

The Great War Victoria Cross Winner – Sgt John Moyney 1895 – 1980

By Chris Percival (Great-Grandson)

John Moyney VC was born on January 8th 1895 in Rathdowney, Co. Laois. As a young man, he worked with local farmers. He enlisted 7th April 1915 with 2nd Battalion Irish Guards and left for France on 5th October 1915 with No 5 Company. He was promoted to Lance-Corporal on 20th December 1915 and Lance-Sergeant on 18th October 1916.

During the famous battle of the Somme, he had a lucky escape, after being buried alive by a shell blast. By the late summer of 1917 Moyney was a Lance-Sergeant in No 3 Company, under the command of Captain Gunston, who recommended him for the VC. On 12/13th September 1917 at Ney Copse, Belgium, north of the Broembeek stream, Moyney was in command of fifteen men forming two advanced posts. The Broembeek cut through the northern sector of the Ypres front, between Wijdendrift and the southern edge of Houthulst Forest. At 2.45 am on the 13th September, Moyney and his men were left isolated after a German attack. They found themselves surrounded and cut off as a result of their comrades being captured on one flank and had been ordered to retreat on the other flank, thinking that Moyney and his men had been captured or killed.

After sanctioning the abandonment of the remaining posts and a withdrawal of the main line to a new position, a patrol was sent across the Broembeek with orders to bring in casualties, cover the withdrawal of posts still holding out in Ney Copse and reconnoitre the enemy positions. By a series of errors Ney Copse was not thoroughly searched and one platoon of No 3 Company was left behind. By the time the mistake was realised it was too late to risk another patrol. The missing platoon's plight appeared hopeless. Moyney's platoon had been divided between two posts on the southern edge of Ney Copse. He took



charge of one with fifteen men. The other post was commanded by Corporal Fitzgerald. After they were cut off, the Germans had established a machine-gun post between them and the Broembek. Surrounded by the Germans, Moyney held his post for four days and five nights, having no water and little food. On several occasions they were shelled by both the Germans and the British. On the fifth day, with over 200 Germans advancing to dislodge him, he attacked them with bombs, while also using his Lewis gun team with great effect. Finding himself surrounded, he led his men in a charge through the Germans and reached the stream. On reaching the stream, Moyney and Private Woodcock covered the party while they crossed unscathed, before crossing themselves under a shower of bombs and machine-gun fire. As a result of those events in September 1917, John Moyney was recommended for the Victoria Cross - the highest military honour for bravery in the field. His citation was published in The London Gazette, Wednesday 17th October 1917.



The Moyney Family

The Citation reads as follows:

His Majesty The KING has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of the Victoria Cross to the undermentioned Officer, Non-Commissioned Officers and men.

"No. 7708 L./Sgt. John Moyney, Ir Gds. (Rathdowney, Queen's County)"

'For most conspicuous bravery when in command of fifteen men forming two advanced posts. In spite of being surrounded by the enemy he held his post for ninety-six hours, having no water and little food. On the morning of the fifth day a large force of the enemy advanced to dislodge him. He ordered his men out of their shell holes, and taking the initiative, attacked the advancing enemy with bombs, while

he used his Lewis gun with great effect from a flank. Finding himself surrounded by superior numbers, he led his men in a charge through the enemy, and reached a stream, which lay between the posts and the line. Here he instructed his party to cross at once while he and Pte. Woodcock remained to cover their retirement.

When the whole of his force had gained the southwest bank unscathed he himself crossed under a shower of bombs. It was due to endurance, skill and devotion to duty shown by this non-commissioned officer that he was able to bring his entire force safely out of action'.



Left Jack Moyney with Thomas Woodcock

John Moyney VC returned home after the war and obtained a job as Head Porter in Roscrea



Railway Station, County Tipperary, where he worked for almost forty years. Along with a local priest, he helped set up a Section of the Transport Branch of the St. Joseph's Young Priests' Society in his place of work. The St. Joseph's Young Priests' Society helps with the education and training of young Priests. Moyney collected for forty years and raised £7000. He collected funds daily at Roscrea Railway Station and also cycled around to local farmers collecting money for the Society. He was able to extract generous amounts of money from wealthy protestant farmers, mainly because he had fought in the Great War and had won the Victoria Cross. Moyney, like most of the men that had fought in the



Great War, felt that while they went away as heroes at the outbreak of the war, however, upon their return home the political climate had changed as a result of the 1916 Rising. After the executions of 1916 the general public became sympathetic towards the rebels. Many of the men who returned were called traitors and had become targets for local IRA flying columns. Not so Moyney: he would say in later years that after winning the Victoria Cross, he was too famous for the IRA to assassinate. Also he had fought with many of the men who went on to fight in the War of Independence with the IRA and the Civil War. Jack Moyney, as he was locally and popularly known, was the last surviving Irishman of The Great War to win the Victoria Cross. His Great War medals can be viewed in the Regimental Headquarters Museum of the Irish Guards, London. He died on the 10th November 1980 and is buried in Roscrea Roman

Catholic Cemetery.

The picture above was taken by the famous Fr. Browne and shows Cpl. Andy Duggan Pte. Bergin and Sergeant Moyney (centre) VC at Warley Barracks in Essex 1919. Photo taken by Fr. Francis Browne M.C. Irish Guards.

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