

THE STORY OF EDWARD ST JOHN DANIEL



Edward St John Daniel was born at the family home 1 Windsor Terrace, Clifton, Bristol on 17th January 1837, the first child of a well-known Bristol attorney, Edward Daniel. His mother, Barbara Bedford, was the granddaughter of Henry Beauchamp St John, the 12th Baron St John, and there is evidence that Edward was known as "St John" by his family. Edward St John Daniel was also the first cousin 12 times removed of Henry Tudor, King Henry VII (1457-1509), through their common ancestor, Henry's grandmother, Margaret Beauchamp (c. 1410-1482).

Daniel's mother died shortly after giving birth to his third sister, Lucy Gertrude, in February 1850, when Daniel was barely thirteen. The following year, just before his 14th birthday, Daniel joined HMS Victory as a Naval Cadet. His naval education continued during a 12 months spell in HMS Dauntless, which was on detached service. In 1852, he joined the Flag-Ship HMS Winchester under Capt. Granville Loch and soon saw his first action during the second Burmese War. For this service he received the India General Service Medal, with clasp for "Pegu". During his time in Burma, he developed chronic leg ulcers, which affected him for the rest of his life.

In 1853, Daniel joined HMS Diamond as a Midshipman, under the celebrated Capt. William Peel, RN, third son of the British statesman Sir Robert Peel, founder of the modern police force. HMS Diamond was sent to the Black Sea at the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854, and officers and men from the Diamond formed part of the Naval Brigade, under Capt. Stephen Lushington of HMS Albion, which assisted the Army in the land operations. Daniel was appointed ADC (Aide-de-camp) to Capt. Peel.

The following day, 17th October 1854, Daniel and his fellow ADC [Sir Evelyn Wood] volunteered to bring up boxes of ammunition to the Diamond Battery, under heavy Russian fire which had disabled the horses

On 5th November 1854, at the grim and bloody Battle of Inkerman (or Inkermann), Daniel was a conspicuous figure as he rode around the battlefield mounted on his pony. Daniel was at his Captain's side throughout the day, as Peel led seven separate charges against the Russians and assisted the Grenadier Guards, who were cut off in a group, to defend their colours.

On 18th June 1855, during the unsuccessful assault on the Redan at Sebastopol, Capt. Peel, who had volunteered to lead the first Ladder Party, was shot through his

left arm and fell back, half fainting. Daniel coolly rendered first aid under a very heavy fire, and brought Peel back to safety – actions that are said to have saved Peel's life. Although Daniel escaped injury, his pistol-case was shot through in two places and his clothes were cut by several bullets.

For these three separate acts of bravery, Daniel was awarded the newly instituted Victoria Cross in the very first list of citations (London Gazette, 24th February 1857). Daniel's citation reads:

"Sir Stephen Lushington recommends this Officer: -

1st. For answering a call for volunteers to bring in powder to the Battery, from a waggon in a very exposed position under a destructive fire, a shot having disabled the horses. (This was reported by Captain Peel, commanding the Battery at the time.)

2nd. For accompanying Captain Peel at the Battle of Inkermann as Aide-de-camp.

3rd. For devotion to his leader, Captain Peel, on the 18th June, 1855, in tying a tourniquet on his arm on the glacis of the Redan, whilst exposed to a very heavy fire.

(Despatch from Sir S. Lushington inclosed in letter from Admiral Lord Lyons, 10th May, 1856)

At the time, Daniel was the youngest recipient of the Cross (being just 17 when he won it). Peel also won the VC for three separate actions in the Crimea. Evelyn Wood, nearly a year younger than Daniel, was recommended for the Cross, but was not awarded it. He had left the Royal Navy in 1855 and joined the Army. However, in October 1858, Lieutenant Wood won the VC in the Indian Mutiny. He eventually rose to the rank of Field Marshal.

Neither Daniel nor Peel was present when Queen Victoria made the first investitures of the Cross at a ceremony in Hyde Park on 26th June 1857. They had been sent to China in the new steam frigate HMS Shannon, which was then diverted to Calcutta in July 1857 on receiving news of the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny. Capt. Peel formed a Naval Brigade (the famous "Shannon's Brigade") which took part in most of the Army operations during the Mutiny campaign. Daniel was an artillery officer in the Brigade and the six 8-inch guns from the ship, which had been transported more than a thousand miles across country, were a decisive factor in the Capture of Lucknow. Peel was injured in the thigh by a musket ball in the final assault at Lucknow and, while recovering from his wounds, contracted smallpox. He died at Cawnpore on 27th April 1858, aged 33.

