

Stories of the Victoria Cross: Told by Those who have Won it.



O tales of heroism are more thrilling and exciting than the narratives of the exploits which have gained the coveted reward of the Victoria Cross; and a story never has so much reality and vividness as when it comes first-hand from the performer of the deed. Accordingly, we have asked a number of the heroes of the Victoria Cross—a truly noble army—to relate in their own language how they came to win the most glorious decoration open to a soldier, the plain bronze cross "For Valour." The narratives which follow require no further introduction, and will, we think, be found to possess an interest which is all their own—the interest and impression of reality.

SERGEANT ABLETT.

One of the most gallant acts which can be conceived is the seizing a live shell and casting it away, so as to prevent mischief from its explosion. A second's delay may be fatal, and the man who picks up the shell cannot tell whether the second in question will be allowed him. If it bursts in his hands it means certain death. Not only the greatest, but also the promptest, courage is needed for such an act of courage. Among the few who have performed such a feat is Sergeant Ablett, late Grenadier Guards, whose own modest account is as follows:—

On the 2nd September, 1854, when in the trenches before Sebastopol, the sentries shouted "Look out there!" a shell coming right in the trenches at the same moment and dropping amongst some barrels of ammunition. I at once pulled it from them. It ran between my legs, and I then picked it up and threw it out of the trench; it burst as it touched the ground.

From the force of it I fell, and was covered by its explosion with gravel and dirt.

Sergeant Baker and others picked me up, and asked if I was hurt. I said, "No; but I have had a good shaking." There was a great number in the trenches at the time, but I am glad to say no one was hurt. The Sergeant reported the circumstances to the officer in charge.

On coming off duty I was taken before the commanding officer, and promoted to the rank of Corporal, and then Sergeant. He also presented me with a silk necktie made by her most gracious Majesty. I was at the battles of Alma, Balaclava, Inkerman, and the capture of Sebastopol after eleven months' siege. This is all I think I need say as to myself and the Victoria Cross. My likeness is to be found in Victoria Cross Picture Gallery, Crystal Palace, and Alexandra Palace.



"I THREW IT OUT OF THE TRENCH."

MAJOR JOHN BERRYMAN.

Among those who won the Victoria Cross at Balaclava none gained it more worthily than Major John Berryman, who served in the Crimea as Troop-Sergeant Major in the 17th Lancers. This is how Major Berryman describes the charge of the Light Brigade:—

"Gallop!" was the order as the firing became general. And here a discharge from the battery in our front, whose guns were doubly shotted, first with shot or shell, and then with case, swept away Captain Winter and the whole division on my right. The gap was noticed by Captain Morris, who gave the order, "Right incline," but a warning voice came from my coverer in the rear rank (Corporal John Penn), "Keep straight on, Jack; keep straight on." He saw what I did not, that we were opposite the intervals of the guns, and thus we escaped, for the next round must have swept us into eternity. My attention here was attracted to James Melrose, a Shakespearian reciter, calling out, "What man here would ask another man from England?" Poor fellow, they were the last words he spoke, for the next round from the guns killed him and many others. We were then so close to the guns that the report rang through my head, and I felt that I was quite deaf for a time. It was this round that broke my mare's off hind leg, and caused her to stop instantly. I felt that I was hit, but not till I dismounted. Seeing that the mare's leg was broken, I debated in my own mind whether to shoot her or not, when Captain Webb came up to me, and asked me, was I wounded? I replied, "Only slightly, I thought, in the leg, but that my horse was shot." I then asked, "Are you hurt, sir?" He said that he was, and in the leg, too; what had he better do? "Keep to your horse, sir, and get back as far as you can." He turned, and rode back. I now caught a loose horse, and got on to his back, but he fell directly, the brass of the breast-plate having been driven into his chest. Seeing that there was no hope of my joining the regiment in the *mêlée*, and the 11th Hussars being close upon me, I moved a little to the right, so as to pass through the interval between the squadrons. Both squadrons closed in a little, and let me pass through. I well remember that Sergeant Gutteridge was the right guide of the 2nd squadron. Finding that Captain Webb

had halted, I ran to him, and on inquiries found that his wound was so painful that he could not ride any further. Lieutenant George Smith, of my own regiment, coming by, I got him to stand at the horse's head whilst I lifted the captain off. Having accomplished this, I assisted Smith to mount Webb's horse, and ride for a stretcher, taking notice where we were. By this time the Russians had got back to their guns, and re-opened fire. I saw six men of my own regiment get together to recount to each other their escapes. Seeing their danger, I called to them to separate, but too late, for a shell dropped amongst them, and I don't think one escaped alive. Hearing me call to these men, Captain Webb asked what I thought the Russians would do?

