

123: William La Touche Congreve VC DSO MC

Basic Information [as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC]

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: William ['Billy'] La Touche Congreve VC, DSO, MC
 Rank: Major
 Battalion / Regiment: Rifle Brigade
 Service Number: Date of Death: 20 July 1916 Age at Death: 25
 Buried / Commemorated at: Corbie Communal Cemetery Extension, Corbie, Departement de la Somme
 Picardie, France
 Additional information given by CWGC: Legion of Honour. Son of Lt.-Gen. Sir Walter Congreve, V.C., K.C.B., M.V.O., and Lady Congreve, of Chartley Castle, Staffs.; husband of Pamela Congreve, of 15, Queen Anne's Gate, London.

In stark contrast to most of the other local war casualties detailed in this work a considerable amount is known and has been recorded about the life, and death, of 'Billy' Congreve and so only the barest outlines will be given here.

Billy Congreve – a summation of his early life and career

William La Touche Congreve was born on 22 March 1891 at Burton Hall, the Congreve family home and the predecessor of Burton Manor when it had been rebuilt after 1903 by Henry Neville Gladstone. His middle name, La Touche, was after his mother's maiden name - she was Cecilia (Celia) Henrietta Dolores Blount La Touche. William's father, Captain Walter Norris Congreve (later General) was a distinguished soldier in the Second Boer War [The Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own)] when, in December 1899, he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

12	Burton Hall	1	Fanny E. Congreve	Head	54	born Wincham, Cheshire
			Celia H.D.	daughter-in-law	23	born India
			Amelia H.S.	sister	51	born Wincham, Cheshire
			Infant	grandson	2 weeks	born Burton
			Mary Thomas	servant		
			Elizabeth Foster	servant		
			Susan Harrison	servant		
			Annie Ellis	servant		
			Ann Davies	servant		
			Frederick Glover	servant		
			John T. Gledhill	servant		
			George Thomas	servant		
			Harriet Shaw	servant		
			John Harrison	servant		

1891 census (extract) – Burton Hall

Fanny E. Congreve	54		born Wincham, Cheshire
Celia H.D.	23	daughter-in-law	born India
Amelia H.S.	51	sister	born Wincham, Cheshire
Infant	2 weeks	grandson	born Burton

Ten servants are also listed in the household.

At the time of the 1891 census (5 April) Billy was just two weeks old, unnamed (and shown as 'infant' in the census return) and with his mother at Burton Hall. Fanny Emma Congreve (nee Townshend, of Wincham Hall near Northwich) was the head of

James W Rynd	Head	M	63	Clergyman	Church of England		Ireland
Rose W	Wife	M	55				Chile
Celia Congreve	Step dau	M	33				India
Winnifred Rynd	Dau	S	25				Lincoln Beckingham
Reginald F	Son	S	24				do do
Walter W.B Monck	Visitor	S	23				Shropshire Welshampton
Geoffrey C Congreve	Ind. Son	S	3				Hants Gosport
Agnes Baker	Serv	S	22	Parlourmaid	Domestic		Not known
Ethel Chapman	Serv	S	18	Cook	do		Sussex Blackham
Alicia Isaac	Serv	S	23	Housemaid	do		Devon Combe Martin
Annie M. Lacey	Serv	S	23	Nurse	do		Not known
Janet Lardine	Serv	S	16	Kitchenmaid	do		Not known

1901 census (extract) – The Rectory, Rectory Road, Brasted, Sevenoaks, Kent

James W. Rynd	63	clergyman, C of E	born Ireland
Rose W.	55		born Chile
Celia Congreve	33	step daughter	born India
Winnifred Rynd	25		born Beckingham, Lincs.
Reginald F.	24		born Beckingham, Lincs.
Walter W.B. Monck	23	visitor	born Welshampton, Shropshire
Geoffrey C. Congreve	3	grandson	born Gosport, Hants.

In the household there were also five servants.

James William Rynd, the Rector of Brasted, was born in 1838 in Kilmessan, County Meath, and died on 8 January 1914.

Rose [nee Rosa Wilhelmina (Minna) Muller] was born in 1844 in Chile, the daughter of William and Marria Muller.

William Muller was born in 1809, in Bremen, Germany and Marria was born in 1821, in Chile. Rosa married Charles W Blount La Touche (born 1835), a Captain in the Indian Army, at St James' Westminster in mid-1866. Following their marriage Charles and Rosa went back to India but Charles died the following year (29 December 1867) in Macherber Kattywar, India, and Cecilia [Celia] Henrietta Dolores La Touche, their only child, was born shortly before Charles died. Charles had served with distinction in India during the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and had been recommended for the VC, although this was not awarded. Had it been granted Cecilia would have had the unique distinction of being the daughter, wife and mother of holders of the Victoria Cross

In April/June 1871, when Cecilia would have been 4½, Rosa married James Rynd in Barnet and they went on to be married for 42 and had nine children.

Additional details of Cecilia [Celia] Congreve and Geoffrey Cecil Congreve, one of her three sons, are given elsewhere in this account.

William ['The Captain'] Congreve, Billy Congreve's grandfather, had been the Chief Constable of Staffordshire (and lived in Stafford) when he retired to Burton Hall in 1889. In the 1901 census he is recorded there, aged 69, with his wife Fanny Emma (64) and two daughters (Winifred Mary Congreve, 28, and Dorothy Lee King, 26). Despite having not lived in Burton for most of his tenure of the village (Burton Hall had been leased to a succession of tenants), William had invested a considerable amount of

money in the village and this had adversely affected the wealth of the family. On William Congreve's death in January 1902 Burton Hall, and the village, passed to his eldest son, Major Walter Norris Congreve, Billy Congreve's father. Walter heard of his father's death at the time that he was serving as Private Secretary to Lord Kitchener in the Transvaal (South Africa). On his return to Britain, and wishing to rid himself of the financial burden of Burton, Walter put the entire Burton estate up for sale and it was sold to Henry Neville Gladstone for £80 000 on 2 February 1903, just 13 months after 'The Captain's' death and just a few weeks short of Billy Congreve's 12th birthday. The family then moved to Ireland - Walter had obtained the post of Personal Assistant (aide-de-camp) to the Duke of Connaught - but Walter, requiring a home in England, purchased Chartley Castle in Staffordshire in September 1904.

Walter Norris Congreve and the Second Boer War

In January 1898 Walter Congreve had been appointed as District Inspector of Musketry to the Aldershot Command but in October 1899, on the outbreak of war in South Africa, he resigned his appointment and was posted to the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade which had been ordered to proceed from Crete to Natal. Walter sailed from Southampton on 24 October and reached Cape Town on 18 November 1899. On his arrival in Durban on 23 November he couldn't join the 2nd Battalion as this was besieged, with the rest of Sir George White's forces, in Ladysmith. Walter Congreve was, therefore, attached to the Staff of the 4th Infantry Brigade and then as Press Censor at Headquarters.

On 15 December 1899 Walter accompanied Sir Redvers Buller, the Commander-in-Chief of British forces in South Africa during the early months of the Second Boer War, towards Ladysmith. However, because of confusion, the heavy artillery became pinned down near Colenso by the Boers artillery and the British guns ran out of ammunition.

Buller recognised the importance of retrieving the artillery before the guns fell into the hands of the Boers and so decided to advance to the line to attempt to pull the guns back to a safer position. During this advance Walter Congreve was hit by at least three bullets and sought refuge, with others, in a donga (a dry gully). Despite his injuries - one bullet had passed through his right leg below the knee - he and three others crawled out of the donga to rescue his close friend, Freddie Roberts, who had also been injured and was lying in open ground.

For his actions at Colenso Walter Norris Congreve, together with six others, was awarded the Victoria Cross. Freddie Roberts (Frederick Hugh Sherston Roberts), Walter's friend, died two days after receiving his injuries and received a posthumous VC. The awards were actually presented awarded in Pretoria by Lord Roberts, Freddie's father (Field Marshal Frederick Sleigh Roberts, 1st Earl Roberts), on 25 October 1900. Lord Roberts himself had been awarded the VC for his actions in 1858 during the Indian Rebellion.

On 22 January 1900 Walter Norris Congreve, during a slow recovery from the injuries he'd received at Colenso, was appointed as Adjutant of Kitchener's Horse, a Corps. of Irregular Cavalry and, subsequently, was promoted to Major (1901) and became private secretary to Lord Kitchener in the Transvaal. He was still in the Transvaal when, in January 1902, he heard that his father, William ['The Captain'] Congreve had died at Burton Hall.



Billy Congreve, a somewhat sickly child, was sent away to school at an early age, firstly to Summer Fields School, Oxford and then to Eton College, (1904 -1907) where he was considered to be an 'average' scholar although he left early to recuperate from a bout of rheumatic fever. Following Eton he received some private education before attending a 'crammer' in London from which he won a place at Sandhurst, then the Royal Military College, in Surrey.

