

“Rebel With a Cause”

A black and white portrait of a man wearing a white turban, a white collared shirt, a patterned tie, and a dark suit jacket. He has a mustache and is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

**Victoria Cross Online
Issue 16 January 2024**

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Welcome to the 16th edition of Victoria Cross Online Magazine, and the first edition of 2024 – so Happy New Year!

The feature article this month is “Rebel with a Cause” – the story of Karamjeet Singh Judge VC, wonderfully told by Steve Snelling, in his second piece for Victoria Cross Online. His first article a few months ago on John Rhodes VC DCM was very well received, so Steve’s return is very welcome.

Secondly there is going to be the first 2 parts of a series of 29 articles featuring the 29 Medical VCs. The stories will be in date of action order, beginning this month with Surgeon James Mouat VC and Thomas Egerton Hale VC.



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“Rebel with a Cause”

Karamjeet Singh Judge was a vehement opponent to British rule in India. But the young Sikh officer was hailed a hero of the Raj for his dauntless valour on a Burmese battlefield. Steve Snelling tells the story of a rebel with a cause.

Hugh Baker (see bottom right) couldn't help but be amused by the incongruity of the scene. There he was, a British tank troop commander in the middle of the Burmese 'dust bowl', sharing a mug of cornflakes with a charming Sikh infantry officer who spoke in the perfectly modulated tones of an English public school boy.

Another hard day's scrapping against a fanatical enemy determined to fight to the death lay ahead, yet Baker was struck only by his smartly attired companion's infectious smile and quiet confidence. "He seemed so young and keen," he recalled.

Karamjeet Singh Judge was all of that and more. Though Baker didn't know it then, the 21-year-old subaltern about to spearhead the renewed assault on the strategically-important river port of Myingyan had his sights fixed on far more than the successful accomplishment of his mission.

Always the first to volunteer to lead patrols into Japanese territory, he was desperate to add personal distinction to his growing reputation for daring.



“Rebel with a Cause”

Only a week or so earlier, he had confided his youthful ambition to Major Johnny Whitmarsh-Knight, his company commander in the 4/15th Punjab Regiment. “I, Karamjeet and the other two platoon officers used to get together very often to discuss our plans for the ensuing tactical advances,” recalled Whitmarsh-Knight, “and it was during one of those discussions that Karamjeet told me he was keen to win a decoration. “I told him, jokingly perhaps, that he would have ample opportunities in the next few days...”

Not long after the battalion arrived at the outskirts of Myingyan where, on the evening of March 17, 1945 Whitmarsh-Knight’s Jat Company was selected to head the next morning’s assault.

Later that night Whitmarsh-Knight called a company conference at which he set out the plan of attack and informed Karamjeet that his platoon was to lead the way, supported by the Sherman tanks of No 2 Troop, C Squadron, 116 Regiment (Gordon Highlanders), Royal Armoured Corps, commanded by Lieutenant Hugh Baker.

The young Sikh officer’s reaction was instantaneous. His face broke into a smile that spoke volumes. As Whitmarsh-Knight later wrote: “Karamjeet was very pleased at this decision.”



Armoured Highlanders: men of C Squadron, 116 (Gordon Highlanders), Royal Armoured Corps, the unit which supported the 4/15th Punjab Regiment in the attack on Myingyan

“Rebel with a Cause”

Protest Marches

Stocky and tough though he was, Karamjeet Singh Judge was hardly an obvious candidate for the officer ranks of the Indian Army. Born into the higher echelons of Sikh society in the princely state of Kapurthala where his father was the chief of police, he was an active member of the Indian National Congress Party and a vociferous supporter of the ‘Britain Out’ movement.

He took part in a number of protest marches and his commitment to the cause of Indian independence brought him into conflict with his elder brother, Ajeet, who he regarded as a ‘traitor’ for serving as a lieutenant in the Royal Indian Artillery.

Such was his strength of feeling that the two brothers were hardly on speaking terms until a chance meeting led to a reconciliation and a remarkable change of heart.

According to Ajeet, Karamjeet, who was then set on moving to Lahore College in order to further his political activities without causing embarrassment to his father, began by asking what he was doing “in this bloody army”.

Ajeet countered by questioning the point of protests that were likely to land him in jail with damaging effects on his studies. And then, responding to his brother’s tirade, he coolly that the army was a worthwhile career since, irrespective of who ruled India, there would always be a need for a professional officer corps.

