# TfL Corporate Archives Research Guides: World War II 75th Anniversary Edition

## Staff Overseas Honours and Awards

How many London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB) staff were awarded medals and what for? We delve into the Transport for London Corporate Archive and reveal the gallant actions of our staff.

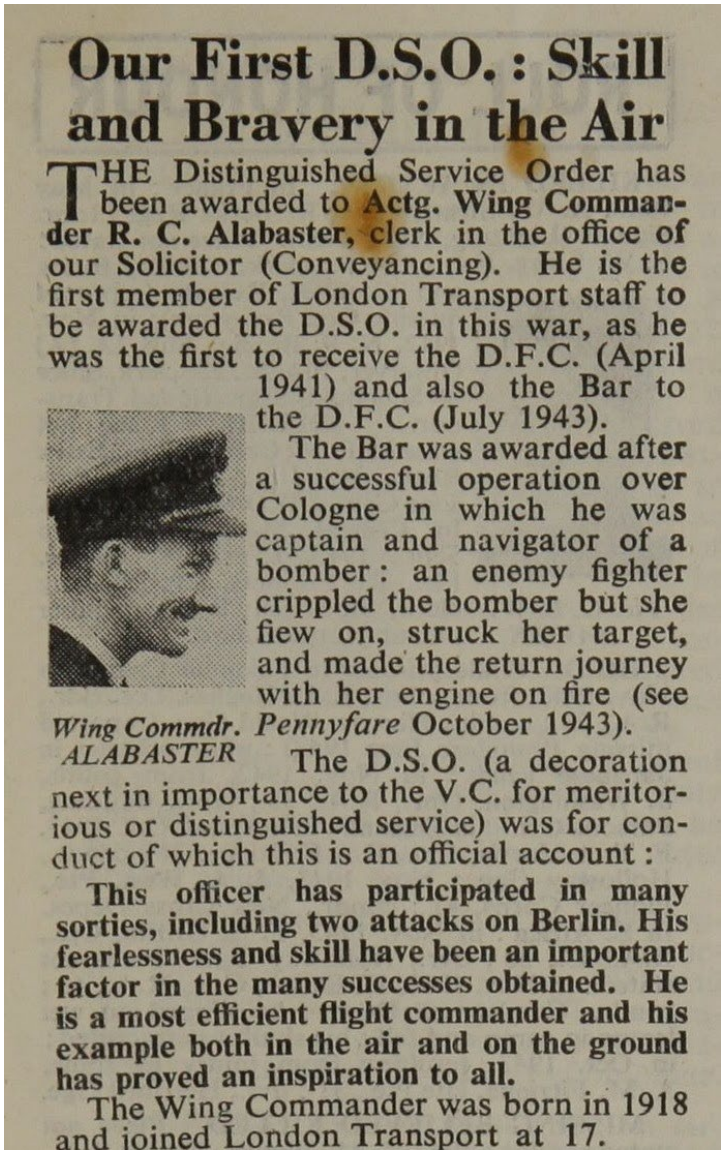
138 members of staff were awarded decorations for gallantry or were mentioned in official dispatches in respect of active service with Her Majesty's Forces during World War Two. Here are some of their stories.

*LPTB Trams & Trolleybus staff who were awarded medals during World War II being photographed before marching in the Victory Parade. 1946. Archive ref num: LT000030/078*

**R.C. Alabaster: Distinguished Flying Cross (with bar)**

Acting Wing Commander R.C. Alabaster, a clerk in the LTPB Solicitor's Office, was the first member of staff to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross (with bar), a gallantry medal ranked just below the Victoria Cross.

In 1943, Alabaster's bomber was hit by a German fighter plane over Cologne. With an engine on fire he succeeded in hitting his target and returned to safety. He took part in many sorties including two raids on Berlin.



# Our First D.S.O.: Skill and Bravery in the Air

THE Distinguished Service Order has been awarded to **Actg. Wing Commander R. C. Alabaster,** clerk in the office of our Solicitor (Conveyancing). He is the first member of London Transport staff to be awarded the D.S.O. in this war, as he was the first to receive the D.F.C. (April 1941) and also the Bar to the D.F.C. (July 1943).