Billy was at the RMC, as a 'Gentleman Cadet Sergeant', from 1909 until 1911; here he excelled and nearly won the Sword of Honour, coming second in his entry [The Sword of Honour is awarded to the British Army Officer Cadet considered by the Commandant to be, overall, the best of the course]. Leaving the RMC in 1911 Billy obtained a commission in the 2nd Light Rifle Brigade on 4 March and, in the same year, was posted to the 3rd Battalion of the Rifle Brigade in Tipperary where he spent the three years until the outbreak of WW1. On 1 February 1913 he was promoted to Lieutenant. However, at the time of the 1911 census Bill was with his parents and younger brother Christopher in Kent:

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
Walter Norris Congreve	Head	48	-	Married	20	3	3	-	Colonel in H.M.'s Army	Army	Employed by H.M.'s Army	Chatham Barracks	British subject	
Cecilia H.D. Congreve	Wife	-	43	Married	20	3	3	-	Nil	-	-	India	British subject	
William La T. Congreve	Son	20	-	Single	1	-	-	-	2 nd Lieutenant in H.M.'s Army	Army	Employed by H.M.'s Army	Burton, Cheshire	120	British subject
Christopher A.J. Congreve	Son	7	-	Single	-	-	-	-	School boy	-	-	Royal Hospital, Dublin	601	British subject
Agnes Boyle	Servant	-	31	Single	-	-	-	-	house maid	-	-	Rathdown, Co. Dublin	611	Irish subject
Margaret Boyle	"	-	28	Single	-	-	-	-	house maid & nurse	-	-	ditto		Irish subject
Mary Cullen	"	-	34	Single	-	-	-	-	house maid	-	-	Rathdown, Co. Dublin	604	Irish subject
Gustine Filson	Cook	-	40	Single	-	-	-	-	Cook	-	-	Rathdown, Co. Dublin	80	Irish subject
Bonnie Rhodes	Servant	17	22	Single	-	-	-	-	house boy	-	-	Midland, Italy	814	Irish subject
Margaret Murphy	Visitor	-	36	Married	44	1	1	-	Wife	-	-	Asst. Nurse	350	Irish subject

(To be filled up by the Enumerator.)

I certify that—
 (1) All the persons in this Schedule are entered in the proper sex column.
 (2) I have entered the names and families in Columns 2 and 3 separately, and have compared their sum with the total number of persons.
 (3) After making the necessary enquiries I have completed all entries in the Schedule which appeared to be defective, and have corrected such as appeared to be erroneous.

Initials of Enumerator: *L.H.*

Sex	Female	Male
4	6	10

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling.)

Write below the Number of Rooms in this Dwelling (House, Tenement, or Apartment). Count the kitchen as a room but do not count scullery, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom; nor warehouse, office, shop.

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature: *W. Congreve*
 Postal Address: *Colonel, Chatham Barracks, Hythe, Kent*

1911 census – Commandant House, Hythe, Kent

Walter Norris Congreve	48	Colonel in His Majesty's army Employed & employer military School of Musketry	born Chatham Barracks
Cecilia H.D.	43		born India
William La T.	20	2 nd Lieutenant in His Majesty's army	born Burton
Christopher A.J.	7		born Royal Hospital, Dublin

Also in the household were five servants and one visitor.

Walter and Cecilia had been married for 20 years and all three children had survived.

Christopher Congreve had been born at the Royal Hospital, Dublin, the Congreves' residence when Walter was the Personal Assistant to the Duke of Connaught.

Geoffrey C Congreve, Walter and Cecilia's second son, was recorded as a naval cadet, aged 13 (born Eastbourne, Sussex) at the Royal Naval College, Osborne, Whippingham, Isle of Wight, in this census.

Commandant House, the address in the 1911 census (and also known as Hay House), was adjacent to Hythe barracks and was built in 1808 - 1810 to provide a new depot for the Royal Staff Corps., which was previously stationed at Chatham.

On 28 June Archduke Francis (Franz) Ferdinand and his wife were assassinated at Sarajevo; Ferdinand was the next-in-line for the Austro-Hungarian throne and it was his assassination that precipitated WW1. However, the political situation in Ireland (then a united part of Great Britain) at this time was also unsettled, the country entering into its 'revolutionary period':

Home Rule seemed certain when in 1910 the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) under John Redmond held the balance of power in the British House of Commons and the third Home Rule Bill was introduced in 1912. Unionist resistance was immediate, with the formation of the Ulster Volunteers (UVF). In turn the Irish Volunteers were established to oppose them and prevent the UVF introduction of self-government in Ulster.

In September 1914, just as the First World War broke out, the UK Parliament passed the Third Home Rule Act to establish self-government for Ireland, but the act was suspended for the duration of the war. Irish nationalist leaders and the IPP under Redmond supported Ireland's participation in the British war effort, in the belief that it would ensure implementation of Home Rule after the war. The core of the Irish Volunteers' leadership were against this decision, but the majority of the men left to form the National Volunteers, some of whom enlisted in Irish regiments of the New British Army, the 10th and 16th (Irish) Divisions, the counterparts of the unionist 36th (Ulster) Division. [Wikipedia]

With the political situation in Ireland being so unsettled it might have been expected that Billy Congreve and the Rifle Brigade would have remained in Ireland but, instead, on 4 August 1914 they were mobilised and returned to a base in Cambridge having first sailed to Holyhead.



SS Lake Michigan

Following just three weeks of preparatory training Billy Congreve and his battalion left Southampton for St Nazaire on the evening of 8 September on the troopship SS *Lake Michigan* but, disembarkation being delayed through the amount of military activity around the port, they were not landed until the morning of 12 September.

On Saturday 19 September Billy and his troops marched to Courcelles, *arriving long after dark. We had to go a long way round, making it a march of seventeen miles with the last few in pitch-dark over cobblestones. All day while marching we could hear the guns on our left.* The following day the troops marched to just outside Vielle Arcy where they were to relieve the Guards Brigade *who in the last three days have had twenty attacks on them, and have*

piled up the corpses in front of their trenches till they can hardly see out of them. The smell is, I hear, horrible.

On Monday 21 September 1914 the 3rd Rifle Brigade was still awaiting orders but Billy had heard that Major-General Hubert Hamilton, commander of the 3rd Division in General Sir Horace Lockwood Smith-Dorrien's 11 Corps., wanted him as his ADC (aide-de-camp, a Personal Assistant) but that the battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel R Alexander, had refused to release him for the post. Hamilton again requested that Billy be transferred to him and, on this same day, this took place - just at the time that the 3rd Rifle Brigade received orders to relieve the 5th Brigade. Billy wrote *It was horrid my leaving them all, just as the battalion was off to the trenches, but the offer was too good to lose.* [Quotations in italics here, and following unless otherwise credited, are from *Armageddon Road : A VC's Diary 1914 – 1916*, Billy Congreve]

Such positions - well behind the front line - were considered 'safe' and these officers were mostly despised by the fighting soldiers. It would turn out, however, that Billy did not wish to lead from a position of safety but (and this is portrayed graphically through his diaries) wished at all times to have a direct involvement in leading from the front. Hubert Hamilton died just three weeks later, on 14 October 1914 (the fourth day of The Battle of La Bassée, after being shot in the forehead, and was replaced by James Aylmer Lowthorpe Haldane, previously the commanding officer of the 10th Infantry Brigade.

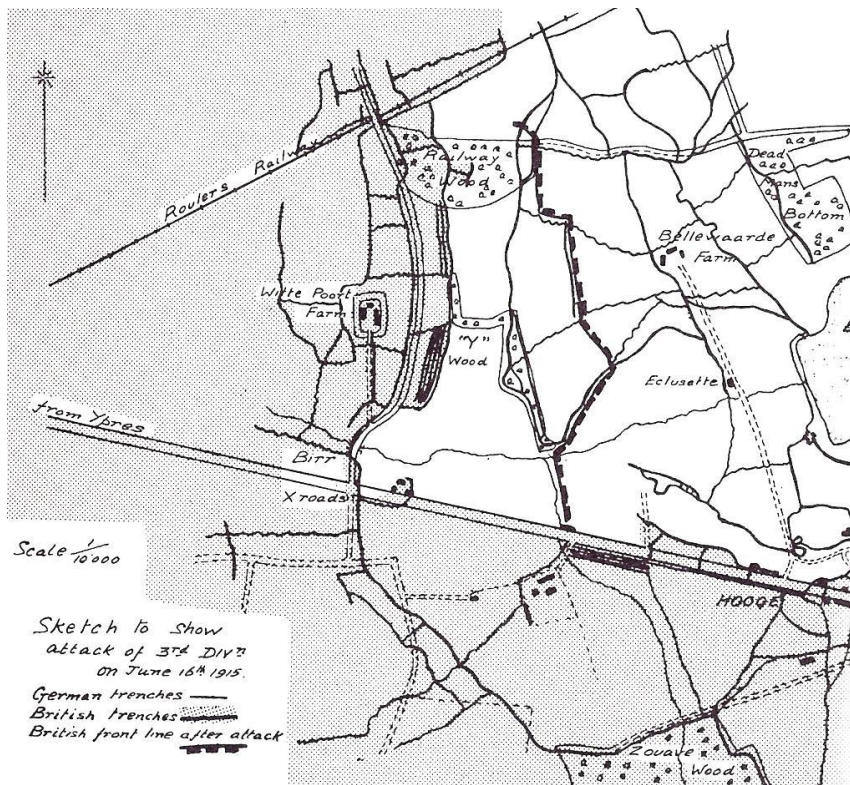
Billy's first significant encounter with the enemy was at the 1914 Battle of Neuve-Chapelle where, having installed himself in a house overlooking the front line trench, he saw how the attack of the Indian troops failed and how the whole involvement was going badly wrong. At one point Billy and his friend Cornwall (both only Lieutenants) took over the control of the reserve Battalions because they were retiring:

It was getting dark now, and when I got to Pont Logy I found to my horror that the Bedfords and Cheshires were retiring, goodness only knows why. I felt inclined to sit down and cry, but hadn't time. The men said that they had had orders to retire. There were very few officers about and what there were seemed useless. The officer commanding - a captain - saluted me and called me 'Sir', which showed he was pretty far gone. Eventually Cornwall and I, after great efforts, got them together and started them digging..... As we stood on the road (it was almost dark), a German machine-gun opened fire down the road ...that cleared us off in no time.

Billy Congreve was a man who led by example and he could be highly critical of those who he perceived to be less competent or who failed to understand the consequences of their actions. On 23 March 1915, the day following his 24th birthday, he wrote

We are to take over the 27th Division line which embraces St Eloi. What joy!! Apparently the 27th Division are in a hopeless state. I am sure it's all owing to that silly old man, Snow, and his Staff.

Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas D'Oyly Snow KCB KCMG (5 May 1858 - 30 August 1940) was a British General on the Western Front during WW1 and played an important role leading the 4th Division in the retreat of August 1914, and commanding VII Corps. at the unsuccessful Gommecourt diversion on the First Day of The Somme (1 July 1916) and at



Billy Congreve's sketch map (redrawn) in *Armageddon Road: A VC's Diary 1914 – 1916*

The Battle of Cambrai in November 1917. Billy Congreve clearly disliked Snow; on 21 February he commented that *General Snow commands the 27th and is about as much good as an old hen...* When Billy referred to him as a *silly old man* Snow was aged 56.

In mid-June 1915 (Billy had been made a Captain on 6 June) the 3rd Division was in action at The First Battle of Bellewaarde, or The Battle of Hooze. This poorly-recorded conflict took place in an area of only around ½ mile square, but over 1000 men died within a 12 hour period (with many others

dying later from wounds and infection) as the British forces moved eastwards into German territory. Billy Congreve was then the aide-de-camp to Major General Haldane of the 3rd Division, within the V Corps., and becoming an influential member of the divisional staff. Billy's recorded criticism of poor leadership and organisation had continued:

Monday, May 31st (on a reconnaissance of land recently captured) After, we moved up the slope to the south. On the way, we found one of our dead men and a whole heap of abandoned rifles and equipment. The whole of this area is in a most disgraceful condition, and reflects the worst possible credit on the 27th and 28th Divisions. Everywhere we went we found traces of bad discipline and worse. The 8th Brigade told us that on taking over from the 28th Division, many wounded men were found still lying out; no attempt having been made to collect them. In one ruined cottage alone, twenty men were found. All had been wounded and had been collected and placed there. Nineteen were dead from lack of attention, and the only living man – a CSM in the 60th – was nearly so. It's terrible and I can see no possible excuse. There are many more instances of bad Staff work, but this is perhaps the worst.

4 June The V Corps Staff has been an awful worry ever since we came up here. The poor General is near driven mad. General A. is, I think, a bully and not a brilliant soldier. General J., his Chief Staff Officer, is already very cordially disliked – it's an unfortunate combination.

[Note: 'General A.' was Field Marshal Edmund Henry Hynman Allenby, 1st Viscount Allenby, GCB, GCMG, GCVO. Allenby had been put in command of V Corps. when Field Marshal Herbert Plumer went to command the Second Army. Allenby had, already, developed some reputation for poor decision-making and leadership: in 1914 a subordinate claimed that *he cannot explain verbally, with any lucidity at all, what his plans are* and it has been commented that commanding a Corps. seemed to make Allenby's bad temper even worse, where anything from a split infinitive in a staff paper to discovering a corpse in the field without the tin helmet that Allenby ordered his men to wear sent him off into a rage. [*Generals: Ten British Commanders Who Shaped The Modern World* Mark Urban Faber and Faber, London (2005).

'General J.' was Brigadier-General Sir Hugh Sandham Jeudwine, KCB, KBE. After the war he became Chief of General Staff at Headquarters British Army on the Rhine and then, from 1919, General Officer Commanding the 5th Division in Ireland. His last appointment was as Director General of the Territorial Army in 1923 before he retired in 1927.]

9th June We have been ordered to do an attack on Bellewaarde Farm. The date of the attack is the 14th. It's now the 9th and, of course, it is the most desperate business to get everything ready in four days. It is almost ludicrous and would be, if it wasn't so desperate... The 9th Brigade have now been out for nearly a week, so will have had some small chance of training themselves, but the 7th Brigade... will have no rest, no chance to organise all the little details that are so essential... The ammunition supply is very limited... Altogether, it is no pleasing job. The General has already made up his mind, I think to fail. I think there need be no failure, but it is not a bit satisfactory.

11th June We may now, I hear, get a day or possibly two days extra. The General and Colonel Evans are almost balmy. As well as the many natural worrying details, there is always the horrid atmosphere of the V Corps. General A. comes every day and sits talking for ages, and generally finishes by saying how easy the whole thing is – and being generally somewhat displeasing. It doesn't trouble me but, but it is a bore having the Staff bothered.

On 25 June 1915 Billy Congreve had a short break from his service on the front line when he returned to England to meet up with his girlfriend, Pamela Maude, in London. Pamela was recuperating from an unspecified operation and Billy was able to stay only until 1 July when he returned to the front line, arriving into camp at about 4 pm. Interestingly, he appears to have sailed back with noted architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, a friend of the Congreve family and later the designer of The Cenotaph, Whitehall. Billy and Pamela announced their engagement at the end of December 1915.

Billy's most momentous military actions, marriage and death, all occurred in the last few months of 1915 and first 7 months of 1916; this is the outline of the events of that short period.

On 18 August 1915 Billy, still a Lieutenant was appointed as a General Staff Officer (GSO) 3rd Grade and on 3 September he was promoted to Captain. During September and October 1915 Billy Congreve's 3rd Division was involved in the huge combined-armies operation around Hooze which, if all had gone according to plan, would result in the British meeting with the French armies and pushing northwards towards Belgium. On 21 August 1915 Billy wrote

Here we are, holding Hooze again. We hoped against hope that we were on the Canal line for the winter, and worked hard at getting everything put to rights. Now all our work goes into others' hands and we come to this beastly place, where everything has to be done over again. Hooze is in a poor way. Its condition after the 6th Division attack was too awful and, ever since then, the 17th Brigade have been working hard to get it straight, but it's a hard job. The dead bodies, old and new, made everything so fearfully slow, for one cannot dig a yard without coming on some grim relic which has either to be reburied or dug round.



The operation around Hooze turned out to be a fiasco and resulted in great loss of life, but for his actions Billy was awarded the Military Cross. Awarded on 11 January 1916, this was the same day that Captain Noel Godfrey Chavasse MC of the Royal Army Medical Corps. was awarded the same honour.

On 8 December 1915 Billy Congreve had been appointed Brigade-Major to the 76th Brigade (3rd Division) [the post he held when he was killed] and, on 22 February 1916, he was awarded the Legion of Honour Croix de Chevalier.

In early March 1916 the 76th Brigade was to relieve another brigade in the 3rd Division in the vicinity of The Bluff, near St Eloi and south of Ypres. The Bluff, an artificial hill in the landscape created by spoil from the adjacent Ypres-Comines Canal was the site of the Battles of Ypres. Elevated (just 9 metres high) in an otherwise flat landscape, The Bluff - just behind the British front line - was one of the best vantage points in the Ypres Salient which made it an important military objective. On 20 March Billy Congreve, accompanied by Lt. John Glubb, surveyed the area of The Bluff and Glubb later wrote

We went round the trenches with the young Congreve, who was the brigade-major. He was famous as a brave man. When we were walking with him in the line, between The Bluff and the canal, he suddenly spotted a broken machine-gun lying in the open on top of The Bluff spoil bank itself. He calmly climbed out of the trench and walked up the slope of The Bluff in the open to look at it. He must have been in full view of the Boche line for miles. Presumably none of the enemy was looking, as nobody would have dreamt that anyone would walk there in daylight.

Congreve had a great effect on the morale of his brigade.

[*Into Battle : A Soldier's Diary of the Great War* Lt-General Sir John Bagot Glubb Book Club Associates 1978]

On 27 March 1916 an attack near St Eloi in heavy mist led to Billy, then just 25, gaining his next military award. An unknown number of Germans, positioned in a large shell crater, were under attack and were returning the British fire. Billy noticed that, although their firing was continuing, a sandbag had been hoisted on a stick and was being waved about by some of the Germans. Concluding that at least some of the Germans were willing to surrender Billy thought that bluff might work so, instructing a nearby officer and four men to follow him, Billy dashed for the crater waving his revolver in the air. Although fired upon Billy wasn't hit and, on reaching the rim of the crater and looking in:

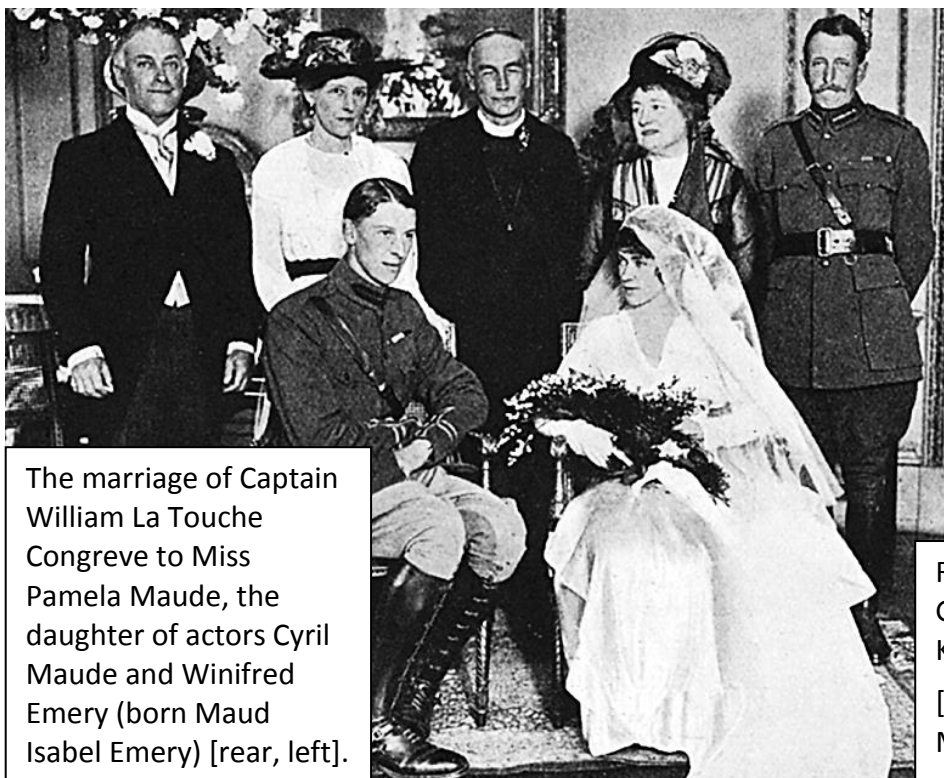
Imagine my surprise and horror when I saw a whole crowd of armed Boches! I stood there for a moment feeling a bit sort of shy, and then levelled my revolver at the nearest Boche and shouted, 'Hands up, all the lot of you!' few went up at once, then a few more and then the lot; and I felt the proudest fellow in the world as I cursed them.