“Rebel with a Cause”



Proud family: Karamjeet, far right, with his three brothers, two sisters and parents after enlisting in the army. His father, Sardar Sunder Singh, third from right seated, was Inspector General of Police for Kapurthala State.

Not long after, Ajeet heard that Karamjeet had enrolled in the Officer Training School at Bangalore. When they next met, at Multan, Karamjeet was a captain in a pioneer unit and far from happy with his lot.

Having opted for a force which he thought offered the quickest route to active duty in Burma, he had found himself stranded in a training establishment far from the fighting.

Ajeet intervened on his brother's behalf. He sent a formal written request for a transfer to the 15th Punjab Regiment and a few weeks later Karamjeet, having accepted a drop in rank to lieutenant, was posted to Ambala prior to undergo jungle training at Haridwar with the 39th Indian Infantry Division.

His military education complete, he joined the 4th Battalion as a replacement officer in late 1944, just as the Fourteenth Army was preparing to unleash its long-awaited counter-offensive with the objective of smashing the Japanese army in Central Burma.

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‘Man of principles’

The unit’s battle-hardened officers, many of whom already boasted decorations earned in the struggles around Kohima, quickly warmed to Karamjeet. To Arthur Marmont, he appeared “very gallant and extremely young” while to fellow Sikh Sucha Singh he was “a man of principles who stood by his word”.

Johnny Whitmarsh-Knight was similarly impressed with C (Jat) Company’s newest recruit. The company commander, who had served with the battalion since 1941, recalled: “He was slimly built, athletic in appearance and had a lively and cheerful nature. He was a good soldier, modest but forceful in his sense of purpose. He wasn’t a bull-shitter, but definitely a very intent and determined young man.”

His keenness was matched by a flair for leadership. As well as ensuring his platoon was always well prepared for any action, he was ever willing to take on the responsibility of leading potentially hazardous reconnaissance incursions.

“He accomplished these patrols very successfully on at least three separate occasions,” wrote Whitmarsh-Knight, “[and] brought back very useful information about the enemy’s positions and strength.”

Such virtues were much in demand in the early weeks of 1945 as Lieutenant General Bill Slim launched the attack that would culminate in the most crushing defeat suffered on land by the Imperial Japanese Army.

Feinting a thrust across the Irrawaddy towards Mandalay where the bulk of the enemy forces were deployed, he wrong-footed his opponents by mounting an audacious attack on Meiktila, the nerve centre and nodal point of road, rail and air communications in Central Burma.

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With armoured formations leading the way, Slim’s bold master-stroke effectively split the Japanese forces in two. Four days of bitter fighting during which the enemy garrison fought almost to the last man ended in the fall of Meiktila on March 3. Then came the assault on Mandalay.

Threatened with destruction, the Japanese launched a series of desperate counter-attacks in an attempt to eliminate the main British bridgehead across the Irrawaddy and to recapture Meiktila to keep open an escape corridor from embattled Mandalay.

The fighting that followed was among the most savage anywhere during the Second World War. As the Japanese diverted reinforcements bound for Mandalay to the struggle around Meiktila, the 4/15th Punjab Regiment found itself engaged in a succession of actions aimed at blocking the enemy advance, reopening the road to Meiktila and then pushing on to capture Myingyan to provide a crucial river-head supply base.

To the last nullah

With the help of daring air drops, powerful columns from 7th Indian Division were sent out across the arid, dusty plain defended to the last nullah by a fanatical and fearsome enemy force that contested every yard of the way.

The 4/15th, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Conroy MC, was part of 33 Brigade which was tasked with clearing a triangle of territory to the north and east of the Nyaungu bridgehead.

The whole area was flat and open and intersected by dry river beds which the Japanese turned into formidable natural defence lines. One such position, curving south of Myingyan at Sindewa chaung, provided the 4/15th with a stiff test.

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Isolated by a wide encircling move carried out by two companies on the night of March 2/3, the tree-screened position was then attacked by the rest of the battalion supported by two troops of tanks from C Squadron, 116 RAC.

Having carried the first objective under heavy fire, the assaulting force ran into trouble as they neared a second line of defence. The tanks' commander, Captain Bryan Smith (top right), later wrote: “I could see mines protruding from the only road up the steep-sided chaung bed. I laid my tanks up and fired high explosive at the top of the chaung side where the Japanese were dug in, though for once not in bunkers.

