

## The VC.

Chris Jobson

With the recent awarding of a VC to an Australian soldier the Australian media and the Australian War Memorial comment that there are now "98 Australian VCs"; this figure is wrong - there are now 93 Australian servicemen that have been awarded the Cross.

There exists amongst the Australian Defence Force and a number of Australian defence-related organizations (such as the Australian War Memorial and the Department for Veterans' Affairs) a misunderstanding with regard to the number of Australian Victoria Cross (VC) recipients. The current stated figure of 98 recipients is, to put it bluntly, wrong and the problem is that Australians, particularly school children learning about our Defence history and visitors to the War Memorial, are being taught and informed about a distortion of facts. The correct number of Australian VC recipients, as at 2011, is in fact 93.

An Australian VC recipient is a person who was in the Australian defence force, as an Australian serviceman, at the time of the action for which he was awarded the Cross, regardless of his country of origin or citizenship. It is interesting to note that of the Australian servicemen awarded the VC eight were English, four were New Zealanders, two were Irish, two were South African and one was Danish (an "English" Australian Serviceman was awarded the Cross during the South African War and during The Great War the Australian recipients included the other seven Englishmen, the four New Zealanders, the Irishman and the Dane).



The incorrect number of 98 includes four Australians and an Englishman who were NOT Australian servicemen at the time of their relevant actions. These men were as follows:

**Sergeant James Rogers.** Rogers initially served in the South African War in Australia's 1<sup>st</sup> Victorian Mounted Infantry Company; however, when the Unit returned to Australia in 1900 Rogers stayed behind, discharged from the Australian colonial unit and joined the South African Constabulary. It was for his actions in this South African unit, as a South African serviceman, that Rogers was awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Lieutenant Wilbur Dartnell.** Dartnell was in South Africa in 1914 and, with the outbreak of The Great war, he sailed to England and joined the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the Royal Fusiliers. It was for his actions, as a British officer in this British Army Regiment, that Dartnell was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross (as a point of interest, Dartnell never, at any time, served in an Australian armed service).

**Sergeant Samuel Pearse.** Pearse was born in the United Kingdom (he was not an Australian); however, he served in the AIF's 1<sup>st</sup> Machine Gun Battalion on the Western Front. In 1919 he took discharge from the Australian Battalion as it prepared to return to Australia and enlisted into the British Army's 45<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the Royal Fusiliers. It was for his actions as a British soldier in this British Army Regiment, serving in the British North Russia Relief Force, that Pearse was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. (Pearse was not Australian born and he was serving as a British soldier in the British Army at the time of his relevant action)

**Corporal Arthur Sullivan.** Sullivan served in the Royal Australian Artillery and was posted to the United Kingdom, as a reinforcement, in July 1918. However, the War ended before he could be allotted to a unit on the Western Front. Sullivan discharged from the AIF in June 1919 and enlisted into the British Army's 45<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the Royal Fusiliers. It was for his actions as a

British soldier in this British Army Battalion, serving in the British North Russia Relief Force, that Sullivan was awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Wing Commander Hughie Edwards.** [Edwards](#) transferred (was not detached) from the Royal Australian Air Force to the Royal Air Force in 1936. It was for his actions, as a (British) Royal Air Force officer, serving in the RAF's 105<sup>th</sup> Squadron, that Edwards was awarded the Victoria Cross (Sir John Smyth, in his book *Victoria Cross 1856 – 1964*, also accredits Edwards as being a British (RAF) VC recipient).



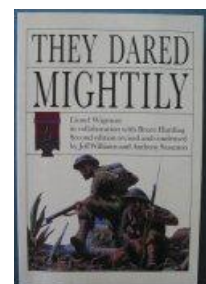
The only persons entitled to be on the Australian Honour Roll of Victoria Cross recipients are those whose actions were undertaken whilst serving as an Australian serviceman. Those who discharge or transfer from the Australian armed forces and join the armed forces of another country, and then carry-out an action that results in the awarding of a Victoria Cross, are not Australian servicemen; therefore they are not Australian VC recipients (Flight Sergeant (acting Pilot Officer) Rawdon Middleton, on the other-hand, was an Australian serviceman on attachment to the RAF and was therefore technically an RAAF serviceman when he carried-out the actions for which he was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross).

