

THE WAR IN BURMA - TWO MORE VCs

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Introduction

The Award of the Victoria Cross to Surgeon Captain Ferdinand LeQuesne after the attack on the village of Tartan during the Kachin Hills expedition of 1893 in the series of wars in Burma has been described previously [1]. This article describes the award of two further Victoria Crosses during the Third Burmese War to Surgeon Owen Edward Pennyfather Lloyd and Surgeon John Crimmin

Owen Edward Pennefather Lloyd

Owen Lloyd was born on 1st January 1854, the son of Major M Pennefather Lloyd, 59th Regiment, of County Roscommon. He was educated at Fermoy College and Queens University Cork graduating LRCP and LRCS (Edinburgh) in 1877 [2]. Commissioned as a Surgeon in the Army Medical Department on 4th August 1878 he served in England until 12th June 1879 when he set sail for the Cape of Good Hope. He served in the Zulu War and was awarded the medal and clasp '1879' and on the cessation of the Zulu war took part in the force under Sir Garnet Wolseley to capture King Sekukuni in Eastern Transvaal. Surgeon Lloyd joined the force on 3rd November 1879 and was attached to the 1st Bearer Company under command of Surgeon Major James Hector. Lloyd had a good knowledge of Bearer Company Drill as his reports confirm, so Hector was glad to have him as an instructor to the men in stretcher exercises [3]. He accompanied Hector and half the force that set off to attack Sekukuni's Town. In the ensuing action he *'showed courage, zeal and energy in the discharge of his duties'* and after the action he was left in charge of the Bearer Company when Hector was ordered to return to Headquarters [3].

A year later Lloyd found himself still on the African Continent but fighting a different enemy; the Boers. He was amongst those besieged in the small town of Standerton during a siege which lasted 88 days and during which he was in medical charge of the town. During the siege there was both disease and wounds to deal with but luckily small in numbers. The town was relieved when peace was declared on 26th March 1881 [4].

Lloyd, now a seasoned campaigner, returned to England for a year, in January 1882 and then left for Ceylon, where he stayed for three years. He then returned to England for a further twenty-one months, followed by a posting to the West Coast of Africa in December 1887 until March 1889. During this period he was censured for alleged carelessness in attendance on married families [5]. After a further brief period at home, on 17th December 1889 he once again sailed for the Indian sub continent, where on 4th August 1890 he was promoted to Surgeon Major, Medical Staff [5].

On 6th January 1893 Lloyd was part of the garrison of Sima Post, in the Kachin Hills. The garrison consisted of 275 men

of the Magwe and Mogoung Military Police Battalions, commanded by Captain Morton and with Lieutenant WH Dent, 2nd Battalion Yorkshire Regiment, as Intelligence Officer. At approximately 2am an outlying picket spotted two Kachins creeping up the Kamja road and opened fire on them. There was no further movement or activity until 7am when Kachins, numbering about 500, who had taken up positions under cover of darkness, opened fire and attacked the Post on three sides.

Lloyd was directed by Captain Morton to go to the south-west side of the post and take charge of the defence as Dent was on the sick list and confined to his bed. This area was under intense enemy fire and in danger of being overrun by Kachins. Lloyd sent word of the precarious situation to Captain Morton who came over and ordered a party to proceed outside the post and attempt to drive the Kachins away. Morton, accompanied by Bugler Purna Singh, then left by the south gate of the post to visit an outlying picket some 80 paces across open ground. He had not gone far when he was wounded in the abdomen and fell to the ground. Lloyd, on hearing of this ran out of the Post to Morton's aid and found him lying fatally wounded in the arms of his bugler. With the enemy close-by and keeping up an intense fire, which killed three of the picket, Lloyd called for help to carry the body back into the post. A Subadar and five men of the Magwe battalion quickly responded but as they crossed the open ground the bugler was killed and Morton, wounded in the abdomen for a second time died, as they reached the cover of the Post (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Surgeon Major Lloyd treats Captain Morton.

The fighting continued for some time until the Kachins were eventually driven back from the jungle surrounding the Post. The fort was now under command of Lloyd, although Dent had dragged himself from his sick bed and rendered valuable assistance during the fighting. The garrison was eventually relieved at about mid day [6].

The native troops were all rewarded with the Indian Order of Merit and Lloyd's award of the Victoria Cross appeared in the *London Gazette* of 2nd January 1894.

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Figure 2. OEP Lloyd in full dress uniform.

During the attack in the Sima Post by Kachins, on the 6th January 1893, Surgeon Major Lloyd, on hearing that the Commanding Officer, Capt Morton (who had left the fort to visit a picket about eighty yards distance) was wounded, at once ran out to his assistance under a close and heavy fire, accompanied by Subadar Major Singh. On reaching the wounded officer, Surgeon Major Lloyd sent Subadar Major Singh back for further assistance, and remained

with Captain Morton till the Subadar returned with five men of the Magwe battalion of Military Police, when he assisted in carrying Captain Morton back to the fort, where that officer died in a few minutes afterwards. The enemy were within ten or fifteen paces, keeping up a heavy fire, which killed three men of the picket, and also Bugler Purna Singh. This man accompanied Captain Morton from the fort, showed great gallantry in supporting him in his arms when wounded, and was shot while helping to carry him back to the fort. He took command of the fort after the death of Captain Morton, Officer Commanding.

