

'THE FIGHTING AT CANDIA':

HERAKLEION'S VICTORIA CROSS

The story of Will Maillard,
the only naval surgeon to win the
Victoria Cross



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Foreword

Between 395 and 1204 Crete was part of the Byzantine Empire; from 1204 to 1669 it was ruled by Venice, and in 1669 was ceded to the Ottoman Empire. However, between 1898 and 1913 (when it became part of Greece) Crete was independent, under the aegis of an international protectorate through which British, French and German troops were quartered on the island. Herakleion, then still retaining its Venetian name of Candia, was in the British sector.

In the first year of the protectorate was won one of the least-known Victoria Crosses. Unusually, there was no war on; unusually, the man to whom it was awarded not only survived, but survived unwounded. This booklet tells the story of Will Maillard, V.C., M.D., R.N. It has been compiled from papers, including letters from him, held in the Historic Collections Library of the Institute of Naval Medicine, of which I am Librarian.

Thanks are due to Captain (Retd) P.H. Starling, Curator of the Army Medical Services Museum, for sharing with me the results of his research in the National Archives (Public Record Office), including Will Maillard's service record, the entries from H.M.S. Hazard's log for the 6th September 1898, and a copy of Will Maillard's death certificate.

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The life of Will Maillard

Surgeon William Job Maillard, M.D., V.C., R.N. was born at Banwell in Somerset on the 10th March 1863, son of the Rev. Daniel Galland Maillard, a Methodist minister, and his wife Winifred Elizabeth, née Dawkins. Will was educated at Kingswood School, Bath and at Dunheved College, a Victorian public school at Launceston. By qualifying M.D. (with Gold Medal in Medicine) at Guy's Hospital in 1890, when he had already been appointed Surgeon to *H.M.S. Duke of Wellington*, Will became the first naval medical officer to achieve M.D. while serving.

After postings to *H.M.S. Ganges* and *H.M.S. Iron Duke*, Will was appointed to *H.M.S. Blake*, flagship of the West Indies station. On this posting he met his wife, (Marian) Edith Beresford, a trained nursing sister; in the British Honduras, now Belize. They were married in 1893 in Edith's home town in Shropshire. The years from 1894 saw postings to *H.M.S. Partridge*, *Blake* (again), *Pembroke*, *Onyx* and *Excellent*, until Will joined, on 19th August 1897, *H.M.S. Hazard*, a gunboat patrolling the Mediterranean station.

At that time Crete was an independent international protectorate with a mixed Muslim and Christian population. In 1898 a dispute about tax collection in the capital, Candia (now known as Herakleion or Iraklion), escalated into full-scale inter-religious fighting. Since Candia was in the British zone, there were British troops stationed nearby. Colonel Reid, commanding a regiment of the Highland Light Infantry, accompanied a patrol into the town to subdue the unrest.

A correspondent to the *Times*, writing from *H.M.S. Astræa*, takes up the story of the events of Tuesday 6th September, 1898:

"The whole of the houses round the harbour opened fire on the Custom-house and English patrol. Every window held two or three riflemen, and the fire is described as something appalling. The patrol immediately got into the Custom-house and started to return the fire ... The *Hazard* now began sending armed boats in, 24 men and two officers, altogether there were about 85 men and six officers dead, alive, or wounded in the neighbourhood of the Custom-house. ... The whole town seems to have risen at the first shot ... it is believed that 900 or thereabouts of Christians have been massacred ... The *Hazard's* men behaved magnificently, and I hope they get something out of it. Their doctor should get the V.C. His clothes were shot through in at least a dozen places whilst he was helping the wounded, and he escaped marvellously without a scratch."¹

Will Maillard, who had specially requested to be sent ashore, had disembarked

¹ *The times*, Monday 19th September, 1898

from the *Hazard's* boat and reached a place of safety. However, he went back through a hail of bullets in an attempt to rescue Ordinary Seaman Arthur Stroud, who was wounded and had fallen back into the boat. Stroud was, unfortunately, dying, and it was impossible for Maillard to lift him out, as the boat, not having been tied up, was adrift. Will returned to his post unhurt; but his clothes were riddled with bullet-holes.

