

'FOR VALOUR'

ULSTER VCS OF THE GREAT WAR



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The Victoria Cross is the highest military decoration awarded for valour 'in the face of the enemy' to members of the armed forces of various Commonwealth countries, and the former British Empire. It takes precedence over all other orders, decorations and medals. It may be awarded to a person of any rank in any service and to civilians under military command.

The VC was instituted on 29 January 1856 by Queen Victoria to honour acts of 'valour' - the word was of Victoria's own choosing - during the Crimean War. Since then, the medal has been awarded 1,356 times to 1,353 individual recipients. Three people - Arthur Martin-Leake, Noel Godfrey Chavasse and Charles Hazlitt Upham - have had been awarded the VC twice, a distinction known as 'VC and Bar'.

No less than 628 awards were made for acts of valour during the Great War, accounting for almost half the 1,356 Victoria Crosses issued throughout its history.

Of the 628 awards made during the Great War, an impressive tally of 23 are of local interest on the basis of Ulster birth, Ulster parentage and service in the 36th (Ulster) Division.

Twelve men of Ulster birth won the VC. (*Tabulated by county*):

- Antrim (2): **James Crichton** (Carrickfergus)
Robert Quigg (Bushmills)
- Armagh (1): **William Frederick McFadzean** (Lurgan)
- Cavan (1): **James Somers** (Belturbet)
- Donegal (1): **James Duffy** (Gweedore)
- Down (3): **Edward Barry Stewart Bingham** (Bangor)
Edmund de Wind (Comber)
Robert Hill Hanna (Kilkeel)
- Fermanagh (1): **Eric Norman Frankland Bell** (Enniskillen)
- Monaghan (2): **Thomas Hughes** (Castleblayney)
David Nelson (Stranooden)
- Tyrone (1): **Robert Morrow** (Newmills)

Seven VC winners were born outside Ulster but had Ulster parentage:

Ernest Wright Alexander: Born in Liverpool with a Belfast mother

James Anson Otho Brooke: Born in Aberdeen with a County Fermanagh father

Geoffrey St George Shillington Cather: Born in London with a Coleraine father and a Portadown mother

Hugh Colvin: Born in Burnley, Lancashire, of Ulster parentage

John Spencer Dunville: Born in London with a County Down father

John Alexander Sinton: Born in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, of Ulster parentage

Richard Annesley West: Born in Cheltenham with a County Fermanagh father

Four of the nine VCS won by men serving with the 36th (Ulster) Division were neither of Ulster birth nor of Ulster parentage:

James Samuel Emerson of the 9th Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers was born in Collon, County Louth

Ernest Seaman of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers was born in a small village near Norwich

Norman Harvey of the 1st Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers was born in Newton-le-Willows in Lancashire

Cecil Leonard Knox of the Royal Engineers was born in Nuneaton in Warwickshire.

As one might expect, Ulster VCs were overwhelmingly military and were won on the Western Front, the principal theatre of military operations during the Great War. Three were won in other theatres: Gallipoli (**James Somers**), Palestine (**James Duffy**), Mesopotamia (**John Alexander Sinton**). Only one of the Ulster VCs was awarded to a sailor (**Edward Barry Stewart Bingham**) who won his at the Battle of Jutland.

Eleven of the 23 Ulster VCs winners did not survive the war.

Eight died as a result of the engagement for which they won the award:

James Anson Otho Brooke

William Frederick McFadzean

Eric Norman Frankland Bell

Geoffrey St George Shillington Cather

John Spencer Dunville

Ernest Seaman

James Samuel Emerson

Edmund de Wind

Three died as a result of subsequent engagements before the end of the war:

David Nelson won his VC at Néry in September 1914 but was killed in action in April 1918.

James Somers won his VC at Gallipoli in July 1915 but died at home as the result of effects of gas attack (in the latter stages of the war) in May 1918.

Robert Morrow won his VC for an act of valour near Messines on 12 April 1915 and was killed in action on 26 April 1915.

Norman Harvey was a casualty of the Second World War.

As we will see, three VCs of local interest were awarded for acts of valour in 1914, two in 1915, six in 1916, five in 1917 and six in 1918.

Note

The nine Ulster Division VCs are indicated with an asterisk.

The 1st Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and the 2nd Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers did not constitute part of the original Ulster Division. The 1st Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers joined the Ulster Division from the 29th Division on 18 February 1918 and 2nd Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers joined from the 32nd Division on 4 February 1918.

ERNEST WRIGHT ALEXANDER

2 OCTOBER 1870 - 25 AUGUST 1934

Born in Liverpool, Ernest Wright Alexander was the son of Robert Alexander, a shipowner and director of the Suez Canal Company, and Annie Alexander (née Gregg), a Belfast lady. He was educated at Cherbourg House, Malvern, Harrow and Sandhurst. He received his first commission in July 1889. He served twice in India: from 1892 to 1900 and from 1903 to 1906, when he was promoted to major. In 1914 he was still a major (because promotion was painfully slow in the peace-time army) and serving with the 119th Battery of the Royal Field Artillery.

British troops first encountered the German Army at Mons on 22 August and Alexander won his VC two days later. On 24 August 1914, during the retreat from Mons at Elouges, Belgium, when the flank guard was attacked by a German corps, Alexander handled his battery against overwhelming odds with such conspicuous success that all his guns were saved notwithstanding that they had to be withdrawn by hand by himself and volunteers led by a Captain Grenfell of the 9th Lancers, who also received the VC for his part in rescuing the guns. This enabled the retirement of the 5th Division to be carried out without serious loss. Subsequently, Major Alexander rescued a wounded man under heavy fire.

Alexander's courage and leadership resulted in a series of rapid promotions, culminating in his command of the Royal Artillery of XI Corps from May 1917 to April 1918 and the rank of major general. During the course of the war Alexander was mentioned nine times in dispatches. Alexander's VC is on display at the Ashcroft Gallery in the Imperial War Museum in London.



1914

DAVID NELSON

3 APRIL 1886 - 7 APRIL 1918

The first VC ever awarded was won by Charles Lucas, a Monaghan man, on 21 June 1854 during the Crimean War. One of the earliest VCs of the Great War was won by another Monaghan man – Sergeant David Nelson of 'L' Battery, Royal Horse Artillery – at Néry, a small village in the *département* of Oise, near Compiègne.

David Nelson was the eldest son of George and Annie Nelson, Stranooden, Monaghan. A regular soldier, Nelson had enlisted in the Royal Field Artillery in 1904. He subsequently transferred to the Royal Horse Artillery. He was promoted to bombardier with 'L' Battery on 3 April 1910 and to sergeant on 5 August 1914 (the day after Britain declared war on Germany), having obtained a first-class gunnery certificate from the School of Gunnery at Shoeburyness.

