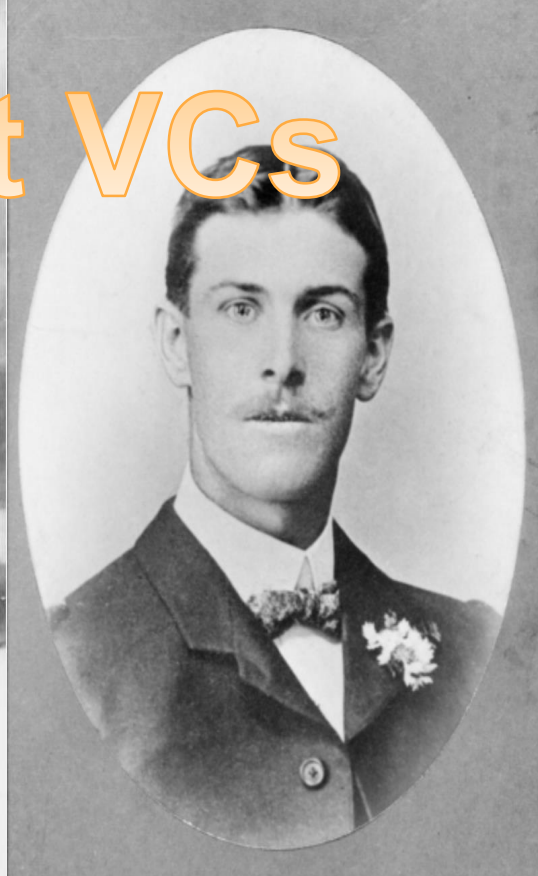
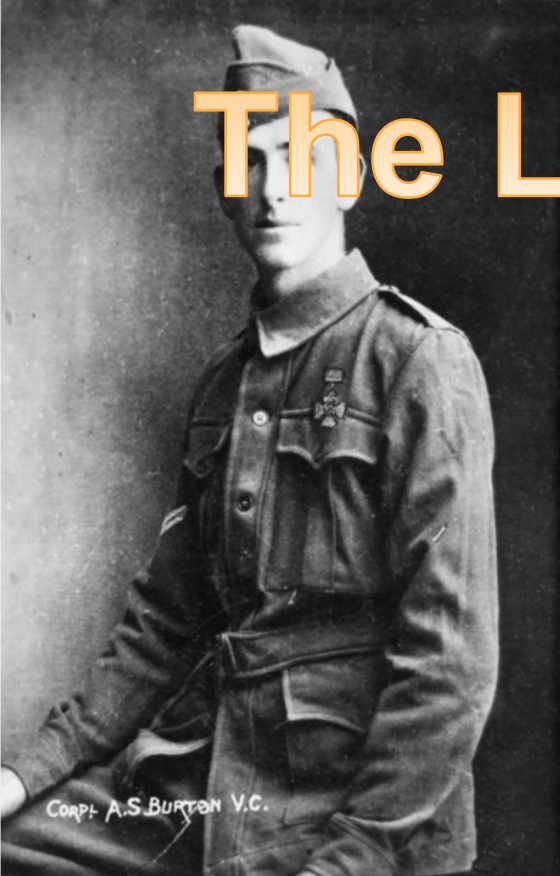


The Loneliest VCs



Victoria Cross Online
Issue 17 February 2024

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Welcome to the 17th edition of Victoria Cross Online Magazine.

The feature article this month is a follow up piece by Dr Tom Lewis OAM on "The Loneliest VCs" which focuses on 5 VCs from Australia who have no known grave.

Secondly there is going to be Parts 3-5 of a series of 29 articles featuring the 29 Medical VCs. This will feature the stories of William Sylvester VC, Herbert Reade VC and Joseph Jee VC.

There is also news on a newly published biography on Alfred Henry Hook VC and the auction of the Victoria Cross medal awarded to Edward Jennings VC during the Indian Mutiny.

