



VCS OF THE NORTH

CUMBRIA, DURHAM & NORTHUMBERLAND



ALAN WHITWORTH

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Cumbria, Durham and
Northumberland

Alan Whitworth



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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	viii
<i>British Army Campaigns 1660–2000</i>	xvi
Cumbria Victoria Cross Holders	1
ACTON, Abraham	3
CHRISTIAN, Harry	5
FORSHAW, William Thomas	6
HEWITSON, James	10
JEFFERSON, Francis Arthur	11
LEEFE-ROBINSON, William	14
MAYSON, Tom Fletcher	19
SMITH, Edward ‘Ned’ Benn	21
SMITH, James Alexander	24
WASSALL, Samuel	28
WESTON, William Basil	30
WYATT, George Harry	31
Durham Victoria Cross Holders	35
ANDERSON, Charles	37
ANNAND, Richard Wallace	38
BARTON, Cyril Joe	47
BRADFORD, George Nicholson	50
BRADFORD, Roland Boyes	58
COLLIN, Joseph Henry	67
COOPER, Edward	69

DONNINI, Dennis	71
GOATE, William	74
GUNN, George Ward	79
GUY, Basil John Douglas	81
HEAVISIDE, Michael Wilson	82
KENNY, Thomas	87
KIBBY, William Henry	92
McKEAN, George Burden	94
McNALLY, William	97
MALING, George Allen	100
MORRELL see YOUNG, Thomas	101
MURPHY, Michael	102
NEWELL, Robert	107
ROBSON, Henry Howey	108
WAKENSHAW, Adam Herbert	109
YOULL, John Scott	116
YOUNG, Thomas	118
 Northumberland Victoria Cross Holders	 123
ALLEN, William Wilson	125
CAIRNS, Hugh	127
CHICKEN, George Bell	129
DOBSON, Frederick William	135
JENNINGS, Edward	139
JOHNSON, James Bulmer	140
LAIDLAW, Daniel Logan	141
LAWSON, Edward	143
LEACH, James	144
LIDDELL, John Aiden	145
PERCY, Henry Hugh Manvers	148
 <i>Glossary</i>	 153
<i>Bibliography</i>	158

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Preface

It is now nearly 160 years since the instigation of the Victoria Cross by Royal Warrant dated 29 January 1856, ‘the most democratic and at the same time the most exclusive of all’ military honours awarded for courage in the face of the enemy, regardless of class, race or creed. The following year 1857 witnessed the first investiture of the Victoria Cross, when sixty-two men received their medals from HM Queen Victoria in Hyde Park on 26 June. Sailor Charles David Lucas, First Mate of HMS *Hecla*, was the very first Victoria Cross winner in the century and a half of its existence. Today there is as much interest in the deeds and men who carried them out as there was then when the *London Gazette* first began recording and publishing the Victoria Cross recipients within its pages.

The Victoria Cross was originally conceived as an award for all ranks of the Army and Navy who, in the presence of an enemy, had performed some signal act of valour or devotion to their country, but over time the conditions of award and scope for receipt have been extended to include virtually every citizen, including civilians and women. From its inception, the actual decoration was deliberately designed to be intrinsically ‘worthless’, simply a scrap of bronze without rich gems or precious metals. Its true worth lay in its associations, and it was an honour so rare that it was impossible to ‘buy’ or ‘earn’ it in the way several other high awards could be acquired. Though no specific comment on the medal’s intrinsic lack of value was made in the inauguration warrant, this was the theory behind its creation, exemplified in spirit by a clause which stated that ‘neither rank, nor long service, nor wounds, nor any other circumstances or condition whatsoever, save the merit of conspicuous bravery’ should ‘establish a sufficient claim to the honour’. This condition thereby placed ‘all persons on a perfectly

equal footing in relation to eligibility for the decoration' – the nearest thing to a completely democratic award ever created within the annals of military history. This aspect was further confirmed by the elective procedure laid down in those cases where a number of 'equally brave and distinguished persons' had been thought worthy of the honour. The names submitted to the sovereign were to be chosen by their fellow comrades in arms taking part in the action concerned.