"They are sure to pursue, sir, unless the Heavy Brigade comes down."

"Then you had better consult your own safety, and leave me."

"Oh no, sir, I shall not leave you now."

"Perhaps they will only take me prisoner."

"If they do, sir, we will go together."

"Don't mind me, look to yourself."

"All right, sir; only we will go together, whatever happens."

Just at this time I saw Sergeant Farrell coming by. I called to him. He asked, "Who is it?" When told, he came over. I said, "We must get Captain Webb out of this, for we shall be pursued."

He agreeing, we made a chair of our hands, lifted the Captain up, and found that we could carry him with comparative ease. We had got about 200 yards in this manner, when the Captain complained that his leg was very painful. A private of the 13th being near, Malone, I asked him would he be good enough to support Captain Webb's legs, until we could procure a stretcher? He did so, and several of the officers passed us. Sir G. Wombwell said, "What is the matter, Peck?" (Captain Webb's nickname.)

"Hit in the leg, old fellow. How did you escape?"

"Well, I was unhorsed and taken prisoner, but when the second line came down, in the confusion I got away, and, seizing the first horse I could, I got away, and I find that it is Morris's."

Sir W. Gordon made the same inquiry, and got the same answer. He had a very nasty cut on the head, and blood was then running down his face. He was carrying

his dress cap in his hand. We had now reached the rear of the Greys, and I procured a stretcher from two Infantry band boys, and a young officer of the "Greys" gave me a "tourniquet," saying that he did not know how to apply it, but perhaps I might. I put it on the right thigh, and screwed it up. Doctor Kendal came here, and I pointed out what I had done, and asked was it right?

"Ah! and you sergeant?" looking at the stripes on my arm.

"Yes."

"Ah! If you were in French service, I would make you an officer on the spot." Then, standing in his stirrups and extending his right hand, said:—

"Oh! it was grand, it was *magnifique*, but it is not war, it is not war."

This officer was General Morris. We re-



"I LIFTED THE CAPTAIN OFF."

"I could not have done it better myself; bring him along."

I and Farrell now raised the stretcher and carried it for about fifty yards, and again set it down. I was made aware of an officer of the Chasseurs d'Afrique being on my left by his placing his hand upon my shoulder. I turned and saluted. Pointing to Captain Webb, but looking at me, he said:—

"Your officer?"

"Yes."

sumed our patient, and got to the doctors (Massy and Kendal). I saw the boot cut off and the nature of the wound, the right shin bone being shattered. Farrell made an exclamation, and I was motioned to take him away. I told him that I should go and see the end of it. He said that he was too exhausted to do any more. Finding a horse in the line, I mounted him, although the animal belonged to the 4th Light Dragoons, and thus dropped in behind

the Duke of Cambridge, and heard what passed. The Duke, speaking to Lord Cardigan, said:—

"Cardigan, where's the Brigade, then?"

"There," said Cardigan.

"Is that all of them? You have lost the finest Brigade that ever left the shores of England."

A little further on he spoke to Captain Godfrey Morgan (Lord Tredegar):—

"Morgan, where's the regiment, then?"

"Your Royal Highness, that is all of them!"

"My poor regiment, my poor regiment!"

I now took my place in the ranks, and, in numbering off, being on the extreme left, I counted 22. We fell back during the night, and, being dismounted, I, with my servant, was left behind. I suffered intensely with my head, and got a napkin and tied it as tightly as possible round my brows. I also had time to examine my wound, which was inside the calf of my leg. A small piece about the size of a shilling had been cut clean out of my leg; but except that the blood had run into my boots, I felt but very little inconvenience from it. Cold

water bandage was all I used; but, unfortunately, scurvy got to it, and it was a long time healing.

PRIVATE WILLIAM NORMAN.

Private William Norman, of the 7th Regiment, in a true modest and soldier-like style thus describes the exploit which won for him the Victoria Cross:—

On the night of December 19, 1854, I was placed on single sentry at some distance in front of the advanced sentries of an out-lying picquet in the White Horse Ravine—a post of much danger, and requiring great vigilance. The Russian picquet was posted 300 yards in our front. Three Russian soldiers advanced under cover of the brushwood for the purpose of reconnoitring. I immediately fired my rifle, which was the signal of alarm, and then jumped into the trench almost on the top of the three Russians, two of whom I succeeded single-handed in taking prisoners, and marched them into our lines, the other one having fled back to the Russian lines.

My feelings I can hardly describe, as what I did was on the spur of the moment. But



"I JUMPED ALMOST ON THE TOP OF THREE RUSSIANS."