

**“Frankly, I enjoyed  
the war”**

**Victoria Cross Online  
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## EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Welcome to the April edition of the Victoria Cross Online magazine. There is a new feature with the introduction of "Book of the Month" where I will review either an upcoming publication or a recent one. The opening title is the upcoming new book by Kevin Brazier on Gurkha and Indian Army VCs.

There is also a piece by the editor on one of most remarkable Victoria Cross recipient biographies in Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart VC.

I'm indebted again to regular contributor Ned Malet de Carteret for his article on Ferdinand Le Quesne VC, the island of Jersey's Medical VC.

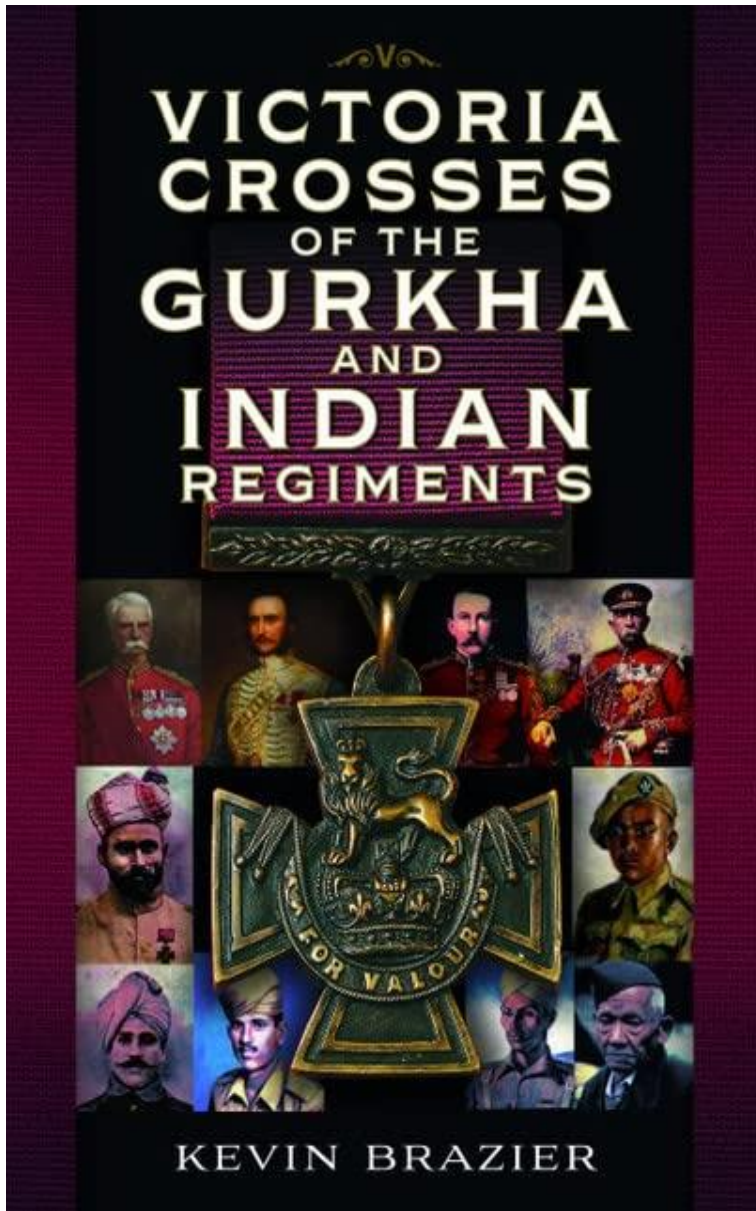
Finally, for this month is the story of both the only VC awarded (to date) on Canadian soil and the only VC to date where the VC action was performed not in the presence of an enemy force.



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# Book of the Month



On 30<sup>th</sup> April 2023 the latest Victoria Cross themed book by Kevin Brazier is published by Pen & Sword. Kevin is a prolific writer on military subjects with previous works on “The Complete Victoria Cross”, “The Complete Blue Max” and “The Complete George Cross”. These were followed in the last year with “VCs of the Zulu and Boer Wars” and the three volume “Knights Cross”.

