

Sailor V.C.'s.



WING to the preponderance of the military element in the records of this world-renowned decoration, the naval heroes are apt to be overlooked; and yet their cases make most fascinating reading, as will be evident from the selection set forth in the following pages. It is by no means well known that the very

pretty general, the other forts opening fire as the ships closed. At noon a masked battery of destructive 24-pounders commenced operations on the *Hecla*. The range was only 500yds., and almost every shot told.

Suddenly, with a roar and a scream, a great live shell crashed on to the *Hecla's* quarter-deck, where young Mr. Lucas stood directing his men. In the twinkling of an eye the brave young mate had made up his mind to deal with the deadly thing; so, seizing it with both hands, the fuse hissing in his face, he hurled it into the sea. Almost before reaching the water, the shell exploded with a terrific roar, but its awful destructiveness was harmlessly spent on the balmy air and the dancing, sunlit waves.

For this heroic deed Mr. Lucas was immediately promoted lieutenant; and on the institution of the Victoria Cross (January 29th, 1856) he was strongly recommended for the "new naval and military decoration," by Sir Charles Napier.



REAR-ADMIRAL C. D. LUCAS.
(The very first recipient of the V.C.)
From a Photo. by Fradelle & Young.

first award of the Victoria Cross was given to a naval officer, the present Rear-Admiral C. D. Lucas. On the 20th of June, 1854, the British Fleet was bombarding Bomarsund, a fort in the Aland Islands, Gulf of Bothnia. As usual, every officer burned to distinguish himself; but Captain Hall, of the *Hecla*, had a little plan of his own. Under his orders were the *Valorous* (Captain Buckle) and the *Odin* (Captain Scott); and with these he resolved to attack the fortress independently. Next morning at ten o'clock the three vessels steamed into position, and immediately opened fire on the principal fort—which, by the way, mounted the formidable armament of eighty guns. The fire was at once returned, and the action became



"SEIZING THE SHELL WITH BOTH HANDS HE HURLED IT INTO THE SEA."

Not only the first V.C., but the second also, was awarded to a naval officer—Lieutenant (now Rear-Admiral) John Bythesea (a fine nautical name). This case is one of the most romantic deeds of daring to be found even in the annals of the Victoria Cross. Our fleet lay off the Island of Wardo, in the Baltic, on August 7th, 1854, Lieutenant Bythesea being an officer of the watch on board H.M.S. *Arrogant*, the senior flagship, commanded by Captain Yelverton. After paying an official visit to Sir Charles Napier one day, the captain came back to his ship and remarked to young Bythesea that Sir Charles had through him administered a gentle rebuke to the whole fleet.

"He has learned," said Captain Yelverton, "that important despatches from the Czar are constantly being landed on the island (Wardo) and then forwarded to the commanding officer at Bomarsund. And Sir Charles is surprised rather that no officer has had sufficient enterprise to put a stop to this kind of thing."

This was more than enough for the young lieutenant, who there and then resolved to emulate the exploits of Dick Turpin. The moment his "turn" on deck was over, he inquired at the ship's office whether any man on board spoke Swedish. Yes! Stoker Johnstone did, having been born in the country; and Stoker Johnstone found the adventure after his own heart. When Captain Yelverton heard of Bythesea's intention, he suggested a stronger "force" than two men for so perilous a mission. He was overruled, however, on the ground that a large party would be likely to attract attention, and so ruin the whole affair.

On the 9th of August, Johnstone and his officer landed in a small bay and strolled along to a farm-house close by. Here the gallant stoker got into conversation with the Finnish farmer, whose language was painful and frequent and free. This was because the Russians had "hired" all his horses, so he

couldn't gather in his crops. Sympathy with these grievances brought valuable information and hospitality to the "expedition." Johnstone, prompted by his officer, remarked casually, "I hear that mails and despatches are carried through Wardo to Bomarsund; they'd be important, I suppose?" "Important!" echoed the farmer, "I should think so, indeed. Why, the Russians repaired nine miles of the road to facilitate their transport." This was conclusive enough, for when the Russians take to road-repairing, they are usually actuated by something far more urgent than the mere well-being of the community.

