THE MEDALS OF THE MET

In 1958, PC Henry William Stevens became the second Metropolitan Police officer to be awarded the George Cross. At the time, he was 30 years old with five years service, and stationed at Bromley.

At 7.55pm on Saturday March 29 he was working as an aide to CID with DC Moody and PC Wanstall when they responded to an alarm at a house in Bickley Park Road. Moody and Wanstall entered the front garden to check the house and grounds while Stevens went round the back. The house was surrounded by a high fence and suddenly a man leapt over, landing a few yards in front of Stevens.

The intruder was Ronald Easterbrook, aged 26, a violent criminal with a record which included assaulting a policeman with a lead-loaded rubber hose and stabbing a man with a carving knife. In his pocket was a loaded .22 revolver.

PC Stevens, who was in plain clothes, called to him: 'I'm a police officer, stop.' But Easterbrook bolted. The officer chased him for about 75 yards when Easterbrook turned and shouted: 'Stop, or you'll get this.' Stevens saw the barrel of a gun pointing directly at him but did not slow down; a second later there was a flash and he felt a heavy blow to his face. The bullet would have entered his brain but it was halted by his teeth and jawbone, which were both shattered, lodging finally in his tongue.

Stevens could feel the broken teeth and blood filling his mouth but launched himself at the gunman who pulled the trigger a second time. The gun misfired and Stevens landed on Easterbrook and wrenched the weapon from his grasp. Then gripping him around the neck he forced him against some railings.

Automatic pistol

Easterbrook cried out: 'All right I'll give in, I've had enough'. But as the officer eased his grip he broke free.

Although in shock and pain, Stevens continued the chase, shouting for help. Easterbrook turned and tried to run past him but Stevens grabbed his jacket and coat and held on, as he was dragged along the road, until Easterbrook slipped out of the garments.

Easterbrook escaped — but not for long. Thanks to the bravery of PC Stevens, the police had his gun, hat, coat and jacket and from these he was soon identified and arrested. He was later sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.

Eight years later another officer from

PHOTO: Courtesy of Spink & Son's

In the second instalment of his three-part series Sgt Anthony Rae, Lancashire, tells how three George Crosses went to the men of the Metropolitan Police

Bromley won the award. On August 25, 1966, PC Anthony John Gledhill, aged 28, was driving an area car with PC Terence McFall when they were sent to check a suspicious car in Deptford, south east London. The vehicle was, in fact, stolen and the five men inside were preparing for an armed robbery. One of the gang, William Gentry, aged 34, had a revolver and an automatic pistol; another held a sawn-off shotgun and he was later identified as John McVicar, aged 26, who had recently escaped from prison where he had been serving eight years for robbery.

There followed a car chase in which the bandits fired at least 15 shots at the police. Their car was hit three times, but Gledhill managed to follow them for five miles, at speeds of up to 80 mph, often on the wrong side of the road and against one-way systems until the bandits car crashed at Rotherhithe. The robbers ran off in separate directions.

The officers saw Gentry was armed and drove after him, catching him up in a nearby yard. However, as the police car drew up, Gentry pointed the revolver at Gledhill's head and ordered: 'Get out or else it's your lot.' The unarmed officers obeyed and Gentry jumped in to their car and reversed out of the yard still pointing his gun at the two policemen. But as Gentry momentarily turned away

Gledhill dived at the car grabbing his gun hand.

The car sped forward dragging Gledhill along but the officer kept his grip while holding onto the window with his other hand. The vehicle swerved and crashed, throwing Gledhill to the ground and injuring his arm.

McFall ran up and threw open the passenger door, striking out at Gentry with his truncheon. Gledhill ran back to the driver's door but was knocked over as Gentry burst out. The gunman backed away warning the officers not to move and fired a shot; he pulled the trigger again but there was just a click — he had run out of bullets.

Both officers ran at Gentry and Gledhill grabbed the firearm as McFall hit the gunman with his truncheon. Gentry tried to pull the other pistol from his pocket but help arrived and he was overpowered. He later told an inspector: 'That driver of yours is really good. We thought we had a good one but we couldn't lose him. Tell your man he can have five grand to drive for us next time.'

Four of the bandits were eventually arrested including McVicar, who was caught committing another robbery the following month.

Bizarre plot

Gentry was sentenced to 17 years and McVicar received 15 years in addition to the eight he was serving prior to his gaol escape. The following year McVicar obtained notoriety when he escaped again, this time from the maximum security wing at Durham prison.

Anthony Gledhill was awarded the George Cross. PC McFall received the George Medal.

The fourth George Cross awarded to a Metropolitan Police officer went to Inspector James Wallace Beaton, aged 30, for foiling a bizarre plot to kidnap Princess Anne in 1974.