“The 4/15th company attacked over the chaung bed and up the other side whilst my six tanks gave covering medium machine gun fire to help keep the Japs' heads down. When we ceased fire I observed through my periscope an especially active naik [corporal] bayoneting his way along the enemy trench, his body bending up and down, his arm already bandaged.” The naik was Gian Singh, of A (Sikh) Company, and, contrary to Smith's impression, he employed a machine-gun and grenades to capture the enemy position. But that was merely the beginning. Despite having been wounded in the arm, he then made a single-handed attack on a cleverly concealed anti-tank gun which had already scored hits on two Shermans.



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Knocked down by a grenade blast that wounded him a second time, he staggered up and charged again only to be felled by another bullet. At that moment one of the tanks, commanded by Sergeant Ogilvie Cowie (see right), opened up with its 75mm gun, killing some of the crew. Gian Singh then followed in and disposed of the remaining Japanese and captured the gun.

It was a startling example of infantry-tank co-operation which earned the 24-year-old naik a well-merited Victoria Cross and helped pave the way for an even more spectacular action involving the same two units just 15 days later.

‘Untankable’

Formidable obstacle though the Sindewa chaung was, it was as nothing compared with Myingyan. The port was heavily defended by a large Japanese force that had plenty of time to prepare its defences. As well as steep-sided nullahs honeycombed with hidden bunkers, the ground was freckled with fox-holes and trenches covered by mortars and buildings turned into miniature fortresses.

The Japanese had already seen off one attack when Colonel Conroy, in company with officers of 116 RAC and 139 Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, made his plans for a second assault to be led by Lieutenant Karamjeet Singh Judge’s platoon in conjunction with four Shermans commanded by Lieutenant Hugh Baker.



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In spite of the armoured assistance and the artillery support arrayed behind them, the task facing Karamjeet’s men was a daunting one. The ground ahead of them, with its precipitously sloped nullahs, hillocks and patches of dense scrub, was ideal country for defence. In places, observed Conroy, it was “untankable”.

Even where it was possible for the Shermans to advance, the threat from snipers and kamikaze squads, limited their usefulness. For with the crews having to attack ‘closed up’, they were largely reliant on the infantry to identify enemy positions.

It was a handicap that quickly became clear on the morning of March 18. At 1000 hrs, preceded by a concentration of heavy artillery and mortar fire that bracketed the forward Japanese positions on the southern outskirts of Myingyan, Baker’s Shermans clattered forward followed by the vanguard of Johnny Whitmarsh-Knight’s Jat Company.

After overcoming heavy sniper interference, the tanks and infantry made it safely across the first dry river bed before swinging right to advance parallel to a railway line that ran towards a cluster of cotton mills that were Karamjeet’s ultimate objective.

“The ground in front of the mills was very open,” wrote Baker, “but near the chaung was a series of deep nullahs which were absolutely riddled with bunkers. The tanks engaged as many... as they could see whilst the infantry were pinned to the ground under fairly heavy small arms fire aimed mostly at the tanks. “After putting about 20-plus of the enemy to flight we were ordered to advance which we did in bounds of about 50 yds, the infantry following.

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Unfortunately, the tanks had only been able to engage the enemy bunkers in the side of the nullahs facing them with the result that each time the infantry passed a nullah they came under heavy light machine gun and rifle fire and [attack from] grenade dischargers from the nullah side which had been blind to the tanks.”

The attack, already dislocated, might have ended there but for the extraordinary intervention of Karamjeet Singh Judge.

‘Completely impervious’