The latest tome by Kevin Brazier follows a similar style of layout to his previous works. In this book you will find the stories of all the men awarded the VC while serving in the Gurkha and Indian regiments of the Indian Army; this also includes British soldiers serving in both.

. The Indian Army have been involved in wars all over Europe, Africa, the Middle and Far East, in many campaigns. However, it was not until 1912 that native Gurkhas and Indians were eligible for the award. It would be 1914 when the first native Indian was awarded it and 1915 for the first Gurkha. Prior to his only British soldiers serving in the Indian Army had been awarded the VC.

The book is neatly organised into two parts – the first focusing on men who served in the Gurkha Regiments and the second on those in the Indian Army.



# Book of the Month



Kevin Brazier hails from Essex, and left school aged 16, barely able to read and write. He was diagnosed with dyslexia at the age of 18. He educated himself reading books and at the age of 50 published his first book "The Complete Victoria Cross" Kevin has since published works on the George Cross, Knights Cross and Blue Max. He regularly travels the world documenting the final resting places of gallantry award recipients.

Order Now at <https://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk/Victoria-Crosses-of-the-Gurkha-and-Indian-Regiments-Hardback/p/23164>

The two part layout is further divided neatly into war or campaign that the Victoria Crosses were awarded in. In keeping with the previous formats of Kevin's books, the recipients are arranged chronologically by the date of their action.

Each of the mini sections are begun with a brief synopsis setting out the context behind the campaign. It is then followed by the recipients. Each of the recipients' individual entries contain a biography featuring their background, career in the military and their later life. Some of the individual stories are further illuminated with little anecdotes or quotes about the person involved.

The entries are finished with information about the final resting places of the recipients, many of which have images in the book from the author's own collection. There is also information on the location of the medal groups whether it be in private collections or in a regimental museum. If you are a keen and avid reader of the history of the Victoria Cross, and would like an easy to use reference work on the Gurkha and Indian Army recipients this is a must for a VC Library and will certainly gracing mine in the near future!

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[https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/?page\\_id=2747](https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/?page_id=2747)



How do you tell the story of one of the most remarkable of all recipients of the Victoria Cross? Described as “The Unkillable Soldier” and someone who would feature in a Boy’s Own Comic, Sir Adrian Paul Ghislain Carton De Wiart served in three major conflicts, survived two plane crashes, tunneled out of a POW camp, and suffered gunshot wounds to the face, head, stomach, ankle, leg, hip and ear. He even tore off his own two fingers prior to his hand being amputated! How do you tell the story of a man who also became a personal representative to Winston Churchill, “frankly enjoyed” World War I and oh yes earned a VC?:

The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography describes him as “with his black eyepatch and empty sleeve, Carton de Wiart looked like an elegant pirate, and became a figure of legend.” So where did the legend begin?

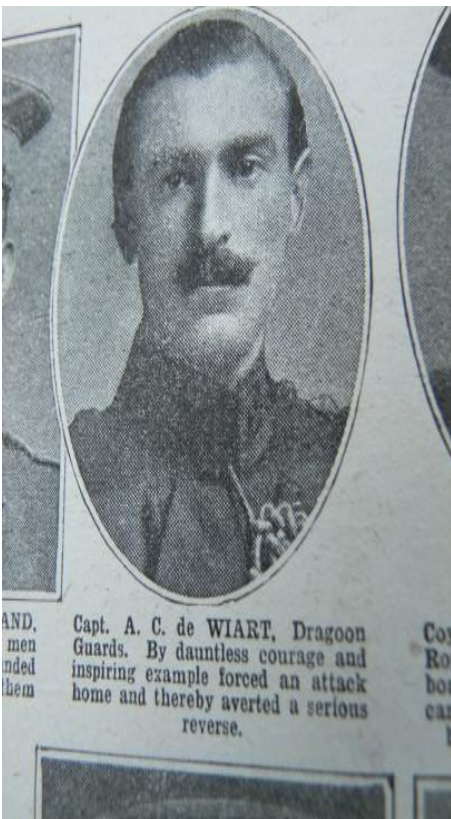
He was born into an aristocratic family on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1880 in Brussels, Belgium, the eldest son of Leon Constant Ghislain Carton de Wiart and Ernestine (nee Wenzig). His early childhood was spent in both Belgium and England. When he was six, his parents divorced and it prompted his father to move the family to Cairo, Egypt where he became a Director of the Cairo Electric Company. This was where young Adrian learned Arabic. At the age of 11, his new English step-mother sent him to boarding school in England, a Roman Catholic oratory school.

