

**A SCARCE VICTORIA CROSS GREAT WAR PHOTO POSTCARD PORTRAYING
SERGEANT NORMAN FINCH. AWARDED THE VICTORIA CROSS FOR
ACTIONS AT ZEEBRUGGE**



Norman Augustus Finch (1890-1966) was born at 42 Nineveh Road, Handsworth, Birmingham, on Boxing Day 1890, the son of John Finch, a postman, and his wife Emma Amelia. He attended Benson Road Board School and Norton Street Council School and worked as a tool machinist for the Birmingham firm H.W. Ward & Co, before joining the Royal Marine Artillery on 15th January 1908. He was described on his papers as standing 5ft 11, with brown hair, blue eyes and a fresh complexion.

Finch, who later forfeited 346 days' service towards his engagement and pension for being under age, trained at Eastney and embarked in the cruiser Diadem, his first ship, on 17th June 1909. The following year he left the Home Fleet and, as gunner second class, joined HMS Minotaur for a two-year stint on the China Station. A short time at Eastney separated spells in

the Portsmouth training cruiser HMS Spartiate and the Chatham cruiser HMS Antrim, which he joined on 3rd December 1912.

He served on Antrim for three years, being promoted to Bombardier (1913) and Corporal (1915), before returning once more to Eastney on 19th August 1916. During this time Antrim operated out of Rosyth with the Third Cruiser Squadron as Rear-Admiral William Pakenham's flagship. Antrim had narrowly evaded a U-Boat attack on 9th October 1914, and a report, subsequently published in the Birmingham Mail, stated that Finch had been given a shore job after "his nerves gave way".

He quickly found a niche as a trainer. Promoted Sergeant on 15th March 1917, he became a Temporary Instructor for gunnery at sea in November. Finch went back to sea in the battlecruiser Inflexible, part of the Grand Fleet, in the following January, but shortly afterwards was recalled as preparations began for the raid on Zeebrugge.

On 22nd/23rd April 1918 at Zeebrugge, Belgium, Sergeant Finch was second in command of the pom-poms and Lewis gun in the foretop of HMS Vindictive. At one period Vindictive was being hit every few seconds, but Sergeant Finch and the officer in command kept up a continuous fire, until two heavy shells made direct hits on the foretop killing or disabling everyone except Sergeant Finch who was, however, severely wounded. Nevertheless, he remained in his battered and exposed position, harassing the enemy on the Mole until the foretop received another direct hit, putting the remainder of the armament completely out of action.

Finch was still recovering in hospital from shrapnel wounds to his right hand and right leg when he learned that he had been chosen to receive the VC. Officially it was stated that he was elected for the honour by non-commissioned officers and other ranks of the 4th Royal Marines. No one was more surprised than Finch himself. "Seems to me if one has the VC, the whole lot ought to have it."

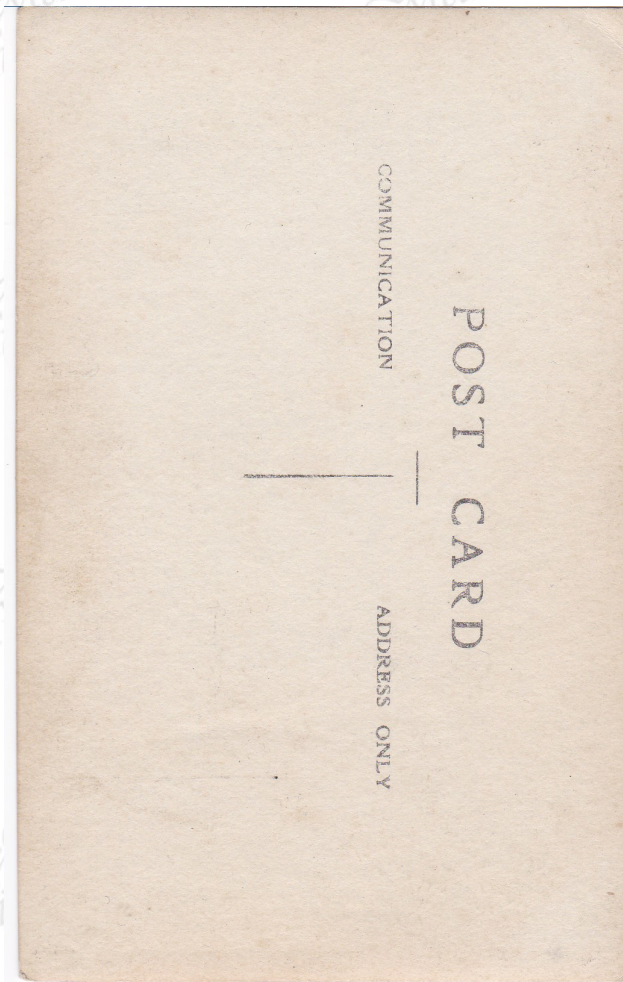
After his investiture at Buckingham Palace on 31st July 1918, Finch returned to Eastney Barracks in style, with a band leading the way and his flag-bedecked car being drawn by a party of marines to the parade ground, where, amid loud cheering, he was received by the Commandant, RMA.

He married Elizabeth Jane Ross on 3rd April 1919 in Birmingham, and five days later took up a new appointment as Instructor of Coast Defence Gunnery. The following August, Finch, who had been paid a war gratuity of £32 with £14 from the Naval Prize fund, was promoted Colour Sergeant. He signed on for a further engagement on 8th January 1921, and in July joined the 10th Royal Marines Battalion, his service with this unit being broken by two months in HMS Crescent. In September 1922 he went to the 11th Battalion which, with the Corps' other Zeebrugge VC, Edward Bamford, among its officers, was deployed in the Eastern Mediterranean for a year.

On 27th January 1924 Finch received a Long Service and Good Conduct Medal. Promoted to Barrack Quartermaster Sergeant on 23rd December 1925, he eventually retired in 1929 on his 39th birthday with three good conduct badges to his name and a recommendation for the Meritorious Service Medal, which he duly received.

Settling in Southsea with his wife and son, who later served in the RAF, Finch became a postman and then, a bank messenger in Portsmouth's North End. On New Year's Day 1931 he was made a Yeoman of the Guard. Mobilised briefly during the Munich Crisis of 1938, he returned to his old job as Quartermaster Sergeant in the Portsmouth Division in October 1939. He served in Corps home establishments throughout the war, being promoted Temporary Lieutenant (Quartermaster) on 25th February 1943. Released from service in August 1945, he

returned to his job as a bank messenger and ceremonial duties with HM Bodyguard of the Yeoman of the Guard, in which he became only the second marine to hold the rank of divisional Sergeant Major. His last award was the Royal Victorian Medal (silver) which he added to his 1935 Jubilee Medal and 1937 and 1953 Coronation Medals.



Following his wife's death from cancer, Finch, now in his 60s, moved to a small flat. He lived there alone until, after suffering a heart attack, he was persuaded to move in with a friend, another ex-marine, and his family. Finch spent the last two years of his life with the Shaws, whose children nicknamed him "Flump". Norman Finch died in St Mary's Hospital, Milton, Portsmouth, on 15th March 1966 and was cremated at Portchester Crematorium six days later.

Postcard sized Approx 13.7 x 8.6 cm. The above taken from the fine vconline website:

<http://www.vconline.org.uk/norman-a-finch-vc/4586699276.html>

A scarce original period VC recipient VC photo postcard