



Corporal Charles Alfred Jarvis, VC, 57th Field Company, Royal Engineers, was born at Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire on 29 March 1881. He was the elder son of Charles Alfred Jarvis, a Coastguard, and Mary Jane Jarvis, of Admiralty Buildings, Saltoun Place, Fraserburgh, then Rattray Coastguard Station, and subsequently Carnoustie.

His siblings were Evelina, Mary, James and Elizabeth.

His father was awarded the Royal Humane Society medal for saving two boys from drowning at Berwick.

Charles completed his education at Carnoustie School.

Aged sixteen, he was confirmed at Carnoustie's Holyrood Church and, on leaving school, he was taken on as an Apprentice Plumber, but was unable to complete the apprenticeship.

His mother and sister died within a month of each other in 1898, and two years later Charles senior was also dead.

He was employed as a Metal Worker and was a member of the Walthamstow Branch of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers.

In 1899 Charles enlisted in the Royal Engineers at Chatham and was sent to Singapore where his unit was involved in the construction of military works. He was transferred to the Reserve in 1907 and worked as a Telegraphist in London.

On the outbreak of war, Charles was called up and sent to France with the Royal Engineers, arriving at Mons on 22 August 1914. The following day he was one of the men sent to destroy eight of the bridges over the Mons-Conde Canal.

Although coming heavy fire from German fire, Jarvis managed to blow up the bridge at Jemappes. This was the deed for which he was awarded the first VC of the war.

Later the same day Lieutenant Maurice James Dease 4th Battalion, The Royal Fusiliers, from Gaulstown, Coole, County Westmeath, won the second VC of the War.

The citation read, "Lance-Corporal Jarvis worked for 1½ hours under heavy fire, in full view of the enemy and finally succeeded in firing charges for the demolition of a bridge. He was wounded in the process."



The war was only three weeks old when Charles Jarvis was awarded the Victoria Cross for his gallantry in blowing up the Bridge of Jemappes to cover the retreat of the army from Mons. The British Expeditionary Force had moved up to the Mons-Conde canal during the night of 22-23 August 1914, intending to advance into Belgium the next morning. It soon became clear, however, that they were vastly outnumbered, and the order was given to defend the line of the Canal and destroy the bridges. The enemy fire onto this position became very heavy and the casualty toll increased to the point at which it was decided that they need to retire to the relative safety of the southern bank. Whilst this was going on Lance Corporal Jarvis and Sapper Neary of the Royal Engineers were preparing the bridge for demolition. This was one of five bridges within a three mile stretch of the Mons – Condé Canal allotted to the 57th Field Company RE that had to be blown.

The hazardous task of demolishing the bridges was made even more dangerous by chronic shortages of manpower and equipment. Lance Corporal Jarvis and Sapper Neary were allocated the Lock 2 bridge at Jemappes. Working from a small boat held in position by soldiers of the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, Jarvis and Neary painstakingly applied demolition charges to the girder supports. All the while they were in full view of the enemy and under intense fire. Captain Theodore Wright continually moved backwards and forwards along the canal bank in a car that he had commandeered encouraging his men. As their situation worsened, Jarvis sent the infantrymen back into cover, although Private Heron, 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, continued to assist him and was awarded the DCM. They occasionally had to expose themselves even more as they dashed back for extra explosives and to run out the leads.



He himself continued to work for over an hour, occasionally dashing back for extra explosives and to run out the leads.

As the gunfire intensified, the infantry themselves were forced to fall back, leaving Jarvis dangerously exposed. An electrical plunger was now needed to set away the demolition - but there was only one to destroy five bridges spaced three miles apart.

Ducking down in the boat, Jarvis pulled himself along the bank to safety. It was nothing short of a miracle that he escaped unhurt. He met Captain Theodore Wright, who had by that time been wounded in the head. Captain Wright told Jarvis to go back to the bridge and he would bring the necessary equipment.



Whilst Captain Wright set off in his car in search of the necessary equipment Lieutenant Boulnois and Sergeant Smith, Corps of Royal Engineers, cycled passed the Lock No 2 Bridge on their way to Pont Richebe, the road bridge near the Railway Station. Seeing them, Lance Corporal Jarvis stopped them and obtained the plunger that Lieutenant Boulnois was carrying. The lines were connected, the demolition charges set-off and the bridge was successfully put out of use collapsing into the canal. Throughout, the company of the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers had remained in position holding off the enemy.

Only one of the eight bridges allocated to 57th Field Company was destroyed, but this in no way detracts from the heroism of those who attempted it.

In 1915 he returned to Britain and was presented with his medal at Buckingham Palace. He was discharged from the Army in 1917 and went on to work at the Naval Dockyard at Portsmouth. In January 1917 he was discharged from the Army after over 17 years service, claiming in an interview with the *London Star* that the authorities had done this to avoid paying him the pension granted to men with 18 years' service.

After leaving the Army he found work as a Labourer. During the Second World War he was employed at Portsmouth Dockyard.

He returned to Scotland in 1943 and married Janet Grace Black, a widow from Cupar, Fife. The couple lived in St Monance. Charles died in Dundee Royal Infirmary on 19 November 1948, and is buried in Cupar. In Carnoustie, he is commemorated with a bronze plaque erected by the local branch of the British Legion in a street named Jarvis Place.