-opened and started to bleed. He had

to receive medical attention before he was able to leave the Palace. He remains Wales' most decorated ever Non-Commissioned Officer.

Jack was one of the lucky ones. He returned to a job with the Ebbw Vale Steel, Iron and Coal Company (who gave him a house and coal and electricity for life). Working as the Commissionaire at the General Offices (for the EVSIC), the crimson ribbon attached to his lapel was the only clue to his heroic past and Victoria Cross. More than 400 other men who had worked for the Company never returned. The town also presented him with a gold watch. In 1920 he attended the VC Garden Party at Buckingham Palace on 26th June. In 1921, at Cardiff Arms Park, which had been turned into a giant parade ground, Williams was introduced to the Prince of Wales during his visit to South Wales.

In 1924 Williams took part in a wreath laying ceremony at the newly erected Cenotaph in Newport, at which the Duke of York was present.

John Williams married Gertrude Williams, born 1888 at Tredegar Monmouthshire in 1908. His first child was Doris Elizabeth born 1909 but sadly died 1910.

In March 1927 his wife Gertrude died. The couple had had eleven children, five boys and six girls. In June of the following year, Williams was present at the unveiling of the National War Memorial in Cardiff, where he met the Prince of Wales a second time. In 1929 he represented the 10th South Wales Borderers at the unveiling of a memorial to the 24th Battalion at Gheluvelt, near Ypres. Also in 1929 he attended the House of Lords Dinner, presided over by the Prince of Wales. In that same year, however, the Ebbw Vale Company went into bankruptcy, which resulted in Williams being transferred to the housing department as a rent collector. He moved from Garden City, where his wife had died, to a house in Willowtown. In 1936 Williams met the Prince of Wales for a fourth time when the prince visited South Wales to see the poor conditions and high unemployment there. This was the visit when the prince spoke out about what he saw of unemployment and poverty, saying: 'Something must be done'. The comments bordered on the political and were widely reported in the press.



In 1937 Williams was reinstated as Commissionaire at the General Offices when the new works started up. Meanwhile, he married again, this time to Morfydd Rees of Aberbeeg, a telephonist at the General Offices. The couple moved from Garden City, where his wife Gertrude had died in 1927, to a company house at 4 The Dingle, Queens Square, Ebbw Vale, Willowtown. In the Second World War, Williams served as a Captain in the Home Guard in Ebbw Vale.

When peace returned he attended the Victory Parade on 8th June 1946, and also attended a VC Dinner at the Dorchester Hotel.

On 7th March 1953 at the age of 66, John Williams died in St Woolos Hospital, Newport, Monmouthshire, and was buried in Ebbw Vale Cemetery alongside his first wife and one of his daughters. Thousands of local people lined the route of his funeral cortege. He was survived by his second wife, Morfydd, along with five sons and five daughters.

At some point the headstone for Williams's grave was removed during cemetery clearance work and not replaced. When it was later discovered that his grave was unmarked, a fund was set up to provide a suitable replacement headstone for the local hero's grave. A service of rededication took place on 21st October 1990 after a commemorative parade had passed through Ebbw Vale. Tragically, one of Williams' sons, Harry Williams, died on the way to the ceremonies, but a granddaughter and grandson were present, with the former wearing her grandfather's medals for the occasion.

Apart from his VC, DCM, and MM and bar, Williams was also awarded the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal, Coronation Medal (1937) and the French Medaille Militaire.



His portrait used to hang in the Ex-Servicemen's Club in Ebbw Vale, and a plaque commemorating him is on the first floor of Ebbw Vale Town Civic Centre. Other commemorations include a hall being named after him at The Centre, Abertillery, Gwent, and a memorial in Havard Chapel, Brecon Cathedral, Powys. There also used to be a commemoration in the offices of Richard Baldwin & Thomas in Ebbw Vale. Williams' medals and a portrait are in the collection of the South Wales Borderers Museum in Brecon.

The date of his initiation is not known but his membership of the Order is confirmed as Sir Windsor James Lodge No.1933. The Lodge wrote in the Quarterly Journal of Summer 1919 the following:- Dear Bro. Rose, Herewith I beg to forward you a few facts concerning Bro. C.S.M. J. H. Williams, V.C., D.C.M., M.M.

In January, 1917, he was awarded the D.C.M. for bravery on the Somme; July, 1917 the M.M. for bravery at Paschendale; in 1918 a bar to the M.M. for bringing in 18 wounded under fire; and in 1918 was awarded the V.C. for cutting up a Machine Gun Company and capturing several prisoners.

He belongs to the South Wales Borderers (or the old 24th of "glory and renown" fame) and is nick-named "Soldier Jack."

Owing to wounds received in action his right arm is now practically useless, and we Buffs should like the Order to recognise in some tangible form his heroism. The locality and the Ebbw Vale Company are doing all in their power to assist him, and the P.G.L., his mother Lodge and the local Lodges have collected at present (April 7th) £20 and hope to double it.

Will you kindly appeal to G.L.E. and the Order generally for subscriptions to this deserving and heroic brother?

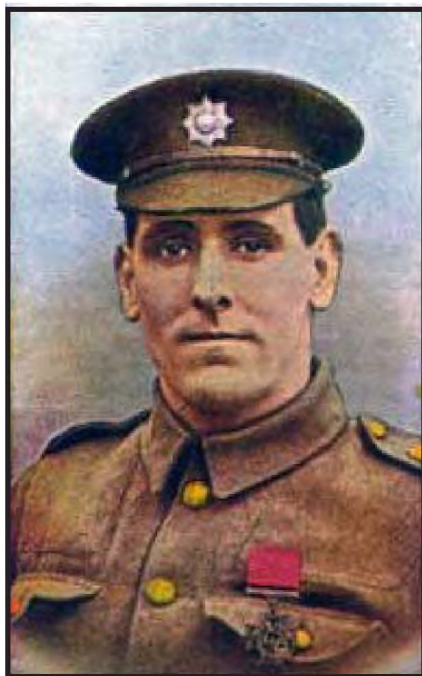
The sums subscribed may be sent to the Grand Sec., or to Ed. J. Hill, R.O.H., Manager. Co-operative Stores, Cwm, Mon.

Yours fraternally,

THOS. B. MATINDALE.