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Following on from boarding school, he was accepted to begin a degree in Law at Balliol College, following in his father's footsteps in his choice of career. He did not complete the degree, however, as the outbreak of the Second Boer War in 1899, prompted the 19 year old Adrian to apply to join the British Army to serve in South Africa.

As he was under military age, wasn't a British subject and had not got his father's consent, he lied about his age (claiming he was 25) and used a pseudonym. Therefore Trooper Carton set sail for his first taste of warfare.



It was a baptism of fire which ended with bullet wounds to the stomach and groin, which necessitated a return to England. It was then his incandescent father found out that he had abandoned his Oxford studies, but did permit Adrian could stay in the Army. After recuperating in Oxford, he was commissioned into Second Imperial Light Horse, and returned to South Africa. He was then given a regular commission as a Second Lieutenant in the 4<sup>th</sup> Dragoon Guards. He then transferred to India in 1902 where he enjoyed a number of sports including shooting and pig sticking. He was described at the time by contemporaries as a “delightful character and must hold the world record for bad language.”



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He returned to South Africa in 1904 as Aide-de-Camp to the Commander in Chief, Sir Henry Hildyard, and he described this period of his career as his “heyday” in his later autobiography. By 1907, he had served in the British Army for 8 years but was still not a British subject. On 13<sup>th</sup> September that year, he took the oath of allegiance to King Edward VII and was formally naturalised.

In 1908 he married Countess Friederike Maria Karoline Henriette Rosa Sabina Franziska Fugger von Babenhausen, an Austrian Princess hailing from Klagenfurt. They would later have two children.

He travelled widely prior to the outbreak of World War I, and received a promotion to Captain on 26 February 1910. He then served as adjutant to the Duke of Beaufort. He regularly hunted with the Duke, who was also the Honorary Colonel of the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars. He served in this role until departing for Somaliland in 1914, where a colonial war had broken out led by the Dervish and their leader Mohammed Bin Abdullah aka “The Mad Mullah”.



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Carton De Wiart had been seconded to the Somaliland Camel Corps where he found himself serving with Hastings Ismay (later Lord Ismay and a military advisor to Churchill). During an attack on an enemy stronghold, he was shot in the arm and in the face, losing his left eye and part of his ear. Ismay described the incident:

"He didn't check his stride but I think the bullet stung him up as his language was awful. The doctor could do nothing for his eye, but we had to keep him with us. He must have been in agony."

For his exploits, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1915. Ismay later stated that "I honestly believe that he regarded the loss of an eye as a blessing as it allowed him to get out of Somaliland to Europe where he thought the real action was."

De Wiart was returned to England to recuperate in a nursing home in Park Lane. He was to return to the same place on each subsequent occasion he was wounded. This became such a regular occurrence that they kept his own pyjamas ready for his next visit!





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While recuperating from these injuries, Carton de Wiart received a glass eye. It caused him such discomfort that he allegedly threw it from a taxi and instead acquired a black eye patch. Such setbacks were not to delay him long. In February 1915, he embarked on a [steamer](#) for France. He soon realised his ambition to fight on the Western Front when he was sent to Ypres in May 1915.



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During the Second Battle of Ypres, the Germans launched a heavy artillery barrage in which Adrian's left hand was shattered. According to his later autobiography "Happy Odyssey", he tore off two of his own fingers when the doctor at the field hospital refused to amputate them. His hand was later removed later that year.

After a period of recovery, Adrian managed to again convince the Medical Board that he was fit for battle. How is that possible with no left hand or left eye? In 1916, he was placed in command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment, and while commanding them on the Somme, his legend was firmly cemented.

Descriptions of his actions on the Somme stated that he electrified his men. The eye patch, empty sleeve and striking moustache, combined with his bravery, made him famous, with the men under his command describing his presence as helping alleviate their fear before going over the top.

