

**Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, Case 5 (2022-2023) Victoria Cross posthumously awarded to Squadron Leader A.S.K. Scarf, Royal Air Force, and four other of his medals**

<b>Statement from Expert Adviser</b>	Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the medals meet Waverley criteria one and three.  <b>See below</b>
<b>Note of case hearing</b>	<b>See below</b>
<b>Press release</b>	A press release was issued by the Secretary of State on 28 October 2022: <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rare-victoria-cross-awarded-following-far-east-battles-in-second-world-war-at-risk-of-leaving-the-uk">https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rare-victoria-cross-awarded-following-far-east-battles-in-second-world-war-at-risk-of-leaving-the-uk</a>
<b>Recommended price</b>	£660,000 (plus VAT of £22,000 which can be reclaimed by an eligible institution)
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Deferral period</b>	27 January 2023
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Deferral period</b>	30 April 2023
<b>Note of outcome</b>	

**RCEWA – Victoria Cross posthumously awarded to Squadron Leader A.S.K. Scarf, Royal Air Force, and four other of his medals**

**Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the medals meets Waverley criteria one and three.**

Please note that images and appendices referenced are not reproduced.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **1. Brief Description of object(s)**

Medal group of five consisting of Victoria Cross, 1939-1945 Star, Pacific Star, Defence Medal and British War Medal awarded to Sqdn Ldr Arthur Scarf, 62 Sqdn, RAF

Materials: Bronze, white metal (either cupro-nickel or silver), ribbon

Dimensions: Exact dimensions not known

Maker(s): Hancocks (VC only), other medals are likely to be the Royal Mint.

Date: Circa 1946

Condition: This medal group is in good condition with only some light surface oxidation and dirt which is to be expected in objects of this nature and date.

### **2. Context**

Provenance: This medal set was awarded posthumously to Mrs Elizabeth 'Sallie' Scarf, the widow of the deceased Sqdn Ldr Arthur 'Pongo' Scarf. The VC itself was presented by King George VI at Buckingham Palace on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1946. It has been passed down through the family into the hands of the present owner, who is a direct descendent of Sqdn Ldr Scarf.

This medal group was on loan from the family to the RAF Museum for several years and is believed to have been on public display.

### **3. Waverley criteria**

This medal group meets the requirements of Waverley Criteria One and Three as it is closely connected with our history and national life that its departure would be a misfortune. It is also of outstanding significance to the study of a particular branch of history.

This medal group includes the only Victoria Cross awarded to the RAF for Pacific theatre during the Second World War so it is representative of the gallantry and sacrifice of the aircrew stationed in the Far East during the Second World War, with their limited numbers of substandard aircraft with which they made a desperate effort to defend against the overwhelming forces of the Japanese. It links to the attitudes of the British Government towards the Empire in the Far East and that theatre's continued treatment as a less significant part of the Second World War. It has a number of implications with regards to the relationship between the British Government and the countries of the Empire which would warrant further exploration and research particularly in relation to the increased understanding of the need to comprehend the experience of Empire from all perspectives.

Due to the award criteria of the VC it is unusual for RAF personnel to receive this award. Only 26 have been awarded to the RAF and none since the Second World War so this entirely unique Victoria Cross is particularly rare and significant to our national history.

## **DETAILED CASE**

### **1. Detailed description of object(s) if more than in Executive summary, and any comments.**

This medal group of five consists of a Victoria Cross, 1939-1945 Star, Pacific Star, Defence Medal and British War Medal awarded posthumously to Sqdn Ldr Arthur Scarf, 62 Sqn, RAF. The Victoria Cross in this group was awarded to Mrs Elizabeth Scarf, Sqdn Ldr Scarf's widow, by King George VI at Buckingham Palace on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1946. His remaining medals will have been issued by the War Office and sent using the postal service. The medals were not issued mounted as a group, and this mounting will have been done on behalf of the Scarf family. The medals are in good condition and there is no evidence of significant wear.

The four campaign medals in this group are relatively common as they were issued to all personnel who met the qualifying criteria during the Second World War. The Victoria Cross however is the highest gallantry award issued in the UK and 1,358 have been awarded since its inception in 1856. 181 were awarded during the Second World War, only 22 of these were awarded to the RAF. Sqdn Ldr Scarf's Victoria Cross is the only example awarded to a member of the RAF for their service in the Far East as such there are no objects which are directly comparable with this medal group in existence.

### **2. Detailed explanation of the outstanding significance of the object(s).**

Squadron Leader Arthur Scarf joined the Royal Air Force in 1936 and was the commander of 62 Squadron based at RAF Butterworth, Malaya. The RAF stationed in the Far East had considerably less resources and less technologically advanced aircraft than those personnel operation in Europe, the Mediterranean and the Middle East and were considerable outnumbered by the Japanese. Despite this they were expected to defend British Empire holdings in the Far East.

