

= Robert Henry Cain =

Major Robert Henry Cain VC TD ( 2 January 1909 ? 2 May 1974 ) was a Manx recipient of the Victoria Cross , the highest award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces .

Cain grew up on the Isle of Man and joined the Honourable Artillery Company in 1928 . After working overseas he was given an emergency commission into the Army in 1940 . He transferred to the South Staffordshire Regiment in 1942 , and joined their 2nd Battalion , part of the British 1st Airborne Division . He saw action during the Invasion of Sicily in 1943 and again during the Battle of Arnhem the following year . During the battle Major Cain 's company was closely engaged with enemy tanks , self @-@ propelled guns and infantry . Cain continually exposed himself to danger while leading his men and personally dispatched as much enemy armour as possible . Despite sustaining several injuries he refused medical attention and for his gallantry he was awarded the Victoria Cross .

Later in the war he took part in Operation Domsday , where the 1st Airborne Division oversaw the German surrender in Norway . He left the army in late 1945 and returned to his pre @-@ war job at Royal Dutch Shell . He died of cancer in 1974 .

= = Early life = =

Robert Cain was born in Shanghai on 2 January 1909 . His parents were Manx and returned to the Isle of Man when he was young , where he was educated at King William 's College . In 1928 Cain joined the Honourable Artillery Company , a unit of the Territorial Army ( TA ) . The TA was the volunteer reserve force of the British Army and members continued in civilian work ; Cain worked in Thailand and Malaya for Shell . He was placed on the supplementary reserve list on 12 February 1931 .

= = Second World War = =

In April 1940 , shortly after the start of the Second World War , Cain was given an emergency commission into the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers as a Second Lieutenant . In 1942 , he was seconded to 2nd Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment before being temporarily promoted to the rank of Major in April 1943 ? a position he would keep until being honourably granted the rank in 1945 . The 2nd Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment was part of 1st Airlanding Brigade which landed in Sicily in July 1943 as part of Operation Ladbroke . In the same month , Cain took command of the battalion 's B Company .

= = = Battle of Arnhem = = =

The Battle of Arnhem was part of Operation Market Garden , an attempt to secure a string of bridges through the Netherlands . At Arnhem the British 1st Airborne Division and Polish 1st Independent Parachute Brigade were tasked with securing bridges across the Lower Rhine , the final objectives of the operation . However , the airborne forces that dropped on 17 September were not aware that the 9th SS and 10th SS Panzer divisions were also near Arnhem for rest and refit . Their presence added a substantial number of Panzergrenadiers , tanks and self @-@ propelled guns to the German defenses and the Allies suffered heavily in the ensuing battle . Only a small force managed to hold one end of the Arnhem road bridge before being overrun on the 21st . The rest of the division became trapped in a small pocket west of the bridge and had to be evacuated on the 25th . The Allies failed to cross the Rhine , which remained under German control until Allied offensives in March 1945 .

= = = Advance into Arnhem = = =

The Allies planned to fly the British and Polish to Arnhem in three separate lifts over three days . Major General Roy Urquhart decided to deploy the 1st Airlanding Brigade first , as glider troops could assemble more quickly than parachute infantry and secure the landing areas . Cain took off with the first lift along with two companies of the South Staffords but only five minutes after departing from RAF Manston the tow rope connecting the Albemarle tug to his Horsa glider pulled out of the leading aircraft . After landing safely the glider 's occupants were able to fly out the following day with the second lift .

In Arnhem the Allied plan quickly unravelled . Only a small group of the 1st Parachute Brigade , mainly elements of Lieutenant Colonel John Frost 's 2nd Battalion , were able to reach the bridge . The 1st and 3rd Battalions were unable to penetrate the outer suburbs of the city and their advance stalled , so in order to support them the first lift of the South Staffords were sent forward on the morning of the 18th . When Cain arrived with the second lift they too were sent forward , arriving at the outskirts of Arnhem on the night of the 18th . Lieutenant Colonel David Dobie of the 1st Battalion proposed a concentrated attack on a narrow front between the Lower Rhine and the Arnhem railway line . The South Staffords would advance toward the bridge , with the remnants of the 1st and 3rd Battalions on their right flank , while the 11th Parachute Battalion , remained in reserve . The Staffords moved forward at 4.30am with D Company in the lead , followed by B and A Companies with C Company in reserve . In the area around St Elizabeth Hospital , the lead company met heavy resistance clearing houses and B Company took the lead , getting as far as a dell near the Arnhem City Museum . Here Cain and his men encountered enemy armour for the first time . The company was only armed with PIATs and mortars and although Cain and several of his company opened fire on the tanks and guns , they did not manage to disable any . By 11 : 30 they had run out of PIAT ammunition and the tanks now dominated the area . Their position was clearly hopeless and so Lieutenant Colonel McCardie , the commanding officer ( CO ) of 2nd Battalion , The South Staffordshire Regiment , ordered them to withdraw from the dell . Cain fell back with several of his men but few of them were able to escape , while the men of the other companies were forced to surrender in their droves . Cain was the only senior officer of the battalion to escape in what he later described as the " South Staff 's Waterloo " .

