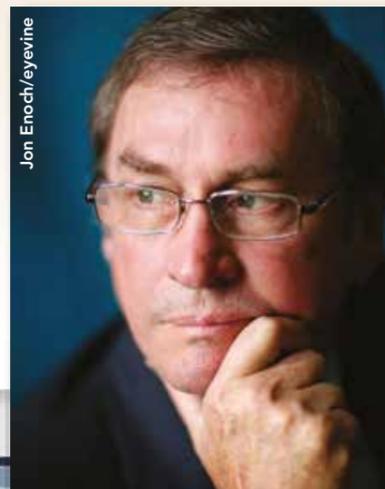


BRIGADIER GENERAL ALEXANDER HORE-RUTHVEN, 1ST EARL OF GOWRIE VC, GCMG, CB, DSO & BAR, PC

Few men have enjoyed such a successful career as both a soldier and a statesman. Alexander Hore-Ruthven, the 1st Earl of Gowrie, reached glorious heights in each sphere and, as a result, was rewarded with a glittering array of decorations and titles. Lord Ashcroft examines the actions of Brigadier General Alexander Hore-Ruthven, 1st Earl of Gowrie VC, GCMG, CB, DSO & Bar, PC.



Jon Enoch/eyevine

Alexander Gore Arkwright Hore-Ruthven was born in Windsor, Berkshire, on 6 July 1872, the second son of the 9th Baron Ruthven and Lady Caroline Annesley Gore. Educated at, first, Winchester College and, later, Eton College, he initially worked in a tea merchant's office in Glasgow, before travelling to India to work on a tea plantation in Assam.

While working there, Hore-Ruthven succumbed to malaria and he returned to England. In 1891, he joined the Highland Light Infantry Militia – which did not have the status of the Regular Army – and was promoted to captain in 1896.

In 1898, Hore-Ruthven transferred into the Regular Army, and he was employed with the Egyptian Army until 1903, spending the first two years of his service involved in the Second Sudan Campaign. On 22 September 1898, he was serving in the Nile Expeditionary Force and in command of the Camel Corps detachment of Colonel Parsons' column during the attack on the last Dervish stronghold at Gedaref.

Parsons' force of 1,350 men – which was considerably outnumbered – captured the town of Nur Angora, leaving 500 Dervish casualties. Within six days, Ahmed Fadid, one of the Dervish leaders, arrived on the scene with a force of 8,000 men but, yet again, after a fierce action, he too was repulsed.



TOP: British troops in action during the fighting in the Mahdist War. Fought between the Mahdist Sudanese and the Egyptian, and later British, forces, this conflict, which lasted between 1881 and 1889, is also known as the Mahdist Revolt, the Sudanese Mahdist Revolt, the Anglo-Sudan War, or the Sudan Campaign.

ABOVE: A picture of Hore-Ruthven in uniform, an image that was taken to commemorate the award of the Victoria Cross.

Lord Ashcroft's "Hero of the Month"



During his time in the Sudan, Hore-Ruthven repeatedly distinguished himself on the battlefield, and he was Mentioned in Despatches at least twice. He was also present at the final defeat of the Khalifa in 1899 (the Khalifa – Abdallahi ibn Muhammad – had eventually succeeded the Mahdi as the leader in 1891).

By then, Hore-Ruthven had already been awarded his Victoria Cross, for an act of bravery during the attack on Gedaref on 22 September 1898. In the heat of battle, he saw that an Egyptian officer had been wounded and that the advancing Dervishes were only fifty yards

from where he lay.

Although the enemy was firing and charging, Hore-Ruthven rushed forward, picked up the wounded officer and carried him towards the 16th Egyptian Battalion. Because he was progressing more slowly than the advancing Dervishes, Hore-Ruthven stopped two

ABOVE LEFT: The orders of chivalry of Brigadier General Alexander Hore-Ruthven, 1st Earl of Gowrie VC, GCMG, CB, DSO & Bar, PC. (© IWM; Courtesy of the Lord Ashcroft Collection)

ABOVE RIGHT: Brigadier General Alexander Hore-Ruthven, 1st Earl of Gowrie VC, GCMG, CB, DSO & Bar, PC pictured wearing many of the medals, orders and decorations shown in the photographs on this page.

