

Villagers chaired VC hero

Written by Donald Fullarton - Last Updated Sunday, 08 February 2015 16:29



THE villagers of Cardross turned out in force at the station in 1918 to honour a Victoria Cross-winning hero of World War One.

Lieutenant Reginald Graham was the first of six members of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders to be awarded the highest honour for gallantry in that conflict.

The Helensburgh and Gareloch Times proudly reported on his homecoming: "On Friday evening a large gathering of the residents of the village assembled at the railway station to welcome Major Reginald N.Graham V.C. home from active service.

"Major Graham is the eldest son of Mr and Mrs Fred Graham, Darleith, Cardross, and joined the 9th Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders in 1914 at Dumbarton, being subsequently transferred to the Machine Gun Corps and proceeding to Mesopotamia, where he gained his great honour.

"The reception was entirely spontaneous, as it was only in the afternoon that it became known in the village that the gallant hero was on the way home.

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“On alighting from the train Major Graham was promptly ‘chaired’, and, preceded by a piper, carried shoulder high along the station platform to his waiting car, amid a scene of great enthusiasm.

“Major Graham, in an eloquent little speech, expressed his sincerest thanks to the Cardross people for this cordial reception, and paid a high tribute to the Dumbartonshire men of 2/9th Argylls who served with him in Mesopotamia.”

His parents lived at Cameron House on Loch Lomonside and Ardencaple Castle in Helensburgh before moving to the village.

At the time a Lieutenant in the 9th Battalion of the Argylls, he was attached to the 136th Machine Gun Corps, 28th Brigade, 7th Meerut Division, when he won the Victoria Cross for his gallantry at Istabulat, Mesopotamia, on April 22 1917.

The Register of the Victoria Cross states: “Lieutenant Graham was in command of a machine-gun section which came under very heavy fire.

“When his men became casualties he insisted on carrying the ammunition and although twice wounded, he continued in control and with one gun opened accurate fire on the enemy.

“This gun was put out of action and he was again wounded and forced to retire, but before doing so he disabled his gun and then brought a Lewis gun into action with excellent effect until all the ammunition was expended.

“He was wounded yet again and again was forced to retire.”

In the course of the action he received six wounds — in the hand, face, leg, left arm, and two in

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the thigh. He completely recovered and rejoined the Machine Gun Corps abroad.

The award was reported in the London Gazette of September 14 of that year and he received the medal from King George V at an investiture in Buckingham Palace.

While he was in Mesopotamia from September 1916 to January 1918 he kept a diary, including descriptions of his voyage to Mesopotamia, comments on his fellow officers, and concerns over discipline in the ranks arising from a close relationship between his commanding officer and a Company Sergeant Major.

He also commented on the health of the officers in his company, and described the living conditions, but he did not tell of his own injuries at Istabulat.

He wrote about supporting a raiding party on Turkish front lines after which two British soldiers were displayed on the enemy parapet in January 1917, and his wounding at the battle of Istabulat when he won the V.C.

In 1975 he added notes briefly summing up the end of his war service, and it and some paintings and sketches are now preserved in the Imperial War Museum.

John Reginald Noble Graham was born in Calcutta, India, on September 17 1892.

His father, Frederick Noble Graham, became the second Baronet of Larbert House and Househill on the death of his father in 1926, and Reginald in turn became the third Baronet on November 25 1936.

He was educated at Eton and at Trinity College, Cambridge. On leaving university he joined the Anchor Line, of which his father was a director, but after two years in the Glasgow office World War One broke out.

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After the war he returned to India where he was manager of Karachi and Bombay Graham's Trading Companies, and he was chairman of the Karachi Chamber of Commerce from 1927-28.

While there he gained the rank of Squadron Leader in the service of the Calcutta Light Horse, then Commander in the Bombay Light Patrol.

Back in Britain he rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in the Argylls, attached to Staff Movement Control Scottish Command, and fought in the Second World War.

He received an O.B.E. at an investiture in 1946, and three years later the King Haakon VII Liberty Cross, a medal awarded to Norwegian or foreign military or civilian personnel for outstanding achievement during war.

He was Gentleman Usher of the Green Rod to the Most Ancient and Noble Order of the Thistle from 1959-79.

He married Rachel Septima Sprot, daughter of Sir Alexander Sprot, and they had two children, Lesley, born on August 20 1921, and John Alexander, born on July 15 1926, who became the fourth Baronet after his father's death in Edinburgh at the age of 88 on December 6 1980.

He was cremated at the city's Morton Hall Crematorium, and his ashes are buried in front of a memorial cross in the Crematorium grounds, without a memorial tablet. His medals are at the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders Museum at Stirling Castle.