Ian Ball, aged 26, planned to kidnap the princess and demand a £3 million ransom. He hired a house in Hampshire for a hideout, a car in which to carry out the kidnap and a typewriter for the ransom note addressed to the Queen. This asked for the money in untraceable £5 notes and demanded that documents were drawn up for a civil action, with damages of £1 million, against the police or Royal Family should they disclose his true identity.

It continued: 'No excuses will be accepted for failing to compile these documents. If they cannot be drawn up

under existing laws, the laws must be changed.' The note also demanded a free pardon from the Queen for all offences he might commit including 'the murder of any police officers'.

Shortly before 8pm on Wednesday March 20, 1974, Princess Anne and her husband, Captain Mark Phillips, were driving to Buckingham Palace along The Mall when Ball pulled his hired Ford Escort in front of the royal car. With the Royal couple in the rear was Lady-in-Waiting Miss Rowena Brassey and front were the driver Alexander Callender and Princess Anne's bodyguard, Inspector Beaton. Ball approached the car; in his pockets were a .38 revolver, a .22 revolver and four pairs of handcuffs.

Inspector Beaton went to speak to Ball. He was armed with an automatic pistol but thought Ball was only an irate motorist so did not draw his weapon. Ball held a gun to the driver's head and told him not to move then turned the .38 revolver on Beaton and without warning shot him in the chest. Although seriously wounded, Beaton fired back but missed. Then his gun jammed.
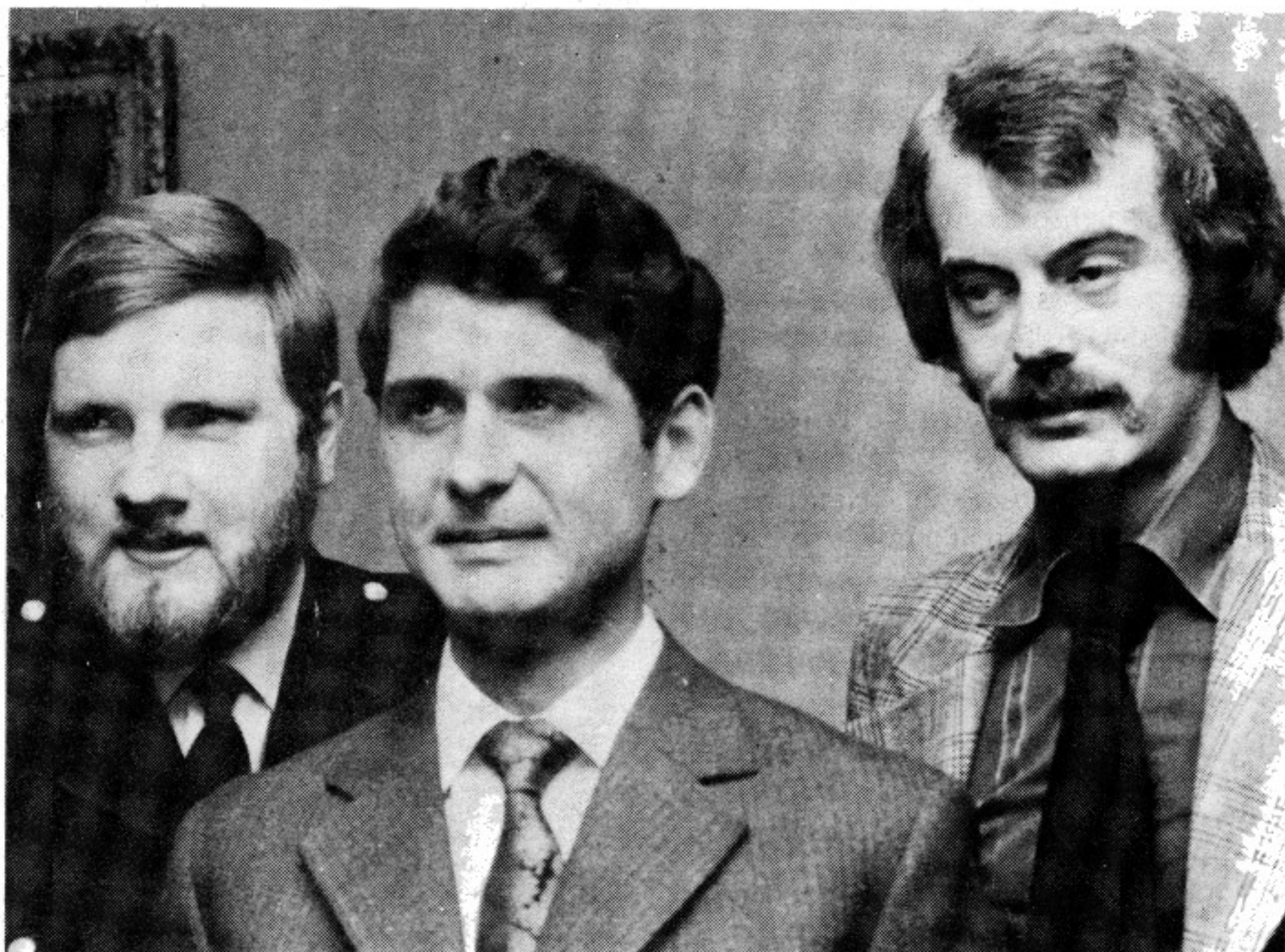
Shattered window