LEFT: A portrait of a young Hore-Ruthven. (© IWM; Courtesy of the Lord Ashcroft Collection)

RIGHT: Having been appointed Governor of South Australia, Hore-Ruthven arrived in Adelaide during May 1928. He took to his duties with enthusiasm, visiting many areas of the State in a de Havilland DH.60 Moth owned by his Aide-de-Camp, Captain Hugh Grosvenor. During 1931 Hore-Ruthven was present at the unveiling of the National War Memorial 'Spirit of Sacrifice' in Adelaide. He gave the following address during the ceremony: "It is not only for ourselves that we have erected this visible remembrance of great deeds, but rather that those who come after us and have not experienced the horrors of war, or realised the wanton destruction and utter futility of it all, may be inspired to devise some better means to settle international disputes other than by international slaughter. This memorial is the seal of South Australia's homage to her sons, who in the ranks of brave company from all parts of the Empire, gave their lives during the Great War."

BELOW: The medals awarded to Brigadier General Alexander Hore-Ruthven, 1st Earl of Gowrie VC, GCMG, CB, DSO & Bar, PC, all of which are on display in the Imperial War Museum. (© IWM; Courtesy of the Lord Ashcroft Collection)



or three times, put down the wounded man and fired on the enemy to check their advance. Nobody who witnessed the incident was in any doubt that the Egyptian officer would have been killed but for Hore-Ruthven's extraordinary bravery.

Hore-Ruthven's VC was announced in the *London Gazette* on 26 February 1899 when the final sentence of his citation confirmed the widespread belief that he had saved a comrade's life: "Had the officer been left where he first dropped, he must have been killed."

He received his decoration from Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle on



11 May 1899. Six days later, he joined the Cameron Highlanders as a second lieutenant and was promoted to full lieutenant the following year. Thereafter, he became a special service officer to the Somaliland Field Force and took part in the action at Jidballi in January 1904. From 1905 to 1908, he was military secretary to two successive Lords Lieutenants of Ireland, Lords Dudley and Aberdeen.

In 1908, he was promoted to captain in the 1st Dragoon Guards (he had had to go through the promotion system a second time after switching from the militia to the regular Army), and then worked as military secretary to the Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief of Australia until 1910.

During the First World War, Hore-Ruthven continued to cover himself in glory. From November 1914 to March

1915, he served as a brigade major in France. In April 1915, he was promoted to major in the Welsh Guards and two months later was employed with the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. However, he was seriously wounded at Gallipoli, becoming – in fact – the very first casualty of the newly formed Welsh Guards Regiment.

He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order on 2 May 1916, for his conduct in Gallipoli. Over the next two years Hore-Ruthven was mentioned no less than five times in despatches and was made a Companion of the Bath and a Companion of St Michael and St George, as well as receiving a Bar to his DSO.

This Bar was announced in the *London Gazette* on 10 December 1919, when his citation read: "He commanded his brigade with conspicuous gallantry and judgement throughout the operations



ABOVE LEFT: One hour after Japanese bombers struck at Hawaii on the morning of 7 December 1941, Prime Minister John Curtin of Australia declared that "from one hour ago, Australia has been at war with the Japanese Empire". Here Prime Minister Curtin looks on as the Governor-General of Australia, Lord Gowrie, signs Australia's declaration of war against Japan.

ABOVE RIGHT: The opening ceremony of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra on 11 November 1941. Amongst the many official guests on the flag-bedecked dais are the Governor-General of Australia, Lord Gowrie (front row, third from right), R.G. Menzies (left of flagpole, second row from back), and Senator J.S. Collings (right of Gowrie). (Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial; P01313.001)

BELOW LEFT: The Australian Governor-General, Lord Gowrie, pictured inspecting American troops on New Guinea, circa 1943. (Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial; 014914)

east of Ypres from 28 Sept. to 27 Oct. 1918 inclusive. His presence and personal bearing at critical times during the fighting was of decisive value, especially during a strong enemy counter-attack. On 20 Oct. at St Louis, he went forward among the attacking troops at a critical juncture, and inspired them to the final effort, whereby the high ground of great tactical value was captured."

As if all this was not enough, Hore-Ruthven was one of the very few men to be awarded the *Croix de Guerre* by both France and Belgium. His many other decorations included the prestigious Order of the Dannebrog from Denmark.

As a full colonel, he commanded the Welsh Guards from 1920 to 1924 and, for the following four years, the Guards Brigade at Aldershot. He retired from the Army with the rank of brigadier general. In 1928, he succeeded his friend, Lieutenant General Sir Tom Bridges, as Governor of South Australia, before taking up the post of Governor of New South Wales seven years later.