Its recipients were to bear no special privilege of knighthood or companionship, banners or robes, and the award contains no ranks within itself. It is not an 'order of chivalry', such as the Order of the Garter or the Bath, as it was once erroneously described by King Edward VII – a point that its founder Queen Victoria was at pains to draw attention to; it was simply a decoration 'to be highly prized and eagerly sought after by the officers and men of our naval and military services'.

Pensions were granted to all holders of the Victoria Cross below commissioned rank. Initially a pension of £10 per year was made payable to all non-commissioned ranks. In July 1898 it was decided this amount might be increased in times of need, at discretion, to £50 and later to £75. It was not until 1959 that the pension was allowed irrespective of rank and increased to £100. In 1995 it was increased to £1,300, at which time there were thirty-three recipients still alive.

The 1856 warrant also provided for the expulsion of a holder if 'convicted of treason, Cowardice, Felony or for any infamous Crime, or if he be accused of any such offence and doth not after a reasonable time surrender himself to be tried for the same'. Liability to expulsion lasted for life, not just for a period of service, but the sovereign retained the right to restore the award. It has been forfeited on eight occasions.

The first man to forfeit the award was Edward St John Daniel, who took to drink and became dissolute. He was arrested on 21 June for sodomy with four subordinate officers. The Admiralty stated that he was 'accused of a disgraceful offence' and had deserted to evade inquiry. The alleged desertion appears to have been engineered by his captain and the Admiral of the Mediterranean Fleet to avoid unwelcome revelations at a court

martial. Daniel fled to New Zealand, where he served with the Armed Constabulary Field Force; he died in 1868 during the Fenian disturbances among the Irish gold miners.

Others were erased from the register of holders after convictions ranging from theft of ten bushels of oats to bigamy. Colour Sergeant Edmund Fowler of the Royal Irish Regiment faced forfeiture after a conviction for embezzlement in 1887. He had been awarded his VC for his actions while serving as a private with the Cameroonians in March 1879, after storming and clearing a cave of armed Zulus who had just shot dead his officer. When the Secretary of State sought the Queen's permission to erase Fowler's name from the register, her secretary replied that she could not bring herself to approve it. Fowler had distinguished himself in earning the Cross and, as his sole punishment was a reduction to the ranks, it appeared that his offence could not have been so serious. 'He is still considered fit to serve the Queen, and Her Majesty thinks he should retain his VC' and so he did.

Those who forfeited the VC were also required to surrender the decoration itself. The Treasury Solicitor cautioned the War Office in 1908 that this was illegal, as the medal remained the property of the recipient. The War Office response was a catch-22 solution. It would return forfeited Crosses if the holders applied for them, but it would not inform them that they could do so: King George V ended the affair. His secretary wrote in 1920, 'The King feels so strongly that, no matter the crime ... the decoration should not be forfeited. Even if a VC holder were to be sentenced to be hanged for murder, he should be allowed to wear the VC on the scaffold.'

This came much too late for Private Valentine Bambrick of the 60th Rifles. Having taken his discharge from the Army at Aldershot in 1863, he was celebrating his new freedom in a local public house when he discovered Commissariat Sergeant Russell hitting a woman in an upstairs room; Bambrick intervened and gave the sergeant a thorough beating. Russell brought a charge of assault against Bambrick and accused him of stealing his medals. The woman, the only witness, disappeared. Russell and his cronies testified convincingly, and Bambrick was sentenced to three years

in Pentonville. Mortified by this injustice and by the erasure of his name from the VC register, Bambrick was found hanged in his cell on 1 April 1864, three months after his jailing. A note expressed his despair at the loss of his award. Private Bambrick was buried in an unmarked felon's grave.