During the retreat from Mons, part of the 1st Cavalry Brigade – including 'L' Battery – was bivouacked in Néry. At approximately five o'clock on the morning of 1 September 1914 the battery, with horse teams hooked to the guns, was waiting to move off in the early morning mist when they were surprised by German troops on the nearby hills who poured heavy fire into their bivouac area. Members of 'L' Battery immediately unhooked their guns and brought them into action. For two hours they maintained a rapid fire against the German positions, losing guns and troops throughout the action, until only one gun remained, served by two wounded men, one of whom was David Nelson.

At 7:15 am reinforcements arrived which were able to eject the Germans from their commanding position. During the course of the action 45 officers and men from 'L' Battery were either killed or wounded. Hospitalised after the action at Néry and taken prisoner by the Germans two days later, Nelson managed to escape after a few days in captivity and rejoin the BEF (the British Expeditionary Force).



1914

1914

JAMES ANSON OTHO BROOKE

3 FEBRUARY 1884 - 29 OCTOBER 1914

Three members of 'L' Battery were awarded the VC for the action at Néry: Captain E. K. Bradbury, Sergeant-Major G. T. Dorrell, and Sergeant Nelson. Bradbury's VC was awarded posthumously. The award of Sergeant Nelson's VC was gazetted on 16 November 1914. The citation read: 'For helping to bring the guns into action under heavy fire at Néry, on 1st September, 1914, and while severely wounded remaining with them until all the ammunition was expended, although he had been ordered to retire to cover.' The day before his VC was gazetted, Nelson was commissioned as a second-lieutenant. By March 1918 Nelson was a major.

While commanding 'D' Battery, 59th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, he was wounded on 7 April 1918. He died of his wounds on the following day and is buried in Lillers Communal Cemetery. Lillers, a small town in Pas de Calais, is about 15 kilometres north-west of Bethune and the Communal Cemetery and Extension lie to the north of the town.

Sergeant Nelson's VC is in the Imperial War Museum in London.

The Brookes of Colebrooke in County Fermanagh are an Ulster family with a remarkable record of military service. For the Brooke family military service was as natural as breathing. Twenty-six Brookes served in the Great War and 27 in the Second: twelve of them died in action. The family also provided the United Kingdom with Alan Brooke, 1st Viscount Alanbrooke, its 'Master of Strategy' (as his statue in Whitehall describes him) and Chief of the Imperial General Staff for the greater part of the Second World War.

Although born in Aberdeen, J. A. O. Brooke was the grandson of Sir Arthur Brinsley Brooke, the second Baronet of Colebrooke, and the son of Sir Harry Vesey Brooke and Patricia Moir-Byres. He was educated at Wellington and at Sandhurst where he had won the Sword of Honour. He was also a fine sportsman. When he won his VC during the First Battle of Ypres, he was a 30-year-old lieutenant in the 2nd Battalion, Gordon Highlanders, his father's old regiment.



On 29 October 1914 near Gheluvelt, Belgium, Lieutenant Brooke led two attacks on the German trenches under heavy rifle and machine-gun fire, regaining a lost trench at a very critical moment. By his marked coolness and promptitude on this occasion, Lieutenant Brooke prevented the enemy from breaking through the British line at a time when a general counter-attack could not have been organised. Having regained the lost trench, he went back to bring up support, and while doing so, was killed.

Lieutenant Brooke was posthumously promoted to captain, effective from September 1914. He is interred at Zantvoorde British Cemetery, Zonnebeke, Belgium. There is a memorial to him at Springbank Cemetery, Aberdeen, and another attached to a captured German field gun at the Inniskillings' Regimental Museum in Enniskillen.



1915

ROBERT MORROW

7 SEPTEMBER 1891 - 26 APRIL 1915

Robert Morrow, the son of Hugh and Margaret Morrow, was born and raised on a farm near Newmills, Dungannon, County Tyrone.

He was 23 years old when he won his VC and a private in the 1st Battalion, Royal Irish Fusiliers.

Marcus Cunliffe, the historian of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, has described him as 'a quiet, undemonstrative boy'. He was also small in stature. Nevertheless, on 12 April 1915 near Messines, Belgium, Private Morrow rescued and carried to places of comparative safety several men who had been buried in the debris of trenches wrecked by shell fire. He carried out this work on his own initiative and under heavy fire from the enemy.

A fortnight later (on 26 April 1915) he was killed in action at St Jan in the Ypres Salient, Belgium. He is buried in White House Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery.

King George V presented the VC to his mother at Buckingham Palace. His VC is displayed at the Royal Irish Fusiliers Museum in Armagh.



JAMES SOMERS

12 JUNE 1884 - 7 MAY 1918

Somers, the son of Robert and Charlotte Somers, was born in Belturbet, County Cavan. He first joined the Special Reserve of the Royal Munster Fusiliers on 14 January 1913. He joined the 2nd Battalion Inniskillings in July 1914, and later served in Belgium and France when war broke out, being severely wounded on the Retreat from Mons in August 1914. Having recovered from his wounds in England, he was ordered to join the 1st Battalion, and sailed off to Gallipoli. He was 31 years old, and a serjeant [sic] in the 1st Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers when he won his VC there.

On 1/2 July 1915, when, owing to hostile bombing, some of his troops had retired from a sap, Serjeant Somers remained alone there until a party brought up bombs. He then climbed over into the Turkish trench and bombed the Turks with great effect. Later on, he advanced into the open under heavy fire and held back the enemy by throwing bombs into their flank until a barricade had been established. During this period, he frequently ran to and from his trenches to obtain fresh supplies of bombs.

In a letter to his father, Somers explained:

I beat the Turks out of our trench single-handed and had four awful hours at night. The Turks swarmed in from all roads, but I gave them a rough time of it, still holding the trench. It is certain sure we are beating the Turks all right. In the trench I came out of, it was shocking to see the dead. They lay, about three thousand Turks, in front of our trenches, and the smell was absolutely chronic. You know when the sun has been shining on those bodies for three or four days it makes a horrible smell; a person would not mind if it was possible to bury them. But no, you dare not put your nose outside the trench, and if you did, you would be a dead man.



1915

1916

After Gallipoli, he served on the Somme. On the 1 April 1917 he joined the Army Service Corps. After being gassed, he was medically discharged and died in Cloughjordan, County Tipperary (where his father was now sexton of the local Church of Ireland Church), on 7 May 1918. He was buried with full military honours in Modreeny Church of Ireland cemetery, County Tipperary. His Union Jack-draped coffin was carried on a gun carriage, led by the Pipe Band of the Cameron Highlanders. His headstone simply states: 'He stood and defended. The Lord wrought a great wonder.'



