

Edinburgh naval hero's VC sold for £240,000

A Victoria Cross awarded to a Scots captain in the Royal Navy for his remarkable bravery during the First World War has fetched £240,000 at auction in London.



Royal Navy Captain Henry Peel Ritchie WW1 Victoria Cross
Captain Henry Peel Ritchie from Edinburgh earned the V.C. for
his "gallant command" of the battleship HMS Goliath's steam

pinnacle after it was attacked at Dar-es-Salaam in East Africa on 28 November 1914.

Ritchie, 38, was wounded eight times in 20 minutes as the vessel came under a "storm" of shells and bullets in the city's harbour. He maintained command until he fell unconscious due to loss of blood.

The first naval V.C. awarded in the Great War, the medal was presented to Ritchie by King George V at Buckingham Palace the following year.

It went under the hammer alongside Ritchie's five other medals at Noonans of Mayfair, where it was bought by a private bidder after a battle with a rival collector.

Ritchie was born at Melville Gardens, Edinburgh, on 29 January 1876, and attended George Watson's College before joining the Navy as cadet in 1890 aged just 14.

Rising through the ranks, he won the Army and Navy lightweight boxing championship in 1900, and was also commended by Their Lordships of the Admiralty for attempting to save the life of a rating from drowning at Chatham in 1903.

After the outbreak of war in 1914, he was ordered to East Africa to help locate and destroy the German commerce raider Königsberg.

As second-in-command of the battleship HMS Goliath, Ritchie went to Dar-es-Salaam, where a number of German ships had been supplying Königsberg after the raider became trapped.

Ritchie took command of Goliath's steam pinnacle to enter the harbour, where the vessel came under heavy German fire from huts by the water's edge, from houses, wooded groves and hills above, and even from a cemetery.

Ritchie was hit on the forehead, in the left hand, twice in the left arm, in his right arm and hip; and finally, two

bullets through his right leg, before he fainted.

But his efforts helped bring the pinnacle back alongside Goliath, which opened fire with its main 12-inch guns.

Ritchie received his V.C. on 24 April 1915 and, the following month, returned to light duties with an appointment at the Haslar Gunboat Yards in Hampshire.

His citation, in the London Gazette of 10 April 1915, read: "For most conspicuous bravery on the 28th November 1914 when in command of the searching and demolition operations at Dar-es-Salaam, East Africa.

"Though severely wounded several times, his fortitude and resolution enabled him to continue to do his duty, inspiring all by his example, until, at his eighth wound, he became unconscious.

"The interval between his first and last severe wound was between twenty and twenty-five minutes."

Ritchie was later appointed to the command of the armed boarding steamer Suva, employed in the Red Sea, supporting military operations including those by Lawrence of Arabia.

Ritchie, who was promoted Captain on the Retired List in January 1924, lived at Craigroyston House in Edinburgh, where he died on 9 December 1958, aged 83.

The V.C., which remained in "extremely fine" condition, was sold alongside Ritchie's 1914-15 Star, British War and Victory Medals, Coronation 1937 medal and Coronation 1953 medal.

Christopher Mellor-Hill, Head of Client Liaison at Noonans, said after the sale: "The price achieved reflects the bravery and gallantry of Ritchie and the importance of the Victoria Cross.

"It was also the first Naval VC of WW1 when the Navy was very

busy blockading German East Africa and hunting the German battleship SS Konigsberg.