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**Capt. (temp. Lt.-Col.) Adrian Carton de Wiart, D.S.O., Dn. Gds.**

**For most conspicuous bravery, coolness and determination during severe operations of a prolonged nature. It was owing in a great measure to his dauntless courage and**

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inspiring example that a serious reverse was averted.

He displayed the utmost energy and courage in forcing our attack home. After three other battalion Commanders had become casualties, he controlled their commands, and ensured that the ground won was maintained at all costs.

He frequently exposed himself in the organisation of positions and of supplies, passing unflinchingly through fire barrage of the most intense nature.

His gallantry was inspiring to all.

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During the fierce fighting for the village of La Boisselle, the momentum swung back and forth. When three other commanding officers were killed, Adrian took charge of all units fighting in the village and led from the front, holding off enemy counterattacks. He received the Victoria Cross, the highest British military award for gallantry for his actions at La Boisselle. He, however, declined to even mention the award in his autobiography, later telling a friend that “it had been won by the 8<sup>th</sup> Glosters, for every man has done as much as I have.”

He took part in a number of other offensives in the war, being wounded seven more times. His batman, Holmes, described in detail the number of scrapes Adrian got involved in.



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“They shifted us from Ypres then back on the Somme again to the Devil’s Wood, and that’s where the old man got shot through back of his head. But fortunately it missed his spinal cord.”

At the end of the war Carton de Wiart was sent to Poland as second in command of the British-Poland Military Mission under General Louis Botha. Carton de Wiart was appointed a Companion of the Order of the Bath in the 1919 King's Birthday Honours List. After a brief period, he replaced General Botha in the mission to Poland.

On 27 July 1920, Carton de Wiart was appointed an aide-de-camp to the king, and brevetted to colonel. He was active in August 1920, when the Red Army were at the gates of Warsaw.

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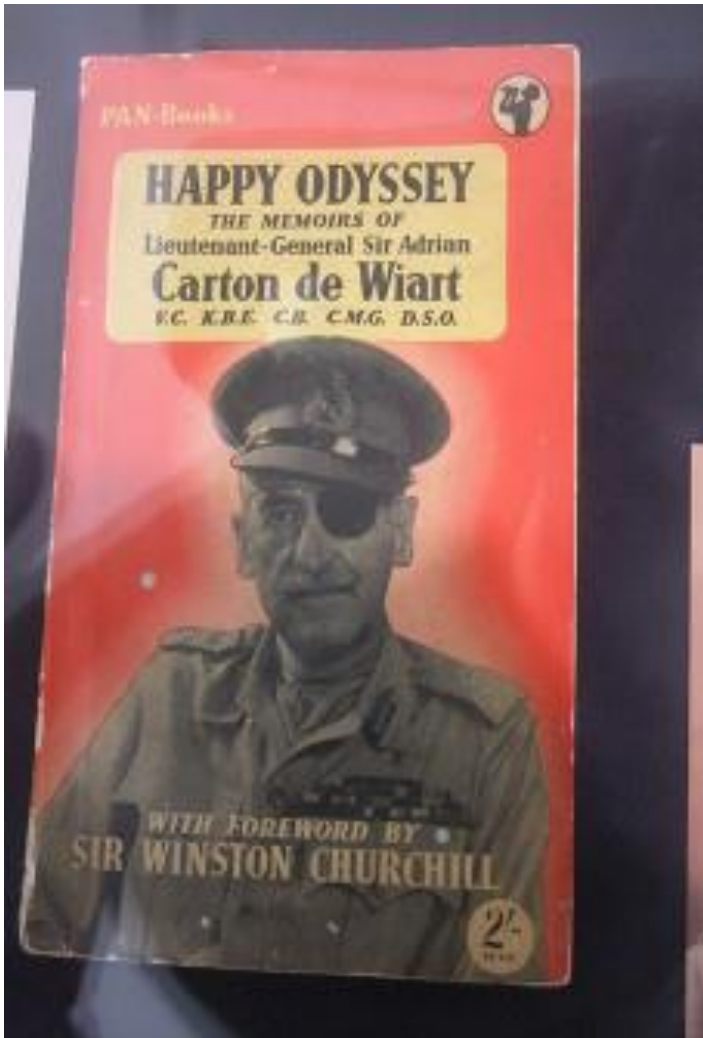
While out on his observation train, he was attacked by a group of Red cavalry, and fought them off with his revolver from the footplate of his train, at one point falling on the track and re-boarding quickly.