Ball aimed the gun at Princess Anne and said: 'Please get out of the car.' The Princess told him to go away.

Captain Phillips managed to shut the offside door but Ball pointed the .22 revolver through the window and shouted: 'Open the door or I'll shoot.' Beaton climbed in to protect Princess Anne with his own body. As Ball fired, Beaton held his hand in front of the gun's muzzle and took the full force of the shot. The bullet splintered and lodged in his hand along with fragments from the shattered window, but the Princess was unharmed.

Then Beaton kicked the door open to tackle Ball but was shot a third time. The bullet went through his intestine into his pelvis and he fell to the road unconscious. By then the chauffeur, Mr Callender had jumped from the car and grabbed Ball. But he was shot in the chest.

Ball had not reckoned on the bravery of the police and public who kept coming on as quick as he could shoot them. Journalist Brian McConnell, aged 46, jumped from a passing taxi and tried to calm Ball, saying: 'Give me the gun old chap, don't shoot, these people are friends of mine.' Ball's reply was a bullet which hit McConnell in the chest narrowly missing his heart and lungs.

PC Michael Hills, aged 22, on duty nearby, ran up to see Ball trying to pull Princess Anne from the car. He caught hold of Ball's arm and was shot in the stomach. PC Hills staggered away and

HEROES: Left to right, PC Michael Hills, Insp James Beaton and DC Peter Edmonds were awarded medals for helping to foil the attempted kidnap of Princess Anne

Picture: The Photo Source

called for assistance over his radio.

A passing chauffer, Glenmore Martin, pulled up in front of Ball's car to prevent his escape, then tried to tackle the gunman. Ball pushed a gun into Martin's ribs forcing him to back off.

As Ball turned his attention back to the Princess, Ronald Russell, aged 28, ran up behind him and punched him on the head. Ball turned and fired but missed. Russell ran for cover behind the car where he found PC Hills, supported by Martin, trying to use his radio. Russell tried to get the officer's truncheon but on hearing more commotion at the car he ran back to help.

Ball again had Princess Anne by the arm and threatened her with a gun, shouting: 'Come on Anne, you know you've got to come.' Captain Phillips managed to pull the Princess back into the car and she tried to clamber out of the opposite side. But Ball ran round the car to stop her.

At that moment Russell put himself between the Princess and the gunman and struck him in the face.

By then the street was alive with blue lights and sirens as police reinforcements arrived. Ball tried to make a run for it but Russell struck him a third blow knocking him off balance.

DC Peter Edmonds chased Ball who turned and pointed his gun but before he could pull the trigger Edmonds knocked him to the ground.

Ball later pleaded guilty to trying to kidnap Princess Anne, attempting to murder two policemen and wounding two civilians.

There was evidence of mental illness

and he was committed to a secure hospital 'without limit of time'.

Seven awards for bravery were subsequently made by the Queen: as well as the George Cross to Inspector Beaton, George Medals went to Hills and Russell; Queen's Gallantry Medals to Callender, McConnell and DC Edmonds; and the Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct to Martin. For her 'calm and brave' behaviour, Princess Anne was appointed a Dame Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order; and for their 'excellent conduct' Captain Phillips was appointed a Commander of the Order and Miss Brassey a Member of the Fourth Class of the Order.

Extreme danger

The fifth and latest George Cross to be won by a member of the Metropolitan Police was awarded to Captain Roger Philip Goad, aged 40. Goad was an Explosive Officer in that force when on August 29, 1975, he was called to a terrorist bomb left in a shop doorway in Kensington Church Street, London. As a former Army bomb-disposal officer, already the holder of the BEM, he was only too aware of the extreme danger. Yet without hesitation Captain Goad approached the bomb alone. He was defusing it when it exploded, killing him instantly.

Although not strictly a policeman the name of Roger Goad was added to the Roll of Honour of Metropolitan Police Officers killed in the line of duty. The George Cross was awarded posthumously on October 1, 1976. ○