

THE BORELLA RIDE

The bravest of the brave

Dr Tom Lewis OAM, Lead Historian for The Borella Ride, highlights three Victoria Cross recipients who be featured in this epic event

The Victoria Cross

In 1918, Lieutenant Albert Borella ran ahead of his platoon, across the chaos of a battlefield in France, to attack a German machinegun with only a revolver in his hand. He then led his remaining 10 men to successfully attack a German garrison and hold the position for hours against an enemy counter-attacks that outnumbered them ten to one.

In 1969, Warrant Officer Keith Payne fought off a fierce enemy ambush in Vietnam. Despite being wounded in his hands and arms, he ventured into enemy territory at night, under direct attack, to find forty lost comrades, some wounded, bringing them back to safety.

In 2013, Corporal Cameron Baird made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan to save a critically wounded mate. Three times he personally attacked a heavily defended doorway to give his team the opportunity to enter the enemy's stronghold and break a vicious stalemate.

These are the extraordinary actions of men who have earned the Victoria Cross. An award only given to military personnel of the British Empire and Commonwealth who have proved their extreme bravery, devotion to duty and self-sacrifice while under direct attack from the enemy.

Albert Borella VC, Keith Payne VC and Cameron Baird VC – who received his Victoria Cross posthumously – are three of only 100 Australians who have received this award. Their actions show that they are the ultimate soldiers. Men who will step forward and do what needs to be done , no matter the risk to themselves.

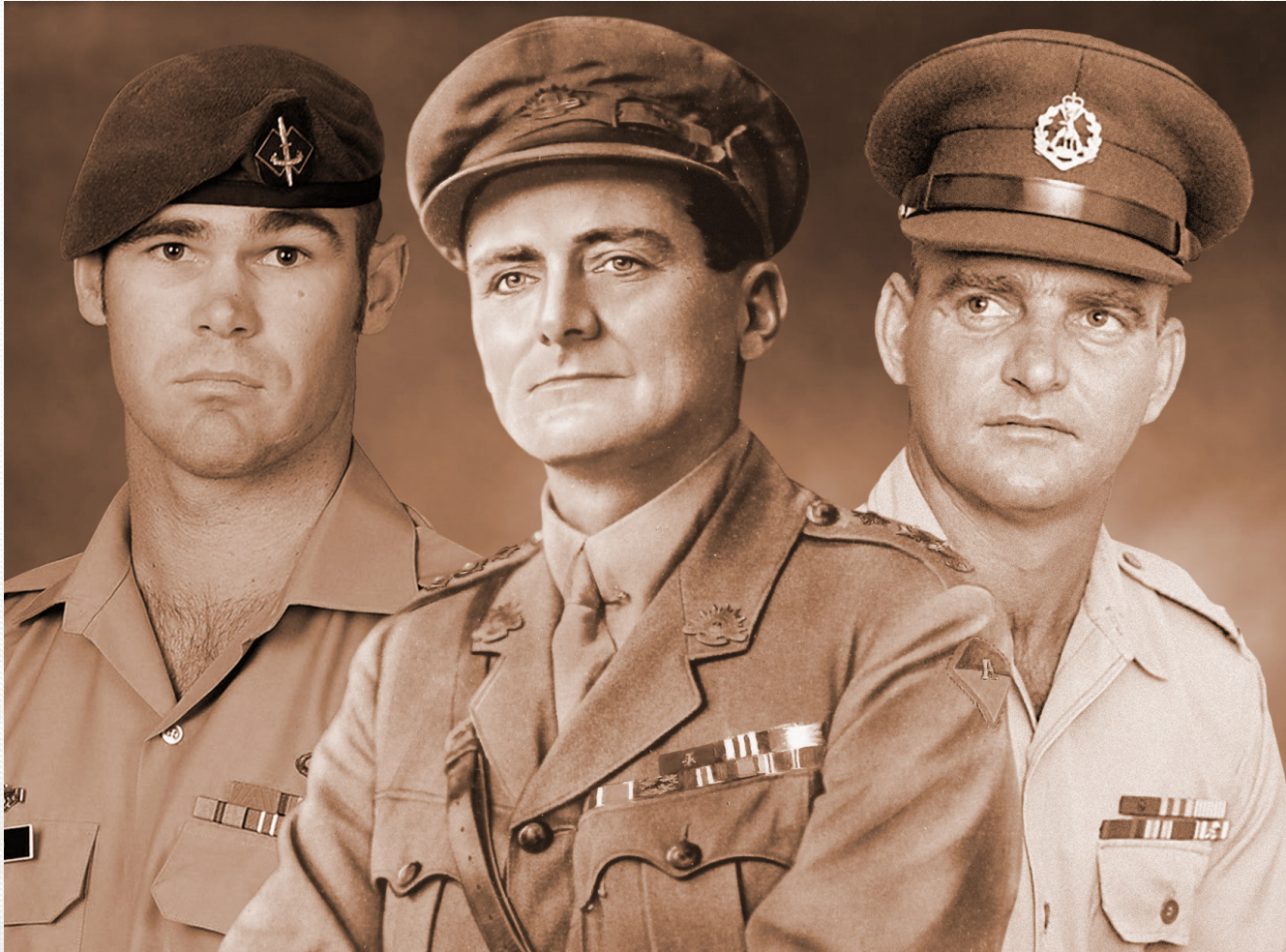
Since its inception in 1856, the Victoria Cross has been awarded 1,357 times to military personnel – army, navy or air force – across the British Empire and Commonwealth.