When the Poles won the war, the British Military Mission was wound up. Carton de Wiart was promoted to temporary brigadier general and also appointed to the local rank of major general on 1 January. He was promoted to the substantive rank of colonel on 21 June 1922, with seniority from 27 July 1920 and relinquished his local rank of major general on 1 April 1923, going on half-pay as a colonel at the same time. Carton de Wiart officially retired from the army on 19 December, with the honorary rank of major general.

For 15 years following his retirement, Adrian lived the life of a Polish gentleman having been given the use of a large estate called Prostyn. In his memoirs he said “In my fifteen years in the marshes I did not waste one day without hunting.” His peaceful life was interrupted by the looming conflict of World War II, and he was recalled to his previous job as Head of the British Military Mission to Poland. The invasion of the country saw it overrun, and Adrian never saw Prostyn again.

Adrian was forced to flee for the Romanian border, and his car convoy was attacked by the Luftwaffe, and one of his aide's wife was killed. He was in danger of arrest in Romania, but escaped by aircraft on a false passport. In April 1940, Adrian was summoned to lead a hastily arranged campaign to occupy Namsos, in Norway. Despite overwhelming odds, and lack of artillery support, Adrian quickly realised the campaign was failing and recommended withdrawal. He was asked to hold before the Government ordered the evacuation. Adrian arrived back at Scapa Flow on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1940 (his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday!)

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He returned to command of the 61<sup>st</sup> Division, which was soon transferred to Northern Ireland as a defence against a possible invasion.

However, following the arrival of Lt General Sir Henry Pownall as Commander in Chief, Adrian was told he was too old to command a division on active duty.

On 5<sup>th</sup> April 1941, he flew to Belgrade to support the Yugoslav Government who were about to be invaded. After refuelling in Malta, both engines failed and the plane crashed into the sea. Adrian was knocked out, but the cold water stirred him and he swam to shore.

He was captured by the Italians immediately after making landfall. He was a high profile prisoner. After 4 months at the Villa Orsini in Sulmona, he was taken to a special prison for officers at Castello di Vincigliata. He made friends with several other senior officers including a fellow VC in Lt General Philip Neame (also the only VC with an Olympic Gold Medal). Another prisoner, Lord Ranfurty described Adrian as “a really nice person, superbly outspoken”. He was committed to escape. Adrian would make five attempts, including seven months tunnelling. Once he evaded capture for 8 days disguised as an Italian peasant, despite being unable to speak Italian, being 62 years old, with an eye patch, an empty sleeve and multiple scars and injuries.



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He was eventually released over two years later and was then sent to China by Winston Churchill to be his personal representative to Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek, a post he held until 1946. Churchill was a firm admirer of Carton de Wiart, describing him as "a model of chivalry and honour" and writing the foreword to his autobiography.

In the New Years Honours List of 1945, Adrian was made a Knight Commander of the British Empire (KBE) and he was later assigned to a tour of the Burma Front. A good part of Adrian's reporting had to do with the increasing power of the Chinese Communists. Adrian was described as “despising all Communists, and that Mao Zedong was a fanatic”. He finally retired from public life in 1947 though mishaps still followed him.

Whilst on route home he stopped in Rangoon, where he fell down some steps and broke several vertebrae and knocked himself out. He needed a stay in hospital before returning to England. His wife died in 1949, and two years later, he re-married to a divorcee, Joan Sutherland and they settled in County Cork, Ireland at Aghinagh House, Killinardrish.

Adrian passed away peacefully at the age of 83 on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1963. He left no papers. He was buried in Caum Churchyard just off the main Macroom road. The gravesite is just outside the actual graveyard wall on the grounds of Aghinagh House. His medals are held by the Royal Dragoon Guards Museum, Winchester, Hampshire. A number of items owned by Adrian are displayed at the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum, Gloucester.

