



Portrait of Captain Hugo Vivien Hope Throssell VC of the 10th Australian Light Horse Regiment



Portrait of Lieutenant A. J. Shout VC, 1st Battalion.



Studio portrait of Captain Albert Jacka VC MC and Bar of the 14th Battalion, AIF.

THIS COMPANY OF BRAVE MEN: THE GALLIPOLI VCS

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Lieutenant W. Dunstan with his parents and family after he was decorated with the Victoria Cross at Parliament House

On March 20 the Australian War Memorial is launching a landmark travelling exhibition. For the first time ever, nine Victoria Crosses from its collection will tour the country. Titled *This company of brave men: the Gallipoli VCs*, the exhibition will contain the Memorial's complete collection of Victoria Crosses from the Gallipoli campaign. The tour is being held to mark the 95th anniversary of the Gallipoli campaign, and is made possible through the generous sponsorship of Mr Kerry Stokes AC and Seven Network Limited.

The Victoria Cross is the highest form of recognition that can be bestowed on an Australian soldier for remarkable and unselfish courage in the service of others. It is a rare award, given when the nation is at war, facing peril or a great test of national commitment. All ranks of the services are eligible for the Victoria Cross. It is democratic in its nature and its distribution reflects great integrity. The award has its origins in the mid-nineteenth century, when Queen Victoria instituted the medal as a special tribute to recognise acts of outstanding courage. Despite its elevated status, the Victoria Cross is not made from precious metal, but is cast from the bronze of captured cannons from the Crimean War. It is suspended from a plain maroon ribbon, and since the Boer War a number of awards have been made posthumously.

In 1991 Australia extended its own system of honours and awards. Wishing to maintain the tradition and esteem of the Victoria Cross, it made only minimal changes to the highest award by instituting the Victoria Cross for Australia. Ninety-seven Australians have received the Victoria Cross.

Before the First World War only seven Australians had been awarded the Victoria Cross, most during the Boer War. By late 1914 thousands of eager young men had joined the Australian Imperial Force (AIF); they sailed to Egypt to undergo extensive training before their first big test on Gallipoli. The landing of Australian troops at ANZAC Cove at dawn on April 25, 1915 began an eight-month-long struggle which saw 8,700 Australians killed by the time troops were withdrawn in December. By then, countless acts of bravery had been performed, many unrecognised and unrewarded, but nine Australian soldiers had been recommended for, and later received, the Victoria Cross.

The first of these men, Lance Corporal Albert Jacka, immediately became a national hero. Jacka had enlisted in September 1914 as a private in the 14th Battalion, AIF. He won his Victoria Cross at Courtney's



Australian War Memorial Director Steve Gower and Minister for Veterans Affairs Alan Griffin, showing some of the Australian War Memorial's collection of medals which include the Victoria Cross

Post, Gallipoli, on May 19, 1915. On that day he and four other men were holding a portion of a trench when it was attacked. After those with him were killed or wounded, Jacka single-handedly attacked and killed seven Turks, saving the trench from being overrun. His Victoria Cross was the first awarded to a soldier of the AIF, but it was not the only instance of his bravery. Jacka was also awarded the Military Cross for his work at Pozieres, on the Western Front, on August 7, 1916 and a Bar to this award for his conduct at Bullecourt on April 8, 1917. It was widely agreed that these acts were as outstanding as that for which he received his Victoria Cross. Even Charles Bean, the Australian official war historian, said that 'everyone who knows the facts, knows that Jacka earned the Victoria Cross three times'.

Jacka returned home a captain and was feted as a war hero. He used his status to help other returned servicemen, and had a successful business career in Melbourne. Jacka's health eventually failed, however, and he died on January 17, 1932, aged just 39. The Australian War Memorial received Jacka's medals in 1988.

Another soldier who won the Victoria Cross on Gallipoli was, like Jacka, welcomed home as a hero. Second Lieutenant Hugo Throssell joined the 10th Light Horse at the outbreak of war, and arrived on the peninsula in August 1915. He was awarded the Victoria Cross for an action on August 29 - 30 which took place at Hill 60. The 10th Light Horse was brought into an offensive action to extend the front line past Hill 60

in the early hours of the 29th. Throssell and his men became involved in a fierce bomb fight, which continued all night. Throssell was wounded twice, but even with his face covered in blood he refused medical help, continuing to shout encouragement to his men. His was the first Victoria Cross awarded to a Western Australian in the war, and the only one to go to an Australian light horseman.

The seven remaining Victoria Cross medal groups in the exhibition were all awarded for actions in the battle at Lone Pine, fought over a small stretch of ground on the Turkish Gallipoli ridge. On August 6 a bayonet assault was launched against the enemy lines. Reaching the trenches, the Australians found them covered with stout logs and had to fight their way in. They then had to hold on for four days against heavy counter-attacks. Captain Alfred Shout was mortally wounded in the action and so his Victoria Cross was awarded posthumously. Lieutenant Frederick Tubb, and Corporals Alexander Burton and William Dunstan fought side by side in fierce trench fighting. Burton was killed, and all three were awarded the Victoria Cross. The other Gallipoli awards went to Private John Hamilton, Lance Corporal Leonard Keysor, and Lieutenant William Symons.

Canberra residents will not miss out on viewing the medal collections which are about to head out on tour. In their absence, the Hall of Valour will be redeveloped; when it reopens later in the year, the Memorial's entire Victoria Cross collection will be on display.