Australian commandos and sailors from Z Special Unit – better known as “Z Force” – succeeded in sinking seven enemy ships with limpet mines after they were smuggled in and out of the area on a fishing boat. The boat, under the command of Major Ivan Lyon, had been appropriately renamed *MV Krait* after a small, but deadly, Asian snake.

On 30 January 1945, Lord Gowrie was

ABOVE LEFT: Lieutenant Arthur Roden Cutler, on the right, after his investiture of the Victoria Cross by the Governor-General, Lord Gowrie, at Admiralty House on 11 June 1942. The announcement of Cutler’s VC in the *London Gazette* includes the following: “For most conspicuous and sustained gallantry during the Syrian Campaign and for outstanding bravery during the bitter fighting at Merdjayoun [in June 1941] when this artillery officer became a byword amongst the forward troops with whom he worked.” (Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial; 012576)

Later, in 1935, he was granted a peerage, becoming 1st Earl of Gowrie and Viscount Ruthven of Canberra and Dirleton (in East Lothian) for his services to Australia and, on 23 January 1936, he was sworn in as Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief of Australia. His war record and his charming personality made him immensely popular in Australia and the surrounding Commonwealth territories. He undertook some gruelling tours including visiting Papua and New Guinea, where both peoples gave him a warm welcome. In 1938, Lord Gowrie was made a member of the Privy Council.

His term of office as Governor-General was due to end in 1939 but his chosen successor, the Duke of Kent, then accepted a naval appointment on the outbreak of the Second World War, so Lord Gowrie agreed to stay on in Australia and supervise the Commonwealth’s war effort.

The war, however, also brought personal tragedy: his only son, Major The Hon Patrick Hore-Ruthven, died of wounds received in action in Libya whilst on an SAS mission in December 1942.

Fortunately, Patrick Hore-Ruthven had already fathered a son, Grey, who later, as the 2nd Earl of Gowrie, served in Margaret Thatcher’s Cabinet during the 1980s.

While serving in Australia, Lord Gowrie’s manifold qualities endeared him to all sections of the community. Many admired his superb fighting record as an officer, including his Gallipoli association with the ANZACs (the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps). Others warmed to his courteous manner, his wise counsel and his political and diplomatic skills.

Lord Gowrie’s own experiences as a soldier were invaluable during this period and he personally obtained the approval that was needed to launch Operation Jaywick, the famous raid on Japanese ships in Singapore in September 1943. In this daring Special Forces’ operation, fourteen British and



ABOVE and LEFT: Alexander Gore Arkwright Hore-Ruthven was born in Windsor. This Blue Plaque, which commemorates his gallantry in action for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross, can be seen at The Hermitage, Hermitage Lane in Windsor. (Both images courtesy of Peter Reed)

finally succeeded as Governor-General by the Duke of Gloucester and received an astonishing show of affection from the Australian people for his years of service. In fact, in office for nine years and seven days, he remains the longest serving Governor-General in Australian history and the only one to have been advised by five Australian Prime Ministers.

From 1945 to 1953, by which point Lord Gowrie was over eighty, he served as Deputy Governor and Lieutenant Governor of Windsor Castle. It was only in Coronation year that he finally retired from public life.

Brigadier General Alexander Hore-Ruthven, 1st Earl of Gowrie VC, GCMG, CB, DSO & Bar, PC died on 2 May 1955 in Shipton Moyne, Gloucestershire, at the age of eighty-two. Hore-Ruthven and his wife, who died in 1965, are buried together at St John the Baptist

Churchyard in Shipton Moyne.

When his orders, medals and decorations came up for sale at Christie’s in 1989, the auction house needed nearly two full pages to list and photograph all twenty of them. Similarly, a huge display case was later needed in order to display them at the gallery that bears my name in the Imperial War Museum. In fact, his is the largest medal group out of my entire collection of 181 VCs.

I feel immensely honoured to own and be able to show the public the awards of this wonderful soldier and statesman – a quite remarkable man who devoted almost his entire life to serving his country and the Commonwealth, both on and off the battlefield, all over the world. ■

VICTORIA CROSS HEROES

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a Conservative peer, businessman, philanthropist and author. The story behind the Hore-Ruthven VC appears in his book *Victoria Cross Heroes*. For more information visit: www.victoriacrossheroes.com Lord Ashcroft’s VC collection is on public display at the Imperial War Museum (though the museum is closed for refurbishment work until 29 July). For more information visit: www.iwm.org.uk/heroes