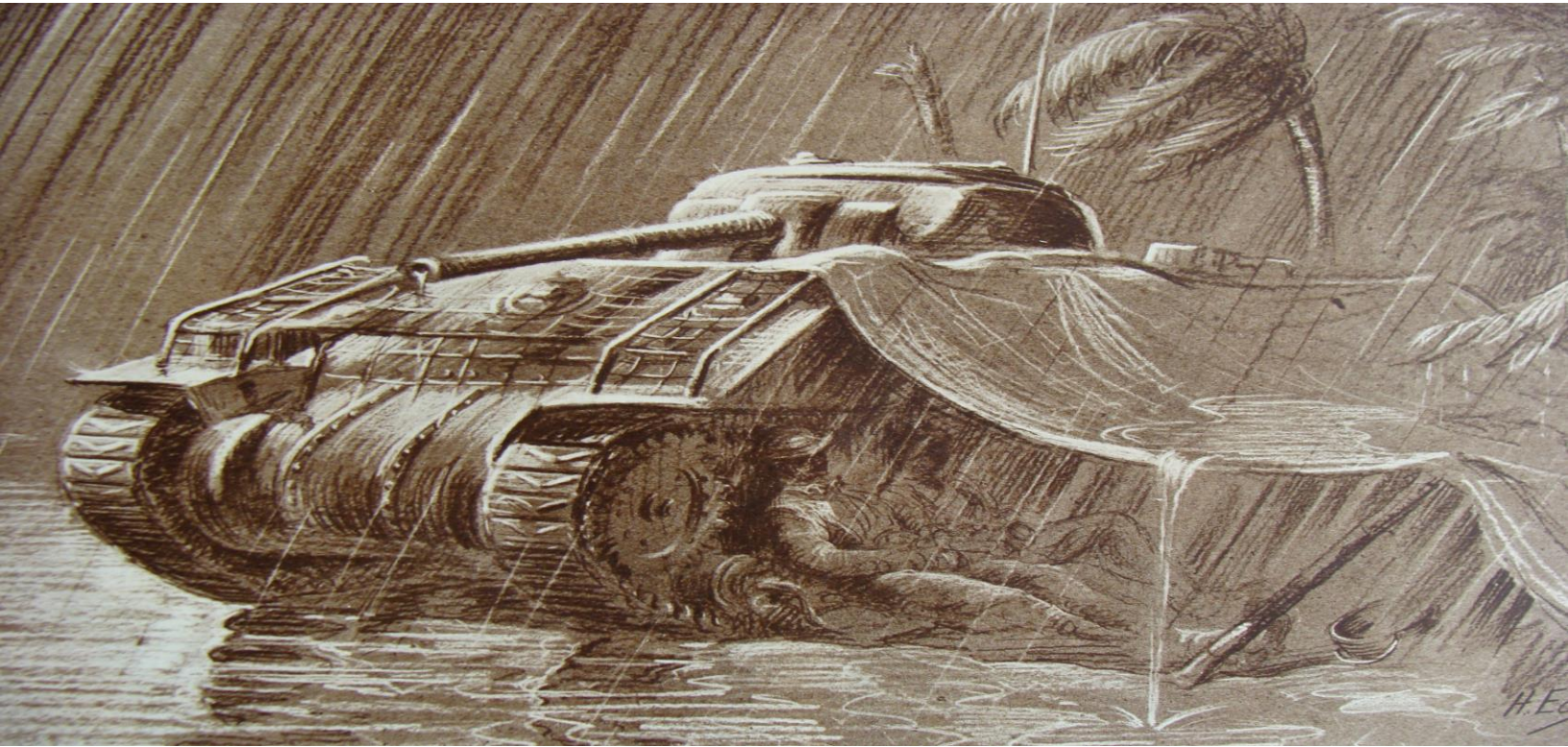
With the gap between the tanks and the infantry widening dangerously, the young Sikh officer at the sharp end of his first high-intensity action reacted instantly. Ignoring the hail of machine-gun and mortar fire raking the ground, he sprinted after the tanks.

In a scene that would be repeated time after time over the course of the next few hours, he made for the rear of Baker’s Sherman where a ‘house’ telephone located in an armour-plated box offered his only means of communication with the tank commander.

With bullets rattling against the turret and hull of his tank, Baker heard the buzzer followed by Karamjeet’s voice. “Given everything that was going on around us,” he recalled, “I was astonished at how calm and polite he was.

“He just said, ‘could you come back and eliminate the bunkers on the other side of the nullah’. He then guided us to the target. He’d give us an instruction, something like, ‘two o’clock’, and then he’d stand by the side of the tank and fire a burst from his Tommy gun at the bunker so that we could see where he needed us to shoot.