The farmer promised his visitors food, and lodging in an outhouse, if not in the farmhouse itself. It soon became known, however, that a party had landed from the British Fleet, and the Russians instituted searching inquiries in every direction, even going as far as domiciliary visits. One night the very farmhouse in which Bythesea and his companion slept was surrounded by soldiers, and the adventurous twain had given up all hope, when they were skilfully saved by their host's young daughters, who disguised them beautifully as Finnish peasants. After this came several other narrow escapes of capture and certain death. One day these daring fellows met a Russian search party, where-

upon they slouched down to the beach, put off in a small boat, and rowed out to sea, this time masquerading as fishermen.

On the morning of the 12th of August—the fourth day of the adventure—Lieutenant Bythesea learned from his farmer friend that the Russian mails were landed, and that these, as well as the usual despatches, would be sent on to the fortress that night in charge of the Emperor's *aide-de-camp*. "The escort will number five or six men," continued the farmer, "and will start as soon as the moon rises. They proceed until they reach that part of the island nearest the British



REAR-ADMIRAL BYTHESEA.
From a Photo. by Maull & Fox.

fleet, and then they lie low until the moon has disappeared."

Now, by this time the young officer knew every inch of the route traversed, so at midnight he and his companion took up positions close to the spot selected as a hiding-place by the mail-carriers and their escort. In a few minutes, the whole Russian party came along quietly, and concealed themselves at the roadside, one man almost touching the English officer. Suddenly up jumped the latter, his pistol covering the soldier nearest him; Johnstone did the same. Three of the five men were overcome with terror, thinking that a large force was upon them, but two of the carriers dropped their bags and took to their heels. The remaining three were quickly disarmed, and sternly ordered to get into the big boat close by, taking the mail bags and despatches with them. The moment the boat was launched the prisoners were compelled to row, Bythesea steering, while the chuckling stoker sat in the bow, revolver in hand.

The adventurers were only just in time. Soon after their boat had glided away into the darkness, the Russian guard came along to see whether the mails had been got through safely. Seeing nothing of the carriers, they went back, singing, to report that all was well.

When the prisoners had been put on board the *Arrogant*, the mails and despatches were taken to Sir Charles Napier, whose surprise and admiration were unbounded. The senior officer, General Baraguay d'Hilliers, could not at first credit the story; but his scepticism gave way to enthusiasm on beholding the valuable papers in his own cabin.

We next have to consider a double-barrelled case, in which the coveted decoration was gained by Admiral of the Fleet Sir



ADMIRAL SIR JOHN E. COMMEREILL, G.C.B.

From a Photo. by John Hawke, Plymouth.
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QUARTERMASTER W. RICKARD.

From a Photo. by Hughes & Mullins, Ryde.

John E. Commerell, G.C.B., and Chief Officer of Coast Guards W. Rickard: the democratic nature of the V.C. is here very apparent.

In 1855, the *Weser*, Commander Commerell, was in the Sea of Azov; and about a month after the fall of Sebastopol, it occurred to this dashing young officer that he ought to "be around" doing things. At this time it was well known that the Russians had immense stores of corn and forage stacked in granaries in the vicinity of Genitchi and along the Isthmus of Perekop. These stores were originally intended for the garrison of Sebastopol, and their destruction was one of the principal objects that brought our fleet to the Sea of Azov in 1855.

On Thursday night, October 11th, three stout-hearted volunteers quietly left the *Weser*; these were Commander Commerell, Quartermaster W. Rickard, and an A.B. named Milestone. Presently their small boat touched the Spit of Arabat, and here the three landed, their mission being to make bonfires of the Russian cornstacks, which lay some miles away, on the banks of the Salghir River. After hauling the boat across the Spit, they again took to the water and pulled over the Putrid Sea. At length the gallant fellows quitted the boat and struck inland for about three miles towards the granaries, wading through two turbulent rivers on the way. The corn was protected by a guard, as



"RICKARD DASHED BACK, AND LITERALLY DRAGGED HIS MATE OUT OF THE BOG."

well as by a large body of Cossacks, stationed in a village hard by.

It says much for our heroes' caution that they reached their goal unobserved; and then, without losing a moment, Commander Commerell set fire to the biggest stacks on the windward side, his companions also doing their share in other directions, and with due regard to the meteorological conditions then prevailing.

