

The Victoria Cross is the highest medal awarded to anyone in the British Forces.

Here is a story of a man who won it – twice.

<p>Noel Chavasse was the younger of twins born to Edith and the Reverend Francis Chavasse, an Anglican priest had twins. The family grew up in Liverpool, where Reverend Francis was the priest of a parish. Both boys loved God and tried to live as Christians to their very best ability. Noel studied medicine at university and became a doctor. He felt that was a good way to follow Christ. His twin Christopher studied theology and became a priest. The young men were such good athletes that they both ran for Britain in the 400 metres at the 1908 Olympics.</p>	<p>Stretcher carrying. On August 8th 1916, during the Battle of the Somme, Noel’s regiment suffered heavy losses trying to advance at Guillemont. They lost one sixth of their force: 167 men from 600 were wounded.</p> <p>During the fighting a shell blew up just behind Noel, and splinters of metal exploded into his back. He carried on with his work all day, and in the evening crept again into No Man’s Land with his stretcher bearers. They rescued three wounded soldier just 20 metres from the enemy line. For this bravery Noel was awarded the Victoria Cross.</p>
<p>At the start of the Great War, Dr Noel joined the Royal Army Medical Corps and was attached as a surgeon-lieutenant to the King’s (Liverpool) Regiment.</p> <p>Christopher became an army chaplain and served in France. We know a lot about Noel because his family still have a lot of his letters home from France. He had great care for his men. He wrote home about how to get them access to taps and water for washing, how important de-lousing was, and how he was using an early tetanus jab to reduce the risk of infection from cuts and wounds.</p>	<p>After he got better, Noel was offered a job away from the front line, but insisted he rejoined his men. On 31st July 1917, during the Third Battle of Ypres, Noel led his men forward: ground was gained after a new tank broke through. Noel moved his first-aid post forward to help the wounded more quickly, but as he worked in his aid post Noel was hit in the head by shell splinters. He lost a lot of blood, and his skull was damaged. The wound was dressed but he refused evacuation, again went into No-Man’s-Land with a torch that night, looking to help other wounded men.</p>
<p>Noel’s letters show great cheerfulness and compassion, even in periods of heavy losses. In March 1915 his battalion lost a lot of men at the Second Battle of Ypres, where gas was used. Noel asked for a gramophone to play music to the men as the injured recovered! One dangerous job for army stretcher-bearers was to search No Man’s Land, between the trenches, when darkness fell. Often, Noel would work all day as a doctor, then volunteer to join the Stretcher Bearers to find wounded men in No-Man’s-Land at night.</p>	<p>During the night of 31st July 1917, a shell burst directly over Dr Noel’s dugout. He was the only one left alive. He crawled to a nearby dugout for help and explained what had happened. He was taken to hospital with severe stomach wounds. He came round after his operation, his usual cheerful self, but his wounds were so serious he died 4 days later.</p> <p>He was awarded, after his death, a second Victoria Cross (called a ‘Bar’). His medals are displayed at the Imperial War Museum, London. He is one of only three men to have gained a VC and Bar</p>
<p>Noel was not popular with senior officers all the time. He often asked uncomfortable questions and complained about the men’s living conditions. He spoke up for soldiers suffering from ‘shell shock’: when soldiers lost their ability fight through the impact of constant danger. He wanted treatment for those who showed signs of what we would now call a nervous breakdown. At the time some officers said this was just weakness and cowardice. It is likely that this attitude held back Noel’s promotion.</p>	<p>The Bible says:</p> <p>“Whoever shares with others should do it generously. Whoever has authority should work hard. Whoever shows kindness to others should do it cheerfully. Love must be completely sincere. Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good. Love one another warmly, as Christian brothers, and be eager to show respect to one another. Work hard. Do not be lazy. Serve the Lord with a heart full of devotion. Let your hope keep you joyful. Be patient in all your troubles. Pray at all times.”</p> <p>14 pieces of advice / Saint Paul, Romans 12:8-11</p>