

= Bruce Kingsbury =

Bruce Steel Kingsbury , VC (8 January 1918 ? 29 August 1942) was an Australian soldier of the Second World War . Serving initially in the Middle East , he later gained renown for his actions during the Battle of Isurava , one of many battles forming the Kokoda Track Campaign in New Guinea . His bravery during the battle was recognised with 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 . The first serviceman to receive the VC for actions in Australian territory , Kingsbury was a member of the 2 / 14th Infantry Battalion .

On 29 August 1942 , during the Battle of Isurava , Kingsbury was one of the few survivors of a platoon that had been overrun by the Japanese . He immediately volunteered to join a different platoon , which had been ordered to counter @-@ attack . Rushing forward and firing his Bren gun from the hip , he cleared a path through the enemy and inflicted several casualties . Kingsbury was then seen to fall , shot by a Japanese sniper and killed instantly . His actions , which delayed the Japanese long enough for the Australians to fortify their positions , were instrumental in saving his battalion 's headquarters and he was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross as a result .

= = Early life = =

Born in the Melbourne suburb of Preston on 8 January 1918 , Kingsbury was the second son of Philip Blencowe Kingsbury , an estate agent , and his wife Florence Annie , née Steel . Growing up in Prahran , Kingsbury became friends with Allen Avery when he was five years old . The two often raced billycars down the hilly streets , and would remain lifelong friends . Kingsbury attended Windsor State School as a child , and his results were good enough to earn a scholarship at Melbourne Technical College . Avery began an agricultural course in Longerenong . Although qualified as a printer , Kingsbury began working at his father 's real estate business , a job he disliked .

Unhappy in the estate agency , Kingsbury took up the position of caretaker on a farm at Boundary Bend , not far from where Avery was working . After three months , the pair decided that they would go on an adventure ? walking through western Victoria and New South Wales . In February 1936 , Kingsbury and Avery left their jobs and began travelling north , working on various farms and estates . The pair eventually arrived in Sydney several months later , and returned to Melbourne on the first train back . Kingsbury resumed working as a real estate agent , while Avery worked as a nurseryman . They spent their free time at dances and parties . During this time , Kingsbury met and became close to Leila Bradbury . As the war in Europe escalated , Kingsbury and Avery made up their minds to enlist . Despite his parents ' disapproval , Kingsbury signed up to the Australian Imperial Force on 29 May 1940 .

= = Middle East = =

Kingsbury was originally assigned to the 2 / 2nd Pioneer Battalion , but requested a transfer to the 2 / 14th Infantry Battalion to join Avery who had , coincidentally , enlisted on the same day at a different recruitment centre . The pair undertook basic training at Puckapunyal , where they were assigned to the same section (7 Section of 9 Platoon) and were given drill instruction , rifle drill and mock battle training . After 7 Section learned they would be sent overseas , Kingsbury informed Avery that he planned to propose to Leila . The pair went to Melbourne to try to organise the wedding . Although Kingsbury gave Leila a wristwatch as an engagement present , they could not arrange a marriage licence before he left , and the marriage never took place .

Kingsbury , along with the rest of the 7th Division , was shipped to the Middle East in late 1940 . Spending time in Tel Aviv and the surrounding areas , the 7th Division continued training and awaited further orders . On 9 April , the division was sent forward to Mersa Matruh in Egypt to support the Commonwealth force 's defences . It replaced a Scottish unit and took up positions in the garrison . On 23 May , Kingsbury 's brigade was sent back to Palestine , en route to battle in

Syria and Lebanon . The 2 / 14th fought against the Vichy French on the Lebanese mountain ranges , as part of a three @-@ pronged attack on Beirut . During this time , the division fought in many towns , including a major battle in Jezzine , where Avery was wounded by a grenade ? which drove metal splinters into his spine ? and awarded the Military Medal for his " cool courage and devotion " . As the war with the Vichy French was winding down , on 11 July Kingsbury and Avery were selected for a contingent to collect and bury the dead . The battalion stayed in Beirut for a few months , until setting up a semi @-@ permanent camp at Hill 69 , outside Jerusalem .

On 30 January 1942 , the 7th Division left Egypt for Australia , sailing via Bombay , as the division was needed to fight against the Japanese . Kingsbury 's battalion made landfall at Adelaide and continued to Melbourne by rail . The battalion arrived on 16 March , and was given a week 's leave . After this , the battalion underwent training in Glen Innes , before camping in Yandina , Queensland . On 5 August , the battalion moved north to Brisbane , boarding a ship to Port Moresby to join the fighting in New Guinea , where a force of mostly Militia personnel were engaged in a desperate defensive action .

= = Kokoda Track Campaign = =

Following the Battle of the Coral Sea , the Japanese abandoned the attempt to capture Port Moresby from the sea and , on 21 July , landed ground forces at Buna in north @-@ east Papua . After capturing the town of Kokoda for the second time on 9 August , the Japanese began advancing along the Kokoda Track towards Port Moresby . The 2 @,@ 500 @-@ strong Japanese force met the 39th and 53rd Infantry Battalions , at the town of Isurava . As the battle was beginning to develop , on 26 August , members of the 2 / 14th , including Kingsbury , arrived at Isurava to reinforce the exhausted 39th Battalion .