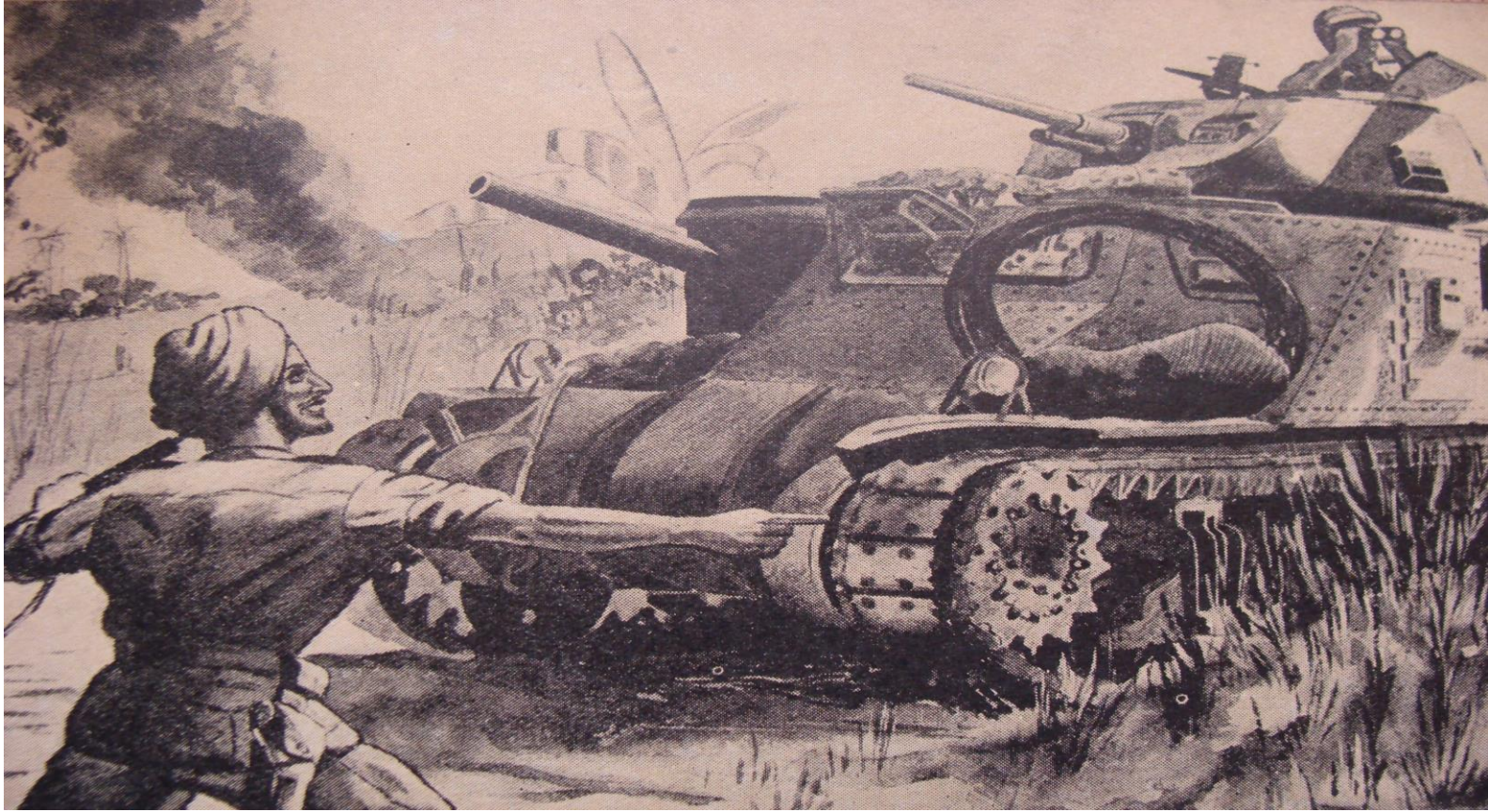
“Rebel with a Cause”



“Then, we fired a couple of rounds of 75mm high explosive with delayed action fuses to penetrate the bunkers before exploding. It was pretty effective.” Some 40 yards back, Johnny Whitmarsh-Knight caught occasional glimpses between the hillocks and shrub of the darting figure of Karamjeet flitting between his platoon and the tanks as they rumbled forward. At least three times, he saw him make the same journey “under heavy automatic and small arms fire as well as terrific enemy shelling”. Whitmarsh-Knight could scarcely believe what he was witnessing. Karamjeet, he later wrote, appeared “completely impervious to all the fire around him” and yet at the same time “was the cynosure of all eyes”.

One moment he would be standing in the open directing the tanks, fully exposed to shot and shell, the next he would be rushing forward, hurling smoke grenades and firing his sub-machine gun, to pinpoint the next troublesome enemy position. “During one of his dashes across to the tanks,” noted Whitmarsh-Knight, “I saw two Japs suddenly jump out of a small nullah and rush towards Karamjeet with fixed bayonets. Without hesitation he opened fire with his tommy gun and killed both at a distance of only 10 yards. He then went on with his task, unperturbed by what had just taken place.”

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Nest of bunkers

Time and time again over the course of nearly five hours' of intense fighting the tactic was courageously repeated with the same degree of success. In this way, no fewer than seven bunkers were destroyed and their garrisons wiped out by a combination of tank fire and infantry charges that were personally led by Karamjeet Singh Judge.