JOHN ALEXANDER SINTON

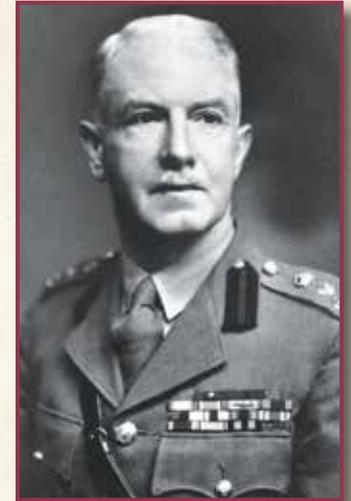
2 DECEMBER 1884 - 25 MARCH 1956

Born in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, John Alexander Sinton was the third of the seven children of Ulster-Scots parents. Walter Lyon Sinton, his father, was of Quaker stock, while Isabella Mary (née Pringle), his mother, was a Presbyterian. On his mother's side he was a cousin of James Pringle KC MP and a nephew of Thomas Sinton, the industrialist. On his father's side he was a cousin of Ernest Walton (who won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1951 for his role in splitting the atom in 1932).

The family returned to Ulster in 1890 and that remained Sinton's base throughout his much travelled life. Academically gifted from an early age, Sinton attended the Nicholson Memorial School, Lisburn, and the Royal Belfast Academical Institution before graduating MB BCh BAO (Belfast) in 1908, first of his year, adding the diploma in public health (Belfast and Cambridge) in 1910 and the diploma in tropical medicine (Liverpool) in 1911. He was first in the entrance examination for the Indian Medical Service (IMS) and was gazetted lieutenant IMS in July 1911. However, before being posted to India he was seconded for a year as Queen's University research scholar to the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine where his contact with Sir Ronald Ross may have influenced his later career as a malariologist.

Sinton served with great distinction in the military branch of the IMS from 1912 to 1921, when he transferred to the civil branch in which he served until his retirement in 1936. He served on the North-West Frontier, in Mesopotamia, Afghanistan, Waziristan, and Turkestan, and was decorated many times, receiving the VC in 1916, the OBE, and the Russian order of St George, and was mentioned in dispatches six times.

He was 31 years old and a captain in the IMS when he won the VC for attending to the wounded under very heavy fire at Orah Ruins, Mesopotamia, on 21 January 1916. The citation to his VC in the London Gazette reads:



1916

EDWARD BARRY STEWART BINGHAM

26 JULY 1881 - 24 SEPTEMBER 1939

For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty. Although shot through both arms and through the side, he refused to go to hospital, and remained as long as daylight lasted, attending to his duties under very heavy fire. In three previous actions Captain Sinton displayed the utmost bravery.

In 1943 he achieved the rank of brigadier. Quite apart from his military career, Sinton achieved international pre-eminence as a malariologist, published over 200 scientific papers (many of them about malaria) and was a Fellow of the Royal Society.

A member of the Senate of Queen's University, he also served as a JP, High Sheriff and Deputy Lieutenant of County Tyrone.

He died at his home at Slaghtfreedan Lodge, Cookstown, County Tyrone, and was buried with full military honours at Claggan Presbyterian cemetery in Cookstown. In an obituary in the *British Medical Journal*, Colonel H. W. Mulligan observed that 'Sinton had an exceptionally quick, receptive, and retentive brain, but his greatness sprang not so much from his unusual intellectual gifts as from the simple qualities of absolute integrity and tremendous industry'. At the time of his death he was the only person entitled to place the letters VC FRS after his name.

His Victoria Cross is displayed at the Army Medical Services Museum at Aldershot.



A month before the beginning of the Battle of the Somme 150 ships of the British Grand Fleet, commanded by Admiral Jellicoe, confronted 100 ships of the German High Seas Fleet, commanded by Admiral Scheer, in the grey waters of the North Sea, making it the largest naval engagement of the Great War. As aircraft played no part in the battle and submarines played only a minimal role (although fear of them figured prominently in Admiral Jellicoe's calculations), the Battle of Jutland is likely to remain the biggest and last purely surface encounter in naval history.



In its coverage of the battle, one of the first 'deaths' to be reported by the *Belfast News-Letter* was that of Commander the Hon. E. B. S. Bingham, third son of Lord and Lady Clanmorris of Bangor Castle, who was the commander of HMS Nestor, a destroyer. However, the report proved inaccurate because Commander Bingham had been picked up by a German destroyer after the sinking of the Nestor. Nor, understandably, was the *Belfast News-Letter* at that stage aware of the personal courage and the quality of the leadership which Bingham had displayed at Jutland.

On sighting the enemy, the Bangor-born Bingham had ordered his own destroyer and HMS Nicator, to close to within 2,750 meters of the German battle fleet so that he could deploy his torpedoes. While mounting their attack Nestor and Nicator came under concerted fire and Nestor was subsequently sunk. For his leadership and courage Bingham earned his VC, one of the comparatively few awarded for naval bravery during the Great War.

Bingham had joined the Royal Navy in 1895 and had previously seen action in the Battle of the Falkland Islands in December 1914 (which avenged the British defeat at Coronel off the coast of Chile a month earlier).

After the Battle of Jutland (which was a tactical German victory but a strategic British one), Bingham spent the remainder of the war as a POW. After the war he resumed his career in the Royal

1916

WILLIAM FREDERICK MCFADZEAN*

9 OCTOBER 1895 - 1 JULY 1916

Navy and retired as a rear admiral in 1932.

Bingham's VC was purchased by the North Down Borough Council in 1983 and is now on display at the North Down Museum, based in Bangor Castle, where Bingham was born and which was once his home.

The great allied offensive on the Somme in which the 36th (Ulster) Division distinguished itself began at zero hour (7:30 am) on 1 July 1916. Even before the men of the Ulster Division went over the top that morning William Frederick McFadzean, the Young Citizen Volunteers' most famous member, had performed a selfless and heroic act which was to win him a posthumous VC.

McFadzean was born 9 October 1895 in Lurgan and was baptised in First Lurgan Presbyterian Church. He was the eldest son of William, a linen yarn salesman who had been born in Dundalk, County Louth, and Anne Pedlow McFadzean, a Lurgan lady. William had three younger brothers and a sister.