It turned out he had captured 4 officers and 68 men and, although recommended for the Victoria Cross, Billy was awarded the DSO for conspicuous gallantry. The citation in the *Supplement to the London Gazette* (16 May 1916) reads: *Congreve, William La Touche Capt., Rifle Brigade. For conspicuous gallantry. He consolidated a newly-won*

position under very difficult conditions at a critical moment, and by personal courage brought about the surrender of a considerable body of enemy officers and men.

Two months later Billy returned to Britain on leave and, on 1 June 1916, he married his long-time girlfriend and actress, Pamela Cynthia Maude, at St Martin's-in-the-Fields.

On 16 May 1916 Billy Congreve was awarded the DSO and on 13 June he was Mentioned in Despatches.



The marriage of Captain William La Touche Congreve to Miss Pamela Maude, the daughter of actors Cyril Maude and Winifred Emery (born Maud Isabel Emery) [rear, left].

Rear right are Billy Congreve's parents, General Sir Walter Norris Congreve VC KCB MVO DL and Cecilia.

[Yooniq Images RM #102265795
Mary Evans Picture Library 2008]

Mid-1916 had been designated as the time for a major combined offensive and so, after just a few days of honeymoon, Billy rejoined his brigade at Meteren. Around this time Billy's father, Walter Norris Congreve, was serving on the front line and many instances are recorded when, in the battlefield area, father and son met to discuss the war. Indeed, on one occasion, in August 1915, Billy's youngest brother, Christopher John, then aged only 12 (during a school holiday and dressed in his Boy Scout's uniform) had visited Billy on the front line. It has been suggested that Christopher was the youngest British person to visit the front line during WW1.

On Thursday 20 July 1916 the fighting to capture the area around Longueval and Delville Wood was the main priority and two battalions of Billy's 76th Brigade (X111 Corps., 3rd Division) were involved, the 2nd Suffolks and the 10th Royal Welch Fusiliers (RWF). The Suffolks began their advance from a westerly direction at 3.35am and the RWF failed to make contact as they were led astray by guides who lost their way. The Suffolks went on unsupported and the two leading companies were decimated. When the 10th Royal Welch Fusiliers did finally arrive they were mistakenly fired on by a machine-gun barrage from the 11th Essex battalion in which they lost many of their

officers. It was this mess that Congreve was attempting to sort out when, talking to Major Stubbs at the Suffolks HQ and making notes of the situation, he was shot in the throat by a sniper, concealed in a cornfield, as he was climbing down from the top of a disused gunpit. The time of death was 10.55am; he was aged 25 years, 4 months and 8 days.

It was recorded at the time that

Just as he said the word 'work', he was hit. He stood for half a second and then collapsed. He never moved or spoke, and he was dead in a few seconds.

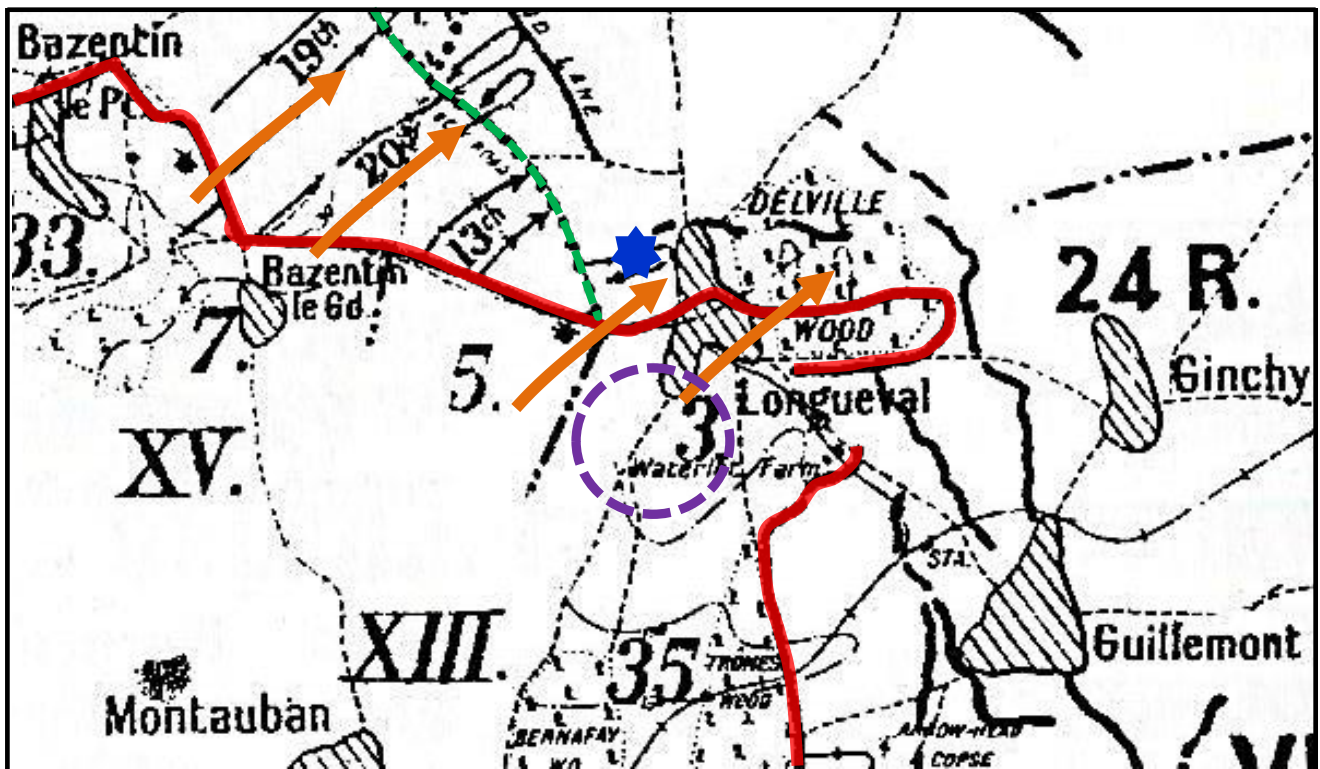
The following day Congreve's body was taken to the nearby town of Corbie and his father, who had heard of his son's death but still had to attend a Fourth Army Conference that morning, afterwards visited his body. For his actions at this time Billy was awarded the VC posthumously and his citation sums up this award. It is generally recognised that if Billy had survived the Great War that he would have been one of Britain's military leaders during WW2.

Citation - An extract from the *London Gazette*, dated 24th October, 1916 records the following: "For most conspicuous bravery during a period of fourteen days preceding his death in action. This officer constantly performed acts of gallantry and showed the greatest devotion to duty, and by his personal example inspired all those around him with confidence at critical periods of the operations. During preliminary preparations for the attack he carried out personal reconnaissances of the enemy lines, taking out parties of officers and non-commissioned officers for over 1,000 yards in front of our line, in order to acquaint them with the ground. All these preparations were made under fire. Later, by night, Major Congreve conducted a battalion to its position of employment, afterwards returning to it to ascertain the situation after assault. He established himself in an exposed forward position from where he successfully observed the enemy, and gave orders necessary to drive them from their position. Two days later, when Brigade Headquarters was heavily shelled and many casualties resulted, he went out and assisted the medical officer to remove the wounded to places of safety, although he was himself suffering severely from gas and other shell effects. He again on a subsequent occasion showed supreme courage in tending wounded under heavy shell fire. He finally returned to the front line to ascertain the situation after an unsuccessful attack, and whilst in the act of writing his report, was shot and killed instantly."

Billy's widow, Pamela, had been married to Billy for only 7 weeks before he was killed and, on 21 March 1917, she gave birth to their daughter, Mary Gloria Congreve.

On 21 July 1916 'Billy' La Touche Congreve was buried at Corbie Communal Cemetery and, on 1 November 1916, his widow received her husband's medals from the King at Buckingham Palace.

Billy Congreve was the first officer in the Great War to earn all three medals, the VC, DSO and MC and was Mentioned in Despatches on 5 occasions. Had he been awarded the VC when he was first recommended for this, in March 1916 (when, instead, he was awarded the DSO), he would have had the honour of gaining the VC and bar.



The area of The Somme around Longueval and Delville Wood on the 19 / 20 July 1916

The red line marks the main British front line, the orange arrows the direction of attack and the purple circle the opening position of the 3rd Division. Billy Congreve was shot by the trench/road known as Duke Street; this position is identified by the symbol ★.

His character showed a rare combination of sweetness and strength.

“ Under his modesty and gentleness he possessed great strength of character.
 “ He was beloved by all ranks, and the fine example he set of duty well done
 “ will for long keep him alive in their memories ”

are the words of his Divisional General, and in yet another letter from the same Officer we read :—

“ His splendid standard of duty, his great disregard of self made him think
 “ nothing too little to be done as long as anything remained to be done. He
 “ never spared himself and that I trusted him as I have rarely trusted anyone
 “ in my life was because I knew that few in the whole Army had so high a
 “ sense of duty. He was a natural soldier with the instinct and perception
 “ which would have made him one day a great soldier.”

Few young Officers (Major William Congreve was but twenty-five when he met his death) can have earned such golden words from their Commanding Officer.