There were no further erasures after 1908, and the names of the eight men who forfeited their awards have been restored to the register of holders. The present warrant still provides for the cancellation and annulment of an award holder and the removal of the recipient's name, but it seems unlikely that this will ever happen.

Exploitation of the Victoria Cross for gain, while technically not misconduct, was considered dishonourable, and remains virtually unheard of. Piper George Findlater of the Gordon Highlanders, was awarded his Victoria Cross for gallantry in the 1897 Tirah Campaign in India. Although shot in both feet during the charge on 20 October and in great pain, he sat erect under heavy fire and continued playing the regimental tune *Cock o' the North*. He was decorated by the Queen at Netley Hospital. His deed became renowned, and he was engaged to play the march on stage at London's Alhambra Theatre for £30 a week – an amount far in excess of his army pay. Some disapproving officers clubbed together to stop the performances, and General Sir Evelyn Wood, in full dress uniform, visited Dundas Slater, the theatre manager, and offered to pay Findlater's salary if the acts were cancelled. Slater laughingly refused, saying he had already spent £300 on advertising alone!

Since the original warrant, other warrants have been issued modifying or extending its provisions – in 1858, for instance, Queen Victoria decreed that the Cross could be won by those who 'may perform acts of conspicuous courage and bravery ... in circumstances of extreme danger, such as the occurrence of a fire on board ship, or of the floundering of a vessel at sea, or under any other circumstances in which ... life or public property may be saved'. In 1881, a new Victoria Cross warrant was signed which stated, 'Our Will and Pleasure is that the qualification (for the award of the Victoria Cross) shall be "conspicuous bravery or devotion to the country in the

presence of the enemy” – but for this stipulation, there would have been no need for the institution of the George Cross.

In 1902 HM King Edward VII approved the important principle of awarding it posthumously. In 1911 King George V admitted native officers and men of the Indian Army to eligibility and, in a lengthy warrant dated 22 May 1920, it was further extended to include the RAF, and ‘matrons, sisters, nurses ... serving regularly or temporarily under the orders, direction or supervision’ of the military authorities, emphasising, however, that the VC ‘shall only be awarded for most conspicuous bravery or some daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy’.

Queen Victoria chose the design for the new decoration herself, a cross patée in bronze, bearing the royal crest in its centre surmounting a scroll bearing the inscription *For Valour*. It is connected by a V-shaped link to a bar engraved on the face with laurel leaves, and having a space on the reverse for the recipient’s name. The date of the deed for which the honour is bestowed is engraved on the back of the Cross itself. It is worn on the left breast suspended from a 1½-inch wide ribbon. Initially, the Cross was suspended on a royal blue ribbon for naval personnel, and a red ribbon for army recipients; but in the royal warrant dated 22 May 1920 it was decreed that henceforth all Victoria Crosses would be hung from a plain crimson ribbon, irrespective of the recipient’s parent service.

The actual Cross in size measures little more than an inch square (35mm) and weighs nearly one ounce (27grams¹), calculated from the fact that 12 finished medals together weigh 10–11 ounces,² and is cast in bronze from metal melted down from the cascabels (a large knob at the rear of the cannon on to which ropes were tied in order to man-handle the gun) of cannons captured from the Russians at Sebastopol in the Crimean War, and fashioned by the London firm of Messrs Hancock, who made the very first Victoria Cross and have continued to do so: the last remaining cascabel is tended by 15 Regiment Royal Logistic Corps at Donnington. Because they are cast and chased, no two Victoria Cross medals are exactly alike,

and it seems fitting that each uniquely gallant act should be honoured by a decoration that itself remains unique.

