

## VC Biog 5 Henry May, VC (873 words excluding refs)

### Morag Cross 1 Feb 2014

#### \*\*\* VC5.1

In August 1915, the *Glasgow Herald* announced: 'Private Henry May, VC, 1st Scottish Rifles (Cameronians) ... for conspicuous bravery ... at La Boutillerie on October 22 [1914] has been awarded the highest honour' in the British army. Although the Herald mistakenly reversed the title of his regiment, this Victoria Cross was especially significant to the city, because 'Private May is the first [Glaswegian] to receive the [VC]' during the war. [Source: *Glasgow Herald*, 2 Aug 1915, p9].

#### \*\*\* VC5.2a and b use both

Henry May (1885-1941) grew up in Bridgeton, one of six children of an Irish-born gasworks-stoker. Henry's mother was born in Madras, India, during her father's service there in the Royal Artillery. Possibly inspired by his grandfather, May, a textile worker, was already a part-time Volunteer soldier when he enlisted in The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) in 1902, aged only 17 (although recorded as being 18). [Source: Census 1881, 1891, 1901, *British Army WWI Pension Records 1914-1920*, at [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); Statutory Register of Marriages, Deaths, at [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk); '4th (Volunteer) Battalion, The Scottish Rifles,' *Scottish Military History Website*, at [www.scottishmilitaryarticles.org.uk](http://www.scottishmilitaryarticles.org.uk)].

#### \*\*\* VC5.3

May served in South Africa, transferred to the Army Reserve in 1905, and by 1914 he had three children and worked for Frew, Forrest & Co, muslin manufacturers in Bridgeton. As a reservist, May was mobilized the day after war broke out. He was posted to the 1st Battalion, The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) on 6 August and embarked to France the following week. [Sources: Source: *British Army WWI Pension Records 1914-1920*, at [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); Census 1911, at [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk); *Glasgow Herald*, 2 Aug 1915, p9].

#### \*\*\* VC5.4a and or b

The Battalion participated in the retreat from Mons, fighting on the Mons-Conde Canal, Le Lateau, and around 26 August, the Cameronians covered 56 miles in just 36 hours. The also fought in the battles of the Marne and Aisne. [Source: 'Typescript Summary', *Victoria Cross Biography No M33, Pte Henry May VC*, Military Historical Soc', Cuttings File, Compiler W M Lummis, National Army Museum, London].

#### \*\*\* VC5.5

On 22 October 1914, while the battalion were digging new positions (literally, entrenching themselves) at La Boutillerie, Lt D A H Graham's platoon, which included Private May, 'was sent out in front as a screen against ... attack'. [Source: 'Typescript Summary'; Brig R G Thorburn, 'VCs of the Regiment: IV: The Great War', *The Covenanter (Regimental Journal of the Cameronians)*, March 1956, both in *Victoria Cross Biography No M33, Pte Henry May VC*, Military Historical Soc', Cuttings File, Compiler W M Lummis, National Army Museum, London].

**\*\*\* VC5.6**

May himself recalled 'At daybreak ... my platoon ... advanced about 700 or 800 yards [to] a ditch. ...the enemy ... were many times our number. We managed to stop them until [the battalion] finished the trench-digging ... As soon as we left the ditch [L/Cpl Lawton] was wounded ... about 100 yards away ... I ran across the firing line, through a hail of lead, followed by two of my chums, namely L/Cpl James McCall and Private James Bell'. [Source: 'Typescript Summary', *Victoria Cross Biography No M33, Pte Henry May VC*, Military Historical Soc', Cuttings File, Compiler W M Lummis, National Army Museum, London].

**\*\*\* VC5.7**

May was typically low-key about his bravery. 'I just did what any man in the regiment would have done ... to bring in a wounded man, Lance Corporal Lawton ... the Germans had machine guns on us at a range of about 50 yards. Lt Graham followed me out and emptied his revolver into [them]'. [Source: *Glasgow Herald*, 2 Aug 1915, p9].

**\*\*\* VC5.8a or b**

The full extent of the danger is described in retrospect by May himself: 'When I got to [L/Cpl Lawton] I ... pulled him to his feet. [McCall] took one arm and I the other ... but the Huns had no respect for the wounded but continued to fire ... [Lawton] was killed in my arms and ... McCall ... [rendered] unconscious. I then flattened myself ... to fire my last cartridge, when [Lt Graham was shot]'. [Source: 'Typescript Summary', *Victoria Cross Biography No M33, Pte Henry May VC*, Military Historical Soc', Cuttings File, Compiler W M Lummis, National Army Museum, London].

**\*\*\* VC5.9a or b**

'It was great devotion that impelled me to rescue him. He had been so good to us', said May of his platoon commander, Graham. 'He was behind me, I had to go back ... the Germans firing all the time ... between [Pte Bell and myself] we took [Graham]'. They covered 'quarter of a mile in a zig-zag manner' when 'Bell was shot ... but ... wriggle[d] into safety ... we were about 300 yards from the British trenches'. [Source: *Glasgow Herald*, 2 Aug 1915, p9; 'First City VC ... Dies', *Glasgow Eastern Standard*, 2 Aug 1941, pp5, 8].