The manner of his death was as follows :—

“ He was in a broken road and getting the Regiment there to make them-
 “ selves secure, and when looking at the ground in front which is somewhat
 “ higher was shot by a German sniper from a cornfield. The bullet struck
 “ him just below the breast bone, and he must have died instantaneously.”

A friend and fellow Officer of Major Congreve's wrote :—

“ One had only to walk round the trenches to see how the men loved him. He
 “ was quite unspoilable and success never turned his head. He only insisted
 “ that he had done nothing, but had been very frightened, neither of which
 “ were in the least true. He often undertook and accomplished the apparently
 “ impossible. I feel his loss grievously as he had such a specially charming
 “ personality, and I had seen much of him.”

Extracts from *Major William La Touche Congreve VC, DSO, MC of the Rifle Brigade*
 This is a contemporary document reproduced at www.julienco.com/congreve.pd



MRS. W. LA TOUCHE CONGREVE AND HER LITTLE DAUGHTER

Mrs. W. La Touche Congreve is the wife of the late Major W. La Touche Congreve, V.C., D.S.O., M.C., who was killed in action very shortly after his marriage. He was the son of Major-General W. W. Congreve, V.C., and, like his father, was in the Rifle Brigade. Mrs. Congreve was Miss Fanny Maule and is the daughter of Mr. Cyril Maule. The baby is a god-daughter of Queen Mary.



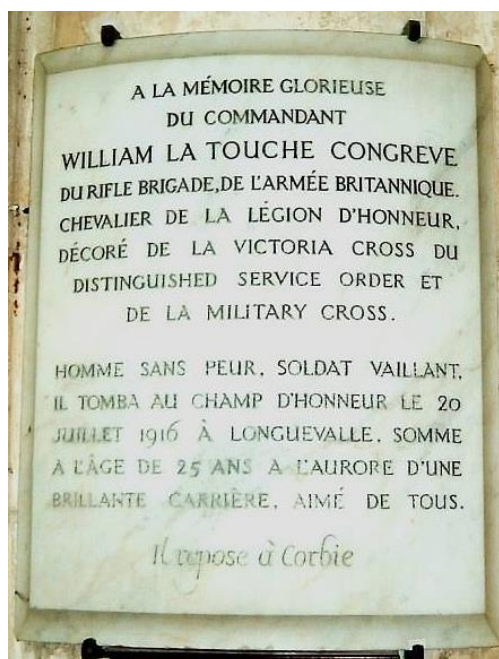
William La Touche Congreve's war grave at Corbie Communal Cemetery, Somme

A fellow officer commented: *I don't think there was ever anyone like him; he was absolutely glorious, and even when he was ADC, all the men knew and loved him -which is unusual. His friendship has done more for me in many ways than I can say; it was the most priceless thing I had. He was the bravest and most gentle fellow in the world, and I can*

imagine the smile with which he greeted the 'sudden turn' when the bullet got him.

Billy Congreve also has a plaque to his memory (designed by Sir Edwin Landseer Lutyens, a friend of the Congreve family) in Corbie church and another plaque by Lutyens at St John the Baptist's church in Stowe-by-Chartley, near the family home, in Staffordshire.

Billy Congreve's service in the First World War is also recalled, along with that of his father, in a Roll of Honour book in St Michael's Church, West Felton, Shropshire, the village having been his childhood home when his father lived at West Felton Grange from 1903 to 1924. His VC is recorded in the same village on the community building called the Haslehurst Institute, land for building which had been given by his father. Billy is named also on the village War Memorial.



William La Touche Congreve memorial, Corbie church



Major William La Touche Congreve commemoration on the War Memorial plaque in St John the Baptist Church, Stow-by-Chartley, Staffordshire

Correspondence.
O/C No 2. Infantry Section forwards. Tel of officers eligible for
1914 Star. 26.11.17.
Address. G.H.Q. 3rd Division.

The Hon. Mr. W. Fraser
Inveran.
Haver
Scotland
address:-

This Medal Index Card has, on the reverse, a Scottish address for Pamela, Billy Congreve's widow. On 22 December 1919 she had married Major the Hon. William Fraser, so this inscription post-dates this event.

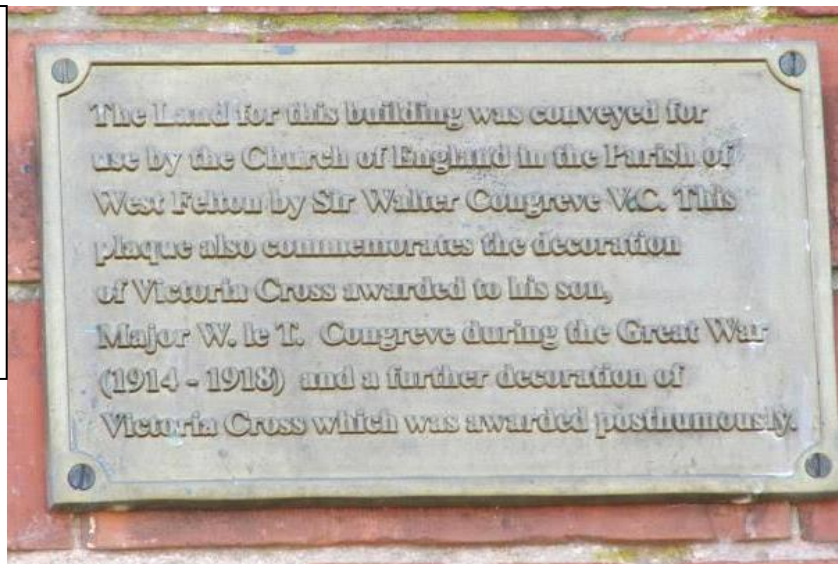
CONGREVE Capt. R. Major W. LAT.
Life Brigade
M. S. D. h. f. 4. 1. 1. 7
V. C. D. L. O. 476
Filed
Page 240

Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929

In Summer 1919 the army paid outstanding credits – mainly remaining wages – to soldiers or, in the case of those who had died, their family or nominated representatives. At the same time a War Gratuity was often paid. Billy Congreve had accrued a total payment of £35 12s 8d from the army, equivalent to a *labour value* (wages) of around £5550 in 2016. Most of this payment was made to Cox & Co., the banking company used by many officers. In addition it appears that a War Gratuity of £59 was paid (the recipient was not recorded) in October 1919; this is equivalent to a *labour value* (wages) of around £9150 in 2016.

The War Gratuity was introduced in December 1918 as a payment to be made to those men who had served in WW1 for a period of 6 months or more home service or for any length of service if a man had served overseas. The rules governing the gratuity were implemented under Army Order 17 of 1919 but the amount paid was related to the length of war service.

The land for this building was conveyed for use by the Church of England in the Parish of West Felton by Sir Walter Congreve VC. This plaque also commemorates the decoration of Victoria Cross awarded to his son, Major W. le T. Congreve during the Great War (1914 – 1918) and a further decoration of Victoria Cross which was awarded posthumously.



Haslehurst Memorial Institute

BRILLIANT YOUNG OFFICER'S FATE.

By the death in action of Brevet-major W. La Touche Congreve, D.S.O., Rifle Brigade, the Army loses a brilliant young officer who has close family connections with Cheshire and Denbighshire. He was the eldest son of Lieutenant-general W. Norris Congreve, V.C., C.B., M.V.O. (who several months ago was given the command of an army corps in France), of Congreve, Staffs, and Burton Hall, Cheshire, and who is a nephew of the late Mr. Walter Ralph Congreve, of Segrwyd, Denbigh. Deceased, who had been awarded the Military Cross, the D.S.O., and the Croix de Chevalier, was only married on June 1, his bride being a daughter of Mr. Cyril Maude.

Western Mail -
Wednesday 26
July 1916

The Memorial Plaque,
RMA Chapel,
Sandhurst
[<http://www.vconline.org.uk/william-l-congreve-vc/4586228117>]

THE FALLEN AND WOUNDED.

PERSONAL NOTES.

Major W. La T. Congreve, D.S.O.

Mr Cyril Maude, the English actor, lately received word of the death of his son-in-law, Major William La Touche Congreve, D.S.O., of the British Army, who was killed in action in France on July 20th. Major Congreve, who had been named for promotion to a colonelcy, married Miss Pamela Maude, the actor's youngest daughter, last June, in London, when home on furlough, and was a bridegroom of but little more than a month when he met his death. His service in the Army had been one of marked distinction. He had been awarded the Military Cross and the decoration of the Legion of Honour, and had been recommended for the Victoria Cross. He was 24 years old.

North Otago Times, New Zealand –
25 September 1916



Five Postscripts

1: Celia Blount La Touche Congreve, Billy's mother, Celia (Cecilia) is worthy of mention. Born the daughter of Captain La Touche, an officer who served with distinction in India during the Indian Mutiny of 1857, she played her own significant part in the Great War in Europe receiving from the French Government first the Reconnaissance Francaise and later (for her services during the bombardment of Rosieres-aux-Salines in 1918) the Croix de Guerre. For her services in Antwerp, where she helped to remove the wounded, she was awarded the Queen Elizabeth Medal by the King of the Belgians.

