

= Eric Gascoigne Robinson =

Rear Admiral Eric Gascoigne Robinson VC , OBE (16 May 1882 ? 20 August 1965) was a Royal Navy officer and an English 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 . He earned his award by going ashore and single @-@ handedly destroying a Turkish naval gun battery while a lieutenant commander with the fleet stationed off the Dardanelles during the Gallipoli campaign in the First World War .

After these exploits , he was badly wounded on the front line on the Gallipoli Peninsula , but recovered and served continuously for the remainder of the war and into the Russian Civil War . In 1939 aged 57 , he again volunteered for military service and spent three more years at sea , commanding convoys during the Battle of the Atlantic . During his lengthy career , Robinson remained a highly regarded officer who had served through four wars .

= = Early life = =

Eric Gascoigne Robinson was born in 1882 at Greenwich in South @-@ East London to John Lovell Robinson and Louisa Aveline Gascoigne . John was the chaplain of the Royal Naval College at Greenwich and Eric 's youth was spent in preparation for a life at sea . Robinson joined HMS Britannia aged just fifteen in 1897 and rapidly progressed to the battleship HMS Majestic and then the first class protected cruiser HMS Endymion , in which he took part in suppressing the Boxer Rebellion in China . It was here , aged 18 , that he saw his first action with the relief force , being wounded in action , mentioned in despatches and gaining a reputation as a daring and resourceful officer . He remained in China serving on a Yangtze gunboat for several years before returning to England and becoming a torpedo specialist at HMS Vernon , Portsmouth , in 1907 .

In 1910 , Robinson was promoted to Lieutenant Commander and spent his time between HMS Vernon , the depot ship HMS Thames and the cruisers HMS Blenheim and HMS Amethyst on active service . In 1913 , he married Edith Gladys Cordeux , with whom he had three children . Robinson was slightly injured in a train accident shortly after his wedding , but soon recovered and was dispatched to the Mediterranean Sea at the outbreak of the First World War on board the old battleship HMS Vengeance .

= = Gallipoli campaign and the Victoria Cross = =

The exploit in his Victoria Cross nomination was the result of Robinson 's close friendship and working relationship with another aggressive officer , Roger Keyes , whom he had first met in China fifteen years before . Keyes was asked by his superior , Admiral John de Robeck , to prepare an assault on the Turkish gun battery at Orkanieh (also known as Achilles ' Tomb) , a position between Kum Kale and Yeni Shehr on the southern shore of the Dardanelles . This position had withstood fire from the battleships of the Allied fleet during the preceding weeks . Robinson was suggested as the leader of a commando force of sailors and Royal Marines tasked with destroying the battery and withdrawing in good order .

Robinson accepted the mission without hesitation . His force landed undetected early in the morning of 26 February , destroyed two small artillery pieces and made fast progress towards the main battery before being pinned down by Turkish snipers in the mid @-@ afternoon . The white naval uniforms of the sailors proved an easy target for the Turks and casualties mounted as Turkish reinforcements were brought up to cut off the raiding party . Instead of withdrawing in the face of this threat , Robinson marched his men through gullies and came out close to a small rise behind the main battery . The open ground of the rise was covered by several Turkish snipers , but realising the importance of removing the artillery overlooking the sea passage , Robinson delegated command of the party to a junior officer and made the climb alone , dodging bullets in his white uniform until he crested the rise unhurt , emerging a few minutes later and starting back apparently unconcerned by the increasingly heavy gunfire directed at him . He was said to be " strolling around . . . under heavy

rifle fire . . . like a sparrow enjoying a bath from a garden hose " . The battery had been ungarrisoned , and Robinson was able to lay fuses which destroyed the large 9 @. @ 4 " main gun and two anti @- @ aircraft emplacements within the position . Withdrawing in good order , Robinson evaded the Turkish reinforcements and then directed gunfire from the fleet onto their positions , including a force garrisoning an ancient tomb , inflicting heavy casualties . An immediate recommendation for the Victoria Cross was put forward by Admiral de Robeck who had observed proceedings from HMS Queen Elizabeth offshore .

During March , in preparation for the landings on the peninsula , Robinson led four sorties into the extensive sea minefields around the beaches and bays of Gallipoli . On one of these , his minesweeper was struck by small calibre shells 84 times and the other operations were scarcely less dangerous but , in spite of the Turkish resistance , Robinson was able to clear wide lanes for the invasion forces .

