

Company Sergeant Major Nelson Victor Carter, 12th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment (1887-1916)



[West Sussex Record Office RSR MS 7/27-41]

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.

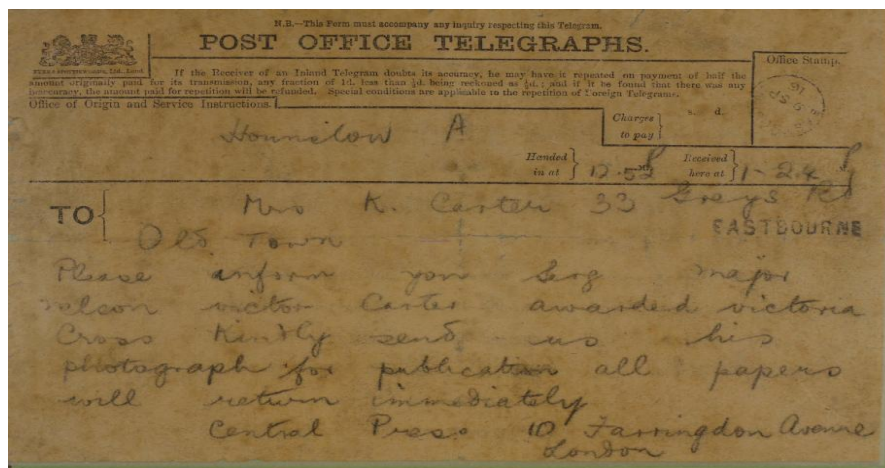
28-6-16

My Darling Little Kelly
 It does seem a long time since I had a letter from you. how are you & young Jessie getting along? I suppose that you are having just as rotten weather out home in England as we are out here. I think I remember the weather like summer here, one day it pouring with rain & the next into boiling hot, just the right sort of weather to take the fads off. but I suppose that we shall get a rest shortly & some of the poor devils need it too

I had a letter from home the other day, it is the first one since I left England. I have not the time at present so I am going to drop them as cards.
 I am sorry that I can't get those cards yet, but will send them on to you as soon as I can get some, did you see my letter to Mr. Hollister in the Eastbourne Gazette that you sent me last week.
 Well Dick I have a devil of a lot to do before we move off tonight, so I suppose that I must draw to a close
 With fondest love & kisses
 Your loving Husband
 Nelson
 X X X X X
 X X X
 Jos
 Write soon

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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 been 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.



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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.

EASTBOURNE V.C.

Fund for Relatives of Serjeant-Major N. V. Carter.

"The Sussex County Herald" states that something is to be done towards a fund for the relatives of the late C.S.M. Carter, V.C. Mr A. R. Shipman, proprietor of the Hailsham Electric Theatre, who announces his intention to act apart an evening on behalf of the wife, daughter and parents of the dead hero, is to be congratulated upon taking the initiative in the matter, and it is to be hoped that the sum realized will form the first instalment of a substantial fund.

Mrs Carter (widow of Serjeant-Major Carter) of 53, Grey's-road, Old Town, has received the subjoined letters:—


"Dear Madam,—Please accept my deepest sympathy for you in the great loss you have sustained



MRS. N. V. CARTER AND HER INFANT DAUGHTER.

The King commands me
 to assure you of the true sympathy
 of His Majesty and The Queen
 in your sorrow.

David Lloyd George


 BUCKINGHAM PALACE
 26th March, 1917.

It is a matter of sincere regret to
 me that the death of Serjeant-Major Nelson
 Victor Carter, 12th Battalion Royal Sussex
 Regiment, deprived me of the pride of personally
 conferring upon him the Victoria Cross,
 the greatest of all rewards for valour and
 devotion to duty.

George R.D.

Mrs. Catherine Carter,
 33, Gray's Road,
 EASTBOURNE.

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.