

Captain Ram
Bahadur Limbu
VC, MVO



Captain Ram Bahadur Limbu VC, MVO
VC & GC ASSOCIATION/RORY LEWIS

HERO *of the* MONTH

by Lord Ashcroft



Gurkha Ram Bahadur Limbu with his L1A1 SLR rifle, circa 1965 KEYSTONE/GETTY

My admiration for the bravery of Gurkhas serving in the British Army over the past two centuries and longer has no limits. They have proved to be the very best soldiers: strong, disciplined, loyal and, above all, courageous. One man who exemplified all those qualities and more was Captain Ram Bahadur Limbu VC, MVO, one of just 26 recipients of the Victoria Cross in the gallantry medal's long and rich history who were either Gurkhas or British officers serving with Gurkha regiments.

Ram Bahadur Limbu was born on July 8, 1939, in the village of Chyangthapu, in eastern Nepal. He was the son of Tek bir Limbu, who had fought against the Japanese during World War Two, and his wife, Tunimaya. Life in Nepal, one of the world's poorest countries, was hard – so tough that Ram, as he was known, was one of only three children from eight siblings who survived to adulthood.

When Limbu was just eight, his father died – but not before telling his son of his wartime experiences. Such tales left a deep impression on the young boy, so much so that he resolved that one day, like his father, he would become a Gurkha soldier in the British Army. For a time as a boy, he was educated by one of his elder brothers. Later, he worked on the land as a farmer, but he was restless to do more with his life.

'Border area' skirmish

Aged 17, Limbu and two friends went to the nearest British recruiting station to join as a Gurkha soldier but without

“On November 1, 1957, Limbu joined the 10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles having passed one of the toughest selection processes in the world”

success. He then spent time in Darjeeling, India, working for a timber company. However, on November 1, 1957, and by this time 18, Limbu joined the 10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles having passed one of the toughest selection processes in the world. Limbu arrived at Sungei Patani in Malaya in early 1958 to begin his military service.

In 1961, he married Tikamaya Limbu (the surname was quite common in Nepal) and the couple quickly had two sons, who would later both serve as Gurkhas. In 1963, Limbu was promoted to lance corporal, and he served in Singapore. However, the next year he was posted to Borneo. At the time there were various tensions in southeast Asia and hostilities between Malaysia and Indonesia had spilled into open conflict often known as the Konfrontasi by early 1963 – effectively an undeclared war with Britain supporting the former country.

By 1964, Britain decided that the only way to deal with the incursions from Indonesia was to attack the positions on the Indonesian side of the border – although these acts of aggression were not publicly admitted. On November 21, 1965,

Captain Kit Maunsell (Limbu's CO) led an attack on a well-defended Indonesian position on the 50ft-high hill at Gunung Tepoi. It was on this day that Limbu, then 26, showed such outstanding bravery that he was later decorated with the VC.

A lengthy citation went with the announcement of his gallantry award in *The London Gazette* on April 22, 1966, when, for the reasons already outlined, the area of fighting was described as the “border area”. The citation described how the enemy, of platoon strength, had the advantage of being on top of a sheer-sided cliff and the only approach was along a narrow “knife edge ridge enabling only three men to move abreast”.

The citation went on to detail Limbu's gallantry: “Leading his support group in the van of the attack he could see the nearest trench and in it a sentry manning a machine gun. Determined to gain first blood, he inched himself forward until, still ten yards from his enemy, he was seen and the sentry opened fire, immediately wounding a man to his right. Rushing forward he reached the enemy trench in seconds and killed the sentry, thereby gaining for the attacking force a first but firm foothold on the objective. The enemy were now fully alert and, from their positions in depth, brought down heavy automatic fire on the attacking force, concentrating this onto the area of the trench held alone by Lance Corporal Ram Bahadur Limbu.

“Appreciating that he could not carry out his task of supporting his platoon from this position, he courageously left the comparative safety of his trench and, with a complete disregard for the hail of fire being directed at him, he got together and led his fire group to a better fire position some yards ahead. He now attempted to indicate his intentions to his



Limbu poses with his son, Bhakta, following his investiture at Buckingham Palace KEYSTONE/ALAMY



Limbu as a sergeant on parades at Wellington Barracks before marching off to Guard Duty at Buckingham Palace. He wears his VC on his chest. April 15, 1974 ERIC HARLOW/MIRRORPIX/GETTY

platoon commander by shouting and hand signals, but failing to do so in the deafening noise of exploding grenades and continuous automatic fire, he again moved out into the open and reported personally, despite the extreme dangers of being hit by the fire not only from the enemy but by his own comrades.”

