

= Billy Sing =

William Edward " Billy " Sing , DCM (2 March 1886 ? 19 May 1943) was a part Chinese Australian soldier who served in the Australian Imperial Force during World War I , best known as a sniper during the Gallipoli Campaign . He took at least 150 confirmed kills during that campaign , and may have had over 200 kills in total . One contemporary estimate put his tally at close to 300 kills . Towards the end of the war , Sing married a Scottish woman , but the relationship did not last long . Following work in sheep farming and gold mining , he died in relative poverty and obscurity in Brisbane during World War II .

= = Early life = =

Sing was born on 2 March 1886 in Clermont , Queensland , Australia , the son of a Chinese father and an English mother . His parents were John Sing (c . 1842 ? 1921) , a drover from Shanghai , China , and Mary Ann Sing (née Pugh ; c . 1857 ? unknown) , a nurse from Kingswinford , Staffordshire , England . Sing 's mother had given birth to a daughter named Mary Ann Elizabeth Pugh on 28 May 1883 , less than two months before marrying Sing 's father on 4 July 1883 . It is unclear whether this child was John Sing 's daughter as well . A daughter , Beatrice Sing , was later born into the family on 12 July 1893 . The three children grew up together on the farm run by the Sings , and all three performed well academically .

There was considerable anti @-@ Chinese sentiment in Australia at this time . As a boy , Sing was well known for his shooting skill , but was the subject of racial prejudice due to his ancestry . He began work hauling timber as a youth , and later worked as a stockman and a sugarcane cutter . Sing became well known for his marksmanship , both as a kangaroo shooter and as a competitive target shooter . In the latter role , he was a member of the Proserpine Rifle Club . He regularly won prizes for his shooting , and also played cricket with skill .

On 24 October 1914 , two months after the outbreak of war , Sing enlisted as a trooper in the Australian 5th Light Horse Regiment of the Australian Imperial Force . His Certificate of Medical Examination at the time showed that he stood at 5 ' 5 " (165 cm) and weighed 141 lb . (64 kg) . According to John Laws and Christopher Stewart , he was accepted into the army only after a recruitment officer chose to disregard the fact that Sing was part Chinese ; at the time , only those of European ancestry were generally considered suitable for Australian military service .

= = Military service = =

= = = Gallipoli Campaign = = =

Sing began his military career as part of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) forces in the Gallipoli Campaign in modern day Turkey . Biographer John Hamilton described the Turkish terrain thus : " It is a country made for snipers . The Anzac and Turkish positions often overlooked each other . Each side sent out marksmen to hunt and stalk and snipe , to wait and shoot and kill , creeping with stealth through the green and brown shrubbery ... " Sing partnered with spotters Ion ' Jack ' Idriess and , later , Tom Sheehan . The spotter 's task was to observe (spot) the surrounding terrain and alert the sniper to potential targets . Idriess described Sing as " a little chap , very dark , with a jet black moustache and goatee beard . A picturesque looking mankiller . He is the crack shot of the Anzacs . "

Chatham 's Post , a position named after a Light Horse officer , was Sing 's first sniping post . Biographer Brian Tate wrote , " It was here that Billy Sing began in earnest his lethal occupation . " He set about his task with a Lee ? Enfield .303 rifle . An account by Private Frank Reed , a fellow Australian soldier , states that Sing was so close to the Turkish lines that enemy artillery rarely troubled him . His comrades left three particular enemy positions to his attention : a trench at 350 yards (320 m) from his post , a communication sap at 500 yards (457 m) , and a track in a gully at

1 @, @ 000 yards (914 m) . According to Reed , " Every time Billy Sing felt sorry for the poor Turks , he remembered how their snipers picked off the Australian officers in the early days of the landing , and he hardened his heart . But he never fired at a stretcher @-@ bearer or any of the soldiers who were trying to rescue wounded Turks . " In contrast , Hamilton said in a 2008 interview , " We have an anecdote where , after spotting an injured Turk , he said ' I 'll put that poor cuss out of his agony ' and just shot him . He was a very tough man . "

Sing 's reputation resulted in a champion Turkish sniper , nicknamed ' Abdul the Terrible ' by the Allied side , being assigned to deal with him . Tate alleges that the Turks were largely able to distinguish Sing 's sniping from that of other ANZAC soldiers , and that only the reports of incidents believed to be Sing 's work were passed on to Abdul . Through analysis of the victims ' actions and wounds , Abdul concluded that Sing 's position was at Chatham 's Post . After several days , Sing 's spotter alerted him to a potential target , and he took aim , only to find the target ? Abdul ? looking in his direction . Sing prepared to fire , trying not to reveal his position , but the Turkish sniper noticed him and began his own firing sequence . Sing fired first and killed Abdul . Very shortly thereafter , the Turkish artillery fired on Sing 's position ? he and his spotter barely managed to evacuate from Chatham 's Post alive .