In a moment, fierce flames shot up here and there, and a frightful outcry burst from the Russians. The Cossacks got under arms, mounted, and dashed at full gallop after the incendiaries, who had taken to their heels towards the boat. An incessant fusillade was kept up, and the fugitives had many miraculous escapes. They had almost reached the shore of the Putrid Sea, when they suddenly found themselves waist deep in an awful morass. Commerell and Rickard managed to flounder out, but poor, exhausted Milestone stuck fast like one of his inanimate namesakes. It was an awful moment. The galloping Cossacks were almost upon them; the sky was lurid with their handiwork; and to linger seemed

to court immediate destruction. Nevertheless, Rickard dashed back, and, though greatly distressed himself, literally dragged his mate out of the bog, the Russians being then less than 40yds. distant. In another minute or so, Commerell had pushed off into the darkness amidst a perfect hail of bullets from the baffled Cossacks. Plainly, the latter would have served their Imperial master better had they remained behind and tried to extinguish the flames.

Midshipman Arthur Mayo, formerly of the Indian Navy, won his Cross during the dark days of the Mutiny. Towards the end of 1857 there was an Indian Naval Brigade, as well as one from the Royal Navy, prepared for service inland, there being little to do on board ship. On November 22nd, a smart party of volunteers, together with about a hundred of the Indian Marine, were sent on to Dacca, north-east of Calcutta, to disarm some companies of the 73rd Bengal Sepoys stationed at that place. The Sepoys got to hear of the object of this expedition, and promptly prepared to resist. A sharp hand-to-hand encounter ensued, the sailors charging right into the enemy's lines,



MIDSHIPMAN ARTHUR MAYO.
From a Photo. by Cox & Durrant, Torquay.



ADMIRAL SIR NOWELL SALMON, K.C.B.
From a Photo. by the London Stereoscopic Company.

cutting down the gunners where they stood. Mr. Mayo led the attack on two particularly well-served 6-pounders; and during the daring race up to the muzzle of these guns, he was actually more than sixty feet ahead of his shipmates—"stormed at with shot and shell," of course.

The next portrait is that of Admiral Sir Nowell Salmon, K.C.B., who, as a lieutenant of just ten months' standing, gained the V.C. at the second relief of Lucknow, in November, 1857. After Sir Colin Campbell had captured the Secunderbagh, on the afternoon of Monday, the 16th, he turned his attention to the Shah Nujjiff—a large mosque within a walled garden, strongly occupied by the mutineers. For upwards of three hours Captain Peel's guns, as well as a field-battery, had vainly plied this fort with shot and shell. The defenders were in comparative safety, while the attacking force—including Peel's "Shannon" Brigade—was exposed to a particularly murderous fire. Presently one of the naval guns was ordered up to within 20yds. of the Shah, and our poor blue-jackets fell faster than ever, mainly owing to the extraordinary marksmanship of a certain Sepoy, who had posted himself on the wall, well under cover. There appeared to be no

means of checking this deadly fire, or even returning it with effect, save by climbing a big tree that grew at one corner of the fort. At last Captain Peel announced that whoever would bring the sharpshooter down should receive the V.C.

The response to this was not exactly enthusiastic, for it seemed to involve certain death. Presently, however, a volunteer dashed forward, but no sooner had his eager arms gripped the gnarled trunk than he dropped lifeless. Then came two more heroes—Lieutenant Salmon and Seaman John Harrison. The former climbed the tree like a monkey, and then after "fixing" his man by means of his binocular glass, he called out to Harrison to hand him up a loaded rifle. Next moment the binocular was shattered to pieces in his hand, but young Salmon took aim coolly and fired like a Queen's Prizeman at Bisley. The Sepoy fell dead; and Lieutenant Salmon and his companion received the V.C. on Christmas Eve, 1858.

It is no wonder that our gallant defenders in both Services should have such a brilliant reputation for valour the world over. Their officers are ever ready to set an example of that dauntless daring that has given us our unique place among the nations of the earth. Take the case of Rear-Admiral A. K. Wilson, C.B., who gained this coveted decoration on February 29th, 1884.



REAR-ADMIRAL A. K. WILSON, C.B.
From a Photo. by John Hawke, Plymouth.

