



LORD ASHCROFT'S
"HERO OF
THE MONTH"

Wing Commander Frederick William Palmer

VC, MM

INITIATIVE AGGRESSION • BOLDNESS LEADERSHIP • SACRIFICE SKILL • INITIATIVE

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. Whilst Wing Commander Frederick William Palmer's award is not part of the collection, Lord Ashcroft feels that it falls within the category of initiative:

"Difficult situations, which place lives under threat, require quick decisions and clear solutions. Often those who act are not in charge, but they take control. Confident, aware of what needs to be done, they are convinced they can pull it off. Someone has to act."



Shortly after his 24th birthday, Palmer left for France on 16 November 1915 and was present at both Delville Wood and Redan Ridge.

By early 1917, Palmer was back in France and in February the British began to press north from Courcellette, close to the Albert-Bapaume road. It was part of the area that had been seized by the enemy during the Battle of the Somme. Christopher Stone, the regimental historian, described the land as "desolate, treeless, a mass of mine craters, shell holes and wire entanglements..."

On 16/17 February, the 22nd and 23rd Royal Fusiliers (99th Brigade, 2nd Division) were involved in heavy fighting that left 85 men dead. D Company from the 22nd Battalion had come under intense fire because the enemy had been alerted to their early morning attack on 17 February by deserters. It was during the height of the battle that Palmer, by then a lance sergeant, showed such outstanding bravery that he was later awarded the VC. The citation for his decoration, announced on 3 April 1917, stated:

"For most conspicuous bravery, control and determination.

"During the progress of certain operations, all the Officers of his Company having been shot down, Sjt. Palmer assumed command, and, having cut his way under point blank machine gun fire, through the wire entanglements, he rushed the enemy's trench with six of his men, dislodged the hostile machine gun which had been hampering our advance, and established a block.

"He then collected men detached from other regiments, and held the barricade for nearly three hours against seven determined counter-attacks, under an incessant barrage of bombs and rifle grenades from his flank and front.

"During his temporary absence in search of more bombs, an eighth counter-attack was delivered by the enemy, who succeeded in driving in his party, and threatened the defences of the whole flank. At this critical moment, although he had been blown off his feet by a bomb and was greatly exhausted, he rallied his men, drove back the enemy and maintained his position.

"The very conspicuous bravery displayed by this Non-commissioned Officer cannot be overstated, and his splendid determination and



devotion to duty undoubtedly averted what might have proved a serious disaster in this sector of the line."

Palmer's wounds from the battle were not serious and on 25/26 April, by then commissioned as a second lieutenant, he was back in the thick of the fighting during an attack on the enemy-held Oppy Wood. At one point, he had to hide in a shell-hole in the enemy wire to avoid the heavy fire. Once again, there were heavy casualties and on this occasion the wood remained in enemy hands.

Palmer received both his VC and the MM, for earlier acts of bravery, from King George V at an investiture in Hyde Park on 2 June 1917. A month later, on 11 July, he was asked to attend a Special Meeting of the Council of the Metropolitan Borough of Hammersmith, where he grew up. Clearly nervous, Palmer received a rousing reception and was asked to inscribe his name on the borough's Roll of Honour.

During his visit, Palmer told the audience that it was impossible to

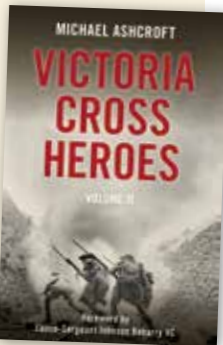
comprehend what life was like for troops in France and Belgium, and he urged them to write to people they knew on the frontline at least once a week as it would cheer them up. He also said that a regular parcel would be most welcome.

After the war, Palmer was transferred to the RAF as a lieutenant. After being demobbed, he became a planter in Malaya and lived in Singapore. He also worked as a director of Kyle, Palmer & Co, printers and publishers. After the death of his first wife, who bore him a son, he remarried: on Christmas Eve 1937, he wed Doris Kimsinn, the daughter of a Chinese magistrate, at St Mary's Church, Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, and the couple went on to have a son and two daughters.

After the outbreak of the Second World War, Palmer returned to England and was granted a commission in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR). As a pilot officer in the Administrative Special Duties Department, he served in the ground defence forces

VICTORIA CROSS HEROES II

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His sixth book on gallantry, *Victoria Cross Heroes Volume II*, was published in November. For more information, please visit: www.victoriacrossheroes2.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. 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



TOP: The two hour investiture in Hyde Park on 2 June 1917 saw 351 awards presented. Here recipients, and next of kin, await their presentations.

BELOW LEFT: King George V awards the VC to Pvt. Thomas Hughes, Connaught Rangers. The investiture on 2 June was among the largest seen in Hyde Park. Recently promoted, 2nd Lt. Frederick Palmer was one of seven VC recipients honoured. Four posthumous VCs were also presented.

BELOW: The commemorative stone unveiled by Shepherd's Bush War Memorial to honour Frederick Palmer.

TOP RIGHT: A view of the battlefield in the area around Courcellette taken a few weeks prior to Palmer's VC action. The dead in the foreground are Canadian soldiers killed in the fighting in the area in October 1916. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL)

RIGHT: Palmer pictured prior to his transfer to the RAF.



FREDERICK WILLIAM PALMER was born in Hammersmith, west London, on 11 November 1891. He was the son of Thomas Palmer, a taxicab owner, and his wife Rhoda (née Smith). By 1914, the year he married Daisy Dightam, Palmer was working for a publishing company. After the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, he enlisted as a private into the 22nd Battalion, The Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment).