Along the way, Baker lost one tank which toppled over onto its turret as it struggled to negotiate one particularly steep-banked nullah. Luckily, its crew scrambled clear without injury as the attack swept past them.

Around 1445 hrs they were within 30 yards of the company's final objective, the main, north-south, road running through Myingyan. The firing had all but ceased. "It seemed as though the battle was over," wrote Whitmarsh-Knight.

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Baker thought so too. “We began to relax,” he recalled. “We began to open the hatches to let some air in. It was so hot and full of fumes inside the turret and we’d been closed up for nearly five hours. And at that moment, they suddenly started shooting again.”

The fire from a nest of three bunkers, cleverly concealed beneath bushes and trees on the edge of a chaung bank, sent the infantry scurrying for cover in some nearby buildings and abandoned trenches.

Although no more than 15 yards away from the tanks, Baker, peering through his periscope, had trouble locating them. Realising his difficulty, Karamjeet dashed across the fire-swept ground and began guiding the tank commander onto the target.

According to Whitmarsh-Knight, he led them to within 20 yards of the enemy position, but though two of the bunkers were soon subdued one, containing a light machine gun, continued to resist. “Karamjeet told the tanks to stop firing,” added Whitmarsh-Knight. “He then led a section charge on to this strong point, shouting words of encouragement to his men.”

Karamjeet was within 10 yards of the enemy, wrote Whitmarsh-Knight, when “the ‘automatic’ opened fire, wounding Karamjeet mortally in the chest”.

Baker remembered those fateful final moments slightly differently. “Just after directing us towards the bunkers, he was hit in the breast by machine-gun fire,” he recalled. “But even then, his only thought was for his men. As they rushed out to pick him up, he waved them back. He wouldn’t let them risk their lives. “I was so mad, instead of destroying the bunker with a 75mm delayed action shell in the usual way, I ran my tank backwards and forwards over the bunker and squashed them into the ground.”

“Rebel with a Cause”

‘Bravest soldier’

Karamjeet’s death and the destruction of the last of 10 bunkers confronting his platoon signalled the end of a five-hour fight. The battle for Myingyan would last another four days, but the end was never seriously in doubt following the young Sikh officer’s courageous actions.

His commanding officer credited him above all others for seizing the initiative with a matchless display of “inspiring leadership”. “To the last moment,” wrote Hugh Conroy, “Lieutenant Karamjeet Singh Judge dominated the entire battlefield by his numerous and successive acts of superb gallantry.”

As a veteran of all the battalion’s fights from the Arakan through to Myingyan, Johnny Whitmarsh-Knight considered Karamjeet’s performance without equal. “As a personal witness of this officer’s protracted deeds of valour of the highest order,” he wrote, “I can but say that he was the bravest soldier I have seen.”

Hugh Baker was of the same opinion. In a report written a month later, he described Karamjeet as “the finest leader I ever saw in action” and added: “The crews of the tanks were awed by his example and bravery and begged of me to write a citation of his deeds.”

On July 3, 1945, the London Gazette duly announced the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross to Lieutenant Karamjeet Singh Judge.

In one of the war’s most extraordinary ironies, the rebel with a cause was thus honoured with the highest martial distinction by the very nation whose rule of his homeland he so vehemently opposed.

“Rebel with a Cause”



Posthumously honoured: Karamjeet's father shows his son's Victoria Cross to Lieutenant Colonel Hubert Conroy DSO, MC (1911-2001) at a parade held in the Red Fort, Delhi in 1945. Conroy, who had been commissioned in 1931, retired in 1959 after service in the Korean War and the Egyptian Canal Zone.

The Medical VCs

1. James Mouat VC

The first of 36 doctors to be awarded the Victoria Cross to date was James (later Sir James) Mouat, received for his actions during the Battle of Balaclava in the Crimean War.

Mouat was born on 14th April 1815 in Chatham, Kent, the son of an Army Surgeon of the same name. His father was serving in the 25th Dragoons as an Assistant Surgeon when the younger James was born. James' younger brother Frederick also became a distinguished surgeon.