GEORGE HENRY WYATT



George Henry Wyatt was born in Britannia Row, Worcester on 5th September 1886. The son of Arthur and Sarah Ann (nee Mason). His father was a groom to a Worcester veterinary surgeon, but moved three years later to become a coachman at Hindlip Hall, in the employ of the Dowager Lady Hindlip.

George was baptised on 29th September at St. Mary's church in the Arboretum. He had three brothers and a sister and the family seem to have moved around 1892 to Hadzor, near Droitwich, where Arthur became a coachman. The young George was engaged as a blacksmith's boy. George first went to school at Hindlip, sang in the local church choir and then attended the Holloway School at Droitwich. After attending Holloway School at Droitwich, Wyatt's ambition was always to join the Army and this he did at the age of 18 in November 1904. A burly six footer, he enlisted in the Coldstream Guards at Birmingham and served for nearly four years, half the time in Egypt. He left the Army in November, 1909, joining the Reserves, attached to the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

By 1911 Wyatt had joined the Barnsley Police Force but on the outbreak of the First World War he was recalled as a Reservist. He re-joined the Coldstream Guards and as a member of the British Expeditionary Force left for France on 14th August, 1914.

Britain had declared war on Germany on 4th August 1914. On 8th August advance parties landed in France and two days later the main contingents of the British Expeditionary Force joined them. On 20th August the German Army marched into Brussels while the British advanced towards Mons to link with the Belgian and French Armies. The battle of Mons (23rd August) had been intended to hold the German Army but the French and British were overpowered and the Retreat began, with the British Expeditionary Force making stands at strategic points along the way, most notably at Le Cateau. On 25th August 1914 the Guards Brigade reached Landrecies and prepared to spend the night in this large village. The Guards were the senior Brigade in the 1st Division, part of 1 Corps which was commanded by Sir Douglas Haig. Landrecies was his Headquarters for the night. The 2nd Worcestershire's were in the same Corps, but in the 2nd Division. However the German 27th Regiment also planned to camp in Landrecies that night and the two columns clashed just outside the village. A Company of Coldstream's were manning the outpost picquet when the Germans surprised them, and themselves, in the dark. Fighting was hand to hand, men shooting blind. Then a German rifle grenade set fire to the hay stacks which soon burned brightly, illuminating the few Guards to a whole German Regiment. Lance Corporal Wyatt ran out of the line and fiercely attacked the haystack to beat out the flames while his comrades were able to regain some control and keep the enemy at bay. The clash was initially reported to British Expeditionary Force Headquarters, falsely, that 1 Corps had been defeated. The Battle of Le Cateau opened on 26th August, ending in the



further retirement of the British Expeditionary Force to the Marne. Wyatt's second act of heroism occurred at the battle of Villers Cotterets. As the British Expedition dawn broke on 1st September. The dense forest caused difficulties for both sides in an intense battle as the 3rd Coldstream Guards 'leapfrogged' with other units on the road south. Men from different regiments soon intermingled and it was during the confused fighting that Wyatt was injured and then returned to the line.

An extract from "The First Seven Divisions" by Captain Lord Ernest W. Hamilton, he recalls the battle thus:- "The 4th (Guards) Brigade reached Landrecies in the retirement from Mons, at 1 p.m. on the 25th August 1914.

This brigade had made the furthest progress towards the contemplated junction with the 2nd Army Corps and they were very tired. They went into billets at once, some in the barracks, some in the town. They had about four hours rest; then there came an alarm that the Germans were advancing on the town, and the brigade got to its feet. The four battalions were split up into companies, one to each of the exits from the town. The Grenadiers were on the western side; the 2nd Coldstream on the south and east; and the 3rd Coldstream, to the north and North West. The Irish Guards saw to the barricading of the streets with transport waggons and such like obstacles. They also loopholed the end houses of the streets facing the country.

As a matter of fact the attack did not take place till 8.30 p.m., and then it was entirely borne by two companies of the 3rd Battalion Coldstream Guards. At the North West angle of the town there is a narrow street, known as the Faubourg Soyere. Two hundred yards from the town this branches out into two roads, each leading into the Foret de Mormal. Here, at the junction of the roads, the Hon. A. Monck's company had been stationed. The sky was very overcast, and the darkness fell early.

Shortly after 8.30 p.m. infantry was heard advancing from the direction of the forest; they were singing French songs, and a flashlight turned upon the head of the column showed up French uniforms. It was not till they were practically at arms length that a second flashlight detected the German uniforms in rear of the leading sections. The machine gun had no time to speak before the man in charge was bayoneted and the gun itself captured. A hand to hand fight in the dark followed, in which revolvers and bayonets played the principal part, the Coldstream being gradually forced back by weight of numbers towards the entrance to the town. Here Captain Longueville's company was in reserve in the Faubourg Soyere itself, and through a heavy fire he rushed up his men to the support of Captain Monck.

The arrival of the reserve company made things more level as regards numbers, though, as it afterwards transpired, the Germans were throughout in a majority of at least two to one. Colonel Fielding and Major Matheson now arrived on the spot, and took over control. Inspired by their presence and example, the two Coldstream companies now attacked their assailants with great vigour and drove them back, with considerable loss, into the shadows of the forest. From here the Germans trained a light field gun on to the mouth of the Faubourg Soyere, and,

firing shrapnel and star shell at point blank range, made things very unpleasant for the defenders. Flames, began to shoot up from a wooden barn at the end of the street, but were quickly got under, with much promptitude and courage, by a private of the name of Wyatt, who twice extinguished them under a heavy fire. A blaze of light at this point would have been fatal to the safety of the defenders, and Wyatt, whose act was one involving great personal danger, was subsequently awarded the Victoria Cross for this act and for the conspicuous bravery which he displayed a week later when wounded at Villiers Cotterets.

In the meanwhile Colonel Fielding had sent off for a howitzer, which duly arrived and was aimed at the flash of the German gun.

By extraordinary piece of marksmanship, or of luck, as the case may be, the third shot got it full and the field gun ceased from troubling. The German infantry thereupon renewed their attack, but failed to make any further headway during the night, and in the end went off in their motor lorries, taking their wounded with them.