Finally, there is the news from Australia of the impending announcement of another gallantry award for Dasher Wheatley VC.



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The Loneliest VCs

BY DR TOM LEWIS OAM

Of the 101 Australian military personnel who have been awarded the Victoria Cross, our highest honour for bravery, most lie in recognised graves. But five of our fallen – including our newest and only naval VC – have no known final resting place.

To explain further, when the recipients of the Crosses were given their honour, many were awarded posthumously – they had died in the action in which they performed their feats of bravery. But their bodies were recovered, and later buried or cremated.

Many of the other Cross recipients survived warfare. Later they died, and the usual process followed – they were given a funeral. But often they were overseas when that happened, often reflecting the fact that many of these military personnel were born overseas, and had sometimes gone to the country of their birth after their Australian military service. So, 37 of our 101 VCs are interred in other countries. Perhaps the most remote of these is the grave of Sergeant Samuel Pearse, who earned his VC in 1919. He is buried in a military cemetery near the Obozerskaya railway station, between Emtsa and Archangel, in North Russia.

Of the VC recipients interred in Australia, most lie in the states or territories where they spent the rest of their lives. They are distributed as follows:

Australian Capital Territory	2
New South Wales	13
Queensland	5
South Australia	5
Tasmania	3
Victoria	18
Western Australia	9

The Loneliest VCs

BY DR TOM LEWIS OAM

The Northern Territory's only VC was Albert Borella from WWI. He was buried in Albury-Wodonga, where he spent his final years.

Four VCs are still living with us. And five of our 101 have no known grave.

Sixty-four Victoria Crosses went to the Australian Army in World War I. The Gallipoli campaign saw nine of these in only around six months, testimony to the fierce and close quarter fighting. When Gallipoli was closed down the AIF moved to the Western Front, where they were joined by thousands more Australians for almost three more years of fighting. Four of the five "no known grave" VCs come from WWI, although curiously, one received his VC for a WWI action, but died in WWII.



Two had fairly conventional ends. Lance-Corporal Alexander Burton died in 1915. Born in Kyneton, Victoria, in 1893, Burton, an ironmonger, joined the Australian Imperial Force and was posted to the 7th Battalion. Although he missed the landing on Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, he saw it from the deck of a hospital ship, where he was being treated for an infection. A week later he was in the trenches, fighting in different areas with his Battalion.

On 9 August at Lone Pine, the Turks launched a counter-attack on a newly captured trench commanded by Lieutenant Frederick Tubb.

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BY DR TOM LEWIS OAM

The Turks advanced and knocked over a sandbag barricade but Tubb and Burton rebuilt it, together with a Corporal William Dunstan. The enemy twice more destroyed the barricade, but each time was driven off and the barricade rebuilt. Burton was killed by a bomb while he was building up the parapet.

Burton's body was not recovered. Although this is difficult to understand, it reflects the fact that often soft-skinned humans in combat can be literally blown apart. To make matters worse their bodies can lie in a contested area – often known as “No Man's Land” where they might lie for some time. Others may lie in the same area. When one side or the other takes that part of the battlefield hasty burials often result, usually into mass graves. It is an unpleasant aspect of battlefields, but reflects the fact that it is urgent necessity, not nicety, that is needed at the time. Burton has no known grave. He is commemorated on the Lone Pine Memorial.



Private Thomas Cooke died in 1916. He was 35 years old, comparatively old for a private, and married with a family. Born in New Zealand, he had migrated to Australia shortly before the war.

In the initial attack on Pozières, in France, Cooke's battalion captured ground, and held on under heavy enemy artillery fire and counter-attacks. Cooke was in a Lewis machinegun team working in a dangerous position. After the others with him were killed or wounded, he remained fighting at his post. war memorial in Kaikōura NZ, his town of birth.

The Loneliest VCs

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Cooke was later found dead at his gun. His body was lost in later fighting. He has no known grave site. Cooke's name is recorded on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial and on the war memorial in Kaikōura NZ, his town of birth.