As the surviving men fell back through the 11th Battalion 's positions , Major Gilchrist ( A Company , 11th Battalion ) met Cain , who told him that " The tanks are coming , give me a PIAT " . Gilchrist was unable to oblige and so the Staffords regrouped behind the 11th Battalion 's positions ; roughly 100 surviving men forming into five small platoons under Cain 's command . Lieutenant Colonel George Lea , commander of the 11th Battalion , ordered them to capture a piece of wooded high ground known as Den Brink to cover a fresh advance , and a bayonet charge quickly cleared the enemy there . However , the thick tree roots on the hill made it impossible to dig in , and after suffering severe casualties , Cain took the decision to withdraw back to Oosterbeek .

= = = = Oosterbeek perimeter = = = =

The remnants of the four battalions fell back in disarray to the main divisional positions at Oosterbeek . Here they were gathered into defensive units by Lieutenant Colonel Sheriff Thompson , CO 1st Airlanding Light Artillery Regiment , who forcibly stopped many of the panicked troops . Alarmed that the many retreating units would soon leave his own 75 Millimetre Howitzers undefended , he sought out Cain , the most senior officer , and ordered him to form the men into a defensive screen ahead of the gun positions . Thompson later sent Major Richard Lonsdale to take command of these outlying troops , and throughout Wednesday 20 they weathered strong German attacks before falling back to the main divisional perimeter . The sector was designated " Thompson Force " , but was renamed " Lonsdale Force " when Thompson was wounded the following day . To the north and west of Oosterbeek other units fell back in the face of strong German resistance and over the next few days a thumb shaped perimeter formed around the town , with the Rhine at its base .

Lonsdale Force 's sector covered the southern end of the eastern perimeter , and Cain was one of three Majors defending this sector of the line . As the battle progressed he became determined to

destroy as much enemy armour as possible and sited himself in a laundry 's garden , much to the chagrin of the Dutch owner . Over the coming days Cain was everywhere , dealing with armour and snipers and encouraging his men . On the afternoon of Thursday 21st two tanks approached Cain 's position . Guided by a colleague in a building above him , Cain waited in a trench until the first tank ? actually a StuG III self @-@ propelled gun ( SPG ) ? was close enough to engage . The SPG fired at the building , killing Cain 's colleague and showering him with masonry but despite this , Cain kept his position . Staff Sergeant Richard Long of the Glider Pilot Regiment remembered that through the clouds of dust , Cain fired round after round from his PIAT until the SPG was disabled , but whilst engaging the second tank a round exploded in the PIAT with a bright flash and Cain was thrown backwards . Cain recalled thinking he was blind and " shouting like a hooligan . I shouted to somebody to get onto the PIAT because there was another tank behind . I blubbered and yelled and used some very colourful language . They dragged me off to the aid post . " The British brought forward one of the Light Regiment 's 75mm guns which blew the tank apart .

Witnesses believed that Cain was incapacitated , but within half an hour his sight returned . He refused morphia and against all advice returned to the front lines , deciding that he " wasn 't wounded enough to stay where [ he ] was " . On the following day his eardrums burst from the constant firing and barrage , but he was content to stuff his ears with bandages and continue fighting . On Sunday 24th , shortly after a truce to allow the evacuation of casualties , Cain was alerted to the approach of a Tiger tank . Together with a Royal Artillery gunner he raced for a 6 pounder anti @-@ tank gun , manoeuvred it into position , fired and disabled the tank . He wanted to continue using the gun , but the recoil mechanism was destroyed .

By 25 September , the area occupied by the Lonsdale Force saw heavy fighting against self @-@ propelled guns , flamethrower tanks , and infantry . There were no PIATs available to the force by now ; instead Cain armed himself with a two @-@ inch mortar . Mortars are muzzle @-@ loading indirect fire weapons but Cain was forced to fire it on an almost horizontal plane due to the enemy 's proximity . His citation states that his leadership ensured that the South Staffordshire gave no ground and drove the enemy off in complete disorder . By the end of the battle , Cain had been reportedly responsible for the destruction or disabling of six tanks , four of which were Tigers , as well as a number of self @-@ propelled guns .

That night the Division began to withdraw in Operation Berlin . Many men shaved and blackened their faces and Cain removed a week 's growth of beard from his face , drying himself on his dirty , blood @-@ soaked Denison smock . After successfully crossing the Rhine , this led Brigadier ' Pip ' Hicks to comment " there 's one officer , at least , who 's shaved " . Cain 's reply was " I was well brought up , sir . " Cain made sure all of his men were over the river by dawn , before he himself crossed in an old boat .