Although the royal warrant instituting the Victoria Cross was not issued until January 1856, the earliest deed of valour to win the award was performed nineteen months earlier, on 21 June 1854, by a 20-year-old Irishman, Charles Davis Lucas, Mate of *HMS Hecla* which was attacking the fortress of Bomarsund in the Baltic. At a range of only 500 yards a live shell with fuse still hissing landed on the deck of the *Hecla*, from a Russian battery. Lucas picked it up with his bare hands and threw it overboard – it exploded as it entered the sea, but the ship and crew were saved from certain destruction. Lucas was promoted to Lieutenant on the spot by his commanding officer and eventually rose to the rank of Rear-Admiral. An interesting aside to this was that the very first Victoria Cross awarded was actually lost, along with other medals, on a railway journey and never recovered and a replacement had to be made which was never inscribed.

Some sixty-two VCs who had been ‘gazetted’ – i.e. their names and deeds cited in the *London Gazette* (which still takes place) – were present at Hyde Park, London, on the morning of 26 June 1857, when Queen Victoria held her first investiture ceremony for the newly instituted decoration that bore her name. In keeping with the democratic spirit of the award all recipients stood shoulder to shoulder, regardless of rank, while Her Majesty actually presented the decoration to each man from horseback.

Today the Victoria Cross remains the supreme British award, taking absolute precedence over all other awards and decorations. In the 150 years of its existence, there have been 1,357 awards.³ Of these, 633 were won in the 1914–18 war, and 182 in the 1939–45 war. These totals include three awards of a Bar to the VC – in effect, ‘double VCs’. At the time of writing just thirteen holders of the Victoria Cross are still alive, including one ‘Northern’ recipient.

Since the end of the Second World War the original VC has been awarded only fifteen times, four in the Korean War, one in the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation in 1965, four to Australians in the Vietnam War, two during the Falkland’s War in 1982, one in the Iraq War in 2004, and

three in the war in Afghanistan in 2006 and 2012, the latter being awarded posthumously to L/Cpl James Ashworth: the last living person to receive the VC was L/Cpl Johnson Beharry of the 1st Battalion, the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment while serving in Iraq in 2004.⁴

Among that roll of brave, within these pages the reader will find listed briefly the names, dates and deeds of just under fifty men from the northern counties of Cumbria, Durham and Northumberland who have been awarded the Victoria Cross medal. These men were either born and bred, or lived and died in these counties, or played a significant role in northern life, as in the instance of the Honourable Henry Hugh Manvers Percy, later knighted to become Lord Percy, who was Member of Parliament for North Northumberland 1865–8 and whose family seat is Alnwick Castle. As a body they make up almost one-tenth of the total of Victoria Cross recipients, and indeed, if we included VC holders who served in northern regiments, but who were not born or did not live in these counties, undoubtedly the percentage would be well over 10 per cent of the total. However, by choice, my decision is only to include those with significant personal northern connections rather than regimental connections.

Within this group of northern VC recipients are a number of 'firsts' to hold our interest, for instance, it was 2nd/Lt. Richard Annand who gained the first VC of the Second World War. Lieutenant-Colonel Roland Bradford, was one of only four sets of brothers to have secured the VC. He and his brother George were the only brothers to win a VC in the First World War and the last of the four sets to win the Victoria Cross. Roland Bradford also had the distinction of being the youngest General in the British Army. Then there is the youngest Victoria Cross recipient who won his award aged just 19.

Finally, it might be interesting to conclude with a few words about an aspect of the Victoria Cross not usually mentioned. Since 1879 more than 300 VC medals have been publicly auctioned or advertised for sale. Others have been privately sold. The monetary value of the VC can be seen in the increasing sums that the medals reach at auction. In 1955 the set of medals awarded to Edmund B Hartley were bought at Sotherby's for the

then record price of £300. In October 1966 the Middlesex Regiment paid a new record figure of £900 for a Victoria Cross awarded after the Battle of the Somme. In January 1969 the record reached £1,700 for the medal set of William Rennie. In April 2004 the VC awarded to Sergeant Jackson, RAF, was sold at auction for £235,250. On 24 July 2006 an auction at Bonham's in Sydney, Australia, of the VC awarded to Captain Alfred Shout fetched a world-record hammer price of A\$1million (approximately £410,000 at the then current exchange rate).

