

Curragh History Archives



A Curragh V.C.

The story of how a rare Victorian Cross was found on The Curragh Plains and the background to the man who won it.

No. 1584 Sergeant Joseph Ward VC **8th King's Royal Irish Hussars**



Joseph Ward VC (1832 - 23 November 1872) was born in Kinsale, County Cork, and was an Irish recipient of the Victoria Cross, the highest and most prestigious award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces.

Ward was about 26 years old, and a sergeant in the 8th King's Royal Irish Hussars, British Army during the Indian Mutiny when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the VC. On 17 June 1858 at Gwalior, India, Sergeant Ward - together with Captain Clement Walker Heneage, Farrier George Hollis and Private John Pearson - was in a charge made by a squadron of the 8th Hussars when, supported by a division of the Bombay Horse Artillery and the 95th Regiment, they routed the enemy and captured two of the enemy's guns.

Curragh History Archives

Their citation read:

8th Hussars

Selected for the Victoria Cross by their companions in the gallant charge made by a squadron of the Regiment at Gwalior, on the 17th of June, 1858, when, supported by a division of the Bombay Horse Artillery, and Her Majesty's 95th Regiment, they routed the enemy, who were advancing against Brigadier Smith's position, charged through the rebel camp into two batteries, capturing and bringing into their camp two of the enemy's guns, under a heavy and converging fire from the Fort and Towa.

(Field Force Orders by Major-General Sir Hugh Henry Rose, G.C.B., Commanding Central India Field Force, dated Camp, Gwalior, 28th June, 1858.



8th King's Royal Irish Hussars (1850)

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8th King's Royal Irish Hussars

The Curragh Connection

My visitor had a story to tell. He had been out for a Sunday afternoon walk on the Curragh plains near to a veterinary surgeons house, when he noticed something on the edge of a hoof-print in the soft ground. On picking it up, and cleaning off the mud he saw that it was an old army-type medal. At home he washed it in warm water, and the cross shape became clear. He wanted to know if it was of any interest or value.

The medal was very easy to identify as a Victoria cross without a cross bar or ribbon and slightly hollowed in its centre by some blow. The first question was if it was genuine.

Curragh History Archives

I contacted the British Embassy, and the military attaché gave me the address of Hanthingys in London where the medals have always been made.

They could verify it and give details of its age upon examination.

It turned out to be of very early vintage and was one of the 1850's Indian Mutiny era. The next step was to visit the V.C. and G.C. Association offices, where records of awards are retained. V.C.'s had been fairly generously awarded at that time, but the location of most are known. Four medals were awarded to the 8th Royal Irish Hussars on one day for an outstanding charge which decided the outcome of an important battle; not to individuals. It was decided who was to get the award by drawing lots. Three of the crosses were accounted for, the other had been held by a Sgt. Ward. He returned to Ireland and served for a time on the Curragh! He was reduced to the ranks for drunkenness and sent to a militia in Cavan, where he died, age 45, and is buried.

The house near which the cross was found had been a public house at the time, and since soldiers then wore their medals at all times, it may have been lost on a dark and unsteady journey back to barracks of a winters night.

The agent in Ireland for the British Cavalry museum contacted me and came to view the medal. He had served in the 8th Hussars in Korea. They offered to buy it since they did not have a V.C. in their collection, but its owner did not accept their offer.

Some months went by and one afternoon the T.V. programme "Live at Three" was reporting on an antiques fair being held in Dublin. At the end of the show the most unusual item was unveiled from under a top hat and there in lone splendour was the Victoria Cross of farrier Sergeant Ward. It had been sold for over £5,000.

I have been told that all these crosses have been cast from captured bronze Russian cannon barrels taken in the Crimean War. The award was initiated by a then very young Queen Victoria at the time of that war.

An article from John Faulkner regarding an interesting find on the Curragh.