

LORD ASHCROFT'S "HERO OF THE MONTH"

Private George Imlach McIntosh

AGGRESSION

BOLDNESS · INITIATIVE LEADERSHIP · 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. Private George McIntosh's award is part of the collection and Lord Ashcroft feels that it falls within the category of

"For many actions killing is the means to the end. To prevail, maximum force has to be applied. Aggression is invariably fast and adrenalin fuelled. It epitomises the idea of 'hot courage', acting quickly in the mayhem of battle.."

A Portrait of George Imlach McIntosh

TOP RIGHT British troops crossing the Yser Canal at Boezinge near the area in which McIntosh and his colleague. fought, on 31 July 1917. The condition of the ground that da was appalling of the infantry being seriously handicapped by mud, which made it almost impossible for them to move out of a walk (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)



■ EORGE IMLACH McIntosh was born in Rathven, Banffshire, on 22 April 1897. He was the son of Alexander McIntosh, a fisherman, and his wife, Mary. As a young boy, he lived in Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire, and attended Fraserburgh Academy.

In 1910, his family moved to Buckie, Banffshire, and McIntosh became apprenticed to Tom Jones & Son, a local wood merchant. Soon after beginning his apprenticeship, he



worked on the Cluny Dock extension to Buckie harbour. As a teenager, he was a keen footballer and played for Buckie Thistle FC.

In 1913, McIntosh joined the 6th Battalion, Gordon Highlanders (Territorial Force). On the outbreak of hostilities in August 1914, he was serving in Tom Jones & Son's sawmill and, despite being only 17, was quickly mobilised. He arrived

with his unit in France on 10 November 1914 and went into the line on 6 December. Subsequently, he saw action at many of the major battles including Neuve Chapelle, Festubert, Givenchy, Loos and

Early on in the conflict, he suffered from trench-foot, which forced his evacuation, but he soon returned to the front line. However, it was on the opening day of the Third Battle of Ypres that Private McIntosh showed such outstanding bravery that he was awarded the VC.

The citation for his decoration described the role of McIntosh, by then aged 20, in fierce fighting north of St Julien, Belgium on 31 July 1917:

"For most conspicuous bravery when, during the consolidation of a position, his Company came under machine gun fire at close range. Pte. McIntosh immediately rushed forward under heavy fire, and, reaching the emplacement, he threw a Mill's Grenade into it, killing two of the enemy and wounding a third



ABOVE Men of the Gordon Highlanders on their way to the front in 1914. Pictured in Plymouth, the individual on horseback is Colonel William Eagleson Gordon VC, CBE. McIntosh did not arrive in France until 1916.





Subsequently, entering the dug-out, he found two light machine guns, which he carried back with him. His quick grasp of the situation and the utter fearlessness and rapidity with which he acted, undoubtedly saved many of his comrades and enabled the consolidation to proceed unhindered by machine gun fire. Throughout the day the cheerfulness and courage of Pte McIntosh was indomitable, and to his fine example, in a great measure, was due the success which attended his Company.

Hic VC was announced in The London Gazette on 6 September 1917. Just six days later, he returned to the UK on leave and, on 13 September, he arrived unannounced at his parents' home in Buckie. After word spread of his VC and his homecoming, he was presented with a purse of fifty gold sovereigns by his pre-war employer. Such was his new hero status that further gifts soon followed.

McIntosh received his VC from King George V in an investiture at Ibrox Park, Glasgow, on 18 September 1917. In an apparent attempt to prevent him facing further extreme danger, he was appointed as the batman to a senior field officer. However, he made it clear that he preferred to serve with

his battalion and he soon resumed his front line duties with the Gordon Highlanders.

McIntosh survived the rest of the war and, after being demobbed, returned to Buckie where he worked as a herring runner for Thomson & Brown, a local fish sales company. In July 1919, he moved back to Fraserburgh where, in the post-war depression, his jobs included working as the groundsman at Buckie bowls

On 27 April 1923, McIntosh got married in Elgin, Morayshire, to Alexandrina Sutherland, and the couple went on to have a son and a daughter. On 1 July 1939, McIntosh was appointed the janitor and groundsman of Buckie High School.

As the Second World War dawned. McIntosh tried to rejoin his old regiment but he was too old, at 42, to be accepted as an infantryman. On 26 August 1939, he was mobilised into the RAF and thus played a role in the Second World War, although this time away from the front line. From 1940-1, he served as Flight Sergeant in charge of ground defences at RAF St Eval, Cornwall.

In 1941, he was appointed as Station Warrant Officer at Reykjavik, Iceland. During this service, he was attached to HMS Manilla, a maintenance ship running between Iceland and Archangel, Russia. On one voyage, the ship was attacked and set on fire by enemy bombs. Although a number of crew were preparing to abandon ship, McIntosh showed both bravery and leadership in persuading them to remain at their posts and help put out the fires that threatened the petrol tanks. For his actions, he was Mentioned in Despatches.

During the Second World War, McIntosh also served at various RAF fighter stations in the UK, including Manston, Kent, and Coltishall in Norfolk. In 1945, he was demobbed at

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



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Ludham, Norfolk, and returned to his pre-war school janitor's job. In 1955, McIntosh was made a Freeman of the Royal Borough of Buckie.

In 1956 he attended the VC centenary celebrations in London, and four years later, in February 1960, he took a day off from his job to become the first and only "ranker" in the history of his regiment to take the salute at a passing out parade.

Later the same year, he encountered serious health problems, including a series of heart attacks which resulted in two operations. McIntosh died in Woodend Hospital, Aberdeen, on 20 June 1960, aged 63. Four days later, hundreds of mourners attended his funeral when he was buried at the New Cemetery, Buckie, with full military honours.

There is a portrait in his honour at the Gordon Highlanders Museum in Aberdeen. I become the proud custodian of McIntosh's medal group in 1996 when I purchased it at a Spink auction in London. This summer I loaned this splendid medal group to the Gordon Highlanders Museum in Aberdeen to mark the centenary of McIntosh's VC action.

TOP LEFT George McIntosh's VC medal group

Private McIntosh 'C' Company 6th Battalion, Gordon Highlanders, is presented with the Victoria Cross by King George V.

BELOW

General Sir Ivor Maxse (GOC 18th Corps) presenting medal ribbons to men of the 51st (Highland) Division for acts of gallantry undertaken on 31 July. The ceremony took place at School Camp, St. Janster Biezen, on 21 August 1917.

