

# Press release: First World War heroes commemorated as Britain remembers the Battle of Arras

Throughout April, 17 brave British soldiers will be remembered in special ceremonies, one hundred years to the day they were awarded the Victoria Cross (VC) – the nation’s highest military honour.

From Glasgow to Wandsworth in London, communities will come together to pay their own special tributes with a commemorative paving stone laid in honour of their hometown heroes.

British soldiers did not fight alone. They were joined by men from all corners of the Commonwealth who fought alongside their British comrades. A further 8 VCs were awarded to soldiers from Australia and Canada who fought alongside soldiers from Newfoundland, New Zealand, and South Africa.

During the battle which ran from 9 April 1917 to 16 May 1917 in the trenches of Northern France, some 158,000 British, Commonwealth and Allied soldiers lost their lives.

Lord Bourne, Minister for Integration and Faith, said:

As we continue to commemorate the centenary of the First World War, we should remember the exceptional sacrifices made by those from across both the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. They lost their lives in the fight for liberty.

Each recipient of the Victoria Cross displayed an incredible level of bravery into the face of unimaginable danger. Often they risked their own life to save the lives of their comrades. They remain an inspiration to this day.

I hope that the laying of these commemorative paving stones across the country will ensure these remarkable stories are remembered. I would encourage people in communities across the country to find out more about their local heroes.

Those overseas-born soldiers awarded the Victoria Cross, including at the Battle of Arras, are honoured with a permanent memorial at the [National Memorial Arboretum](#) in Staffordshire, which was unveiled in 2015.

As part of the government’s First World War Centenary Programme, the Department for Communities and Local Government launched the campaign to remember and honour all those awarded the Victoria Cross during the First World War with a commemorative paving stone.

The design of the stones was selected from a public competition and includes the name of the soldier and regiment, along with the marking of the Victoria Cross. They are made of Scoutmoor Yorkstone, a hard-wearing British stone that is quarried near Ramsbottom and are sited in locations visible to the public to inspire viewers to 'pause and remember'.

## **Further information**

### **Wandsworth paving stones**

In Wandsworth, south London, commemorative paving stones will be laid on 22 April 2017 for three locally born recipients of the VC. Two of those, Edward Foster and Reginald Haine, were both awarded for their brave actions during the second phase of the Battle of Arras.

Edward Foster had been employed as a local dustman before the outset of the First World War when he volunteered to join his local regiment, the East Surrey Regiment. Now a Corporal, after a short period of training, he found himself at the front during the Battle of the Somme and again at Arras. During an attack to capture the village of Villiers-Plouich, he engaged two enemy machine guns, even after losing one of his own and succeeding in capturing the enemies' weapons.

Reginald Haine, at the age of 20, vulnerable to opposition fire led an attack on an enemy stronghold in the village of Gavrelle on 28 April 1917. Along with a comrade from the 1st Battalion, Honourable Artillery Company, using bombs launched by hand, they repelled a trench full of the enemy, captured the town for the British forces, disabled two machine gun posts and captured 50 prisoners. Despite the risk of their position being completely surrounded by the enemy, Haine held his position for the night.

Lieutenant Colonel Reginald Haine went on to receive the Military Cross for action in India in 1919, served in the Home Guard in WW2 and returned to civilian life as an accountant after his military career.

The third being honoured in Wandsworth is Captain Arthur Lascelles VC. He was born locally in Streatham and served with the Durham Light Infantry. He was awarded the VC for bravery in December 1917 at Masnieres in northern France.

### **British-Canadian VC awards**

Two soldiers due to be remembered in Britain this April – William Milne and John Pattison – although born in Britain, emigrated to Canada, enlisted and then fought with the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Both took part in the Battle of Vimy Ridge, itself a part of the larger Arras offensive.

Private William Milne aged just 24, crawled across the sleet-covered ground on the front line close to the enemy to throw hand grenades at two enemy machine gun posts ensuring a safer advance. His actions saved lives of many of his colleagues but sadly William Milne died in action shortly afterwards.

Lieutenant Colonel Simon Rushen, chief of staff of the Canadian Defence

Liaison Staff will attend the memorial for William Milne in Cambusnethan Old & Morningside Parish Church, in North Lanarkshire, on Friday 7 April 2017.