In 1832, both James and Frederick Mouat were entered into University College Hospital in London to begin their medical education. They lived at 73 Great Portland Street and then Charlotte Street whilst studying. James qualified with MRCS, England in 1837. It is believed he also studied for a time in Paris before he joined the 44th Foot on 14th December 1838 as an Assistant Surgeon. The Regiment was stationed in India at the time, and his first tour of duty was in Afghanistan in January 1839. Later that year, he transferred into the 4th Foot stationed in India at Bangalore and then Bellary, where cholera epidemics were rife amongst the men.

The Medical VCs

1. James Mouat VC



James remained in India until 1848, when the 4th Foot returned to barracks in Winchester. He was promoted to Surgeon on 3rd November 1848 (it required 10 years service prior to this promotion), and he then joined the 10th Foot who later that year were posted to Ireland. In 1852, James achieved his FRCS and later served in Malta.

In August 1854, he was transferred into the 6th (Inniskilling) Dragoon Guards and would serve with them in the Crimea. He was the principal Medical Officer of the Regiment.

On 25th October 1854, the Battle of Balaclava took place. Although his Regiment was not part of the ill-fated Charge of the Light Brigade, he was summoned to provide aid to the acting Commander of the 17th Lancers, Captain William Morris, who had been wounded and collapsed soon after retiring from the Valley. Mouat and Sergeant Charles Wooden of the Lancers attended to Morris while under fire from the Russian guns and stopped the bleeding from a head wound. For their bravery they were awarded the Victoria Cross.

The Medical VCs

1. James Mouat VC



Mouat's recommendation for the VC was not considered until March 1858, and then gazetted in June that year. On 12th July, following the publication in the London Gazette, Charles Wooden (pictured left) wrote privately to Mouat stating his involvement in going to the aid of Captain Morris. Mouat agreed and forwarded the letter to Horse Guards with a supporting letter verifying the statements of Sergeant Major Wooden of the 17th Lancers. Mouat explained Wooden's exact movements.

Wooden's application was considered on 13th September 1858, and on 4th October, the military secretary on behalf of the Commander in Chief recommended Wooden for the VC and it was gazetted on 26th October 1858.

As well as being a man of action in the field, Mouat was also very active in looking after the welfare of his troops. On 2nd November 1854, he had written to the Commander of the 6th Dragoons, stating the troops lacked proper shelter, clothing and suggested parades should be cancelled when wet weather hit. He was heavily involved in changing the men's diets when the cold and wet weather caused an outbreak of scurvy.

The Medical VCs

1. James Mouat VC

Mouat later had medical charge of the field general hospital of the 3rd Division until the fall of Sebastopol. He was also present at the Battles of Inkerman and Tchernaya. On October 1st, 1855, he was promoted to Surgeon-Major and held the local appointment of Deputy Inspector-General of Hospitals in Turkey. During the Crimean Campaign, he was appointed Companion of the Bath and appointed to the French Legion of Honour.

Mouat appears to have been a very skilled surgeon. One of his cases, a severe facial injury where he had attempted to stop the bleeding by ligating the carotid artery, was reported in the *Lancet*. He was also a member of the Crimean Medical Society which met regularly to discuss medical issues. He was also an early opponent of the use of chloroform for pain relief during operations, feeling that it was dangerous and other methods could be used instead.

On his return to England after the war, he gave evidence to the Sanitary Commission on the sanitary conditions in the Army, the organisation of military hospitals and the treatment of the sick and wounded. Some of his evidence irritated others present including Florence Nightingale when he stated Medical Officers at the frontline deserved more recognition than those based in hospitals such as Scutari. She described Mouat as “a typical clever fellow, the unscrupulous blackguard, the unmitigated rogue. I believe I need hardly say that, in all this, I am referring to his conduct to his men, as Inspecting Medical Officer. I do not refer at all to his medical practice, which is not my business to give an opinion.”

The Medical VCs

1. James Mouat VC



Mouat returned to service soon after the Commission's conclusion and was posted to New Zealand between 1860-61. He served throughout the Taranaki Campaign, then returned to the UK for a short period of leave. He returned to New Zealand in 1863 as Deputy Inspector-General. He was present in the field as principal medical officer throughout operations in Waikato, Taranaki, and Tauranga between 1863-65, and was mentioned in despatches repeatedly.

Mouat left New Zealand in 1864 after being promoted to Inspector General of Hospitals. He retired on 28th April 1876 shortly after writing his "Proposal for the reintroduction of the regimental system 1875". He was appointed Honorary Surgeon to Queen Victoria and was knighted in 1894. He died on 4th January 1899 at the age of 83 of a stroke at his house at 108 Palace Gardens Terrace in Kensington. He was survived by his wife, Adela Rose Ellen (nee Tindall) and was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery.