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the war”





# “Frankly, I enjoyed the war”

The impressive medal group of Sir Adrian Paul Ghislain Carton de Wiart VC KBE CB CMG DSO displayed at The Royal Dragoon Guards Museum. The image is courtesy of Thomas Stewart.





# Jersey's Medical VC

The island of Jersey's second recipient of the Victoria Cross was a man of the medical profession – Ferdinand Simeon Le Quesne VC (pictured right). He would be awarded his Cross for his actions in the Chin Hills, Burma (now Myanmar).

Ferdinand Simeon Le Quesne was born in St Helier, Jersey on Christmas Day, 1863. He was the 3<sup>rd</sup> son of Lt Colonel Giffard and Augusta (nee Simeon) Le Quesne.



He qualified as a Surgeon in 1886 and in July joined the army as a Surgeon Captain attached to the 2nd Norfolk Regiment.

In Burma on 4th May, 1889, a detachment of the 2nd Norfolks together with 60 men of the 42nd Gurkha Light Infantry was entering the village of Tartan, which had been rebuilt by the rebels since its destruction in February. The force was commanded by Captain Otway Mayne.



The Medical VC Grove, National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire.

# Jersey's Medical VC

When almost at the bottom of the hill two seemingly abandoned stockades suddenly burst into tremendous fire.

One of the first to fall was 2nd Lieutenant Michel, leading the main party forward. Forced to withdraw, the troops pulled back with Michel's body but he still remained exposed to the Chin fire.

Private Charles Crampion fetched Le Quesne to treat Michel's wounds. He dressed the wounds aided by Crampion and two Gurkhas, all the time under constant Chin fire. After about ten minutes Le Quesne and his helpers brought Michel's body under cover. Observing this brave act, from a position about thirty yards away, was Captain Mayne, who himself was wounded.

Le Quesne now dashed across the fire swept hillside to Mayne's side and commenced dressing his wounds, at which point he himself was wounded. Mayne's own statement testifies to the bravery of Le Quesne.





# Jersey's Medical VC

"The splendid coolness and gallantry displayed by Surgeon Le Quesne in attending to the wounded, he himself being exposed during the whole time to a very hot fire, under which several men dropped; this was more especially the case while attending to 2nd Lieutenant Michel, owing to his extremely exposed position. I consider that Surgeon Le Quesne's conduct is deserving of the highest possible recognition."

By now some eleven officers and men had been killed and with only two doolies, Captain Westmoreland, on whom command now rested, decided that withdrawal was the only option. This, the force did, leaving Tartan burning once again. Some days later a force returned again to the scene of the action and destroyed the now unoccupied stockades

Medical Staff ...	Surgeon Ferdinand Simeon Le Quesne	Displayed conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty during the attack on the village of Tartan, by a Column of the Chin Field Force, on the 4th May last, in having remained for the space of about ten minutes, in a very exposed position (within five yards of the loop-holed stockade from which the enemy were firing), dressing with perfect coolness and self-possession the wounds from which Second Lieutenant Michel, Norfolk Regiment, shortly afterwards died. Surgeon Le Quesne was himself severely wounded later on whilst attending to the wounds of another Officer
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# Jersey's Medical VC



The Victoria Cross was presented to him by General B L Gordon at Rangoon in December 1889.

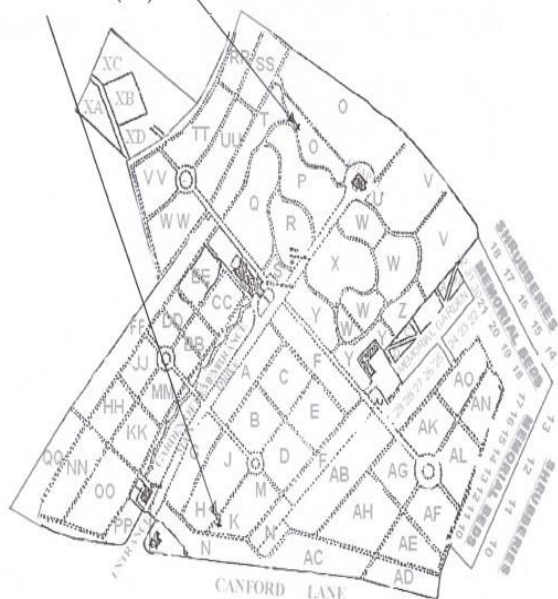
Ferdinand recovered from his wounds and took part in further actions in Burma, including with the Chin Lushai Field Force in 1890, the Wuntho Field Force in 1891 and the Kaukwee Expedition. He was awarded the Indian General Service Medal 1854-95 with three clasps and was further Mentioned in Despatches. After a year in England from 1893 to 1894 India beckoned again and he saw service in Bengal until 1900 and then the Punjab until 1901, during which time he was promoted to the rank of Major, in May 1898.

