



LORD ASHCROFT'S  
 "HERO OF  
 THE MONTH"

# Captain Noel Chavasse

VC & Bar, MC



battalion of Liverpool Scottish was wonderful, and his loss to them is irreparable. I do not believe a man of more noble character exists.

The Bar to Chavasse's VC was announced on 14 September 1917 when the citation praised his "extraordinary energy and inspiring example". The posthumous decoration was later presented to his family. He was the only VC and Bar of the Great War and one of only three in the entire 160-year history of the award.

Chavasse is buried in the Brandhoek New Military Cemetery, Belgium, where his headstone bears a representation of two VCs. The inscription on the white stone, chosen by his father, reads: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Since his death, Chavasse has had at least sixteen memorials dedicated to his memory, including one at Liverpool Cathedral. The total of memorials is greater than for any other VC holder in the world.

Decades ago, Captain Chavasse's service and gallantry medals were left by his family to St Peter's College,

## VICTORIA CROSS HEROES

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His five books on gallantry include *Victoria Cross Heroes*. For more information, please visit: [www.victoriacrossheroes.com](http://www.victoriacrossheroes.com)

Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collection is on public display at Imperial War Museum, London. For more information visit: [www.iwm.org.uk/heroes](http://www.iwm.org.uk/heroes). For details about his VC collection, visit: [www.lordashcroftmedals.com](http://www.lordashcroftmedals.com)

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Oxford. However, in 2009, after lengthy private negotiations, the college agreed a deal to sell his medal group to me for an undisclosed sum.

I felt hugely privileged to add the Chavasse medals to my medal collection, which now totals 200 VCs. I had long felt that my VC collection would never be complete until it had one of the three VCs and Bars that have been awarded since the decoration was instituted by Queen Victoria in 1856.

**FAR LEFT:** A short distance from his grave, diagonally over the main N308 Ypres-Poperinghe road inside the grounds of the church in the village of Brandhoek, is this Chavasse VC Memorial. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

**LEFT:** A contemporary drawing depicting Captain Noel Chavasse searching during the hours of darkness, aided by a torch, for the wounded that lay in front of the German trenches. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)



**LEFT:** Surviving German bunkers at Wieltje, in the approximate area where Chavasse had established the Regimental Aid Post in which he was mortally wounded. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

## SACRIFICE

AGGRESSION • BOLDNESS  
 INITIATIVE LEADERSHIP  
 SKILL • ENDURANCE

The many Victoria Crosses and George Crosses in the Lord Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum in London are displayed under one of seven different qualities of bravery. Captain Noel Chavasse's awards are part of the collection, Lord Ashcroft feels that they fall within the category of sacrifice:

"In what is apparently the simplest quality of bravery, Sacrifice epitomises selfless responsibility. Noble, strong, dependable, life is offered up to protect, save or comfort others. It is not always lost, but it is always freely given."

While at university, Chavasse, who was one of seven children, was a talented sportsman, earning blues for athletics and lacrosse. Indeed, he and his twin brother, Christopher, represented Britain in the 1908 Olympics, both running the 400 metres. After qualifying as a doctor in 1912, Noel Chavasse became house physician at the Royal Southern Hospital, Liverpool, and the following year he became house surgeon at the same hospital.

As the Great War loomed, Chavasse was commissioned as a lieutenant into the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC). After the outbreak of hostilities, he served in France and Belgium, where he was attached to the 10th King's (Liverpool Scottish).

This battalion saw action in June 1915 at Hooge, near Ypres, when Chavasse continually went into No Man's Land for nearly forty-eight hours until he was satisfied that there were no more wounded men who needed treatment. He was awarded the Military Cross for his courage.

On 27 July 1916, the battalion was moved to trenches in front of Guillemont. Although unable to reconnoitre the enemy positions, they still attacked at 04.20 hours on 9 August.

A few hours later, they had sustained 189 casualties out of 600 men. Chavasse attended to the wounded all day under heavy fire, frequently in view of the enemy. During the night he searched for injured men directly in front of the enemy lines.

The next day, he recruited a stretcher-bearer and, under heavy shell-fire, carried a critically injured man 500 yards to safety. On the return journey Chavasse was wounded but it did not stop him from further sterling deeds that night.

Helped by twenty volunteers, he rescued three wounded men from a shell-hole just twenty-five yards from

the enemy trenches. He also buried the bodies of two officers and collected numerous identity discs from dead soldiers. It was estimated that during those two days, Chavasse saved the lives of some twenty seriously wounded men as well as treating countless "ordinary" cases that passed through his hands.

Chavasse's VC was announced in *The London Gazette* on 26 October 1916. The citation concluded that, "His courage and self-sacrifice were beyond praise."

By the summer of 1917, the battalion had moved to trenches near Wieltje, to the north-east of Ypres. Preparations were made for what was to be the Third Battle of Ypres – an attempt to recapture the Passchendaele Ridge. The new offensive began on 31 July and the Liverpool Scottish, poorly protected against the enemy's mustard gas, lost two officers and 141 other ranks.

On the first evening of the battle, Chavasse was wounded in the skull. He had his injury bandaged but he refused to be evacuated. Time and again, under heavy fire and in appalling weather, he went into No Man's Land to search for and attend to the wounded. With virtually no food, in great pain and desperately weary,

**N**OEL CHAVASSE, narrowly the younger of identical twin boys, was born in the vicarage at St Peter le Bailey, Oxford, on 9 November 1884. When his father became the Bishop of Liverpool in 1900, Chavasse was educated at Liverpool College School, and in 1907 he graduated with first class honours in natural sciences from Trinity College, Oxford.



**TOP RIGHT:** A view of the model of the bronze memorial depicting Captain Noel Chavasse VC & Bar, MC, which, created by sculptor Tom Murphy, can be seen in Abercrombie Square in Liverpool.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** Captain Noel Chavasse VC & Bar, MC's grave in Brandhoek New Military Cemetery, roughly four miles west of Ypres on the road to Poperinghe. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

**RIGHT:** Captain Noel Chavasse VC & Bar, MC. (COURTESY OF THE ARMY MEDICAL SERVICES MUSEUM)