



Press Release

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By Royal Warrant Only...

The National Archives celebrates 150th anniversary of Victoria Cross

To celebrate the creation of the Victoria Cross (VC), The National Archives, Kew, has made the VC registers available online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline. The VC was instituted by Royal Warrant on 29 January 1856 as an award for servicemen who had performed an act of valour.

Four War Office documents have been digitised and placed on The National Archives website to mark the 150th anniversary of this prestigious award. The documents include the original royal warrant as signed by HM Queen Victoria on 29 January 1856 and three registers of recipients of the awards from 1856-1944. A fifth document, a Cabinet file, listing recipients from the institution of the award in 1856-1946, has been included in the project and is also now available online.

The digitisation of the files means that people can now log onto www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline and search the registers for people who received the Victoria Cross by their name, rank, regiment, date of act of bravery and campaign. In some instances the registers contain detailed notes on when the award was presented and by whom.

One entry from the Victoria Cross Registers, an extract taken from the London Gazette, reads:

War Office 14th June 1917

T/2nd Lt. John Harrison, M.C.E. York. R

For most conspicuous bravery and self-sacrifice in an attack.

Owing to the darkness and to smoke from the enemy barrage, and from our own, and to the fact that our objective was in a dark wood, it was impossible to see when our barrage had lifted off the enemy front line.

Nevertheless, 2nd Lt. Harrison led his company against the enemy trench under heavy rifle and machine-gun fire, but was repulsed. Reorganising his command as best he could in No Man's Land, he again attacked in darkness under terrific fire, but with no success.

Then, turning round, this gallant officer single-handed made a dash at the machine-gun, hoping to knock out the gun and so save the lives of many of his company.

His self-sacrifice and absolute disregard of danger was an inspiring example to all. (He is reported missing, believed killed.)

William Spencer, Senior Military Specialist at The National Archives and author of an upcoming researcher's guide to Medals, said 'The Victoria Cross is a highly prestigious award that has been granted to individuals over the last 150 years to recognise acts of great bravery. Information held within the files at The National Archives highlights the valiant acts performed by the recipients.

'The digitisation of the registers to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the VC is a great way of highlighting the achievements of the recipients to those who are interested in learning more about the people who received the award.'

To search the registers and other documents connected to the Victoria Cross, log onto www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline

For more information contact:

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Notes to Editors:

- William Spencer has been a medal collector for over 30 years. He served in the Royal Navy before joining The National Archives in 1993, where he has been Military Specialist since 1996. He is the author of the best-selling Army Service Records of the First World War and Air Force Records for Family Historians. His new book *Medals: The Researcher's Companion*, a guide to both military and civil awards, will be published in May 2006.
- Searching the VC Registers on documents online is free; however there is small fee of £3.50 to download the documents to your PC.

The National Archives, Kew, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk has one of the largest archival collections in the world, spanning 1000 years of British history, from Domesday Book to newly released government papers. The free museum and research rooms are open to the public 6 days a week.

Over nine million records are available to view at Kew and some, including wills, First World War Army medal cards and Second World War Seamen's medal records, are also available online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline

The Family Records Centre, Islington, which is jointly managed by The National Archives and the Office for National Statistics, holds the indexes (not the certificates themselves) for births, deaths and marriages for England and Wales from July 1837 and also copies of wills, before 1858, from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) and some other church courts.