*Wing Commdr. ALABASTER*

The Bar was awarded after a successful operation over Cologne in which he was captain and navigator of a bomber: an enemy fighter crippled the bomber but she flew on, struck her target, and made the return journey with her engine on fire (see *Pennyfare* October 1943).

The D.S.O. (a decoration next in importance to the V.C. for meritorious or distinguished service) was for conduct of which this is an official account:

**This officer has participated in many sorties, including two attacks on Berlin. His fearlessness and skill have been an important factor in the many successes obtained. He is a most efficient flight commander and his example both in the air and on the ground has proved an inspiration to all.**

The Wing Commander was born in 1918 and joined London Transport at 17.

*"Our First Distinguished Service Order: Skill and Bravery in the Air". Feature on the heroic actions of long serving London Transport employee Acting Wing Commander Alabaster. 1944. Archive ref num: LT000030/078*

# Conductor in a Plane Set a Ship on Fire

THE words 'This gallant pilot set an example of the highest order' occur in the account of the award of the D.F.C. to **Warrant Officer E. J. Ledwidge,** aged 27, conductor at Watford High Street Gge. 'A most determined pilot', he showed excellent qualities in many sorties. In an attack on shipping off the island of Cos, he defied fierce A.A. fire to close in on a vessel, which he raked with bullets, hit with bombs, set on fire.

**His plane was nit repeatedly, a petrol tank caught alight. Flames spread rapidly and he was forced down to sea. But he boarded a dinghy and eight hours later drifted ashore—to fight another day!**

At the garage they speak of the unassuming manner and cheery grin of the conductor, who had his first bus in July 1939 and was called up in August 1940. The accompanying photograph was taken at El Alamein as he stood in the cockpit of his plane.

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## E.J. Ledwidge: Distinguished Flying Cross

Bus conductor at Watford High Street Garage, Warrant Officer Ledwidge's plane was hit repeatedly when his petrol tank caught on fire. "Flames spread rapidly and he was forces down to sea. But he boarded a dinghy and eight hours later drifted ashore - to fight another day."

*Award of the Distinguished Flying Cross to Warrant Officer E. J. Ledwidge. January 1944. Archive ref num: LT000030/078*

## J. J. E. Stapley: Distinguished Service Medal

Able Seaman in the Navy and Underground car examiner J. J. E. Stapley received the award for courage during the assault on Anzio, Italy. Able Seaman Stapley was employed at East Ham Depot, having previously worked at Northfield Depot.

**ANZIO SAILOR'S D.S.M.**

An Underground car examiner at East Ham Depot, **A.B. J. J. E. Stapley** has the Distinguished Service Medal for :

