
By Chris Loader
Nelson Victor Carter was born in 1887 in Hailsham in East Sussex, the son of Richard and Harriet Carter. Carter came from a reasonably poor background as in the 1891 census his father was a bricklayer’s labourer and he had many siblings living with him. Carter joined the Army early on in his lifetime, in the Royal Field Artillery serving in the 1900’s. However Carter after being in the Army for a few years suffered a hernia and need a life changing operation which ended him being dismissed from the army. Carter was a very tall man being 6ft 1 which was recorded in his Service Records along with Two Buffalo Bill tattoos on his forearms. It was in 1911, that Carter married his wife Kathleen Camfield who would be the love of his life. After being dismissed from the Army, Carter took a job working at the Eastbourne Town Cinema where he was the Cinema Commissionaire. However at the outbreak of war, Carter wanted to enlist in the Army again and because of the desperate recruitment campaign of 1914 the country was in need of soldiers so Carter answered his country’s call. Carter firstly joined the 11th Royal Sussex Regiment, but because of his previous military experience in the Royal Artillery, he cruised through the ranks being a Corporal and a Sergeant. However when the 12th Royal Sussex Regiment was formed in October 1914 he was promoted to Company Sergeant Major of A Company in the battalion. During his time in the 12th Battalion he was a great boxer, becoming the Regimental Heavyweight Champion in 1915. However 1916 was the defining of Carter’s life. The Battle of Richebourg – l’Avoue on the 30th June is where Carter won his VC but ultimately lost his life. This action was a preliminary diversion for the major British and French offensive on the Somme on the 1st of July which the Somme saw the heaviest loss of life ever seen in the British Army.

[West Sussex Record Office RSR MS 7/27-41]
This is Carter’s last letter to his family written two days before the last day of his life. The letter shows a different side, to the soldier has been a loving family man, and indication of a quality of a Victoria Cross winner has being attached and loyal to his fellow soldiers. The Battle of Richebourg is known as an infamous day in the Royal Sussex as being the Day Sussex Died, as many men of the 12th battalion were local or native to the county of Sussex, with the battalion suffering over 50% casualties as 366 men from the Battalion died. However Carter is credited as being an extraordinary soldier in which the London Gazette describes the action which ended up the Sergeant Major being posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. “For the most conspicuous bravery. During an attack he was in command of the fourth wave of the assault. Under intense shell and machine gun fire he, penetrated with a few men, into the enemy’s second line and inflicted heavy casualties with bombs. When forced to retire to the enemy’s first line, he captured a machine gun and shot the gunner with his revolver. Finally, after carrying several, wounded men to safety, he himself was mortally wounded and died within a few minutes. His conduct throughout the day was magnificent’. After the Battle and the news that Carter had been awarded the Victoria Cross the town of Eastbourne saw Carter as a local hero. This picture shows the telegram of Carter’s confirmation to his wife that he had posthumously received the VC.

After the announcement of Carter’s Victoria Cross in September 1916 the local peoples of Eastbourne decided to create a fund in tribute to help Carter’s wife and young daughter to help them receive an income.
After Carter’s death serving King and Country, the Carter family received many letters from fellow soldiers, showing their sympathies. With Carter being awarded the VC, The Prime Minister, David Lloyd George and King George V wrote their condolences to the family. Overall Carter’s sacrifice is not forgotten amongst the Royal Sussex and the county of Sussex, as he was a truly brave soldier and he is remembered as being part of the elite order of a Victoria Cross winner.