It turned out that the attacking force, consisting of a battalion of 1,800 men, with one light field piece, had been sent on in these lorries in advance of the general pursuit, with the idea of seizing Landrecies and its important bridge before the British could arrive and link up with the 2nd Army Corps. The attack qua attack failed conspicuously, inasmuch as the enemy was driven back with very heavy loss; but it is possible that it accomplished its purpose in helping to prevent the junction of the two Army Corps. This, however, is in a region of speculation, which it is profitless to pursue further.

The Landrecies fight lasted six hours and was a very brilliant little victory for the 3rd Coldstream; but it was expensive. Lord Hawarden and the Hon. A. Windsor Clive were killed, and Captain Whitbread, Lieutenant Keppel and Lieutenant Rowley were wounded. The casualties among the rank and file amounted to 170, of whom 153 were left in the hospital at Landrecies. The two companies engaged, fought under particularly trying conditions, and many of the rank and file showed great gallantry. Conspicuous amongst these were Sergeant Fox and Private Thomas, each of whom was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. The German losses were, of course, unascertainable, but they were undoubtedly very much higher than ours.

At 3.30 a.m. on the 26th, just as the 2nd Army Corps in their trenches ten miles, away, to the west were beginning to look northward for the enemy, the 4th Brigade left Landrecies and continued its retirement down the beautiful valley of the Sambre.

At Villiers-Cotterets we were again forced into a rear-guard action. At nine o'clock on the 1st September the 4th (Guards) Brigade, which

was acting as rear guard, was overtaken at Soucy, where, in accordance with orders, it had faced about whole, the 2nd Division was having a two hours halt for rest and dinner. It was a case of surprise, the Brigade being thoroughly prepared and, indeed, expecting to have to hold the enemy in check.

Dispositions were therefore made accordingly. The 2nd Grenadiers and 3rd Coldstream held the ground from Montgobert to Soucy, with the Coldstream lining the long grass ride that runs through the woods at Haramont. They were supported by two batteries of the 41st Brigade, Royal Field Artillery. The 2nd Coldstream and Irish Guards were posted in rear of the first line along the northern edge of the Forêt De Villiers-Cotterets, at the base of the ridge known as the Rond De La Riene.

The enemy commenced by shelling the front line, and shelling it with such accuracy that General Scott-Ker ordered the Grenadiers and 3rd Coldstream to fall back through the 2nd line and take up a position in rear. This was done, but subsequently these two battalions were brought up into line with the Irish Guards along the northern edge of the woods, whilst the 2nd Coldstream were sent back to take up a covering position in rear of the wood, along the railway east and west of Villiers-Cotterets Halte. Such was the position without much change



up to midday, when the enemy's attack began to slacken and shortly afterwards they appeared to have had enough of it and drew off. The 4th Brigade thereupon resumed its march as far as Thury, which was reached about 10.30 p.m. Their casualties in this action amounted to over 300. The Irish Guards had Colonel

the Hon. G. Morris and Lieutenant Tisdall killed; Major Crichton and Lord Castlerose wounded. In the Grenadiers the Hon. J. Manners and Lieutenant McDougall were killed, and in the Coldstream, Lieutenant G. Lambton was killed and Captain Burton, and Captain Tritton wounded. The Brigadier General Scott-Ker) was himself badly wounded in the thigh, and the command of the brigade was taken over by Colonel Corry".

The supreme honour of the Victoria Cross was awarded to George Wyatt for these two separate acts of valour, he was just 27 years old. During the Battle of Mons, the Lance Corporal was with a detachment of Coldstream Guards which came under night time attack on August 25th from an estimated force of 1,000 Germans. The Guards officers in charge

of the detachment were bayoneted and its machine gun team killed, and the entire British positions were suddenly illuminated when a haystack caught fire. Under a constant hail of bullets, George Wyatt went within 25 yards of the German front line to put out the flames single handed. Even when the haystack re-ignited, he returned again to douse it.

A few days later, while involved in a rearguard action in a forest, George Wyatt was wounded in the head but continued firing at the enemy until he could no longer see through the blood streaming down his face. A medical officer bound his wound and told him to go to the rear, but he at once returned to the firing line and continued to fight.

His Victoria Cross was presented to him at Buckingham Palace on 4th March 1916 by King George V. Wyatt returned to France and was promoted to Lance Sergeant.

After the war George Wyatt, was interviewed about winning the Victoria Cross, and in his own modest way he said. "Well, there's not much for me to say about it. I just did as I was told. During the retirement from Mons the 3rd Coldstream Guards reached Landrecies. It was dark at the time, and there we were attacked by a large number of Germans who must have been rushed up in motor lorries. We lost our machine gun, and had to rely solely upon rifle and bayonet. Suddenly something flared up between us and the enemy, and Major Matheson shouted, "Put out that light". So I did it. I never thought it would bring me the Victoria Cross. How did I put the fire out? Oh, I jumped on it and dragged some equipment over it. After a while it burst out again, and I ran back and extinguished it. Yes, there was heavy fire from the Germans when I first obeyed the order. That affair at Villers Cotterets. I got hit on the head and went on firing. That's all".

His Citation, recorded in the London Gazette on 18th November 1915 reads:- "For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty. At Landrecies, on the night of 25th- 26th August, 1914, when a part of his Battalion was hotly engaged at the end of a street close to some farm buildings, the enemy, by means of incendiary bombs, set light to some straw stacks in the farmyard. Lance Corporal Wyatt twice dashed out of the line under very heavy fire from the enemy, who were only 25 yards distant, and extinguished the burning straw. If the fire had spread it would have been quite impossible to have held our position. Also at Villa Cotteret, after being wounded in the head, Lance Corporal Wyatt continued firing until he could no longer see owing to the blood which was pouring down his face. The Medical Officer bound up his wound and told him to go to the rear, but he at once returned to the firing line and continued to fight".

He was just 27 years of age when he became the first VC in the Coldstream Guards since the Crimean War and was also awarded the Russian Cross.

At the time of his exploits, his parents were living at the Pear Tree Inn, Hindlip, and it was a reporter from Berrow's Worcester Journal who first broke the news to them of their son's VC. They were naturally overjoyed.

George Wyatt went up through the ranks, and was promoted to Lance Sergeant on 28th February 1917. He was also to win another gallantry medal for his exploits, the Cross of the Order of St George, awarded by Russia for "undaunted courage". His Cross of the Order of St. George became lost and the family were presented with a replica by the Regiment in August 1988. He was demobilised on 14th January 1919.

