

William Harold Coltman VC, DCM & Bar, MM & Bar – Lance Corporal – 1st/6th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment - 241028



William was born in Rangemore, Burton-on-Trent on 17th November 1891 and baptised at All Saints Church, Rangemore on 27th December 1891. He was the son of Charles and Annie Coltman (Gopsill).

In 1901 William was living at 46 Tatenhill Common, Staffordshire.

In 1911 William was working as a servant for John and Annie Chesman at their farm in Repton, Derbyshire.

He married Eleanor May Dolman in Burton-on-Trent in 1913.

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| No. | Corps | | V.C. LG. 6.1.1919 |
| | 241028 | | Name |
| | 1/6th Bn. N. STAFF. R | | COLTMAN |
| N/CPL. | | T.F. | W.H. * (MM) |
| Operations | Vol. | Page | |
| DCM. LG. 25.8.1917 | C.92-31 | | |
| * BAR. 12.3.1919. | D.177-1. | | |
| File Nos. :- | | | |
| NOTE:- also awarded M.M. LG. 26.3.17. and BAR LG. 16.8.17. | | | |

William enlisted in the North Staffordshire Regiment in January 1915. Due to his deep religious beliefs which made him unwilling to kill another man, he was permitted to become a stretcher-bearer. He would go on to be the most decorated British soldier during World War One.

The Military Medal (MM) is gazetted when awarded but no citation is given. William was still a private at the time of this award. The award was made for rescuing a wounded officer from no man's land in February 1917. The officer had been commanding a wiring party during a misty night. The mist cleared and the party found themselves under fire, the officer was wounded in the thigh and Coltman immediately went out to bring the man in.

He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) for gallantry over a period of days in July 1917. The citation in *The London Gazette* read:

‘Conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in evacuating wounded from the front line at great personal risk under shell fire. His gallant conduct undoubtedly saved many lives, and he continued throughout the night to search for wounded under shell and machine gun fire, and brought several in. His absolute indifference to danger had a most inspiring effect upon the rest of his men.’

The second award of the MM was gazetted in August 1917. This award was for conduct behind the front lines in June 1917 and covered three separate instances of gallantry in a short period in June 1917. On 6 June an ammunition dump was hit by mortar fire causing several casualties, Coltman took responsibility for removing Verey lights from the dump. The following day he took a leading role in tending men injured when the company headquarters was mortared. A little over a week later, a trench tunnel collapsed trapping a number of men. Coltman organised a rescue party to dig the trapped men out.¹

The second award of the DCM was made for conduct in September 1918, only a week before his actions that earned him the VC. The citation read:

‘On the 28th September 1918, near the St. Quentin Canal, near Bellenglise, he dressed and carried many wounded men under heavy artillery fire. During the advance on the following day he still remained at his work without rest or sleep, attending the wounded, taking no heed of either shell or machine-gun fire, and never resting until he was positive that our sector was clear of wounded. He set the highest example of fearlessness and devotion to duty to those with him.’

He was 26 years old and a stretcher bearer, when the following deed took place in France, for which he was awarded the VC.

‘For most conspicuous bravery, initiative and devotion to duty. During the operations at Mannequin Hill, north-east of Sequehart, on the 3rd and 4th of Oct. 1918, L.-Corp. Coltman, a stretcher bearer, hearing that wounded had been left behind during a retirement, went forward alone in the face of fierce enfilade fire, found the casualties, dressed them and on three successive occasions, carried comrades on his back to safety, thus saving their lives. This very gallant NCO tended the wounded unceasingly for 48 hours’.

Coltman was invested with his Victoria Cross by King George V at Buckingham Palace on 22nd May 1919.



After the war, William returned to Burton and took a job as a gardener with the town's Parks Department. During the Second World War he was commissioned in the Army Cadet Force in 1943 and commanded the Burton ACF; he resigned his commission in 1951. He retired in 1963 and died at Outwoods Hospital, Burton, in 1974.

