

THE MEDICAL VICTORIA CROSSES

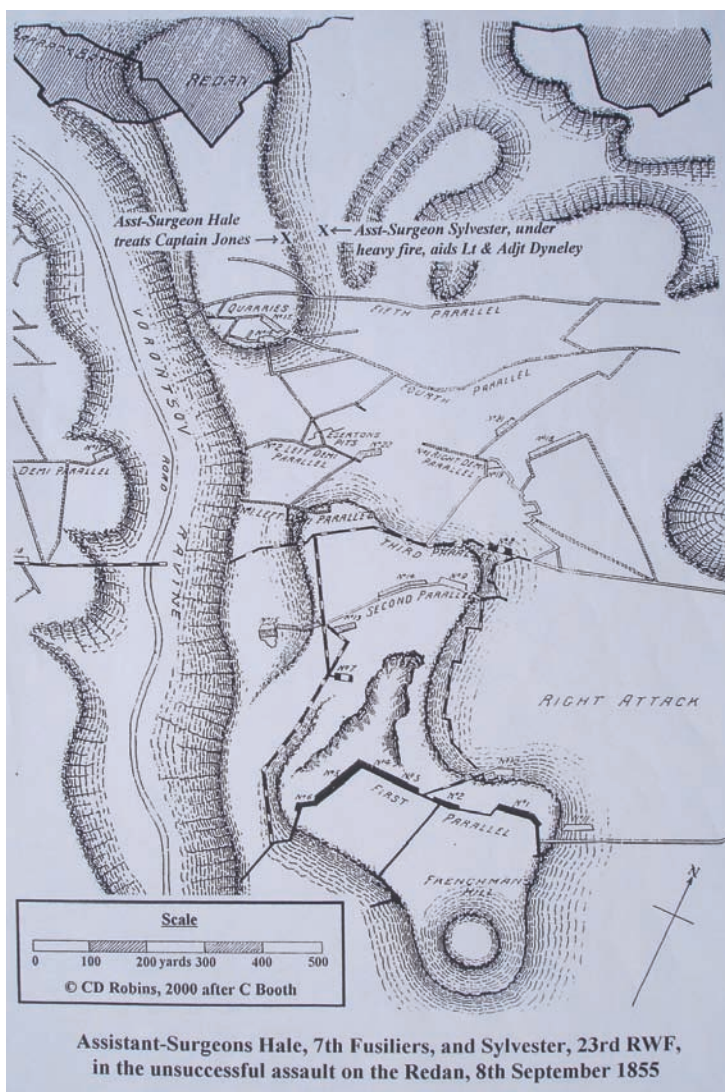
BRAVERY IN THE TRENCHES - THE ATTACK ON THE REDAN

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Introduction

The city of Sebastopol was besieged for a year during the Crimean War by an alliance of British, French, Turkish and Sardinian troops; the Redan was the massive fortification that guarded the city itself (Figure 1). There was much bravery in the siege works before and during the assault on Sebastopol, not least in rescuing wounded men. This paper outlines the stories resulting in the award of the Victoria Cross to two Assistant Surgeons and the unsuccessful application for the award by another.



Assistant-Surgeons Hale, 7th Fusiliers, and Sylvester, 23rd RWF, in the unsuccessful assault on the Redan, 8th September 1855

Figure 1. Map detailing the locations of actions during the assault on the Redan (By kind permission of Maj C Robins)

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Thomas Edgerton Hale

T.E. Hale was born on 24th September 1832 near Nantwich, the son of a doctor. Educated at Grove Park School, Wrexham and Kings College London, he qualified as a Doctor in 1854 and soon after joined the army as an Assistant Surgeon in 7th Foot (Royal Fusiliers) and went with them to the Crimea.

The attack on the Redan on 8 September 1855.

For the 7th Fusiliers, this was not their first attack against the Redan having been involved in the previous assault on 18th June 1855. For this second sortie Assistant Surgeon Hale was detailed by Dr Moorhead to accompany the 7th in the assault. He carried his pocket case of instruments, two tourniquets, lint and bandages. Accompanying him were three men, 'one carrying a pint of brandy, 24 bandages and half a pound of lint, three sponges, two old sheets cut up, splints, tape, pins, tow, a canteen of water and a cup'. The second man carried the canvas stretcher and shoulder straps and a canteen of water and the third man was armed to protect the party against marauders [1].