Canford Cemetery

Ferdinand LE QUESNE VC (405)

Manley JAMES VC (949)

Frederick BELL VC (502)



Ferdinand served in the Boer War from November 1901, and was awarded the Queens South Africa Medal with clasps for Cape Colony, 1901 and 1902 and was once again Mentioned in Despatches.

After two years in England, he returned to Bengal until 1909, having been promoted to Lt Colonel. In 1914, he joined the British Expeditionary Force at the outbreak of WWI, but little is known of his service.

Grave Photo and Cemetery Map courtesy of Kevin Brazier

# Jersey's Medical VC

Just before his death, he returned to Jersey and visited the Societe Jersiaise informing them that he would bequeath to them his medals. Ferdinand died on 14 April 1950, aged 86 at 6 Victoria Square, Clifton, Bristol. He was buried at Canford Cemetery, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol, on 19 April 1950.

In the 1980's an employee of the Societe Jersiaise stole his medal and defaced the reverse of it, erasing the details. Luckily it was recovered and together with his medal set is on display in the Jersey Museum. Sadly, however, without any information as to the life and actions of this very brave Jersey doctor.

It is rather a coincidence that the Chin Hills, in what is now Myanmar, and its people are well known to us in Jersey these past 30 or so years through my Aunt Nettie, Genette Dagtoglou. She funded the medical degree of Dr Sasa, and via the charity Health and Hope UK, primary medicine and aid reaches the population. Substantial funding has been made over the years by the people of Jersey and the Jersey Overseas Aid Commission.

The plight of the Chin people today is particularly grim especially since last year's coup and the re-imprisonment of Dau Aung San Suu Kyi, who has long standing connections and support in Jersey.



# Timothy O'Hea VC



A Victoria Cross tale where the recipient was a man of mystery both in life and in death – the only VC awarded on Canadian soil and the only VC not awarded for “gallantry in the presence of the enemy”.

Timothy O'Hea was born in 1846 in Schull, Bantry, County Cork, Ireland. Little is known about his early life and childhood. At the age of 19 he enlisted in the Prince Consort's Own Rifle Brigade, and was posted with his Regiment to Canada in 1866 during the height of the Fenian troubles.



On the night of 9<sup>th</sup> June 1866, a truck, loaded with gunpowder and attached to a passenger train carrying 800 German migrants, caught fire. O'Hea, who was one of four soldiers escorting the ammunition, gave the alarm, and called for help. He was urged to stand back, but instead found a bucket, water and a ladder which he mounted 19 times and single-handed put out the fire after nearly an hour of effort.

A military board recommended O'Hea for the Victoria Cross; he was gazetted on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1867.



# Timothy O’Hea VC



Recent changes in the regulations allowed the award to be made in peacetime “for conspicuous courage under the circumstances of great danger.”

It is believed that O’Hea received his Victoria Cross whilst still in Canada. He soon left the Army and travelled to New Zealand where he served in the Mounted Constabulary. He moved to Sydney, Australia in June 1874 and two days later begged to join Andrew Hume, who had just been released from prison to substantiate his claim that a survivor of the Leichhardt Expedition of 1848 was living with Aborigines in North West Australia. Hume arranged that O’Hea could meet him at Maitland. They were joined by an English ex-soldier Lewis Thompson and began to travel across Queensland.

# Timothy O'Hea VC

The party then spent six weeks at Thargomindah Station owned by V.J. Dowling, who was absent. The expedition chose not to wait for Dowling to return, and left Nockatunga Station on 1 November 1874. The next day they headed for Cooper's Creek and camped at Graham's Creek., where Hume refused to allow O'Hea to fill the large water bags.

