

Details of Gallantry Awards

Recipients of the George Cross & George Medal

Capt Samuel Garside. GM.

Awarded for incidents at: The river at McNeils Wharf, Barking Essex , 24 September 1940 High Road, Twickenham, Middlesex, 1941. Garside is credited with one of the fastest and safest disposals recorded. He with his Sgt went to investigate a reported UXB, on arrival they found a clear pathway that the bomb had made through the ground, (called a trace). The bomb was a 500kg this was determined by the size of the entry hole, approximately 24 inches. Garside probed the hole until he reached the tail fins. As they were in reach he tied a rope to them, between him and his Sgt they were able to pull the tail fins from the ground. When these were removed it left a clear shaft, using a long pole Garside pushed an explosive charge down onto the bomb, which they then detonated exploding the bomb below. Site cleared without having to get a shovel out. For this and other incidents he received the George Medal.

Volunteer S. J. Ferguson

On the night of 17th/18th October 1940 during a heavy enemy attack from the air, in the Barking area, Volunteer Ferguson, who was on duty at his company headquarters, proceeded to a group of houses which had received direct hits.

"It was reported to him that a woman - a resident of one of the houses - was imprisoned under the wreckage. Despite the fact that the walls of the dwelling were collapsing, he made his way without hesitation into the ruins and found a woman bleeding from a severed artery. Ferguson at once applied first aid amid the flames of incendiary bombs and gave every help to her, at risk of his own life. He remained beside her until it was possible to remove her for conveyance to hospital."

Stephen John Tuckwell

GC awarded for great gallantry and undaunted devotion to duty. AB Tuckwell worked with Sub-Lt Miller on many occasions in the dangerous work of mine disposal and together they disposed of some ten of these deadly weapons. They were both awarded the George Cross for dealing with a mine that had fallen into the soft mud in Roding River, which runs into Barking Creek. Sub-Lt Miller decided to borrow a canoe and having put this on a fire-float with the necessary kit, he and AB Tuckwell went off up the creek to where the mine was thought to be lying. They then left the River Fire Service fire-float and went on in the canoe, until they sighted the black rim of the mine which was stuck in the mud by the nose. They worked together - AB Tuckwell having refused a suggestion that he should retire to a place of safety. He pointed out that as Sub-Lt Miller would be working under at least a foot of water he would need someone to hand him the tools - in short he preferred to take the same risks. They managed to get out one fuse, but could not reach the other, so appealed to several crane-drivers who had come to see what was happening, and they at once volunteered to help. The two experts got back into the water, put ropes round the mine, and with the assistance of the crane-drivers, the huge cylinder was dragged slowly out of the creek, over the muddy bank and up on to the wharf. The final stages of the operation were then completed in comparative comfort.

Commendation awarded for brave conduct and devotion to duty. Later served at 'HMS Mirtle', HMS Vernon's Mine Investigation Range at Buriton.

Richard John Hammersley Ryan

GC awarded posthumously for great gallantry and undaunted devotion to duty. Lt Cdr Ryan was one of two officers who stripped the first magnetic mine of Type C found in a German aircraft which had crashed at Clacton. When magnetic mines were first dropped over London he came forward without hesitation for the perilous work of making them safe, although, with his unrivalled knowledge of this work, he was well aware of the dangers he so readily accepted. The clock of the bomb-fuse was normally timed to explode the mine about 22 seconds after its fall. If it failed to do so, it might be restarted by the slightest movement, even a footfall. The amount of the clock already run off could not be known, and once it was restarted time for escape could not be more than a few seconds. Lt Cdr Ryan tackled six of these mines with his own hands, one of them in a canal where he worked waist deep in mud and water which would have made escape impossible. Here he found and removed the bomb-fuse only by groping for it under water. At Hornchurch he made safe a very hazardous mine which threatened the aerodrome and an explosives factory, and then he and his assistant, Chief Petty Officer Ellingworth with whom he had shared many dangerous assignments, went on to Oval Road North, Dagenham on 21 Sep 40. Here they tackled a mine hanging by a parachute in a warehouse and both were killed by its explosion as they entered the building.

Reginald Vincent Ellingworth

GC awarded posthumously for great courage and undaunted devotion to duty. Worked as assistant to Lt Cdr Ryan in rendering safe magnetic mines in London during 1940. They worked on many assignments together, sharing the dangers involved. The principal hazard of these mines was the fact that the clock of the bomb fuse was normally timed to explode the mine about 22 seconds after its fall. If it failed to do so, it could be restarted by the slightest movement, even a footfall. The amount of the clock already run off could not be known, and once it was restarted the time for escape could not be more than a few seconds. At Dagenham, Essex, the two men tackled such a mine hanging by a parachute in a warehouse, and were both killed by its explosion. CPO Ellingworth had previously been commended by HMS Vernon for his work on mines. Killed with Lt Cdr Ryan at Oval Road North, Dagenham 21 Sep 40 when GC mine hanging from its parachute in roof beams exploded as they entered the building.