Wyatt's full medal entitlement is:-

Victoria Cross

1914 Star and Bar

British War Medal

Victory Medal with Mentioned in Dispatches Oak Leaf

1937 Coronation Medal

1953 Coronation Medal

Order of St George (3rd Class), Russia



Wyatt returned to the police force in Doncaster and in June 1924 he was awarded one Guinea for bravely stopping a runaway horse. He retired from the police in February 1934 and took up farming on a smallholding.

He married Ellen, formally Graham, on 1st January 1912. They had two sons and a daughter, first Son Arthur Wyatt born 28th November 1912, Daughter Ellen Wyatt born 29th April 1914 and second Son George Wyatt born 10th December 1916.

His presence is recorded at several events including:-

26th June 1920	The Garden Party at Buckingham Palace.
9th November 1929	The Dinner at the House of Lords, Westminster.
8th June 1946	The Victory March, Whitehall, and the Dinner at the Dorchester Hotel, London.
26th June 1956	The V.C. Centenary Review In Hyde Park, London
17th July 1962	The Garden Party at Buckingham Palace, London
17th July 1962	The Lord Mayor's Banquet at the Mansion House,
18th July 1962	The 3rd Dinner of the V.C. & G.C. Association.

On 17th July he paid his first visit to his home in Doncaster since receiving his honour from the hands of the King. He was met at Doncaster Station by the Chief Constable and former colleagues in the Police Force and driven in an open car, preceded by a military band to the Mansion House where he received a civic welcome by the Mayor and Corporation. He was afterwards entertained at a banquet, where he was presented with a gold watch by the Doncaster Watch Committee. The Mayoress of Doncaster presented the V.C.s wife with a silver Jug and Sugar Bowl.

George Wyatt died in Spotborough near Doncaster on 22nd January 1964, his death is not war related and is buried at St. John the Evangelist's Church, Cadeby Cemetery near Doncaster. His headstone shows the image of the Square and Compass of the Freemasons, it can be assumed that he was a member of that organisation as well as the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes.

The Redundant Churches Commission would not give permission for a memorial to be erected in Cadeby Church so an enlarged photograph was presented to the Cadeby Inn on condition that it be allowed to be exhibited in the church on special occasions.



His Victoria Cross was remembered 28th August 2014 when Worcester people have held a special ceremony to remember one of the city's bravest sons. The event, organised by Worcester City Council, saw the unveiling of a commemorative paving stone to honour George Wyatt, a soldier who valiantly contributed to the First World War effort on the front line.

The unveiling of the Commemorative Paving Stone is part of a national programme, co-ordinated by the Department for Communities and Local Government. The programme invites local authorities to participate in commemorating those who were awarded the Victoria Cross during World

War One. Worcester is among the first ten cities nationally to commemorate this event. Representatives from the Royal British Legion and the Coldstream Guards were present at the event.

George Henry Wyatt went above and beyond his duty as a soldier in the War and was awarded the Victoria Cross for



his bravery in the face of the enemy. To commemorate this prestigious award, City Council Cabinet member Councillor David Wilkinson today unveiled the stone outside the Guildhall. Councillor David Wilkinson said: "I am proud that Worcester has been able to commemorate the courageous actions of a soldier born in Britannia Road. The Victoria Cross is the most prestigious military award and this is an appropriate and important way of marking the bravery of our very own World War One hero".

George Henry Wyatt was initiated into the Order in the Queen Mary Lodge 1735 (Date unknown at the present time), his exploits were recorded in the Buffalo Quarterly Journal in 1920 and 1923 in the following manner:-

Doncaster V.C. Honoured: Presentation to Police Constable Wyatt.

Under the auspices of the Queen Mary Lodge, No. 1735, a massed Lodge was held in the ballroom at the Danum Hotel, Doncaster, on 5th March, for the purpose of presenting a wallet of Bank of England notes and a Buff medal, suitably inscribed, to Bro. George H. Wyatt, V.C., late of the Coldstream Guards, who won the coveted award at Landrecies on the night of 25th-26th August, 1914, and later at Villiers-Cotterets in September, 1914. There were nearly 200 brethren present.

The Lodge was opened at 7 p.m. by the Lodge Presiding officer, Bro. W. H. Smith, C.P., of Balby, and at 8.30 the Provincial Grand Primo took the chair, and at 9 p.m. made the presentation, after reciting the acts of bravery of Bro. Wyatt. Bro. Taylor's speech was suitable to the occasion.

Bro. Wyatt suitably responded, thanking the brethren for the splendid gift, disclaiming that he had done more than any other soldier or sailor of the British forces. He simply did his duty. The reply was brief and modest, and was received with tremendous applause which lasted quite two minutes.

Bro. Needham moved a hearty vote of thanks to the visiting brothers of the Doncaster and District Lodges, and Bro. Nettleship, K.O.M., moved

a vote of thanks to the G.S.B. members from Rotherham, and the Keresby Lodge, Denaby, and these were suitably replied to. Bro. Vanhoute moved a vote of thanks to Bro. A. Hall, K.O.M., P.P.G.P., the hon. secretary, who had successfully carried the arrangements through. Bro. Hall suitably replied, saying it had been a labour of love. A very happy meeting was brought to a close with the National Anthem.

The wallet, which contained over £35, was a beautiful suede leather, embossed in gold letters, "R.A.O.B. (G.L., Eng.), Bro. George Wyatt, V.C. (late Coldstream Guards), March 5th, 1920". The Buff medal was one issued only by the Order to soldier brothers who have done their bit in the Great War, and suitably inscribed.

Bro. Wyatt, it may be recalled, won the V.C. for most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty at Landrecies on the night of the 25th-26th August, 1914, when a part of his battalion was hotly engaged at the end of a street close to some farm buildings. The enemy, by means of incendiary bombs, set light to some straw stacks in the farm yard. Lance corporal Wyatt twice dashed out of the line under very heavy fire from the enemy, who were only twenty five yards distant, and extinguished the burning straw. If the fire had spread it would have been quite impossible to have held our position. Also at Villiers-Cotterets, after having been wounded in the head, Lance Corporal Wyatt continued firing until he could no longer see owing to blood which was pouring down his face. The medical officer bound up his wounds and told him to go to the rear, but he at once returned to the firing line and continued to fight.