At 9am on Saturday 8th September the 7th Fusiliers, 400 men plus officers, set off on the approach march and halted at the third parallel [2]. The men waited whilst the French carried out their attack on the Malakoff and were then called forward to the next parallel, accompanied by Hale with his twenty stretcher-bearers plus the two men carrying the medical supplies. Here they were subjected to grape shot which wounded a dozen men including Captain Hickie, wounded in the head. Hale stopped to dress the wounded allowing the regiment to get some way ahead. He eventually caught up with them by running under fire and in the advanced trench found Major Turner who had been hit in the head. As the 7th fought to get into the Redan, Hale found himself occupied until 6.30 dressing wounded until a Sergeant informed him that men were lying wounded outside the sap. Hale, exposed to Russian fire did his best to dress the wounded and get them under cover (Figure 2). According to Hale's own words there were thirty killed and fifty wounded [3]. Hale himself had a narrow escape when a shell burst close by knocking him over and wounding several others [4].

For his actions during the attack 23-year-old Hale was awarded a Victoria Cross which was gazetted on 5th May 1857. The original recommendation for the award is slightly different from that which appeared in the London Gazette. It states

First. For remaining with an officer who was dangerously wounded, (Captain H.W. Jones 7th Foot, in the fifth parallel, during a panic on 8th September 1855, when all the men in the immediate neighbourhood retired excepting Lieut. W. Hope & Dr. Hale; and in endeavouring to rally the men in conjunction with Lieut. W. Hope 7th Royal Fusiliers.

Secondly - For having on 8th September 1855 after the Regiments had retired into the trenches, cleared the most advanced sap of the wounded; & carried into the sap, under a heavy fire, several wounded men from the open ground, being assisted by Sergeant Charles Fisher 7th Royal Fusiliers.

There is a note in the left hand column of the recommendation 'I will probably be desirable in the copy sent to the gazette of this officer's service, that the words during a panic, should be omitted'. It duly was when the citation appeared in the London Gazette.



Figure 2. Artists depiction of T.E. Hale action (RHQ RAMC)

Hale survived the fighting unscathed and with the evacuation of Sebastopol by the Russians went into the town and 'liberated' certain souvenirs including a walnut table, a candlestick and an icon [5]. After the Crimean Campaign Hale went to India in 1857 and served in various locations in the Indian sub continent. He served not only with the 7th but also with the 43rd in 1869 and the 94th in 1873. He eventually retired from the army in 1876. Created a Commander of the Bath in 1905, he died on Christmas Day 1909 at Nantwich, aged 77 and was buried in Acton Parish Churchyard.

Hale's medals, less his CB were sold at Christies on 13 July 1955 and purchased by the RAMC for the hammer price of £420.00. They were later reunited with his CB and are now on display in the Army Medical Services Museum along with his sword and a powder horn.

Henry Thomas Sylvester

Henry Sylvester entered the army on 3 March 1854 as an Assistant Surgeon, Staff. In September of that year he was appointed as Assistant Surgeon 23rd Foot and accompanied the regiment to the Crimea.

On 8 September 1855 the regiment paraded at 0845 'in coatees, black trousers and forage caps, every-mans water bottle to be quite full' [6]. The 23rd were placed in the left bayou, close to the 22nd Battery. When the attack on the Redan took place the 23rd moved up to the 5th Parallel and then the commanding officer was ordered to attack the right flank of the Redan. The five companies advanced steadily and got some distance before heavy Russian fire halted the advance [7]. Lt Col Lysons himself was severely wounded in the thigh and fourteen out of the eighteen officers were wounded and ninety-seven men fell.

One of those wounded was Lieutenant and Adjutant Dyneley, who wounded in the head, staggered about in some confusion and eventually entered a cave under the Russian defences. On hearing of this, Sylvester went out under fire to the cave and dressed Dyneley's wounds (Figure 3) at dusk a party of men from the regiment recovered his body.

For his actions on that day Sylvester was awarded a Victoria Cross, gazetted on 20 November 1857.

For going out on 8th September 1855 under a heavy fire, in front of the fifth Parallel Right Attack, to a spot near the Redan,



Figure 3. Artists depiction of H.T. Sylvester action (RHQ RAMC)

where Lieut and Adjutant Dyneley was lying mortally wounded and for dressing his wounds in that Dangerous situation. This officer was also mentioned in General Sir James Simpson's Despatch of 18 Sep 1855 for his courage in going to the front under a heavy fire to assist the wounded [8].

Queen Victoria presented his Victoria Cross to him in Hyde Park on 26th June 1857 and he also received the Legion d'Honneur to hang with his other Crimean campaign medals.

After the Crimean Campaign Sylvester went to India and took part in the campaign to suppress the Mutiny and received the medal with a clasp for The Relief of Lucknow. He retired from the army in 1861 and initially became a house surgeon at Swansea Hospital. He later moved to London and became Chief Medical Officer to Millbank Prison and was also in private practice at Westminster.