After the catastrophe that overtook poor old Valentine Baker in the Eastern Soudan, a small force under Sir Gerald Graham, V.C., moved into that part of the Khedive's dominions, and soon encountered the enemy, 10,000 strong, at El Teb. A naval force, consisting of 115 officers and men, and commanded by Sir William Hewett, V.C., co-operated with Graham, whose little army, all told, numbered 3,750. Few people who

the Greek heroes. For some time he wrought great havoc, but at last his sword blade snapped off a few inches below the hilt, and the valorous captain was practically defenceless. He was immediately speared, and severely wounded. Nevertheless, casting his sword-hilt full in the face of the foremost Arab, he dashed in front of his men and commenced to floor the swarthy warriors *with his fists!* The Arabs fell back



"WILSON DASHED IN FRONT OF HIS MEN AND COMMENCED TO FLOOR THE SWARTHY WARRIORS WITH HIS FISTS."

read these lines can conceive the ferocity with which Osman's stalwart spearmen hurled themselves on the British squares time after time.

The warriors didn't like the machine guns of the Naval Brigade, nor the 9-pounders of the Royal Artillery, and they strove desperately to capture these respect-compelling pieces. The blue-jackets had to drag their guns, as well as load and fire them, so the close attention of the Arabs was found very trying.

Hand-to-hand fights were everywhere in progress; and in the midst of the frightful carnage appeared Captain Wilson, laying about him with his long sword like one of

amazed, thinking the man was mad, so Wilson's extraordinary heroism certainly saved many lives. A moment later the gap in the British square closed up, and the captain was rescued by his adoring blue-jackets.

Only three men of colour have received the Victoria Cross, and Captain of the Foretop William Hall was the first of these. He was one of the *Shannon* Naval Brigade under Sir William Peel, V.C., at the historic relief of Lucknow. Like Admiral Sir Nowell Salmon, Mr. Hall gained his V.C. during the storming of the Shah Nujiff Fort, which only yielded, after a long



SEAMAN W. HALL.
From a Photo. by E. Ayling, Croydon.

and stubborn fight, to the impetuous rush of the 93rd Highlanders. Asked as to the various incidents of the battle, Mr. Hall said he couldn't remember everything, since his attention was mainly taken up by the 24-pounder, of which gun he was the captain. "The part we took in pounding the Shah," observed this venerable seaman, "was pretty much the same as though we were engaging a naval enemy; we got as close up as we could, and gave 'em no time. Besides, the closer we got, the more we escaped the murderous fire of the Sepoys. I remember that after firing each round we ran our gun forward, until at last my gun's crew were actually in danger of being hit by splinters of brick and stone torn by the round shot from the walls we were bombarding.

"Our lieutenant, Mr. Thomas Young, moved from gun to gun with a quiet smile and a word of encouragement; and when at last the gunner next to me fell dead, Mr. Young at once took his place. I

have heard it said," concluded the old hero, quietly, "that my gun wrought tremendous havoc on the walls of the fort."

Lieutenant-Colonel G. D. Dowell (Royal Marine Artillery) hardly missed a single action in the Baltic during the two years our fleet occupied that sea. Early on Friday, July 13th, 1855, the boats of H.M.S. *Arrogant* engaged the Russian gunboats together with the fortress of Viborg, in the Gulf of Finland. During the action a shell exploded the magazine of one of our cutters, which was used as a rocket-boat. The boat did not sink, but immediately swamped, and then drifted slowly away under the batteries. One of the seamen on board (George Ingouville, V.C.), although severely wounded, jumped into the sea, swam round to the boat's painter, and then commenced to tow her off, so as to prevent her falling into the enemy's hands as a prize. At this time many of the crew were clinging helplessly to the boat, and were in imminent danger either of being drowned or killed by the shower of grape and small shot poured by the Russian gunners upon the helpless craft.

Seeing this, Lieut. Dowell, who was on board the *Ruby*, leaped into one of the ship's boats with a few volunteers, seized the stroke oar, and pulled with might and main towards the disabled cutter. The risk was terrible, as the gunboats and fortress were concentrating their fire on the one target. Notwithstanding this, the young lieutenant rescued three of the half-drowned crew, and placed them safely on board the *Ruby*. Once more Dowell and his gallant companions advanced fearlessly towards the belching batteries, this time rescuing poor Ingouville, and taking the cutter in tow. Finally, amid the ringing

cheers, not only of their own comrades but also of the Russians, Lieutenant Dowell's party drew out of range and placed in safety the rescued boat and her distressed crew.