Bro. Wyatt also holds the Russian medal of St. George, 3rd Class, the Mons Star of 1914 and 1915, the Victory Medal, and the General Service Medal five in all.

Autumn 1923

The Prince of Wales and a Doncaster V.C. Buff.

Bro. George Henry Wyatt, of the Queen Mary Lodge, who is a Police Constable in the Doncaster Borough Force, was on special duty at York during the visit of the Prince of Wales, on 7th June. (It will be remembered that our gallant brother won the V.C. when serving with the 3rd Battalion Coldstream Guards early in 1914). He was on duty outside the Mansion House, when the Prince caught sight of him, and went up to him and cordially shook him by the hand, and engaged him in conversation. The Prince asked Bro. Wyatt what regiment he served in, and as obviously delighted when the wearer of the famous Cross replied that he was in the 3rd Coldstream Guards, and was in the same brigade as the Prince, the Fourth Guards Brigade, when the Guards took Quinsey, opposite La Bassee, at the time the Prince was in the 2nd Battalion of the Grenadier Guards. After the Freedom of the City had been conferred on the Prince,

P.C. Wyatt opened the door of his motor car for him, and, before being driven away, His Royal Highness bade P.C. Wyatt Goodbye, and again shook hands with him. It may here be stated that, in addition to the V.C., Bro. Wyatt won the Russian medal of the Order of St. George (third class), the Mons Star of 1914, Victory and General Service medals, also a Buffalo medal, presented to him by the Doncaster Buffs in the Queen Mary Lodge in 1920, with a roll of bank notes.



CHARLES ALLIX LAVINGTON YATE



One of the earliest Victoria Crosses awarded during the Great War (World War One) was to Staff College graduate Major Charles Allix Lavington Yate of the 2nd Battalion, King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, for his actions at the battle of Le Cateau on 26th August 1914.

Charles (known to his friends as 'Cal' from the initials of his forenames) was the eldest son of the Reverend George Edward Yate, a Prebendary of Hereford, former Fellow and Tutor of St. Johns College, Cambridge, and, for almost 50 years, the vicar of Madeley near Much Wenlock in Shropshire.

Charles Yate was born at Ludwigolust on 14th March 1872 and was educated at Weymouth College in Dorset. In January 1891 he passed the Civil Service examination then required for acceptance at the Royal Military College at Sandhurst and on 13th August 1892 he was gazetted as a Second Lieutenant in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, he was 9th out of 1100 cadets. He joined the 2nd Battalion, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry on 13th August 1892 in Bombay. He first saw active service with the Battalion in the hard fought Tirah Expedition of 1897-98 against the Afridi and Orakzai tribesmen in what was then

called the North West Frontier and is now in Pakistan and Afghanistan. For this action he was awarded the medal and clasp of the Tirah Expedition. Captain Yate was the only British officer who witnessed the affray on March 30th, at Pul-i-Khisti, between General Komoroff's troops and the Afghan garrison of Ak Tapa and Penjdeh.

In February 1899 the Battalion was posted to Mauritius in the Indian Ocean where Charles sat and passed his entrance examination to the Staff College. However, before he could sail to England to join the course the Boer War broke out in South Africa and his Battalion were picked up in Mauritius and taken by ship to Cape Town in South Africa, where they were in the vanguard of British troops. During the war Yate was badly wounded in the Battle of Graspan on 25th November 1899 and he took little active part thereafter. Nevertheless, he was one of the deputation sent to General Botha in order to arrange the start of peace negotiations. He was awarded the Queen's Medal with four clasps for his service in South Africa.

On returning to Madeley for a spell of convalescence, local miners met the train at Madeley Market station, took the place of the horses drawing his carriage and pulled him through the streets back to his home in celebration of his many acts of bravery.

On 22nd January 1901 Charles finally took his place as a student at the Staff College at Camberley where he spent the next two years studying a wide variety of subjects ranging from drawing sketch maps in the field, drafting operation orders, tactical campaign planning, besieging fortresses, and making movement plans for troops. Although the conflicts that were used as case studies or examples dated back to the Franco Prussian War, the American Civil War, the Napoleonic wars and even earlier, the principles of staff work would have been applicable to more modern warfare.

On 17th September 1903 he married at St. George's Church, Hanover Square, London, Florence Helena Brigg, from Greenhead Hall, Yorkshire. There were no children from this marriage. His cousin was Sir Charles Yate of Madeley Hall, who was created a Baronet in 1921 and died in 1940.

In July 1904, following graduation from Staff College, Charles was sent on a special mission with three other British officers to Japan to report on the tactics and fortifications employed during the Russo-Japanese War. His studies at Camberley would have prepared him well for such duties. Before leaving for Japan, he had attained the grade of 1st Class Interpreter in Japanese (as well as in French and German). Charles was present at the siege and subsequent surrender of the Russian forces at Port Arthur in January 1905. He was one of the first men to enter Port Arthur with the Japanese at the end of 1904. Yate was

presented with two medals by the Japanese Emperor, one of which was later to cause some amusement to his colleagues. It was called the Order of the Sacred Treasure, 4th Class. The second was the Japanese War Medal for Manchuria (Port Arthur). Yate returned from Japan, arriving at Liverpool on 22nd March 1906 and later went back to South Africa for two years, serving as captain of General Staff, in the Cape Colony District. Charles wrote seven reports about the Port Arthur campaign and these were included in a set of volumes on the war published in 1908 by the War Office.

Charles returned to South Africa for two years and served as a staff officer, putting the knowledge he had gained at Camberley to good use. He returned to Britain in February 1908 and continued to serve as a staff officer, first at Army HQ and then with the General Staff at the War Office in London and was still there when he was promoted to Major in February 1912.

When he left the War Office he re-joined the 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and sailed with them to France in August 1914 with the British Expeditionary Force. He turned down an offer to work on General Joffre's staff, preferring to take the more active role of company commander.

The 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry was part of the 13th Brigade of the 5th Division. The battalion arrived in the Mons area on 22nd August and took part in the fight to defend the town from the Germans on 23rd August. The 5th Division was on the left flank of the British II Corps and men of the 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry were in positions close to the railway bridge over the Conde Canal at Les Herbieres. The next day they were involved in fighting a rearguard action to the south east near the town of Wasmes.