Captain Alfred Shout, despite being an Army soldier in WWI, was curiously buried at sea. Shout had served in the Boer War, and following that conflict worked as a carpenter in Sydney, while serving part-time as an officer in the local militia. He joined the AIF when war was declared and took part in the landing on Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. He was awarded the Military Cross and Mentioned in Despatches for actions over the next month.

In August, in fighting at Lone Pine, Shout was involved in an action that saw him attacking an enemy trench, killing eight Turks with grenades. Later that day he was with one of the locally-made grenades when it exploded prematurely, causing horrendous injuries.

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Shout died on a hospital ship of his injuries two days later. He was buried at sea, with his Victoria Cross awarded two months later. He is commemorated at the Lone Pine Memorial, Gallipoli, Turkey.



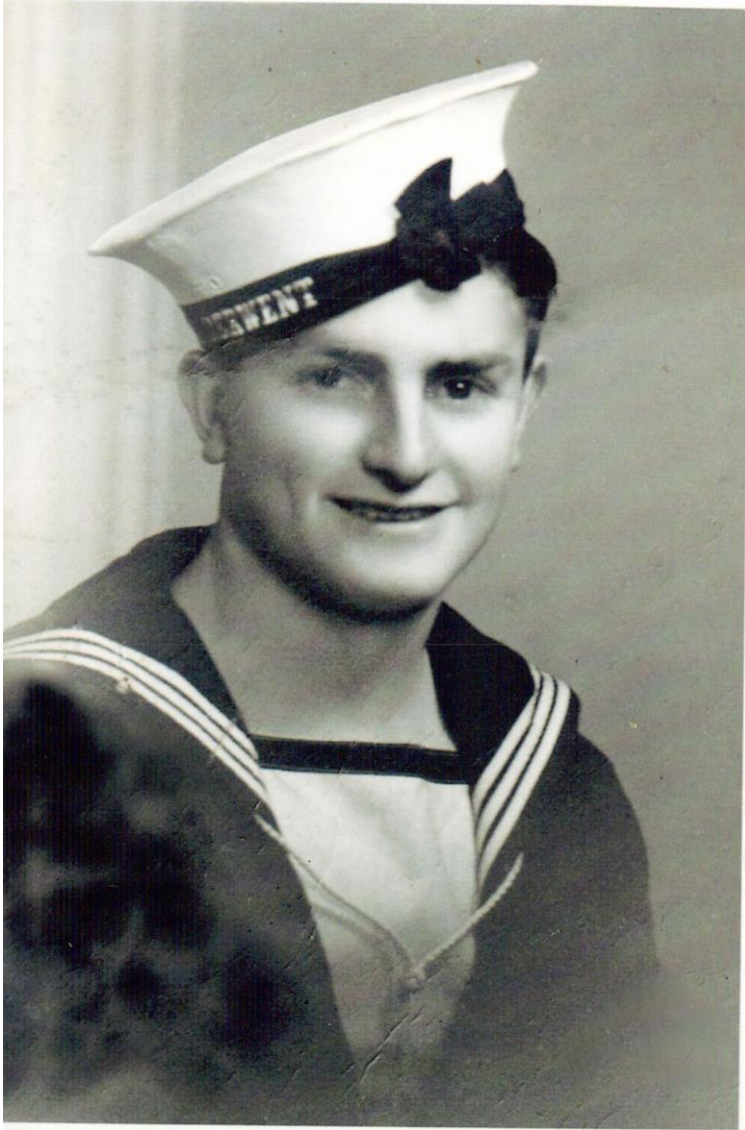
Corporal Walter Brown served in both WWI and II. A Tasmanian, he enlisted in 1915 in the Light Horse before transferring to the infantry. He gained the Distinguished Conduct Medal in 1917 for bravery before he was involved in an attack on a German trench at Villers-Bretonneux in France. He then attacked an enemy sniper with two Mills bombs, and caused the surrender of several other enemy soldiers. He was awarded the Victoria Cross.