Later the family moved to Belfast (where the three younger children were born) and lived at Rubicon, Cregagh. From school records, it is known that he entered Mountpottinger School in Belfast on 13 April 1904 and was enrolled in the Third Class. He left the school on 12 August 1908 and attended the Trade Preparatory School in Belfast. He was an enthusiastic junior member of Collegians Rugby Club and was on the staff of Spence, Bryson & Company as a clerk before enlisting on 22 September 1914. Perusal of the casualty lists of the 14th Rifles in the Belfast newspapers in July 1916 confirms that a high proportion of YCV members were similarly involved in the linen trade.

Standing six feet tall, McFadzean became a 'grenadier' or a 'bomber' in the battalion because of his height. On the morning of 1 July 1916 before 'zero hour' he was busily equipping himself to undertake his role as a 'bomber'.

The award of Private McFadzean's VC was gazetted on 26 September 1916. The citation succinctly explains how he won his VC:



1916

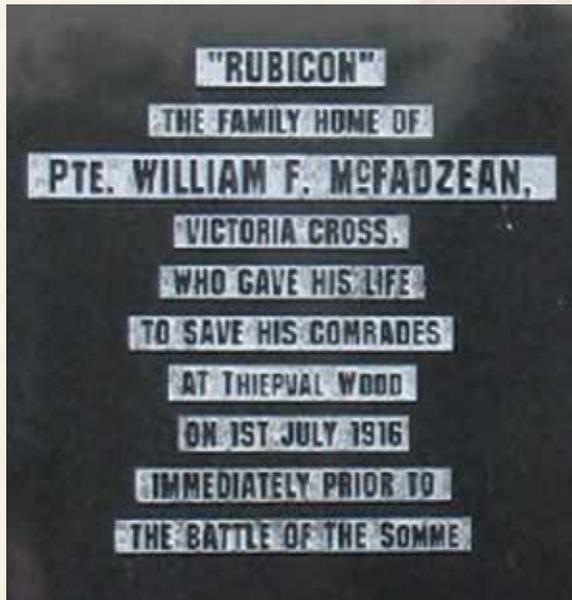
ERIC NORMAN FRANKLAND BELL*

28 AUGUST 1895 – 1 JULY 1916

For most conspicuous bravery near Thiepval Wood, on 1st July, 1916. While in a concentration trench, and opening a box of bombs for distribution prior to an attack, the box slipped down into the trench, which was crowded with men, and two of the safety pins fell out. Private McFadzean, instantly realising the danger to his comrades, with heroic courage threw himself on top of the bombs. The bombs exploded, blowing him to pieces, but only one other man was injured. He well knew his danger, being himself a bomber, but without a moment's hesitation he gave his life for his comrades.

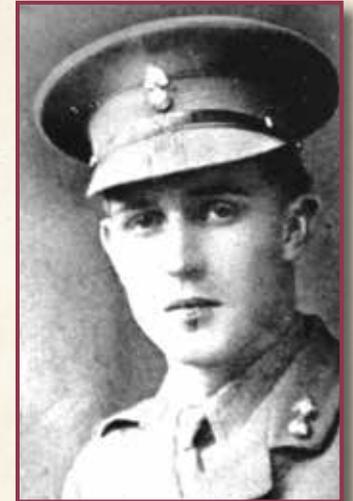
William's comrades laid the body carefully aside, hoping that he would receive a decent burial later. However William has no known grave and is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing, Pier and Face 15A and 15B.

King George V presented Private McFadzean's VC to his father at Buckingham Palace on 28 February 1917.



Eric Norman Frankland Bell was born at Alma Terrace in Enniskillen and was the son of Edward and Dora Bell. At the time his father was quartermaster to the 2nd Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. His mother came from Manorhamilton, County Leitrim, and his father from Budeaux, Devon.

E.N.F. Bell had been living and working in Liverpool at the outbreak of the Great War but returned to Enniskillen to join the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. His family set a unique record during the war: his father and two brothers (Alan and Haldane) served in the same 9th battalion. At the time of his award Captain E.N.F. Bell was attached to 109th Brigade's Light Mortar Battery.



Captain E.N.F. Bell's VC was announced in the London Gazette of 26 September 1916. The citation read:

For most conspicuous bravery at Thiepval, on 1st July, 1916. He was in command of a trench mortar battery, and advanced with the infantry to the attack. When our front line was hung up by enfilading machine gun fire, Captain Bell crept forward and shot the machine gunner. Later on, no less than three occasions, when our bombing parties, which were clearing the enemies' trenches, were unable to advance, he went forward alone and threw trench mortar bombs among the enemy. When he had no more bombs available he stood on the parapet, under intense fire, and used a rifle with great coolness and effect on the enemy advancing to counter-attack. Finally he was killed rallying and reorganizing infantry parties which had lost their officers. All this was outside the scope of his normal duties with his battery. He gave his life in his supreme devotion to duty.

King George V presented Captain E.N.F. Bell's VC to Captain E.H. Bell on 29 November 1916.

Eric's sister Dora, who had possession of the medal, emigrated to New Zealand where she settled and married in 1933 and at this point the VC disappeared from view until 1999. Then

1916

ROBERT QUIGG*

28 FEBRUARY 1885 - 14 MAY 1955

the Regimental Colonel of The Royal Irish Regiment received a phone call from the British High Commissioner in New Zealand to say that Air Vice Marshal Sir Richard Bolt KBE CB DFC AFC, who had been New Zealand's Chief of Defence Staff from 1976-1980 and who was Dora Bell's stepson, had possession of E. N. F. Bell's VC which he wished to ensure was kept in an appropriate place. He donated it to the Inniskillings' Regimental Museum, Enniskillen, where it may now be seen.

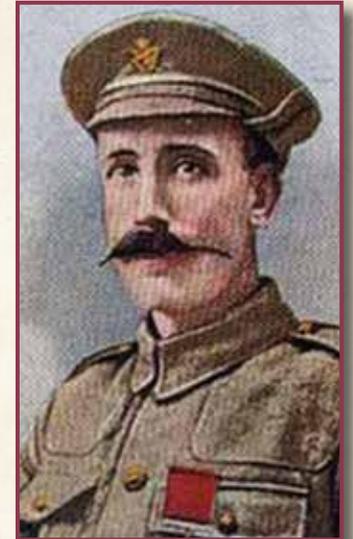
Captain E.N.F. Bell is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing, Pier and Face 4D and 5B.

Robert Quigg was born in Carnkirk, a townland about two miles from Bushmills, between that town and Ballintoy.