Alan Whitworth
Whitby, December 2014

Notes

1. Information supplied by Brian Best, Victoria Cross Society.
2. John Glanfield, *Bravest of the Brave: The Story of the Victoria Cross* (Sutton Publishing, 2005).
3. This figure is made up of the following: 1,353 individuals; 3 double VCs; 1 to an unknown American soldier.
4. On 26 Feb. 2015 the VC was awarded to L/Cpl Joshua Leakey, Parachute Regiment for his actions in Afghanistan. He is the third serviceman – and the first living serviceman – to receive the award for service in this country.

British Army Campaigns 1660–2000

Dates	War	Campaigns	Medals Awarded
1660–84	Against the Moors	Tangier	
1685	Monmouth Rebellion		
1689	Scottish		
1689–91	Against James II	Ireland	
1690–7	War of the Grand Alliance	Low Countries	
1701–13	War of Spanish Succession	Low Countries	
		Spain	
1715	Against the Old Pretender	Scotland	
1739–42	War of Jenkins' Ear	South America	
1741–8	War of Austrian Succession	Flanders	
		Germany	
		India	
		North America	
1745–6	Against the Young Pretender	England	
		Scotland	
		Germany	
1756–63	Seven Years War	Canada	
		West Indies	
		India	
		Mediterranean	

1776–83	American War of Independence	North America West Indies Gibraltar	
1771–1819	Maharatta Wars	India	1st India Medal (17 bars)
1793–1815	Napoleonic Wars	Low Countries Mediterranean Egypt South America Portugal–Spain India South Africa Waterloo	Gold Medals & West Indies Cross (officers only) Seringapatam Medal Military GSM (GSM 23 bars, sanctioned 1847)
1812–14	American War	North America	Waterloo Medal
1814–16	Nepalese War		Military GSM (3 bars)
1824–6	First Burma War		1st India Medal (bar)
1824–31	Ashanti War		1st Burma Medal
1834–5	Kaffir War	West Africa	
1839–42	First Afghan War	South Africa	Medal for S Africa Medal for Capture of Guznee Jellalabad Medal Candahar, Guhznee & Cabu Medal Medal for Defence of Kelat-I-Ghilzie China Medal Sinde Medal Star for Gwalior Campaign Medal for Sutlej Campaign (4 bars) New Zealand Medal Medal for S Africa Punjab Medal (3 bars) Medal for S Africa
1841–2	First China War	India	
1843	Subjugation of Sinde	India	
1843	Gwalior Campaign	India	
1845–6	First Sikh War	India	
1845–7	First Maori War	New Zealand	
1846–7	Kaffir War	South Africa	
1848–9	Second Sikh War	India	
1850–3	Kaffir War	South Africa	
1852	2nd Burmese War	India GSM (1854) (1 bar)	
1854–6	Crimean War	Crimea Medal (4 bars)	
1856–7	Persian War	India GSM (1854) (1 bar)	
1857–8	Indian Mutiny	Indian Mutiny Medal (5 bars)	

Dates	War	Campaigns	Medals Awarded
1857–60	Second China War	China Medal	
1860–70	2nd/ 3rd Maori Wars	New Zealand Medal	
1863	Umbeyla Expedition	India	India GSM (1854) (1 bar)
1866	Fenian Raid	Canada	GSM (1899) (1 bar)
1867–8	Abyssinian Expedition	Abyssinian Medal	
1873–4	Ashanti War	West Africa	Ashanti Medal
1870	Red River	Canada	GSM (1899) (2 bars)
1878–80	2nd Afghan War	Medal for Afghanistan (6 bars)	
	Kabul to Kandahar Star		
1870–80	Minor Expeditions	Bhutan	Each a Bar to India GSM (1854)
		Looshai	
		Jowaki	
		Nagaland	
		South Africa	Medal for S Africa (6 bars)
		Cape of Good Hope	GSM (2 bars)
1877–9	Zulu War		
1880–1	Basutoland/Transkei		
1881	First Boer War		
1882	Egyptian Campaign		Egyptian Medal (2 bars)
			Khedive's Star
1844–89	Sudan Campaign		Egyptian Medal (11 bars)
1885	Van Riel's Rebellion	Canada	North-West Canada Medal (1 bar)
1885–7	2nd Burmese War		
1888	Sikkim Campaign	India	India GSM (1854) (1 bar)
1882–92	Operations NE Frontier of India and Burma	Burma 1887–9	India GSM (1854) (1 bar)
		Hazara 1888	Each a bar to India GSM (1854)
		Chin–Lushai	
		Burma 1889–90	
		Burma 1889–92	
		Lushai 1889–92	

