Local First World War Victoria Cross recipients



Robert Quigg VC in army uniform

Sergeant (Sgt.) Robert Quigg and Private (Pte.) Robert Morrow both received the highest military honour for selflessness in saving others. Sergeant Robert Quigg VC was honoured for bravery under fire during the Battle of the Somme, while Private Robert Morrow VC carried out many acts of heroism under horrendous conditions during the First World War until his death in 1915.

Both are due to be remembered in their home villages – Bushmills in Co. Antrim and Newmills in Co. Tyrone – as part of wider initiatives to help increase understanding about the First World War and conserve and explore its legacy.

HLF has awarded over £4million to community projects across the UK through its dedicated First World War: then and now programme, which launched in 2013 and offers groups between £3,000 and £10,000 to explore, conserve and share local FWW heritage.

Paul Mullan, Head of HLF, Northern Ireland, said: “We are supporting a range of projects marking the centenary of the First World War, to allow local people to explore, explain and highlight Northern Ireland’s strong and diverse links with the conflict.

“These two projects demonstrate how HLF can support community groups to both uncover and conserve important local heritage. The First World War projects are providing better access and resources for everyone, helping increase our collective knowledge and awareness of this crucial part of our history.”

Sgt. Quigg’s story

Sgt. Quigg’s VC was awarded for bravery during the Battle of the Somme. On 1 July 1916, his platoon in the Royal Irish Rifles advanced three times only to be beaten back, with many member of his battalion killed or wounded. When it became known that platoon commander Lieutenant Harry Macnaghten was missing the Co. Antrim man immediately volunteered to go out into no man’s land and search for his commander.

Under heavy shell and machine gun fire, he went out and returned seven times for the lieutenant – whose body was never found – each time bringing back a wounded man, the last dragged on a waterproof sheet yards from German-controlled land. His efforts lasted for seven hours, until he was too exhausted to continue. Sgt. Quigg received a hero’s welcome on his return home, and lived until 1955.

The Robert Quigg VC Commemoration Society has received a HLF grant of £9,500 to commemorate the role of the decorated soldier and other men from Bushmills who played a role in the conflict. The society currently promotes history through community-based activities such as education workshops and public information days, as well as an annual Bushmills at War exhibition.

It is looking to assist people seeking information on relatives involved in the war, and help local people learn more about the conflict. Any findings made by people researching their own family heritage will be encouraged to be shared, while the group is hoping to produce a short educational video on Sgt. Quigg, which will be made available online.

Leonard Quigg, great nephew of Robert and Chair of the Robert Quigg VC Commemoration Society, said: “It is vitally important to remember the incredibly brave actions of local heroes such as Robert Quigg. We are delighted to be able to work on such a project, and it also provides a great starting point for local people to learn the wider story of the First World War.”

Pte. Morrow’s story

The Newmills Cultural Group has received £9,900 from the HLF to upgrade the existing VC memorial in the village, as well as run a series of commemorative events to educate people about Pte. Morrow and also the heroism and horrors of the First World War.

On 12 April 1915, Pte. Morrow’s battalion, of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, were dug in below the Messines Ridge, southeast of Ypres, when they came under heavy shellfire which left many buried in collapsed trenches.

Ignoring the explosions and violence around him, the soldier dug out six men and carried them to safety, returning each time to see if more people needed help. He died two weeks later, having been seriously wounded at St. Julien.

Although a memorial to the private already exists in Newmills, the applicants say there is little awareness, both locally and beyond, about who he was and why he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

Drew Robinson, Chair of the Newmills and District VC Group, said: “We want to provide people with ownership of Pte. Morrow’s bravery, and also the legacy and lessons of the First World War, to ensure such important and serious moments in our history are well remembered.”

Further information

Ryan Miller on tel: 07789 552 340 or email: ryanmiller@nick-garbutt.com.