

General Sir Sam Browne



Samuel James Browne was born on 3 October 1824 in Barrackpore in West Bengal, India. The town is located in the Brahmaputra-Ganges delta region on the eastern bank of the Ganges about 25 kilometres from Kolkata (Calcutta). The town was a military and administrative centre under British rule and the name derives from the English word 'barracks'.

He was the son of Dr John Browne, a surgeon in the Bengal Medical Service and his wife Charlotte (née Swinton).

Samuel Browne joined the 46th Bengal Native Infantry as a subaltern, participating in action at Ramnuggar, Sadoolapore, Chillianwalla and Gujarat. In 1849 he was made a Lieutenant and tasked with raising a cavalry force to be designated the 2nd Punjab Irregular Cavalry and later incorporated into the regular force. He commanded that unit for the next five years and led them in several engagements. He was decorated for action during the Bozdar Expedition in 1857, being promoted to Captain. In 1904, three years after his death, the unit was re-designated as the 22nd Sam Browne's Cavalry (Frontier Force) in his honour.

He won the Victoria Cross on 31 August 1858 at Seerporah, India, in an engagement with the rebels. Captain Browne, whilst advancing upon the enemy's position, pushed on with one Sowar, a mounted orderly, upon a nine-pounder gun and attacked the gunners, preventing them from re-loading and firing on the infantry who were advancing to attack. In the conflict which ensued Captain Browne received two sword cuts, one on the left knee and another which severed his left arm at the shoulder, but not before he had cut down one of his assailants. The gun was eventually captured and the gunners killed.

Samuel Browne's Victoria Cross is on display at the National Army Museum in Central London adjacent to the Chelsea Hospital, home of the Chelsea Pensioners.

He carried on serving in the army but the loss of his left arm caused him great difficulty in drawing his officer's sword. Previously he would have held the scabbard with his left hand and drawn the sword with his right hand but after his loss he could not have done that. Sometime after this incident he devised and began to wear the belt which bears his name, incorporating an additional belt round the waist to secure the scabbard.

Later the wearing of the Sam Browne belt would be adopted by other officers who knew him in India, but it was not to come into common use in the British Army until after his retirement. Browne's original belt is now on public display in the India Room of the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst.

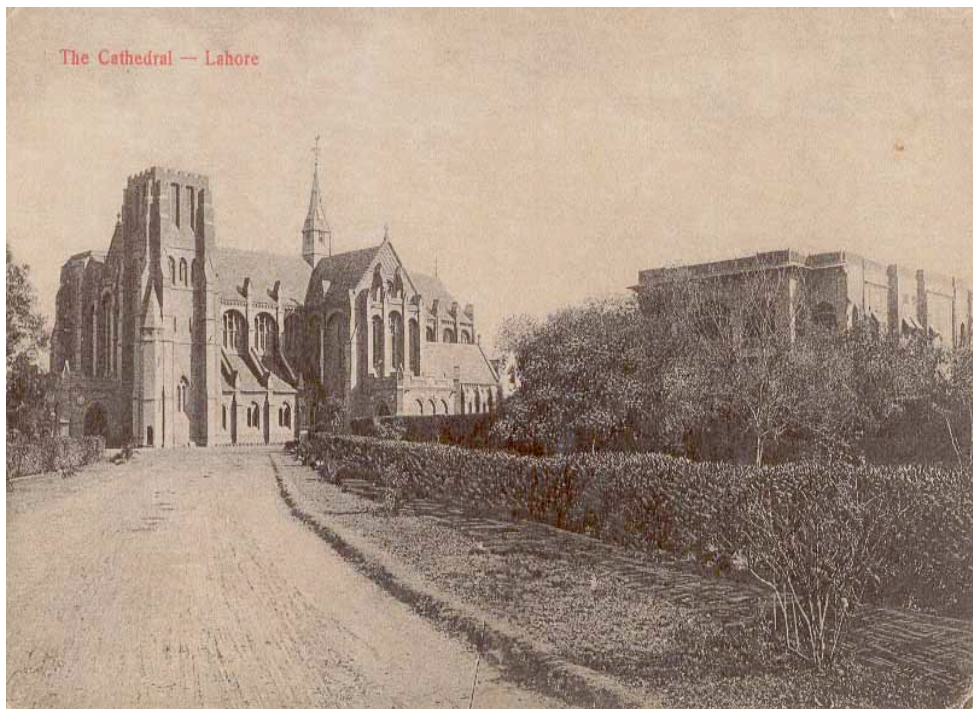
In 1878, as commander of the Peshawar Field Force during the Second Afghan War, Browne brought sixteen thousand troops and forty eight guns to the Khyber Pass. After capturing the key fortress of Ali Masjid, which commanded its entry, he proceeded through the Pass and captured Jalalabad. Browne was made a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath for this action.

Samuel Browne was promoted to General in 1888, and awarded the Order of the Bath's Grand Cross in 1891.

He retired from the army in 1898, moved to Ryde on the Isle of Wight where he died on the 14 March 1901 at the age of seventy four. His remains were cremated at Woking but there is a memorial in Ryde Cemetery as well as plaques in St Paul's Cathedral and Lahore Cathedral.

General Sir Samuel Browne
Memorial Tablet at Lahore Cathedral, India

"To the glory of God and in perpetual memory of General Sir Samuel James Browne, V.C., G.C.B., K.C.S.I. a distinguished soldier of the Indian Army, this tablet is erected by friends who loved and comrades who trusted him. Born 3rd Oct. 1824. Died 14th Mar. 1901. With 46th Bengal Native Infantry at Ramnuggar, Sadoolapore, Chillianwalla, Gujerat. With 2nd Punjab Cavalry on North-West Frontier, 1852-1857, at Lucknow 1858. Koorsi Rooyah, Aligange, Sirpoora. Commanded Peshawar Field Force 1878-1879, Ali Musjid 1878."



Postcard of Lahore Cathedral

General Sir Samuel Browne medals



*VC and medal group awarded to General Sir Sam Browne.
NAM 1999-09-55 National Army Museum
Royal Hospital Road, Chelsea, London. SW3 4HT*

"Sam Browne (1824-1901) was born in India, the son of a surgeon of the Bengal Army. He joined the East India Company's Army as an Ensign in the 46th Regiment of Bengal Native Infantry and served throughout the Second Sikh War (1848-1849) and in campaigns on the North West Frontier, where he commanded the 2nd Punjab Cavalry. During the Indian Mutiny (1857-1859) Browne received the VC for his bravery at Seerporah on 31 August 1858, when he led a successful attack on the enemy guns, engaging in hand to hand combat. During the struggle he was severely wounded and lost his left arm.

Browne went on to command the Punjab Cavalry and the Corps of Guides before playing a distinguished part in the Second Afghan War (1878-1880). While commanding the 1st Division of the Peshawar Field Force, he captured the Ali Musjid fortress and forced the Khyber Pass. For these services he was appointed a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath in 1879 and received the thanks of Parliament.

Browne later reached the rank of General and is famous for inventing the 'Sam Browne' belt. The latter made it easier for him to carry and use a sword and pistol after his injury."

Information from www.national-army-museum.ac.uk/exhibitions/vc