

William McBean, V.C. 1819-1878

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Army officer

One of two holders of the Victoria Cross remembered in the Grange Cemetery, William McBean was not a typical senior army officer of the Victorian period. He was born in Inverness on 1 January 1819, the elder son of John McBean, a shoemaker, and his wife Ann Gordon. He enlisted in the 93rd Highlanders in 1835 aged 16 and served in Canada where the regiment was based 1838-48.

The 93rd saw active service in the Crimea in 1854-56. McBean, by then a colour sergeant, was gazetted as an Ensign in August 1854 and a Lieutenant in December 1854. He served as Adjutant from early 1855 until his promotion to Captain in April 1858 and then Major in 1860. He was present at the battle of Alma (September 1854) and the siege of Sevastopol but missed Balaclava (October 1854) having been left in charge of men invalided to Varna.

After a year at home in Scotland the 93rd left for China in June 1857 but were diverted to India because of the Indian Mutiny. They arrived in Calcutta in time to take part in the relief of Lucknow and the defeat of rebels based in Cawnpore before returning to re-capture Lucknow in March 1858. It was on 11 March, during an assault on a strongly garrisoned fort there, that McBean won the V.C. "For distinguished personal bravery in killing eleven of the enemy with his own hand in the main breach of the Begum Bagh at Lucknow". The regiment remained in India until 1870 but McBean returned home in 1869 due to ill-health.

Back in Scotland McBean married Victoria Beveridge in Kirkcaldy on 28 July 1870. Sadly, in September 1871, she gave birth to a son but died soon afterwards of Puerperal Peritonitis, aged 27, and was followed to the grave in November by her two month old child.



The Graphic, 3 August 1878, p. 12

McBean was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel in 1873 and commanded the regiment from late 1873 until he retired in February 1878 and was promoted to the honorary rank of Major General. However, a bad fall from a horse led to gangrene and his relatively early death on 22 June 1878, aged 59.

Photo by Thomas Stewart: McBean's medals at Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders Museum, Stirling Castle