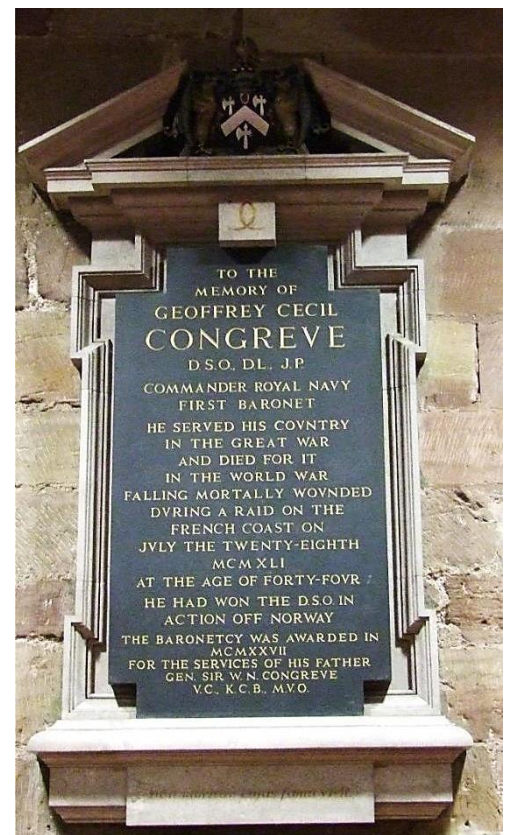


Celia Blount La Touche Congreve

2: On 22 December 1919 Pamela Congreve, Billy's widow, married Major the Hon. William Fraser, DSO, MC (born 5 July 1890). He was one of Billy's closest friends and the officer who (after Billy's death), had commanded the 1st Gordons, part of the 76th Brigade previously commanded by Billy, during the last months of the war. William Fraser had been Billy's Best Man at his marriage to Pamela 3½ years earlier. By the end of the war Fraser was a Temporary Lieutenant-Colonel, with a Distinguished Service Order, a Military Cross, and three Mentions in Despatches, but on the return of peace he reverted to the substantive rank of Captain, serving on the staff at Sandhurst. He was promoted to Brevet Major in December 1919 and in February 1940 he was appointed to command the 24th Infantry Brigade (Guards), organising for the proposed intervention in Norway. In 1944 he retired with the honorary rank of Brigadier and from 1945 to 1947 he was Chief of the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration mission in Paris, delivering food and medical aid and dealing with displaced persons. William Fraser died on 11 November 1964 in Suffolk. Pamela and William Fraser had two sons, one of whom died as a child, the other being General Sir David Fraser of the Grenadier Guards who died on 15 July 2012. Pamela died on 20 October 1975.

3: Billy Congreve had two younger brothers:

[i] Geoffrey Cecil Congreve was born in 1897 and died 28 July 1941 aged 44. He married Helena Madeline Mary Allhusen, daughter of Augustus Henry Eden Allhusen and Osma Mary Dorothy Stanley, on 14 October 1922 and he gained the title of 1st Baronet Congreve of Congreve.



Memorial to Sir Geoffrey Congreve, the sole baronet of the second creation. South nave aisle of St. Michael and All Hallows church, Penkridge, Staffordshire. [<http://www.militaryimages.net/>]

Geoffrey participated in WW1 in the Royal Navy; in July 1914, on the outbreak of war, he was a Midshipman on an old (built 1896) battleship, HMS *Hannibal*. By June 1918 Geoffrey was a Lieutenant and, between 1920 and 1921 was the aide-de-camp to the General Officer Commanding Egypt and Palestine. By June 1926 Geoffrey was a Lieutenant Commander and he retired from the navy on 25 August 1928 as a Commander.

This however, was not the end of Geoffrey Congreve's military career as he was re-enlisted during WW2, winning the DSO in action in Norway in 1940. Whilst on HMS *Quebec* he fell mortally wounded during a commando raid on the French coast on 28 July 1941, aged 43.

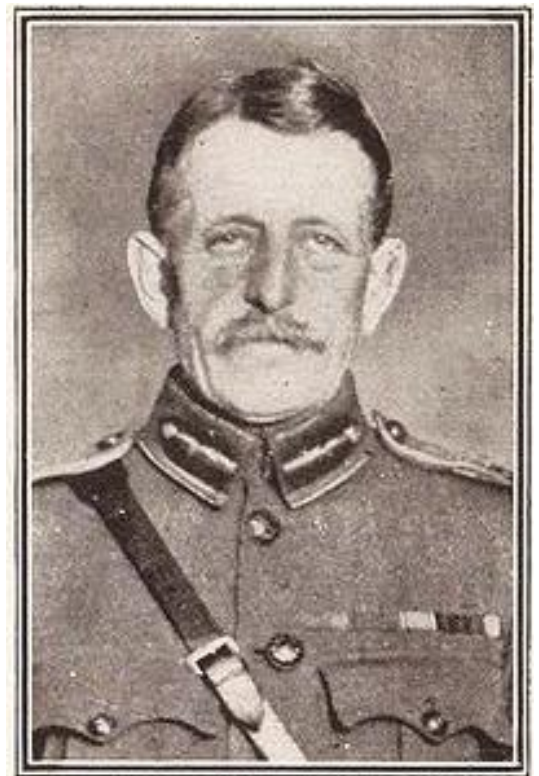
Geoffrey and Helena had three daughters: Ann Henrietta Congreve (born September 1923), Marygold Elizabeth Congreve (born August 1926) and Carola Congreve (born February 1929).

[ii] Arthur Christopher John Congreve was born on 12 May 1903 whilst the family was living near Dublin. Whilst it is known that he joined the Rifle Brigade, became a Major and retired in 1946, little else is known of his army career. However, it is believed that he was married four times:

- in late 1927 to Rosemary Minna Thurburn of Cransley Hall, Northants, at St Mark's, North Audley Street, Mayfair. Gloria Congreve was a bridesmaid. They divorced in 1933 and had one child, Audrey Melissa Congreve.
- 9 April 1943, in Newmarket, to Janet Henrietta Curtis, daughter of Vice-Admiral Berwick Curtis and Mildred Henrietta Curtis. They were divorced in 1950 and they had no children.
- in 1951 to Jessie Violet B Onslow in Tenbury.
- In 1956 to Audrey E Lester, in Westminster.

Arthur Christopher John Congreve died in December 1992, aged 89, in Hampshire.

4: Walter Norris Congreve, the father of Billy Congreve (and Geoffrey Cecil and Arthur Christopher John Congreve) was posted in December 1911 to the command of the 18th Infantry Brigade, the Headquarters of which - being at Lichfield - were in easy reach of his new home at Chartley. Early in July 1914, in talking to a friend, he remarked that he was not likely to achieve anything more important in the army (he was then 52) than the Command of an Infantry Brigade. However, on the outbreak of WW1 Congreve's Brigade was ordered to mobilise and in



LIEUT.-GEN. W. N. CONGREVE, V.C.
Commanding the Thirteenth Army Corps of
the Fourth British Army on the Somme.

September 1914 Congreve and his 18th Infantry Brigade were sent to France and Belgium to get front-line experience. In 1915 he was promoted to Major-General and, in July 1916, was in action when he heard that his son 'Billy' had been killed. In the middle of June 1917 Congreve was severely wounded by a shell at the foot of the Vimy Ridge; his left hand was almost completely blown off by shrapnel and had to be amputated. Later, he had an iron hook fitted. In 1917 he returned home, in fairly poor health, to Chartley and was created a KCB. Promoted to Lieutenant-General, in January 1918, for services in the field, Walter Norris Congreve returned to command the V11 Corps. (part of the 5th Army, commanded by General Sir Hubert Gough) in France. Still in poor health, he transferred to the Command of the X Corps., resting near Crecy, and remained there until the end of the war. In August 1919, and still in poor health, Congreve went to Palestine as Commander of the North Force of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force and, in October 1919, he became G.O.C. of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force - he now commanded all the troops in Egypt and Palestine except the Egyptian Army. Returning to England in 1923 (Congreve was now a full General and Colonel-Commandant, he became a Brigadier-General and aide-de-camp to King George v. On 29 June 1925 he took up his final post when he became Governor of Malta. It was in Malta, in February 1927, after a distinguished army career in two wars that Walter Norris Congreve VC KCB KSA died and, with full military honours, was buried at sea off the island.

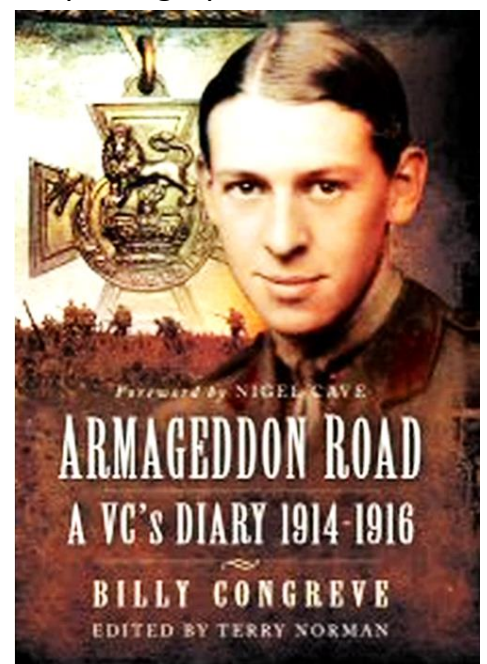
Perversely, there was no commemoration of either Billy Congreve or his illustrious father, Walter Norris Congreve, in Burton village, until the unveiling on 20 July 2016 of a commemorative stone to mark the centenary of Billy's death. A copy of the article written by the author to record this event (containing some additional material) is added as an addendum to this entry.

Billy Congreve kept a personal diary of his army career and this has been published (firstly in 1982) and reprinted in 2014 with additional notes and photographs:

Armageddon Road : A VC's Diary 1914 – 1916
 Billy Congreve Edited by Terry Norman
 2014 Pen & Sword ISBN: 978 1 47382 1194

The story of Sir Walter Norris Congreve and William La Touche Congreve is told in:

The Congreves : Father and Son
 Lt. Col. L. H. Thornton & Pamela Fraser
 1930 John Murray, London



Major WILLIAM LA TOUCHE CONGREVE
Rifle Brigade D.S.O. M.C.