On 13th July 1858, Daniel was finally presented with his VC (which, with Peel's, had been forwarded to India from Hong Kong) by Capt. Francis Marten, commanding Shannon's Brigade, at a special full-dress parade held at Gyah, Bengal

Peel's Cross was later sent to his brother, Sir Robert Peel, in England (it is now displayed at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich).

On 15th September 1859, Daniel was promoted to Lieutenant. On 24th April 1860, the Duke of Somerset presented him to Queen Victoria at a Levee held at St James's Palace. The Queen is said to have been "much impressed by him".

In addition to the IGS medal and VC, Daniel's medals and decorations include the Crimea Medal with clasps for "Sebastopol" and "Inkerman"; Turkish Crimea Medal; Sardinian Crimea Medal; Turkish Order of Medjidie, 5th Class; Legion d'Honneur; and Indian Mutiny Medal, with clasps for "Relief of Lucknow" and "Lucknow".

In 1860, at the age of 23, Edward St John Daniel was clearly a naval officer of outstanding prospects.

On 24th May 1860, exactly one month after his presentation to Queen Victoria, Daniel was severely reprimanded when additional lieutenant on the sloop HMS Wasp for being twice absent without leave. Wasp was in the English Channel, due to leave for the Cape of Good Hope where Daniel had been appointed to HMS Forte. On 9th June he was found in the wardroom in a state of drunken torpor, when he should have been standing middle watch. A court martial was held on HMS Impregnable at Devonport on 16th June. Daniel pleaded guilty to the charge of drunkenness, but favourable consideration was given to his gallant services and privations in the Crimea and India. He was sentenced only to be dismissed from the Wasp and to be placed at the bottom of the list of lieutenants for a period of two years.

On 26th January 1861, Daniel was appointed to the screw steam ship HMS Victor Emanuel serving in the Mediterranean. On 25th June, he was placed under arrest and the following day the ship proceeded to join Rear Admiral Dacres, Captain of the Fleet and Senior Officer at Corfu, where Daniel would clearly face another court martial. At about 10 pm that night, the Master-at-Arms found that Daniel was missing from the ship. Two men were sent ashore to effect an arrest, but they could not find him. On 28th June, Daniel was marked "Run" (i.e., a deserter). Normally such a report would not be made for two weeks. Because of this fact, the suggestion has been made by some that Daniel could have been paid off by the Navy in order to avoid the scandal of what would inevitably have become a high-profile and embarrassing court martial. Alternatively, Daniel might have left a note explaining his desertion, although there is no surviving record of this. In July, his name was removed from the Navy List.

There have been several suggestions as to what Daniel's "disgraceful offence" may have been. One suggestion is that Daniel attempted to drown a fellow officer. Another is that his offence was drunkenness, although it seems unlikely that, on its own, this would have been considered sufficiently disgraceful. The clearest evidence, however, is contained in a letter from Capt. William Clifford of HMS Victor Emanuel to Rear Admiral Dacres, which states that Daniel was arrested for "taking indecent liberties with four of the Subordinate Officers of the Victor Emanuel".

Whatever the full truth of Daniel's offence, on 4th September 1861 Queen Victoria signed the Royal Warrant that made Edward St John Daniel the first man to forfeit the Victoria Cross:

"Whereas it hath been reported unto us that EDWARD ST. JOHN DANIEL late a Lieutenant in Our Navy, upon whom we have conferred the decoration of the Victoria

Cross, has been accused of a disgraceful offence, and having evaded enquiry by desertion from Our Service, his name has been removed from the list of officers of Our Navy ... Know ye therefore, that we are pleased to command and declare that the said Edward St. John Daniel shall no longer be entitled to have his name enrolled in the Registry of persons on whom we have conferred the said decoration, but shall be and he is hereby judged and declared to be henceforth removed and degraded from all and singular rights, privileges and advantages appertaining thereunto."

Of the 1354 Victoria Crosses that have been awarded to date, only eight have been forfeited, for offences ranging from theft of a cow to bigamy. Of these, Daniel was the only officer and the only Royal Navy man. The last forfeiture was in 1908.

On 8th February 1868, the Admiralty loaned Daniel's forfeited VC to a Colonel MacKenzie, collector of naval and military medals, on condition that "it be returned, if at any time required". The medal later came into the collection of Major-General Lord Cheylesmore, where it was displayed at the Royal United Service Institution in Whitehall. On the death of Lord Cheylesmore, the medal was sold by auction on 18th July 1930, at Glendinings in London for forty pounds. The medal has since been sold at auction several times. The last known sale was at Christies, London on 24th July 1990, where the medal realised 19,800 pounds.

