

Remembrance Day 2021 Tim Collins

Let me start by reading out three citations for bravery awards during the First World War to the same person – Theodore Hardy:

This citation is for the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) was published in the London Gazette on 5 March 1918:

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in volunteering to go with a rescue party for some men who had been left stuck in the mud the previous night between the enemy's outpost line and our own. With his left arm in splints, owing to a broken wrist, and under the worst weather conditions, he crawled out with patrols to within seventy yards of the enemy and remained with wounded men under heavy fire.

This citation is for the Military Cross (MC) was published in the London Gazette on 19 April 1918:

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in tending the wounded. The ground on which he worked was constantly shelled and the casualties were heavy. He continually assisted in finding and carrying wounded and in guiding stretcher bearers to the aid post.

And this citation is for the award of the Victoria Cross was published in the London Gazette on 9 July 1918:

For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty on many occasions. Although over fifty years of age, he has, by his fearlessness, devotion to men of his battalion, and quiet,

unobtrusive manner, won the respect and admiration of the whole division.

His marvellous energy and endurance would be remarkable even in a very much younger man, and his valour and devotion are exemplary.

The three highest awards of bravery that this country bestows.

Remarkable to be earned by one man.

Remarkable still when you know that Theodore Hardy was not a regular soldier.

This is the final line of that last citation:

This very gallant chaplain was seen moving quietly amongst the men and tending the wounded, absolutely regardless of his personal safety.

Hardy was an Army Chaplain. A non-combatant. He didn't have a rifle or a pistol to defend himself. And yet he put himself in the front line to be with the men he had spiritual care for.

Theodore Hardy was born on 20 October 1863 in Exeter. And was a parish priest in Northumbria when war broke out in 1914.

He was initially rejected for service as a Chaplain, as he was 51 years' old when war started. However, in August 1916 Hardy was eventually accepted for army service as Temporary Chaplain, attached to the 8th Battalion, Lincolnshire Regiment.

In the two years he served as chaplain, he honoured his calling and walked alongside the officers and men of the 8th Battalion.

In early October 1918, Hardy was severely wounded attempting to retrieve yet another wounded soldier. He died a week later. Just a month before the end of the war.

But Theodore Hardy's heroics are not unique in the story of the Royal Army Chaplaincy. In total, five chaplains, including Hardy, have been awarded the Victoria Cross: one in the 2nd Afghan War, three in the First World War and one in the Second World War.

The story of the Chaplaincy within the forces is a remarkable one. Each chaplain a volunteer. Each one called to serve in the most extreme of parishes; each one selflessly serving others.

Non-combatants living out their faith – walking the extra mile, giving their tunic, being the Good Samaritan – living out the words of Jesus. *My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

During the First World war, names such as Woodbine Willy and Tubby Clayton became synonymous with the bringing of comfort, care and compassion to those caught up in the horror and destruction, the senselessness of war.

And so many made that ultimate sacrifice. Laying down their life for their friends.

179 Army Chaplains died during the First World War; 96 during the Second.

60 Royal Navy Chaplains died on board ships during the First and Second World Wars

The Royal Air Force has seen 24 of its chaplains give their lives in service to its men and women.

In many ways, their role is simple and focuses on spiritual support, on pastoral care and on moral guidance – and in these simple acts chaplains have walked alongside the troops for hundreds of years.

They were there in the the Crimea, the Western Front, Gallipoli, North Africa, Korea, Suez, Aden, Northern Ireland, The Falklands.

They were there most recently in Iraq, and in Afghanistan. On the battlefield, on board ship, at the air force base.

The conflicts may change but the call, care, compassion and prayer remain constant. Selflessly serving others – in extreme situations.

To paraphrase one Great War chaplain, “we go where the troops go; if we are not always able to pray with them, we can always pray for them. And we ask that you do too!”

And this evening, this Remembrance Sunday, I ask you to offer your prayers to those men and women who walk alongside our troops offering the love of Christ to one and all. Amen