



Like father... Shergar's first foal born earlier this month



Victory in the Derby and a proud Aga Khan

£75,000 price put on VC courage

By ALAN COCHRANE and ALUN REES

THE only Victoria Cross won by a Battle of Britain pilot must be saved for the nation, an MP said last night.

"Taxpayers should be prepared to pay even more than its market value to help the widow who is having to sell it."

"This is an exceptional case," said Tory MP Mr Tony Beaumont-Dark, "so let us make an exceptional gesture."

He called on the Government to find £75,000 for the VC, £25,000 more than it is expected to fetch at auction.

The money could then be invested carefully—and Mrs Muriel Nicolson could receive £7,500 a year in interest alone.

"Any sum of money paid by the nation would be a small price to pay for the sacrifice made by this brave man and his family," said the MP.

"Mrs Nicolson has stayed loyal to his memory—the country should do likewise."

Mr Beaumont-Dark, MP for Birmingham's Selly Oak, has written to Mrs Thatcher asking her to intervene.

The VC is for sale because Flight Lieutenant Nicolson's 70-year-old widow cannot live on her £42-70 per week pension.

Pilot Nicolson won Britain's top bravery award for shooting down a German Messerschmitt from his blazing Hurricane at the height of the air battle over southern England.

Five years later he was killed in an air crash in India.

Mr Beaumont-Dark believes the medal should be donated by the Government to the Imperial War Museum or the RAF Museum at Hendon, North London.

The RAF Museum would love to acquire the Nicolson VC and is hoping to bid for it if it finally goes to auction.

The museum already has his first fighter plane—a Mark I Spitfire—on display.

Wing Commander Bill Wood said: "It would be a marvellous acquisition for us, truly a jewel for our crown."

"We have already had offers of help, financial offers, from friends."

Private collectors, some from the United States are likely to push the price up to record levels however.

Wing Commander Wood said: "We feel it belongs with the IAF now and not with a private collector."

"Perhaps some fairy god-mother will buy it and drop it into our laps although I fear that only happens in films."

The Imperial War Museum said they had not yet considered the possibility of buying the medal.

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Ransom riddle of the kidnapped Derby victor

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was driven off in a horsebox and Mr Fitzgerald, 58, in a van.

His wife and five children were left in the house.

Mr Fitzgerald said he was driven 30 or 40 miles lying face down in the van and was dumped four hours later.

He was warned not to tell the police. He did not, but Giles Drion, the manager of the Ballymany Stud, sounded the alert at 5 am next day.

The gang were said to have indicated they wanted £2 million for Shergar's safe return and they would confirm this later. Last night they had made no contact as a massive hunt spread.

The police seemed to be getting nowhere. Chief Superintendent James Murphy of Newbridge said: "We haven't got a description of the men or their vehicles. We don't know what accent they had."

"Mr Fitzgerald had very little conversation with them and couldn't say where they came from. So I don't know if they are criminals, or IRA, or if they are from the North."

Why the eight-hour delay before police were alerted?

Mr Murphy said: "It's diffi-

cult to get people who are terrorised to talk clearly. Mr Fitzgerald is clearly afraid for his family. I spent two hours trying to get him to talk, but he's shaking."

Would a ransom be paid? "It will be my policy to block such a move," said Mr Murphy.

What are the odds on Shergar's recovery? "I'm not a betting man," said Mr Murphy.

Others were asking about security at the stables. One stable lad said: "There

didn't seem to be much security here even though we had one of the world's most valuable racehorses on the farm."

Another stable lad Greg Keating, 20, said: "Mr Fitzgerald is snattered. Shergar is his pride and joy."

Shergar is owned by a syndicate of millionaires headed by the Aga Khan. He described it as his best-ever horse.

A spokesman for shareholders Mrs Meg Mullion, wife of shipping magnate Jim

Mullion, said: "There seems to be no question of being held to ransom. To give in to these villains would be a step down the road to the end of civilisation."

Among the joint owners are Greek shipping tycoon Stavros Niarchos, Vernons, pools millionaire Robert Sangster, and top racehorse trainer Vincent O'Brien.

Mr Sangster said in Australia: "This is a tragedy. It could have far-reaching effects on the bloodstock industry in Ireland."

Detectives said it was "very much a possibility" that the gang were not after a ransom but planned to use Shergar for breeding.

A spokesman said: "It could be a ludicrous attempt by country boys to produce their own champion."