Following his desertion at Corfu, Daniel somehow made his way back to England. Less than two weeks after the Royal Warrant of forfeiture was issued, Daniel was aboard the Black Ball line American clipper Donald McKay in Cobourg Dock, Liverpool, bound for Melbourne, Australia. The Donald McKay sailed on 16th September 1861 and arrived in Melbourne on 7th December 1861.

It is believed that Daniel may have spent his two years in Australia digging in the Gold Fields around Melbourne. In early 1864, the New Zealand Colonial Government was enlisting men in Victoria to serve in the Maori Wars. On 18th January 1864, one day after his 27th birthday, Daniel enrolled at Melbourne as Private E. St. J. Daniel, No 428, No. 5 Company of the Taranaki Military Settlers. He gave his height as 5' 8" and his occupation as "Miner". Daniel signed up for three years service, after which time the NZ Government had promised grants of land to the Settlers. Daniel sailed to New Zealand aboard the Gresham, which arrived at New Plymouth, Taranaki Province, North Island on 15th February 1864. In the following months and years, Daniel's Company took part in many operations against the Maoris in South Taranaki.

On 8th August 1864, Daniel was sentenced to 168 hours intensive labour for an unspecified offence. He was released on 15th August but confined again on 30th August. He was tried by Regimental Court Martial on 2nd September and released on 13th October.

On 3rd October 1866, Daniel made his Last Will and Testament. He gave his domicile as Patea, Taranaki Province. Daniel left everything "including the land to which I am entitled in this Colony for my services as a Military Settler" to his father. In May 1867, the Taranaki Military Settlers were disbanded when a temporary peace occurred in the Maori Wars. It has been reported that Daniel received his land grant, which he sold soon afterwards, but the evidence for this is unclear and ambiguous.

On 26th November 1867, Daniel enlisted as a Constable in No. 2 Division of the NZ Armed Constabulary, where he later achieved the rank of Lance Corporal. In March 1868, disturbances arose among the Irish Catholic and Protestant communities in the West Canterbury Goldfields, South Island, after news was received that "Fenians" (Irish Catholic supporters) had been sent to the gallows for the murder of police officers in Manchester, England. To quell these disturbances, members of No. 2 Division, including Daniel, were sent to Hokitika, a busy, lawless port on the West Coast and the centre of the riots. The 70-strong force, under Lieut.-Col. Thomas McDonnell, arrived at Hokitika aboard the steamer St Kilda on 4th April 1868. The danger of insurrection was soon dissipated and, on 21st April, McDonnell embarked for Patea with half of the force. The remaining detachment, which included Daniel, had little to do other than guard the prisoners and frequent the very large number of local hostelryes.

On 16th May 1868 Daniel, who according to later reports had been ill for some time, was admitted to Hokitika Hospital where he died on 20th May. He was 31 years of age. His death certificate gives the cause of death as "delirium tremens". The following day Daniel was given a full military funeral.

Edward St John Daniel was buried in Grave No. 851, Block 27, Hokitika Cemetery. Back in England, news of his death was published in the Bristol Times and Mirror on 1st August 1868. No mention was made of the forfeiture of his VC, nor of his exile in Australia and New Zealand.

In July 1971, concern was expressed over the overgrown state of Daniel's unmarked grave in Hokitika Municipal Cemetery. As a result, the Hokitika-Westland branch of the NZ Returned Services Association (equivalent to the Royal British Legion) made representations to the local Borough Council. The grave lay in a remote part of the cemetery that was due to be bulldozed and closed off, being very close to an eroding cliff. A suggestion that the body be exhumed and reburied in another area was rejected in favour of a granite memorial plaque in the Returned Services portion of the cemetery. This plaque, which was eventually erected the following year, at a cost of 75 New Zealand dollars, reads simply:

In Memory Of
EDWARD ST JOHN DANIEL V.C.
OF BRISTOL, ENGLAND
DIED HOKITIKA 20th MAY 1868
AGED 31 YEARS

The area around Daniel's actual grave (still unmarked) has now been redeveloped as a park and car park.

The Victoria Cross Warrants have always included a provision for the restoration of forfeited awards. In the latest recoding of the rules and ordinances, issued by Queen Elizabeth II on 30th September 1961, the 15th Article includes the simple statement:

"It shall be competent for Us, Our Heirs and Successors, to restore the Decoration when such recommendation has been withdrawn and with it such pension as may have been forfeited."

