

Unveiling of a memorial plaque to  
**MAJOR GENERAL DANIEL BEAK, VC, DSO, MC & Bar.**  
1891-1967



Cheltenham War Memorial  
12.30 pm, 27th September 2006



**MEDALS AWARDED TO DANIEL BEAK**

Left to right: Victoria Cross; Distinguished Service Order (DSO); Military Cross (MC) & Bar; 1914-15 Star; British War Medal (1914-20); Victory Medal (1914-19) with "MID Oakleaf"; 1939-45 Star; Africa Star with clasp "8th Army"; War Medal (1939-45) with "MID Oakleaf"; King George V Silver Jubilee Medal 1935; King George VI Coronation Medal 1937; Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal 1953.

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## MAJOR GENERAL DANIEL MARCUS WILLIAM BEAK. VC

Daniel Marcus William Beak was born on 27th January 1891 at Southampton, son of Mr. and Mrs. W.H. Beak, formerly of West End House, Donhead St. Mary, Wiltshire. He was educated locally at Taunton's School, later lived in Salisbury and was an active member of Cheltenham YMCA for two years prior to the First World War when, during the enforced absence through illness of his friend, the local YMCA Secretary, William Turner, he took on the role of Acting Secretary for several months. The YMCA at the time was situated at 31 Cambray Place, now occupied by the Carphone Warehouse and various smaller businesses. In 1919, after the war was over, Beak returned a hero as the guest of Cheltenham YMCA and it seems very likely that he helped in the ambitious move to 51, 53 and 55 Promenade, now the home of Cheltenham Borough Council which acquired the premises from the YMCA when the latter moved to Vittoria Walk in 1956.

Beak enlisted in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) as a ranker on 26th January 1915, rising swiftly to Petty Officer. He was gazetted Sub-Lieutenant on 8th May 1915 for duty with the Royal Naval Division, with whom he saw service in Gallipoli, where he was present during the evacuation of the peninsula. He spent the rest of his active career on the Western Front in France (including the area of the Somme) where he was awarded numerous gallantry medals, including the Victoria Cross,

[*London Gazette*, 26 January 1917], Award of the Military Cross, Temp. Sub-Lieutenant Daniel Marcus William Beak, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. "For conspicuous gallantry in action. He led his men in the attack with great courage and initiative, and materially assisted in the capture of the enemy line. He set a fine example throughout."

[*London Gazette*, 18 July 1917], Award of a Bar to the Military Cross, Temp Sub-Lieutenant (Acting Lieutenant-Commander) Daniel Marcus William Beak MC, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. "For conspicuous gallantry during operations, when he continually dashed forward, under heavy fire, to reorganise the men, and led them on with great bravery through the enemy barrage and machine-gun fire."

[*London Gazette*, 26 July 1918], Created Companion of the Distinguished Service Order (DSO), Temporary Commander Daniel Marcus William Beak MC, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. "For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. During a night attack by the enemy the right flank of his division was left in a dangerous position. He arranged for a flank to be formed in that direction, and subsequently covered the retirement of two brigades with a composite rear-guard which he organised and commanded. His initiative and presence of mind greatly assisted in extricating these brigades from a very difficult situation. Throughout, the skilful handling of his battalion was particularly noticeable."

[*London Gazette*, 15 November 1918], Award of the Victoria Cross, Logeast Wood, France, 21st, 25th August & 4th September 1918, T/Commander Daniel Marcus William Beak DSO, MC, Commander Drake Battalion, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.

"For most conspicuous bravery, courageous leadership and devotion to duty during a prolonged period of operations. He led his men in attack, and, despite heavy machine-gun fire, four enemy positions were captured. His skilful and fearless leadership resulted in the complete success of this operation and enabled other battalions to reach their objectives.

Four days later, though dazed by a shell fragment, in the absence of the brigade commander he reorganised the whole brigade under extremely heavy gun fire and led his men with splendid courage to their objective. An attack having been held up, he rushed forward, accompanied by only one runner, and succeeded in breaking up a nest of machine-guns, personally bringing back nine or ten prisoners. His fearless example instilled courage and confidence in his men, who then quickly resumed the advance under his leadership.

On a subsequent occasion he displayed great courage and powers of leadership in attack, and his initiative, coupled with the confidence with which he inspired all ranks, not only enabled his own and a neighbouring unit to advance, but contributed very materially to the success of the Naval Division in these operations."

Beak held several appointments throughout WWI with the Royal Naval Division's Drake, Anson and Howe Battalions, finally commanding Drake Battalion on 12th March 1918 until the demobilisation of the Royal Naval Division in June 1919. He then joined the Royal Scots Fusiliers, transferring to the King's Regiment in 1932 with the rank of Major. From 1939-40 Beak commanded the 1st Battalion, the South Lancashire Regiment, was promoted Brigadier in 1940, Acting Major-General in 1941, and was appointed General Officer Commanding at Malta in 1942.

He lived in retirement at Sheepgrove Lodge near Lambourn in Berkshire and died following a long illness on 3rd May 1967 in the Princess Margaret Hospital, Swindon, Wiltshire. He was buried on the 9th May 1967 in Brookwood Cemetery, Woking, Surrey. There is currently no headstone on his grave, a situation which is being investigated with a view to rectification.

The Victoria Cross group of twelve medals awarded to Daniel Beak was sold at auction by Spink & Son in November 2003 for a then world record sum of £155,000, partly because it was the first Naval VC to feature a crimson ribbon, all previous awards having been dark blue.

