

= Cyril Bassett =

Cyril Royston Guyton Bassett VC (3 January 1892 ? 9 January 1983) was a New Zealand recipient of the Victoria Cross (VC) , the highest award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces . He was the first and only New Zealander to be awarded the VC in the Gallipoli Campaign of the First World War .

Born in Auckland , Bassett was a bank worker when the First World War began . A member of New Zealand 's Territorial Force , he volunteered for service abroad with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF) and was posted to the New Zealand Divisional Signal Company as a sapper . He saw action on the opening day of the Gallipoli Campaign , and it was during the Battle of Chunuk Bair that he performed the actions that led to his award of the VC . Medically evacuated due to sickness shortly after the battle , he later served on the Western Front and finished the war as a second lieutenant . He returned to the banking profession but was recalled to active duty during the Second World War . He served on the Home Front and by the time he was taken off active duty in December 1943 , he had been promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel and was commander of signals in the Northern Military District . When he retired from his banking career he became a justice of the peace in Devonport . He died in 1983 at the age of 91 .

= = Early life = =

Cyril Bassett was born on 3 January 1892 in Auckland , New Zealand to a printer , Frederick Bassett , and his wife , Harriet . After completing his formal education , Bassett worked as a clerk for the National Bank of New Zealand . In 1909 , he joined what later became the Territorial Force and was assigned to the Auckland College Rifles . Two years later he transferred to the Auckland Divisional Signal Company .

= = First World War = =

When the First World War broke out , it was Bassett 's intention to join the Royal Navy . However , his mother , who was from a family with a history of service in the British Army , convinced him to enlist in the New Zealand Military Forces . Bassett was not particularly tall and was initially rejected due to his lack of height . He persisted with his attempt to enlist , and eventually joined the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF) as a sapper in the Corps of New Zealand Engineers , assigned to the New Zealand Divisional Signal Company .

Bassett embarked with the main body of the NZEF for the Middle East in October 1914 . Initially based in Egypt , after a period of training , he landed at ANZAC Cove on 25 April 1915 , the opening day of the Gallipoli Campaign . Along with the other signallers of his unit , he was immediately set to work laying communication lines . In early May , his courage under fire was noted in consideration for a gallantry award .

Later in the campaign , Bassett was promoted to corporal . In August 1915 , a series of offensives against Turkish positions along the Gallipoli front were planned to break the stalemate that had developed since the initial landing . On 7 August , the New Zealand Infantry Brigade attacked Chunuk Bair , a prominent hill overlooking the battlefield . The battle lasted for three days , with Chunuk Bair captured by the brigade 's Wellington Infantry Battalion on the second day , during which Bassett , in command of a section of five other signallers of his unit , laid down and maintained telephone lines between brigade headquarters and the front lines . He braved continuous gunfire during this time . Although not wounded , two bullets passed through the fabric of his tunic during the fighting . After the battle , his name , along with those of the other five signallers of his section , was collected by Major Arthur Temperley of brigade headquarters , who nominated Bassett for the Victoria Cross (VC) .

The citation for Bassett 's Victoria Cross read as follows :

No. 4 / 515 Corporal Cyril Royston Guyton Bassett , New Zealand Divisional Signal Company . For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty on the Chunuk Bair ridge in the Gallipoli Peninsula

on 7th August , 1915 . After the New Zealand Infantry Brigade had attacked and established itself on the ridge , Corporal Bassett , in full daylight and under a continuous and heavy fire , succeeded in laying a telephone line from the old position to the new one on Chunuk Bair . He has subsequently been brought to notice for further excellent and most gallant work connected with the repair of telephone lines by day and night under heavy fire .

The citation incorrectly refers to Bassett 's actions on 7 August ; it was not until the following day that the Wellington Infantry Battalion captured Chunuk Bair . A few days after the battle , Bassett was evacuated from Gallipoli due to poor health . Suffering from dysentery , he spent several months recuperating in England . In June 1916 , he rejoined his unit , by then on the Western Front in France as part of the New Zealand Division . Later that year , he participated in the Battle of the Somme and in 1917 was commissioned as a second lieutenant . He was wounded twice during his time in France . He returned to New Zealand in late 1918 as the New Zealand Division started demobilising and was formally discharged from the NZEF in 1919 .

= = Interwar period = =

Bassett returned to his banking career after the war , managing branches of the National Bank in Auckland and later in Paeroa . He retained a link to the military , rejoining the Territorial Force but was placed on the retired list of officers in 1929 . By 1939 he was manager of the Auckland Town Hall branch of the National Bank . He had also married , his union with Ruth Louise Grant producing two daughters .

= = Second World War = =

Called up for the National Military Reserve as a result of the outbreak of the Second World War , Bassett was placed on active duty in 1941 as a captain in the Royal New Zealand Corps of Signals . He was not required to serve overseas and instead he worked in signals while remaining in New Zealand . Promoted to major in February 1942 , his active war service ended in December 1943 . By then he had achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel and was commander of signals in the Northern Military District .

= = Later life and legacy = =

Bassett returned to the National Military Reserve from which he eventually retired in 1948 . As a civilian , he once again resumed his banking profession . He retired in 1952 but remained active in the community of Devonport , Auckland as a justice of the peace . He died in Stanley Bay , Auckland on 9 January 1983 , shortly after his 91st birthday , and his ashes were buried at North Shore Memorial Park . He was survived by his two daughters and his wife . His VC , gifted to the Corps of Signals upon his death , is displayed at the Auckland War Memorial Museum .

According to his daughter , Bassett rarely spoke about his achievements as " It just wasn 't done " , and in fact , she did not learn of her father 's award until she studied Gallipoli at primary school . He was modest of his achievements and expressed embarrassment at being the only New Zealand VC recipient of the Gallipoli Campaign .

Bassett remains the only signaller to have been awarded the VC and was a lifetime member of the Corps of Signals Association . In recognition of Bassett 's rank at the time he won the VC , the Bassett Memorial Trophy is awarded annually to the most outstanding corporal in the Corps of Signals . The trophy is a statue of Bassett on Chunuk Bair .