

Race to raise £200,000 to save Stratford war hero's VC medal

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WAR historians are racing against time to raise cash to stop a rare medal leaving the country.

The appeal, dubbed #SavetheScarfVC, aims to secure the Victoria Cross of heroic airman Arthur Scarf, whose name is engraved on Stratford-on-Avon's war memorial.

The Royal Air Force Museum, which is leading the efforts, has already raised £463,000 but needs another £200,000 to reach its target. The hope is to keep RAF squadron leader Arthur's medal at the museum near Wolverhampton, where it can be displayed for future generations to see.

The Battle of Malaya VC was sold at auction last year to a buyer from abroad for a world record-busting £660,000, including fees. But the government's Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport and Arts Minister put a temporary block on it being taken out of the country. And to give historians a better chance of hitting the target, the deadline has been extended until the end of April. Stratford resident and military history expert David Austin is spreading the word about the appeal and encouraging people to chip in to the fund.



Arthur Scarf Credit: Spink (62731244)

Mr Austin told the Herald: "This is the only Victoria Cross awarded for an air action in the Far East, as all the other ones were in Europe or elsewhere, so it's unique. And, of course, we have Arthur Scarf's name on our war memorial in the Remembrance Garden which is why I decided to get involved".

Arthur Scarf, known as Pongo, held a position at what was to become the NFU Mutual in Stratford, working in the claims department between the wars. He left to join the RAF in 1936, ending up in the Far East campaign commanding No 62 Squadron. Arthur's VC was awarded in recognition of his bravery on a daylight raid on Singora, Malaya, on 9th December 1941.

As previously featured in the Herald, he was leading the raid, which saw all available aircraft ordered to take part. He had just taken off when enemy Japanese aircraft arrived and destroyed or disabled the rest of the squadron. He took the courageous decision to fly on alone to Singora and, despite attacks from enemy fighter planes, completed his bombing run. On his way back, his aircraft was attacked and he was severely wounded in the back and arm. He crash-landed at Alor Star – without causing injury to his crew – but died two hours later in hospital. In a poignant twist, Arthur's pregnant wife Elizabeth 'Sally' was a nurse stationed at the same hospital.

The Victoria Cross was presented to Sally four years later in 1946, by King George VI at Buckingham Palace. The King told her: "Your late husband did a wonderful act, for which his country will be eternally grateful." The medal was put up for sale through auctioneers Spink by a descendant of the Scarf family. Now its fate is hanging in the balance.



Arthur Scarf's VC medal.

David Austin is campaigning to keep Arthur Scarf's VC in this country, the WWII hero's name being commemorated in Stratford's Garden of Remembrance.

Photo: Mark Williamson. (62733859)



Mr Austin, a retired Royal Navy aircraft engineer and project manager, is a volunteer on the War Memorial Register team for the Imperial War Museum. He has spent the past five years visiting and photographing almost 1,000 memorials across Warwickshire to help complete the national register.

He added: "Arthur Scarf had a lot of injuries – a big hole in the middle of his back and one of his arms was shot off but he managed to bring the aircraft back with the crew and landed safely. His story smacks of heroism of the highest order. To anyone wondering why we should try and save his VC medal for the UK, I would say the action itself was courageous but the family story is also emotional in that his wife was two-months pregnant with their unborn child when he died. It will be fantastic if the RAF Museum can do this – I'm hoping someone will come up with a large amount of money before too long."

To find out more about the #SaveTheScarfVC appeal, or to donate, see:
<https://www.gofundme.com/f/save-the-scarf-vc>