Except for three months leave in England in 1898, Lloyd remained in India until July 1905, during which time he served as medical Officer to the Franco-British Boundary Commission on the Mekong River in 1894-95 and the British-Chinese Boundary Commission on the Burmese Frontier in 1898-99. On 4th August 1898 he was promoted Lieutenant Colonel RAMC (Figure 2).

When he returned to England in 1905 he was appointed Senior Medical Officer of Dover Garrison, having been promoted Colonel on 22nd April 1905 but the wilds of India beckoned again and he returned there in March 1906 as Principal Medical Officer to the Bareilly Brigade and was appointed Honorary Surgeon to the Viceroy.

He was noted for being a keen shot and in 1897 was credited for shooting 150 head of big game. Despite his hunting skills he was a vegetarian.

Promoted Surgeon General on 17th November 1909, he served in South Africa until December 1913, during which time he was created a Companion of the Order of the Bath in 1910. He eventually retired from the army on 1st January 1914. He was not to enjoy retirement for long, being 'taken into temporary employment on full pay on account of the national emergency' on 22 January 1915 and was employed as Deputy Director Medical Services, Southern Command and was 'Brought to the notice of the Secretary of State for War for valuable services rendered in connection with the war'[5].

From 1922 until 1924 he was Colonel Commandant R.A.M.C. and created a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath in 1923. He married Florence, daughter of Captain and Lady Louisa Morgan and they had one son and daughter. Owen Lloyd died on 5th July 1941 at St Leonards-on-Sea, aged 87 years. He was buried in his son's grave in Kensal Green Cemetery, West London (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The medal group belonging to OEP Lloyd on display in the AMS Museum.



Figure 4. Surgeon John Crimmin defends the wounded.

John Crimmin

John Crimmin was born on 19th March 1859 in Dublin and qualified LRCP, LRCS (Ireland) in 1879 and then D.P.H. some time afterwards. He entered the Indian Medical Service as a Surgeon in September 1882 [7].

He served during the Burma Campaign of 1886-8 gaining the medal with clasp and then with the Karen Field Force as Senior Medical Officer during the years 1888-89.

It was the action near Lwekaw in eastern Karenni that was to result in the award of the Victoria Cross on 1st January 1889. Crimmin was the Medical Officer attached to the 27th Bombay Infantry who were engaged in an intense and close fight with a large Karen Force. With men falling all around him Crimmin was doing his utmost to treat the wounded despite the enemy directing their fire at him but Crimmin continued to render aid to the wounded. On another occasion, whilst the 27th were driving the Karens from bamboo and trees, Crimmin was treating a wounded infantryman, Private Saiful Khan, when he was attacked by several Karens, Crimmin drew his sword and thrust it into one Karen and then attacked another, defending the wounded man (Figure 4) [8]. Crimmin was mentioned in despatches in the *London Gazette* of 25th November 1889 and the *London Gazette* of 17th September 1889 gave notice of the award of the Victoria Cross.

John Crimmin, Surgeon, Bombay Medical Service. Lieut Tighe, 27th Bombay Infantry (to mounted infantry of which corps Surgeon Crimmin was attached), states that in the action near Lwekaw, Eastern Karenni, on the 1st Jan 1889, four men charged with him into the midst of a large body of the enemy who were moving off from the Karen left flank, and two men fell to the ground wounded. He saw Surgeon Crimmin attending one of the men about two hundred yards to the rear. Karens were round the party in every direction, and he saw several fire at Surgeon Crimmin and the wounded man. A Sepoy then galloped up to Surgeon Crimmin, and the latter joined the fighting line, which then came up. Lieut Tighe further states that very shortly afterwards they were engaged in driving the enemy from small clumps of trees and bamboo, in which the Karens took shelter. Near one of these clumps he saw Surgeon Crimmin attending a wounded man. Several Karens rushed out at him. Surgeon Crimmin thrust his sword through one of them and attacked a second; a third Karen then dropped from the fire of a Sepoy. The remaining Karens fled.

On 30th September 1894 he was promoted to Surgeon Major and Lieutenant Colonel on 30th September 1902. He was created a Companion of the Indian Empire on 1st January 1901. Some time after he retired from the active list and became the Civil Surgeon at Rutnagherry and then Health Officer for the Port of Bombay. On 24th March 1911 he was awarded the Volunteer Decoration and promoted to Colonel on 26th October 1913 having been created a Companion of the Order of the Bath on 3rd June 1913. During the First World War he served on the North-West Frontier as Assistant Director of Medical Services of the Kohat Brigade and was appointed Honorary Physician to the King on 18th February 1916.

Crimmin retired on 27th March 1919 and took up residence initially in Croydon and then in Somerset. He died on 20th February 1945 aged 85 years, at Wells Somerset and was buried in Wells Cemetery. He left three daughters and three sons, including Colonel George William Crimmin OBE RAMC [9].

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