

MAJOR WILLIAM LA TOUCHE CONGREVE. V.C., D.S.O., M.C.,  
OF THE  
RIFLE BRIGADE.

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GAILLANT young life, and a career, which, though short, had been of exceptional brilliance, was cut short when Major Congreve met his death on the battlefields of France.

He was the elder son of Lieut.-General Walter Norris Congreve, V.C., K.C.B., M.V.O., and Mrs. Congreve of Chartley Castle, Staffs.

The Congreve family is distinguished in the widely different fields of literature and of war. Congreve is the direct descendant of the most brilliant of playwrights general — Congreve's European fame and reputation was of the Restoration Dramatist. When visiting England took occasion to pay his respects to the famous Dramatist.

Lieut.-General Congreve has had a most distinguished military career. He has taken an active part in the present war while his wife has been in France nursing wounded French soldiers.

How deep must be their grief at the loss of their gallant son! All who speak of him, do so with loving admiration, as sincere as it is enthusiastic.

Major Congreve was educated at Eton and Sandhurst. He was gazetted first to the Rifle Brigade. He went to France in September, 1914, and was for a time aide-de-camp to Major-General Hamilton, and to General Hamilton's successor.



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He was devotedly attached to his work, eager for action, ever ready to face danger, and having a very high standard of duty.

He served in the Third Division as a general Staff Officer, and later as Brigade Major of an Infantry Brigade.

Nothing daunted him, nothing could stop him. He worked at the highest pressure and was always in the front line, offering a priceless example to his men by whom he was beloved and honoured.

It was given to Major Congreve to find that "the path of duty is the way to glory." He was awarded the Military Cross, and was also made a Chevalier of the Legion d'honneur.

Later, for his gallantry in taking prisoners, practically single-handed, two officers and seventy-two men at St. Eloi, he was awarded the D.S.O., and recommended for the Victoria Cross.

In June, 1916, he was gazetted Brevet-Major, and it is the opinion of his Commanding and fellow Officers that, had he lived, he would certainly have been appointed to the Command of a Brigade.

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."

He was buried at Corbie and the men of the Gordon Highlanders and Regiments in the Third Division carried wild poppies and cornflowers to lay upon him.

“Bright names will hallow song  
And thine was of the bravest, and when shower'd  
The death-bolts deadliest the thinn'd files along,  
Even where the thickest of war's tempest lower'd  
They reached no nobler breast than thine.”

The honour of the Victoria Cross was bestowed on Major Congreve posthumously:—

“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 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 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.”

There is only one other instance in which the V.C. has been awarded to both father and son, that of the late Lord Roberts and his son Lieut. F. H. S. Roberts, K.R.R.C., to whom it was posthumously awarded for conspicuous bravery at Colenso, where by a strange coincidence Major Congreve's father, then Captain Congreve, also won the honour, and it was he who, after being wounded and reaching shelter, saw Lieut. Roberts on the ground (he had been mortally wounded) and went out under heavy fire and brought in him.

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.”

On June 1st, 1916, Major Congreve married Pamela Cynthia, second daughter of Mr. Cyril Maude.

It is difficult indeed to express the profound sympathy which all must feel for the young bride, whose bright happiness is so suddenly cut short.

The women of England are called to dwell in the House of Pain but their sorrow is assuaged by the glory which surrounds their dead.

“What could’ he hope in other years  
If the longest life had crowned him  
But thus to die, with a nation’s tears  
And a world’s applause around him?”