Richard Valentine Moore

B&MD - GC awarded for great gallantry and undaunted devotion to duty. Although he had no practical training, he was called upon in an emergency and disarmed five mines. On the night of 20 Sep, four mines fell on Dagenham but only one exploded. Moore and his assistant accompanied police officers to the site of two of the unexploded devices. One had fallen on a road outside a factory which had been evacuated. On examination, it could be seen that the impact had distorted the fuse ring so that it could not be unscrewed. Moore borrowed a drill from the factory and drilled out two gaps on opposite sides of the ring so that it broke in two, thus allowing the fuse to be extracted. CPO George Wheeler was awarded the BEM (Mil Div for gallantry) in this action

John Bryan Peter Miller

GC awarded for great gallantry and undaunted devotion to duty. Worked with AB Tuckwell in the dangerous work of mine disposal during the early days of the Blitz. Called to deal with a mine which had fallen into the soft mud in Roding River, which runs into Barking Creek. Sub-Lt Miller decided to borrow a canoe and having put this on a fire-float with the kit, he and AB Tuckwell went up the creek to where the mine was thought to be lying. They then left the River Fire Service fire-float and went on in the canoe until they sighted the black rim of the mine which was stuck in the mud by the nose. They worked together - AB Tuckwell handing the necessary tools to Sub-Lt Miller who was working under about a foot of water. They managed to get out one fuze, but could not reach the other, so appealed to several crane-drivers who had come to see what was happening, and they at once volunteered to help. The two experts got back into the water, put ropes round the mine, and with the assistance of the crane-drivers, the huge cylinder was dragged slowly out of the creek, over the muddy bank and up on to the wharf. The final stages of the operation were then completed in comparative comfort

Recipients of the Victoria Cross

Job Drain

Job Drain, lived in Greatfield Road, Dagenham. He joined the army aged 17 in, 1912, as a volunteer and served all four years of World War 1. Job won his VC at the Battle of Le Cateau, in France on 24 August 1914. He was one of a group of soldiers who volunteered to save two artillery guns. One of the carriages was shot down, but Job, sitting on the 'wheeler' was one of three soldiers who brought one of the guns through, despite being under heavy shell and rifle fire from the German infantry. After the war, Job Drain worked as a messenger, fish porter, a local bus driver and finally for the London Electricity Board.

Sir Tasker Watkins

Tasker Watkins was born in Glamorgan, Wales, in 1918 and was Honorary Life Vice Patron of the Welsh Rugby Union Association. He spent his youth in Dagenham and married a local woman in Dagenham Parish Church.

Sir Tasker was awarded the Victoria Cross for action in France on 16 August 1944. His citation reads 'superb gallantry and total disregard for his own safety during an extremely difficult period'. Lieutenant Watkins, the only officer left in his company of the Welsh Regiment, single-handedly charged two gun posts in succession killing and wounding the occupants with his Sten gun. His courage saved the lives of his men and was a decisive influence on the outcome of the battle. After the attack he led his remaining men back to his battalion and safety.

Laurence Calvert

Laurence Calvert was born in Leeds on 16 February 1892. He was married with three children and lived for a while in Oglethorpe Road, Dagenham.

Calvert won his Victoria Cross at Havrincourt, France on 12 September 1918. He was a sergeant in The Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. He single-handedly captured two machine guns and killed their crews.

His citation read: "For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty in attack when the success of the operation was rendered doubtful owing to severe enfilade machine-gun fire."

After the war Calvert moved to Dagenham when he was offered a job as a commissionaire for The National Provincial Bank in London.

He died 7 July 1964. There is a memorial plaque in the Garden of Remembrance, South Essex Crematorium, Upminster.

William Hope

William Hope leased the manor house at Parsloes and kept a herd of shorthorn cattle. He eventually became military attache to Lord Napier, the British Ambassador in Washington. The Hope family left Parsloes in 1878 following a financial crisis.

Lieutenant Hope won his VC on 18 Jun 1855 in the Crimea.

Under heavy fire from Russian batteries, Hope rescued two wounded soldiers who were lying outside the trenches. He searched for them and then returned with a team of four. But one of the injured required a stretcher. Hope ran across open land, found a stretcher and returned to rescue the soldier.

Hope died in Chelsea in 1909.

John Sayer VC

Son of Samuel and Margaret Sayer, of Chadwell Heath and Beacontree Heath, Dagenham. Lived at Wangey Farm in Chadwell Heath, commemorated in St Chads Church.

For the Most conspicuous bravery, determination and ability displayed on the 21st March, 1918, at le Verguier, when holding for two hours, in the face of incessant attacks, the flank of a small isolated post. Owing to mist the enemy approached the post from both sides to within 30 yards before being discovered. Lance-Corporal Sayer, however, on his own initiative and without assistance, beat off a succession of flank attacks, killing many and wounding others. During the whole time he was exposed to rifle and machine-gun fire, but he showed the utmost contempt of danger and his conduct was an inspiration to all. His skilful use of fire of all descriptions enabled the post to hold out till nearly all the garrison had been killed and himself wounded and captured. He subsequently died as a result of wounds at Le Cateau 18th April 1918 aged 39.