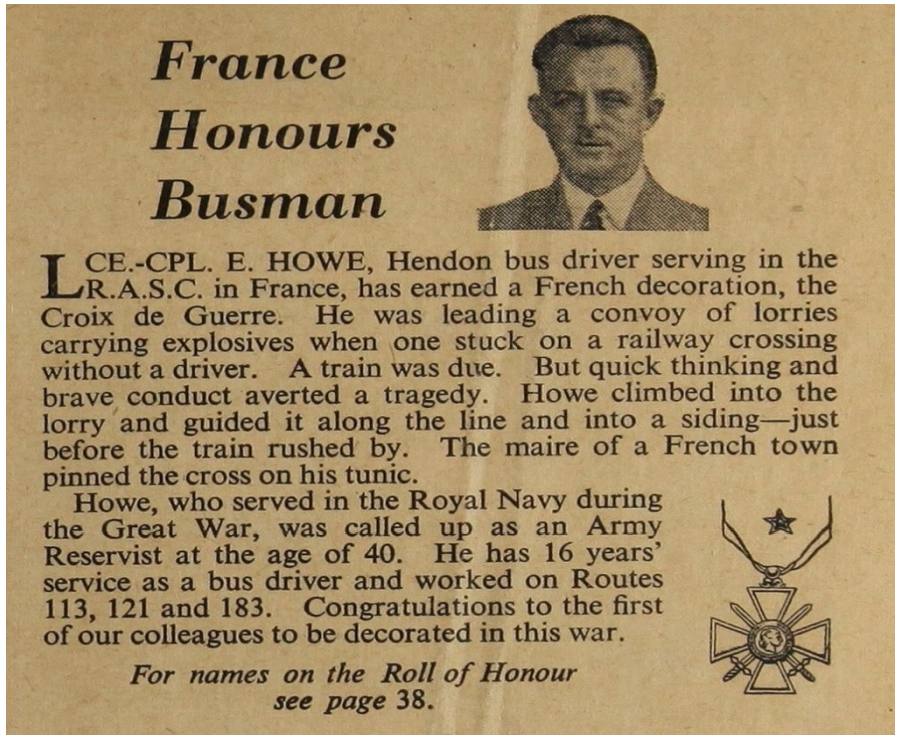
**'Outstanding courage, leadership, resource and determination during the assault on Anzio and in subsequent bombardments in support of the Army, and in maintaining an unbroken flow of supplies which accomplished the building up of the beach-head despite bombing, mining and bombardment by shore batteries.'**

Jack Stapley was at Northfields Depot before working at East Ham. He served in the Navy before the war and was called up as a reservist.

*Announcement of a Distinguished Service Medal to Underground car examiner. 1944. Archive ref num: LT000030/078*

## Lance Corporal E Howe receives the Croix de Guerre

The Hendon bus driver was awarded a French decoration for moving a lorry stuck on rail tracks into a siding just as a train was approaching, averting a tragedy.



***France Honours Busman***

LCE.-CPL. E. HOWE, Hendon bus driver serving in the R.A.S.C. in France, has earned a French decoration, the Croix de Guerre. He was leading a convoy of lorries carrying explosives when one stuck on a railway crossing without a driver. A train was due. But quick thinking and brave conduct averted a tragedy. Howe climbed into the lorry and guided it along the line and into a siding—just before the train rushed by. The maire of a French town pinned the cross on his tunic.

Howe, who served in the Royal Navy during the Great War, was called up as an Army Reservist at the age of 40. He has 16 years' service as a bus driver and worked on Routes 113, 121 and 183. Congratulations to the first of our colleagues to be decorated in this war.

*For names on the Roll of Honour see page* 38.

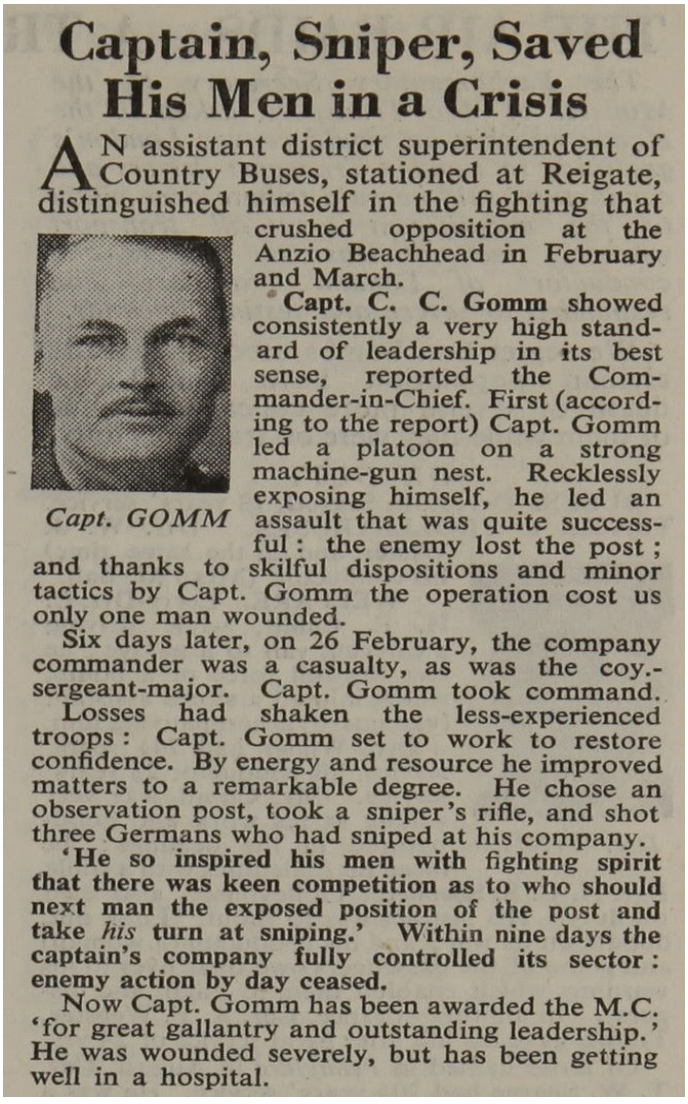
*Announcement of the Hendon bus driver's award of a French decoration for moving a lorry stuck on rail tracks. 1940. Archive ref num: LT000030/078*