Henry Sylvester died on 13 March 1920 at Paignton, Devon and is buried in Paignton Cemetery. His medals are on display in the Army Medical Services Museum along with his sword and a brass bowl used by him during the campaign.

Acting Assistant Surgeon George Fair

George Fair served for a very short time in the army. He was commissioned as an Acting Assistant Surgeon on 10 November 1854 and resigned on 14 March 1856. During this period he served with the 55th Regiment during the Crimean campaign having arrived just after the battle of Inkerman in which the regiment had fourteen men killed and sixty-nine men wounded. Throughout the winter the regiment suffered from the cold and bowel diseases that did not spare medical men and ordinary soldiers alike. A 2nd Assistant Surgeon of the 55th was amongst the dead from disease. Throughout early 1855 disease continued to visit the regiment but by May the Surgeon felt that the regiment was 're-established' [9].

With the regiment now relatively fit they took their part in the line and Fair was with them on the 8 September 1855 during their part in the assault on the Redan, having been involved in their previous assault on 18 June 1855 when he dressed wounded under fire [10]. On 8 September George Fair advanced to the Fifth Parallel and his Commanding Officer, LtCol Alfred Cure testified that Fair was 'in the most advanced Parallel, tendering assistance to the wounded under a most heavy fire, until the regiment retired to camp' [11]. Other officers also testified to his bravery on that day. The regiment itself suffered ninety-four men and six officers wounded, chiefly wounds of the upper extremity and head [12].

Fair's bravery did not go unnoticed but some time after other recommendations for bravery. In a letter dated 23 December

1855 from Lieutenant Colonel Cure to Doctor Andrew Smith, The Director General, Cure states that due to his own mistake Doctor Fair's name was not submitted for an award [13]. Cure also wrote to Fair on the same day apologising for the omission. It is at this time that Fair's father, Thomas Fair becomes involved because in the file is a letter from Doctor Smith to Fair senior stating *'I shall not forget your son's interests when an opportunity offers of my forwarding them. I regret I can do nothing towards the object he now has in view, many of high merit like himself and of large standing in the service are desirous of leave and I suspect Doctor Hall will find himself constrained'*. Obviously at some time Fair junior had expressed a desire for some leave.

The correspondence concerning Fair's bravery was forwarded to Horse Guards by Andrew Smith who received an acknowledgement on 2 January 1856. Not content with Andrew Smith's answer about leave, Fair enlisted some high-ranking help in the matter and Brigadier General Warren commanding 3rd Division wrote to Sir William Codrington requesting leave of absence for Fair. In the file are also copies of letters sent to Andrew Smith for inclusion in Fair's personal file at Army Medical Directorate [14]. On 22 August 1856 Cure wrote to Fair informing him of the award of the Legion d'Honneur [15].

There it would seem it would rest but on 12 March 1858 Thomas Fair wrote to Major General Sir Charles Yorke at Horse Guards requesting the award of the Victoria Cross to his son, then in South America. He enclosed copies of all the aforementioned correspondence and a copy of *Report of an Officer Recommended for the Decoration of the Order of the Victoria Cross*. This was dated 11 March 1858 and signed by Henry Daubeney, Colonel 55th Ft [16].

"He was in the most advanced parallel exercising his professional duties with the greatest coolness and deliberation notwithstanding the very heavy fire of the enemy and when Captain Richards, 55th Foot was so severely wounded by a grape shot as to be unable to stand carried him in his arms to the rear until he deposited him in a place of safety".

There is no further correspondence in the file except on the front of the *Report of an Officer* it is annotated *'Submitted to Board 30th March 1858. Rejected'*. The reasons for rejection are unclear, but perhaps was related to a 'cut off' date for submitting applications for awards for the Crimean campaign and Fair's was simply too late.

References

1. Letter from hale in the Hale Victoria Cross File AMS Museum
2. Hale letter
3. Hale letter
4. In his letters Hale mentions that he noted the presence of Fair in the trenches.
5. Hale letter
6. Gary ADL & McCance Stoupe, Regimental Records of the Royal Welch Fusiliers (Foster Groom: London 1923)
7. Regimental Records
8. The National Archives, WO32/7305
9. Medical and Surgical History of the British Army which served in Turkey and the Crimea during the war against Russia in the Years 1854-55-56. In two volumes. Volume 1, Medical History of Individual Corps.
10. TNA WO98/2 Papers relating to the recommendation for the award of the Victoria Cross to George Fair.
11. TNA WO98/2
12. Medical and Surgical History
13. TNA WO98/2
14. TNA WO98/2
15. TNA WO98/2
16. TNA WO98/2