= = Victoria Cross = =

Fifty @-@ nine decorations were published for the small group of men who successfully escaped Arnhem and these were awarded in an investiture ceremony at Buckingham Palace on 6 December 1944 . As well as being the only survivor of the battle to receive the Victoria Cross , Cain was also the first ( and currently only ) Manxman to be awarded the medal . Posthumous VCs were announced later , including one for Lance Sergeant John Baskeyfield of the 2nd South Staffordshire Battalion 's anti tank platoon . The 2nd Battalion thus became the only British battalion to receive two VCs in one engagement during the Second World War .

War Office , 2nd November , 1944 .

The KING has been graciously pleased to approve awards of the VICTORIA CROSS to : ?

Captain ( temporary Major ) Robert Henry Cain ( 129484 ) , The Royal Northumberland Fusiliers , ( attd . The South Staffordshire Regiment ) ( I Airborne Division ) ( Salcombe , Devon ) .

In Holland on 19th September , 1944 , Major Cain was commanding a rifle company of the South Staffordshire Regiment during the Battle of Arnhem when his company was cut off from the rest of the battalion and during the next six days was closely engaged with enemy tanks , self @-@ propelled guns and infantry . The Germans made repeated attempts to break into the company

position by infiltration and had they succeeded in doing so the whole situation of the Airborne Troops would have been jeopardised .

Major Cain , by his outstanding devotion to duty and remarkable powers of leadership , was to a large extent personally responsible for saving a vital sector from falling into the hands of the enemy .

On 20th September a Tiger tank approached the area held by his company and Major Cain went out alone to deal with it armed with a Piat . Taking up a position he held his fire until the tank was only 20 yards away when he opened up . The tank immediately halted and turned its guns on him , shooting away a corner of the house near where this officer was lying . Although wounded by machine gun bullets and falling masonry , Major Cain continued firing until he had scored several direct hits , immobilised the tank and supervised the bringing up of a 75 mm. howitzer which completely destroyed it . Only then would he consent to have his wounds dressed .

In the next morning this officer drove off three more tanks by the fearless use of his Piat , on each occasion leaving cover and taking up position in open ground with complete disregard for his personal safety .

During the following days , Major Cain was everywhere where danger threatened , moving amongst his men and encouraging them by his fearless example to hold out . He refused rest and medical attention in spite of the fact that his hearing had been seriously impaired because of a perforated eardrum and he was suffering from multiple wounds .

On 25 September the enemy made a concerted attack on Major Cain 's position , using self @-@ propelled guns , flame throwers and infantry . By this time the last Piat had been put out of action and Major Cain was armed with only a light 2 " mortar . However , by a skilful use of this weapon and his daring leadership of the few men still under his command , he completely demoralized the enemy who , after an engagement lasting more than three hours , withdrew in disorder .

Throughout the whole course of the Battle of Arnhem , Major Cain showed superb gallantry . His powers of endurance and leadership were the admiration of all his fellow officers and stories of his valour were being constantly exchanged amongst the troops . His coolness and courage under incessant fire could not be surpassed .

There are some errors in Cain 's citation . The action described as occurring on the 20th actually took place on the 21st ( indeed this is the day on which Lieutenant Meikle ? his spotter in the building above ? was killed ) , and the Tiger tank he engaged was in fact a StuG III .

= = Later life = =

The hostilities in Europe officially ended on 8 May 1945 , when the Allies accepted the unconditional surrender of German forces . There were however a large number of German units in Norway ? one of the few places in Europe still under German control ? and the Allies feared the German commander there might attempt to fight on . In Operation Domsday , Cain travelled to Oslo , Norway , with the 1st Airlanding Brigade on 11 May 1945 . Working with Milorg ( the Norwegian resistance ) , the British took the surrender of German troops in Norway without incident , before returning to the UK on 25 August 1945 . Having remained in the service of the South Staffordshire Regiment , Cain officially relinquished his wartime commission on 28 December 1945 and was granted the honorary rank of Major . Upon leaving the army he went back to his pre @-@ war occupation with Shell , living in East Asia and then West Africa . In 1951 he was elected to the Nigerian House of Representatives while working there . He returned to Britain in 1965 and settled in the Isle of Man upon his retirement .

Cain died of cancer on 2 May 1974 in Crowborough , Sussex . He was cremated at Worth Crematorium and buried in the family grave at Braddan Cemetery on the Isle of Man . There are several memorials in Cain 's honour . King William 's College has a memorial scholarship in his name and the chapel in the Hospice at Douglas is dedicated in his name . An oak tree in Dhoon Arboretum , planted with acorns gathered from Arnhem , has been christened the Arnhem Oak in memory of his bravery . His medal , Denison smock and the maroon beret he wore during the Battle of Arnhem are all held at the Staffordshire Regiment Museum . His daughter , Frances Catherine

Cain , unveiled a set of commemorative coins honouring her father on the Isle of Man in 2006 . She is also married to , and acts as the agent for , British television and motoring journalist Jeremy Clarkson who presented a BBC documentary , " The Victoria Cross : For Valour " on Cain and other VC winners in 2003 . Frances Cain was unaware of her father 's VC until after he died because , according to Clarkson , " he 'd never thought to mention it " .

= = Medals and decorations = =