## C. C. Gomm: Military Cross

Captain Gomm was awarded the Military Cross for showing exceptional leadership fighting at the Anzio Beachead in Italy. In 1944, Captain Gomm, an assistant district superintendent of Country Buses at Reigate, led a platoon on a machine-gun nest where the enemy lost the post.

A few days later and following the injury of the company commander, Gomm took the lead and was able to restore confidence in "shaken", "less-experienced" troops.

In battle, Gomm sniped three enemy combatants and was awarded the Military Cross for great gallantry and leadership. During battle he was severely injured.



**Captain, Sniper, Saved His Men in a Crisis**

AN assistant district superintendent of Country Buses, stationed at Reigate, distinguished himself in the fighting that crushed opposition at the Anzio Beachhead in February and March.



*Capt. GOMM*

**Capt. C. C. Gomm** showed consistently a very high standard of leadership in its best sense, reported the Commander-in-Chief. First (according to the report) Capt. Gomm led a platoon on a strong machine-gun nest. Recklessly exposing himself, he led an assault that was quite successful: the enemy lost the post; and thanks to skilful dispositions and minor tactics by Capt. Gomm the operation cost us only one man wounded.

Six days later, on 26 February, the company commander was a casualty, as was the coy.-sergeant-major. Capt. Gomm took command. Losses had shaken the less-experienced troops: Capt. Gomm set to work to restore confidence. By energy and resource he improved matters to a remarkable degree. He chose an observation post, took a sniper's rifle, and shot three Germans who had sniped at his company.

**'He so inspired his men with fighting spirit that there was keen competition as to who should next man the exposed position of the post and take *his* turn at sniping.' Within nine days the captain's company fully controlled its sector: enemy action by day ceased.**

Now Capt. Gomm has been awarded the M.C. 'for great gallantry and outstanding leadership.' He was wounded severely, but has been getting well in a hospital.

*Captain C.C Gomm shows exceptional leadership fighting at the Anzio Beachhead in Italy. 1944. Archive ref num: LT000030/078*

## S. F. Merritt: Distinguished Flying Cross

Acton Works fitter, Flying Officer S. F. Merritt took over a damaged plane, diverting it behind allied lines after the wounded pilot and crew had bailed out. Merritt later bailed out before letting the plane fall to earth - he was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross.

# Someone Took His Place, and Saved Lives

THREE bursts of flak made the underneath of the British plane like a sieve. The plane, heading for Brussels, was losing height, so it was decided to bale out. The pilot had been wounded in the leg : others bandaged his leg, arranged his parachute, and helped him to descend.

*F.O MERRITT, D.F.C.*

Meanwhile F/O Merritt had jumped into the pilot's seat and taken charge of the 'ship', from which all the other members of the crew baled out. After dropping 5,000 ft. Merritt straightened the machine, crossed into Allied lines and (making sure the plane was clear of houses) baled out, letting the plane fall to earth.