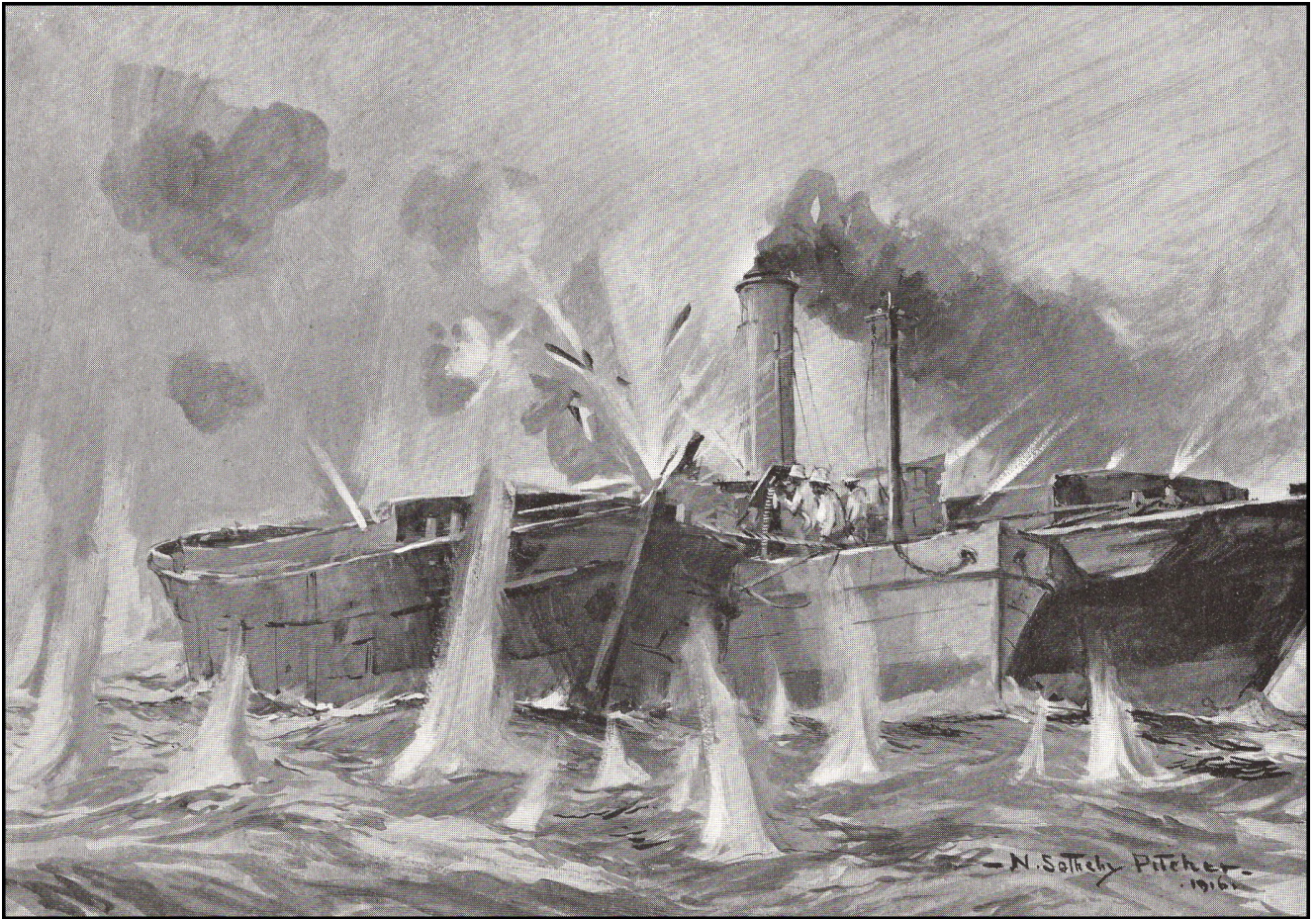
“After competition between a bidder on the phone and a commission bidder, the medal was purchased by a private collector.”

Capt. Ritchie’s V.C was among the highlights of a “phenomenal collection” of naval medals put together by the late Jason Pilalas.

Pilalas, of Connecticut, USA, served as an officer in the US Navy, with whom he completed three tours of Vietnam, and later went in “relentless pursuit of knowledge of all things relating to the Royal Navy”.