On 24th June 1981, Mr Norman Turnbull of South Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand sent a petition to H.M. Queen Elizabeth requesting a pardon and restoration to the Victoria Cross Registry for Edward St John Daniel. Mr Turnbull argued that Daniel was a victim of alcoholism and appealed to the Queen's compassion and fair-mindedness in giving a sympathetic consideration to the petition. Mr Turnbull received a reply dated 28th September 1981 from the Official Secretary to the NZ Governor-General (to whom the Queen's Private Secretary had referred the petition). This official reply curtly pointed out that:

"The restoration of forfeited awards may only be made on a petition to the Sovereign from the former recipient himself. In Daniel's case this is not possible. Furthermore, as your proposal relates to events so long ago it is considered inappropriate to reverse the decision made in 1861 by Queen Victoria".

In 1992, radio producer John Armstrong made contact with VC researcher Victor Tambling of Birmingham, England, an expert on the eight forfeited VCs. What Victor Tambling had to tell him was astonishing and subsequently became the focus of Armstrong's radio documentary "*Switched Identity*," first broadcast by BBC Radio Bristol. Mr Tambling showed Armstrong a small sepia "cabinet photograph," taken in London by Thomas Fall of Baker St, of a man believed to be Edward St John Daniel. Tambling had bought the photograph from a reputable dealer as a portrait of Daniel.

The same image is also to be found in the Imperial War Museum and National Army Museum files on Edward St John Daniel, which were originally collated by leading VC researcher, the late Canon William Lummis. What made no sense at all was that although the photograph bore an uncanny likeness to the known portrait of Daniel in uniform, it was of a man apparently in his late thirties, or forties. Subsequent research at the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television revealed that the photograph was certainly taken after 1865 (when Daniel was in New Zealand) but more than likely after 1875 (seven years after Daniel's death).

It is known that Canon Lummis had himself obtained a copy of the cabinet photograph prior to 1956, before he became aware that there was an earlier photograph of Daniel in uniform, and before he discovered that Daniel had died in 1868. Unfortunately he does not say how or from whom he obtained the cabinet photograph.

In May 2001, a new documentary on the life and career of Edward St John Daniel was broadcast on New Zealand national television, as part of the very popular "*Epitaph*" series, hosted by Paul Gittins. The documentary had sought the expertise of Dr Tim Koelmeyer, a leading forensic pathologist, to carry out a photographic comparison of the bone structure indicated in the portrait in uniform and the later cabinet photograph. When the two images were superimposed and carefully compared, Dr Koelmeyer reports:

"I think there's quite a remarkable result here with the superimposition. If one particularly concentrates on the position of the eyes, the eye sockets, the jaw and so on - Well, I'm quite convinced that the portrait and the photograph are one and the same person".

Victor Tambling's thesis is that at some time between October 1866 and May 1868, Daniel secretly returned to England. Having left New Zealand, his identity in that country was then adopted by another man, who may have found this to be of some personal advantage. This other man, Tambling believes, is possibly Robert Daniels of Birmingham who enlisted with the Taranaki Military Settlers in Melbourne on the very same day as Daniel. Robert Daniels' Regimental No. was 427 (Edward St John Daniel's was 428), and he sailed to New Zealand with Daniel aboard the *Gresham*. There is also clear evidence in the NZ National Archives that information on these two men has been mixed up.

Another intriguing clue comes from the celebrated American author Jack London who, in 1902, toured the East End of London interviewing various characters in the slums and workhouses. In 1903 he published a non-fiction account of his observations and interviews in *"The People of the Abyss"*. Chapter 7, entitled *"A Winner of the Victoria Cross,"* describes meeting an elderly man who claimed to have joined the Navy as a boy, to have served in China, Burma, the Crimea and Indian Mutiny, to have won the Victoria Cross and to have sailed the globe. The man then relates an incident in which he was insulted by a Lieutenant, who called him a name that referred to his mother. Enraged, the man struck the Lieutenant with an iron bar, who then fell into the sea. Jumping in after him, determined to drown them both, the two men ended up fighting in the water. For this action, he was court-martialled, stripped of the Victoria Cross and pension rights, and sent to prison.

Although Jack London's version of events does not match precisely the career of Edward St John Daniel (eg. Daniel was not sent to prison), the number of coincidences in the story is remarkable. It is especially interesting that one of the accounts of Daniel's "disgraceful offence" is that he attempted to drown a fellow officer. If the man's story about winning and losing the Victoria Cross is true, he could only be Edward St John Daniel. Who, then, is the man buried at Hokitika? According to Victor Tambling, it may be Robert Daniels.