

Victoria Cross Commemorative Paving Stone



In recognition of the bravery of
GEORGE HARRY WYATT
WORCESTER

Laid at the Guildhall
26th August 2014

In attendance:
Worcestershire County Lieutenancy, Lord Richard Faulkner
Robin Walker MP, Worcester City Council
The Coldstream Guards



The Victoria Cross

The Victoria Cross (VC) 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 previous British Empire territories. It is first in the order of wear in the United Kingdom honours system, and takes precedence over all other orders, decorations, and medals, except the George Cross, with which it shares equal precedence. It may be awarded to a person of any military rank in any service and to civilians under military command. The VC is usually presented to the recipient or to their next of kin by the British monarch at an investiture held at Buckingham Palace.

The VC is 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."

As part of the Centennial commemoration of the First World War, the UK Government has established a scheme for commemorative paving stones to be laid in the birthplace of Victoria Cross recipients, to be administered by the local Council. A total of 454 Victoria Crosses were awarded to UK-born residents and a further 173 for servicemen who were born overseas in the Great War. Five Victoria Crosses were awarded for action on 23 August 1914, the first day British shots were fired on the Western Front.



George Henry Wyatt

The citation in the London Gazette, 18th November 1915 reads:

No. 5854 Lance-Corporal George Harry Wyatt, 3rd Battalion, Coldstream Guards.

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 Villers Cotterets, 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.

George Wyatt's life

George Wyatt was born in Britannia Row, Worcester on 5th September 1886. His parents were Sarah and Arthur, who was a groom, George was baptised on 29 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. After attending Holloway School at Droitwich, Wyatt enlisted in the Coldstream Guards at Birmingham in November, 1904. He served in Egypt for two and a half years and 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 rejoined the Coldstream Guards and as a member of the British Expeditionary Force left for France on 14th August, 1914.

Soon after arriving on the Western Front Wyatt took part in the Battle of Mons. On two occasions he displayed outstanding bravery and was awarded the Victoria Cross. It was presented to him at Buckingham Palace on 4th March 1916. Wyatt returned to France and on 28th February was promoted to Lance-Sergeant. He was wounded on two occasions but survived the War.

Wyatt returned to the police force in Doncaster and in June 1924 bravely stopped a runaway horse. He retired from the police in February 1934 and took up farming. George Wyatt died on 22nd January 1964 and is buried at Cadeby Cemetery near Doncaster.

After the war George Wyatt, was interviewed about winning the Victoria Cross.

" 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 "

The Western Front, August 1914

Britain 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 BEF 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 I Corps which was commanded by Sir Douglas Haig. Landrecies was his HQ for the night. The 2nd Worcestershires 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 Coldstreams 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 BEF HQ, falsely, that I Corps had been defeated. The Battle of Le Cateau opened on 26th August, ending in the further retirement of the BEF to the Marne.

Wyatt's second act of heroism occurred at the battle of Villers Cotterets. As the BEF retreated I Corps marched through the Retz Forest as soon as 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.



*George Wyatt (front left) and other Guardsman winners of the
Victoria Cross, photographed after the War
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