= = = E15 mission = = =

Robinson volunteered in April for an even more dangerous mission , following the Turkish capture of submarine HMS E15 which had stranded below the guns of Fort Dardanus near Kepez Point . All efforts to destroy this craft had so far failed and it was considered vital for naval morale that it was not salvaged by the enemy . Robinson took command of two picket boats from the battleships HMS Triumph and HMS Majestic , each armed with two torpedoes mounted on the gunwales in dropping gear , and entered the Dardanelles under cover of darkness on 18 April . Caught in a blaze of searchlights , and under heavy fire from the Turkish artillery and machine guns , both boats miraculously arrived unscathed . A carelessly @- @ directed Turkish searchlight briefly illuminated E15 . The boat from HMS Majestic under the command of Lt Goodwin seized the opportunity and attacked . The first torpedo missed , and seconds later the boat was struck by a shell that blew away much of her stern , mortally wounding one of her crew and causing her irreparable damage . Undeterred , Goodwin went in again and scored a direct hit with his second torpedo , just forward of the conning tower , wrecking the submarine .

Observing his consort 's plight , Robinson did not hesitate , steaming to the stricken vessel and rescuing her crew before escaping downstream to Mudros . It was estimated that the Turks fired at least 500 heavy calibre rounds of ammunition at the two boats in just a few minutes . A German officer present noted that " I have never on the course of the war seen an attack carried out with such pluck and fearlessness " . It has also been commented that this action should have brought Robinson a second Victoria Cross , but he was promoted to Commander by special decree instead .

= = = Later war service = = =

In August , Robinson was sent to Anzac Cove as a naval liaison officer and on his second day there , was badly wounded near the front line , forcing his evacuation to England , where King George V presented him with his medal at Buckingham Palace . Returned to the Mediterranean in December 1915 following his recuperation , he took over the coastal monitor HMS M21 , in which he shelled Turkish positions throughout Egypt and Palestine and was awarded another mention in despatches and the Egyptian Order of the Nile , 4th Class . Returning to England in the summer of 1917 , he narrowly missed selection for Keyes 's operations against Zeebrugge and Ostend owing to his war wounds , and instead trained crews of coastal torpedo boats , a role which led to a distant posting in the Caspian Sea during the Russian Civil War , fighting the Bolshevik forces along the Russian coastline . Robinson commanded a squadron of coastal torpedo boats in the Caspian and forced the surrender of several enemy forts through aggressive tactics . These achievements would later win him the Imperial Russian Order of St. Anne , 2nd Class . His most notable achievement at this time was leading a small coastal motor boat inside the harbour of Fort Alexandrovsk , where he sank a barge and prompted a mass surrender from the garrison .

= = Peacetime and Second World War service = =

Following this period of extended service , Robinson was brought home , appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire by the King for his Caspian Sea service , promoted again to Captain and posted to HMS Iron Duke . Robinson then served in a number of training establishments and dockyards , as well as a brief stint with the Far East Fleet , during which he received the Japanese Order of the Sacred Treasure , Third Class for his services . In 1925 , he was inducted into the Freemasons and remained a prominent member of the Navy Lodge for the rest of his life . The organisation still commemorates him in their publications . He retired at age 51 in 1933 as a rear @-@ admiral , but when the Second World War broke out , Robinson immediately offered his services and for three years , commanded convoys across the Atlantic Ocean . For this service , he was later presented with the Norwegian King Haakon VII 's Freedom Cross . Eventually a bout of ill @-@ health caused by a combination of the strain of long service , his age , and the death of his son , Midshipman Edward Cordeaux Robinson , in the sinking of the cruiser HMS Neptune in December 1941 , prompted a second retirement in 1942 .

= = Retirement and death = =

Robinson settled in the village of Langrish , near Petersfield in east Hampshire . He died peacefully at Haslar Naval Hospital , Gosport , on 20 August 1965 and was laid to rest at St John 's , the village church he had served for 20 years as warden . For unknown reasons , his grave was without a headstone until 1998 , although a large plaque to him was dedicated by his sister in 1969 and surmounts the altar . Following investigations by the Naval VC Association , his grave was discovered and a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone erected . At the dedication ceremony , attended by over 150 friends , relatives , Masons and servicemen , Admiral Derek Reffell gave the eulogy which stated : " The admiral was a hero , but more importantly he was a naval man from the finest mould . Now at last we can accord him the dignity he deserves . "