

## VC Biog 7 Ranken, Harry Sherwood, VC 1043 words excluding refs

### Morag Cross 14 February 2014

#### \*\*\*7.1

The numerous tributes to army doctor, Captain Harry S Ranken, VC, all noted that by his death, medicine had lost an outstanding researcher into tropical diseases. At the comparatively young age of 31, he had already contributed substantially to healthcare both military and civilian.

#### \*\*\*7.2a and b use both

Harry (not 'Henry') Sherwood Ranken (1883-1914) was born in Glasgow, the elder son of Rev Henry Ranken, assistant, and then parish, minister of Irvine from 1891 until 1928. Harry Ranken was Dux of Irvine Royal Academy in 1899, an indication of his outstanding academic achievements to come. [Sources: Hew Watson (and others), 1920, 'Irvine Parish', *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* Vol 3, *Synod of Glasgow and Ayr*, p101; Obituaries, *British Medical Journal*, 3 Oct 1914, p608; 12 Dec 1914, p1049; *Glasgow Herald*, 28 Sept 1914, p9].

#### \*\*\*7.3a or b, and use c as well

He studied medicine at Glasgow University, winning (among other awards) three prizes in renowned surgeon Professor Sir William McEwan's classes. He graduated in 1905, becoming house-physician at the Western Infirmary, Glasgow (where he would have known Dr DJ Mackintosh, father of fellow VC recipient Donald Mackintosh, see separate story). He was next the assistant medical officer at the Brook Fever Hospital, London (where a successor institution, the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, has named one building 'Ranken House'). [Sources: 'Captain Harry Sherwood Ranken', *University of Glasgow Story*, at [www.universitystory.gla.ac.uk](http://www.universitystory.gla.ac.uk); 'Sir William Macewen CB, DSc, DCL, MD, FRS (1848-1924)', *Historic Hospital Admission Registers Project*, at [www.hharp.org](http://www.hharp.org); Obituaries, *British Medical Journal*, 3 Oct 1914, p608; 12 Dec 1914, p1049; Heidi Bullimore, Senior Communications Officer, Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust, personal communication].

#### \*\*\*7.4

In the entrance examination for the Royal Army Medical Corps, 'which was open to the whole [British] Empire, he took first place', in 1909, and continued to prove his brilliance. He won the prizes in hygiene, military and tropical medicine, and the prize for highest overall marks during the course. From 1909-11, he was stationed in London, and in 1910 the Royal Society appointed him assistant to bacteriologist and pathologist Dr Henry Plimmer. They researched and published jointly on new treatments for trypanosomiasis, the parasitic deadly disease better-known as African sleeping sickness. [Sources: *Glasgow Herald*, 28 Sept 1914, p9; 'RAMC Profile of Harry Sherwood Ranken MB, CHB, MRCP', *RAMC in the Great War*, at [www.ramc-ww1.com](http://www.ramc-ww1.com); 'The Services', and Obituaries, *British Medical Journal*, 17 July 1909, p181; 3 Oct 1914, p608; 12 Dec 1914, p1049; 'Plimmer, Henry George (1856-1918)', Ref No GB0100 TH/PP46, *College Archives: King's College, London*, [Online Catalogue], at [www.kingscollections.org](http://www.kingscollections.org)].

#### \*\*\*7.5a and b use both

He also assisted fellow Glasgow graduate Lt Col H B Leishman, the RAMC's Professor of Pathology. Leishman was working on anti-typhoid vaccines around this period, and had previously identified the cause of 'dum dum fever' or Leishmaniasis. Even as a young lieutenant, Ranken's own contribution was obviously highly valued by such eminent colleagues. [Sources: *Glasgow Herald*, 28 Sept 1914, p9; 'RAMC Profile of Harry Sherwood Ranken MB, CHB, MRCP', *RAMC in the Great War*, at [www.ramc-ww1.com](http://www.ramc-ww1.com); 'The Services', and Obituaries, *British Medical Journal*, 17 July 1909, p181; 3 Oct 1914, p608; 12 Dec 1914, p1049; H D Rolleston, 2004, 'Leishman, Sir William Boog', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [Online Edition], at [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com); 'Leishman, Lt-Gen. Sir William Boog', *Who Was Who*, 2007 [Online Edition], Oxford University Press, at [www.ukwhoswho.com](http://www.ukwhoswho.com)].