**\*\*\* VC5.10a and b use both**

May 'managed to drag the lieutenant still nearer safety', Corporal Taylor 'came running over out of cover... [and] told me to lift Mr Graham on to his shoulders', but 'no luck, the corporal [Taylor] was shot dead' while still holding Graham, who was hit by the same bullet. 'Graham implored me to leave him', but May dragged to cover, reached the trenches himself and sent out stretcher bearers to retrieve Graham. The man they saved honoured his three rescuers by later becoming a highly-decorated major-general. [Source: *Glasgow Herald*, 2 Aug 1915, p9; 'Typescript Summary', *Victoria Cross Biography No M33, Pte Henry May VC*, Military Historical Soc', Cuttings File, Compiler W M Lummis, National Army Museum, London].

**\*\*\* VC5.11a, b or c use one**

May was hospitalised by shrapnel, or officially, a 'gunshot wound in face' received at Ypres on 2 November 1914. His surprised wife, Christina, learned the (belated) news of his award from journalists in Colvend St, Bridgeton in April 1915. May received a rapturous welcome on his return to Glasgow in August 1915, being carried shoulder-high through the railway station. It was a bittersweet homecoming, however, as his younger brother, L/Cpl James May, King's Own Scottish Borderers, had been killed in action on 18 October, 1914. [Sources: *Glasgow Herald*, 2 Aug 1915, p9; *Daily Record and Mail*, 20 April 1915, quoted on *Bridgeton's War Hero: Pte Henry May*, Compiled by Will McArthur, 2002, at [www.glesga.ukpals.com](http://www.glesga.ukpals.com); *British Army WWI Pension Records 1914-1920*, at [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); 'Casualty Details: James May', *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, at [www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org); 'Pte Henry May', *Lloyd's Weekly News*, 18 April 1915, in *Victoria Cross Biography No M33, Pte Henry May VC*, Military Historical Soc', Cuttings File, Compiler W M Lummis, National Army Museum, London].

**\*\*\* VC5.12a and b use both**

On the first anniversary of the war, 4 August 1915, he addressed a munitions committee meeting in Bridgeton: 'The hero-worshippers ... were twice disappointed, for Private May entered and left ... practically unrecognised [wearing] a long waterproof [and] a cloth cap'. [Source: *Glasgow Herald*, 5 Aug 1915, p3].

**\*\*\* VC5.13a –VC citation must be used important - and either b or c**

May attended Glasgow City Council's celebratory luncheon the following day, as well as touring local munitions factories, saying 'Stick to your work for the sake of the boys in the trenches!' King George V presented the VC on 12 August 1915, and May retired from the army shortly afterwards. He re-enlisted, and was commissioned as a temporary second lieutenant in the Royal Army Service Corps in 1918. [Sources: *Daily Sketch*, 11 Aug 1915, p12; *Glasgow Herald*, 6 Aug 1915, p9; 13 Aug 1915, pp7, 9; *British Army WWI Pension Records 1914-1920*, at [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); 'Typescript Summary', and Brig R G Thorburn, 'VCs of the Regiment: IV: The Great War', *The Covenanter (Regimental Journal of the Cameronians)*, March 1956, both in *Victoria Cross Biography No M33, Pte Henry May VC*, Military Historical Soc', Cuttings File, Compiler W M Lummis, National Army Museum, London].

**\*\*\* VC5.14**

Bridgeton was a traditionally a centre of the textile manufacturing industry, and Henry May later became a partner in the Glasgow Manufacturing Company, a hosiery firm. His funeral in 1941 was attended by fellow Glasgow Victoria Cross recipients Downie, McAulay, Ritchie (see separate stories), and D H Lauder. [Sources: 'First City VC ... Dies', *Glasgow Eastern Standard*, 2 Aug 1941, pp5, 8; and typescript extracts, *Daily Record and Mail*, 30 July 1941, in *Victoria Cross Biography No M33, Pte Henry May VC*, Military Historical Soc', Cuttings File, Compiler W M Lummis, National Army Museum, London].

**\*\*\* VC5.15a or b**

May's Victoria Cross was purchased for The Cameronians Regimental Museum, Hamilton, in 1994, and his time-worn gravestone was renewed by former Cameronians, among others, in September, 2006. It bears the words, 'He risked his all for others, and we remember him with pride'. [Sources:

'VC Returns to Cameronians', *Soldier* 8 Aug 1994; 'Victoria Cross Holders: Private Henry May', *The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) General Trust Website*, at [www.cameronians.org](http://www.cameronians.org).

**\*\*\* VC5.16a or b**

Bridgeton remembers him as well, with a series of granite paving slabs inset with local Victoria Cross holders' names installed at Bridgeton Cross in November 2010, including Henry May, 1885-1941. [Sources: L Keough and J McGinley, 'Lest We Forget', *Glasgow Local News*, 11 Nov 2010, at [www.localnewsglasgow.co.uk](http://www.localnewsglasgow.co.uk); 'Remembrance service Bridgeton 11/11/10', Discussion thread started 23 Oct 2010, *RHF Veterans Forum*, at [www.rhf.org.uk](http://www.rhf.org.uk)].

**\*\*\* VC5.17a, b c and/ or d use as many as required**