

A SCARCE VICTORIA CROSS GREAT WAR PHOTO POSTCARD PORTRAYING PRIVATE MICHAEL HEAVISIDE. AWARDED THE VICTORIA CROSS FOR ACTIONS AT FONTAINE LES CROISELLES



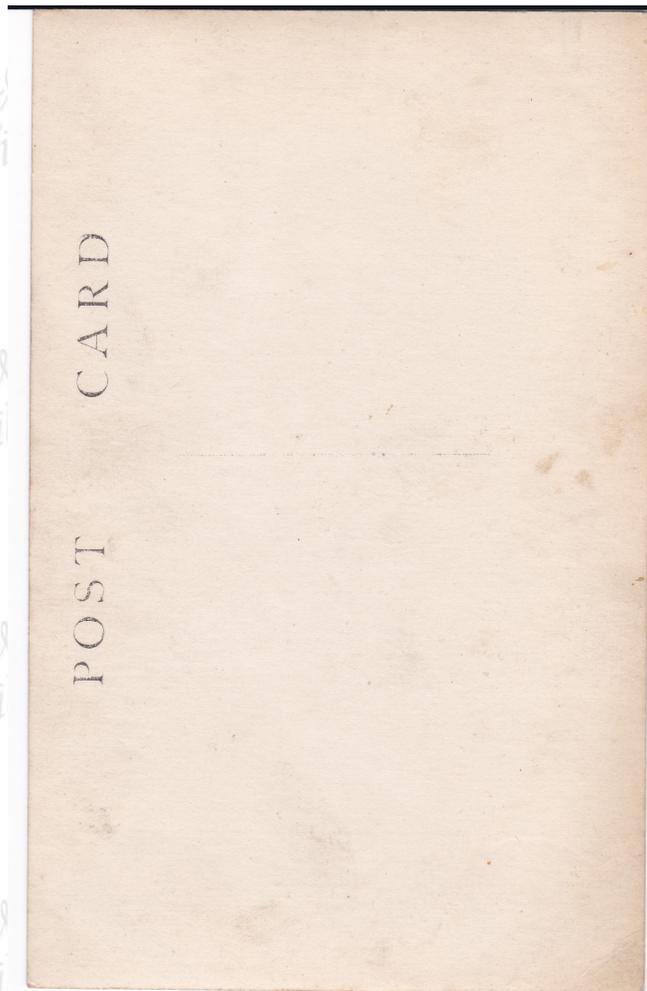
Michael Wilson Heaviside (1880-1939) was born at Station Lane, St Giles, Durham on 28th October 1880. His father, John Wilson Heaviside, was a grocer before working in a colliery as an under keeper. He married Ann "Annie" Fawell, a dressmaker, in 1886. Michael had three siblings: Ethel (born 1882), Annie (born 1883) and Thomas (born 1886).

Michael was educated at Kimblesworth Colliery School, County Durham and was employed as a miner at Burnhope Colliery. He enlisted with the Royal Army Medical Corps and served in South Africa as a stretcher-bearer in the Second Boer War. He also served with No 11

General Hospital in Kimberley and is understood to have returned to Britain having contracted enteric fever. He was awarded the Queen's South Africa and King's South Africa Medals. He returned to mining and in 1913 moved to the Oswald pit.

He married Elizabeth Draper on 30th December 1905 at the Register Office, Landchester. They began married life in Burnhope, and later lived in Sacriston and Craghead. Michael and Elizabeth had a large family with fifteen children in total born between 1906 and 1930. Sadly, some of the children died at very young ages, and one of the sons, Victor, was killed in action in World War II on 9th August 1944.

Michael enlisted on 7th September 1914 in 10th Durham Light Infantry and was posted to France on 10th June 1915. He transferred soon afterwards into the 15th Battalion. On the evening of 5th May 1917, the battalion returned to their barricades on the Hindenburg Line, near Fontaine-les-Croisilles, France. Only one hundred yards separated the British and German positions but the terrible fighting of the preceding days had died down. Snipers and machine gunners were, however, still active and any movement attracted deadly fire. Then about 2 o'clock the next afternoon, 6th May 1917, a sentry noticed movement in a shell hole about forty yards from the German barricade. A wounded British soldier was desperately waving an empty water bottle.



Any attempt to help this soldier in daylight would result in almost certain death for the rescuers. Michael Heaviside, however, said that he was going to try. Grabbing water and a

first aid bag, this thirty-six year old stretcher bearer scrambled over the barricade and out into no-man's-land. Immediately, he came under heavy rifle and machine gun fire from the German positions and was forced to throw himself to the ground. He then began to crawl sixty yards across the broken ground from shell hole to shell hole to where the wounded soldier was sheltering.

On 12th July he returned home by train to be met by his father, three of his children, local dignitaries and a cheering crowd. He was taken by car to Stanley town hall, escorted by the South Moor Colliery Band, D Company, 1st Battalion Durham County Volunteers and Church Lads' Brigade cadets from Beamish. The VC was presented to him by King George V in the forecourt of Buckingham Palace on 21st July 1917. He was discharged from the Army on 8th June 1919. He became close friends with fellow VC, Ernest Sykes.

Michael returned to mining at Craghead. The effects of gas poisoning, coal dust and heavy smoking resulted in his death at his home at 14 Bloemfontein Terrace, Craghead on 26th April 1939. He was buried in an unmarked grave in St Thomas' Churchyard, Craghead as the family was unable to afford a headstone at the time. His widow remarried later that year to John Cooper. Burial records for the churchyard were lost in a fire, but his grave was re-located by marching burial numbers to known graves and using a process of elimination for the remainder. A headstone, paid for by the family, the DLI Association and the Light Infantry, was dedicated on 1st November 1999. St Thomas' Church was later converted into a private residence, but pedestrian access is still permitted to the churchyard.

In addition to the VC, he was also awarded the Queen's South Africa Medal 1899-1902 with three clasps, King's South Africa Medal 1901-1902 with two clasps, 1914-15 Star, British War Medal 1914-20, Victory Medal 1914-19, and George VI Coronation Medal 1937. His Victory Medal carried a Mentioned in Despatches oak leaf but no record is in the London Gazette of the award. On 12th July 1957, his son, Company Sergeant Major Norman Heaviside, presented the medals to the Durham Light Infantry, watched by Michael's widow and over 30 members of the family.

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

<http://www.vconline.org.uk/michael-w-heaviside-vc/4586954510.html>

A scarce original period VC recipient VC photo postcard