Letters home from him are rather diffident about the affair – on September 14th he wrote "There is no chance of my really getting the Victoria Cross"²; but his V.C. was gazetted on 2nd December. He thus became the first, and so far the only, officer of the Royal Naval Medical Service to be awarded the V.C., and was presented with the medal by Queen Victoria at Windsor, three days after the award was gazetted.

In 1899 Will was promoted Staff Surgeon "for distinguished service", and appointed to the staff of the R.N.V.R. depot ship *H.M.S. Daedalus* at Bristol, where he stayed between 23 November 1899 and 29 August 1900. His next posting was to *H.M.S. Archer* on the Australian station. From April to July 1901 he was in England again, aboard *H.M.S. Duke of Wellington*, but from 31st July took sick leave on half pay. He was retired unfit on 7th April 1902, and on 7th June of the same year was admitted to the Royal Naval Hospital at Great Yarmouth, which specialised in mental disorders.

The nature of Will Maillard's illness is unclear: opinions have ranged from "severe mental strain at war in Crete ... chronic diffuse meningo-encephalitis about 3 years"³ to "possibly a brain tumour"⁴; perhaps he was suffering from what we would now call post-traumatic stress disorder. Eventually, on 19th January 1903, he was discharged into the care of his wife Edith, who took him to Bournemouth, where they bought a house and called it "Crete".

Will Maillard died, aged 40, on 10th September 1903, and is buried in Bournemouth's Wimborne Road Cemetery. His grave is maintained *in perpetuo* by an arrangement with the council made by Edith in 1938. It was visited by the author in the summer of 2003; later that year, to commemorate the centenary of Will Maillard's death, it was professionally cleaned by the Royal Naval Estates Office through the sterling efforts of staff at Royal Marines Poole.

² Letter in INM files

³ Death certificate

⁴ Winton, John. *The Victoria Cross at sea* (London: Michael Joseph, 1978). Some of Winton's information on Will Maillard derives from O'Connor, A. *Surgeon William Job Maillard, V.C., M.D., R.N.* (JRNMS, Vol. 50 (1964), pp. 64-70) and consequently perpetuates several inaccuracies.

The Times, Monday 19th September, 1898

The fighting at Candia

The following account of the fighting at Candia is taken from a private letter written by an officer on board H.M.S. Astræ[a], which has been sent to us with permission to publish. The letter is dated "Candia, September 9":-

"Dear -- , - Of course you have heard of the row here – we do not know yet how bad it was – and will have gathered that the news had not reached us in Suda Bay when I wrote my last letter. The fighting was actually going on whilst I was writing, and when we got the news I was too busy to add anything to my letter. Probably the newspaper accounts are very bald as yet, so I had better start from the beginning. Ten days ago orders came from the council of admirals at Suda to instal Christians to collect all taxes in the towns, and, on the Turkish Governor of Candia being informed of this, he said at once that it could not possibly be done; that the town would rise as one man. This was reported to the admirals; and then it appeared that the wrong orders had been received, and that the only tax to the collection of which a Christian was to be appointed was a certain duty on produce imported into the town which has not been collected during the last two years. This tax is known as the 'dime' or 'deem'. The Governor said he thought there would be no difficulty about that, and we were ordered off to Suda, leaving the gunboat Hazard here. Later on the Turkish authorities made the complimentary remarks on our methods which I quoted in my last. Tuesday, 6th, was the day appointed to instal the Christian collector. That morning Colonel Reid, our military commissioner (who is also in command of the regiment quartered here), attended a meeting of the Mussulman notables, at which various matters were discussed, and the Turkish Governor told him as he parted from him that there was not the slightest fear of trouble over the collector's installation, but recommended him to take a patrol down with him to the Custom-house. Colonel Reid took four of his own men with him and walked straight down to the Custom-house, where he met the new collector and a certain Major Churchill (a man of English parentage and a Christian in the Turkish army, doing duty as chief of staff to the Governor, and also as chief of the police or *gendarmarie*). On his way down Colonel Reid met his ordinary street patrol of 16 men, and noticing that the crowd looked a bit threatening, he took them with him. On arrival at the Custom-house Major Churchill made a great fuss about the key of the office – said that he had no official orders to hand it over, that it was lost, &c. At last one of the Turkish guard on the Custom-house produced it, the door was unlocked, and the colonel and collector marched in. Major Churchill disappeared, and instantly the whole of the houses round the harbour opened fire on the Custom-house and English patrol. Every window held two or three riflemen, and the fire is described as something appalling. The patrol immediately got into the Custom-house and started to return the fire. There was a guard of 45 Highlanders near the telegraph office, and 40 of these were brought down to reinforce, but they had to come *via* the tunnel and archway through the town wall just behind the Custom-house, losing several men. The Turkish guard was supposed to keep this gateway, but they allowed the mob to go through after our men, and three were stabbed in the back in the archway. The Hazard now and [*sic*] began sending armed boats in, 24 men and two officers, altogether there were about 85 men and six officers dead, alive, or wounded in the