When WWII broke out, Brown volunteered for the Army.

He went missing after the fall of Singapore in February 1942, when he was last sighted declaring, "no surrender for me". He likely died fighting in the confusion surrounding the island's last stand.

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Teddy Sheean is the last of the five with no known grave. HMAS Armidale was attacked relentlessly from the skies by Japanese aircraft on 1 December 1941, and hit by at least one torpedo. Despite “Abandon Ship” being ordered, he returned to his 20mm Oerlikon gun to defend his shipmates from the strafing and circling enemy. Armidale has not been found. She lies in waters closer to Timor than Australia, and a search for her has begun.

It is a sad aspect for the bravest of our brave that they lie in unmarked graves. But at least we can remember them by recalling their stories.

Dr Tom Lewis OAM, a retired naval officer, is a military historian. Recent books include *Teddy Sheean VC*; the only biography of Australia’s only naval Victoria Cross winner; *Attack on Sydney Harbour* – about the midget submarine raid of 1942; and *Bombers North*, a study of the Allied air missions out of northern Australia in WWII. His latest work *The Sinking of HMAS Sydney* – how sailors, lived, fought and died in Australia’s greatest naval disaster, was released by Big Sky in November 2023.

The Medical VCs

3. William Henry Thomas Sylvester VC



William Sylvester was born on 16th April 1831 in a small house in Long Street, Devizes, Wiltshire. Little is known of his early life, until he trained as a doctor at the University of Edinburgh. He then chose to enlist with the 23rd Regiment of Foot (later the Royal Welch Regiment) as an Assistant Surgeon.

In the latter months of 1854, he was posted with his Regiment to the Crimean Peninsula where he would serve throughout the campaign in the trenches at Sebastopol. He would be mentioned in despatches and be decorated by both the

British and the French. It was his actions on 8th September 1855 at the Great Redan which led to the award of the Victoria Cross. During the assault, Lieutenant and Adjutant Dyneley was hit and badly wounded. He was lying in the open in front of the right flank of the attack. Sylvester volunteered to go out and try and help the Lieutenant, and ran out under heavy enemy fire and managed to reach Dyneley. He was supported in the effort by Robert Shields VC. Sadly, Dyneley was mortally wounded, but Sylvester still dressed his wounds in a dangerous and exposed position.

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/william-henry-thomas-sylvester-vc/>

The Medical VCs

3. William Henry Thomas Sylvester VC

Sylvester was then posted soon afterwards to the Indian Mutiny, where his Victoria Cross was presented to him having been posted out to India and presented to him in 1858. He served in the Relief of Lucknow and was awarded the Indian Mutiny Medal with two clasps. He retired from service in the Army in 1861 as a Surgeon Major.

He retired down to the south-west of England, and stayed in the medical profession. He died on 13th March 1920 at his home, 8 Beach Road, Paignton, Devon after a short illness, aged 88. He was the last VC of the Crimean War to die. He was laid to rest in Paignton Cemetery.



The Medical VCs

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/william-henry-thomas-sylvester-vc/>

3. William Henry Thomas Sylvester VC



William Sylvester VC's grave in Paignton Cemetery
courtesy of Kevin Brazier

The Medical VCs

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/william-henry-thomas-sylvester-vc/>

3. William Henry Thomas Sylvester VC



William Sylvester VC's medal group at the Museum of Military Medicine courtesy of Thomas Stewart.

The Medical VCs

4. Herbert Taylor Reade VC



Herbert Reade was born in Perth, Ontario, on the 20th of September 1828. He was the son of Staff Surgeon George Hume Reade, who was Colonel of the 3rd Regiment of the Leeds Militia in Upper Canada, (today's Ontario), and who was killed during the Crimean War in 1854. Reade attended schools in Quebec and in Ireland.

