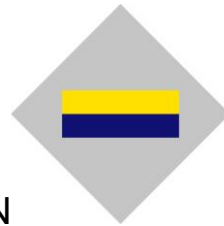


BRUCE KINGSBURY VC



2/14 AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY BATTALION



His Victoria Cross was the first gained on territory administered by the Australian Commonwealth.

It was also the first one awarded in the South-West Pacific Area.

2/14th Australian Infantry
Battalion

21st Brigade, 7th Division, ,
A.I.F.

29 August 1942, at Isurava,
Papua

"Cowards die many times before their deaths, the valiant never taste of death but once."

Private Bruce Steel Kingsbury VC was born in Preston just outside of Melbourne on the 8th January 1918, the son of Philip Blencowe Kingsbury and Florence Annie Steel who immigrated from the UK prior to the end of WW1. Bruce attended Melbourne Technical College on a scholarship and after graduation qualified to work in the printing industry. Instead Bruce decided to go and work in his father's real estate business. Unhappy working in real estate and missing the companionship of his best mate (Alan Avery) Bruce found work on a property at Natya situated in the Mallee District of Victoria. Here he was not far from his mate Alan who was working on a sheep station.

In February of 1936 several months after Bruce's arrival at Natya, he and Alan decided to go walk about and began the 900 km walk to Sydney . Picking fruit and working on various farms. They made their way through Piangil on the Victorian/ NSW border working up through Leeton and Wagga Wagga, eventually arriving in Sydney exhausted and longing for home, they quickly caught a train back to Melbourne.

Bruce returned to his father's real estate business in Northcote where he worked until the 29th of May 1940 . Like so many other young men he answered the call and enlisted in the AIF , much to the disappointment of his parents. Unbeknownst to him Alan Avery had also enlisted on the same day. Bruce was posted to the 2/2 Pioneers, but after meeting up with his old mate Alan while training at Puckapunyal, (who was already in the 2/14th) he received permission to transfer to the 2/14th Infantry Battalion. Together again the two mates were off on the adventure of a life time. The 2/14th embarked Sydney on the 19th October 1940 aboard the HMT *Aquitania* bound for the Middle East . Stationed 300 km's from Tobruk at a place called Mersa Matruh; they maintained defensive positions and soon encountered their first taste of air raids.

On the 7th June 1941 the 2/14th launched their first campaign, the invasion of Syria and Lebanon . The Allied Offensive named Operation Exporter was aimed at preventing Nazi Germany from using the territory as a staging ground for attacks on the Allied stronghold in Egypt . The area was under the control of General Henri Dentz the Vichy High Commissioner of the region, who had allowed Luftwaffe planes to refuel in Syria during May 1941. Little did Bruce or the other men of the 2/14 th realise the first enemy they would encounter would not be the Germans, rather the Vichy French.

After the defeat of the Vichy French the 2/14th took leave in Beirut and set up a training camp at Hill 69, 16kms from Tripoli . With the outbreak of war in the Pacific Bruce along with the 2/14th boarded the 'Ile de France' on the 30 th January 1942 , bound for India where they re-embarked aboard the 'The City of Paris', arriving in Adelaide and marching into Springbank training camp.

On the 16th March 1942 they were granted one week's leave back in Melbourne before making their way up to Glen Innes in northern NSW to undergo 14 days of harsh training. Bruce and Alan escorted their Commander to Yandina not far from the Blackall Range in Queensland . In July of that year further training was carried out at Coolumb Beach located on the Sunshine Coast . The men participated in physical training and coast watching.

On the 5th August 1942 the 2/14th once again left Australian shores, this time bound for Port Moresby aboard the American Liberty Ship the *James Fennimore Cooper* . Previously on the 21st August 1942 the Japanese landed at Gona on the 21st July 1942 with a force of 1,500 troops with a further 4000 to follow. The plan was to travel overland and achieve their objective; the capture of Port Moresby . They planned to advance across this tortuous path and take Port Moresby from the north. The small Australian forces in the Buna/Gona area, and later the 39th Battalion coming up the Track to reinforce Kokoda fought a desperate rear-guard action but were pushed all the way across the mountains to Isurava.



