



The Victoria Cross won by a luckless teenage sailor fetched 51,000 pounds at Spink's in London on 21 July 1998.

At 17, Midshipman Duncan Boyes was the toast of the Royal Navy after carrying the Queen's Colours through a hail of musket balls. The VC, won during an assault on Japanese warlords during the Shimonoseki Expedition in 1864, was sold by his old school, Cheltenham College, to provide scholarships in his name.

During hi-jinks in Burmuda, Boyes and another midshipman were court-martialled for breaking into a naval yard after being refused entry because they had no passes. Both men were dismissed from the Service. There is some suggestion that this harsh penalty may have indicated other offences.

Duncan Gordon Boyes was born in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, on 5th of November 1846.

Duncan won his VC at the age of 17, for his part in action at Shimonoseki, Japan, on the 6th September 1864. The citation was published in the London Gazette on 21 April 1865 and read:

Duncan Gordon Boyes,
Royal Navy,
Midshipman of Her Majesty's Ship Euralus.

Boyes apparently displayed 'conspicuous gallantry' in the capture of the enemy's stockade. He "carried the Colour with the leading company, kept it in advance of all, in the face of the thickest fire. His Colour was six times pierced by musket balls".

Duncan was invested with his VC on 22 September 1865 by Admiral Sir Michael Seymour GCB.

Duncan's short life was to take a turn for the worse from then on. After his dismissal from the Service in 1867 he began to suffer from fits and bouts of severe depression and began drinking heavily.

For the sake of his health he went to New Zealand to work with his brother on his sheep station, but the scandal seems to have followed him, for he was to suffer a complete breakdown and took his own life on 26 January 1869 at Dunedin. His death certificate lists the cause of death as "delirium tremens".

He was buried in the Southern Cemetery, with a stone at his head and feet. In 1954 the Dunedin RSA, as a consequence of his VC, reburied him in the Andersons Bay Cemetery in the servicemen's section and placed the standard bronze plaque in his memory.