1891–8	Central Africa	Samana 1891	Central Africa Medal (1 bar)
1893	Matabele War	Hazara 1891	Chartered Co. of S Africa Medal (2 bars)
1894–5	Waziristan Campaign	Hunza 1891	India GSM (1854) (1 bar)
1895	Chitral Campaign	NE Frontier 1891	India GSM (1854) (2 bars)
1895–6	3rd Ashanti War	Chin Hills 1892–3	Ashanti Star
1896–7	Rhodesia	Kachin Hills 1892–3	Chartered Co. of S Africa Medal (2 bars)
1896–7	Expeditions	East Africa	Royal Niger Company's in Nigeria Medal (1 bar)
1896–8	Sudan	India	Sudan Medal
1897–8	Indian Frontier Expeditions	West Africa	Each a bar to India Medal (1895)
		West Africa	
		Malakand 1897	
		Samana 1897	
		Punjab 1897	
		Frontier 1897–8	
		Tirah 1897–8	
1897–8	Operations in Uganda and Somaliland	South Africa	East & Central Africa Medal (3 bars)
1899–1902	Second Boer War		S Africa Medal (Queen's) (28 bars)
1900	Boxer Rebellion	China	King Edward's S Africa Medal (2 bars)
1900–20	Numerous small expeditions in East and West Africa	Africa	China Medal (3 bars)
			GSM (1902) (43 bars)
1901	Ashanti Rebellion	West Africa	Ashanti Medal (1 bar)
1901–2	Waziristan	India	India Medal (1895) (1 bar)
1903–4	Tibetan Expedition		Tibet Medal (1 bar)
1906	Zulu Rising	South Africa	Medal for Zulu Rising in Natal (1 bar)
1908	NW Frontier of India		India GSM (1908) (1 bar)
1911–12	Abor Expedition	NE Frontier of India	India GSM (1908) (1 bar)

Dates	War	Campaigns	Medals Awarded
1914–18	First World War	France/Flanders SW Africa SE Africa China Dardanelles Egypt Palestine Mesopotamia Salonika Italy Russia NW Frontier India	1914 Star 1914–15 Star British War Medal Victory Medal
1919	3rd Afghan War		India GSM (1908) (1 bar)
1919–20	Russia		
1919–20	Mahsud Expedition		India GSM (1908) (1 bar)
1919–21	Arab Insurrection		GSM (1919) (5 bars)
1919–21	Ireland	Mesopotamia	
1919–21	Waziristan		India GSM (1908) (1 bar)
1921–2	Malabar Rebellion		India GSM (1908) (1 bar)
1930–1	Waziristan		India GSM (1908) (1 bar)
1930–2	Burma		India GSM (1908) (1 bar)
1933	Mohmand Expedition		India GSM (1908) (1 bar)
1935	NW Frontier of India		India GSM (1908) (1 bar)
1936–39	Arab Rebellion		India GSM (1908) (1 bar)
1936–9	NW Frontier of India		Palestine GSM (1918) (1 bar)
1939–45	Second World War		India GSM (1936) (2 bars)
		Norway	1939–45 Star
		France	Africa Star
		Flanders 1939–40	Italy Star