



Information sheet no 087

Henry Raby VC

Henry Raby was born on 26th September 1827 at Boulogne, France. His family were influential industrialists in South Wales. He attended Sherbourne School in Dorset.

Raby joined the Navy as a Volunteer First Class on 8th March 1842 at the age of fourteen on HMS *Monarch*. He was promoted to Mate on 7th March 1848, and two years later, was promoted to Lieutenant on 15th January 1850. Before the outbreak of the Crimean War, he was serving in HMS *Wasp* on the west coast of Africa. Once the war had started, the ship was involved in operations along the Circassian coast supporting the Turkish Army. Raby was selected to be part of the Naval Brigade, a combined force of sailors from HMSs *Wasp*, *Sidon*, *London* and *Monarch*, which landed at Sebastopol on 23rd October 1854. The brigade served in the trenches at Inkerman and Sebastopol.

On 18th June 1855, a combined force of British and French troops, including the naval brigade, began an assault on the fortress at Redan, Sebastopol. The assaulting forces had to carry scaling ladders over vast tract of open ground to reach the fortress at Redan and were subjected to fierce attack from the defending troops. Once there, the walls of the fortress were too great an obstacle to the men when under attack. Although the attack was unsuccessful, many acts of bravery took place within the British troops, one of which was by Raby, who was second in command of one of the parties.

The attacking forces were forced to retreat, but soon the battlefield was covered with wounded, dead and dying men. A soldier of the 57th (Middlesex) Regiment was seen from the Naval Brigade's trench, sitting up and calling for help. Raby, accompanied by Lt Henry D'Aeth from HMS *Sidon*, Capt of the Forecastle John Taylor from HMS *London* and Boatswain's Mate Henry Curtis of HMS *Rodney*, left the shelter of their trench and ran the seventy yards from the trench to where the soldier was sitting. He had been shot in both legs and was unable to move. The four sailors picked him up and carried him, and despite intense enemy fire, they managed to return to their trench unscathed. For this action, they were received Mentions in Dispatches. The Naval Brigade was re-embarked on the 19th September.

Raby was promoted Commander on 29th September 1855 for his services in the trenches. On 24th February 1857, Raby, Curtis and Taylor were awarded the newly instigated Victoria Cross. D'Aeth had contracted cholera and died within hours of contracting the illness on 7th August 1855, and, therefore, missed out on the award. Raby and his colleagues personally received their Victoria Cross from the Queen at the first ever investiture at Hyde Park on 26th June 1857. Raby had the honour of being the first Naval man to be invested with the VC, by virtue of being the most senior officer of the service present at Hyde Park. However, chronologically, Charles Lucas was the first Naval man to win the award - his awarding action being in 1854. In addition to the VC, Raby was also awarded the French Legion d'Honneur, the Order of Medjidie 5th Class, the Turkish and Sardinian Crimean medals, and the Crimean Medal with bars for Inkerman and Sebastopol.



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After the war, Raby returned to the west coast of Africa in command of HMS *Medusa* and later transferred to HMS *Alecto*. The main purpose on this station was on anti-slavery patrol and he was commended on several occasions for the part he played in this service. In 1861, while leading a squadron in an attack on Porto Novo, a slaving port, he was wounded and later received a commendation from the Foreign Office for treaty negotiations he conducted with chiefs along the Old Calabar River. He attained the rank of Captain on 24th November 1862. In 1863, he married Judith Forster, and had three sons, two of whom survived.

From 1868 to 1871, Raby commanded HMS *Adventure* on the China Station. He was awarded the Companion of the Bath in 1875, and retired from the Navy on the 27th September 1877, being promoted to Rear-Admiral on the retired list on the 21st March the following year. In his retirement, Raby lived in Southsea, Portsmouth, and took an active interest in local charitable affairs. He died at his home on 13th February 1907 at the age of eighty. He was given a full military funeral, and was buried in Highland Road cemetery, Portsmouth. One of his sons followed his father into the Navy but the other became a Captain of Artillery.