

The Indian Mutiny – Part 2

PH Starling

Director, AMS Museum, Keogh Barracks, Ash Vale

Lucknow

Lucknow sits as the capital of Oudh and was the home of the British Resident. To the mutineers it symbolised British rule and so they directed their attention to it.

The Chief Commissioner had spent most of his life in India and aware of the trouble brewing amongst the native troops had prepared for the eventuality of troubles. His force numbered 1730 men plus civilians and non-combatants. Once the Commissioner heard of the mutiny he immediately disarmed his Sepoy forces and drove them out of the city which he then prepared for the arrival of the mutineers. Over the next few months the city was besieged with the Residency becoming the centre of resistance.

A relief force set out for Lucknow in July and after capturing Cownpore en route, had to wait there for reinforcements. By 23rd September the relief column was just a few miles south of Lucknow and prepared to assault the city and relieve the Residency which it did, two days later. By now the relief column itself was severely depleted and found itself besieged in the Residency; this lasted a further six weeks. On 12th November, a further relief column approached the Residency and by 19th November had broken through and began to evacuate it [1].

Marching in that first relief column were the 78th Highlanders who had as their Surgeon, Joseph Jee with Valentine McMaster as an Assistant Surgeon.

Joseph Jee

Joseph Jee was born on 9th February 1819 at Hartshill, Warwickshire, the son of Christopher Preston Jee. His education took place in universities in London, Edinburgh and the Ecole de Medecine, Paris, eventually qualifying as a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons (MRCS) in 1841. On April 15th 1842 he applied for and was appointed as Assistant Surgeon 57th Foot. He exchanged into 15th Dragoons on 22nd December 1843. On the 23rd June 1854 he was appointed Surgeon, 78th Foot [2]

It was with the 78th that he took part in the Persian Campaign of 1857 and during the battle of Kooshat he had his charger shot from under him [3]. On 10th May the regiment sailed for India and were greeted on their arrival at Bombay on 22nd May by news of the mutiny. They marched towards Allahabad and first encountered the rebels on 12th July at Futtehpore but not before the regiment had lost men along the route to heat stroke [3].

On entering Cownpore, Jee would have witnessed the distressing sites of the massacred English women and children. Disease did not allow the 78th to advance straight away on Lucknow but they awaited reinforcements in Cownpore where Cholera claimed more lives. Finally on 25th September the 78th were before Lucknow and it was on that date that Joseph Jee would earn himself the nation's highest award for gallantry.

General Outram had directed that dhoolies carrying the wounded should be moved through the city under the charge of Surgeon Jee accompanied by Surgeon Home of the 90th Regiment. Despite having a guide they got lost in the maze of narrow streets and eventually found themselves in a large square and were immediately fired on from all sides, many of the dhoolie bearers being killed and the others fleeing. The survivors took refuge in a large house and were besieged by between 500-1000 mutineers. After a long night they were eventually rescued the next day [4].

His citation for the award of the Victoria Cross best describes the action (Figure 1):



Figure 1 Surgeon Joseph Jee tending to the wounded at Lucknow 1857

“For most conspicuous gallantry and important services on the entry of the late Major-General Havelock’s relieving force into Lucknow, on 25 September 1857, in having, during action (when the 78th Highlanders, then in possession of the Char Bagh, captured two 9 pounders at the point of the bayonet), by great exertion and devoted exposure, attended to the large number of men wounded in the charge, whom he succeeded in getting removed on cots and on the backs of comrades, until he had collected the dhooly-bearers who had fled. Subsequently on the same day, in endeavouring to reach the Residency with wounded men, Surgeon Jee became besieged by an overwhelming force in the Mote Mehal, where he remained during the whole night and the following morning, voluntarily and repeatedly exposing himself to a heavy fire in proceeding to dress the wounded men who fell while serving a 24 pounder in a most exposed position. He eventually succeeded in taking many of the wounded through a cross fire of ordnance and musketry safely into the residency by the river-bank, although repeatedly warned not to make the perilous attempt” [5].