Perhaps, in all the history of war, there is no more wonderful record of bravery than the story of the actions for which honours came to Major William La Touche Congreve of the Rifle Brigade. His father before him had won the Victoria Cross for saving the guns at COLSEN. But this man did more than that. In M.C., D.S.O., Legion of Honour, all these things came to him in turn. The greatest tribute of all was reserved for the last, but he never lived to receive it. On the 20th of July 1916 he was killed near the village of LONGUEVAL, on the Somme. A year earlier he had won the M.C. at HOODE "for his valuable help in rallying the men, bringing up reinforcements, and assisting the ~~British~~ Battalion Commander on the spot under a continuous and heavy fire." That was on July the 25th 1915. Before many months had passed he gained further distinction. He was now acting as Brigade Major to one of the Brigades of the 3rd Division. They were hard fighting for the 3rd Division. They saw the Ypres Salient before they marched Southwards to take part in a greater enterprise on the Somme. The Bluff is a small wooded knoll on the North Bank of the Ypres-Commines Canal, and is really little more than an artificial mound formed by the earth from its excavation. In that low country, however, even a 40 foot mound is a valuable property and defensible, and on the 14th of February, after a hot bombardment, the Germans attacked and took it. The Bluff and some 600 yards of trench besides. They held it for exactly 17 days. On the 2nd of March the 3rd Division excepted it, and drove the Germans back even beyond their original trenches. In this action Major Congreve's energy and courage contributed much towards the success of his brigade. Before the battle commenced he gathered very valuable information at great personal risk. Several times he went out alone in front

of the trenches in order to discover the strength and dispositions of the enemy. His conduct during the attack was marked by the same disregard of danger. When all communication between Brigade Headquarters and the front line across a belt of ground 150 yards wide, which was being swept by fire from the German artillery. On the second morning he was so badly shell shocked that he had to be removed with barely before he could continue. A month later the Division went into action again, this time at St Eloi. Once more Major Congreve rendered conspicuous service. It was said of him that "his conduct throughout these operations was the talk of the brigade." The attack was successful, but afterwards it was found that a number of the enemy had escaped attention in one of the centers. The Brigade Major went out across the gap, and the entire garrison of the center 3 German officers and 70 men, surrendered to him. For his gallantry on that day he was awarded the D.S.O. Again, on the 26th of April, the Germans opened a heavy bombardment with 5.9 howitzers on the farm buildings which were his Brigade Headquarters. One shell alone killed or wounded 16 of the Brigade staff. Major Congreve at once went out to help the wounded, and stayed until the last man had been carried into safety. On the 15th they attacked the German positions on the two ridges which run from BAZENTIN-LE-GRAND to LONGUEVAL. During the days and nights that preceded the attack, Major Congreve spared himself no hardships to ensure that all should go well when the hour came. Not once but many times he took out parties of officers and N.C.O.s more than 1000 yards in front of our lines to reconnoitre the ground. His labours were well rewarded on the morning of the 16th, when his Brigade took all their objectives. At this Major Congreve had no fear for himself. He went about his business as though that tormented country around Longueval and field-day at hand. He was always where the shells fell thickest. The village of Longueval in three days was not a place where a

Lieutenant James Price Lloyd, an Oxford University Classics scholar, worked for Military Intelligence within the Welsh Regiment during WW1. After the war the government destroyed all the archives relating to the propaganda war – the details were regarded as being too sensitive to risk being made public. However, Lloyd wrote a series of articles entitled 'Tales of the VC' which appeared in Australian newspapers; Lloyd's papers and articles have survived. The handwritten pages, above, begin Lloyd's story of William La Touche Congreve and the typeset pages, below (*Otago Daily Times*, 8 June 1918), continue this article.

[source: [http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu/en/contributions/5397#prettyPhoto\[gallery\]/2/](http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu/en/contributions/5397#prettyPhoto[gallery]/2/) and <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=ODT19180608.2.87>]

the shells fell thickest. The village of Longueval in those days was not a place where a cautious man would linger. But Major Congreve chose as his headquarters a house at its northern edge, that he might not lose touch with the battalions of his brigade.

Often he saved others by his coolness in an emergency. On the 19th July he happened to be in the quarry between Montauban and Longueval. This quarry was a busy place on that day. Here were the headquarters of a brigade. The tunnels and dugouts which honeycombed its sides were doing duty also as dressing stations. There were men of many units passing through it continually to and from the line. Suddenly the storm broke. For four hours shells, gas and high explosive, rained upon the place. For a few minutes there was panic and confusion. Men ran this way and that to escape death. Then Major Congreve, calm and cool, as always, came amongst them and comforted them. He led them out of the quarry to a place of safety. Then he went back and helped to carry out the wounded, who were in peril of being gassed.

The next day he did much the same thing. He was walking up the sunken road that leads from Caterpillar Wood to Montauban. The road was crowded with troops—mostly field gunners off duty and infantrymen. Just then a German 8in battery near Guillemont, which had been shelling a gun position a little distance

away, shortened their range and dropped their first shell on the lip of the road. It wrought fearful havoc. This one shell alone accounted for more than 20 men. The shelling continued, and but for Major Congreve the toll of casualties would have been far greater. Once more he set a wonderful example of unselfish courage, and so averted a panic. Even when he was wounded by a fragment of shell, he refused to have his hurt examined. He was afraid that he might be sent out of the line. That he could not have endured; so he carried on.

And he carried on until death found him at last. On the morning of July 20 he had gone up to the front line to see how the Suffolks of his brigade had fared in an attack. There, as he was writing a message, he was struck by a chance bullet and killed instantly.

After his death he was recommended for the honour of the Victoria Cross. His brigadier, in forwarding the recommendation, said of him that "the many acts of conspicuous gallantry which the late Major Congreve had performed have led to a unanimous request from the officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of my brigade that I should submit his name for the honour of the Victoria Cross.

I therefore do so because I feel that to his wonderful example are largely to be attributed the high standard of discipline and morale which permeates the whole brigade—a standard that has enabled it

to acquit itself so gallantly and creditably in all the hard fighting in which it has taken part in the Third Division. . . . The whole of my brigade would feel that a reward had been given to the relatives of one who, perhaps, had earned the decoration as fully as any other soldier, living or dead, to whom it has been awarded."

"A Student in Arms" was thinking of someone very like Major Congreve when he wrote of the Beloved Captain:—"To see him was to catch his point of view, to forget our personal anxieties, and only to think of the company and the regiment and honour. . . . But he lives. Somehow he lives. And we who knew him do not forget."

Postscript 5

William ['Billy'] La Touche Congreve VC, DSO, MC - 20 July 1916

Ian L. Norris

This brief account describes the commemorative event on 20 July 2016 in Burton which marked the centenary of the death of Major Congreve on the Somme. Additional details are given which outline the history, after 1916, of Billy Congreve's wife and daughter.

*A description of Billy Congreve's life, his VC Citation and his connection to Burton, are given in the accompanying article **William ['Billy'] La Touche Congreve VC, DSO, MC – a Burton Hero** on this website (<http://www.nestonpast.com/>).*

Billy Congreve was killed on Thursday 20 July 1916 and on the afternoon of Wednesday 20 July 2016, to observe the centenary of his death, a short ceremony took place outside the Gladstone Village Hall during which a commemorative stone was unveiled. Representing the Congreve family was Ben Stephenson, a grandson of Billy Congreve.

The ceremony was opened by Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Trelawny who outlined the history of the Rifle Brigade, the regiment in which Billy Congreve served.

The Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own) was an infantry rifle regiment formed in January 1800 (as the "Experimental Corps. of Riflemen") which had an illustrious service in both World Wars before its amalgamation with the 1st Green Jackets and the King's Royal Rifle Corps., to form The Royal Green Jackets, on 1 January 1966.

Councillor Razia Daniels, Deputy Lord Mayor of Chester, gave a summary of Billy Congreve's life before Billy's VC Citation was read by Lieutenant Colonel Nick Jenkins OBE, onetime an officer with The Royal Green Jackets and from 1989 to 1992 the Commanding Officer of the 5th (Shropshire and Herefordshire) Battalion The Light Infantry.

The commemorative stone was unveiled by Councillor Razia Daniels and Bugle Major Mark Douglas played the Last Post, Reveille and No More Parades. Light



Councillor Razia Daniels, Deputy Lord Mayor of Chester, unveiling the commemorative stone to Billy Congreve. This has been set directly below the foundation stone which was laid on 28 July 1906 as a memorial to Henry Neville Gladstone who donated the Hall – then the Village Institute – to Burton village.



The commemoration cake and cupcakes decorated with an image of the Victoria Cross.



Bugle Major Mark Douglas and some of the visitors and local residents attending the unveiling.



The Congreve memorial stone below the Gladstone plaque.

refreshments, including a cake and cupcakes decorated with an image of the Victoria Cross, were served to the (approximately 50) persons attending the ceremony.

Following the commemoration at the Gladstone Village Hall some of the visitors were accompanied across the road to the Parish Church of St Nicholas to look at the Congreve memorial plaques, windows and family graves before a brief visit to Burton Manor.



Ben Stephenson, a grandson of Billy Congreve, examining the memorial stone on the Congreve vault in Burton churchyard.



Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Trelawny, Ben Stephenson, Lieutenant Colonel Nick Jenkins and the Reverend Cathy Helm following the visit to the church.

Ben Stephenson, a grandson of Billy Congreve, at the rear of Burton Manor.



Pamela Cynthia Congreve and Mary Gloria Congreve

Just seven weeks after his marriage on 1 June 1916 to Pamela Cynthia Maude, at St Martin's-in-the-Fields, Billy Congreve was killed by a sniper's bullet whilst leading his troops on the front line on the Somme battlefield. Unknown to Billy, Pamela was then pregnant with their child and Mary Gloria Congreve was born 21 March 1917.

On 1 November 1916 Pamela received Billy's decorations from King George V at Buckingham Palace and, on 22 December 1919, she married Major the Honourable William Fraser, DSO, MC, at the Parish Church of St George's, Hanover Square, in the City of Westminster in central London (where the baroque composer George Frideric Handel had been a regular worshipper in the 18th century). William Fraser (born 5 July 1890) was a career military and the fourth son of Alexander William Frederick Fraser, 19th Lord Saltoun of Abernethy; a great friend of Billy Congreve he had been Billy's Best Man at his marriage to Pamela in 1916.