neighbourhood of the Custom-house. The mob now managed to set fire to the Custom-house, and the party occupied the archway, returning the fire from the houses opposite and escaping in small parties, carrying their dead and wounded to the Turquoise. Many most gallant things were done, the lieutenant-commander of the Hazard making a most determined attempt to get through to bring off the two signallers in the telegraph office. He found the street choked with a yelling mob and every window in it filled with riflemen, and had to desist. The mob now broke down the gates to the tunnel, and the remainder of our people made a bolt for the boats, the Turquoise taking, I think, all their wounded and most of their dead. The mob poured after them into the harbour, and the Hazard opened fire with great effect on them, every shell bursting with tremendous results. This game commenced about 1 o'clock, and it was past 5 when the Turkish Governor appeared on the scene, and the firing stopped at once. (He said afterwards he knew nothing about what was going on until he heard the Hazard's guns!) They did not succeed in getting the Turquoise out of the harbour until 10 o'clock. They found then that she had four bluejackets, four soldiers, and one officer dead on board, and nearly 70 wounded, of whom ten were bluejackets and over 30 soldiers, the remainder being Christian refugees. The whole town seems to have risen at the first shot, and when we arrived at midnight the whole Christian quarter was sacked and burnt. We have got off about 300 refugees, but it is believed that 900 or thereabouts of Christians have been massacred. The camp was distantly attacked before we arrived, as were also our hospital and the telegraph office. We were in great anxiety about the camp, for there were only 120 men in it and 40,000 "bashis" under arms in the town. The camp is an enormous straggling place, and we knew they could not hold it all. There was only one possible means of access for reinforcements, and that was barred to us by the heavy surf running on the rocks all along the coast. It would have been throwing men's lives away to attempt to get through it; with the further consideration that the reliefs might have found the small postern gate giving access to the camp through the enormous Venetian fortifications was not held by our troops. It was pretty dreadful to be absolutely helpless. We dared not bombard the town as we did not know that there had been a general massacre at that time, and as the firing had ceased it was considered that it might endanger our handful of troops as well. We have found since that the Governor (thinking, no doubt, that things had gone far enough) sent 100 Turkish troops to reinforce our camp, and had also saved our sick and hospital guard. The telegraph office and signalmen and operators escaped by a miracle. Of course, ships have arrived by dozens, and French and Italian troops have reinforced the camp, but nothing has been done to avenge our 15 dead and 70 wounded, to say nothing of our Vice-Consul, his father, wife, and family, with the other 900 massacred men, women, and children. It makes one groan to think, first, that it would probably never have happened if we had been here, and that in any case our 120 riflemen with Maxims and boats' guns must have made a difference in the situation in the harbour which the Hazard's puny force could not effect. The Hazard's men behaved magnificently, and I hope they get something out of it. Their doctor should get the V.C. His clothes were shot through in at least a dozen places whilst he was helping the wounded, and he escaped marvellously without a scratch. The Christians came down yesterday and drove the Turkish outposts in, but retired again during the night. It is rumoured that there are 90,000 of them under arms in the neighbourhood awaiting developments."