On 25th August the 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, as part of 5th Division, must have marched at least 30 miles before reaching the town of Le Cateau, to the south west of Mons, and was looking forward to a good night's rest and a decent meal. The news of the arrival of the 4th Division from England also cheered the men up.

What came to be known as the Battle of Le Cateau on 26th August was a blocking action to slow down the German pursuit so that the majority of the British Expeditionary Force could retreat towards Paris in good order to regroup and make a stand.

It was at Le Cateau that Sir H. Smith-Dorrien, commander of II Corps, after consultation with his commanders, planned a holding action against the advancing German Army. Smith-Dorrien did not have the full support of Sir John French, commander of the BEF, or the assistance of Sir Douglas Haig's 1st Corps either, after the latter's dawn withdrawal

from Landrecies on the morning of the 26th. In fact, Haig was so worried about the position at Landrecies during the night that he had asked II Corps to spare some troops. Fortunately the situation improved enough for the units of I Corps to make their escape.

For evidence of just how heroic the stand at Le Cateau was to be, we need to look no further than the tally of five Victoria Crosses which would be awarded as a result of the day's fighting. Two were won by members of the 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and three went to the Royal Artillery.

The 5th Division decided to take up positions to the south of the Le Cateau to Cambrai Road and the 13th and 14th Brigades were also heavily involved. The 13th Brigade consisted of the 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, along with the 2nd Dukes, 1st Royal West Kent and the 2nd Kings Own Scottish Borderers. Companies of the Kings Own Scottish Borderers and A, C and D Companies of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry were close up to the main Cambrai Road. But half of B Company of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry was ordered by Brigadier General G.J. Cuthbert, the brigade commander, to dig trenches along the side of the Bavai - Reumont road and at right angles to it. These positions were also just to the south of the road to Troisvilles. The rest of B Company was on the other side of the Reumont road, together with the battalion's machine gun section. This section's two guns were intended to give some enfilading protection to the 2nd Manchesters and 2nd Suffolks of the 14th Brigade to the east. Divisional field batteries made the situation more complicated as they occupied the line of company supports. Gun teams and limbers crowded the narrow road to Troisvilles.



In addition Battalion Headquarters was close to B Company on the west of the road near a position held early in the day by part of B Company. A culvert under the road was used for communication between the two firing lines. The 1st Royal West Kent was to the rear of B Company as Brigade Reserve.

At about 06.00 hours Cuthbert, who was in the sunken road leading to Troisvilles, to the left of the artillery teams, issued an order to the Battalion Headquarters to the effect that there would be no retirement for the fighting troops and they were to fill up their trenches with as much ammunition, water and food as possible. In order to ensure this order was received a Staff Officer also came around to the positions to give the instructions verbally.

The Adjutant, Captain C. H. Ackroyd, when riding back from the left flank drew enemy fire which seemed to act as a signal for the battle to commence. Within minutes whistling shells came pouring down on the British positions. Communication became impossible and telephone lines were soon destroyed.

The town of Le Cateau fell into enemy hands at about the same time as the battle commenced, and the ridge where the 2nd Suffolks were in position was exposed to fierce fire as it was to the east side of the battlefield where enemy guns were concentrated. The Suffolks were under considerable pressure, being attacked from the right flank as well as from the front. They were assisted by companies of the 2nd Manchester and 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

It was not until 11.00 hours when the Germans emerged from the direction of Montay Spur to the north, that Major Yate, in charge of B Company of the 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, had the target that he wanted for his machine gunners. B and D Companies opened fire and from then onwards they were continuously involved in the action.

Until noon the German artillery concentrated on destroying the British guns, which they outnumbered by a ratio of six to one. Slowly the number of guns able to reply was reduced. At about 12.45 hours orders were given to pull out any gun that could be saved. This led to an even fiercer response from the enemy artillery, until about 13.20 hours when there was a lull in the fighting, enabling some of the remaining guns to be taken away.

The shelling and rifle fire was now directed on the infantry positions and all the time the Germans were gaining ground. Of the two King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry machine guns, one fired for about six hours while the other was eventually knocked out.

Between 14.30 hours and 14.45 hours the end came for the Suffolks: they were overwhelmed from the front, right flank and right rear. They had been under continuous bombardment for nine hours.

Two German battalions swept over the Suffolk's ridge and down the beet field on the western slopes. The range for the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry platoons and machine guns came down to 600 yards. B Company held their fire to the very last moment and then opened fire. This caused havoc and the Germans retreated for a short period, leaving their casualties behind them.

It was, however, only a matter of time before the enemy returned. At about 14.00 hours Sir Charles Fergusson (5th Division) had given the order for the retirement, which had reached some of the front line battalions but Major Yate either did not receive the order or decided to remain, possibly to give other troops the chance to withdraw.

At about 15.00 hours reserve battalions began to fall back to the rear covering the retirement of the front line troops who were running out of ammunition. Yate's company, along with companies of the Kings Own Scottish Borderers decided to stay and fight it out. They became surrounded on three sides and were continuously shelled and subjected to concentrated rifle and machine gun fire. The end came at about 16.20 hours when Yate, in charge of the remnants of B and D Companies in the second line of trenches, gave an order to the nineteen men who remained. They refused German calls for their surrender and charged the enemy. Yate fell wounded and his gallant band of Yorkshiremen was overwhelmed. The enemy had got round the right hand flank of the



battalion and the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry casualties were at least 600 on the day, of whom just over half were prisoners. The total British casualties for the day were 7,812 men and 38 guns, but the enemy had suffered heavily as well and had not managed to disrupt the retreat towards Paris.

By 16.30 hours it was all over and the Germans who captured Yate's part of the line were identified by their badges as being from the 26th, 66th and 72nd Regiments.

Most of the captured prisoners were taken to Le Cateau, and then on the 31st to Cambrai before being transferred to Germany. The official account of 'B' Company's action, repeated in several later accounts, claims that Charles Yate was severely wounded on the battlefield. However, a photograph taken of Charles with his captors soon afterwards shows no physical evidence of a wound. He and the other survivors were probably evacuated first to the town of Le Cateau and then to Cambrai before Charles and several other officers were eventually transported to an officers' prisoner of war camp at Torgau in central Germany.