Near the beginning of August 1915 , Sing was hospitalised for four days with influenza . That same month , an enemy sniper 's bullet struck Sheehan 's spotting telescope , injuring his hands and face , and then hit Sing 's shoulder , but the latter was back in action after a week 's recuperation . Sheehan was more severely wounded , and was shipped back to Australia . This was reportedly the only time that Sing was injured at Gallipoli . He would not fare so well later on in the war .

= = = Sniping record = = =

Sing 's marksmanship at Gallipoli saw him dubbed ' The Assassin ' or ' The Murderer ' by his comrades . He reportedly acquired the latter nickname due to his callous attitude towards the enemy . By early September 1915 , he had taken 119 kills , according to Brigadier @-@ General Granville Ryrie , commanding officer of the 2nd Australian Light Horse Brigade . Regimental records list Sing as having taken 150 confirmed kills , but on 23 October 1915 , General William Birdwood , commander of ANZAC forces , issued an order complimenting him on his 201 unconfirmed kills . Historian Bob Courtney noted that an official kill was recorded only if the spotter saw the target fall . If the first shot missed the target , it was very risky to take a second shot , as this could give away the sniper team 's position .

Major Stephen Midgely estimated Sing 's tally at close to 300 kills . Midgely had brought him to the attention of Birdwood , who in turn had told Lord Kitchener that " if his troops could match the capacity of the Queensland sniper the allied forces would soon be in Constantinople . " Birdwood had reportedly joined Sing as his spotter on one occasion , and had the opportunity to witness his marksmanship first hand .

In February 1916 , Sing was Mentioned in Despatches by General Sir Ian Hamilton , Commander of the Allied Forces . This was the first official recognition of his service . On 10 March 1916 , he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal , with a related entry in military records reading : " For conspicuous gallantry from May to September , 1915 , at Anzac , as a sniper . His courage and skill were most marked , and he was responsible for a very large number of casualties among the enemy , no risk being too great for him to take . " Apart from the recognition he received from his superiors , Sing 's exploits were also reported in British and American newspapers of the time .

= = = Western Front = = =

At the end of November 1915 , Sing suffered from myalgia and was confined to the hospital ship HMHS Gloucester Castle for almost two weeks . During this time , he was conveyed to Malta , then Ismaïlia , Egypt . While in Egypt , he was also hospitalised with parotitis and mumps , but rejoined his unit at the end of March 1916 .

Sing transferred to the 31st Infantry Battalion on 27 July 1916 at Tel @-@ el @-@ Kibir and sailed

to England the following month . Following a brief period of training in England , he sailed for France and entered action on the Western Front in January 1917 . He was wounded in action several times , and commended many times in reports by Allied commanders . In March 1917 , he was wounded in the left leg and hospitalised in England . In May 1917 , while recovering in Scotland , he met waitress Elizabeth A. Stewart (c . 1896 ? unknown) , who was the daughter of Royal Navy cook George Stewart . The two were married on 29 June 1917 in Edinburgh . In July 1917 , Elizabeth Sing 's address was noted in records as 6 Spring Gardens , Stockbridge , Edinburgh .

After a month with his new wife , Sing returned to the trenches in France in August 1917 , but was in very poor health due to his battle wounds and the effects of gas poisoning . It is not clear whether he operated as a sniper on the Western Front , but in September 1917 , he led a unit in the Battle of Polygon Wood in counter @-@ sniper operations . For this action , he was awarded the Oorlogskruis (Belgian Croix de Guerre) in 1918 , and was also recommended for the Military Medal ? but never received it . In November 1917 , he was confined to hospital again due to problems with his previously wounded leg . In mid @-@ February 1918 , he was hospitalised due to a gunshot wound in the back . Sing suffered lung disease from his exposure to gas , and it soon brought his military career to an end .

= = Return to civilian life = =

Sing returned to Australia on submarine guard duty in late July 1918 . An army medical report from 23 November 1918 noted that he had gunshot wounds in the left shoulder , back , and left leg , and had suffered gas poisoning . The report stated that his general health was ' good ' but that he complained of coughing upon exertion . It recognised that Sing 's disability were the result of service , was permanent , and recommended that he be discharged as permanently unfit for service . Following his departure from the army , he briefly turned his hand to sheep farming , but the land he was given was of poor quality . He then worked as a gold miner .

According to some accounts , Sing and his wife were honoured by the local community when they arrived in Proserpine , Queensland , in late 1918 . Other accounts , however , state that although Sing arranged for passage from Scotland to Australia for his wife , there was no evidence that she made the journey . If Sing 's wife did come to Australia , it appears that she left her husband after a few years ; Tate suggests that the " transition from the green hills and ancient culture of Edinburgh to the dust and rough life of the mining district around Clermont must have been traumatic for Elizabeth Sing " and might have been a reason for her departure .