Letters home

HMS. Hazard
Candia, Crete
Sept 9th 1898

My dear Girls⁵,

This is the 2nd anniversary of my wedding day⁶ - a date ever to be remembered. If you ever read the papers my news will be stale. To put it tersely, the "Hazard", or rather the Hazard's men, your brother amongst them, have had their "baptism of fire". And a pretty severe baptism it was. I have told the story in my letter to Edith and she will doubtless tell you all about it. – And just fancy, your brother has been recommended by the Colonel of the Highland Light Infantry & Lt Cr Vaughan Lewis for the Victoria Cross. Well it was all luck. I had my chance & I took it. It all seems a dream to me. How I escaped being killed I don't know. In fact why any of our 52 officers & men escaped I don't know. There were 40,000 fanatic Mussulmen in the town that night.

The skipper & I, & his Steward went ashore in the gig following up our first party who had been sent ashore in response to the request of the Colonel of the HL Infantry. Directly we entered the harbour we had to run through a perfect storm of bullets. As we landed 2 of our men were killed & two wounded (out of 8). Edith will tell you of the rest.

The affair is not over yet, and we have heavy work before us.

Out of our total (Hazard) of 52 officers & men landed

4 were killed

7 severely wounded

8 slightly wounded

19

The HLI had 5 killed & 23 wounded.

I had a narrow escape a bullet going through my trousers & tunic Just by the left hip.

I cannot believe that I have been recommended for the VC. (though it has always been one of my secret ambitions). It all seems a dream. 3 men were killed and 15 wounded of the HL Infantry whilst they were playing football. We were taken like rats in a trap.

However there it is. I don't think really that I shall get it. The aut[ho]rities⁷ seem loth to give VC's to Naval Officers they keep them for their pet soldiers.

I have been very busy since this affair happened on the 6th September in the afternoon. A lot of wounded to attend to.

The Turks after we went off to the ship had a regular time of it. They killed 750 of the 1000 Christians in Candia (you must remember that Xtians here are as big blackguards as anyone else. it simply means they belong to the Greek Church). And now the Turks are going to have their revenge. – Our British troops in Candia are in a most perilous condition.

There will be a big row about this – The authorities must have known there was a big row impending & they had no business to leave a small ship like the Hazard at Candia to stand the brunt.

But we have made our name

If I don't get the VC, I hope to get the D.S.O. (Distinguished Service Order) & perhaps get promoted to Staff Surgeon. I hope I do⁸

⁵ Maillard's two sisters

⁶ The only published source gives the year of Will's marriage to Edith as 1893. Whose the mistake is, is unknown at present

⁷ [Hole in paper]

⁸ He was.

You will know by the papers no doubt that I am not wounded or killed. I thought of telegraphing but I hate telegrams myself & I think most other people do.

Marshall distinguished himself on the ship by taking it on his own responsibility to fire shells into the place. It was the only thing that saved our land party from being all murdered. Every one of us thought it was all up.

I hope Lil⁹ got her birthday present all right it was rather late as usual, but I had been busy. Supposing I should get the Victoria Cross, wouldn't it be lovely - & shouldn't I be proud for the sake of my wife & sisters.

Would that the Pater & Mater were alive

With much love
from your Brother

Will.

HMS Hazard
Candia
Sept 14

My dear Lil,

Thanks very much for your letter. The success in duty is rather a blow to me just now, and I shall be glad of the loan from you. I hope to be able to pay it off in a very short time, as I hope to be promoted for this affair. If I am my pay will be increased by £1[?]¹⁰ a year.

There is no chance of my really getting the Victoria Cross, but I may get the D.S.O. (Distinguished Service Order) – I dined on board the Revenge last night & everyone was most kind & complimentary – they said the behaviour of the Hazard's officers & men had sent a thrill through the ship. So you can imagine I am happy.