And they could get away with it. Stringent blood tests can prove the sire, but they are not always carried out, said the Jockey Club.

Former top jockey and best selling author Dick Francis said last night: "I hope the kidnapers didn't get the idea from me."

Stolen

Sixteen years ago Mr Francis wrote a thriller called Blood Sport about thoroughbreds being stolen to service mares whose foals were registered as being sired by other stallions.

Police faced a mammoth task searching thousands of isolated farmhouses and barns.

A horse expert said: "Hiding Shergar would be no problem. Let him roll in a field of mud with his shaggy winter coat and he could be mistaken for a hack."



Robert Sangster: "Tragedy"

Crimes that rocked the world of racing

RACEHORSES have been an easy target for villains ever since punters started putting money on them.

In one celebrated case of "ringing" last year a two-year-old called Flockton Grey was substituted with a three-year-old called "double" called Good Hand, netting £200,000 for the gang.

There have even been cases of "contracts" being put out. In the 'sixties the top South

African racehorse, Sea Cottage, was shot for a gangland contract of £10,000. But it survived and went on to win.

Only two cases of kidnaping have been recorded previously. Champion Italian filly Carnauba was recovered alive in an abattoir in 1975 and in America three years ago a two-year-old filly was found near her stable six months after being seized.

Mrs W's son: I'm her top fan

By CAROLE NEWTON

TV CLEAN-UP campaigner Mrs Mary Whitehouse was given unexpected backing yesterday in her fight to safeguard the nation's morals. It came from her wayward son Christopher.

Despite his free-living life-style, Christopher Whitehouse, 37, who was arrested in a drugs raid last week, says he is her number one fan.

He said yesterday: "Quite simply she's the best mum in the world and I'm very proud of her and the fight she's engaged in. I accept her view totally."

"I share her views on pornography. I've seen porno-

graphic magazines, who hasn't? But I think it is unfeeling, uncaring and does not illustrate the depth of relationships, people should have."

Mrs Whitehouse phoned her son yesterday following the publicity caused by his arrest. "I told her it was all rather amusing and that I was OK. I don't feel I've let her down," said Christopher.

He lives in a commune farmhouse near the Staffordshire village of Betley. It was raided by police looking for drugs. Six people were arrested but none has so far been charged.

UHT milk 'is not fit for a dog'

AGRICULTURAL Minister Peter Walker told MPs yesterday that even his dog Bomba would not drink EEC Ultra Heat Treated milk.

His old English sheepdog—full name Bombardier Blunderbuss—became well known recently when it was revealed that he was addicted to the new British cheese, Lymeswold.

Mr Walker's scathing verdict on UHT milk came as he told the Commons of his moves to keep it out of Britain despite a European Court ruling that an import ban is illegal.

He said the milk was "unsafe" and would stay banned pending lengthy health checks.

The aim was to ensure it

satisfied the same health and hygiene requirements imposed on the production and processing of our own milk.

Mr Walker added that cheap imports could undermine doorstep deliveries, which he was determined to protect.

He said that he believed housewives would stay loyal to fresh milk, even if the UHT variety was allowed in.

"Anyone who has tasted the stuff would find it very difficult to drink instead of the stuff delivered on the doorstep," he said.

"While I boasted that my dog ate Lymeswold cheese, he certainly would not drink UHT milk."

Love conquers crash heartache

COURAGEOUS shop assistant Ingrid Brookbanks kept romance alive after her fiancé was seriously injured in a road accident, by using "the language of love."

Steven Pennington, who is unable to walk and talk because of brain damage, was awarded £250,000 agreed damages in the High Court yesterday.

Mr Justice Cantley heard that the 25-year-old Ingrid, who lives with Steven's parents at Byfields Road, Kingsclere, near Basingstoke, Hants, plans to become Steven's wife after he leaves a rehabilitation centre.

"It is her unswerving

intention to devote the rest of her life to looking after him," Steven's counsel, Mr Richard Rougier, QC, said.

Earlier, Ingrid had told the court: "We cannot have normal conversation, but we managed to communicate using the language of love."

The couple had been engaged for a year when Steven's motorcycle was in collision with a sports car in Basingstoke in 1980.

He sued the car driver, Dr Ian Plant of Sarum Road, Winchester.

Ingrid said afterwards: "The years ahead are going to be tough but wallowing in self-pity does nobody any good. I love Steven and we will manage."