One has to be very careful with the use of the term “Australian”. As already mentioned, not all the Australian VC recipients were technically Australians (ie. native-born or naturalized Australians), particularly during the South African War and The Great War, but they were, never-the-less, Australian servicemen and are rightly referred to as Australian VC recipients.

The five Victoria Cross recipients listed above were NOT Australian VC recipients. Rogers' name appears on the South African Constabulary's list of VC recipients; Dartnell, Pearse and Sullivan all appear on the Royal Fusiliers' VC Honour Roll, and Edwards appears on that of the Royal Air Force. They cannot be listed on both the Rolls of these countries (and their relevant services/regiments) and on that of Australia. As already stated, Rogers, Dartnell, Pearse, Sullivan and Edwards are NOT Australian Victoria Cross recipients.

To argue that the figure of 98 is correct because the five recipients in question were Australian, regardless of which country they were serving at the time, doesn't stand-up either; Pearse was not an Australian (he was English and was awarded the Cross for actions as a British soldier in a British Army regiment). If original nationality is the criterion then one must remove up to 17 names from the Australian VC figure (93), because these 17 Australian servicemen were a mixture of nationalities (eight Englishmen, four New Zealanders, two Irishmen, two South Africans and a Dane); leaving a figure of 76 “Australian recipients”. If previous service within the Australian defence forces is the argument for inclusion then Dartnell's name must be removed, as he never served in the Australian Army. There is only one criterion for classification as an Australian VC recipient and that is to have been serving as an Australian serviceman at the time of the relevant action. Therefore the correct figure of Australian VC recipients is 93.

The incorrect number of Australian VC recipients also appears in Lionel Wigmore's book *They Dared Mightily* (written prior to the Vietnam War it details 92 recipients instead of the then correct figure of 87); however, as stated in the book's credit information, this publication was “...edited for the Board of Management of the Australian War Memorial” (one of the organizations that persists in distorting the facts in regard to this subject).



A British publication, entitled *Ribbons & Medals Naval, Military Air Force and Civil*, written by H. Taprell Dorling, correctly lists, by countries, the total number of Victoria Crosses awarded as of its date of publication (1963), and accurately records a total of 87 Australian VC recipients; add to this figure the

four Crosses awarded during the Vietnam War and the two Crosses awarded in Afghanistan, and you have a total of 93. Rogers' VC is included in the South African awards, and those of Dartnell, Pearce, Sullivan and Edwards are included in both the British Army and RAF statistics.

Claiming that there are 98 Australian Victoria Cross recipients is wrong and by doing so both the Australian War Memorial and the Department of Veterans' Affairs are providing people (particularly school children) with inaccurate (wrong) historical information; there are only 93 Australian Victoria Cross recipients.

The Australian War Memorial, in a letter of reply after I addressed this matter some years ago, agreed with my facts but refused to publicly acknowledge them (ie. it wouldn't change the figure and explanation on display at the Memorial's Hall of Valour) and both *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Canberra Times* refused to publish my recent letters to the editor on the matter (surprise - surprise).

### Note:

Persons are AWARDED the Cross; they don't WIN the Cross - and people who are awarded the Cross are RECIPIENTS not WINNERS.

You can read the full list [HERE](#).

***Chris Jobson was an RSM with 4 Fd Regt at Lavarack Barracks and the School of Artillery and is a Military History buff.***

A wife asks her husband, a computer engineer; "Could you please go shopping for me and buy one carton of milk, and if they have eggs, get 6!" A short time later the husband comes back with 6 cartons of milk. The wife asks him, "Why the hell did you buy 6 cartons of milk?" He replied, "They had eggs."

That's a joke Rupe!!

## Vietnam History.

Canberra Times

A major row is brewing between Vietnam War veterans and the Australian War Memorial over the official written history of the conflict.

The veterans want a key section of the official history of the war rewritten, alleging that major factual errors about Agent Orange contained in one of the history's volumes are now being accepted as fact by a new wave of historians.