### \*\*\*7.6a and b use both

Ranken became a member of the Royal College of Physicians of London in 1910, and in September 1911, was attached to the Egyptian Army, where he 'accepted an appointment [on] the Sudan Sleeping Sickness Commission'. He went to the Yei River in Lado Enclave, Sudan, recently reclaimed by the British from the notorious misrule of Belgian monarch Albert II. Ranken used intravenous metallic antimony for treating sleeping sickness, and discovered that it was also effective against yaws, a disfiguring and infectious skin disease. [Sources: *British Medical Journal*, 18 Oct 1911, p422; 29 June 1912, p1482; 24 Aug 1912, p408; 12 Dec 1914, p1049; H S Ranken, 'The Treatment of Human Trypanosomiasis and Yaws ...', *Proc Royal Soc London. Series B*, 86, Dec. 17, 1912, pp203-14; 'Yaws, Factsheet No 316', *World Health Organisation*, at [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)].

### \*\*\*7.7

Ranken returned to Irvine in the summer of 1914, intending to return to the Sudan to continue his research, but it was left unfinished. He volunteered for service immediately war broke out, and was attached to the 1st Battalion, The King's Royal Rifle Corps. They landed in Rouen on 13 August, and almost at once, his 'gallant conduct under fire', between 21 and 28 August made him a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honour. Ranken was also mentioned in Sir John French's Despatches on the Battle of the Aisne, but his great consideration for others was to cost him his life. [Sources: *British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920*, [Online Database], and *De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour*, Vol 1, p301, [Online Resource], at [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); *Glasgow Herald*, 28 Sept 1914, p9; 8 Jan 1917, p8; Obituaries, *British Medical Journal*, 3 Oct 1914, p608; 12 Dec 1914, p1049; 'King's Royal Rifle Corps', *The Long, Long Trail*, at [www.1914-1918.net](http://www.1914-1918.net); *Glasgow Medical Journal*, Vol 87, Feb 1917, p102; *London Gazette*, Issue 28945, 20 Oct 1914, p8388].

### \*\*\*7.8

Dates and places given in Ranken's VC citation in the *London Gazette* conflict with the official war records of his regiment. The Rifle Corps were in Haute-Avesnes a week earlier than the *Gazette* notice specifies, so it would appear that Ranken's award was received for actions at La Bouvette Wood, during the Battle of the Aisne, on 19 September. It was during this battle that the side-effects of shellfire 'astonished the medical world', the concussive shockwave following the explosion causing blindness, lung damage, and death without apparent external injury. Ranken experienced the intended effect, ironically from a British shell, which 'almost severed ... his leg ... [He] got combat officers to bind his own wounds', and arrest the bleeding. [Sources: Gerald Gliddon, 2005, *VCs*

*Handbook: The Western Front 1914-1918*, Sutton Publishing, p10; *London Gazette*, Issue 28976, *Third Supplement of 13 Nov*, Published 16 Nov 1914, p9374; *Times History of the War*, Vol 4, p45].

### \*\*\*7.9

Ranken refused to leave his patients, continuing to tend their injuries, and thereby sacrificed his own survival. 'He lay where he fell overnight ... the ground over which he was carried was so rough ... he was twice tumbled out of the stretcher'. He would not allow his case to be prioritised over others, and his leg was eventually amputated. An eyewitness saw Ranken on a stretcher at Braisne Railway Station, talking and feeling comfortable, but he later died of a blood clot. [Sources: *Glasgow Herald*, 8 Jan 1917, p8; *Glasgow Medical Journal*, Vol 87, Feb 1917, p102; 'RAMC Profile of Harry Sherwood Ranken MB, CHB, MRCP', *RAMC in the Great War*, at [www.ramc-ww1.com](http://www.ramc-ww1.com)].

