



LORD ASHCROFT'S
"HERO OF
THE MONTH"

Private Hubert William Lewis

VC

SKILL

AGGRESSION · BOLDNESS
INITIATIVE LEADERSHIP
SACRIFICE · 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. Private Hubert William Lewis VC's award is part of the collection and Lord Ashcroft feels that it would fall within the category of skill:

"Wisdom, sound judgement and technical knowledge are the hallmarks of Skill. It is about using resources to greatest effect usually under intense pressure. For many involved in bomb disposal, while a single movement might start the clock ticking, the puzzle still has to be solved, the game won. Perseverance is everything."



Sir Bryan Mahon's Expeditionary Force and dug in around Salonika as they waited for an offensive by German and Bulgarian forces. However, eventually the British decided to attack first, and on 17 October 1916 Lieutenant Colonel H.F. Wingate, the battalion's commanding officer, was ordered to mount a raid on the German trenches situated on the heights of Dorsale.

Lewis, a small but strong man, was a member of 'D' Party, one of the four raiding parties. Bad weather delayed the assault but finally, at 21.00 hours on 22 October, it began. As 'D' Party rushed forward to reach the starting point for their final assault, they were spotted by a German sentry and the air became alive with red flares and machine-gun and rifle fire.

Over the next forty minutes – and only 300 yards from their starting point – 'D' Party was subjected to intense shelling from the enemy. Lewis was hit in the arm but saw that others were more badly injured and therefore declined medical attention. Then, in a lull in the bombardment, Captain Guthrie Morgan, commander of the raiding party, charged across 120 yards of wire entanglements with 150 men, including the wounded Lewis. As they reached the enemy trenches, there was fierce hand-to-hand combat and the British seized control.

This led to a German counter-attack and Lewis was wounded for a second time, but again he refused medical treatment. Instead, he headed down a seemingly empty trench and was confronted by three German soldiers, but he launched a ferocious and skillful bayonet assault on the men and they quickly surrendered. However, the Germans then started another counter-attack and the signal to withdraw was given. As the men of 'D' Party made the two-hour descent, Lewis saw a comrade fall. Despite his own two wounds, Lewis carried

TOP RIGHT:
Private Hubert
William Lewis VC.

Hubert William Lewis was born in Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire, on 1 May 1896. Always known as 'Stokey', he was the son of Adrian Lewis, a moulder and fitter, and his wife Sarah (née Broome). After attending Milford Haven National School, he started work in the town's vast fish market as a packer. However, on 3 September 1914, he attended a recruitment meeting in the town and two days later he and seventy-five other volunteers from his home town set off for an adventure

with (Lord) Kitchener's New Army. Lewis was one of forty-six men to be sent to Maindy Barracks, Cardiff, the depot of The Welsh Regiment. There he joined the 11th (Service) Battalion, otherwise known as the 'Cardiff Commercial Battalion' or simply the 'Cardiff Pals'.

After training, Lewis departed for France on 4 September 1915. By this point, Bulgaria had joined the war on Germany's side, opening a new front, and Lewis's battalion was one of those detailed to leave the Western Front for Greece. There they joined General



RIGHT:
Artist's impression
of the action in
which Lewis won
the VC.
(ALL IMAGES
HISTORIC
MILITARY PRESS
UNLESS STATED
OTHERWISE)



VICTORIA CROSS HEROES

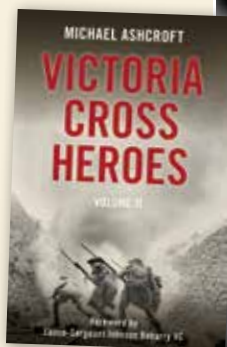
Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster.

His sixth book on gallantry, *Victoria Cross Heroes Volume II*, was published last month. For more information, visit www.victoriacrossheroes2.com.

Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collection is on public display at the Imperial War Museum, London. For more information, visit www.iwm.org.uk/heroes.

For details about his VC collection, visit www.lordashcroftmedals.com.

For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit www.lordashcroft.com. Follow him on Twitter: @LordAshcroft



ABOVE:

Three VC holders at the premiere of the film *Zulu*. From the left to right are Edward Chapman VC, Hubert Lewis VC and Ivor Rees VC. They are talking to Brigadier Leslie Wieler.

the other man down the hillside, dodging shells and shrapnel as they went. At 04.30 hours, he put down the wounded man, walked away and collapsed with exhaustion.

His VC was announced on 15 December 1916 when his citation concluded: 'Private Lewis showed throughout a brilliant example of courage, endurance and devotion to duty.' The announcement that Lewis had received the VC was greeted with great excitement in South Wales. He returned home a hero in January 1917, and at a press conference in the Grand Hotel, Cardiff, won over those present with his modesty.

'I joined The Welsh Regiment as a raw recruit, and I am proud of

the fact that I have not disgraced the honour and proud record of the regiment,' he said. He even pointed out an inaccuracy in *The London Gazette's* citation, denying he had been wounded three times: 'I can only remember being wounded twice.' A far more significant error was that the citation gave his Christian name as 'Herbert' not 'Hubert'. After a jubilant homecoming in Milford, Lewis received his VC from King George V at Buckingham Palace on 5 February 1917, but he was back serving on the Balkan Front within ten days.

On 19 June 1918, Lewis once more distinguished himself on the battlefield, again near Salonika, when he was part of an attacking force that was repulsed by heavy fire and gas. Seeing his commander, Captain Morgan, collapse, Lewis went to his aid. Despite being affected by gas himself and having to fight off the attention of several Bulgarians, he picked up Morgan and carried him to safety in a similar manner to his 1916 VC action. After the war was over, Morgan wrote to Lewis, thanking him for his actions: 'It is impossible for me to express how grateful I am to you for saving my life ... You certainly deserve a bar to your Victoria Cross.'

However, the Bar – the equivalent to a second VC – was never forthcoming and Lewis returned to live in Milford, first running his own fish business and, later, when that venture failed, working in an ice factory. He and his wife had three sons.

Lewis was a regular at meetings of the Victoria Cross and George Cross Association and, during the Second World War, he was a sergeant in the Home Guard. 'Stokey' Lewis died at his home in Milford Haven on 22 February 1977, aged eighty, and he is buried at Milford Haven Cemetery. His name is on the Haverfordwest War Memorial and on a display at Milford Haven Museum. Furthermore, there is a memorial sundial and plaque at Milford Haven Memorial Gardens.

I purchased Lewis' gallantry and service medals privately in 1999. I feel privileged to be the custodian of this splendid medal group and I am delighted that it is now on public display at the Imperial War Museum. ☉

FAR RIGHT:

Located on the south side of Hamilton Terrace, Milford Haven's War Memorial was unveiled on 26 April 1924, by Private Hubert 'Stokey' Lewis VC and General Sir Ivor Philipps, Bart, KCB, DSO. (COURTESY OF JAGGERY; WWW.GEOGRAPH.ORG.UK)

RIGHT:

Commonwealth troops in a trench on the Salonika front. Life in this part of southern Europe was indeed far from easy, for this was a front where diseases such as malaria and influenza were rife.

