

VC Biog 6 John McAulay, VC

Morag Cross 2 Feb 2014

*****VC6.1 a or b**

The war memorial to the City of Glasgow Police in Glasgow Cathedral bears the inscription 'Go tell our city, Living we guarded thee, Dead we guard thee still', a version of the Spartans' famous epitaph at Thermopylae. The only Scottish policeman to gain the Victoria Cross during the First World War was Sergeant John McAulay (1889-1956), of the 1st Battalion, The Scots Guards.

*****VC6.2**

John McAulay was born at Kinghorn, Fife in 1889, the son of a coalminer from Cumbernauld. His family moved to Plean, Stirlingshire, another mining district, and he duly followed his father down the pits. In 1911, he joined the City of Glasgow Police as a probationary constable, and was posted to the Northern Division in March that same year. [Sources: A Dinsmor, 'Constable John McAulay, VC, DCM, City of Glasgow Police', *The Glasgow Police Museum*, at <http://gphs1800.tripod.com/Mcaulay.htm>; Statutory Register of Births, 1911 Census, at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk].

*****VC6.3**

A champion wrestler in police sporting competitions, McAulay joined the 3rd Battalion, The Scots Guards, the regiment of choice for many Glasgow police officers, on 3 September 1914. The Guards were 'in most of the fighting since Mons (August 1914)', and McAulay received rapid battlefield promotions including three in one day in October 1915 (to Corporal, unpaid Lance Sergeant, and acting Sergeant). McAulay, now in the 1st Battalion, was Mentioned in Despatches (officially listed for bravery in the field), in December, 1916. [Sources: *Glasgow Herald*, 12 Jan 1918, p7; *Dundee Courier*, 4 Mar 1918, p4; *London Gazette*, Issue 29890, *Second Supplement* of 2 Jan, Published 4 Jan 1917, p219; 'Military History Sheet', John McAulay, *British Army WWI Pension Records 1914-1920*, at www.ancestry.co.uk].

*****VC6.4**

In September 1917, he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, second only to the VC, for actions during the Battle of Ypres in July 1916. He commanded 'his platoon after his officer had been killed. He cleared two strongly-held dugouts, killing all their occupants, and whenever a sniper's post was located ... he accounted for several single-handed'. Another account says 'For clearing pill-boxes [and] ... accounting for several snipers single-handed'. His award was announced during King George V's morale-boosting tour of Clydeside ship-builders in 1917. An officer said 'you ought to have got it ages ago', as he had been recommended for it an astonishing four times already. [Sources: *The Scotsman*, 14 Jan 1918, p3; *Glasgow Herald*, 19 Sept 1917, p9; UK, *Citations of the Distinguished Conduct Medal, 1914-1920*, at www.ancestry.co.uk; *London Gazette*, Issue 30287, *Fifth Supplement of 14 Sept*, published on 17 Sept 1917, p9598; A Dinsmor, 'Constable John McAulay, VC, DCM, City of Glasgow Police', *The Glasgow Police Museum*, at <http://gphs1800.tripod.com/Mcaulay.htm>; O'Moore Creagh, E M Humphries, 1924, *The VC and DSO, The Complete Record*, Vol 1, pp268-9].

*****VC6.5a or b- use one of the window; and also use one of either c or d, dedication plaque**

The climax to McAulay's incredible series of acts of courage came on a sunken road, at Fontaine Notre Dame, on 27 November 1917 during the Battle of Cambrai. The Guardsmen were pinned down on the trackway, which ran below the level of the surrounding fields, by ferocious German

machine-gun fire. Company commander Lt A Kinnaird, encouraged his men to hold the embankment for several hours, enduring fierce hand to hand fighting. [Sources: *Aberdeen Journal*, 20 March 1918, p2; 21 March 1918, p2; *London Gazette*, Issue 30471, *Sixth Supplement of 8 Jan*, Published 11 Jan 1918, p723].