The Admirals sent an Ultimatum to the Turkish Governor, saying that he was to catch 40 of the ring leaders, and disarm all the Bashi-Bazouks (Turkish irregular troops). by 10 am this morning, if he didn't start doing so by that time the town was to be bombarded (Candia has not b[ee]n bombarded though I see the English newspapers say it has – Confound those Newspaper Correspondents.)

The latest development is that the Turkish Governor with his numerous wives has taken refuge on board the Revenge

I expect we shall go to Malta before long –

I am anxious to get the next mail, as you will by that time have seen all about it.

The only reliable account will be found in the "Times" so please get a copy, it will be either the 8th or 9th of September number¹¹. I saw the Times Correspondent in the Revenge last night & he shewed me his telegram. My name appears therein. No other account is reliable.

Well I have been under fire for the first time, it's a funny feeling to see the bullets splashing the water up all about the boat & to wonder which is going to hit you.

⁹ One of Will's sisters

¹⁰ [Figure cannot be made out, owing to a hole in the paper]

¹¹ The cutting from the Times in INM has been identified as from the 19th September issue.

Well, I'm jolly glad I'm out of it all right. However long I live I can never be nearer death than I was that day. I didn't feel particularly frightened. I had enough to do in attending the wounded bluejackets & soldiers.

I have received a very nice letter from the Staff Officer of the HL Infantry expressing his extreme gratitude for the skill & kindness [with]¹² which I treated their wounded – a kindness which they never will forget.

Mail time.

There is no bombardment at present & probably will not be¹³
11.15 am. Sept 14.

Much love to you all
from your Br
Will

I should like Joe¹⁴ to write if he has time

HMS Hazard,
Candia.
Sunday, 25th September, 1898.

My dear Joe,

Thanks for your letter – short as it was – I was very glad to get it, and I didn't care to hear much about bicycling and tennis just then. You see, I had got the smell of blood into my nostrils and that clears every other feeling out of one's brain. Well it was a miraculous escape for all of us. I quite expected to be dust, or at any rate putrefying by this time. Fortunately I am still on this upper earth – I breathe the upper airs as Virgil says (what is it "inspiro auras superiores"?). Good heavens it was a narrow squeak. – I was wondering how I should die whether the Bashis would shoot me or burn me, or stab me. – I was quite unarmed the whole time. I thought a revolver would only be in the way – and I might shoot myself, or one of our fellows.

Well let us start at the beginning of the whole business -

About a month ago I was told by an interpreter (an Englishman) who was at that time on board the "Hazard" that there were rumours of a big row which was to take place in a month or 6 weeks. The Xtians were to attack the town of Candia at that time in great numbers & to try and murder all the Mussulmans. in the place.

The inhabitants of Candia comprise 4,500 Turkish troops, 1,000 Christians, and the remainder some 17,000 are Bashi-Bazouks – A Bashi-Bazouk is a Turkish Irregular Soldier. All Mahomedans are Bashi-Bazouks, for all of them are armed by the Turkish Government. You know the reputation of the Bashi-Bazouks I expect pretty well. Well on the 2nd September (Friday) we got notice to go down to Candia to relieve the Astræa (a ship of nearly four times our tonnage & with 3 times the number of men on board). When I heard this then I knew we were in for a row. So I got my Jacobson's Surgery, to read up amputations &c.

¹² [Expanded from an abbreviation]

¹³ [Scribbled in a space]

¹⁴ Will's brother

Now another thing had just occurred. The taxes from the country, (Christians & Mussulman) had previously passed directly into Turkish hands. & had as you imagine got no further than the Turkish Governor, Edmed Pasha. The Admirals of the Combined Fleets determined that this should stop, and appointed a Cretan Christian, as a go-between to receive and count the money. (of all the mad things in the world). Our Senior Captain, Hughes Hallett was against this, but his advice was overborne by the other Admirals. A day was appointed for the transfer of the taxes from the Turkish official (Sept 6) to the Christian official.

