



LORD ASHCROFT'S
"HERO OF
THE MONTH"

Acting Lieutenant Colonel William Herbert Anderson

VC

LEADERSHIP

AGGRESSION • BOLDNESS
INITIATIVE • SACRIFICE
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. Acting Lieutenant Colonel William Herbert Anderson's VC is part of the collection, and Lord Ashcroft feels that it falls within the category of leadership:

"Charismatic, strong, inspirational, the natural leader not only takes command, but also infuses all those around them with confidence and hope. They exude calm and resolve. They are a tower of strength."

TOP RIGHT
Acting
Lieutenant
Colonel William
Herbert
Anderson VC.
(LORD ASHCROFT
COLLECTION)

RIGHT
Acting
Lieutenant
Colonel William
Herbert
Anderson's
Victoria Cross
medal group.
(LORD ASHCROFT
COLLECTION)

WILLIAM HERBERT Anderson was born in Glasgow, Scotland, on 29 December 1881. Always known as "Bertie", he was the eldest of five sons born to William James Anderson, an accountant and stockbroker, and his wife, Nora (*née* Kay). However, one of the couple's sons, Harry, had died, aged just seven days old, on 7 March 1887.

The four surviving sons all enjoyed a privileged upbringing, sharing their

time between two vast houses in Scotland. Their parents owned both a country pile, Strathairly in Upper Largo, Fife, and a rambling Georgian town house in Lansdowne Crescent, a prosperous area of western Glasgow.

Bertie Anderson was educated at the Glasgow Academy, Fettes College, in Edinburgh and the University of Tours in France. He joined the 1st Lanark Rifle Volunteers on 20 December 1902, just five days before Christmas Day and only nine days before his 21st birthday.

Commissioned as a Second Lieutenant, Bertie served in the Army for nearly eight years before leaving to join his father's firm of Messrs Kerr, Anderson and Macleod as a partner. In July 1909, he got married in Alexandria, Dumbartonshire, to Gertrude (or "Gertie") Campbell, and the couple went on to have two sons.

On 10 September 1914, just a month of the outbreak of the Great War, Anderson was recommissioned as a Temporary Captain, initially in the 17th Battalion, Highland Light Infantry (HLI).

Anderson served with distinction for most of the war, gaining several promotions. He was invalided home in



March 1917, although he returned to France as second in command of the 12th Battalion, HLI.

On the evening of 25 March 1918, close to a sunken road rising from the Somme Valley, Acting Lieutenant Colonel William Herbert Anderson (by then Commanding Officer of the 12th Battalion) led his men the only way he knew how: from the front. It was his second counter-attack of the day – the first resulted in the capture of twelve machine guns, 70 prisoners and restoring the line.

After four days of relentless fighting, as part of the German's so-called Spring Offensive, Anderson steeled himself for another attack, unaware that he was entering the final hour of his life.

At around 17:00 hours on 25 March 1918, at Bois Favières, northern France, the officer rallied his depleted force in order to drive the enemy from Maricourt Wood and its neighbouring timber yard. The Germans were initially so surprised by the ferocity of the attack that they fell back some 1,000 yards to a slope that provided them some protection from the onslaught.

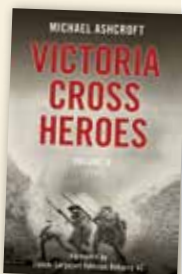
When the advancing British force came to a railway line, it briefly took shelter from heavy machine gun fire before pressing forward once more. >>





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 hardback in 2016 and is now available in paperback. 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



ABOVE Field Marshal Douglas Haig, the C-in-C of the British Army, and Marshal Ferdinand Foch inspecting a Guard of Honour provided by 'C' Company, 6th Battalion, Gordon Highlanders, in preparation for the visit of Marshal Ferdinand Foch, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces, at the British Advanced GHQ at Iwuy during November 1918. It was during an occasion such as this that Foch spoke about Anderson. (NARA)



ABOVE
The four Anderson brothers, Bertie, Ronnie, Charlie and Teddie, photographed in the grounds of a Scottish golf club prior to the First World War. (CHRISTOPHER COX © LORD ASHCROFT)

At around 18:00 hours, as he advanced ahead of his men with his revolver in one hand and his swagger stick in the other, Lieutenant Colonel Anderson fell to the ground, mortally wounded by enemy fire.

His posthumous VC was announced on 3 May 1918 when his citation concluded: "He led the attack in person and throughout showed the utmost disregard for his own safety. The counter-attack drove the enemy from his position, but resulted in this very gallant officer losing his life. He died fighting within the enemy's lines, setting a magnificent example to all who were privileged to serve under him."

Marshal Ferdinand Foch, the French Military Commander, later singled out Anderson for praise when he addressed Scottish troops: "Such men can never

die. He lives today in your hearts and in the hearts of all men who revere heroism, and his name will prove an inspiration to all who fight the battle of liberty against the Boche."

Anderson, the only one of the four brothers to have married, left a widow and two sons, then aged six and four. His widow received his medal at an investiture in Leeds, Yorkshire, on 31 May 1918.

In fact, Bertie Anderson was William and Nora Anderson's fourth and final son to die in the Great War. For the Anderson brothers were a real-life, four-strong "Band of Brothers" who each gave their life for their King, their Country, their comrades and for wider freedoms.

Captain Charlie Anderson, also of the HLI, had been killed in action on 19 December 1914 during fierce fighting in northern France. He was 26. Second Lieutenant Ronnie Anderson, also of the HLI, had been killed in action on the Western Front on 8 October 1915. He was 31.

Teddie, the youngest boy, who had transferred from the HLI to the Royal Flying Corps, had died on 16 March 1918 from the multiple wounds that

he had received the previous day when crashing during a test flight over Hampshire. He was 21.

Mr and Mrs Anderson Snr were, of course, utterly heartbroken to have lost all their children. To make matters worse, the body or remains of only one of their sons was returned to Scotland.

There is a bronze plaque in the nave at Glasgow Cathedral that was unveiled on 22 January 1920 in a ceremony attended by the brothers' parents. It records that it is, "To the memory of four brothers, natives of this city, who died for their country and in the cause of honour and freedom."

William Anderson Snr died in January 1922, aged 70, two years after the plaque was unveiled. Nora Anderson died in 1939, aged 79.

Gertie Anderson, who never remarried after her husband Bertie's death, died in 1967, aged 82. Her sons, Allan and Charlie, served during the Second World War and both survived the conflict.

I am immensely proud to be the custodian of Lieutenant Colonel Bertie Anderson's gallantry and service medals, and that they are on display to the public at the Imperial War Museum. 📍

RIGHT
Acting Lieutenant Colonel Anderson was buried in Peronne Road Cemetery, Maricourt - seen here. His grave can be seen at plot II.G.36. (JAMIE PHARR/ SHUTTERSTOCK)