Each Victoria Cross has an extraordinary story behind it that belongs in the pages of history.

Creation of the Victoria Cross medal

The simple Victoria Cross, made out of dull metal with a plain ribbon, represents the greatest qualities of bravery and self-sacrifice. Queen Victoria herself chose the inscription on the medal, turning down the first suggestion "For the Brave", by explaining that all her soldiers were brave, and instead choosing the words "For Valour".

One of the Royal Family's jewelers, Hancocks Ltd of London, has made all the Victoria Crosses since the inception of the award in 1856. All Victoria Crosses are made from bronze, traditionally taken from guns said to be captured in the Crimean War. The rough-cast Crosses are then individually hand finished; each is therefore unique. The Victoria Cross was deliberately manufactured to have little actual value by not being made of precious metal or featuring jewellery. Its worth lies in what it stands for and what people do to earn it – and it is so highly regarded the medals are extremely valuable.



Left to right: Corporal Cameron Baird VC, Captain Albert Borella VC and Warrant Officer Keith Payne VC

The design of the Victoria Cross shows a lion guarding the Royal crown. This emphasises the personal link that has always existed between the monarch and recipients. Indeed, Victoria Crosses are personally presented to recipients by the British monarch or their representative. Albert Borella received his in 1918 from King George V.

The recipient's name, rank, number and unit are inscribed on the reverse of the suspension bar. The date of the act of bravery is inscribed in the centre of the reverse of the cross. Upon receiving the Victoria Cross, recipients are entitled to have the letters "VC" after their name.

The Remarkable Recipients

The first Victoria Cross recipient was the Royal Navy's Charles Lucas VC, of HMS Hecla, for an action in the Baltic on 21 June 1854 in the Crimean War.

The first Army Victoria Cross was Sergeant Luke O'Connor VC of the 23rd Regiment (later Royal Welch Fusiliers) for his actions in the Battle of Alma on 20 September 1854, also in the Crimean War.

The first Victoria Cross awarded for action in the air had to wait until powered flight became a reality, with that decoration going to Second Lieutenant William Rhodes-Moorhouse VC of the Royal Flying Corps 2 Squadron, for his bravery in a bombing raid in France on 26 April 1915.



Lieutenants Borella, Brown and Captain Shankland after presentation of their Victoria Crosses by King George V at Sandringham. Left to right: Princess Mary, Lieutenant AC Borella VC 28th Battalion AIF, Her Majesty Queen Mary, Captain R Shankland VC Canadian Infantry, His Majesty King George V, Sergeant WE Brown VC 20th Battalion AIF and the Prince of Wales. Australian War Memorial.



Albert Borella
THE BORELLA RIDE

Australia's first recipient was Captain Sir Neville Howse VC for his bravery during the Boer War, in 1900. He also served in World War I and later as Commonwealth Minister for Health, Defence and Repatriation.

Our first World War I recipient was Albert Jacka VC, an infantryman who fought fiercely at Gallipoli and in many other actions after that. Jacka became a household name in Australia, partly because The Great War had captured the Australian imagination due to the high numbers of troops committed, with over 50,000 men signed up within five months of the war's commencement.