Reade entered the British Army in November 1850 as Assistant-Surgeon to the 61st Regiment of Foot, later known as the Gloucestershire Regiment. In 1857, he was promoted to Staff Surgeon 2nd Class.

Herbert Reade was part of the 61st Regiment of Foot who were posted to India at the time of the outbreak of the Mutiny. On the 14th September 1857, the 61st Regiment were part of the No 5 Reserve Column during the assault on Delhi. They were to follow the 3rd Column through the Kashmir Gate. Soon Reade and his medical companions had their hands full with the large numbers of wounded. Ironically, it was not Reade's medical expertise that would see him awarded the Victoria Cross but a completely different act of gallantry.

He was attending the wounded at one end of one of the streets of Delhi, when a party of rebels advanced from the direction of the Bank, and, having established themselves in the houses in the street, commenced firing from the rooftops.

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/herbert-taylor-rea-de-vc-cb/>

The Medical VCs

4. Herbert Taylor Reade VC

The wounded were at great risk of this fire, and could have been captured by the enemy, had it not been for the actions of Reade. He drew his sword and calling on the few soldiers who were nearby to follow him, he charged the houses and despite the heavy fire, dislodged the rebels. He achieved this with just a party of 10 men, of whom 2 were killed and 5 or 6 wounded. Two days later, on the morning of the 16th, he was one of the first up at the breach of the Delhi Magazine, which had been stormed by the 61st Regiment and with the support of a Sergeant of the 61st, spiked one of the enemy's guns.

His Commanding Officer recommended Reade for the VC, until he fell dangerously ill. There followed a period of frequent change of Commanding Officers who overlooked the initial recommendation until, three years later, Reade's claim finally reached the board of inspecting officers at the War Office. After several late claims had been rejected on the grounds of the time-lapse since they were performed, Reade's claim seemed destined for the same fate. Fortunately, the reason for the claim's lateness was accepted and he was gazetted for the VC on 5th February 1861. He was awarded the VC by General Sir R Douglas, the Governor of Jersey in July 1862.

In 1864, he was appointed to the Staff and became Brigade Surgeon in 1879 and Deputy Surgeon General in 1880. He was promoted to Surgeon General in 1886 and retired the following year. He was appointed Honorary Surgeon to Queen Victoria in 1895. He lived in Bath in later life, and died at his home, "Sunnylands", Surrey Park Gardens on 23rd June 1897 aged 68. He was laid to rest at Locksbrook Cemetery. His medals are held at the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Regimental Museum, Gloucester.

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/herbert-taylor-reade-vc-cb/>

The Medical VCs

4. Herbert Taylor Reade VC

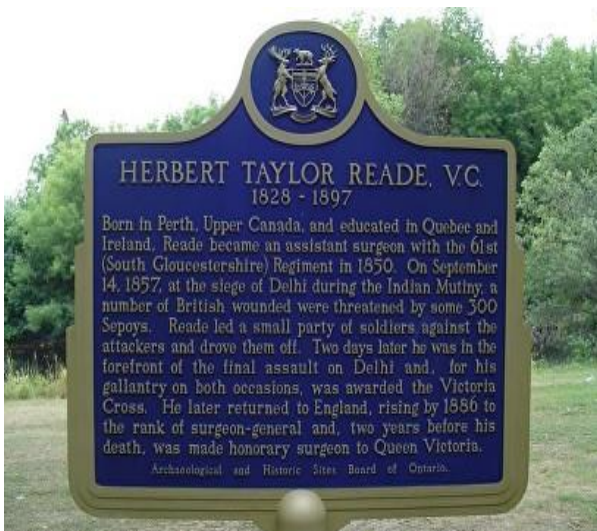


Image of Reade's grave courtesy of Kevin Brazier

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/herbert-taylor-reade-vc-cb/>

The Medical VCs

5. Joseph Jee VC



Joseph Jee was born on 9th February 1819, the son of Christopher Preston Jee, of Hartshill, near Atherstone, Warwickshire. Joseph was educated at the Universities of London and Edinburgh and at the Ecole de Medecine in Paris, becoming a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1841. He entered the Army as Assistant Surgeon in the 15th Hussars in 1842, and was promoted to Surgeon into the 78th Regiment of Foot (later Seaforth Highlanders) in 1854. He served with that Regiment in the Persian Campaign of 1857, being present at the Battle of Koosh-ab and at the bombardment of Mohammen.