Isurava Village Circa 1942

In the afternoon of 26th August 1942 , C Company of the 2/14th relieved C Company of the 39th militia much to the joy of the worn out men of the 39th. The Japanese Commander Major General Horii had been continuing probing actions against their defences. Later that evening more of the 2/14th arrived but the Australian force were still outnumbered six to one.

By the 27th August the 2/14th was now in defensive positions around Isurava, they waited for the inevitable attack that was bound to be unleashed. The Morning of the 28th August saw Horii bombard the Australian positions with his mountain guns followed by waves of attacking Japanese Infantry. This resulted in heavy hand to hand combat.

On the 29th August, Bruce relieved Cpl Lindsay 'Teddy' Bear of his Bren Gun, (due to Teddy's wounds suffered as he led his own counter attack earlier), another wave of Japanese infantry attacked C Company's position. Bruce Kingsbury charged forward shouting "follow me" as he fired the Bren from his hip. Breaking through the Japanese line of advance he cut them down and inspired his fellow soldiers to keep going. He stood alongside his best mate Alan Avery who was armed with a Thompson Sub Machine Gun. This action forced the Japanese to retreat back into the jungle. As the rest of his comrades caught up to him he was hit by a bullet from a Japanese sniper. Alan Avery carried him back to the Regimental Aid Post but he was already dead.

For his selfless act of Valour Bruce 'Steel' Kingsbury was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross the first to be won on Australia territory.

The London Gazette situation reads as follows: In New Guinea, the Battalion to which Private Kingsbury belonged had been holding a position in the Isurava area for two days against continuous and fierce enemy attacks. On 29 August, 1942 , the enemy attacked in such force that they succeeded in breaking through the Battalion 's right flank, creating serious threats both to the rest of the Battalion and to its Headquarters. To avoid the situation becoming more desperate it was essential to regain immediately lost ground on the right flank.

Private Kingsbury, who was one of the few survivors of a Platoon which had been overrun and severely cut about by the enemy, immediately volunteered to join a different platoon which had been ordered to counterattack. He rushed forward firing the Bren gun from his hip through terrific machine-gun fire and succeeded in clearing a path through the enemy. Continuing to sweep enemy positions with his fire and inflicting an extremely high number of casualties on them, Private Kingsbury was then seen to fall to the ground shot dead by the bullet from a sniper hiding in the wood. Private Kingsbury displayed a complete disregard for his own safety. His initiative and superb courage made possible the recapture of a position, which undoubtedly saved Battalion Headquarters,

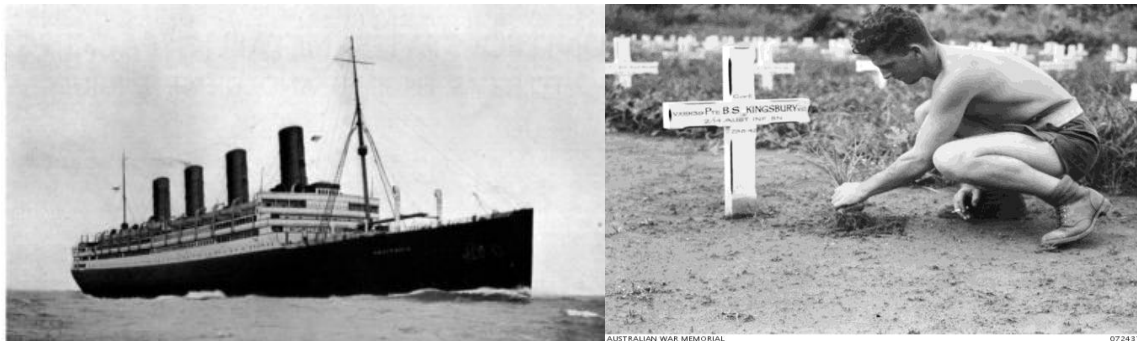
as well as causing heavy casualties amongst the enemy. His coolness, determination and devotion to duty in the face of great odds were an inspiration to his comrades.



Bruce Kingsbury VC rests at Bomana War cemetery.

By the end of the War 7 section, 9 Platoon were the most highly decorated section in the entire British Empire with one Victoria Cross, a Distinguished Conduct Medal and Four Military Medals.

Kingsbury's Victoria Cross is on display at The War Memorial in Canberra .



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