

= Clarence Jeffries =

Clarence Smith Jeffries , VC (26 October 1894 ? 12 October 1917) was an Australian recipient of the Victoria Cross , the highest decoration for gallantry " in the face of the enemy " that can be awarded to members of the British and Commonwealth armed forces . He was posthumously decorated with the Victoria Cross following his actions in the First Battle of Passchendaele during the First World War , in which he led several parties of men in an attack that eventuated in the capture of six machine guns and sixty @-@ five prisoners , before being killed himself by machine gun fire .

Born in a suburb of Newcastle , New South Wales , Jeffries was employed as a surveyor at a mining company where his father served as general manager following his completion of school . Joining a militia battalion in 1912 , he was commissioned as a second lieutenant upon the outbreak of war and tasked with the instruction of volunteers for the newly raised Australian Imperial Force . Transferring into the Australian Imperial Force himself in 1916 , Jeffries embarked with his battalion for service on the Western Front . Wounded at Messines , he was promoted to captain before being killed fourteen days short of his twenty @-@ third birthday .

= = Early life = =

Jeffries was born in the Newcastle suburb of Wallsend , New South Wales , on 26 October 1894 . He was the only child of Joshua Jeffries , a colliery manager , and his wife Barbara , née Steel . Jeffries attended Dudley Primary School before moving onto Newcastle Collegiate and High schools . Apprenticed as a mining surveyor at the Abermain Collieries on the state 's northern coalfields , where his father was general manager , Jeffries was noted as a cricketer and a keen horseman who took a particular interest in breeding thoroughbreds . In July 1912 , Jeffries joined the 14th (Hunter River) Infantry Regiment , Citizens Military Force , as a private under the compulsory training scheme . He was promoted to sergeant a year later .

= = First World War = =

Following the outbreak of the First World War , Jeffries was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Citizens Military Force on 22 August 1914 . By this time he was in charge of the survey department at the Abermain Collieries , but was mobilised for home defence duties and the instruction of volunteers for the newly raised Australian Imperial Force at Newcastle and Liverpool camps . Promoted lieutenant in the Citizens Military Force in July 1915 , he transferred to the Australian Imperial Force on 1 February 1916 with the substantive rank of second lieutenant , and was placed in command of C Company of the 34th Battalion . In May , the battalion embarked from Sydney for the United Kingdom , with Jeffries aboard HMAT Hororata . Arriving in late June , the battalion spent the next five months training in England , during which time Jeffries was promoted to lieutenant .

In late November 1916 , the 34th Battalion was shipped to France for service on the Western Front . Initially posted to the Armentières sector in Belgium , the battalion did not participate in its first major battle until June 1917 , when it took part in the Battle of Messines after the British and Dominion operations switched to the Ypres sector of Belgium . During the engagement , Jeffries received a bullet wound to the thigh while leading a reconnaissance patrol and was evacuated to the 3rd General Hospital in London . While recuperating , he was promoted to captain on 26 June , before rejoining his battalion in September as a company commander .

= = = Victoria Cross = = =

On 12 October 1917 , the 34th Battalion ? as a member of the 9th Brigade ? was to take part in the 3rd Australian Division 's attack on Passchendaele , Belgium . Subject to several days of heavy rain , the battlefield had been transformed into a boggy marsh on which the attack was to commence .

Jeffries commanded B Company during the attack , which he halted at the entrance to Broodseinde railway cutting , as many of the direction tapes leading to the starting position had been destroyed or swallowed up by the mud . To avoid any mishaps , Jeffries and another of the battalion 's company commanders , Captain T.G. Gilder , pushed on alone as far as Keerselaarhoek cemetery to find the tapes marking the battalions starting line for the attack . Thus , by 03 : 00 the 34th Battalion was formed up on the line of attack .

At the designated time of 05 : 25 , the British opened up with an artillery barrage on the German positions just as the Australian forces entered no man 's land for the attack . Heavy machine gun fire assaulted the troops from all directions as they bunched together on the firmer ground to avoid sinking in the boggy mud . Serious resistance was encountered at Hilside Farm , a strong point to the east of Augustus Wood in the centre of the highest part of the Passchendaele ridge . The position consisted of two pillboxes , supported by fifty metres of trench that was occupied by approximately thirty men with four machine guns . The fire from these machine guns forced the men of the 34th Battalion to seek cover on the exposed crest and threatened to halt the entire advance .