He was then part of the Regiment's efforts during the Indian Mutiny, and on 25th September 1857, he was part of Major-General Havelock's relieving force into Lucknow.

During the action, the 78th Highlanders had taken possession of the Char Bagh Bridge, and captured two 9-pounders through a bayonet charge. Surgeon Jee attended to the large number of wounded, whom he succeeded in getting removed on cots and on the backs of comrades until he had collected the Dooly bearers who had fled. Subsequently, on the same day, they endeavoured to reach the Residency with the wounded men, when Jee found himself besieged by a large enemy force in the Mote-Mehal, where he remained for the whole night and following morning repeatedly exposing himself to heavy fire in proceeding to dress the wounded men who fell

The Medical VCs

5. Joseph Jee VC

while serving the 24-pounder gun. He managed to get many of the wounded through a cross fire safely into the Residency, by the river bank, although repeatedly warned it was too perilous a task.

His Victoria Cross was gazetted on 9th November 1860, the very day that he received his medal from Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle. He returned to the Royal Dragoons in 1864 and became Deputy Inspector of Army Hospitals in 1868. He retired the same year as Deputy Surgeon General. He married Norah Carola Riley, the daughter of a barrister in law, in 1880 and they inherited Queensborough Hall in Leicestershire. Jee died at Queensborough on 17th March 1899, aged 80. He was buried in Ratcliffe College, Ratcliffe, Leicestershire. His medals are held by the Museum of Military Medicine, Keogh Barracks, Mytchett, Surrey.



Image courtesy of Thomas Stewart

Hook VC Book Launch

HENRY HOOK VC

A RORKE'S DRIFT HERO



NEIL THORNTON

Hook VC Book Launch

In January 2024, following the launch of a new publishing venture, Barnthorn Publishing, notable writer and historian Neil Thornton, has launched his next book on Henry Hook VC. Neil is a noted writer of several well received and successful works including “A Rorke’s Drift – A New Perspective”, “Arnhem Umbrella: Major Digby Tatham Warter DSO”, “Todger: Thomas Jones VC DCM” and “Witnesses at Isandhlwana” with Michael Denigan.

As the publisher notes “Henry Hook is perhaps the most famous private soldier in British military history. It is his portrayal in the movie, *Zulu*, which has cemented this position, but the real Hook was a far cry from the hard-drinking scoundrel that he was portrayed as on screen. Unlike the character in the movie, Hook’s record was unblemished, and he would earn good conduct stripes as well as excellent character references from his superiors after leaving the army.

Posted to defend the Rorke’s Drift hospital with orders to protect the sick and wounded at the start of the battle, Hook stuck to his task with the utmost determination. Indeed, he was more than willing to lay down his own life in his duty to save the lives of those others who were less able.

Here, Rorke’s Drift expert, Neil Thornton, chronicles Hook’s life, including his early years, his turbulent marriage, and his later life, putting to bed a number of myths that have developed and grown over the years, whilst analysing Hook’s part in the Battle of Rorke’s Drift for which he was awarded the coveted Victoria Cross.”