Quigg signed the Ulster Covenant in 1912 and was active in the pre-war UVF. He enlisted in the 12th Royal Irish Rifles, one of the battalions of the Ulster Division, in September 1914. Employed before the war on Macnaghten estate, he went to war as batman to Sir Harry Macnaghten Bt (the 6th Baronet), the son of Sir Edward Macnaghten Bt (the 5th Baronet) and the grandson of Lord Macnaghten of Runkerry (a law lord who was also the 4th Baronet). Family tradition has it that Quigg was told by Lady Macnaghten that he was not to return home without Sir Harry. If this is true, Lady Macnaghten's stern injunction may offer a partial explanation of Quigg's actions on 1-2 July 1916.

David James Lavery (1896-1988), who was born at Ballytober, Bushmills, where his parents kept the local post office, served with Quigg in the 12th Royal Irish Rifles. Mr Lavery, in conversation with the late Harry Irwin (a bibliophile who was a great mine of information on so many subjects), recalled that Quigg was regarded by his comrades as 'a madman'. He wanted to kill all the Germans and to calm him down he was posted to the cookhouse and then to the bakery. However, even after his duties were over he was always along the parapet to see where the Germans were. Allegedly, Quigg's behaviour was so reckless that other members of the battalion had a difficult time getting him to keep his head down to avoid getting it blown off.

Mr Lavery vividly recalled the issue of the tot of rum and the final minutes before 'zero hour' (7:30 am) on 1 July 1916: 'We were all tensed up and I can still picture Sir Harry at the end of the trench with a big pocket watch in his hand saying "Calm down boys, we've plenty of time"'. According to David Lavery, Sir Harry was killed minutes later.



Quigg won his VC 'for most conspicuous bravery' at the Somme on 1-2 July 1916. According to the citation:

He advanced to the assault with his platoon three times. Early next morning, hearing a rumour that, his platoon officer [Sir Harry] was lying out wounded, he went out seven times to look for him under heavy shell and machine gun fire, each time bringing back a wounded man. The last man he dragged in on a water-proof sheet from within a few yards of the enemy's wire. He was seven hours engaged in this most gallant work, and finally was so exhausted that he had to give it up.

Sir Harry's body was never found. His brother Douglas who was serving as a subaltern with Rifle Brigade inherited the baronetcy, becoming the 7th Baronet. He was killed ten weeks later at Delville Wood, also on the Somme.

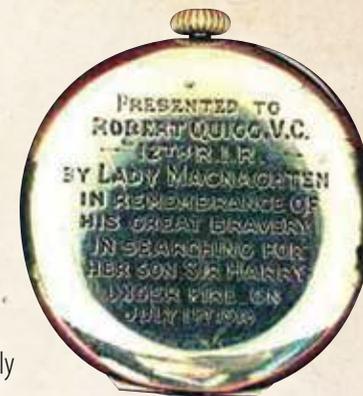


Quigg's VC was one of four awarded to members of the Ulster Division as a result of the events of 1-2 July 1916 but his was the only one not to be awarded posthumously. It is worth observing that two of the four Ulster Division's were won by men consciously placing their lives at risk for the sake of their comrades.

Rifleman Quigg received his VC from King George V at Sandringham on 8 January 1917. It is said that when presenting the VC to Quigg, the King observed, 'You're a very brave man, Quigg.' The gruff Ulsterman replied, 'You're a brave man yourself, King.' A possible explanation for this otherwise bizarre exchange is that George V was speaking Standard English, as you would expect, whereas Quigg was thinking in and speaking Ulster-Scots. 'Brave' in Ulster-Scots means 'decent' rather 'courageous'. Quigg, interpreting the King's use of the word in the Ulster-Scots sense, was merely reciprocating what he understood to be the King's compliment.

When Quigg returned to Bushmills he received a hero's welcome and Lady Macnaghten presented him with a gold watch in recognition of his bravery in attempting to find and rescue her son.

Quigg retired from the army in 1926 (after he was seriously injured in an accident), having attained the rank of sergeant. A member of Aird LOL 1195 and the flute band associated with the lodge, he lived in the Garnside area of County Antrim. Quigg was presented to Her Majesty the Queen when she reviewed ex-servicemen at Coleraine in 1953. He died on 14 May 1955 in hospital in Ballycastle. Quigg received a military funeral after a service conducted by Revd A. N. Kelly, Rector of Billy, and Revd F. G. Guy, Hon. Chaplain to the Forces, and was buried in the graveyard of Billy Parish Church, near Bushmills. Major E. A. D. Liddle, the Commanding Officer of the Royal Ulster Rifles (the Royal Irish Rifles' successor regiment) depot, represented the Colonel of the Regiment, Sir James Steele, a man who has his own niche in British military history. In 1939 Steele, who was born in Ballycarry, signed the executive signal for the mobilization of the army at the outset of the Second World War.



1916

GEOFFREY ST GEORGE SHILLINGTON CATHER*

11 OCTOBER 1890 - 2 JULY 1916

Geoffrey St. George Shillington Cather was born in Streatham Hill, London, of Ulster parents. Margaret, his mother, was a member of the prominent Portadown Shillington family, and Robert, his father, came from Coleraine. Although he grew up in England and was educated at Rugby, he spent his school holidays in Portadown. His education at Rugby was prematurely terminated by the death of his father in 1908.

Cather was employed by the Tetley Tea Company and had worked in the United States and Canada prior to his return in May 1914. He enlisted in the Artists' Rifles in 1914 and in May 1915 was commissioned into 9th Battalion, the Royal Irish Fusiliers. He went to France on 5 October.

At the time of his award Lieutenant Cather was serving as battalion adjutant. Lieutenant Cather's VC was announced in the London Gazette of 9 September 1916. The citation read:

For most conspicuous bravery near Hamel, France, on 1st July, 1916. From 7 p.m. till midnight he searched "No Man's Land," and brought in three wounded men. Next morning, at 8 a.m., he continued his search, brought in another wounded man, and gave water to others, arranging for their rescue later. Finally, at 10-30 a.m., he took out water to another man, and was proceeding further on when he was himself killed. All this was carried out in full view of the enemy, and under direct machine gun fire and intermittent artillery fire. He set a splendid example of courage and self-sacrifice.

King George V presented Lieutenant Cather's VC to his widowed mother at Buckingham Palace on 31 March 1917.

Lieutenant Cather is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing, Pier and Face 15A. His VC was presented in 1979 to the Royal Irish Fusiliers Regimental Museum, The Mall, Armagh, by Captain Dermot Cather RN (Retd), his brother.



THOMAS HUGHES

30 MAY 1885 - 8 JANUARY 1942



Thomas Hughes was born in Coravoo, near Castleblayney in County Monaghan, and was a private in the 6th Battalion of the Connaught Rangers when he won the VC at Guillemont on the Somme on 3 September 1916.