## ORDER OF CEREMONY

Welcome - Peter Worsley (Chairman, Cheltenham YMCA) & of This England magazine  
History of Victoria Cross - Didy Grahame (VC & GC Association)

Account of Daniel Beak's exploits - Capt. Kevin Wilson & Brig. Kit Jebens CBE

Prayers - Rev. Lionel Fitz (President, Cheltenham YMCA & Acting RBL Chaplain)

Last Post (Standards dip) - Mr. A. Webb

Act of Homage - Royal British Legion

Two Minutes' Silence

Kohima Epitaph - Royal British Legion

Reveille (Standards raised) - Mr. A. Webb

Lord's Prayer - Chaplain

Unveiling of Plaque - Mayor of Cheltenham, Jacky Fletcher

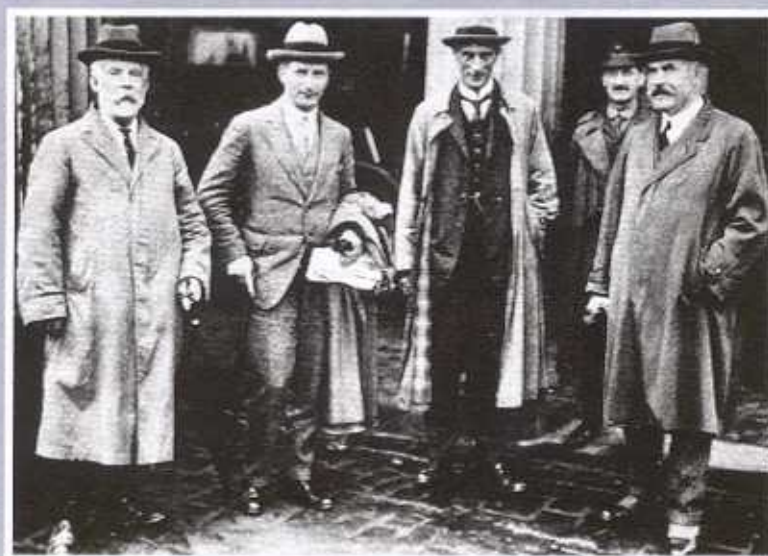
Laying of Wreaths

a) Mayor of Cheltenham

b) Philippe Drouin (Somme Remembrance Association)

c) Didy Grahame (VC & GC Association)

Closing Prayer - Chaplain



Friday, 26th September 1919. Victoria Cross hero Daniel Beak (second left) is greeted at Lansdown Station, Cheltenham, by (left to right) the Mayor (Alderman AJ Bendall), Town Clerk (Robert Owen Seacome), an unidentified railwayman and YMCA Treasurer and Cheltenham Recruiting Officer (Major TE Rickerby).

Pictures and illustrations are taken from "Tales of the Red Triangle, a Social and Pictorial History of Cheltenham YMCA 1855-2005" by Peter Worsley. 200 pages hardback it contains 15 chapters and more than 300 original photos, many in colour. Available direct from the YMCA for only £10.

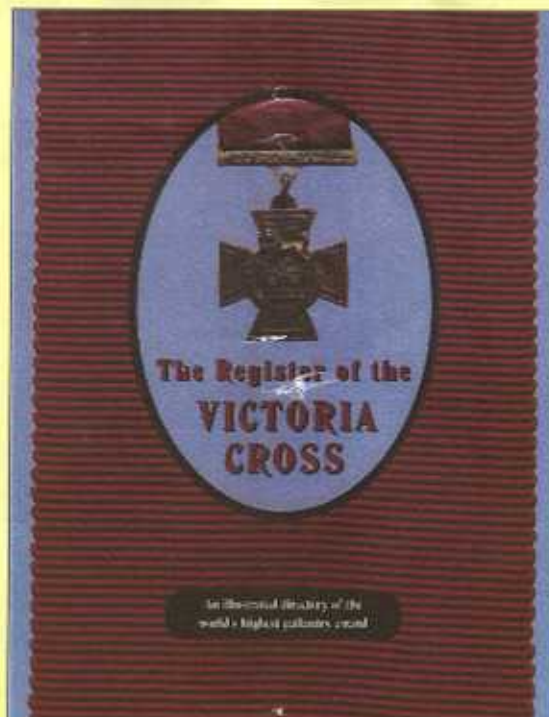


31 Cambray Place, 1898-1921



Promenade, 1921-1956

Founded in 1855, Cheltenham YMCA rented several different premises around the town centre. In 1898 they purchased 31 Cambray Place which remained their headquarters until after the First World War. Before enlisting, Daniel Beak stayed there for two years and was Acting Secretary for several months during the illness of his close friend and Secretary, William Turner. Immediately after the war, however, the YMCA acquired 16, 17 and 18 Promenade (now renumbered 51, 53 and 55). Beak returned to the town as the guest of the YMCA in 1919 and it seems very likely that he assisted Turner the Secretary, Dr. Septimus Pruen the Chairman, and Major Thomas Rickerby the Treasurer, in overseeing this remarkably bold venture. Fitting out took two years to complete before a grand opening ceremony led by Field Marshal Sir William Robertson on 6th December 1921.



Sponsored by *This England* magazine, Cheltenham, publishers of *The Register of the Victoria Cross* and *The Register of the George Cross*

After the unveiling ceremony, guests are invited to a buffet lunch at:  
The Royal British Legion, Potter House, St. Anne's Road, Cheltenham, GL52 2SS.