

WAR DIARY

THE BRAVEST OF THE BRAVE

New Zealand's Gallant V.C.'s.

(By "23/762")

FIFTEEN New Zealanders were awarded the Victoria Cross during the last European War. Eleven of them served with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force; two with the Australian Forces; one with the Royal Navy, and one with a British Regiment.

Of all the honours and decorations conferred on men of the British Empire, the Victoria Cross is the most distinguished. It is given only to those whose great personal courage is worthy of the honour; courage in the face of great danger which frequently means the sacrifice of the recipient's own life.

The Victoria Cross, a bronze medal made from the metal of cannon captured at Sevastopol, was instituted in 1856, at the close of the Crimean War. The ribbon for all forces is now red; until 1918 it was blue for the Navy and red for the Army. During the last war 581 V.C.'s were won by soldiers, sailors, and airmen of the British Forces.

The medal carries the simple words, "For Valour," but behind those words there is always a story of courage and personal sacrifice. In such an article as

Private J. Crichton won his V.C. at Crèvecoeur. Although wounded in the foot he went on with his platoon, and when that platoon was cut off by the enemy he twice swam the Scheldt River crossing an area continuously swept by bullets, and delivered messages. After that he again swam to a bridge, removed fuses and detonators from mines which the Germans had left, and sank the mines in the river, saving the bridge and many lives.

Lieut. R. S. Judson had already won the D.C.M. and the M.M. before he won his V.C. Outside Bapaume, during the New Zealand attack, he bombed his way alone up a trench, destroying three German machine gun crews. Then he jumped out ahead of the enemy, attacked two officers and ten men, and captured two more machine guns which had been delaying our men.

Major L. W. Andrew, now attached to the Permanent Staff, won the coveted distinction during the battle of Messines.



S. P. Andrew, photograph
MAJOR L. W. ANDREW, V.C., N.Z.S.C., gained the coveted distinction at Messines

He attacked a machine gun which had held up the New Zealanders and killed several of the gunners. Then, flinging bombs as he went, he captured another machine gun, again destroying several of the enemy and putting the others to flight.

Sergeant J. G. Grant had charge of an attacking platoon near Bancourt. When they were held up by a nest of five German machine guns, he and a companion rushed the middle gun, which was put out of action. While his platoon took charge Grant attacked the other guns, eventually clearing them out. His great coolness and courage were rewarded.

Private H. Nicholas, already awarded the M.M., captured a German strong-point single-handed at Gheluvelt, in the

Ypres Salient. Rushing ahead of his platoon, he leaped on to the German trench before the enemy realised he was there, shooting the officer and killing all but four of the 16 machine-gunners. These he took prisoners.

Lieut. S. Frickleton, now of Wellington, won his V.C. at Messines when he went forward into our own barrage of shells and destroyed with bombs a German machine gun and its crew. Although he was wounded, he went on again and destroyed another gun, thus clearing the way for his companions.

Sergeant D. F. Brown, who was killed during the Somme battle, displayed magnificent courage. When his company



S. P. Andrew, photograph
LIEUT. H. J. LAURENT, V.C., was decorated for conspicuous bravery on the Somme

was held up he went forward with a companion and captured a German gun; then another and finally, the third time, he went on alone and single-handed destroyed a gun and its crew which had held up the attack. He did not live to receive his V.C.

Sergeant R. C. Travis, V.C. D.C.M., M.M., went out in broad daylight, near Rossignol Wood, destroyed an impassable wire block and then went forward and rushed two German guns, killing the crews. When four Germans attacked and tried to re-take the guns, Travis disposed of them with a revolver in each hand. When our men arrived they found him reloading his guns, with a line of corpses huddled round him.

At Gouzeaucourt, Somme, *Lieut. H. J. Laurent*, V.C., found himself 700 yards ahead of the New Zealand advance against a strong enemy post. His party of twelve was soon reduced to seven, but he reorganised them, dashed forward and captured the position, killing twenty of the German garrison. One officer, 111 men and two dogs were taken prisoner.

Sergeant S. Forsyth was killed in the winning of his V.C. Against great odds he led his men forward and captured three machine guns. Although wounded, Forsyth bandaged his wound and tried to lead a tank under heavy fire to a



S. P. Andrew, photograph
LIEUT. R. S. JUDSON, V.C., destroyed three enemy machine-guns and captured two more

favourable position, but the tank was put out of action, so he organised the crew and outflanked another machine gun, driving the enemy back. This brilliant soldier was killed by a German sniper.

Captain A. J. Shout and *Lieut. P. V. Storkey* won their V.C.'s while serving with the Australian Forces. Captain Shout was killed. Lieut. Storkey, with six men, attacked and captured a German strong-point manned by 80 to 100 Germans, whose machine guns were holding up the Australians.

The Sanders Cup, known to all yachtsmen, commemorates another New Zealand V.C., *Acting-Lieut.-Commander W. E. Sanders*, R.N. He was in charge of H.M.S. *Prize*, one of the famous "Q" ships, the mystery ships of the war. Sanders decoyed a submarine within easy reach and captured it under the most difficult conditions, displaying great gallantry and coolness. He did not live to receive his honour, as the *Prize* was lost with all hands.

The life of *Major-General B. C. Freyburg*, V.C., C.B., C.M.G. D.S.O., reads like a romance, from the days when he lived in Wellington, through his adventures in South American revolutions, to the Great War, when he distinguished himself at the Dardanelles and later won his V.C. in France. The day he won his greatest honour he was wounded four times, led his men personally against a fortified village under murderous machine gun and artillery fire, and refused to leave the battalion. General Freyburg was wounded nine times and mentioned six times in despatches.

These men, by their complete disregard for danger, their great personal courage and self-sacrifice, saved the lives of thousands of their fellow soldiers. Only those who have experienced the pitiless hail of German machine gun bullets can realise the ordeal under which they won the most coveted of all military honours, which is always bestowed personally by the King and entitles the bearer to the use of V.C. after his name at all times.



S. P. Andrew, photograph
LIEUT. CYRIL BASSETT, New Zealand's first V.C.

this those stories, each of them worthy of being told in detail, must be reduced to the barest minimum.

Lieut. Cyril Bassett, now living in Auckland, won the first V.C. awarded during the Great War to a New Zealander. From the very beginning, on Gallipoli, his bravery was noticeable. While he was with the Divisional Signal Co. he went out under continuous enemy fire and laid a telephone wire in full daylight. Despite the hail of enemy bullets he repaired that line day and night so that communication could be maintained.