Appointed a Commander of the Order of the Bath in 1859, Jee met and married Norah Carola Riley in 1860. He continued to serve with the 78th until 20th September 1864 when he transferred to the 1st Dragoons and served with them for three and a half years until March 1868 when he was promoted Deputy Inspector General of Hospitals and was placed on Half Pay

Corresponding Author: Captain (Retd) PH Starling MA, DHMSA, FRHistS; Director - Army Medical Services Museum, Keogh Barracks, Ash Vale, Aldershot GU12 5RQ
Tel: 01252 868820 Fax: 01252 868832
Email: armymedicalmuseum@btinternet.com

(Figure 2). He remained on Half Pay until his death on 17 March 1899. In his latter years he had enjoyed field sports of shooting and salmon fishing and had won trophies for his shooting. He died at his home, Quenilborough Hall, Queensborough, near Leicester, aged 80 years. That same year he had been appointed Honorary Surgeon to the Queen [2,3].

His VC and other medals are on display in the AMS Museum.



Figure 2 Portrait of Jee in later years

Valantine Munbee McMaster

One of Jee's Assistant Surgeons was Valantine McMaster and he would be the second doctor to be awarded a Victoria Cross on 25th September for the action at the Residency.

Valantine Munbee McMaster was born on 16 May 1834 in Trichinopoly, Madras India where his father was serving as a Major in the 6th Native Infantry. He would eventually return to England to begin his education, The 1841 census shows him living with his mother and siblings in Edinburgh. The 1851 census shows him living at 2/2 Salisbury Square, Edinburgh, aged 16 and a student of medicine. On 27th March 1855 he was appointed an Assistant Surgeon 78th Foot having qualified as a Licentiate of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh [6]. He served with the regiment in the Persian Campaign of 1856-7 and was present at both the actions at Kooshab and Mohamrah [4]. With the return of the 78th to India, McMaster accompanied them on its advance towards Lucknow.

With Surgeon Jee, on 25 September, he took part in the relief of Lucknow (Figure 3). According to the regimental history McMaster did not confine himself to his medical duties:

"Lieutenant Kirby was mortally wounded in the final advance while gallantly waiving the Queen's Colour which he had carried throughout the action. On his fall Sergeant Reid of the Grenadier Company seized the Colour and carried it for some distance, when Assistant Surgeon McMaster took it from him and took it nearly up to the Bailey Guard Gate when he handed it over to Colour Sergeant Christie" [4].

The Victoria Cross was conferred on the 78th who were required to nominate an individual to receive and wear it. It was unanimously agreed that it should be awarded to McMaster [4].

"For the intrepidity with which he exposed himself to the fire of the enemy, in bringing in and attending to the wounded on 25th Sept., at Lucknow" [7]



Figure 3 Assistant Surgeon McMaster in the action for which he was awarded the VC – Lucknow 1857

The regiment had 57 killed and wounded during the attack on 25th September [8]. During the ensuing siege which lasted until November McMaster, at times, commanded detachments of men in the defences of the Residency and at some time was wounded.

On 18th May 1859 the Regiment embarked for England and in September 1860 McMaster had transferred to the 6th Dragoons [6]. The Quartermaster of the regiment was Charles Wooden who had been awarded a Victoria Cross along with Surgeon Mouat for the rescue of Captain William Morris, after the charge of the Light Brigade in October 1854 [9]; McMaster also qualified MD at Edinburgh the same year.

After four years with 6th Dragoons McMaster moved to the 18th Hussars for four years, all this time on the Indian subcontinent once again. After a year as a Staff Surgeon he rejoined the 78th on 6th March 1869 and went to Canada and Nova Scotia (Figure 4), returning to Ireland with the regiment in January 1872, where it was stationed at North Queen Street Barracks, Belfast [6].

Soon after his return, on 22nd January 1872, Valentine McMaster died in Belfast of heart disease, aged thirty eight years. He was buried in Belfast City Cemetery and a memorial was erected in St. Columb's Cathedral.

His Victoria Cross is on display in the National War Museum of Scotland.



Figure 4 McMaster in later years wearing his Victoria Cross

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