

**Lieutenant John (“Jack”) Hollington GRAYBURN.  
2nd Parachute Battalion. Platoon Commander, Number 2 Platoon, A Company.**



Commissioned into The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry on 14th September 1940 he served with the 1st Battalion (the 43rd). For the greater part of his service with the Battalion he was the Officer Commanding the Carrier Platoon and promoted T/Captain.

In June 1943 he transferred to the Parachute Regiment (with a reduction to his substantive rank of Lieutenant), serving with the 2nd Parachute Battalion in North Africa and Italy.

At the time of the Arnhem Operation he was platoon Commander of 2 Platoon, “A” Company (Major Tatham-Warter).

For his actions during the defence of the Bridge at Arnhem he was posthumously awarded the **Victoria Cross**.



The following details are given in the London Gazette of 23rd January, 1945:-

*“Lt. Grayburn was a platoon commander of the Parachute Battalion which was dropped on September 17th, 1944, with orders to seize and hold the bridge over the Rhine at Arnhem.*

*He, with his platoon, was to capture the southern end. Lt. Grayburn was wounded in the shoulder almost immediately, but he directed and pressed the assault until casualties became so heavy that he was ordered to withdraw.*

*Later, he successfully organized the occupation of a house vital to the defence of the bridge. Although heavily attacked throughout the next day and night, thanks to Lt. Grayburn's courage, leadership, and skill in disposing his men, the house was held until it was set on fire on September 19th, and had to be evacuated.*

*Lt. Grayburn then formed a fighting force of elements of all arms, including the remainder of his company. Although wounded again, this time in the back, he refused to be evacuated. When tank attacks, against which he had no defence, finally forced his retreat on September 20th, he stood up in full view of the enemy, and directed the withdrawal of his men to the main defensive perimeter.*

*He was killed that night.*

*For nearly four days, despite pain and weakness from his wounds, shortage of food and lack of sleep, Lt. Grayburn displayed supreme and unflinching gallantry and determination. Without his inspiring leadership the Arnhem bridge could not have been held for so long.*

**Extract from the Regimental Chronicle of the Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry - Officers Roll of Honour 1939-1945.**

**Grayburn, Lieutenant John Hollington, VC.** son of Mr. and Mrs. L. M. Grayburn, of Chalfont St. Giles, Buckinghamshire, was educated at Sherborne School and joined the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank two or three years before the war. He joined the Regiment on 14th September, 1940, and served in the 43rd up to 1943, when he volunteered for the Parachute Regiment, seeing service in North Africa and Italy before winning his posthumous Victoria Cross at Arnhem with the 1st Airborne Division for supreme courage, leadership and devotion to duty.

Lieutenant Grayburn was a platoon commander of the Parachute Battalion which was dropped on 17th September with the task of seizing and holding the bridge over the Rhine at Arnhem.

The north end of the bridge was captured and, early in the night, Lieutenant Grayburn was ordered to assault and capture the southern end with his platoon. He led his platoon on to the bridge and began the attack with the utmost determination, but the platoon was met by a hail of fire from two 20-mm. quick-firing guns and from the machine guns of an armoured car. Almost at once Lieutenant Grayburn was shot through the shoulder. Although there was no cover on the bridge, and in spite of his wound, Lieutenant Grayburn continued to press forward with the greatest dash and bravery until casualties became so heavy that he was ordered to withdraw. He directed the withdrawal from the bridge personally and was himself the last man to come off the embankment into comparative cover.

Later his platoon was ordered to occupy a house which was vital to the defence of the bridge, and he personally organized the occupation of the house. Throughout the next day and night the enemy made ceaseless attacks on the house using not only infantry with mortars and machine guns but also tanks and self-propelled guns.

The house was very exposed and difficult to defend and the fact that it did not fall to the enemy must be attributed to Lieutenant Grayburn's great courage and inspiring leadership. He constantly exposed himself to the enemy's fire while moving among, and encouraging, his platoon, and seemed completely oblivious to danger.

On 19th September the enemy renewed and intensified his attacks on the house. All attacks were repulsed, due to Lieutenant Grayburn's valour and skill in organizing and encouraging his men, until eventually the house was set on fire and had to be evacuated. He then took command of elements of all arms, including the remainder of his own company, and re-formed them into a fighting force. He spent the night organizing a defensive position to cover the approaches to the bridge.

The next day he extended his defence by a series of fighting patrols which prevented the enemy gaining access to the houses in the vicinity. This forced the enemy to bring up tanks which brought Lieutenant Grayburn's position under such heavy fire that he was forced to withdraw to an area farther north. The enemy now attempted to lay demolition charges under the bridge and the situation was critical. Realizing this, Lieutenant Grayburn organized and led a fighting patrol which drove the enemy off temporarily, and gave time for the fuses to be removed. He was again wounded, this time in the back, but refused to be evacuated.

Finally, an enemy tank, against which Lieutenant Grayburn had no defence, approached so close to his position that it became untenable. He then stood up in full view of the tank and personally directed the withdrawal of his men to the main defensive perimeter to which he had been ordered. He was killed that night.

From the evening of 17th September until the night of 20th September Lieutenant Grayburn led his men with supreme gallantry and determination. Although in pain and weakened by his wounds, short of food and without sleep, his courage never flagged. There is no doubt that, had it not been for this officer's inspiring leadership and personal bravery, the Arnhem bridge could never have been held for these three days.

Lieutenant Grayburn was married in 1942, and there is one son, born in March, 1943.

From a brother officer: "To write of Jack Grayburn as a soldier one must, I think, start with the Regiment because he was first and foremost a true Regimental officer. He joined the 43rd at Hatherleigh in the autumn of 1940. One has only to take the names of the officers who joined at that time and who have since fallen in action, William Blewitt, Rupert Livingstone, John Cooper and Dick Seers, to realize the strength of the Regimental team of officers which was then building up and which was maintained through Jack's three years with the 43rd.

"The greater part of Jack's service with the Regiment was as commander of the carrier platoon and he brought to it the full force of his infectious enthusiasm. He combined a thorough and detailed care of his men with a reckless dash in all training and exercises. His men loved him for all this and so did his brother officers, and it was not long before he became known as 'Mad Jack.'

"In the autumn of 1942 he did a course at the carrier wing of the School of Infantry at Barnard's Castle. I think this was a considerable landmark, for Jack found there enthusiasm to match his own, and returned with his ability as a commander increased and matured.

"I remember fearing at this time that the humdrum round of training would not satisfy Jack, but I need not have worried, for he set to work undaunted and some excellent and original exercises resulted.... At this time the Regiment was in a brigade commanded by a Guardsman, an excellent and enthusiastic man who had certain violent prejudices. Arthur Clerke Brown, who was brigade major, summed up the latter as a violent antipathy to black buttons, battle drill and General Browning. Despite the fact that Jack Grayburn had distinct leanings towards all three, he completely won the heart of the brigadier and was consulted on practically all matters of carrier organization and tactics in the brigade.

"An account of Jack's time in the 43rd cannot end without mention of his part in sport and particularly rugby football. I can see, and hear, him now letting himself go with everything he had got, as in all he undertook."



**(C) Steve Berridge [www.lightbobs.com](http://www.lightbobs.com)**

*His Medals are now in the care of the "AIRBORNE ASSAULT MUSEUM" at IWM Duxford*