The following has been transcribed from *Smith’s Dock Monthly*, November 1919, pp.198-199. by Tony Harding.

**The Brave Bradfords**

**Two V.C.’S, a D.S.O. and two M.C.’S**

The four brave sons of Mrs. and the late Mr. George Bradford, Milbanke, Darlington, went forth to serve with the Colours at the outbreak of war, and one only – Captain Thomas Andrews Bradford, D.S.O., of the 8th Battalion Durham Light Infantry – has survived.

Within a period of ten months three of Britain’s best, from a single household, laid their lives upon the altar of the nation’s sacrifice. They were ready at the call of duty, and both on sea and land earned rapid distinction. Two V.C.’s, two M.C.’s, and a D.S.O. is a family record that is surely unequalled in the whole Empire.

**Brig.-Gen. R.B. Bradford, V.C., M.C.**

The brothers were born at Etherley, near Bishop Auckland, where Mr. Bradford, their father, was actively interested in extensive coal-mining concerns. Their mother, formerly Miss Andrews, came from a Kentish family, being a native of Willesborough. Temporary Brigadier-General Roland Boys Bradford, V.C., M.C. – the youngest of the boys – was only 25 years of age when he had attained to that exalted military rank, and was the youngest brigadier-general, as he was the youngest lieutenant-colonel, in the British Army.

An Extraordinary Man.

At the age of 20, on May 22nd, 1912, he was gazetted as a second-lieutenant in the 2nd Battalion the Durham Light Infantry, and about two years later, soon after the outbreak of war, was promoted lieutenant. As a platoon commander he went out to France in September, 1914, with the heroic “Second” Durhams, who, in attack and defence, won for themselves an undying name. Soon afterwards he was made temporary captain, and in May, 1915, was transferred to the

7th D.LI. as captain and adjutant.

With the rank of brevet-major he was raised to a lieutenant-colonelcy, in command of the 9th Durhams, in October, 1916, and just over a year later this extraordinary young man, whose death is mourned by the nation, was gazetted temporary brigadier-general, commanding the 186th Infantry Brigade. Three times he had been wounded, but never left the regiment. He was supremely happy when with his gallant men in the thick of the fight, and early in the war confided to his friends: “My greatest wish is that I should be killed on the last day of the war.”

Though the wish was not actually realised, he had lived to see a great change in the fortunes of a formidable foe. Within a few weeks, after a vivid career into which had been crowded more dramatic events than are seen by most people in a long life, he had fallen upon the field of battle fatally injured by a German shell.

A Born Leader.

Early in the campaign Roland Bradford was mentioned in dispatches by General French, and in February, 1915, was awarded the Military Cross. It was after his promotion to the command of the 9th Battalion, in which capacity he proved himself to be a leader bred and born, that he, in November, 1916, was awarded the Victoria Cross for deeds of heroism on the part both of himself and his men that sent a thrill throughout the Empire. The official record was as follows:-

“For most conspicuous bravery and good leadership in attack, whereby he saved the situation on the right flank of his brigade and of the division, Lieut.-Colonel Bradford’s battalion was in support. A leading battalion having suffered very severe casualties, and the commander wounded, its flank became dangerously exposed at close quarters to the enemy. Racked by machine-gun fire, the situation of the battalion was critical. At the request of the wounded commander, Lieut.-Colonel Bradford asked permission to command the exposed battalion in addition to his own. Permission granted, he at once proceeded to the foremost lines. By his fearless energy under fire of all description, and his skilful leadership of the two battalions, regardless of all danger, he succeeded in rallying the attack, captured and defended the objective, and so secured the flank.”

“Above all, Pray.”

Soon after his promotion to the distinguished rank of brigadier-general, he made the following speech to his brigade a few days before death:-

“Comrades, I am going to ask you to put your implicit trust and confidence in me; to look upon me not only as your brigadier, but as your friend. By the help of God I will try and lead you to the best of my ability. As you all know, a few days from now we are going to attack. Your powers of endurance are going to be tested. They must not fail you. Above all, pray; more things are wrought by prayer than the world dreams of. It is God alone who can give us the victory, and bring us through this battle safely.”

General Bradford was killed by a fragment of shell, which hit him in the back, and he was buried in Hermies Cemetery.

His charming disposition endeared him to hosts of friends, and while at the front he was beloved by both officers and men for his extraordinary fearlessness, amazing powers of endurance, and unfailing patriotism and fervour.

**Lieut.-Commander G.N. Bradford, V.C.**

**Hero of Zeebrugge.**

A stirring story of the sea is that provided by the life and death of Lieut.-Commander George Nicholson Bradford, V.C., of the Royal Navy, who died for his country on the night of April 22-23 last year, during the historic attack upon German fortifications at Zeebrugge.

“This officer,” says the official description of the deed which brought the posthumous decoration, “was in command of the naval storming parties embarked in *Iris II*. When *Iris II* proceeded alongside the Mole, great difficulty was experienced in placing the parapet anchors owing to the motion of the ship. An attempt was made to land by the scaling ladders before the ship was secured. Lieut. Claude E.K. Hawkins (late *Erin*) managed to get one ladder in position, and actually reached the parapet, the ladder being crashed to pieces just as he stepped off it. This very gallant officer was last seen defending himself with his revolver. He was killed on the parapet.

“Though securing the ship was not part of his duties, Lieut-Commander Bradford climbed up the derrick, which carried a large parapet anchor and was rigged out over the port-side. During this climb the ship was surging up and down, and the derrick crashing on the Mole. Waiting his opportunity, he jumped with the parapet anchor on to the Mole, and placed it into position.

“Immediately after hooking on the parapet anchor, Lieut.-Commander Bradford was riddled with bullets from machine-guns, and fell into the sea between the Mole and the ship. Attempts to recover his body failed. Lieut.-Commander Bradford’s action was one of absolute self-sacrifice; without a moment’s hesitation he went to certain death, recognising that in such action lay the only possible chance of securing *Iris II*, and enabling her storming parties to land.”

**Lieut. J.B. Bradford, M.C.**

The third brother to meet his death in action was Lieut. James Barker Bradford, M.C., of the 18th Battalion Durham Light Infantry.

He was born in December, 1890, and after a time at Darlington Grammar School went to the Northern College. He served his time with Messrs. Hawthorn and Leslie, engineers, of Newcastle, and in October, 1914, went out to France as a trooper in the Northumberland Hussars, being granted his commission in September, 1915. He was wounded on the Somme, and two months later was awarded the M.C. for successful trench raiding on March 3rd, 1917, when he gallantly sacrificed his life in action.

These are the unvarnished records of three magnificent Britishers, three brothers, whose deeds of prowess will long hold a conspicuous place in the annals of the Army and Navy, and the heartfelt sympathy of the community goes out to Mrs. Bradford, to Miss Bradford, and to Captain T.A. Bradford, D.S.O.

Captain Bradford himself has earned great distinction in the war. He was a Territorial officer before the war, and went out to France with the 8th Durham Light Infantry in April, 1915, at a critical time in the operations on the Western front. The Durhams performed a noble service, and as a result of his deeds of valour Captain Bradford was awarded the D.S.O.

During the war he transferred to the Regular Army, being gazetted to the York and Lancaster Regiment, and later served on the Staff as brigade-major. He is a son-in-law of Colonel W.C. Blackett, C.B.E., T.D., D.L., of Acorn Close, Sacriston, and is largely interested in mining and agriculture.