

William Edward Sing DCM – Trooper – 31st Infantry Battalion (Australian Imperial Force)



William was born on 3rd March 1886 in Clermont, Queensland, Australia. Known as Billy Sing, he was an Australian soldier of Chinese and English descent who served in the Australian Imperial Force during World War I, best known as a sniper during the Gallipoli Campaign.

His parents were John Sing, a drover from Shanghai, China, and Mary Ann Sing (Pugh), a nurse from Kingswinford, Staffordshire, England. As a boy, William was well known for his shooting skill but was the subject of racial prejudice due to his ancestry.

On 24th October 1914, two months after the outbreak of war, William enlisted as a trooper in the Australian 5th Light Horse Regiment of the Australian Imperial Force. He began his military career as part of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) forces in the Gallipoli Campaign in modern day Turkey. Operating as a sniper by early September 1915, William had taken 119 kills. In February 1916, William was Mentioned in Despatches by General Sir Ian Hamilton, Commander of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. This was the first official recognition of his service. On 10th March 1916, he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, with a related entry in military records reading: "For conspicuous gallantry from May to September 1915, at Anzac, as a sniper. His courage and skill were most marked, and he was responsible for a very large number of casualties among the enemy, no risk being too great for him to take."



William transferred to the 31st Infantry Battalion on 27 July 1916 at Tel-el-Kibir and sailed to England the following month. Following a brief period of training in England, he sailed for France and entered action on the Western Front in January 1917.

He was wounded in action several times and commended many times in reports by Allied commanders. In March 1917, he was wounded in the left leg and hospitalised in England. In May 1917, while recovering in Scotland, he met waitress Elizabeth A. Stewart who was the daughter of Royal Navy cook George Stewart. The two were married on 29th June 1917 in Edinburgh. After a month with his new wife, William returned to the trenches in France in August 1917 but was in very poor health due to his battle wounds and the effects of gas poisoning. In September 1917, he led a unit in the Battle of Polygon Wood in counter-sniper operations. For this action, he was awarded the Oorlogskruis (Belgian Croix de Guerre) in 1918 and was also recommended for the Military Medal—but never received it. In November 1917, he was confined to hospital again due to problems with his previously wounded leg. In mid-February 1918, he was hospitalised due to a gunshot wound in the back. William suffered lung disease from his exposure to gas, and it soon brought his military career to an end.

In later life, William reported chest, back, and heart pain. His final days were spent in relative poverty and obscurity, and he died alone in his room in a boarding house in West End, Brisbane, on 19th May 1943. The cause of death was a ruptured aorta. William was buried in the Lutwyche War Cemetery, in Kedron, a northern suburb of Brisbane.