Yate, with his fluency in German, made a statement that he would never consider himself a prisoner of the Germans; he subsequently became a marked man. He was sent under a strong escort to join other officer prisoners at Torgau. Once there, he tried to escape three times and in the third attempt on 21st September he was shot by his captors while trying to struggle through barbed wire. It is said that he fled wounded into a river from which he never emerged alive. The British *Official History* states that he had his skull smashed on attempting an escape.

Major Yate's file at the National Archives (WO 374/77437) gives several accounts of what happened to him once he reached Torgau in the company of two officer colleagues from Le Cateau on 8th September, when his behaviour became quite erratic. He seems to have developed what might later have been termed as a 'persecution complex' and perhaps with good reason.

Clearly Yate was a man in a hurry, and together with a Lieutenant T. Breen he planned an escape. The idea was for the two men to travel to Dresden on foot and then obtain bicycles and reach Switzerland. As there was a shortage of civilian clothes, it was soon agreed that Yate would make the attempt on his own. There was also additional pressure on him as he had been recently interviewed by two German intelligence officers investigating his actions when in Germany before the war (could he have been involved in espionage?). Yate spoke fluent German, and the intelligence officers had told him that they were coming back to interview him a second time in a few days. His disguise was that of a workman, with a hat pulled down over much of his face. On 20th September he was assisted over a high wall of the camp and then dropped down into a moat. He then struck out for the high road, but he had lost his cap and didn't get very far from the camp. No shots were heard but he was reported dead in the neighbourhood of Muehlburg on the following morning, having been found close to the gates of the local sugar factory. The site of his death was on the west side of a wood, on a track between Lehnendorf and Brottewitz.

He was buried three days later at dawn on the 24th in the churchyard at Martinskirchen, which was about 11 kilometres from Torgau, which in turn was 1 kilometre east of the River Elbe. His grave bore an oak cross with an inscription in white capitals. It appeared, according to one version, that he had killed himself with an open razor, an idea given credence by Lieutenant T. Breen, who had been asked to change razors with Yate, thus giving him an open razor to take with him. Another account suggests that he might have been apprehended by the owner of the sugar factory and decided to take his own life, cutting his throat several times, after which 'he staggered about for 40 to 50 yards before

falling to the ground'. Yet another account claims that Yate was shot by the Germans, severely wounded and then plunged into the River Elbe.

What is surely clear was that there was intense pressure on Yate, who appears to have been a man of a very nervous disposition in the first place. He was particularly anxious about being captured by German civilians as Torgau was in a peasant area and they may have taken matters into their own hands. Together with his companions, he had already been badly treated by the populace after Le Cateau and his familiarity with the German language would also have counted against him. Finally it is known that the German Intelligence Service was very interested in him.

Although the British military authorities and family had no wish to admit even to the vaguest possibility of suicide, it appears from the file that the enemy was quite open about investigating Yate's death, with the attitude that there was nothing to hide. They would have been quite happy about the possibility of Yate's remains being exhumed in order to confirm the cause of death but no such request was ever made. In the long run Yate's body was later removed to an Allied cemetery anyway.

One of his officer colleagues quoted in the book *In the Hands of the Enemy* described Yate as follows: 'He was a great loss to us, being a fluent German speaker. His memory was prodigious; he learnt up the names and addresses of all his fellow prisoners in order to notify their relatives in case he succeeded in his attempt'. The Germans allegedly kept his clothes, perhaps as some sort of evidence of his death.

Corporal F.W. Holmes VC (mentioned earlier in this book) also of the 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry wrote this of Yate in *The London Magazine* in April 1915: Major Yate was a very fine officer. He joined us and took command of B Company just before we went out to war. On this day he was in the trenches on our left, not very far from where I was. When we went into action he had 220 men, but they caught so much of the hot fire which was meant for the battery behind that he lost all his men except nineteen when he was surrounded and captured. The day before this happened the Major declared that if it came to a pinch and they were surrounded he would not surrender, and he kept his word. Reckless of the odds against him he headed his nineteen men in a charge against the Germans, and when the charge was over only three of the company could be formed up. All the rest of B Company were either killed, wounded, or taken prisoner, though very few prisoners were taken. The Major was one of them; but he was so badly wounded that he lived only a very short time, and died as a prisoner of war. His is one of the cases in which the Cross is given although the winner of it is dead. He was always in front, and his constant cry was 'Follow me!'

Major Yates citation in the London Gazette of November 25, 1915 read: *"Major Charles Allix Lavington Yate (deceased), 2nd Battalion The Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, commanded one of the two companies that remained to the end in the trenches at Le Cateau on August 26th, and when all other officers were killed or wounded and ammunition exhausted, led his 19 survivors against the enemy in a charge in which he was severely wounded. He was picked up by the enemy and he subsequently died as a prisoner of war"*.

He was an outstanding soldier on all counts. However there is a note in the War Office File WO 32/4993 about his award and the following caption was sent back from the War Office to Sir John French: 'Was his company covering a retreat and was the maintenance of the position in the trenches necessarily continued so long? Also can you say where the latest reliable information is. Is it a fact that he was taken prisoner and has since died?'

This query was soon answered satisfactorily as Yate's VC was confirmed in the second batch of the war. Out of twenty nine awards of a VC proposed by Sir John French in the early months of the war, twenty four were later confirmed. With hindsight it seems that the recommendation of the award for Major Yate should have been one of those rejected, as his reckless actions at Le Cateau achieved absolutely nothing.

Four years after the war ended a memorial to the memory of nine British officers was unveiled by the then Prince of Wales at St Andrew's church, Shiba, Tokyo on 14th April 1922. Yate's name was at the head of the list but the memorial was subsequently destroyed in the Second World War. An article by Yate was posthumously published in *Blackwoods Magazine* in September 1914 entitled 'Moral Qualities in War'.

In his spare time Yate had been fond of riding and from an early age had hunted with the Albrighton hounds. He was also a fine polo player and a good skier, as well as an accomplished linguist.

He is commemorated at St Michael's church, Madeley, Telford, Shropshire, and his name is on a screen at St Adhelm's church, Weymouth, Dorset. His medals are owned by his regiment and are on display at the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry Regimental Museum at Doncaster, South Yorkshire. In 2004, in a visit to the former East Germany, the Queen laid a wreath at Yate's grave at Berlin South Western Cemetery, Stahsdorf (plot II, row G, grave 8).