= = Battle of Isurava = =

The two combined battalions began digging in around Isurava . A headquarters had been set up at the top of the hill , which was vital to the defence of the position . While the Australians dug themselves in , the Japanese , led by Japanese Major General Tomitar? Horii , prepared to attack . On 28 August , the Japanese launched their offensive . The Australians , who had initially been outnumbered but were now roughly equal in strength , resisted in the face of heavy machine @-@ gun fire and hand @-@ to @-@ hand combat . On 29 August , the Japanese broke through the right flank , pushing the Australians back with heavy fire , threatening to cut off their headquarters . The Australians began to prepare a counter @-@ offensive , and men volunteered to join an attack party . Kingsbury , one of the few survivors of his platoon , ran down the Track with the group .

You could see his Bren gun held out and his big bottom swaying as he went with the momentum he was getting up , followed by Alan Avery . They were cheerful . They were going out on a picnic almost .

Using a Bren gun he had taken from wounded Corporal Lindsay Bear , Kingsbury , alongside Avery and the rest of the group , engaged the nearby Japanese . The fire was so heavy that the undergrowth was completely destroyed within five minutes . It was then that Kingsbury , firing from his hip , charged straight at the Japanese .

He came forward with this Bren and he just mowed them down . He was an inspiration to everybody else around him . There were clumps of Japs here and there and he just mowed them down .

His actions demoralised the Japanese , killing several and forcing others to find cover . The rest of the Australian group , inspired by Kingsbury 's actions , forced the Japanese further back into the jungle . Kingsbury was then seen to fall to the ground , shot by a Japanese sniper . The sniper fired one shot before disappearing . Avery , who had been about 6 feet (1 @.@ 8 m) from Kingsbury , briefly chased after the sniper but returned to carry Kingsbury to the regimental aid post ; Kingsbury was dead by the time he arrived there .

= = Legacy = =

Kingsbury 's actions were a turning point in the battle . The Japanese had begun to gather momentum in their attack , and were threatening to overrun the 2 / 14th 's headquarters . His attack inflicted damage to the Japanese force , temporarily halting their advance . This allowed the Australian troops to stabilise their positions , eventually regaining control and defending the battalion 's headquarters . His act of bravery served as an inspiration to the troops . However , the battle ended in defeat for the Australians , with elements of the 2 / 14th breaking during the afternoon of 29 August . The remainder of the battalion managed to withdraw during the night , but suffered heavy casualties and another defeat during fighting the next day at positions around the Isurava Guest House .

Authors and military analysts have speculated that had Kingsbury not attacked , the Japanese might have destroyed the battalion . The Japanese had been attacking in waves , and had started to climb a steep hill to outflank the Australians , in an effort to win the battle . The Australians were low on supplies and the Japanese were on the verge of breaking through the Australian line . Had they broken through , they would have been able to isolate the battalion 's headquarters from the soldiers on the flanks . This would have prevented the Australians from retreating to Alola , allowing the Japanese to overrun them .

For his actions , Kingsbury was awarded the Victoria Cross , which was gazetted on 9 February 1943 . His citation read :

War Office , 9th February , 1943 .

The KING has been graciously pleased to approve the posthumous award of the VICTORIA CROSS to : ?

No . VX 19139 Private . Bruce Steel Kingsbury , Australian Military Forces .

In New Guinea , the Battalion to which Private Kingsbury belonged had been holding a position in the Isurava area for two days against continuous and fierce enemy attacks . On the 29th August , 1942 , the enemy attacked in such force that they succeeded in breaking through the Battalion 's right flank , creating a serious threat both to the rest of the Battalion and to its Headquarters . To avoid the situation becoming more desperate , it was essential to regain immediately the lost ground on the right flank .

Private Kingsbury , who was one of the few survivors of a Platoon which had been overrun and severely cut about by the enemy , immediately volunteered to join a different platoon which had been ordered to counter @-@ attack .

He rushed forward firing his Bren Gun from the hip through terrific machine @-@ gun fire and succeeded in clearing a path through the enemy . Continuing to sweep the enemy positions with his fire and inflicting an extremely high number of casualties on them , Private Kingsbury was then seen to fall to the ground shot dead , by the bullet from a sniper hiding in the wood .

Private Kingsbury displayed a complete disregard for his own safety . His initiative and superb courage made possible the recapture of the position which undoubtedly saved Battalion Headquarters , as well as causing heavy casualties amongst the enemy . His coolness , determination and devotion to duty in the face of great odds was an inspiration to his comrades .

Kingsbury was the first Australian soldier to be awarded the Victoria Cross for actions in the South Pacific and also the first on Australian territory . Kingsbury 's section remains the most highly decorated section in the British Empire , its members having received a Victoria Cross , one Distinguished Conduct Medal and four Military Medals by war 's end ; the platoon also suffered the highest proportional losses in the Kokoda Campaign . Kingsbury 's platoon sergeant , Sergeant Robert Thompson , later commented that when he was recommending Kingsbury for the Victoria Cross , he was asked several times would he " please write it up a bit more with a bit more action and such " and

On the same day or the next day there was another chap named Charlie McCarthy [sic , McCallum] , who really did something , probably far more deserving but they were only going to award one VC , so Bruce got it . I 'm not decrying it . He was worded up and Charlie unfortunately was worded down ?

Kingsbury 's Rock , the rock next to which Kingsbury died , stands within sight of where the 2 / 14th

Battalion 's headquarters had been established , and has been incorporated as part of the Isurava Memorial . His body now rests in the Bomana Cemetery , Port Moresby , and his Victoria Cross is on display at the Australian War Memorial , Canberra . The Melbourne suburb of Kingsbury was named in his honour , as was a rest area on the Remembrance Driveway and a street in the Canberra suburb of Gowrie . Kingsbury 's story was featured in the History Channel production For Valour .