



LORD ASHCROFT'S  
"HERO OF THE MONTH"

# CAPTAIN ALBERT JACKA VC, MC & BAR

The position known as Courtney's Post had been established by the Anzacs on the morning of 25 April 1915, the day of the first Allied landings on Gallipoli. Just over three weeks later, the Turks launched large-scale counter-attacks. In the fighting that followed at Courtney's Post, one of the defenders gained the distinction of being the first Australian recipient of the Victoria Cross in the First World War.

## AGGRESSION

BOLDNESS • INITIATIVE • LEADERSHIP  
SACRIFICE • SKILL • ENDURANCE

The many Victoria Crosses and George Crosses in the Lord Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum in London are displayed under one of seven different qualities of bravery. Whilst Captain Albert Jacka's award is not part of the collection, Lord Ashcroft feels that it falls within the category of AGGRESSION: 'For many actions killing is the means to the end. To prevail, maximum force has to be applied. Aggression is invariably fast and adrenaline fuelled. It epitomises the idea of 'hot courage', acting quickly in the mayhem of battle.'

► A studio portrait of Lance Corporal Albert Jacka. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; A03408)



**A**LBERT JACKA was born in Layard, Victoria, Australia, on 10 January 1893. He was the fourth of seven children born to Nathaniel Jacka, a timber worker, and his English-born wife Elizabeth. When Albert, usually known as Bert, was five years old, his family moved to Wedderburn, Victoria.

After leaving school, Jacka worked as a labourer with his father and, later, an engine cleaner before, aged 18, joining the Victoria State Forests Department. He was also a talented sportsman and he excelled at cycling.

On 8 September 1914, after the outbreak of the First World War, he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). On 10 November, he was posted to the 14th Battalion, AIF, as an acting lance corporal and on 22

December he embarked for the Middle East for two months training.

On 25 April 1915, Jacka took part in the

historic landings at Gallipoli, landing at Anzac Cove. His Victoria Cross was awarded for outstanding bravery at Courtney's Post, Gallipoli, where some of the severely depleted 14th Battalion had been sent to support Anzacs who were under relentless attack from the Turks.

At 03.30 hours on 19 May 1915, a party of Turks crept up to the trench occupied by Jacka and his comrades and the enemy threw in eight bombs. Three men were killed and all of the rest, with the exception of Jacka, were injured. The Turks then jumped into the trench and most of the remaining Australians fled. Jacka, though, kept up a relentless fire on the enemy and thereby prevented their advance.

Jacka was then asked if he would charge the Turks if some men could be found to back him up. 'Yes, two or three,' he replied. With three volunteers, and leading from the front, Jacka launched his counter-attack on the mouth of the communication trench. However, the soldier who followed him was shot three times and the charge was abandoned.

Instead, Jacka asked one of the other volunteers to keep up a steady fire while he went along several trenches, crossed No Man's Land and then ambushed the Turks from the rear. Jacka shot five Turks and bayoneted two others, killing all seven men. 'Well, I managed to get the beggars,' he said the next morning. His VC was announced on 24 July 1915.

Jacka was promoted to sergeant and then company sergeant major while still in the Dardanelles and, after the evacuation from Gallipoli, he went to Egypt, where he was promoted to second lieutenant in March 1916. He served on the Western Front from 7 July 1916 and again displayed quite exceptional bravery at Pozières on 7 August that year.



He and 14 other men from the 14th Battalion were sent to relieve Anzacs who were holding an advanced trench under heavy German bombardment. Early in the morning, the Germans attacked and swept through the Anzac ranks. By now, only seven Australians were uninjured and Jacka himself had been slightly wounded.

As the Germans began to round up Anzac prisoners and wounded, Jacka told the seven fit men to attach their bayonets, saying: 'If we stay here they are bound to capture us and I would sooner be dead than a prisoner. The supports cannot be long in coming. Let's go for them.'

With these words ringing in their ears, the men advanced at scores of Germans, shooting their rifles from the hip. In fierce hand-to-hand fighting, Jacka received multiple wounds as the Germans started to encircle the Australian troops. However, support arrived in the nick of time: many Germans were shot, 50 were taken prisoner and several Australian prisoners were freed.

Bill Jacka, who visited his brother at the regimental aid post, left the ward thinking: 'I won't be seeing you again.' However, Bert Jacka, despite even being reported dead at one stage, defied the odds and survived.

Having been evacuated to Britain, Jacka belatedly received his VC at a Windsor Castle investiture in September 1916. However, he was resentful that he had not also been given a Bar to his VC for his actions at Pozières, which he felt were six times more demanding than his heroics at Gallipoli - in fact, he was awarded the Military Cross for this gallantry.

Jacka returned to his battalion and was awarded a Bar to his MC for several one-man patrols at Bullecourt, where, on one occasion, he personally guided British tanks into position. Yet again though, many thought his extreme bravery worthy of a Bar to his VC.

Promoted to captain in December 1916, Jacka was finally removed from the war by a mustard gas attack in May 1918 at Villers-Bretonneux, which led

to him undergoing life-saving surgery. He is widely regarded as the greatest front line soldier of the First World War, a man who could be terrifyingly aggressive when facing the enemy. Charles Bean, Australia's Official War Historian, said: 'Jacka should have come out of the war as the most decorated man in the AIF ... Everyone who knows the facts, knows that Jacka earned the Victoria Cross three times.'

Jacka was the first Australian recipient of the Victoria Cross in the First World War. This distinction earned him the sum of £500 which had been put up by a Melbourne businessman for the first Australian to be so honoured.

Demobbed in 1920, Jacka married a year later, though he never fully recovered from his injuries. After the war, he co-ran an electrical goods business and was later elected Mayor of St Kilda, a suburb of Melbourne. However, he collapsed at a council meeting and died, just over a month later, on 17 January 1932, aged 39. ☉

▲ Lance Corporal Albert Jacka confronting the Turks on 19 May 1915. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

◀ General Sir William Birdwood (centre) shaking hands with Captain Albert Jacka VC, MC, of the 14th Battalion (left), after presenting him with a Bar to his Military Cross for bravery during the first attack on Bullecourt, near the Hindenburg Line.

The ceremony took place at Ribemont on 12 May 1917. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; E00438)

## VICTORIA CROSS HEROES

► Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is an international businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. An account about Albert Jacka appears in his book *Victoria Cross Heroes* even though Jacka's medal group is not part of Lord Ashcroft's VC collection. For more information, please visit: [www.victoriacrossheroes.com](http://www.victoriacrossheroes.com) Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collection is on public display at Imperial War Museums, London. For more information visit: [www.iwm.org.uk/heroes](http://www.iwm.org.uk/heroes). For details about his VC collection, visit: [www.lordashcroftmedals.com](http://www.lordashcroftmedals.com) For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit: [www.lordashcroft.com](http://www.lordashcroft.com). Follow him on Twitter: @LordAshcroft