Having been wounded in an attack, Hughes returned to the firing line after having his wounds dressed. Seeing a hostile machine gun, he dashed out in front of his company, shot the gunner and captured the gun as well as bringing back four German prisoners.

Hughes received his VC from the King at an investiture in Hyde Park, London, on 2 June 1917. He also received the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Allied Victory Medal. Hughes later achieved the rank of corporal. He died in Carrickmacross, County Monaghan, and is buried in the cemetery attached to St Patrick's Roman Catholic church in Broomfield, near Castleblayney,

His VC is on display at the National Army Museum, Chelsea.

JOHN SPENCER DUNVILLE

7 MAY 1896 - 26 JUNE 1917

Dunville was born at 46 Portland Place, Marylebone, London, to Colonel John Dunville CBE DL and Violet Anne Blanch Dunville (née Lambart).

Colonel John Dunville came from Holywood, County Down, and was chairman of Dunville & Co whiskey distillers. J. S. Dunville was educated at Ludgrove School and at Eton, and was a member of the Officer Training Corps from May 1912 to July 1914. He passed matriculation for Trinity College, Cambridge, but chose to join the army instead.

He was aged 21 and a second lieutenant in the 1st Royal Dragoons when he was awarded the VC for his actions on 24/25 June 1917 near Epehy, a village between Cambrai and Peronne in France.

The citation in the London Gazette of 2 August 1917 reads as follows:

For most conspicuous bravery. When in charge of a party consisting of Scouts and Royal Engineers engaged in the demolition of the enemy's wire, this officer displayed great gallantry and disregard of all personal danger. In order to ensure the absolute success of the work entrusted to him, 2nd Lt. Dunville placed himself between the N.C.O. of the Royal Engineers and the enemy's fire, and thus protected, this N.C.O. was enabled to complete a work of great importance. 2nd Lt. Dunville, although severely wounded, continued to direct his men in the wire-cutting and general operations until the raid was successfully completed, thereby setting a magnificent example of courage, determination and devotion to duty, to all ranks under his command. This gallant officer has since succumbed to his wounds.

Second Lieutenant John Spencer Dunville died of wounds the day after performing the deed, and is interred at the Villiers-Faucon Communal Cemetery, Somme, France, (Plot No. A21). His VC is on display at the Household Cavalry Museum, Windsor.

1917



ROBERT HILL HANNA

6 AUGUST 1887 - 15 JUNE 1967

Born at Aughnahoor, Killeel, County Down, Robert was educated at the nearby Ballinran School. Aged 18, he emigrated to Canada, settling in British Columbia and joining Ontario LOL No 2226 in Vancouver.

Before joining the Canadian Expeditionary Force in November 1914, he had worked as a lumberman. Almost three years later, on 21 September 1917, as Company Sergeant-Major Hanna he won the VC. The official citation, published in the *London Gazette* of 8 November 1917, explains how he won his VC:

On the 21st August 1917, at Hill 70 Lens, France, Company Sergeant-Major Hanna's company met with most severe enemy resistance at a heavily protected strong point, which had beaten off three assaults and all the officers of the company had become casualties. This warrant officer, under heavy machine-gun and rifle fire, coolly collected and led a party against the strong point, rushed through the wire and personally killed four of the enemy, capturing the position and silencing the machine-gun. This courageous action was responsible for the capture of a most important tactical point.

After receiving his VC, Hanna, by now a lieutenant, visited Killeel (the first of a number of return visits to his home town) and received a rapturous reception at public meeting in the Square attended by upwards of 3,000 people. At the end of the war he returned to Vancouver where he ran a logging camp until 1938. In 1930 he married Hannah, a girl of Scottish parentage. They had two sons.

He paraded with the Canadian contingent at the Victoria Cross Centenary Review held by H. M. the Queen in Hyde Park in London in 1956 and is buried at the Masonic Cemetery, Burnaby, British Columbia, but his officer's sword is proudly on display in Killeel's Royal British Legion Club.

1917



1917

HUGH COLVIN

1 FEBRUARY 1887 - 16 SEPTEMBER 1962

Although Hugh Colvin was born in Burnley, Lancashire, his family came from Ulster. He was 30 years old and a second lieutenant in the 9th Battalion, Cheshire Regiment when he won the VC.

On 20 September 1917 east of Ypres, Belgium, when all the other officers of his company and all but one in the leading company had become casualties, Second Lieutenant Colvin took command of both companies and led them forward under heavy fire with great success. He went with only two men to a dug-out, when he left the men on top, entered it alone and brought out 14 prisoners. He then proceeded to clear other dug-outs, alone or with only one man, capturing machine-guns, killing some of the enemy and taking a large number of prisoners.

He subsequently achieved the rank of major. Although he died in Chester, his sister, who lived in Bangor, County Down, had his remains brought to Belfast for burial in the family plot at Carnmoney. His VC is displayed at the Cheshire Regimental Museum, Chester.



JAMES SAMUEL EMERSON*

3 AUGUST 1895 - 6 DECEMBER 1917

James Samuel Emerson, the son of John and Ellen Emerson, was born in the village of Collon, County Louth. When he was 22 years old, and a temporary second lieutenant in the 9th Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers (Tyrone Volunteers), he won the VC for his actions on 6 December 1917, on the Hindenburg Line north of La Vacquerie, France. He died in action that same day.

The *London Gazette* explains how this diminutive officer – he was little more than five foot tall – won his VC:

He led his company in an attack and cleared 400 yards of trench. Though wounded [one soldier afterwards recalled seeing a huge bullet hole in Emerson's steel helmet], when the enemy attacked in superior numbers, he sprang out of the trench with eight men and met the attack in the open, killing many and taking six prisoners. For three hours after this, all other Officers having become casualties, he remained with his company, refusing to go to the dressing station, and repeatedly repelled bombing attacks. Later, when the enemy again attacked in superior numbers, he led his men to repel the attack and was mortally wounded. His heroism, when worn out and exhausted from loss of blood, inspired his men to hold out, though almost surrounded, till reinforcements arrived and dislodged the enemy.

His name is inscribed on the war memorial at the Church of Ireland parish church at Collon and the Cambrai Memorial to the Missing.



1917

1917

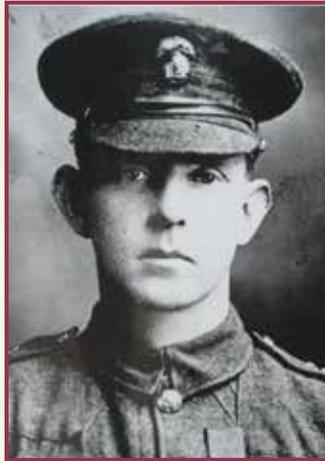
JAMES DUFFY

17 NOVEMBER 1889 - 8 APRIL 1969

James Duffy, a private in the 6th Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, was born on 17 November 1889 in Gweedore, County Donegal. He was 28 years old when he won his VC in Palestine.

