

= Issy Smith =

Issy Smith VC (c . 18 September 1890 ? 11 September 1940) was a British @-@ Australian recipient of the Victoria Cross , the highest award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to eligible forces of the Commonwealth and United Kingdom . In recognition of his VC , he was also awarded the French Croix de Guerre and Russian Cross of St. George (4th class) by the respective governments .

Born Ishroulch Shmeilowitz (and other renderings) , to parents residing in Egypt , Smith travelled to Britain as a child stowaway and first volunteered to serve in the British Army in 1904 . He emigrated to Australia after discharge , where he remained until mobilised as a reservist in 1914 . As a corporal in the 1st Battalion , The Manchester Regiment , Smith was engaged in the Second Battle of Ypres . On 26 April 1915 , Smith , on his own initiative , recovered wounded soldiers while exposed to sustained fire and attended to them " with the greatest devotion to duty regardless of personal risk " . His conduct secured a recommendation for the Victoria Cross , which was awarded to Smith in August 1915 .

After his demobilisation , Smith returned to Australia with his wife and daughter . He became a prominent figure in Melbourne 's Jewish community , was appointed a Justice of the Peace , and unsuccessfully stood as a candidate for the United Australia Party in the 1931 general election .

= = Early life = =

Smith was born in Alexandria , the son of French citizens Moses and Eva Shmeilowitz , who were of Russian origin . His father was employed by the French Consulate @-@ General as a clerk . Aged 11 , Smith embarked as a stowaway aboard a vessel proceeding to London . Undaunted by this unfamiliar environment , Smith attended Berner Street School , Commercial Street , and worked as a deliverer in the East End , then an impoverished ghetto where Yiddish was the predominant spoken language . Persecution and extreme deprivation had compelled millions of Eastern European Jews to migrate to Western Europe , the Americas , and elsewhere . By the time of Issy Smith 's arrival , Jewish immigration to Britain had peaked and was further curtailed by the enactment of the Aliens Act in 1905 .

He joined the British Army in 1904 , becoming a private in the Manchester Regiment . The pseudonym Issy Smith was adopted in the process of enlisting at the behest of a recruiting sergeant . Smith completed his training , serving in South Africa and India with the 1st Battalion . He boxed competitively , winning the British Army 's middleweight championship , and played football . While in India , Smith was present at the Delhi Durbar parade , in which the 1st Manchesters participated , and was thus awarded the Delhi Durbar Medal .

Accepting his discharge in 1912 , Smith emigrated to Australia after brief employment in London . He lived in the Melbourne suburb of Ascot Vale while working for the city 's gas company . Retained as a reservist , Smith was mobilised by the British Army after the commencement of hostilities in August 1914 . Some sources state that Smith was present at the capture of German New Guinea by the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force .

= = World War I = =

The 1st Manchester Regiment , stationed in India , sailed from Karachi for France on 29 August 1914 as the constituent British battalion of the Jullundur Brigade , 3rd (Lahore) Division . The battalion disembarked at Marseilles in late September , but was not deployed to the front until 26 October 1914 , when it occupied trenches east of Festubert .

Actively engaged in the battles of Givenchy and Neuve Chapelle , the 1st Manchesters had incurred hundreds of casualties by the beginning of " Second Ypres " on 22 April 1915 . Chemical warfare first emerged on the Western Front during the German offensive , and Smith himself would be temporarily incapacitated by gas . The 1st Manchesters were involved in an initially successful counter @-@ attack conducted by the Jullundur and Ferozepore brigades on 26 April 1915 , near

Wieltje , in conjunction with other Allied units . Rudimentary forms of protection against the chlorine gas proved ineffectual , limiting the advance and causing many soldiers to succumb to its effects .

During the Allied counter @-@ attack , Smith , of his own volition , ventured towards a German position to attend to a severely wounded soldier . He carried him some 250 yards (230 m) to relative safety while exposed to intense German fire . According to the Victoria Cross citation , he brought in " many more wounded men " throughout the day under similarly perilous conditions " regardless of personal risk " . Recounting his own rescue by Smith to a Daily Mail correspondent , Sergeant Rooke said of the corporal : " He behaved with wonderful coolness and presence of mind the whole time , and no man deserved a Victoria Cross more thoroughly than he did " .