### \*\*\*7.10a and b use both

Ranken received the Victoria Cross in the very first list of such honours during the war, announced on 16 November, 1914. *The Times* medical correspondent (anonymous) claimed friendship: 'Even the enemy has not been able to refuse honour to the work of [the RAMC] ... [Ranken] in a literal sense gave his life for his friends ... calm and fearless, and infinitely careful for [his patients]'. [Sources: *Glasgow Herald*, 17 Nov 1914, p6; *London Gazette*, Issue 28976, *Third Supplement of 13 Nov*, Published 16 Nov 1914, p9374; *The Times*, 19 Nov 1914, p8].

### \*\*\*7.11a and b use both -7.11a is the VC citation and is the whole point of the story

The numerous tributes mention the lost potential, and what Ranken might have contributed to medicine, had he lived. Sir William Leishman, now with the British Expeditionary Force, and fellow officers deplored his loss to science. [Sources: Obituaries, *British Medical Journal*, 3 Oct 1914, p608; 12 Dec 1914, p1049; *De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour*, Vol 1, p301, [Online Resource], at [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); *Evening Telegraph*, 15 Jan 1915, p4].

### \*\*\*7.12a and b use both

As early as June 1915, papers were noting 'The death roll of VCs', as twelve out of the seventeen then awarded 'died in winning the honour'. Three months later, 'The number of VCs who were either killed ... or subsequently [died] grows with every list', as twenty-three, including Ranken, had then died. [Sources: *Western Gazette*, 25 June 1915, p5; *Liverpool Echo*, 7 Sept 1915, p5].

### \*\*\*7.13a and b use both

Possibly because he was one of the first nine VC recipients of the war, and a non-combatant (as a doctor), Ranken's self-sacrifice caught the popular imagination. He appeared on numerous collectable cigarette cards and savings stamps, and was remembered by the staff of the Western Infirmary with a stained glass window. As the parish minister, his father, Rev Henry Ranken, erected a memorial plaque inside Irvine Old Parish Church and a carved monument in the churchyard. His father also led prayers at the unveiling of Irvine War Memorial in 1921. [Sources: *Evening Telegraph*, 12 Mar 1921, p3; *Glasgow Herald*, 8 Jan 1917, p8; *The Scotsman*, 8 Jan 1917, p6; *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 8 Jan 1917, p2].

### \*\*\*7.14a and b

Ranken left a physical legacy, as Rev and Mrs Ranken founded a memorial prize for Glasgow medical students studying pathology, one of Ranken's special interests, and in the early 1930s, the local 'Toc H' charity dedicated a lamp to his memory. Irvine, his home town, has named two streets after their notable former resident, Ranken Crescent and Ranken Drive. [Sources: *Glasgow Herald*, 15 Feb 1924, p7; *The Scotsman*, 15 Feb 1924, p10; *Evening Telegraph*, 12 Dec 1933, p10].

**\*\*\*7.15a and b use both**

The Royal Army Medical Corps continues to remember Ranken. In 1958, his sword was worn by an officer of the Guard of Honour at the 60th Anniversary Service for the RAMC in St Paul's Cathedral. Alan R Ranken presented his elder brother's Victoria Cross and medals to the RAMC in 1967, to be displayed in the Headquarters Mess. Ranken's VC is now proudly displayed in the Army Medical Services Museum at Aldershot. [Sources: *The Times*, 25 June 1958, p6; 'The late Captain Harry Sherwood Ranken, VC, MRCP, RAMC', *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, 1967, Vol 113, p111].

**\*\*\*7.16a and b use both – this is his grave and must be used**