*****VC6.6**

Kinnaird was wounded by a shell, 'McAulay ran to his aid, lifted him on to his back and carried him ... with shells bursting ... The German fire was terrific'. The Germans advanced again, and McAulay, still carrying the officer, 'rallied the men', placed Kinnaird in shelter, and 'seized a machine gun, placed it in the centre of the road, and as the Germans came over the ridge [he] ... completely stopped the attack ... returned to his [Kinnaird] and carried him ... 500 yards through a tornado of ... bullets from machine guns'. McAulay also killed two Germans who tried 'to intercept him'. All but five of the platoon were killed or wounded, but McAulay 'bore a charmed life', and was completely unharmed. He was said to have 'accounted for fifty of the enemy by himself'. [Sources: *Aberdeen Journal*, 20 March 1918, p2; 21 March 1918, p2; *Dundee Courier*, 12 Jan 1918, p3; *London Gazette*, Issue 30471, *Sixth Supplement of 8 Jan*, Published 11 Jan 1918, p723; Gerald Gliddon (ed) 2005, *VCs Handbook: The Western Front 1914-1918*, Sutton Publishing, p122].

*****VC6.7a and b use both**

'He would gladly have given up ... VC, DCM and all' to save Kinnaird's life, but the lieutenant died of his wounds. An Aberdeen journalist in the trenches recorded how McAulay learned of his award in January 1918. 'A modest man [he] was deafened by the cheers ... [fellow sergeants] almost [shook] his strong right arm off ... the VC was ... mounted shoulder high ... and headed by the piper ... marched round and round'. [Sources: *Aberdeen Journal*, 20 March 1918, p2; *Dundee Courier*, 25 April 1918, p3].

*****VC6.8a, and/ or b, and/or c as required (versions of same pic with different lighting etc)**

McAulay returned home on 7 February 1918, and was decorated by King George V on 16 March, but still managed to win a wrestling match 'against Jack Douglas the heavy-weight champion of England ... in the Olympia Picture Palace, Stirling ... for £25'. His father, sadly, died the following week at Plean, near Bannockburn. McAulay won a further wrestling match during a military charities fundraising fete in Belgrave Square, London in September 1918 (which also included hat-decorating competition for wounded soldiers!). [Sources: *Dundee Courier*, 4 Mar 1918, p4; *Evening Telegraph*, 8 Mar 1918, p4; *The Times*, 16 Sept 1916, p5; Military History Sheet and Casualty Form B103, *British Army WWI Pension Records 1914-1920*, at www.ancestry.co.uk].

*****VC6.9**

McAulay rejoined the police in January 1919, where 'such was the high esteem in which he was held', that he was promoted to sergeant that June. He also married in April 1919, but his wife Isabella Horn tragically died in childbirth the following year. The Glasgow Police War Memorial in the Cathedral, designed by architect J J Waddell, was dedicated on the anniversary of Armistice Day, 1921. McAulay laid a wreath at the ceremony, commemorating the 173 police officers of the city's Police Force who had died. He became an Inspector in 1922, and remarried in 1923, to Catherine Thomson. [Source: *Glasgow Herald*, 12 Nov 1921, p4; A Dinsmor, 'Constable John McAulay, VC, DCM, City of Glasgow Police', *The Glasgow Police Museum*, at <http://gphs1800.tripod.com/Mcaulay.htm>; Statutory Registers of Marriages, Deaths at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk].

*****VC6.10a, and either b or c**

John McAulay, VC, DCM, spent most of his career in the Central Division, only retiring in 1946 after 34 years' service. He died aged 67, at his home in Aitkenhead Road in 1956. His daughter, Isabel S McAulay, presented his Victoria Cross to The Scots Guards in 1964. [Sources: *Glasgow Herald* 16 Jan 1956, p2; A Dinsmor, 'Constable John McAulay, VC, DCM, City of Glasgow Police', *The Glasgow Police Museum*, at <http://gphs1800.tripod.com/Mcaulay.htm>; H Smith, 1964 'Sergeant John McAulay, VC, DCM', *Scots Guards Magazine* 1964, pp51-2; Statutory Registers of Marriages, Deaths at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk].

*****VC6.11 a or b (versions of same pic)**