In December 1920 Pamela gave birth to the first of two sons, David; he, as General Sir David William Fraser GCB, OBE, of the Grenadier Guards had a distinguished military career culminating in his appointments as the British Military Representative to NATO in 1975 and the Commandant of the Royal College of Defence Studies in 1977. David William Fraser died on 15 July 2012.

A second son, Alastair Grattan Maude Fraser, was born on 3 March 1926 but died on 7 May 1932.

Brigadier General Hon. William Fraser DSO MC, became the Military Attaché to Brussels between 1931 and 1935 and to Paris between 1938 and 1939. He died on 11 November 1964, and his funeral took place at Aldeburgh on 16 November.

Although Pamela Cynthia Fraser, Billy Congreve's widow, was not recorded on William Fraser's Probate record, it is understood that she died on 20 October 1975 although no public domain records of her death have been found.

FRASER the honourable William D.S.O. M.C. of Clover House Aldeburgh Suffolk died 11 November 1964 at Ipswich and East Suffolk Hospital Ipswich Probate London 19 February to Philip Howard Byam-Cook solicitor and David William Fraser brigadier H.M. army. £39790.

National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966

GODDAUGHTER OF QUEEN MARY

WEDDING OF MISS GLORIA CONGREVE

Queen Mary sent a Georgian silver plate to her goddaughter, Miss Gloria Congreve, who was married in London yesterday to Mr William Stephenson.

The bride is the daughter of the late Major W. Ia T. Congreve, V.C., D.S.O., M.C., and of the Hon. Mrs William Fraser, and is a stepdaughter of Colonel the Hon. William Fraser, D.S.O., Military Attaché at the British Embassy in Paris, who is the brother of Lord Saltoun. She is a granddaughter of the actor, Mr Cyril Maude, who was present at the ceremony with his wife.

The bridegroom is the son of the late Sir Guy Stephenson, C.B., and of Lady Stephenson.

Princess Marie Louise was present at the ceremony in the Church of St Martin-in-the-Fields, which was chosen because the bride's parents were also married there.

Bishop Neville Talbot (cousin of the bridegroom) and Canon F. H. Gillingham officiated, assisted by the Rev. G. L. Davey and the Rev. Warren Hunt. Mr John Stephenson was groomsmen.

THE BRIDE'S GOWN

The bride, who was given away by her stepfather, wore a Victorian gown of heavy ivory-white slipper satin, having a close-fitting bodice finished with a large diamond cross at the low V neckline and long sleeves, very full, puffed into the shoulders.

A gathered panel in the back of the full skirt was lengthened into a rounded train, and her short tulle veil was held in place by a headress of white satin. She carried a trailing bouquet of mixed white flowers—arum lilies, lilies of the valley, gardenias, roses, and orange blossom.

She was followed by a retinue of children. First two pages—Nicholas Baring and Sir John Buchanan Riddell—wearing white, frilled organza blouses and long trousers of bright blue corded silk finished with silver buttons. After them came eight little girls—Audrey and Carola Congreve and Anne Maude (all cousins of the bride), Helen Stephenson (cousin of the bridegroom), Helena Bridgeman, the Hon. Gwen Ellen James, Gillian Barclay, and Euphan Wardlaw-Ramsay.

They wore ankle-length frocks of white and silver organza, finished at the neck and on the short puffed sleeves with silver bows, and on their heads were Victorian bonnets of white silk trimmed with white ostrich feathers and having tiny white and diamond flowers framing their faces under the brims.

The Hon. Mrs William Fraser held a reception afterwards at 40 Belgrave Square, and later the bride and bridegroom left for the honeymoon, which is to be spent abroad.

GUESTS AT CEREMONY

Among the large congregation of guests were:—

Lady Stephenson, Mr and Mrs Frederick Stephenson, Miss Margaret Maude and the Hon. Helen Maude, Colonel and Mrs Francis Congreve, Miss Margerie Congreve, Colonel and Mrs Neiland Congreve, Miss Barbara and Miss Patricia Congreve, Mrs Arthur King, Mr Thomas Talbot, Miss E. Stephenson, Mr and Mrs Maurice Maude, Lady Congreve, Miss Henrietta Congreve, Cecilia Lady Congreve, Captain J. Congreve, the Hon. Mrs Talbot, Lady George Talbot, Miss Eileen Talbot, Mr and Mrs P. K. Stephenson, Mrs G. Congreve, Mr John Maude, Colonel C. G. Maude, Mr and Mrs Edward Horne-Maxwell, Mrs Patrick Melling, the Hon. Mrs Stewart-Macdonald of Gresham, Miss Grist-Stewart, Mrs Norman Macleod, Major and the Hon. Mrs Rodwell-Murray, Comtesse and Lady Mary Fawcett, Miss Leslie Whittle, the Hon. Mrs Hugh Wyndham, the Hon. Lady Buchanan Riddell, the Hon. Mrs John Bailey.

Following a short engagement - announced in The Times on 17 January - Mary Gloria Congreve, the only child of Billy and Pamela Cynthia Congreve, married Augustus William Stephenson on Tuesday 18 April 1939. The wedding, which was attended by Princess Marie Louise of Schleswig-Holstein, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria, took place at the church of St Martin's-in-the-Fields on the corner of Trafalgar Square, the same church where her parents had married some 23 years previously. Augustus was the eldest son of the late Sir Guy Stephenson, C.B. and of Lady Stephenson, née Gwendolen Talbot, and Augustus and



Augustus William Stephenson

The Glasgow Herald - 19 April 1939

Mary Gloria appear to have had three or four sons one of whom, Benjamin Stephenson, attended the centenary ceremony in Burton in July 2016.

Mary Gloria Stephenson, Billy Congreve's daughter, died at Englefield Green in Surrey on 10 June 1992 and her husband, Augustus, died in Kent on 17 November 2000.

In June 1983 Mary Gloria Stephenson put her father's military decorations, until then on display at the Royal Green Jackets (Rifles) Museum in Winchester, up for sale. Following an appeal on behalf of the museum the medals were purchased for £26 000 and are now on permanent display.

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LOCAL CASUALTIES.

MAJOR W. LA TOUCHE CONGREVE, D.S.O., KILLED.

Major William La Touche Congreve, D.S.O., of the Rifle Brigade, who has been killed in action, was the eldest son of Lieutenant-General W. Congreve, V.C., C.B., of Congreve, Chartley Hall, Staffordshire, who before war broke out commanded the 18th Infantry Brigade at Lichfield. At the beginning of the war Major Congreve was A.D.C. to Major-General Hubert Hamilton, commanding the 3rd Division, who was killed in October, 1914. He held the same appointment with General Hamilton's successor, and in the same division served as a General Staff Officer, and later as brigade major of an infantry brigade. Major Congreve was awarded the Military Cross, and was made Chevalier of

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the Legion of Honour. For his gallantry in taking prisoners, practically single-handed, two officers and 72 men at St. Eloi, for which action he was recommended for the Victoria Cross, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order, and was later gazetted brevet-major.

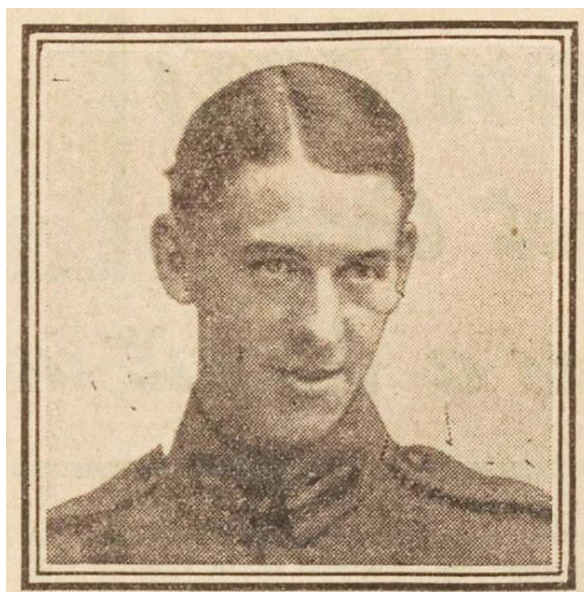
His divisional commander writes: "His loss to me is irreparable, and the army in him loses one of its best soldiers, and by far the most promising officer I have ever known. Young, almost boyish in appearance, he possessed qualities which are generally to be found only in men of much riper years and of far greater experience. He was unsurpassed in bravery, and was distinguished by the highest standards of duty which guided him. Had he lived but a few months longer he must inevitably have attained to the command of the brigade. The whole division mourns his loss, for he was beloved by all ranks, and the fine example he set of duty well done will for long keep him alive in their memories."

Major Congreve was married to Pamela Cynthia, second daughter of Mr. Cyril Maude, on June 1st last.

A Posthumous Award.

Bt. Major William La Touche Congreve, D.S.O., M.C., late Rifle Brigade, exhibited most conspicuous bravery during a period of fourteen days preceding his death in action. During preliminary preparations for the attack he carried out personal reconnaissances of the enemy lines, taking out parties of officers and non-commissioned officers for over 1000 yards in front of our line in order to acquaint them with the ground. All these preparations were made under fire. Later, by night, Major Congreve established himself in an exposed forward position, from whence he successfully observed the enemy, and gave orders necessary to drive them from their position.

Two days later, when Brigade Headquarters was heavily shelled and many casualties resulted, he went out and assisted the medical officer to remove the wounded to places of safety, although he was himself suffering severely from gas and other shell effects. He finally returned to the front line to ascertain the situation after an unsuccessful attack, and whilst in the act of writing his report was shot and killed instantly.



Daily Record , Lanarkshire - Friday 27 October 1916

Dundee Evening Telegraph - Friday 27 October 1916