Private John Pattison also displayed extreme bravery on the battlefield. He crawled across no-man's land, using craters for shelter from heavy machine-gun fire to approach enemy machine gun posts. From a covered position, he threw grenades at close quarters disarming the enemy and saving the lives of his comrades. Although aware he was recommended for the VC, he died two months later in battle so did not receive his VC in person.

John Pattison will be honoured with a memorial service in General Gordon Square in Woolwich, South London on 10 April 2017.

Two Canadian-born soldiers were also awarded the VC for their bravery in the battle. Lieutenant Colonel Thain Macdowell, single-handedly captured 77 enemy soldiers after finding them hidden in an underground fortress. Lance-Sergeant Ellis Sifton eliminated a particularly deadly machine gun post in hand to hand combat, but died in the struggle.

### **Ceremonies taking place throughout April for VCs awarded at Arras include:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Ceremony</b>
Major William Gosling VC	2 April 2017, 10.30am, Parish Church of St John the Baptist & St Helen, Wroughton, Wiltshire
Private William Milne VC	7 April 2017, 11am, Cambusnethan Old & Morningside Parish Church, North Lanarkshire
Lance Corporal Thomas Bryan VC	9 April 2017, 2pm, War memorial in Mary Stevens Park, Stourbridge, Worcestershire
Captain Harry Cator VC	9 April 2017, 3pm, St Margaret's Church, Drayton, Norfolk
Private John Pattison VC	10 April 2017, 11am, General Gordon Square, Woolwich, London
Company Sergeant-Major Edward Brooks VC	10 April 2017, 10am, Aylesbury Vale District Council, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire
Lieutenant Donald MacKintosh VC	11 April 2017, 11.30am, Glasgow Academy, The Saunders Centre, Glasgow
Lance-Corporal Harold Mugford VC	11 April 2017, 11.30am, Bermondsey and Rotherhithe War Memorial, London
Lieutenant Charles Pope VC	21 April 2017, 12.30pm, Sidney Square, Whitechapel, London
Corporal Edward Foster VC	22 April 2017, 11am, Wandsworth Town Hall, Wandsworth, London
Lieutenant Colonel Reginald Haine VC	22 April 2017, 11am, Wandsworth Town Hall, Wandsworth, London
Captain Arthur Henderson VC	24 April 2017, 11am, Renfrewshire House, Paisely, Renfrewshire
Captain David Hirsch VC	27 April 2017, 11.30am, St Chad's Church, Headingley, West Yorkshire

<b>Name</b>	<b>Ceremony</b>
Private Horace Waller VC	29 April 2017, 11am, Dewsbury Town Hall, Dewsbury, West Yorkshire
Sergeant John Ormsby VC	29 April 2017, 11am, Dewsbury Town Hall, Dewsbury, West Yorkshire
Captain Alfred Pollard VC	29 April 2017, Wallington Library Gardens, Sutton, London
Sergeant James Welch VC	29 April 2017, 10.15am, New Street, Stratfield Saye, Hampshire

## **Ceremonies taking place in April for VC recipients from other campaigns**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Ceremony</b>
Private Charles Melvin VC (Battle of Istabulat)	21 April 2017, 11am, Kirriemuir Town Square, Kirriemuir, Angus
Captain Arthur Lascelles VC (Battle of Cambrai)	22 April 2017, 11am, Wandsworth Town Hall, Wandsworth, London

## **Background information**

A total of 25 Victoria Crosses were awarded to soldiers from Britain, Australia and Canada for their gallant actions at Arras.

There were 627 individuals who received the VC during the First World War, although in total 628 VCs were awarded. This is because one individual, Noel Chavasse, was awarded the VC twice during the First World War. Of these individuals, 361 were born in England, 70 were born in Scotland and 16 were born in Wales. Thirty-five were born in pre-partition Ireland and 145 were born in other countries overseas. The first stones were laid on the 23 August 2014, 100 years from the first actions during the Battle of Mons.

The design of the stones was selected from a public competition won by Charlie MacKeith from London. The selected design uses a circular shape, created to inspire viewers to 'pause and remember'. The stones also use the material, form and lettering of the family memorials used by the War Graves Commission.

You can follow the laying of the commemorative stones on Twitter, [#VCPavingStones](#).