On 27 December 1917 at Kereina Peak, whilst the company was holding a very exposed position, Private Duffy, a stretcher-bearer, and another stretcher-bearer went out to bring in a seriously wounded comrade. When the other stretcher-bearer was wounded, Private Duffy returned to get another man, who was killed almost immediately. The private then went forward alone and, under very heavy fire, succeeded in getting both wounded men under cover and attended to their injuries. His gallantry undoubtedly saved both men's lives.

He died in Drumany, Letterkenny, County Donegal, on 8 April 1969 and was buried in Conwal Cemetery, Letterkenny. His VC is displayed at the Inniskilling Museum, Enniskillen.



1918

EDMUND DE WIND*

11 DECEMBER 1883 - 21 MARCH 1918

Edmund De Wind was born in Comber, County Down, his father being the chief engineer of the Belfast and County Down Railway.

Edmund was educated at Campbell College, Belfast, and began employment with the Bank of Ireland in Cavan. In 1910 he emigrated to Canada, as did a sister and a brother, and there entered the employment of the Bank of Commerce. Working in the Edmonton branch of the bank at the outbreak of the Great War, he joined the 31st Battalion (the Calgary Regiment) of the Canadian Army as a private, arriving in France with 2nd Division of C.E.F. (the Canadian Expeditionary Force) in September 1915. Between September 1915 and April 1917 he served in the Calgary Regiment's machine-gun section. He saw action in latter stages of the Battle of the Somme in 1916 and at Vimy Ridge in 1917, earned a commission in September 1917, and was posted to the 15th Battalion, the Royal Irish Rifles (North Belfast Volunteers).

Edmund won the VC for action during the *Kaiserschlacht* (the 'Kaiser's battle' in English), the huge German spring offensive which began on 21 March 1918. Thirty-four year-old Second Lieutenant De Wind was one those who valiantly endeavoured to hold the Germans at bay against overwhelming odds. The award was announced in the London Gazette on of 13 May 1919:

For most conspicuous bravery and self-sacrifice on the 21st March, 1918, at the Race Course Redoubt, near Grugies [southeast of St. Quentin]. For seven hours he held this most important post, and though twice wounded and practically single-handed, he maintained his position until another section could be got to his help. On two occasions, with only two N.C.O.s, he got out on top under heavy machine gun and rifle fire, and cleared the enemy out of the trench, killing many. He continued to repel attack after attack until he was mortally wounded and collapsed. His valour, self-sacrifice and example were of the highest order.

Edmund's posthumous VC was presented to his widowed mother in a ceremony at Buckingham



1918

CECIL LEONARD KNOX*

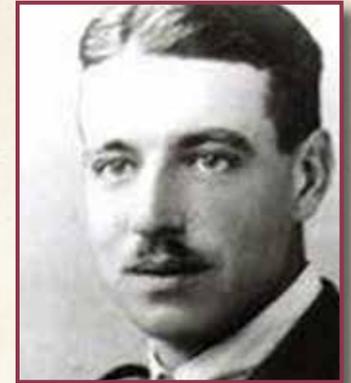
9 MAY 1889 - 4 FEBRUARY 1943

Palace in June 1919. As De Wind has no known grave, he is commemorated on the *Pozières* Memorial to the Missing. A tablet to his memory may also be found in Comber Parish Church and in All Saints Cathedral in Edmonton. He is commemorated in a number of other ways. There is a memorial pillar at the main entrance on the west front of St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast. The pillar bears his name and the date of his death. There is a plaque to his memory in his *alma mater*, Campbell College, Belfast. A housing estate in Comber is named in his honour as is Mount De Wind, a mountain in Jasper Park, Alberta, Canada.

C. L. Knox was born in Nuneaton in Warwickshire and was an Englishman serving with the Ulster Division. He was 29 years old, and a temporary second lieutenant in the 150th Field Company, Corps of Royal Engineers, when he won the VC.

On 22 March 1918 at Tugny, Aisne, France, Second Lieutenant Knox was entrusted with the demolition of 12 bridges. He successfully carried out this task, but in the case of one steel girder bridge the time fuse failed to act, and without hesitation he ran to the bridge under heavy fire, and when the enemy were actually on it, he tore away the time fuse and lit the instantaneous fuse, to do which he had to get under the bridge. As a practical civil engineer, Second Lieutenant Knox undoubtedly realised the grave risk he took in doing this.

Between the wars he joined the Royal Auxiliary Air Force and suffered from a serious parachute accident. He joined the Home Guard at the beginning of the Second World War, becoming a Major. He died as the result of a motoring accident.



1918

RICHARD ANNESLEY WEST

26 SEPTEMBER 1878 - 2 SEPTEMBER 1918

Although Richard Annesley West was born in Cheltenham, he was the son of Augustus George West of White Park, County Fermanagh, and his wife Sara, the daughter of Canon Richard Booth Eyre, a Church of Ireland rector in County Galway.

He had served in the Boer War and continued to serve in South Africa after that conflict. At the outbreak of the Great War he joined the North Irish Horse, Cavalry Special Reserve, becoming a lieutenant in August 1914 and a captain in November 1915. Shortly before the latter promotion, he had been attached to the North Somerset Yeomanry with the temporary rank of major.



in face of heavy machine-gun fire. On 2 September at Vaulx-Vraucourt, he arrived at the front line when the enemy were delivering a local counter-attack. The infantry battalion had suffered heavy officer casualties and realizing the danger if they gave way, and despite the enemy being almost upon them, Colonel West rode up and down in face of certain death, encouraging the men. He told them: 'Stick it men, show them fight, and for God's sake put up a good fight.' Those were probably his last words. He fell riddled with bullets. His magnificent bravery at a critical moment so inspired the infantry that the hostile attack was defeated.

He is buried at the Mory Abbey Military Cemetery. His VC, DSO and Bar and Military Cross were presented to Maud Ethel West, his widow, in the ballroom of Buckingham Palace on 15 February 1919. Mrs West had given birth to their daughter, Gertrude Annesley West on 17 November 1918.



An incredibly brave man, West won four bravery awards during the course of 1917 and 1918: the DSO, the Military Cross, a bar to his DSO and the VC. He was 39 years old, and an acting lieutenant-colonel in the North Irish Horse, to 6th Battalion, Tank Corps when he won the VC for acts of bravery on 21 August and 2 September 1918.