Scarf's leadership and determination to set an example to his men were such that he carried out a single aircraft attack on the Japanese held airfield in Singora, Thailand, following the destruction by the Japanese of the rest of his squadron's aircraft whilst they were preparing to take off and attack Singora air base. Although Scarf knew that a single Blenheim bomber aircraft could inflict little damage on the airfield, he chose to undertake the mission as it would help to maintain the morale of his squadron. During the attack on Singora, Scarf was mortally wounded but still managed to make an emergency landing, ensuring that both of his crew on the Blenheim survived. Scarf himself would die of his wounds shortly after despite the efforts of medical staff, which included his wife. Scarf's actions during the Second World War demonstrated his personal courage and devotion to duty, setting a man who had many similarities to his contemporaries, apart from them and into the annals of history.

Scarf's Victoria Cross is representative not only of his story but the wider story of the RAF in Far East and the challenges they faced as a result of the theatre being under resourced and not prioritised by the British Government of the time. This wider story warrents further exploration and research and Scarf's Victoria Cross is an important part of the material culture which can represent it. The war in the Far East and the role played in it by British personnel is often described as the 'Forgotten War' and certainly has drawn less attention

from historians and the wider public than it deserves. The conduct of the Second World War in the Far East demonstrates the way the Government of the time thought about the Empire and its holdings as well as the practical challenges of defending a location so far from the UK during a time of global warfare. It is increasingly being recognised that there is a need to understand that there are multiple narratives to every historical object and that these narratives need to be shared more widely, the Scarf VC group is an object which allows for the exploration of these stories. Powerful, emotional personal stories like Scarf's, represented by his Victoria Cross medal group, can capture the public's imagination, so these wider stories of Empire and its impact on the people of those countries can be made more accessible and engaging to a wider audience.

The uniqueness of this medal group where it includes the only Victoria Cross awarded to the RAF for the Far East during the Second World War renders it of national importance as it creates a focal point for not only Scarf's story but the wider story of the RAF in the Far East during the Second World War. It also has local significance to the people Wimbledon, as this was where Scarf was born and educated. Apparently, Scarf was an unremarkable scholar but his skill as a rower was impressive, and he was part of the crew who unexpectedly won the Staines Regatta in 1934, so this medal group also has some significance in terms of his links to rowing heritage.

The Victoria Crosses awarded to the RAF are also (except for one example) anomalous as none of them bear the date of the Victoria Cross winning action as has been the practice since 1856 but appear to bear the date that the award was approved by King George VI. This is unusual and would benefit from further research as to the cause of this change, which was only applied to the RAF. Examples of these unusually dated Victoria Crosses being accessible to researchers in the UK will help to further this research.

There is also ongoing research into the origin of the metals used in the production of the Victoria Cross. It is tradition that all Victoria Crosses are produced from one of four Russian cannon that were captured during the Crimean War, which links each Victoria Cross back to the conflict for which the award was originally created as the first gallantry award open to personnel of all ranks. It has become evident that there are differences in composition between Victoria Crosses from different eras and a wider sample size would potentially be helpful to further research.

The Victoria Cross itself is important due to its nature as the highest award for gallantry in the UK and for its history as the first gallantry award that was open to all ranks. The award was instituted due to pressure, initially from journalists but also from the public, on the Government to create a gallantry award that would be open to all. The Victoria Cross also has interesting links to the Royal Family as its institution involved both Queen Victoria and Prince Albert on a personal level. There is evidence that Prince Albert was personally involved in the design. Although, there are several Victoria Crosses in publicly accessible collections (most notably the Lord Ashcroft Collection, held at the Imperial War Museum) which are representative of this.

## **Summary of related items in public/private ownership in the UK**

A number of other items relating to Scarf were sold with this medal group at auction and are presumably in the possession of the buyer, although much of Scarf's personal archive is held at the RAF Museum.

The Operational Record Books for 62 Squadron which would cover Scarf's service are held at the National Archives. Sqdn Ldr Scarf's service records will still be held by the Ministry of Defence and have not yet been made publicly available but will be transferred to the National Archives in the future.

Sqdn Ldr Scarf's VC citation was published in the London Gazette and is widely available online.

The RAF Museum holds some flying logbooks, memoirs, correspondence and personal papers of other personnel who served with 62 Squadron in the Far East during the Second World War which are related to the Scarf VC group as they provide additional context to the operational conditions under which he was awarded the VC. There is also a photograph of two Blenheim Mark 1s flying in formation over Malaya, it is not believed that either of these are the aircraft Scarf flew during his VC action.

There are no original Blenheim Mk.1 aircraft in the UK.

**Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, note of case hearing on 14 September 2022: Victoria Cross posthumously awarded to Squadron Leader A.S.K. Scarf, Royal Air Force, and four other of his medals (Case 5, 2022-23)**

**Application**

1. The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (RCEWA) met on 14 September 2022 to consider an application to export a Victoria Cross posthumously awarded to Squadron Leader A.S.K. Scarf, Royal Air Force, and four other of his medals. The value shown on the export licence application was £660,000 which represented the hammer price at auction plus the buyer's premium. The expert adviser had objected to the export of the medals under the first and third Waverley criteria on the grounds that its departure from the UK would be a misfortune because (i) they were so closely connected with our history and national life (and (iii) they were of outstanding significance for the study of wider story of the RAF in the Far East during the Second World War.