Speed his only cover

At this point, Limbu noticed two of his comrades had been seriously injured. His citation continued: “Knowing that their only hope of survival was immediate first aid and that evacuation from their very exposed position so close to the enemy was vital, he at once commenced the first of his three supremely gallant attempts to rescue his comrades.

“Using what little ground cover he could find, he crawled forward – in full view of at least two machine gun posts that concentrated their fire on him and which, at this stage of the battle, could not be effectively subdued. For three full minutes he continued to move forward but when almost able to touch the nearest casualty, he was driven back by the accurate and intense weight of fire covering his line of approach. After a pause, he again started to crawl forward, but he soon realised only

“I didn’t think I was going to be shot. All I cared about was rescuing my friends”

speed would give him the cover which the ground could not.

“Rushing forward he hurled himself on the ground beside one of the wounded men and, calling for support from two light machine guns that had now come up to his right in support, he picked up the man and carried him to safety out of the line of fire. Without hesitation, he immediately returned to the top of the hill determined to complete his self-imposed



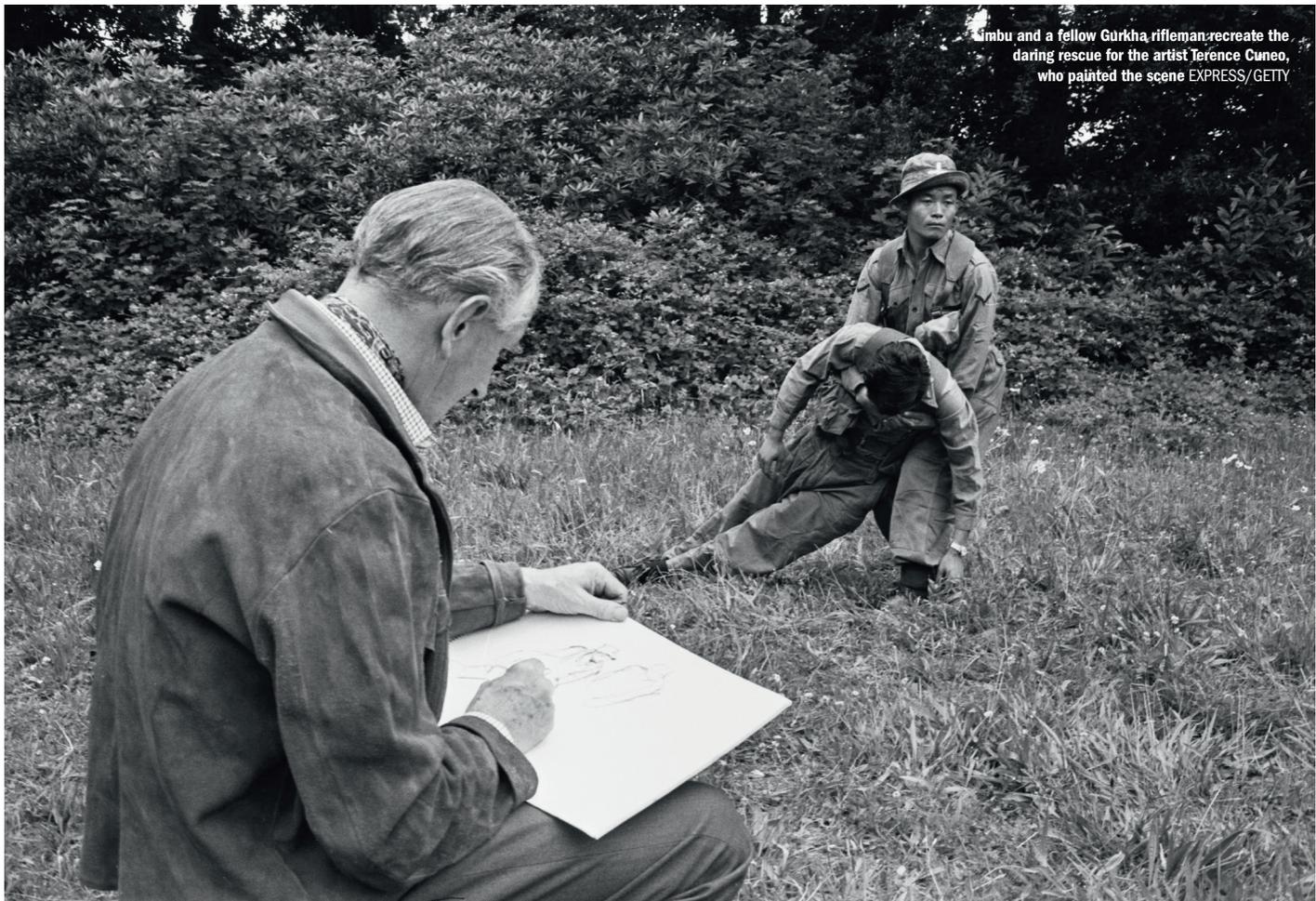
The reverse of Limbu’s VC COURTESY OF VICTORIA CROSS ONLINE

task of saving those for whom he felt personally responsible.”