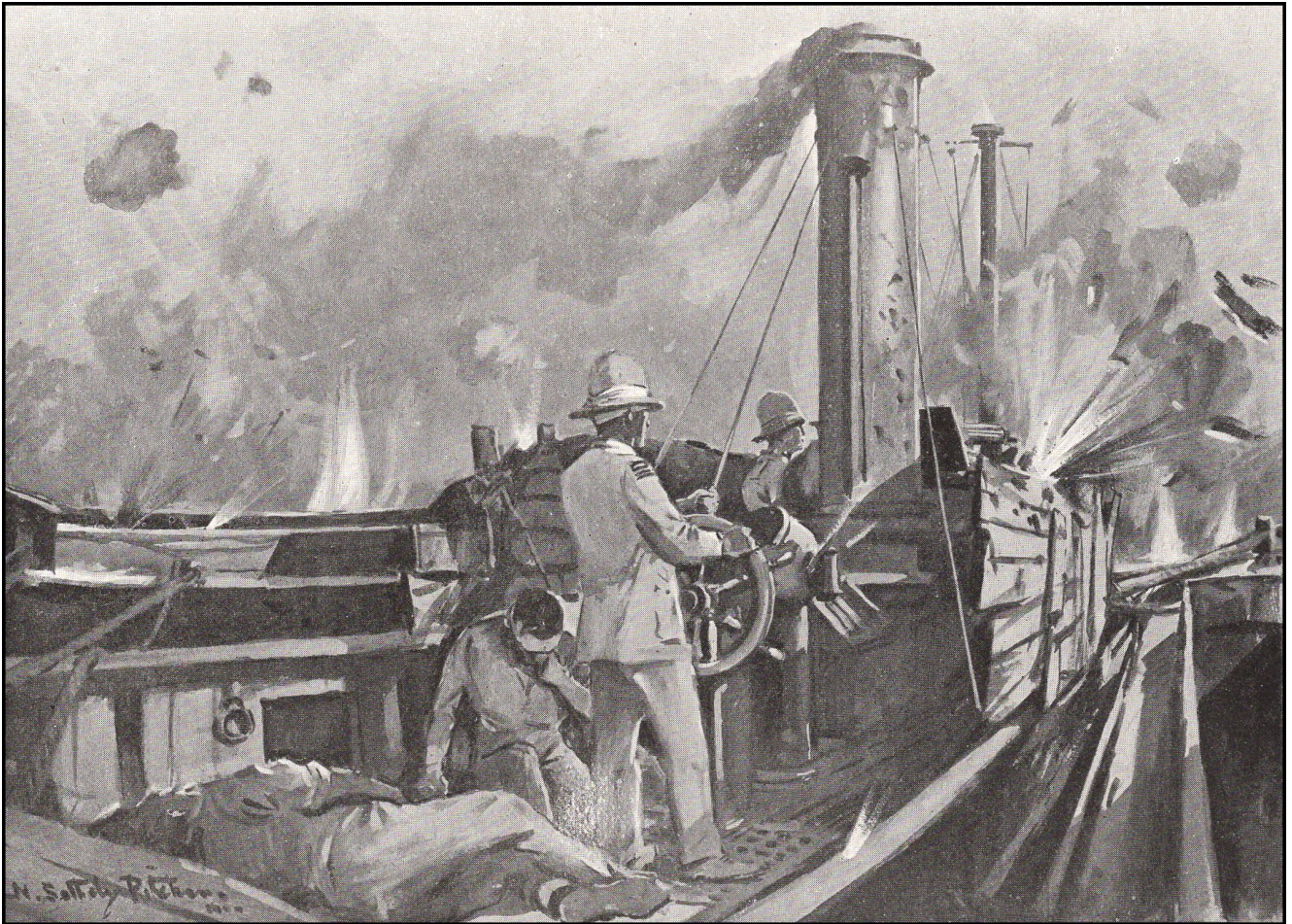
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