Full medal entitlement of Major Charles Allix Lavington Yate:

Victoria Cross.

India Medal (1895-1902) 1 clasp: "Punjab Frontier 1897-98".

Queen's South Africa Medal (1899-1902) 4 clasps: "Belmont"; "Orange Free State"; "Transvaal"; "South Africa 1902".

1914 Star - clasp "5th Aug-22nd Nov 1914".

British War Medal (1914-20).

Victory Medal (1914-19) + Mentioned in Despatches Oakleaf.

King George V Coronation Medal (1911).

Order of the Sacred Treasure (4th Class) (Japan).

Russo - Japanese War Medal (1904-05).



Major Charles Yate was originally buried close to where he died but in 1924 his remains were removed and interred in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Berlin South Western Cemetery at Stahnsdorf, near Potsdam, Germany where a total of 1,176 British and Commonwealth soldiers are buried or commemorated.

He is also listed on the parish war memorial, now on The Green, at Madeley.

His Victoria Cross is displayed at the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry Museum in the Doncaster Museum, England.

Not much is known of Charles Yate as a member of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, save that he was initiated in the Province of Punjab.



Epilogue

It is only now that I have finished writing these stories that I can appreciate how much research and work Bro. Stan Stirman has done in helping me to compile this book. As I said at the beginning, I had hoped, through research, to meet many men who had, through their bravery, contributed to the wars being fought for Crown and Country, it would have been the experience of a lifetime to have met them in person. It has been a labour of love that I have given so much time to the writing of this book, and with that has come the satisfaction that many of our members might enjoy the reading of it.

The scale of loss and suffering bought about by the ferocity of wars seems too big to comprehend by itself. Over many years I have had the opportunity to retrace some of the human stories behind the facts of these epic conflicts. Along the way I have come to realise how keen historians, like myself, never give up in trying to bring to the attention of other members the value of comradeship. It is one of the core principles of Buffaloism and we should always try to instil that value to all our members, young and old alike.

This epilogue brings to an end the tales of some of the brave members of our Order who won the Victoria Cross under really difficult conditions. It is not the end of these magnificent achievements, my fervent hope is that by reading and understanding this book, it might jog the memories of our members and cause them to reveal that I might have missed someone. If that happens, I will gladly update this book.

It is Remembrance Sunday 2015 (8th November) as I type the last words of this book, so I thought it would be fitting to remind readers, of the poems that were written and in many cases recited at the many Remembrance Day parades throughout the country, especially those who belong to the Royal British Legion.

“In Flanders Fields” is a war poem in the form of a rondeau, written during the First World War by Canadian physician Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae. He was inspired to write it on 3rd May 1915, after presiding over the funeral of friend and fellow soldier Alexis Helmer, who died in the Second Battle of Ypres. According to legend, fellow soldiers retrieved the poem after McCrae, initially dissatisfied with his work, discarded it. *“In Flanders Fields”* was first published on December 8th of that year in the London based magazine *Punch*.





It is one of the most popular and most quoted poems from the war. As a result of its immediate popularity, parts of the poem were used in propaganda efforts and appeals to recruit soldiers and raise money selling war bonds. Its references to the red poppies that grew over the graves of fallen soldiers resulted in the remembrance poppy becoming one of the world's most recognized memorial symbols for soldiers who have died in conflict. The poem and poppy are prominent Remembrance Day symbols

throughout the Commonwealth of Nations, particularly in Canada, where "In Flanders Fields" is one of the nation's best known literary works. The poem also has wide exposure in the United States, where it is associated with Memorial Day.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.





The remembrance poppy (a *Papaver rhoeas*) has been used since 1921 to commemorate soldiers who have died in war. Inspired by the World War One poem “In Flanders Fields”, and promoted by Moina Michael, they were first adopted by the American Legion to commemorate American soldiers killed in that war (1914–1918). They were then adopted by military veterans’ groups in parts of the former British Empire: the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Today, they are most common in the UK and Canada, and are used to commemorate their servicemen and women killed in all conflicts since 1914. There, small artificial poppies are often worn on clothing leading up to Remembrance Day/Armistice Day (11th November). Poppy wreaths are also often laid at war memorials.

The Remembrance Poppy is especially prominent in the UK. In the weeks leading up to Remembrance Sunday, they are distributed by The Royal British Legion in return for donations to their “Poppy Appeal”, which supports all current and former British military personnel. During this time, all public figures and people appearing on television are expected to wear them, and those who do not have been criticized. Some have berated this as “poppy fascism” and argued that the Appeal is being used to justify and glorify current wars



Laurence Binyon composed his best known poem while sitting on the cliff-top looking out to sea from the dramatic scenery of the north Cornish coastline. A plaque marks the location at Pentire Point, north of Polzeath. However, there is also a small plaque on the East Cliff north of Portreath, further south on the same north Cornwall coast, which also claims to be the place where the poem was written.

The poem was written in mid September 1914, a few weeks after the outbreak of the First World War. During these weeks the British Expeditionary Force had suffered casualties

following its first encounter with the Imperial German Army at the Battle of Mons on 23rd August, its rearguard action during the retreat from Mons in late August and the Battle of Le Cateau on 26th August, and its participation with the French Army in holding up the Imperial German Army at the First Battle of the Marne between 5th and 9th September 1914.

Laurence said in 1939 that the four lines of the fourth stanza came to him first. These words of the fourth stanza have become especially familiar and famous, having been adopted by the Royal British Legion as an Exhortation for ceremonies of Remembrance to commemorate fallen Servicemen and women.



Laurence Binyon was too old to enlist in the military forces but he went to work for the Red Cross as a medical orderly in 1916. He lost several close friends and his brother in law in the war.

For The Fallen

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
 England mourns for her dead across the sea.
 Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,
 Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill; Death august and royal
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres,
There is music in the midst of desolation
And a glory that shines upon our tears.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted;
They fell with their faces to the foe.

***They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.***

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;
They sleep beyond England's foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes profound,
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known
As the stars are known to the Night;

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain;
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,
To the end, to the end, they remain.





On the 11th hour of
the 11th day of the
11th month

when the guns fell
silent, we will
remember



Our brave men their wounded and dead





The trenches



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