

## MAJOR ALAN CUNLIFFE VIDAL DSO (1892-98)

He was born on 2 May 1880 in Eton, Buckinghamshire. (see picture aged 16).

After a distinguished career at the College, he studied medicine at Edinburgh University. In 1904 he obtained, under the auspices of the Royal College of Surgeons, the so-called 'triple' qualification of Licentiate of Royal College of Physicians and of the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh and Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons in Glasgow.

He was commissioned into the Army on 31 July 1905 as a member of the Royal Army Medical Corps and rose through the ranks to become a Major on 28 February 1918.

He served in South Africa 1909-13, with the British Expeditionary Force in France in 1914 and was taken prisoner of war on at Ligny-en-Cambresy on 27 August 1914. He was taken to camps at Torgau, Burg, Halle and finally Wittenburg, where he was kept from 11 February 1915 to 20 February 1916.

At Wittenburg prison he assisted in the medical treatment of typhus patients. There were 13,000 prisoners (9,000 Russians, 3,000 French and 900 British) in the camp and 1,200 of these were typhus patients at any one time. Four of the six British medical officers being held there contracted the disease, including **Captain Stephen Field (1895-98)** who sadly died 10 April 1915. The food supplied by the enemy consisted mainly of thick soup "containing a minimum of meat" and bread and parcels of food were sent to the prisoners from England.

The prolonged detention of medical officers by the Germans, in violation of the Geneva Convention, aroused worldwide indignation. The US Ambassador intervened in August 1915. The German Government informed him that "Captain Vidal was to be detained for the present for military reasons", but promised early repatriation. Questions were asked in the House of Commons on 21 February 1916, before his release was known (he arrived back in London on 23 February 1916).

On 18 April 1916 he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order "For distinguished service and devotion to duty at Camp Wittenburg, Germany, during the Typhus Epidemic which prevailed there from February to June 1915." He was also awarded the Gold Life Saving Medal of the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem for the same act.

The following Press Report appeared on 22 February 1916

BRITISH DOCTORS RETURNING FROM GERMANY  
Amsterdam, Tuesday

The two British doctors who were reported yesterday to have arrived at Olvenzall from Germany are Major Priestley and Captain Vidal, of the Royal Army Medical Corps. They are en-route for England. - Reuter.

The Press Association adds: These are the two officers mentioned yesterday by Lord Robert Cecil in the House of Commons as having been detained by Germans for more than half a year, in violation of the Geneva Convention, presumably to prevent them reporting on the terrible state of affairs which long existed at Wittenberg camp, and the scandalous treatment of prisoners there.

On 18 April 1916 he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order "For distinguished service and devotion to duty at Camp Wittenburg, Germany, during the Typhus Epidemic which prevailed there from February to June 1915." He was also awarded the Gold Life Saving Medal of the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem for the same act.



The following Press Report appeared in the Daily Mail of 19 April 1916

R.A.M.C. HEROES  
----<>----

#### THE KING'S HONOURS FOR WORK AT WITTENBERG

Honours from the King for the devoted doctors who tended the typhus patients at Wittenberg from February to June 1915, under terrible conditions revealed by Mr. Justice Younger's report, were announced last night as follows:

C.M.G. — Major Harold Edgar Priestley, R.A.M.C.

D.S.O. — Captain Alan Cunliffe Vidal, R.A.M.C., and Temporary Captain James La Fayette Lauder, R.A.M.C.

The official report was full of praise for the splendid way in which these doctors tackled the epidemic, when deserted by the Germans and unable to get proper medical requisites. "Major Priestley's work," says the report, "was beyond all praise." "Captain Vidal was . . . the idol of the camp." "Major Priestley says of Captain Lander that he cannot sufficiently express his admiration for his pluck and skill and for the unobtrusive way in which he did his duty. It was he who, at the beginning, bore the brunt of the outbreak."

After the war he served briefly in India before joining Ampleforth College in 1928 as the School Doctor. He practiced there until he died in 1956.

The following Obituary was written :-

#### DR ALAN VIDAL

Although seen here less frequently of late, Dr Vidal was for many years a figure in the Ampleforth scene familiar to everyone and his absence is felt by all who knew him. He was born in 1880, one of several sons of the Anglican Vicar of Creeting in Suffolk, and was educated at Framlingham and Edinburgh University, where he qualified in medicine in 1905. He immediately joined the R.A.M.C. and in the course of time this took him to India and South Africa.

He was in France shortly after the outbreak of the 1914 war and, with many others, was taken prisoner in the first month of the war. In fact he might have eluded capture but he felt it to be his duty to stay to look after wounded comrades. Eventually, in company with some thousands of allied prisoners, he was taken to Wittenberg, where, conditions of feeding and sanitation being extremely bad, cholera and typhus broke out. Of the six doctors among the prisoners three succumbed and no medical or nursing aid was forthcoming from the captors. Major Vidal and the others struggled as best they could to tend the sick and dying in the most appalling insanitary conditions, which provided one of the most notorious scandals of the war.

Eventually he was repatriated in 1916 and was awarded the D.S.O. for his conspicuous devotion to duty. After working for some years elsewhere he came to practice at Ampleforth in 1927 and became the 'School Doctor' in the following year. Many will recall both his skill and his care in his professional capacity and his kindness, which was experienced by many people in many ways. As a boy one sensed at once that he was giving a personal attention to the case. He always tended to err on the safe side in prescribing treatment, and his close attention to cases that defied ready diagnosis on several occasions saved his patients from serious or even fatal developments.

He showed his real interest in many activities of the School, mostly in the sphere of sport, and, in the earlier years, he was a keen follower of the Hunt. But he would take an interested look round the

School Library on an occasion, revealing a perhaps unsuspected side to his character. Shooting, whether partridge and pheasant in Yorkshire or in Africa nobler quarry, was, with fishing, perhaps his keenest interest, and these he pursued almost to the end. His latter years were saddened by the death of John, his younger son, in a motor accident. In his last months his health was severely impaired and he died on 25th November 1956 after a short illness. We offer our sympathy to his relatives and our prayers for his soul.