

# The Rees Victoria Cross

The Victoria Cross, Military Cross, Air Force Cross and campaign medals awarded to Group Captain Lionel Rees VC, OBE, MC, AFC, Royal Artillery and 32 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps, have been acquired by the Michael Ashcroft Trust, the holding institution for the Lord Ashcroft VC Collection. The VC group of medals are displayed in the Imperial War Museum's Lord Ashcroft Gallery and form part of the permanent display of over 230 Victoria and George Crosses.

After retiring from the Royal Air Force in 1931 Lionel Rees donated his Victoria Cross medal group, sword and aiguillettes to the College with the hope they could be displayed. He rejoined the RAF in the Second World War and served in the campaign in North Africa. The value of the collection has meant that their display at the College has not been possible for many years and there is no prospect of this situation changing. The medals can now be seen by the hundreds of thousands of visitors each year to what is, in effect, the national collection of medals for extraordinary bravery.

Group Captain Rees's name will continue to be commemorated at the College with two Rees bursaries being awarded in his name and an appropriate space in the Project 150 development dedicated to him.

## The actions and the awards

Almost before Rees had landed after his combat, witness reports were coming in that a single Vickers FB5 Gunbus had appeared to have completely broken up a raid of 8 to 10 hostile aircraft. The following day, a recommendation was put forward that Rees be awarded a Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for his action. This was



Lionel Rees (B 1898–1901)

passed up the chain of command until it eventually reached the desk of Major General Hugh Trenchard, GOC Royal Flying Corps in France. He amended the recommendation 'I am of the opinion that Major Rees' action is well worthy of a higher reward and he should be granted a VC'. Sir Douglas Haig concurred and on 7 July 1915 a letter was sent to the HQ Royal Flying Corps.

*others then attacked him at long range, but these he dispersed on coming to close quarters, after seriously damaging two of the machines. Seeing two others going westwards, he gave chase to them, but on coming nearer he was wounded in the thigh, causing him to lose temporary control of his machine. He soon righted it, and immediately closed with the enemy, firing at a close-contact range of only a few yards, until all his ammunition was used up. He then returned home, landing his machine safely in our lines.*

Lionel Rees was invested with his Victoria Cross by King George V at Buckingham Palace on 16 December 1916.

**London Gazette, 29 October 1915, For the award of the Military Cross, Captain Lionel Wilmot Brabazon Rees, No. 11 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps**

**For conspicuous gallantry and skill on several occasions, notably the following:**

*On 21 September 1915, when flying a machine with one machine gun, accompanied by a Flight Sergeant Hargreaves, he sighted a large German biplane with two machine guns 2,000 feet below him. He spiralled down and dived at the enemy, who having the faster machine, manoeuvred to get him broadside on and then opened fire. In spite of this Captain Rees pressed his attack and apparently succeeded in hitting the enemy's engine, for the machine made a quick turn, glided some distance and finally fell just inside the German lines near Herbecourt.*

The medals now on display at the Imperial War Museum



Rees's letter when he donated his medals to the College

**London Gazette, 5 August 1916, Captain (Temp Major) Lionel Wilmot Brabazon Rees, Royal Regiment of Artillery & No. 32 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps**

**For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty Double Crossiers, France.**

*Whilst on flying duties, Major Rees sighted what he thought to be a bombing party of our own machines returning home. He went up to escort them, but on getting nearer discovered they were a party of enemy machines, about ten in all. Major Rees was immediately attacked by one of the machines, and after a short encounter it disappeared behind the enemy lines, damaged. Five*

*On 28 July 1915, he attacked and drove down a hostile monoplane in spite of the fact that the main spar of his machine had been shot through and the rear spar shattered.*

*On 31 August 1915, accompanied by Flight Sergeant Hargreaves, he fought a German machine more powerful than his own for three-quarters of an hour, then returned for more ammunition and went out to attack again, finally bringing the enemy's machine down apparently wrecked.*

**London Gazette, 2 November 1918, For the award of the Air Force Cross, Lieutenant Colonel Lionel Wilmot Brabazon Rees, No. 1 School of Aerial Flying, Ayr, Scotland**

**For duties as a flying instructor**

Lionel Rees died at the Princess Margaret Hospital, Nassau, Bahamas, on 28 September 1955 and was buried in the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery, Nassau.