The Hook book is sure to be a great success (and yours truly has already ordered a copy) and I will post a review in a later magazine. If you wish to purchase a copy please visit

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Henry-Hook-VC-Rorkes-Drift/dp/1917120001/ref=sr_1_5?crid=GZM0OWX0N70O&keywords=neil+thornton&qid=1706391123&sprefix=neil+thornton%2Caps%2C282&sr=8-5

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/alfred-henry-hook-vc/>

Jennings VC Sale

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/edward-jennings-vc/>



Jennings VC Sale

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/edward-jennings-vc/>

On February 14th, 2024, the Victoria Cross medal awarded to Edward (or Edmond to be his correct name) Jennings was sold at Noonan's Auctioneers in Mayfair, London. The medal had a guide price of £20,000 - £30,000. One of three Mayo soldiers awarded the Victoria Cross for gallantry in the Indian rebellion, the poor soldier ended up in a pauper's grave in 1889, along with 190,000 other corpses in Preston Cemetery. In 1997, an appeal was launched to raise funds to mark the Ballinrobe man's final resting place.

After 25 years of service in India, 42-year-old Jennings was nominated by his fellow noncommissioned officers to be given the Victoria Cross, which is the highest and most prestigious decoration in the UK, for "valour in the presence of the enemy". Two such crosses are known for Jennings: the one in the sale and one held by the Royal Artillery, which he sold off during hard times as he ended up as a road sweeper after the war.

While there is some conjecture as to the reason why there were two medals, it is believed the first was sent out to India for presentation. "But once that it was known that he was returning to the UK, Queen Victoria herself expressed a wish to personally decorate him with the V.C. at an investiture at Windsor on October 9th 1860, and a second cross was named up," according to auction house [Noonans](#).

However, Jennings's ship was delayed, so he missed the ceremony, and it "seems likely that the Victoria Cross in Noonans' sale is the one that was named up for presentation by Queen Victoria herself," states the auction house. It was last purchased in 1980 for £5,500 by the seller. In the sale it achieved a hammer price of £55,000 to an as at time of press unknown buyer.

Wheatley VC Award

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/kevin-arthur-wheatley-vc/>



On 30th January 2024 it was announced that a tribunal in Australia had ruled that a recent decision to turn down the award of a posthumous Medal of Gallantry for Kevin "Dasher" Wheatley VC was incorrect. In the tribunal's findings, it now states that it recommends to the Minister, that Dasher Wheatley VC should be awarded the Medal of Gallantry for two separate acts of gallantry prior to his Victoria Cross action. The MG, when announced, will be awarded for his actions on 28th May and 18th August 1965.

The same tribunal has also decided to recommend to the Minister that Ron "Butch" Swanton should receive a posthumous Commendation for Gallantry for his actions during the VC action of Dasher Wheatley. Hopefully the medals will be rubber stamped soon.



Jee VC Grave



On February 5th 2024, the Victoria Cross Trust visited the grave of Surgeon Joseph Jee VC in the grounds of Ratcliffe College, Leicestershire. He had been awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions on 25th September 1857 on the Char Bagh Bridge during the Siege of Lucknow. He repeatedly showed numerous acts of valour in tending to, and evacuating many of the wounded.

Jee retired in 1868 as Deputy Surgeon General . In 1880, he married Norah Carola Riley and they inherited Queensborough Hall in Leicestershire. He died there on 17th March 1899, aged 80. His medals are held by the Museum of Military Medicine at Keogh Barracks in Aldershot.

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/joseph-jee-vc/>

<https://victoriacrosstrust.org/>

Mitchell VC for Sale

On 24th February 2024 the Victoria Cross of George Allan Mitchell VC will be auctioned by Morton & Eden in London for an estimate of £250,000 to £300,000. The medal was previously purchased by the London Scottish Museum from the George Mitchell School in Leyton for £160,000.

Mitchell had been awarded a posthumous VC for his actions in Italy on the night of 23rd-24th January 2024, when he charged single handed up the hill side towards the Damiano Ridge, and captured a well defended German position. Tragically, on taking the position, a surrendered German picked up a rifle and shot Mitchell dead at close range. He is buried in Minturno War Cemetery.



Grave image courtesy of Thomas Stewart

Mitchell VC for Sale



Medal image courtesy of Kevin Brazier