Edhem¹⁵ Pasha telegraphed to the Admirals that the Mussulmans of Candia (numbering at this time some 40,000) were in a ferment & begging to postpone the change for 48 hrs. This request was refused. – & hence the mess.

The whole thing was premeditated on the part of the Bashi-Bazouks. All the morning of the 6th our patrols were walking about the street, little knowing that each window held 2 or 3 Bashis armed with Martini-Henry rifles.

~~About 1pm,~~ a I may say that at this time the only English troops here were a weak battalion of the Highland Light Infantry, of which 200 nearly were away at the different outposts which are in the country from 8-12 miles from Candia. Consequently there could not have been more than 300 of them inside the town. Then there was the Hazard with 120 men, 40 to 50 of whom are Stokers & are not available for landing. Besides that we have only 43 rifles in the ship.

About 1pm Sept 6 a signal was received ~~from~~ by our Skipper from Colonel Reid of the HLI to send in a strong guard. to the Town Gate. Nicholson our SubLt was sent in with about 30 men. At 2 oclock came another signal saying, send stronger guard. The cutter was sent in again with some more men. ~~Then~~ I sent in my Sick Berth attendant in this boat. A quarter of an hour after came the signal Medical Assistance Wanted. The Skipper, Myself, and the Captain's Steward (who volunteered to go ashore to help me) with 5 men rowing started from the ~~shore~~ ship. As soon as we entered the Harbour we were under a heavy fire. – But the damage was done when we reached the landing place. The Bashis had got the exact range, ~~and~~ by practising on the Cutter. which had gone in ¼ hr before us. As we rushed out of the boat, & crossed the 20 or 30 yards of space to the Custom House, on the Quay, 2 men were killed & 3 wounded, out of the 8. – Halfway between the Custom House was a small heap of casks which we used as a halfway shelter. – Well as we were getting out one of the wounded men fell into the stern of our boat, No one seemed to notice it – When we got to the Custom House the skipper said "There is a wounded man in the boat" – So I rushed back to the boat, the firing still continuing & jumped into the boat, & tried two or three times to raise the wounded man. He was mortally wounded I could see but still sensible & he asked me to leave him, as he was a dead man – When I got him into my arms I found it impossible to lift him out of the boat & also to my disquiet¹⁶ I found that the stern of the boat had drifted away from the landing place. I realised ~~tha~~ my failure & ran for my life to the casks. I lay behind them for a little time shouting out for someone to come & help me from the Custom House, but no one came, & I made a final rush to the Custom House. – The wounded man died 2 or 3 hours afterwards. He was shot in the neck & buttock.

I had a miraculous escape, I got a bullet through the lower part of my tunic in front left side & through the upper part of my trousers on that side. It narrowly escaped going

¹⁵ The difference in spelling of this name appears in the original. Edhem is correct

¹⁶ Possibly this word is "disgust"

through my abdomen. Had it done so I would have been a deader by now. We got into the Custom House & barricaded it [with] full sacks & boxes of merchandise & for three hours we were besieged. The Bashis tried to burn us out. We tried to get a signal to the ship, for them to bombard the town but it was not until 6 oclock that Marshall started firing shells – He fired 23. & killed many Bashis. The firing brought the Turkish Governor down (who pretended not to know anything about it), & finally at 6.30 pm or so under safe guard of Turkish troops we went out to the Turquoise – I was busy all night long with the wounded men on the Turquoise, HLI's, bluejackets & Cretans.

At the Custom House a detachment of HLI's took refuge [with] us together with Col Reid – Both Colonel Reid & Lt. Cr. Vaughan Lewis have recommended me for the VC. But I shall not get it, I am perfectly certain of that.

[The following postscripts are scribbled in the two lower corners of the sheet, fitted round a diagram of the action]:

Ta!Ta! Hope I shall get safely out of this. Situation still critical.

NICHOLSON also recommended for VC for helping to carry body of Lieut Haldane HLI (shot thro' the head) from the Town Gate to the Turquois[e] where they took refuge at 2 p.m.