Smith was hospitalised in Dublin , where he recuperated from his gassing . His Victoria Cross was later presented to him at Buckingham Palace by King George V. He was feted by publications such as The Jewish Chronicle , and his status as a recipient of the VC was utilised by the British government for the purposes of stimulating further recruitment . His visits to Jewish communities in the United Kingdom generated much interest , attracting dignitaries and large crowds in the process . On one such occasion , in September 1915 , he was invited back to his old school in the East End to receive a gold watch and chain in honour of his Victoria Cross from his former schoolmates . Also that month , Smith was received at Mansion House , Dublin , by the Under @-@ Secretary for Ireland , Matthew Nathan , who took advantage of the occasion to reaffirm loyalty to both Britain and Ireland . Contemporaries , however , continued to report instances of discrimination against Jewish servicemen , including an incident involving Issy Smith in Leeds . While documenting his recruitment drive , The Jewish Chronicle reported that the proprietor of the Grand Restaurant had refused to serve Smith during his tour of Yorkshire because he was Jewish , while indicating the staff were prepared to accept his non @-@ Jewish acquaintance . Smith 's tour continued without disruption , taking him to Edinburgh , Scotland .

Meanwhile , on the Western Front , the demoralised and depleted Indian Corps fought its final European battle at Loos . With the exception of two cavalry divisions , the Indian Corps in Europe redeployed to the Middle East theatre , sailing from Marseilles on 10 December 1915 and arriving in Basra on 8 January 1916 to be integrated into the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force . Smith returned to active duty as a sergeant , serving in Mesopotamia and Palestine until the cessation of hostilities with the Ottoman Empire and Germany on 30 October and 11 November respectively . He had been wounded five times .

Demobilised after the war , Smith returned to London . As a war hero , he was intermittently invited to social functions . In June 1920 , he attended a garden party at Buckingham Palace , given by the king for all surviving Victoria Cross recipients . They included veterans of the Indian Mutiny , Rorke 's Drift , Relief of General Gordon , the First and Second Boer Wars , countless campaigns on the borders of the empire , and dozens from the Great War . In October 1921 , with Harry Kenny VC , he unveiled the Hackney War Memorial . In 1922 , he attended " The Pilgrimage to Ypres " , in Belgium , laying a wreath at the Cloth Hall there .

= = Legacy = =

Despite his fame and popularity , like many former servicemen contending with post @-@ war economic hardship , Smith struggled financially ? a predicament compounded by illness . As a consequence he pawned his medals for £ 20 , only for them to be recovered by the Jewish Historical Society on the urging of the wife of Chief Rabbi Joseph H. Hertz and ultimately reunited with Smith . Smith 's varied occupations in post @-@ war Britain included work as an actor with a theatre troupe . He emigrated to Australia in 1925 with his wife Elsie (née McKechnie) , whom he had married at Camberwell Register Office . Marriage to Elsie produced two children (Olive and Maurice) and reputedly angered his parents despite the couple 's later observance of Jewish religious tradition in a formal ceremony held at Central Synagogue , Hallam Street .

The family settled in Moonee Ponds , Melbourne , where Smith 's standing in the Jewish community became high . He was appointed manager of British International Pictures in Melbourne , in 1928 , worked for Dunlop Rubber Company , and was finally employed by the Civil Aviation Board at

Essendon Airport . Appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1930 , Smith tried politics as a candidate in the 1931 federal election for the United Australia Party contesting the seat of Melbourne in the House of Representatives , and " seriously challenged the hitherto unassailable Dr Maloney " .

Smith died of coronary thrombosis in September 1940 . He was buried in the Jewish section of Fawkner Cemetery with full military honours . His Victoria Cross was sold by his family in 1990 and later auctioned as part of a collection of Smith 's medals , selling for approximately £ 30 @, @ 000 (\$ 60 @, @ 000) .

Following representations from the Association of Jewish Ex @-@ Servicemen and Women , in September 2013 Communities Secretary Eric Pickles announced that the plan to memorialise British @-@ born First World War Victoria Cross medal holders by laying commemorative paving stones in their home towns would be extended to include Smith , who was born in Egypt .