The flying officer in this daring enterprise was a 30-years-old fitter in our Acton Works, **F/O S. F. Merritt,** whose promotion from Flight Sergt. to Pilot Officer *Pennyfare* reported in March 1944.

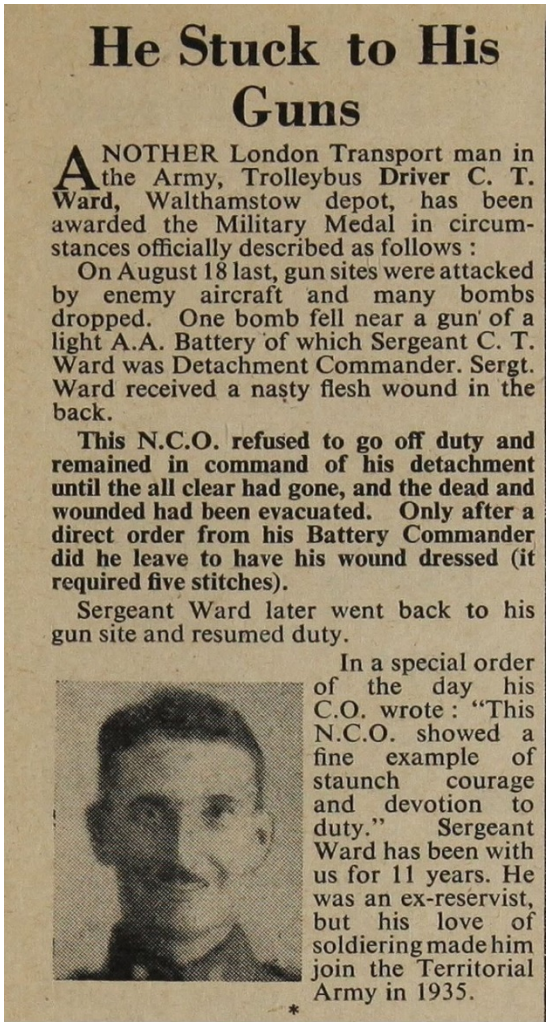
For his conduct in 'carrying out duties in excess of his own' (to quote the citation), the immediate award of the D.F.C. has been made to Flying Officer Merritt. He has been in the R.A.F. more than three years, he was trained in Canada, and up to a few weeks ago he had made 14 operational flights over Germany.

*Action of Flying Officer S.F. Merritt in taking over a damaged plane and diverting it behind allied lines. 1945. Archive ref num: LT000030/078*

## C. T. Ward: Military Medal

Despite being wounded in enemy bombing, trolleybus driver at Walthamstow Depot, Sergeant C.T. Ward remained in command of his military unit, refusing to leave his post. Ward received a “nasty flesh wound” and left to get the wound dressed following a direct order from the Battery Commander.

For this bravery he was awarded a Military Medal.



# He Stuck to His Guns

ANOTHER London Transport man in the Army, Trolleybus **Driver C. T. Ward,** Walthamstow depot, has been awarded the Military Medal in circumstances officially described as follows :

On August 18 last, gun sites were attacked by enemy aircraft and many bombs dropped. One bomb fell near a gun of a light A.A. Battery of which Sergeant C. T. Ward was Detachment Commander. Sergt. Ward received a nasty flesh wound in the back.

**This N.C.O. refused to go off duty and remained in command of his detachment until the all clear had gone, and the dead and wounded had been evacuated. Only after a direct order from his Battery Commander did he leave to have his wound dressed (it required five stitches).**

Sergeant Ward later went back to his gun site and resumed duty.



In a special order of the day his C.O. wrote : “This N.C.O. showed a fine example of staunch courage and devotion to duty.” Sergeant Ward has been with us for 11 years. He was an ex-reservist, but his love of soldiering made him join the Territorial Army in 1935.