Recent research has shown that Elizabeth remained in Edinburgh . She had had daughter (Mary) in 1919 and and a son (Theo) in 1924 , to different fathers (neither of whom was Billy Sing) . She travelled to Australia sometime between 1925 and 1930 , with her two children . She lived in New South Wales with her son 's father until her death in Wollongong in the 1970s . It is not known whether she had any contact with Billy after her arrival in Australia .

= = Later life = =

In later life , Sing reported chest , back , and heart pain . His final days were spent in relative poverty and obscurity . His elder sister or half @-@ sister , Mary Ann Elizabeth , had died in childbirth in 1915 . In 1942 , Sing moved from Miclere to Brisbane , telling his surviving sister Beatrice that it was cheaper to live there . His final occupation was as a labourer .

Sing died alone in his room in a boarding house in West End , Brisbane , on 19 May 1943 . The cause of death was a ruptured aorta . His only significant possessions were a hut (worth around £ 20) on a mining claim and a mere 5 shillings found with him in his room . There was no sign of his medals from World War I , and his employers owed him around £ 6 in wages . Sing was buried in the Lutwyche War Cemetery , in Kedron , a northern suburb of Brisbane . His grave is now part of the lawn cemetery section of the Lutwyche Cemetery , and the inscription on his headstone reads :

AT REST

WILLIAM EDWARD (BILLY) SING (DCM)

Born Clermont Qld . 2 ? 3 ? 1886 ? 19 ? 5 ? 1943

Reg . No. 355 Australian Fifth Light Horse Regiment and later the 31st Infantry Battalion

Son of JOHN SING (bn . SHANGHAI) and MARY ANN (nee PUGH bn . ENGLAND)

AND MARRIED FOR A TIME TO ELIZABETH (STEWART) IN EDINBURGH 29 ? 6 ? 1917

A man of all trades , Pte . Sing was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for conspicuous gallantry , the Belgian Croux [sic] De Guerre and mentioned often in despatches . Serving at Gallipoli and in France from 1915 ? 1918 , he became known as Australia 's most effective marksman / sniper accounting for more than 150 of the opposing forces .

His incredible accuracy contributed greatly to the preservation of the lives of those with whom he served during a war always remembered for countless acts of valour and tragic carnage .

= = Legacy = =

The Queensland Military Historical Society set up a bronze plaque at 304 Montague Road , South Brisbane , where Sing had died . In 1995 , a statue of Sing was unveiled with honour in his home town of Clermont . In 2004 , an Australian Army sniper team in Baghdad named their post the ' Billy Sing Bar & Grill . ' On 19 May 2009 , the 66th anniversary of Sing 's death , the Chinese Consul @-@ General , Ren Gongping , along with Returned and Services League of Australia officers and community leaders , laid wreaths at his grave . Ren said , " Billy Sing is a symbol of the long history of Chinese in Australia , and the great role they have played in your nation 's past ... It also reminds us that China and Australia were allies through both world wars , and that we have a long and proud shared past . "

Sing 's life was recounted in a chapter of Laws and Stewart 's book , There 's always more to the story (2006) , and in greater depth by Hamilton in his book , Gallipoli Sniper : The life of Billy Sing (2008) . Hamilton 's book includes a detailed account of how snipers worked at Gallipoli and their contribution to the progress of the campaign . Reviewer John Wadsley wrote that " Hamilton is able to bring together a range of sources to create the story , and while at times , you get the feeling he is padding it out to make up for the lack of direct material about Billy Sing , the book works . "

A television mini @-@ series , The Legend of Billy Sing , was in post @-@ production as of 2010 . Despite some reports that it was based on Hamilton 's book , the author maintained that he was never contacted by the film makers . Although Sing and his father were partly Chinese and fully Chinese , respectively , the mini @-@ series portrayed them with actors of European ancestry . The director , Geoff Davis , was criticised for this decision . Politician Bill O 'Chee , a member of the Billy Sing Commemorative Committee , said , " When a person dies , all that is left is their story , and you can ? t take a person 's name and not tell the truth about their story . " Davis has said , " Whatever [Sing 's] genetic background , his culture was Australian . To me , he 's very representative of every Australian whose parents were not born here A lot of people are sitting at the back of this bus attacking the driver . A lot of people feel they own the story of Billy Sing . But they 've probably got more resources than me ? if they want to tell that story , then tell it . "

Hamilton characterised Sing as " a cold @-@ blooded killer ... [yet] a man with a sense of humour ... the Anzac angel of death , " and Laws and Stewart described him simply as " one of many Australians of Chinese descent who served with distinction in the Australian forces during World War I . " Around 400 people of Chinese descent served in Australia 's military forces during the 20th century .

A memorial to Sing stands at Hood 's Lagoon , in his birthplace of Clermont , Queensland .

For the 100th anniversary commemoration of the Gallipoli landings , a monument was erected to Sing in the Lutwyche Cemetery in Brisbane , near his grave stone , by the Billy Sing Memorial Committee . It was officially unveiled on the anniversary of his death .