Unaware that Cooper's Creek after running north and south to Naccowlah suddenly turned west to the South Australian border, Hume travelled parallel to it. Despite a despite search they were running low on water and after 3 days Hume decided to return to Graham's Creek. On 6 November, O'Hea collapsed and Thompson left the others to find water, which he found and staggered back to Nockatunga. A search party found Hume's body and O'Hea's body was later believed to be found by Aborigines.

O'Hea was buried at Nockatunga Station. He had left his Victoria Cross with the brother in law of the man who financed the expedition, F. E. De Faur. De Faur presented the medal to the Art Gallery of New South Wales, where it lay in a drawer for 75 years. It was "discovered" in 1950 and was given to Field Marshal Lord Wilson, Colonel-in-Chief of the Rifle Brigade rather than be given to Canada. The medal was then placed at the Regimental Museum in Winchester, Hampshire.



In more recent times, there was a theory that O'Hea was not present in the Expedition, and had returned to Ireland, and the man who died was in fact Timothy's brother John.

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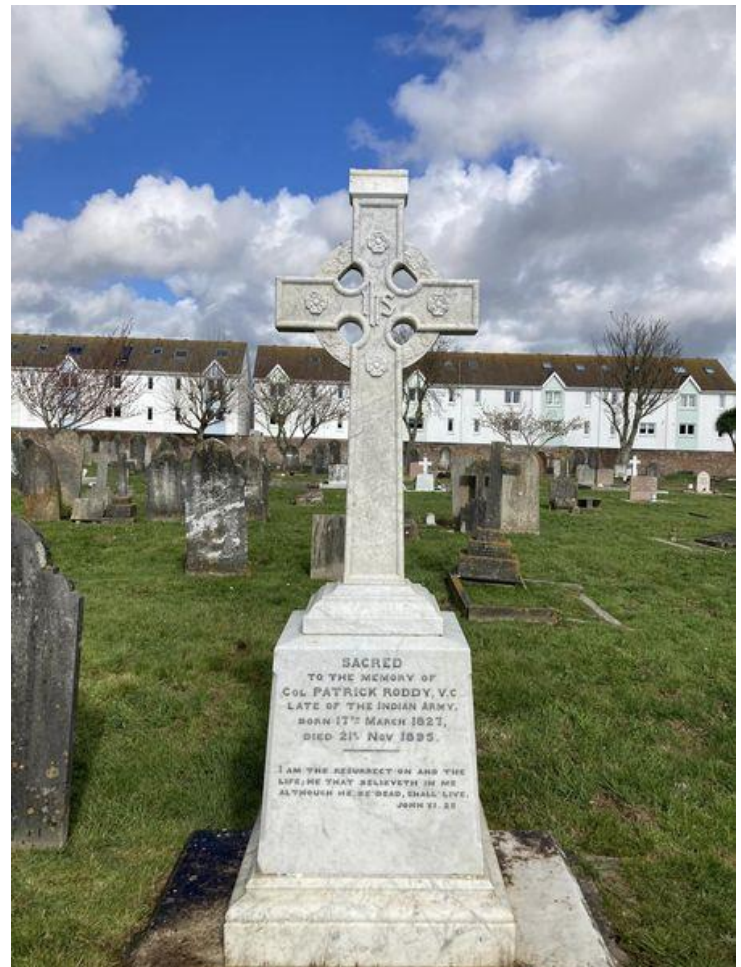


# Grave Restorations

Support Steve's work at <https://www.militarygraverestorer.org.uk/>

**Military Grave Restorer Steve Davies continues to be extremely busy doing his sterling work in the restoration of military graves around the UK. Steve's work covers all the final resting places of many military figures not just recipients of the Victoria Cross. In a recent trip to the island of Jersey, Steve found himself quickly immersed in turning the holiday into a "busman's" one and was involved in restoring two of the island's VC recipients graves. Below are the before and after photographs of the grave of Patrick Roddy VC. Steve has also completed some work on the grave of Jack Counter VC and photographs of this will appear in a later issue. If you wish to read more about Patrick Roddy's story -**

**<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/patrick-roddy-vc/>**



Support Steve's work at <https://www.militarygraverestorer.org.uk/>