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# Headstone for pauper VC grave

By Tim Butcher, Defence Correspondent

A BRITISH soldier who died a pauper after winning the Victoria Cross during the 1857 Indian Mutiny has been honoured with a headstone over his unmarked grave.

After six months spent raising £2,000, the grave of Edward Jennings, an illiterate private from Ballinrode, Co Mayo, was formally marked.

A volley of shots was fired by members of 101 Regt, Royal Artillery, over the grave in the Preston cemetery, North Shields, Northumberland, after a brief ceremony of blessing.

Descendants of Pte Jennings who attended said they were "incredibly proud" to see him recognised with an official grave.

The headstone of black granite bore the inscription "Edward Jennings, VC, Date of Birth circa 1820, died May 10 1889, *in memoriam*." He

was the 202nd recipient of the Victoria Cross when he was honoured for saving the life of an officer being attacked by armed Sepoys during the relief of Lucknow.

Serving in the Bengal Artillery as a despatch rider, he heard an officer's cries.

"Without hesitation Jennings volunteered to go in quest, the other soldiers consenting to remain on the lookout," the official citation said.

"A high wall was no impediment to the Irish private's charger, which, but for the strong, firm arm of its rider, must have stumbled into an abyss on the other side.

"The maddened trooper shouted in the vernacular 'they are coming', on hearing which, the horde scattered and broke, not before the Irish private had cut down half a dozen of them." Jen-

nings put the wounded officer, who was bleeding from half a dozen stab wounds, on his horse and led him under an artillery barrage to safety.

"The officer confessed that, but for the timely intervention of the gallant Bengal artilleryman, he could not have held out for long," the citation said.

On visiting the officer in hospital, Jennings was presented with 1,000 rupees and was offered an immediate commission but declined as he could not read or write.

After serving 23 years in India during which he was wounded twice, Jennings returned to England aged 41 and ended his days in North Shields where he was too poor to have a headstone.

"It is an incredibly proud day for my family," said Kathleen Lough, 64, his great grand-daughter, yesterday. "We have been trying for

generations to have my great-grandfather honoured.

"I only wish my own grandfather had been alive to see it but he died in 1963.

"He had tried to have a memorial erected but was told the plot had not been bought by the family and he was refused the right even to put up a simple wooden cross. It was wonderful to see him finally get the military honours he deserved with artillerymen firing shots over his grave.

"It felt as though I had won the lottery, the feelings of pride were indescribable."

The headstone campaign was led by Phil Pike, founder of the Victoria Cross Commemoration Society, who held an exhibition this year about VCs of the North East.

When Mrs Lough saw the display, she approached Mr Pike and told him of her relative's unmarked grave.