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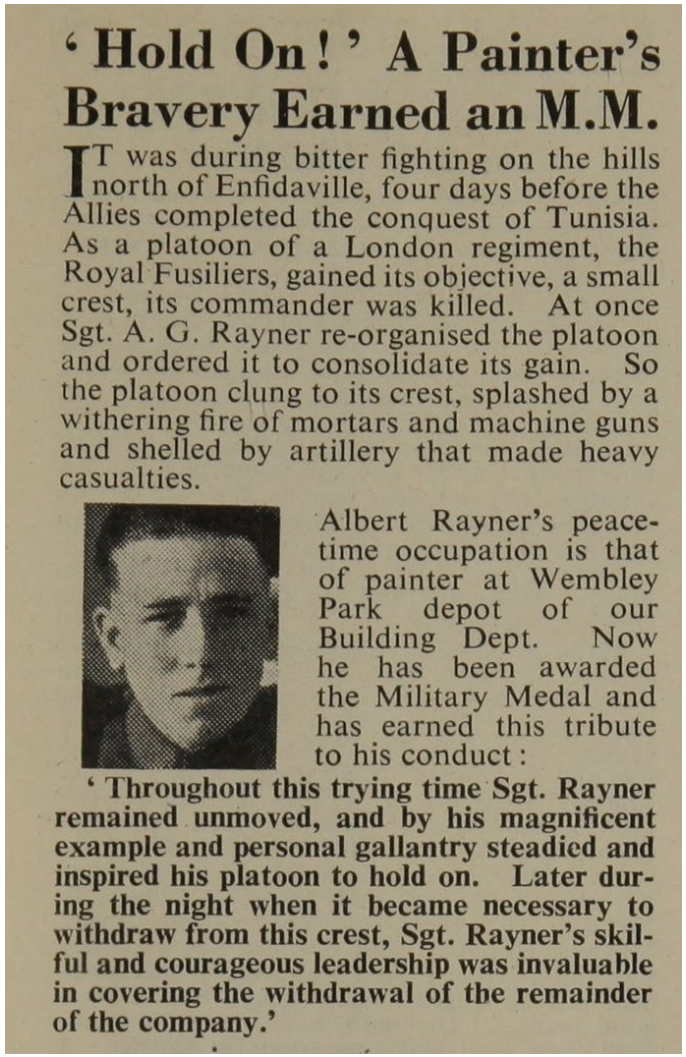
*Article describing a staff member's Military Medal award. 1941.*
*Archive ref num: LT000030/078*



# ‘Hold On!’ A Painter’s Bravery Earned an M.M.

IT was during bitter fighting on the hills north of Enfidaville, four days before the Allies completed the conquest of Tunisia. As a platoon of a London regiment, the Royal Fusiliers, gained its objective, a small crest, its commander was killed. At once Sgt. A. G. Rayner re-organised the platoon and ordered it to consolidate its gain. So the platoon clung to its crest, splashed by a withering fire of mortars and machine guns and shelled by artillery that made heavy casualties.

Albert Rayner’s peace-time occupation is that of painter at Wembley Park depot of our Building Dept. Now he has been awarded the Military Medal and has earned this tribute to his conduct:

**‘Throughout this trying time Sgt. Rayner remained unmoved, and by his magnificent example and personal gallantry steadied and inspired his platoon to hold on. Later during the night when it became necessary to withdraw from this crest, Sgt. Rayner’s skilful and courageous leadership was invaluable in covering the withdrawal of the remainder of the company.’**

## Albert G. Rayner: Military Medal

London Transport Building Department painter Sergeant Albert G. Rayner was awarded the Military Medal for his gallantry and courageous leadership in Tunisia. Sergeant Rayner took over a platoon when its commander was killed and secured its objective under heavy fire.

*Sergeant Albert G. Rayner awarded Military Medal for his gallantry and courageous leadership in Tunisia. 1943. Archive ref num: LT00000/078*

*This story has been compiled using information in records at the Transport for London Corporate Archives. The Corporate Archives seeks to preserve and make accessible records, not to interpret them. A wider range of material is available for physical consultation.*

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