

Soldier's Victoria Cross auctioned with cannonball



Major Knox performed two acts of valor in the Crimean War

The first Victoria Cross to be won by a British army soldier - along with the cannonball, which blew off his arm - has fetched £252,000 (just over \$4,000) at auction.

The medal, which is Britain's highest military award for valor, was given to Glasgow-born Major John Simpson Knox.

It was for acts of heroism between 1854 and 1855 during the Crimean War.

The medal and cannonball, which took off part of Major Knox's left arm, went under the hammer at Spink Auctioneers in London.

A fellow soldier had picked up the missile that hit Major Knox and later gave it to him.

Major Knox, who was born in 1828, ran away from home in Glasgow at 14 and illegally joined the Scots Fusilier Guards as he was under age.

By the time the Crimean War had begun in 1854, he was an acting sergeant major.

He performed the first of two acts of valor on 20 September 1854 during the Battle of the River Alma.

According to the citation for his medal, he "acted with conspicuous courage in reforming the ranks of the Guards at a decisive moment of the action".

The second act of valor occurred in June the following year.

Then, while serving as a lieutenant with the Rifle Brigade, he volunteered for an attack on heavily defended Russian positions at Sebastopol.

According to the citation: "He remained in the field until he was twice wounded, all the time acting with great gallantry."

It was during that attack, on a fortress defending the city of Sebastopol, that Major Knox was struck on the left arm by the cannonball.



The cannonball, which blew off part of Major Knox's arm

After his retirement from the Army in 1872, he took up residence at Cheltenham where he died on 8 January 1897 and was buried in the town's cemetery.

Before the auction, medal expert Oliver Pepys, of Spink auctioneers, said: "Major Knox showed incredible bravery, losing his arm to cannon fire in the process.



The VC (left) was being sold with three other medals Major Knox was awarded

"The medal is being sold with a Russian cannonball, the very one that smashed into Knox's arm. In all my years of working with rare medals and war artifacts I have never seen a more unusual keepsake."

Victoria Cross medals are still cast from bronze taken from cannons captured from the Russians at Sebastopol.

The VC was being sold along with three other medals he was awarded - the Crimea Medal, the French Legion of Honour and the Turkish Crimea Medal.

The seller wishes to remain anonymous.