With heavy enemy fire trying to prevent more rescue attempts, Limbu was pinned down for a few minutes by the intense automatic fire that could be seen striking the ground all round him. However, he eventually reached another wounded man, picked him up and carried him back as fast as he could through the hail of enemy bullets. For the best part of 20 minutes, Limbu had been moving alone in full view of the enemy and under continuous and sustained aimed fire.

The citation stated: “That he was able to achieve what he did against such overwhelming odds without being hit is miraculous. His outstanding personal bravery, selfless conduct, complete contempt of the enemy and determination to save the lives of the men of his fire group, set an incomparable example and inspired all who saw him.”

Finally, rejoining his section, he was able to recover the light machine gun abandoned by the wounded and used it to support the attack and to kill four more enemy before the hour-long battle was won. At least 24 enemy were killed, with the attacking force suffering three killed and two wounded. The citation ended with these words of praise for Limbu: “He displayed heroism, self-sacrifice



Limbu and a fellow Gurkha rifleman recreate the daring rescue for the artist Terence Cuneo, who painted the scene EXPRESS/GETTY

and a devotion to duty and to his men of the very highest order. His actions on this day reached a zenith of determined, premeditated valour which must count amongst the most notable on record and is deserving of the greatest admiration and the highest praise.”

“I didn’t think I was going to be shot”

Limbu’s joy at being awarded the VC was severely tempered by the death of his wife (who had fallen seriously ill) in February 1966, leaving him with two young sons to care for. Just five months after Tikamaya’s death, Limbu was presented with his VC by Queen Elizabeth II in an investiture at Buckingham Palace on July 12, 1966.

The award of the VC was extremely rare in the post-war era, and so Limbu was widely feted as a hero. The party that came to Britain included Captain Maunsell and Limbu’s elder son, Bhakta – then five. Ahead of the investiture, the party was allowed to stay at Edinburgh Castle. Limbu – polite, quiet, unassuming and proud – epitomised the archetypal Gurkha to his CO. However, his CO added somewhat ominously: “The Gurkha doesn’t often get angry but when he does it’s very dangerous.”

Limbu’s original VC was stolen, along with other valuables, while he was

asleep during a train journey in India to his native Nepal in 1967. It was never recovered but he was issued with a replacement medal. That same year, Limbu married a second time, once again in his home village and this time to Punimaya Rai. The couple also went on to have two sons together.

Limbu continued to serve in the Gurkhas and was commissioned and promoted to lieutenant in February 1977 and, in December 1981, to captain. He was made a Member of the Royal Victorian Order in July 1983 after becoming the Queen’s Gurkha Orderly Officer. Limbu retired from the military in June 1985. For several years, he served in the Sultan of Brunei’s Gurkha Reserve Unit before returning to a life of farming in Chyangthapu in 1992. He also acted as a guide to tourists trekking through the Himalayas.

In 2014, Limbu travelled to London to speak during the Gurkha Welfare Inquiry into concerns over issues such as pension rights, equal treatment for Gurkha widows, free medical treatment for veterans in Nepal like that provided for pensioners in the UK. In the same year, he told a British journalist of his VC action: “I didn’t think I was going to be shot. All I cared about was rescuing my friends.”

In September 2022, the British ambassador to Nepal, Nicola Pollitt,

travelled to Damak in Nepal – where Limbu was then living – for him to sign the book of condolence for Queen Elizabeth II after her death. “He signed the book, recalling with pride and sadness his long service for Her Majesty,” she tweeted at the time.

Limbu died from heart and kidney failure in Mediciti Hospital, Lalitpur, Nepal, on April 22, 2023, aged 83. His body was flown to Damak where he is buried in the village cemetery. Honorary Captain Ram Bahadur Limbu VC, MVO was by then the last surviving Gurkha recipient of the VC. **BW**

VICTORIA CROSS HEROES, VOL.II



Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His book, *Victoria Cross Heroes Volume II*, was first published in 2016. For details, visit victoriacrossheroes2.com. For more

information on Lord Ashcroft’s work, visit lordashcroft.com. Visit his website about courage: lordashcroftonbravery.com. Follow him on X and Facebook: [@LordAshcroft](https://www.facebook.com/LordAshcroft)