Jeffries , realising his force was suffering heavy casualties , quickly organised a bombing party of fourteen men and set about outflanking the pillboxes . Accompanying Jeffries was Sergeant James Bruce , a 39 @-@ year @-@ old Scottish @-@ born miner who had worked for Jeffries ' father at the Abermain Collieries . According to popular legend , Bruce had promised to look out for his boss 's son , and remained at Jeffries ' side throughout the attack . Working around the position , the party attacked the emplacement from the rear , capturing four machine guns and thirty @-@ five prisoners ; thus reviving the advance . Jeffries then led his company forward under heavy artillery and machine gun fire to reach their first objective .

Despite the heavy losses which left gaping holes in the Allied line , it was decided that the next stage of the advance was to go ahead . At 08 : 25 , parties from the 34th and 35th Battalions headed out along the south @-@ eastern edge of the ridge towards the outskirts of Passchendaele . Almost immediately , they came under heavy fire from a pillbox close by a railway embankment , at which time Major J.B. Buchanan , the senior brigade officer with the advance party , fell dead , leaving Jeffries to assume control . Gathering a party of eleven men , he set about silencing the machine gun position . Edging across the open ground , the party attacked the position from the west just as the machine gun was firing to the north . Realising that an attack was imminent , the machine gunner switched around , mortally wounding Jeffries in the stomach and sending the rest of the party to ground . When its fire eased , the remaining members of the group worked around the position , rushed it and seized two machine guns in conjunction with thirty prisoners .

With the second objective only partially captured , the remnants of the 9th Brigade , battered by artillery and machine gun fire , were forced to relinquish their position and retreat back to their own lines . All that remained on the Passchendaele ridge of the 9th Brigade was the dead and wounded , among whom was Clarence Jeffries , who was later counted among those with no known grave .

= = Legacy = =

For his actions during the battle at Passchendaele , Jeffries was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross , the notification of which was published in the London Gazette on 18 December 1917 . His citation read :

War Office , 18th December , 1917

His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of the Victoria Cross to the undermentioned Officers , Noncommissioned Officers and Man : ?

Capt. Clarence Smith Jeffries , late Australian Imperial Force .

For most conspicuous bravery in attack , when his company was held up by enemy machine @-@ gun fire from concrete emplacements . Organising a party , he rushed one emplacement , capturing four machine guns and thirty @-@ five prisoners . He then led his company forward under extremely heavy enemy artillery barrage and enfilade machine @-@ gun fire to the objective .

Later , he again organised a successful attack on a machine @-@ gun emplacement , capturing two machine guns and thirty more prisoners .

This gallant officer was killed during the attack , but it was entirely due to his bravery and initiative that the centre of the attack was not held up for a lengthy period . His example had a most inspiring influence .

Severely affected by the unknown fate of his son 's body , Joshua Jeffries set out for Belgium in 1920 in an attempt to discover his son 's " lost grave " . He returned to Australia disappointed , only to learn in January 1921 that Clarence 's body had been exhumed from a battlefield grave on 14 September 1920 , and re @-@ buried in Tyne Cot Cemetery , Plot XL , Row E , Grave 1 . The body had been identified by a set of captain 's pips , Australian numerals and the penciled initials " C.S.J. " found on the ground sheet in which the body was wrapped . Three years later , Joshua Jeffries returned to Belgium once again ; this time to pay his last respects to his son . As a debt of gratitude to the late Lieutenant James Bruce MC , DCM , who as a sergeant had assisted Clarence at Passchendaele before being killed himself on 17 July 1918 , Joshua employed Bruce 's two eldest sons as trainee mining surveyors at the Abermain Collieries .

Following a campaign by the citizens of Abermain , the Capt. Clarence Smith Jeffries Memorial Park was established in 1947 , and upon Barbara Jeffries death in 1964 , she bequeathed her son 's medals to the Warriors Chapel at Christchurch Cathedral , Newcastle , where they are currently on display . Jeffries is also commemorated by photographic portraits in the Abermain Memorial and Citizens ' Club and by a carved chair presented to Abermain Holy Trinity Anglican Church by his uncle and aunt in 1918 . In 1976 , the Jeffries and Currey Memorial Library was opened by the Governor of New South Wales , Sir Roden Cutler , at Dudley Public School to honour two of the school 's pupils who were decorated with the Victoria Cross during the First World War : Clarence Jeffries and William Currey . The pair are also commemorated by the Capt. Clarence Smith Jeffries (V.C.) and Pte . William Matthew Currey (V.C.) Memorial Wall located in the grounds of Sandgate General Cemetery , Newcastle , which was unveiled in an official ceremony on 16 April 2000 . The Clarence Jeffries Housing Estate at Bullecourt Army Barracks in Adamstown is also named in his honour .