

Medicine in the First World War - Key Stage 3

Video Script

Memorials: Royal Army Medical Corps, The National Nursing Memorial **Presenter: Jon**

The National Memorial Arboretum is home to many memorials that recognise those who serve in the emergency services and medical units within the British Armed Forces. In times of peace and conflict, medical teams go above and beyond to protect their country and the people who call it home. In times of conflict, scientists and medical professionals often have to develop new treatments and medicines, which are then used in civilian hospitals. During this past year, we have been all too aware of the amazing service provided by our own NHS in the fight against coronavirus. Their dedication to helping others is an inspiration, as are the people we will learn about today.

The first memorial we will look at is to the Royal Army Medical Corps, the RAMC.

The bronze sculpture, created by the artist Alan Beattie Herriot, shows a wounded soldier being carried from the battlefield in the First World War, by a member of the Medical Corps. Although often called stretcher bearers, many of them chose to carry the wounded this way, rather than use a stretcher, for several reasons. First, the conditions in which they were working were immensely difficult, often they were deep in mud, and the fighting was going on around them. Secondly, many felt that by working alone they were not putting anyone else in danger, as a larger party would have been an easy target for snipers.

During the summer, the trees in this grove all bear dark red leaves. This symbolises the colour of the ribbon of the Victoria Cross, which is the highest honour awarded to members of the armed forces.

Each of the 29 trees has a red plaque, commemorating a VC winner from the Medical Corps.

We are going to look at two men from very different backgrounds, both of whom won a VC during the First World War. One was the most decorated officer of the war, the other the most decorated non-officer.

Noel Chavasse was born in 1884, in Oxford. His father was a vicar, and later became Bishop of Liverpool. Noel and his twin brother Christopher were excellent runners, and in fact both competed in the 1912 Olympic Games, in London. Noel trained in medicine, and became a surgeon, finally deciding to join the RAMC as a Lieutenant, later rising to the rank of Captain.



He was awarded his first VC for his actions on 9 August 1916 at Guillemont in France. Despite being under continuous gunfire, he got to within 25 metres of the enemy line to help and treat the wounded. He spent a further four hours searching for and helping other wounded men, while the fighting was still going on all around him. The next day he went out again and carried a wounded soldier for over 500 metres to safety, despite being wounded himself by shell splinters. Altogether, he saved over twenty men, who would otherwise have died.

His second VC was awarded directly on the orders of King George V. During the Battle of Passchendaele, while under continuous fire, and despite being seriously wounded himself, he went out several times into no-mans-land to treat and recover wounded men. Two days later, on 4 August 1917, he died from his wounds. He is buried in the military cemetery in Brandhoek, Belgium. Noel Chavasse is one of only three people to have ever been awarded the VC twice.

William Harold Coltman, was born in Rangemoor, near Burton-on-Trent in 1891, to very religious parents. In 1915, he volunteered and joined the North Staffordshire Rifles. Due to his religious beliefs, he felt it would be wrong for him to harm or kill another human being, so he asked to become the regiment's stretcher bearer.

On 1 July 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, he carried three wounded men to safety, receiving his first 'Mention in Dispatches', a citation for bravery.

In February of 1917, he won his first medal, the Military Medal, for rescuing an officer who had been wounded and become trapped in barbed wire, just 60 metres from the enemy line.

In June of that year, he led a rescue party to save men wounded by an explosion caused by their flare store being hit, and another when a covered trench collapsed after being hit by a mortar.

For these, and other acts of conspicuous bravery Bill Coltman was awarded the bar to his Military Medal, as well as the Distinguished Conduct Medal, and ultimately a bar to that as well. The armed forces do not award the same medal twice. Instead, the recipient is given a metal bar that attaches to the medal's ribbon.

Finally, in late 1918, Coltman heard that many men had been left behind during a retreat. He went forward into no-mans-land alone, often under fierce fire, to tend the wounded. On three occasions during a 48-hour period he brought wounded men back to safety. This action led to him being awarded the Victoria Cross.

When he returned to England in May 1919, he was presented with his VC by the King himself. On his train journey back from London to Burton he somehow found out that a big civic reception was planned in the town to welcome back the great war hero. Not wanting, as he put it 'any fuss', he got off the train before it reached Burton and walked home.



Many of the techniques and tools that would have been used by Coltman, Chavasse and other medical professionals were brand new and had only been invented as a result of the war. The new medical inventions of the First World War still influence today's medical practices.

Many nurses have served alongside doctors, paramedics, and stretcher bearers to care for those who have been injured. This memorial honours those nurses. The globe was created by stonemason Nick Johnson and is supported by a pair of bronze hands designed by artist Georgie Welch. The stone globe is engraved with the names of 1,265 nurses who lost their lives during the two world wars while providing care to the armed services.

One of the most well-known names on the memorial is Edith Cavell. Edith trained to be a nurse at The London Hospital before becoming a 'travelling nurse' visiting patients in their homes. Nursing was very different in the early days than it is now. Nurses' duties would mainly be making sure beds, and patients, were clean, dressing wounds, taking care of the laundry, and emptying bedpans.

