

KEYSOR VC, GALLIPOLI'S QUIET HERO: THE STORY OF THE MAN
BORN LEONARD MAURICE KYEZOR
AND THE STORY OF HIS KYEZOR FAMILY

Keira Quinn Lockyer

Keira Quinn Lockyer, Ballarat 2014, 302 pp., illustrated.

The story of Leonard Keysor, one of Australia's greatest World War One heroes, is lovingly told and self-published by his great-niece, Keira Quinn Lockyer. The book is evidence of years of research and scholarship by an author who has written a series of other family memoirs. This book is a long-awaited tribute to a Jewish ANZAC and a Victoria Cross recipient. Leonard, the 'quiet hero', was awarded the VC for 50 hours of great courage at Lone Pine, and his citation read: 'It was one of the most spectacular individual feats of the war'.

Australians were awarded nine VCs in all during the Gallipoli campaign, 100 years ago this year. But so desperate was the battle at Lone Pine that no fewer than seven of the VCs at Gallipoli were awarded for heroism at Lone Pine. There were five Jewish recipients of the VC during World War One in the Allied armies, and one of them, Corporal Issy Smith VC, also had strong Australian connections, and was awarded the VC for heroism at Ypres on the Western Front.

Born in London in 1885 and named Leonard Maurice Kyezor, he was the third child and second son of Benjamin and Julia (née Benjamin) Kyezor, members of two well-established Jewish families that had lived in England since the 1700s. The genealogy of both families is well covered, German-born on the Kyezor side, and Spanish and Dutch on the Benjamin side. The Kyezor children grew up in a happy and comfortable home in Maida Vale, and the children went to private schools.

At the age of only seventeen, and with his father's permission, Leonard sailed for Quebec in search of adventure, and then went on to the prairie country of Manitoba. He was probably in Manitoba for some ten years before returning briefly to England to see his family, and in early 1914 he sailed to Sydney where he had siblings and cousins. Among the relatives were the family of the famous Australian theatrical entrepreneur, the late Kenn Brodziak, well known to Victorian members of AJHS.

Three months later war broke out and Leonard presented himself for recruitment in August 1914. Keira Lockyer relates in great detail what happened next, culminating in the description of the peak of Leonard's gallantry at Lone Pine in the eight days following 6 August 1915. He was known as

one of the best bomb-throwers in Lone Pine, often smothering with sandbags the incoming Turkish bombs, made of cast iron and the size of large cricket balls. If an incoming bomb had a long enough fuse, Leonard was an expert at throwing it back into the Turkish trenches – all this he did for 50 hours over a period of eight days, despite the fact he was seriously wounded on both the first and the eighth days.

Leonard was shipped to the military hospital at Lemnos, and then sent back to London in October 1915. The *London Gazette* published the official notification of the VC that month, but misspelt the name as Keysor, and this was repeated in newspapers and on radio around the world – so the spelling stuck!

In January 1916, at a ceremony at Buckingham Palace, King George V personally presented the Victoria Cross to Leonard.

Lockyer has divided her book into two sections, the first titled ‘Leonard’ and the second ‘Leonard’s Family’, and it contains the story of the eventful post-war years. Then follows a section of references, family trees and a time line, all of which are lavishly illustrated with contemporaneous images, letters and documents. Keira has brought the story of the wider family and its connections up to the present day, and her net is thrown wide and far.

Leonard died in London on 12 October 1951, a month before his 66th birthday. His ashes were interred at Golders Green Cemetery.

What really comes through in this carefully written, affectionate and comprehensive tribute, and is particularly shown in the story of the post-war years, is the modesty and humility of this great man. He is quoted as saying: ‘What I did wasn’t anything special. Others did more, only nobody saw them. I had the luck to be noticed.’ And to a Jewish gathering in Sydney in 1918 he said: ‘Proud as I am of my VC, I am even more proud to belong to the Australian Army, and prouder still of being a Jew.’

Being a privately published tribute, and in a small edition meant for limited distribution to family members, those who may wish to contact the author could do so by email: keira.lockyer@bigpond.com

Howard Freeman

FLASHPOINTS: ISRAEL, ANTI-SEMITISM AND THE HOLOCAUST

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