The Medical VCs

1. James Mouat VC



NB Medal Group Image courtesy of Thomas Stewart

The Medical VCs

1. James Mouat VC

His obituary published in the British Medical Journal described his character as “A very dapper wellmade man, always faultlessly dressed, whether in uniform or in mufti; nothing annoyed him more than slovenly or shabby attire, especially among medical officers..... He had a very sharp tongue, and as he usually got hold of the right end of an argument, was formidable in dispute.... Sir James Mouat was held in deserved respect by all branches of the service; and in private life was an attached and sincere friend of those who won his esteem.”

How would Sir James Mouat be viewed today? He was certainly ambitious, medal hungry, sharp tongued, and conservative in his ways. He was also a very skilled surgeon, committed to the welfare of his troops and to the Army Medical Services, a man of energy who could organise medical services that were efficient and effective despite the constant battle against bureaucracy of the Army. Most of all, as the first medical man to be awarded the VC, he will be remembered for his bravery.

Late of
6th Dragoons

Surgeon
James Mouat, C.B., (now Deputy-Inspector-General of Hospitals)
Date of Act of Bravery, 26th October, 1854

ut comode.

For having voluntarily proceeded to the assistance of Lieutenant-Colonel Morris, C.B., 17th Lancers, who was lying dangerously wounded in an exposed situation after the retreat of the Light Cavalry at the battle of Balaklava, and having dressed that officer's wounds in presence of, and under a heavy fire from the enemy. Thus, by stopping a serious hemorrhage, he assisted in saving that officer's life.

The Medical VCs

2. Thomas Hale VC



The second medical VC was Thomas Egerton Hale. Hale was born at Cook Pit Farm, Faddiley, near Nantwich, Cheshire on 24th September 1832. He was the son of George and Sarah Hale.

He was educated at Grove Park School in Wrexham, then Queens College, Birmingham before Kings College in London. He then became a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1854.

Thomas joined the 1st Battalion, 7th Regiment of Foot (later the Royal Fusiliers) on the 14th December 1854 as an Assistant Surgeon aged 22.

Shortly after enlisting, his Regiment received orders to disembark to the Crimea. He was then posted to the front line just behind Sebastopol. Hale had been in the Crimea for less than 9 months when the assault on the Great Redan took place on September 8th, 1855. The events of that day would see Hale decorated with the Victoria Cross.

The Medical VCs

2. Thomas Hale VC



The Medical VCs

2. Thomas Hale VC

On that day, Surgeon Hale came across Captain H M Jones who had been dangerously wounded. Hale remained with the Captain administering first aid whilst under heavy enemy fire. Due to the intensity of the enemy fire, Hale was left with Captain Jones and only one other man, Lieutenant William Hope who was offering covering fire. Hale whilst attending to his wounded officer, attempted to rally other men to support Lieutenant Hope.

This was not the only act of valour that day performed by Surgeon Hale. Later in the afternoon, he ventured out several times under heavy enemy fire with the support of Sergeant Charles Fisher to clear an advanced sap of wounded men. He and Fisher carried them to another sap where they could have their wounds treated.

Hale was recommended for, and approved, for the award of the VC. The citation was published in the London Gazette on May 5th, 1857. Just over a month later, Surgeon Hale was one of 62 men who attended the first investiture of the Victoria Cross by Queen Victoria in Hyde Park, London.

Hale was soon posted to India where the Mutiny had broken out in Meerut. Hale was under the command of Colonel Blunt, where he was in medical charge of a field force. It was an extremely tough campaign at the Trans-Indus Frontier, and he was treating hundreds of men for sunstroke on a daily basis. He remained in India after the Mutiny and became Medical Officer at Chirat in 1860.

The Medical VCs

2. Thomas Hale VC

He married Emily, whom he had met whilst serving in Gibraltar. He became a Surgeon Lieutenant Colonel, and retired from service in 1876. He became a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and was awarded a Companion of the Bath in 1906.

In retirement, he lived in the family home of Faddiley Lodge, Acton, Cheshire, where he died on Christmas Day, 1909, aged 77. He was buried in St Mary's Churchyard, Acton. His widow Emily, outlived him by 12 years, before passing away in Bath. Thomas is named on her memorial stone in Bath Cemetery.



The Medical VCs

2. Thomas Hale VC



Thomas Hale's VC medal group courtesy of Thomas Stewart

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/thomas-egerton-hale-vc/>