That fine, jovial-looking seaman, Chief-Gunner Israel Harding, gained his V.C. on board the *Alexandra*, at the bombardment of Alexandria. At first the practice of the Egyptian gunners was somewhat erratic, but it improved; and very soon well-placed shells were dropping here and there on the British



LIEUT.-COL. G. D. DOWELL, R.M.A.
From a Photo. by Heath & Bullingham.

ships. "One," says Mr. Harding himself, "fell close to the sheep-pen on the *Alexandra*, and killed all the poor, terrified animals—the only damage the missile did. The next shell tore away our strong iron stanchions, bounded along between Captain Hotham and Staff-Commander Hoskins, then tore a chunk out of the mainmast, and finally went overboard, little regretted. A third shell exploded in our steam launch, killing one man and maiming many others. At this time I was passing through the main and upper decks to inspect the supply of ammunition for the guns, when a huge shell from Fort Ada came plunging through the *Alexandra's* port bulwark—just past the feet of Commander Thomas, who was standing on the hammock netting. The projectile was deflected by a metal stanchion, and then entered the Commander's cabin, where it exploded with an appalling roar, tearing and destroying everything. I was then about to descend the ladder of the next deck leading to the after powder magazine, when another great shell pierced the ship's side and passed through the torpedo lieutenant's cabin. It then struck the strong iron combings of the engine-room, and bounded on to the deck among the blue-jackets, who instantly screamed, 'A shell! A shell!'

"My own course of action was decided upon as quick as thought. I just picked up that shell, and flung it into a tub full of water; it was heavy, hot, and grimy. It is dreadful to think what would have happened had the shell exploded. Close at hand was the hatchway leading to the magazine, which at that moment contained *twenty-five tons* of gunpowder. For this act of duty," concludes Mr. Harding, modestly, "I was in the first place promoted to chief gunner, and later on recommended for the Victoria Cross."



CHIEF GUNNER ISRAEL HARDING.
From a Photo. by Barkshire Bros., Southsea.



REAR-ADMIRAL H. J. RABY, C.B.
From a Photo. by W. P. Floyd, Hong Kong.

Rear-Admiral H. J. Raby, C.B., has the distinction of being the first man upon whose breast the Queen pinned the Victoria Cross; the ceremony took place in Hyde Park, opposite Grosvenor Gate, on Friday morning, June 26th, 1857. Admiral Raby then held the rank of Commander. It was while serving as lieutenant with the Naval Brigade in the trenches before Sebastopol that this heroic officer gained his V.C. After the first disastrous attack on the Redan, our officers and men retreated towards the trenches in as orderly a

manner as possible, although scores of gallant fellows fell during that same retreat.

On reaching the sorry "shelter" of the trenches, which were simply ploughed with shot and shell and rifle bullets, Lieutenant Raby heard a cry of pain. Looking up, he saw lying on the missile-swept slope outside, one of the 57th—a raw recruit who had come straight from England to join the famous old "Die Hards," of Albuera. The wounded man lay some eighty or ninety yards beyond the breastwork, and was repeatedly seen trying to rise; this he was utterly unable to do, however, having been shot through both legs. Young Raby's mind was at once made up. Calling for assistance, two seamen of his brigade—Henry Curtis and John Taylor—promptly responded, and the three heroes rushed out towards their helpless comrade. Eye-witnesses tell how the ground around them was instantly swept by a perfect hail of missiles, poured forth by the riflemen who swarmed on the ramparts of the Redan. Unheeding, the little rescue party raised the prostrate youth and quietly bore him in under cover, amid the enthusiastic cheers of their comrades in the trenches.

Young Edward Robinson was one of the Naval Brigade at the siege and

capture of Lucknow; and he won the V.C. on March 13th, 1858. At sunrise the English opened fire once more, the enemy being on their flank as well as in front. Thousands of mutineers swarmed on the other side of the Goomtee River. The fire was briskly returned, and our gallant fellows began to throw up batteries—of a sort. Some of these “defences” had to be erected among dustheaps, the material being branches of trees, dry grass, and straw—anything, in fact, that would make the dust and sand of the so-called earth-works cohere on either side of the guns.