2. Six of the regular eight RCEWA members were present and were joined by three independent assessors, acting as temporary members of the Reviewing Committee. The Chairman explained that the binding offers mechanism was applicable for this case.

3. The applicant was informed that there is currently an interim process put in place for Committee hearings. The Committee is still holding hybrid meetings but any Committee members, including the independent assessors, must attend in person so they can inspect the object prior to discussing the case and voting. Any Committee members or independent assessors that are not able to attend in person and view the object are not able to vote.

4. The applicant confirmed that the value did not include VAT and that VAT of £22,000 would be payable on the buyer's premium in the event of a UK sale. The applicant also confirmed that the owner understood the circumstances under which an export licence might be refused.

**Expert's submission**

5. The expert adviser had provided a written submission stating that this medal group of five consists of a Victoria Cross, 1939-1945 Star, Pacific Star, Defence Medal and British War Medal awarded posthumously to Squadron Leader Arthur Scarf, 62 Squadron, RAF. The Victoria Cross in this group was awarded to Mrs Elizabeth Scarf, Squadron Leader Scarf's widow, by King George VI at Buckingham Palace on 30th June 1946. His remaining medals will have been issued by the War Office and sent using the postal service. The medals were not issued mounted as a group, and this mounting will have

been done on behalf of the Scarf family. The medals are in good condition and there is no evidence of significant wear.

6. The four campaign medals in this group are relatively common as they were issued to all personnel who met the qualifying criteria during the Second World War. The Victoria Cross however is the highest gallantry award issued in the UK and 1,358 have been awarded since its inception in 1856. 181 were awarded during the Second World War, only 22 of these were awarded to the RAF. Squadron Leader Scarf's Victoria Cross is the only example awarded to a member of the RAF for their service in the Far East, and as such there are no objects which are directly comparable with this medal group in existence.

7. Scarf's Victoria Cross is representative not only of his story but the wider story of the RAF in Far East and the challenges they faced as a result of the theatre being under resourced and not prioritised by the British Government of the time. This wider story warrants further exploration and research and Scarf's Victoria Cross is an important part of the material culture which can represent it. The war in the Far East and the role played in it by British personnel is often described as the 'Forgotten War' and certainly has drawn less attention from historians and the wider public than it deserves. It is increasingly being recognised that there is a need to understand that there are multiple narratives to every historical object and that these narratives need to be shared more widely. The Scarf Victoria Cross group is an object which allows for the exploration of these stories. Powerful, emotional personal stories like Scarf's, represented by his Victoria Cross medal group, can capture the public's imagination, so these wider stories of Empire and its impact on the people of those countries can be made more accessible and engaging to a wider audience.

### **Applicant's submission**

8. The applicant, in their written submission, did not address the Waverley criteria.

### **Discussion by the Committee**

9. The expert adviser and applicant retired and the Committee discussed the case. They agreed the medals represented an extraordinary and highly poignant story of great personal courage in the face of overwhelming odds, from an under-researched campaign of the Second World War. They noted that, as an object, the group of medals were not remarkable as, apart from the Victoria Cross, all participants in this theatre of war would have received them. However, given only 12% of the Victoria Crosses awarded during the Second World War were to the RAF, and this was the only one awarded for the Far East and wider Pacific campaign, they agreed that this group was a unique and significant tangible element of a particular moment in British military history.

10. They then discussed the need for further research into the Far East conflict, and that the absorbing story behind this group of medals could provide



an extraordinary level of engagement. The Committee agreed that this group of medals could significantly contribute to further research into an incredibly important, but historically overlooked British campaign during the Second World War.

### **Waverley Criteria**

11. The Committee voted on whether the medals met the Waverley criteria. Of the nine members, five voted that they met the first Waverley criterion. Six members voted that they met the third Waverley criterion. The medals were therefore found to meet the first and third Waverley criteria for their outstanding significance for the study of the British Far East campaign during the Second World War, as well as the role of the RAF within this context.

### **Matching offer**

12. The Committee recommended the sum of £660,000 (plus VAT of £22,000) as a fair matching price.

### **Deferral period**

13. The Committee agreed to recommend to the Secretary of State that the decision on the export licence should be deferred for an initial period of three months. At the end of the first deferral period, if the Arts Council received notification of a serious intention to raise funds with a view to making an offer to purchase the medals, the owner will have a consideration period of 15 Business Days to consider such offer(s). The Committee recommended that there should be a further deferral period of three months that would commence following the signing of an Option Agreement.

### **Communication of findings**

14. The expert adviser and the applicant returned. The Chairman notified them of the Committee's decision on its recommendations to the Secretary of State.

15. The expert adviser agreed to act as champion if a decision on the licence was deferred by the Secretary of State.