

# LORD ASHCROFT'S "HERO OF THE MONTH" BANDSMAN THOMAS EDWARD RENDLE VC

## BANDSMAN THOMAS EDWARD RENDLE VC



## BOLDNESS

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. Though Bandsman Thomas Rendle's award is not part of the collection, Lord Ashcroft feels that it falls within the category of boldness:

"At certain times people take a calculated risk. With audacity, dash and daring, much can be achieved. In simple terms, who dares wins. Boldness combines force with creative thinking. It is impetuous and often completed before anyone knows what is going on."

**T**HE SON of a paper merchant's packer, Thomas Edward Rendle was born in Bedminster, Bristol, on 14 December 1884. One of seven children, he and his two brothers all served during the Great War.

Rendle was educated at St Luke's School, Bedminster, before attending nearby Kingswood Reformatory. After leaving school, he joined the Army in Bristol on 5 September 1902, aged 17. Then, days later, he joined the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (DCLI) in Bodmin, Cornwall.

In the aftermath of the Second Boer War, Rendle was sent with a draft to join the 1st Battalion DCLI at Stellenbosch, Cape Colony, and the battalion remained in South Africa until March 1906. However, shortly before leaving South Africa, Rendle, who was a bandsman, married Lillian Crowe, herself the daughter of a bandsman, on 7 February 1906. After he returned to Britain, the couple had two children, a daughter and a son.

Following the outbreak of the Great War, Rendle left for France on 13 August 1914. On 23 August, he took part in the Battle of Mons and, when a comrade was seriously injured, he commandeered a car to take him to hospital.

Rendle went on to take part in the Battle of Le Cateau and Battle of Aisne in France and, at the end of November, the First Battle of Ypres in neighbouring Belgium. This battle formally ended on 22 November, after which trench warfare set in for the rest of the war.

It was on 20 November that Rendle showed immense courage when a heavy enemy bombardment began at 09.00 hours. At the time, he was carrying out the task of stretcher bearer — a role given to bandsmen in times of war.



When a shell landed and exploded on 'A' Company's parapet, some 15 men were buried in their trenches and others were wounded and killed. Rendle hurried to the aid of the buried and wounded.

The fierce fighting extended to the afternoon and, at one point, with enemy artillery fire at its height, an officer sitting at the bottom of a trench was hit and injured. Realising that his comrade was in need of urgent medical attention, Rendle crawled towards Second Lieutenant Colebrooke, despite the fact that enemy snipers had the position well covered.

After reaching the injured officer, Rendle administered first aid before scraping and scratching a path through the fallen earth. With the injured man on his back, the bandsman eventually crawled to safety without being hit.

Although Rendle had escaped direct injury from the shell and sniper fire, his sight had been damaged by the high explosives that had detonated all around



When a shell exploded on the parapet of a trench during the First Battle of Ypres, a bandsman acting as a stretcher bearer leapt to the rescue. So began the story of the only VC awarded to Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry during the First World War.

him. He was therefore invalided home. In the aftermath of his bravery, he was promoted to lance corporal and sent to recuperate at No.1 Temporary Hospital in Exeter.

The award of his Victoria Cross was announced in *The London Gazette* on 11 January 1915. The investiture took place at Buckingham Palace on 12 July 1915 at a time when recipients of the VC were treated with celebrity status. In order to avoid the attention of the autograph hunters and female admirers outside the gates, Rendle and three other VC recipients needed a taxi to get them in and out of Buckingham Palace.

In fact, Rendle was the only member of the DCLI to be awarded the VC during the First World War and he was also decorated with the Order of St George, 4th Class (Russia). After leaving hospital, the bandsman was never well enough to return to the front line. Instead, he took part in a recruiting



campaign and was employed as a musketry instructor. At one point, he found time to return to his old school St Luke's, where he was given a warm reception by pupils and staff.

After being invalided out of the Army on 12 November 1920, with the rank of sergeant, Rendle returned with his family to South Africa where, as the recipient of the VC, he was always much respected. For many years, he was a part-time bandmaster with the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles, Cape of Good Hope, and he also worked as caretaker and stationery controller for a branch of Standard Bank. Furthermore, Rendle was an enthusiastic member of a South

African veterans' group called the Memorable Order of Tin Hats, "Moths" for short.

With Rendle abroad, an imposter in the UK with the same surname — Joseph Rendle — started impersonating him around the country, using a VC that he had bought to add authenticity to his claims. However, he was eventually arrested, charged and fined.

Rendle died from a coronary thrombosis at the Groote Shuur Hospital in Cape Town on 1 June 1946, aged 61. There were massive crowds on the streets of Cape Town for his funeral two days later. He is buried at Maitland Road No.1 Cemetery in Cape Town, while his VC and service medals belong to the DCLI Regimental Collection in Bodmin, Cornwall. ☉

**LEFT:** Bandsman Thomas Edward Rendle in action on 20 November 1914. The original caption states: "Whilst heavy howitzers were dropping their shells upon a trench occupied by the Cornwalls at Wulverghem, Bandsman Thomas Edward Rendle, of the 1st Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, was attending to the rapidly increasing number of wounded. Suddenly a huge shell burst upon the parapet of a trench nearby, completely shattering the top of it and burying some wounded men under the debris." (ALL IMAGES HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

**LEFT:** Rendle pictured during his stay in hospital in Exeter.

**BOTTOM LEFT:** A second drawing depicts Rendle, scraping the earth away with his bare hands under constant threat from shelling and sniper fire.

## VICTORIA CROSS HEROES

LORD ASHCROFT KCMG PC is a Conservative peer, businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His book *Victoria Cross Heroes* is largely based on his VC collection. 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 Museums, 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)

For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit: [www.lordashcroft.com](http://www.lordashcroft.com). Follow him on Twitter: @LordAshcroft



AGGRESSION • BOLDNESS • INITIATIVE • LEADERSHIP • SACRIFICE • SKILL • ENDURANCE