On 21 August 1918 at Courcelles in France, during an attack, the infantry lost their bearings in dense fog and Lieutenant-Colonel West at once collected any men he could find and led them to their objective,



1918

1918

ERNEST SEAMAN*

16 AUGUST 1893 - 29 SEPTEMBER 1918

Seaman was an Englishman who served in the Ulster Division. Born in a small village near Norwich, Seaman was classified as unfit for active front line service and as a result became a baker in the Army Service Corps. However in the final months of the war that he was allowed to join the 2nd Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and it was as a 25-year-old lance-corporal that he won the VC on 29 September 1918.

The citation reads:

For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty. When the right flank of his company was held up by a nest of enemy machine guns, he, with great courage and initiative, rushed forward under heavy fire with his Lewis gun and engaged the position single-handed, capturing two machine guns and twelve prisoners and killing one officer and two men. Later in the day he again rushed another enemy machine-gun position, capturing the gun under heavy fire. He was killed immediately after. His courage and dash were beyond all praise, and it was entirely due to the very gallant conduct of Lce. Cpl. Seaman that his company was enabled to push forward to its objective and capture many prisoners.

Seaman is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial to the Missing (Panel No. 70), the memorial to the 36th Division at the Ulster Tower, the Felixstowe War Memorial in Suffolk, and the Scole War Memorial (a village where he once lived).

A copy of his medal is held in the Officers Mess at the Royal Logistic Corps Museum at Camberley, Surrey.



JAMES CRICHTON

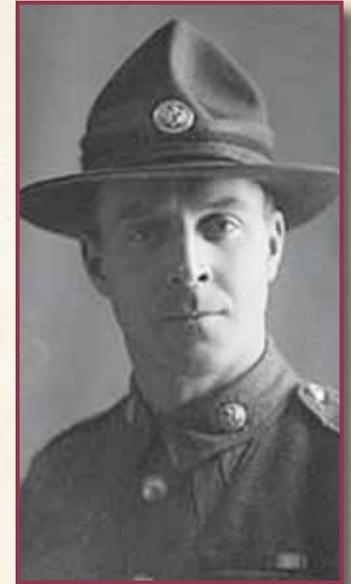
15 JULY 1879 - 25 SEPTEMBER 1961

Crichton was born in Carrickfergus, County Antrim, but grew up in the hamlet of Northrigg by Blackridge, West Lothian, Scotland. Before emigrating to New Zealand, he had served with the Cameron Highlanders during the Boer War. At the outbreak of the Great War, he enlisted in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force and served as a baker on the Western Front until May 1918. He then transferred to the 2nd Battalion, Auckland Infantry Regiment, and was awarded the VC for his deeds on 30 September 1918 at Crèvecœur.

The citation reads:

Private Crichton, although wounded in the foot, stayed with the advancing troops despite difficult canal and river obstacles. When his platoon was forced back by a counterattack he succeeded in carrying a message which involved swimming a river and crossing an area swept by machine-gun fire. Subsequently he rejoined his platoon and later undertook on his own initiative to save a bridge which had been mined. Under close fire he managed to remove the charges, returning with the fuses and detonators.

Crichton later achieved the rank of sergeant. He died at Takapuna, New Zealand.



NORMAN HARVEY*

6 APRIL 1899 -16 FEBRUARY 1942

Harvey was an Englishman who served in the Ulster Division. Born in Newton-le-Willows, Lancashire, he was the son of Charles William and Mary Harvey and the husband of Nora Osmond. He was 19 years old and serving with the 1st Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers when he won his VC.

The citation reads:

For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty near Ingoyghem on the 25th October, 1918, when his battalion was held up and suffered heavy casualties from enemy machine guns. On his own initiative he rushed forward and engaged the enemy single-handed, disposing of twenty enemy and capturing two guns. Later, when his company was checked by another enemy strong point, he again rushed forward alone and put the enemy to flight. Subsequently, after dark, he voluntarily carried out, single-handed, an important reconnaissance and gained valuable information. Pte. Harvey throughout the day displayed the greatest valour, and his several actions enabled the line to advance, saved many casualties, and inspired all.

Harvey joined the Royal Engineers in 1939. Promoted to company quartermaster-sergeant in April 1941, he was killed in action, near Haifa, Palestine, and is buried in the Khayat Beach War Cemetery.



FURTHER READING

Michael Ashcroft, *Victoria Cross Heroes* (London, 2006)

Lord Ashcroft is a Conservative peer, businessman, philanthropist and author, who over 20 years has acquired more than 180 VCs, the story behind which he chronicles in his book. His collection (which is by far the largest in the world) includes the VCs won by Ernest Wright Alexander and Richard Annesley West. The collection is on display in the Imperial War Museum, London.

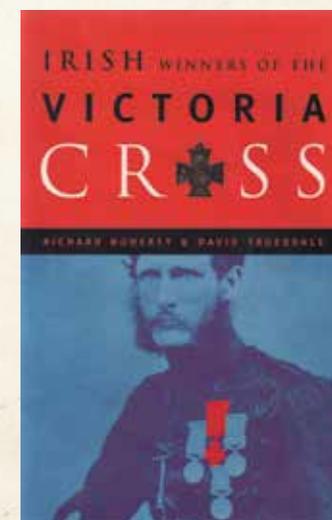
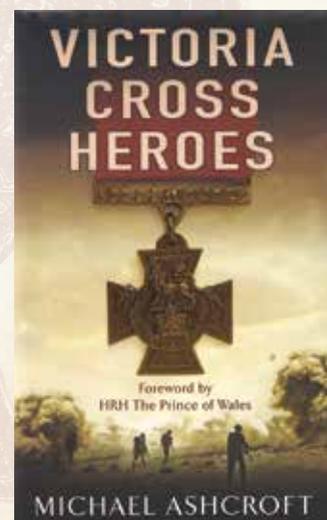
For more information, visit www.iwm.org.uk/heroes. For more details about Lord Ashcroft's VC collection, visit www.lordashcroftmedals.com

Cyril Falls, *The History of the 36th (Ulster) Division* (London, 1922)

Justly regarded as the best divisional history of the Great War, Falls, who became one of the leading British military historians of the twentieth century, reproduces the citations (in full) explaining how each of the Ulster Division's nine VC winners gained their award.

Richard Doherty & David Truesdale, *Irish Winners of the Victoria Cross* (Dublin, 2000)

This superb work of research is an invaluable starting point for anyone interested in this subject.



'... for most conspicuous bravery or some daring pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy'

Queen Victoria



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