In 1907, she was asked to become the matron of a new nursing school being opened in Belgium. A few years later, when the First World War broke out, Belgium was occupied by Germany, and the hospital soon filled with casualties. Edith treated everyone equally, saying "I cannot stop while there are still lives to be saved".

She began sheltering British soldiers and helping them escape occupied Belgium to the neutral Netherlands. From there, they were smuggled out of the country and back to England. This led to her being arrested by the Germans and tried for treason. She was found guilty and sentenced to death by firing squad. Many pleas for clemency were made by the British government, but these were ignored. She was executed on 12 October 1915. The night before her execution, she said "Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone".

Alongside the many women who served as nurses in the First World War, the war saw many women serve as doctors on the front line even though they were not believed capable of doing so.

Medical science has changed enormously in the hundred years between then and now. One thing, though, has not changed, and we are experiencing that through this pandemic. That one thing is the determination of people like Chavasse, Coltman and Cavell to put others first, and help people in whatever ways they can, however dangerous that may be.

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MEDICINE IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR ANSWERS

Session One

Questions after watching the film.

Why would the stretcher bearers sometimes carry wounded men on their backs from the battlefields?

Although often called stretcher bearers, many of them chose to carry the wounded this way, rather than use a stretcher, for several reasons. Firstly, the conditions in which they were working were immensely difficult, often they were deep in mud, and the fighting was going on around them. Secondly, many felt that by working alone they were not putting anyone else in danger, as a larger party would have been an easy target for snipers.

How many Victoria Crosses was Noel Chavasse awarded?

Two

Why did William Coltman become a stretcher bearer?

He became a stretcher bearer because of his religious beliefs. He thought it was wrong for him to harm or kill another human being, so he asked to become the regiment's stretcher bearer.

Who did Edith Cavell help to escape from Belgium?

She began sheltering British soldiers and helping them escape occupied Belgium to the neutral Netherlands

What was Edith Cavell charged with when she was arrested?

She was charged with treason when she was arrested.

Elsie Inglis: A female Scottish doctor on the front line

The War Office did not want Elsie's help when she volunteered to assist in the First World War.

True

There were many women in Scotland that had qualified to be doctors.

False – Elsie was among the first women to qualify as a doctor in Scotland.

Elsie decided to organise her own Scottish Women's Hospitals and sent over 15,000 women overseas to care for the sick and injured.

False – She recruited more than 1,500 women overseas.

Then and Now

Think about the experience of medical professionals serving in the First World War and today. Are there any similarities or differences in what each group has been through? Write your answer below.

As this is a free writing exercise, any answer that looks at similarities and differences between medical professionals in the First World War and now would be acceptable with good reasons.

Kasturba Gandhi and Indian Army Hospitals

Write a Letter

Many patients at Indian Army hospitals wrote letters home. Imagine that you are an Indian soldier being treated at an Indian Army hospital in Britain and write a letter to your family.

What experiences have you been through? What are your surroundings like? Who is looking after you?

As the letter is an informal letter it could be like a conversation with a friend. Informal writing is friendly and natural.

The letter should try and answer the 3 questions:

- **What experiences have you been through?**
- **What are your surroundings like?**
- **Who is looking after you?**

Session Two

Medicine and Innovation

Harry Brearley and the invention of stainless steel

Where was Harry born?

Sheffield

What was Harry's first job after leaving school?

Labourer at the company his father worked at.

How do you think Harry became an industry expert in steel working?

He worked hard and was promoted to the general assistant in the company's chemical laboratory.

What did Harry add to steel to improve it and make it stainless steel?

He added chromium

What did Harry first call his new invention?

Rustless steel

What is the nickname of Sheffield?

Steel City

Properties of Steel

Research the properties of steel and list them below.

There should be research for this. Some answers are below.

- **Corrosion resistant**
- **High tensile strength**
- **Very durable**
- **Temperature resistant**
- **Easy formability and fabrication**
- **Low-maintenance (long lasting)**
- **Attractive appearance**
- **Environmentally friendly (recyclable)**

What properties make stainless steel a good material to make medical equipment?

Stainless steel is used to make medical equipment as it is strong, resistant to corrosion and needs minimal maintenance. In hygienic settings it has antibacterial properties, it is rust-proof and it is recyclable.

Can you name one other use of stainless steel? What properties make it the best material to use for this use?

Stainless steel can be used in a wide range of things. Some items frequently made with stainless steel include:

- Tableware and cutlery
- Cookware (pots, pans, cooking equipment)
- Kitchen sinks
- Kitchen appliances (microwaves, ovens, toasters)
- Garden equipment
- Furniture
- Building structures
- Escalators
- Vehicles (Subway trains, cars, airplanes)
- Food manufacturing machinery and equipment
- Fuel and chemical tankers

In Flanders Field

Put yourself in the place of a medic on the front line during the First World War. Complete the spider diagram and fill it with your emotions and senses of what you see, hear, feel, smell, and even taste around you.

There should be a range of answers on the spider diagram and a poem written from this.