Some unusual Victoria Cross recipients were the two youngest: Hospital Apprentice Andrew Fitzgibbon VC, for action at the Taku Forts, China, on 21 August 1860, and Drummer Thomas Flinn VC, 64th Regiment, for bravery at Cawnpore in the Indian Mutiny on 28 November 1857. Both were aged only 15 years and three months at the time of their actions. Flinn's birthdate is not more precisely known so it is impossible to say who is the youngest. The oldest Victoria Cross recipient was Lieutenant William Raynor VC, also for actions in the Mutiny on 11 May 1857, when he was aged 69 years.

Most unusually, the Victoria Cross has been awarded twice on three occasions, resulting in what is known as a "bar" to the Victoria Cross rather than another medal. This means a narrow strip of metal is sewn across the Victoria Cross ribbon. These unusual men were; Lieutenant Arthur Martin-Leake, Captain Noel Chavasse and Captain Charles Upham.

The largest number of Victoria Crosses awarded for a single collective action was eleven for the defence of Rorke's Drift, South Africa on 22-23 January 1879, made famous by the 1964 feature film, Zulu. Two of the Rorke's Drift Victoria Crosses – those belonging to Lieutenant John Chard VC and Private Robert Jones VC – are on display in The Lord Ashcroft Gallery: Extraordinary Heroes, in London's Imperial War Museum.

The Qualities of the Victoria Cross

So what special quality unites all these men?

Listening to interviews with the few surviving Victoria Cross recipients, such as Ben Roberts-Smith VC or Daniel Keiragh VC, there seems to be strength and determination, and a desire to step up and do

what's right. Of the actions that saw them awarded the Victoria Cross, many of the men simply say words to the effect of "someone had to do something", and that ultimately betrays their finest qualities of courage and self-sacrifice.

If we could meet Albert Borella VC today, when he had just returned from World War I, what might we see?

A quiet man, unassuming and with gentle manners, but nevertheless someone who stepped up when it came his turn to bat. Someone who went forward and took command when it was necessary. Borella was first a private soldier, then a corporal, then a sergeant. Then he was commissioned as an officer.

Borella was one who could say "Follow me" and advance, and whose powers of command were so great he did not need to turn his head to know others were following. A man who in his Victoria Cross action led from the front; stormed a German machinegun, and then held with his men their position against determined enemy counterattack.

Borella and his entire gallant band of brothers are only humans, and yet it seems they have descended to live amongst us and defend us in the most desperate of situations.

It is those who hold the line, who stand up for a society, who battle for honour, justice, truth and all we hold dear that makes us Australian.

To such as our bravest 100 of the Victoria Cross we hold them special and apart.

They are as one with the brave pilots of the Battle of Britain, when a green and pleasant land was saved from invasion.

They are as one with the British bowman and men at arms of the Battle of Agincourt, of whom in the play Henry V, Shakespeare used the line: "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers."

The Band of Brothers was the name Admiral Nelson gave to his fleet's sea-captains. It was the name given to the American warriors who fought on through D-Day and beyond in World War II, Easy Company of the 101st Airborne Division.

The Band of Australian Brothers that are our Victoria Cross recipients are our highest warriors, and for them we are truly thankful.



In 1915, Albert Borella journeyed through 1,000 kilometres of the Northern Territory Outback from Tennant Creek to Darwin to enlist in World War I.

He fought at Gallipoli and the Western Front; was wounded, commissioned on the battlefield, and was awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest honour for valour in combat.

Albert Borella was one of the many who went to fight for their nation.

From 20 February to 3 March 2015, 100 years later, The Borella Ride will symbolically retrace Albert Borella's footsteps along the Stuart Highway in commemoration of the Anzac Centenary.

By commemorating Albert Borella through The Borella Ride, we can reflect on the broader story of Northern Territory development and the significant contribution made by Australians to the First World War.

The Commonwealth Government through the Anzac Centenary Public Fund and the Northern Territory Government are proud to support The Borella Ride, the flagship Anzac Centenary commemorative event for the Northern Territory.

The Albert Borella Victoria Cross Exhibition

Albert Borella's Victoria Cross is on display at the Main Hall of Parliament House as part of a unique Victoria Cross Exhibition.

The Exhibition is free and open to the public from 03 February to 02 March 2015. Albert Borella's Victoria Cross is one of only eleven held in private collection and has rarely been seen on public display. The Albert Borella Victoria Cross Exhibition is an official programmed event as part of The Borella Ride.

Exhibition Opening Times:
03 February – 02 March 2015
10:00am – 5:00pm – Monday to Friday
1:00pm – 5:00pm – Saturday and Sunday

www.theborellaride.com.au

Retracing Albert Borella's journey...