The weather was frightfully hot. Water was scarce and difficult to procure, as the

were some large tubs full of water, together with a number of water-skins. Seizing two or three of these latter, Seaman Robinson quickly filled them, and then dashed back to the guns. Leaping on to the fiercely-burning heaps, he poured gallons of water on the flames, which he ultimately succeeded in extinguishing. Of course, while engaged in this heroic work, he was exposed to another and far more deadly fire, though he was not hit at that moment.

In order to reach the most obstinate part of the blazing batteries, Robinson had to go right outside with his skins of water, and then it was that the Sepoy riflemen redoubled their exertions. Two of the engineers who were at the same time trying to effect some repairs were shot dead by the gallant seaman's side; and just as he himself was standing on the battery emptying the last requisite bag of water, he received a bullet through his shoulder, breaking the collar-bone. The young hero saw his assailant take aim at him, and could, no doubt, have sought shelter, only he considered his duty was not yet finished. Mr. Robinson fell backwards into the works, and lay unconscious while his comrades breached and stormed the enemy's position,



SEAMAN EDWARD ROBINSON.
From a Drawing.

native carriers, who had manfully stuck by the British, were rapidly being shot down. Soon the defensive works became as dry and inflammable as tarred rope. During the night the water-bearers kept pouring the precious fluid on the heaps, but it simply ran through, only to be licked up later on by the fierce morning sun. Presently shell after shell came flying into the batteries—for all the world as if the Sepoys knew their tinder-like composition. Suddenly the “earthworks” blazed up like a furnace, and then, of course, the guns had to be abandoned. Not for long, however. In the rear of the batteries



“ROBINSON POURED GALLONS OF WATER ON THE FIERCELY-BURNING HEAPS.”

as a preliminary to the occupation of the King of Oude's palace beyond.

The next naval veteran whose portrait is here reproduced is Seaman George Hinckley, who gained the V.C. in China in 1862. On October 8th of that year, Hinckley and his comrades left their ship, the *Sphinx*, and marched about thirty miles. Three days' rations carried—nothing more epicurean, however, than adaman-tine biscuit and salt pork. To-day the Chinese roads are not exactly cycle racing tracks, but in 1862 their condition was truly awful. Besides, it rained in torrents during the march, so that "the only dry thing about us was our ammunition—the seventy rounds of ball in our pouches."

Next morning, at four o'clock, the soaked sailors were piped to breakfast. No coffee could be prepared, so the meal consisted of a biscuit or two, and half a gill of rum. Then came the attack on Fung Wha, held by the redoubtable Taipings, who were more than ready for battle. At eight o'clock a dash was made for the gate, and before long many of our brave fellows were lying dead and wounded around the place. The fire from the loopholes and turrets of the gate was simply appalling—great jagged balls, slugs, old screws, and nails. Mr. Hinckley was one of the very few who miraculously escaped without a graze.

The master's assistant, Mr. Croker, was leading his gallant seamen close up to the crazy old walls, when he fell, badly wounded. At this time nothing could live before the Taiping fire, so our fellows got under cover.



SEAMAN GEORGE HINCKLEY.
From a Photo. by Maul & Foz.

Then, having no combatants handy, the marksmen on the walls turned their attention to poor Croker and another wounded officer. The sheltered blue-jackets could hear the mud and gravel ploughed up around the prostrate men; and it was at this moment that Hinckley gained his Cross. After gaining permission from another officer, he deliberately ran out into the open, lifted Mr. Croker in his arms, and threw him over his left shoulder face downwards, so as not to impede his own progress back under cover. There was a joss-house about 150yds. away, and for this the hero made with his helpless burden. After handing the master's assistant

over to the surgeon, Mr. Hinckley actually returned to the spot to the other wounded officer who lay there; and after accomplishing the second rescue under a fusillade of incredible violence, he returned to his duty and his comrades.



"HINCKLEY RESCUES HIS OFFICER UNDER FIRE, AND BEARS HIM TO A JOSS-HOUSE."