But senior figures at the memorial, including military history section head, Ashley Ekins, are resisting any move to have the history rewritten or withdrawn.

Ashley Ekins says he would support a review but not a rewrite of the official Vietnam War history.

The 17-year-old controversy over the toxic herbicide, Agent Orange, used as a defoliant during the war, has been reignited by the publication of two new books on the conflict ***Zombie Myths of Australian Military History*** and ***War Wounds***.

Graham Walker, a Vietnam veteran who also saw active service in Indonesia in 1966, is the author of an essay making the case for the official history to be rewritten in *War Wounds* which was edited by Mr Ekins and his then AWM colleague Elizabeth Stewart. Mr Walker told *The Canberra Times* the official history, written by Professor F.B. Smith and published in 1994, stated falsely that no veterans' diseases could be linked to the controversial herbicide and that the focus on the Agent Orange debate had undermined support for Vietnam veterans on other fronts and those seeking compensation had been motivated by opportunism and greed.

Mr Walker and other members of the veterans community have long argued these claims were offensive and inaccurate.

Professor Smith's *Medicine at War*, the third volume in the official Vietnam War history produced under the imprimatur of the Australian War Memorial, sparked fierce debate on its release, with veterans claiming it was one sided, out-of-date and inaccurate.

Mr Ekins said revising or withdrawing an official history would end a tradition of independence that dated back to the work of Charles Bean after World War One. The senior historian said he would support a fresh review of the Agent Orange issue by a suitably qualified historian in the light of more recent developments but not as part of the official history.



Mr Walker said he and other Vietnam veterans had long feared that if left uncorrected, Smith's "fatally flawed" account would lead to the perpetuation of serious errors including attacks on the character of dead men for decades to come.

"This has now come to pass," he said.

Late last year the Vietnam Veterans' Federation clashed with a Canberra academic, Professor Jeffrey Grey (right), of the Australian Defence Academy, after he ran with the line originally published by Professor Smith in his 1994 book.



In a letter to Professor Grey dated September 19, 2010, federation president Tim McCombe wrote, "In your chapter (in *Zombie Myths*) you say of the Agent Orange Royal Commission 'the final report concluded that herbicides were not guilty of causing the diseases and deformities alleged'.

This is a misleading statement and follows the line of Smith's account." Mr McCombe, who lost a leg to a mine in Vietnam, was one of the men who took offence at being described by Professor Smith as motivated by greed. Mr Walker said these assertions should not be allowed to stand.

"The royal commissioner did find a link between exposure to Agent Orange and some cancers," he said. "He found that a repatriation determining authority might well attribute a Vietnam veteran's soft tissue sarcoma or non-Hodgkin's lymphoma to his exposure to Agent Orange."



## THE FINAL INSPECTION

The soldier stood and faced God,  
Which must always come to pass.  
He hoped his shoes were shining,  
Just as brightly as his brass.

'Step forward now, you soldier,  
How shall I deal with you ?  
Have you always turned the other cheek ?  
To My Church have you been true?'

The soldier squared his shoulders and said,  
'No, Lord, I guess I ain't  
Because those of us who carry guns,  
Can't always be a saint.

I've had to work most Sundays,  
And at times my talk was tough.  
And sometimes I've been violent,  
Because the world is awfully rough.

But, I never took a penny,  
That wasn't mine to keep...  
Though I worked a lot of overtime,  
When the bills got just too steep.

And I never passed a cry for help,  
Though at times I shook with fear.  
And sometimes, God, forgive me,  
I've wept unmanly tears.

I know I don't deserve a place,  
Among the people here.  
They never wanted me around,  
Except to calm their fears.

If you've a place for me here, Lord,  
It needn't be so grand.  
I never expected or had too much,  
But if you don't, I'll understand.

There was a silence all around the throne,  
Where the saints had often trod.  
As the soldier waited quietly,  
For the judgment of his God.

'Step forward now, you soldier,  
You've borne your burdens well.  
Walk peacefully on Heaven's streets,  
You've done your time in Hell.'

*John Stewart sent us that*

If someone with multiple personalities threatens to kill himself, is it considered a hostage situation?