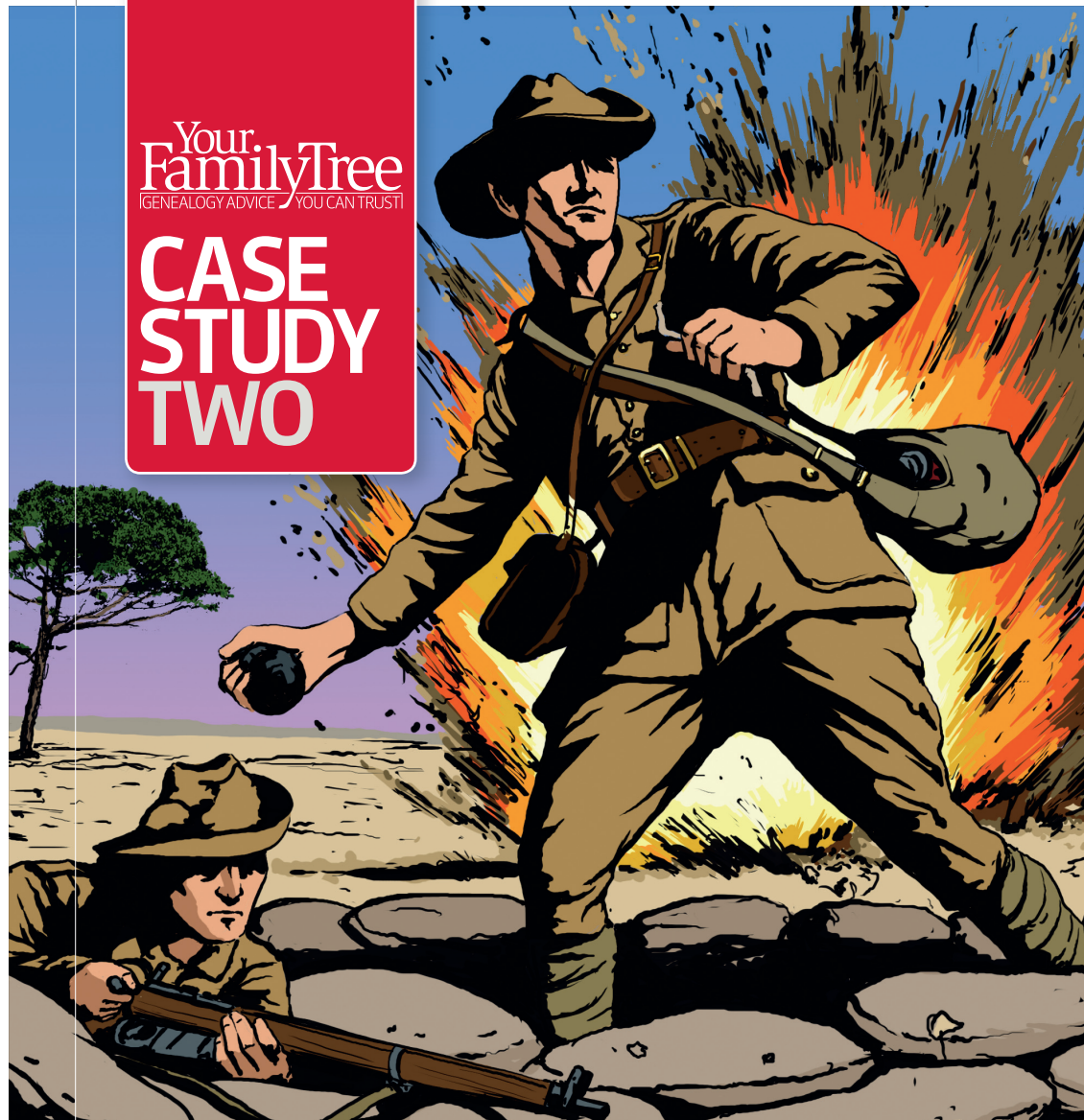


CASE STUDY TWO



Bomb-catching in Gallipoli

The amazing story of a Victoria Cross recipient who became a national hero

By Sue Kingsley Collins



Sue is a writer and filmmaker who has been researching her diverse family history in different parts of the world.

Artifacts and tales passed down by family members meant I knew there was a Victoria Cross recipient in my tree. However, it was only when I researched this deed that I discovered my forebear's true heroism, in one of the grimmest battles of World War I.

Leonard Keyzor VC's photo was displayed by my great-grandfather George Keyzor (Leonard's father's cousin) due to his heroics in Gallipoli, and my father remembered seeing this in the 1920s. By this time, George had adopted the name Kingsley. A subsequent family rift meant all links to the Keyzors ceased. Therefore, my father's childhood recollection of Leonard's photo was crucial in confirming the connection.

The Kyezor/Keyzors were established members of British

HONOUR

ANZAC Day

Australia and New Zealand commemorate ANZAC Day on 25 April, the day of the Gallipoli landings, with a 'gunfire breakfast' (coffee with rum), a pre-battle tradition of WWI soldiers

Jewry since the late 1700s. Leonard Maurice Kyezor was the third of five children of Benjamin Kyezor, a merchant, and his wife Julia Benjamin. He was born on 3 November 1885 and grew up at 19 Sutherland Avenue, Maida Vale, London. His line adopted the 'Keyzor' spelling in 1890.

Around the Empire

Researching Leonard's life was made easier by his WWI career, sufficiently distinguished to merit an entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, online at <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au>. I found his original service record on the National Archives of Australia site (www.naa.gov.au). But how did Leonard get from leafy Maida Vale to Darling Point in New South Wales, where he enlisted on 18 August 1914 and became Private Keyzor 958, with 1st Battalion, H Company?

The answer is via the snowy plains of Canada. Leonard, it seems, left London, aged 18, to seek adventure. I found his arrival in Montreal on the *Tunisian* on 3 October 1903 at Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk). In the 1911 Census, he was farming in the Marquette district of Manitoba. But by 1914, his much-loved sister, Madge, and brother Stanley, had settled in Sydney, NSW. After ten years in Canada, and a brief trip home to England, Leonard joined them.

Stanley's granddaughter, Keira Lockyer, has been researching the Keyzors for over 15 years, and has been invaluable. She confirms Leonard found work as a clerk but within months, war was declared. He enlisted two weeks later. On 18 October, his service record says he boarded troop ship *Afric*, *Transport A19*, bound for Egypt. Initially, his unit had further training, expecting to be deployed to the Western Front.

However, Leonard and many of the Australian units were



instead sent to Gallipoli in Turkey. After the disastrous naval attack in March 1915 on Ottoman Turkish forces occupying the Peninsular, the War Office decided to mount a land assault. In April 1915, Leonard took part in the landings at Anzac Cove and the unsuccessful battle. The Ottoman Turks, led by Attaturk, forced them to withdraw. It wasn't until August that a new offensive was mounted.

Brave bomber

The British troops fighting in the trenches used crude

Contemporary A 1915 Turkish map of the Gallipoli Peninsular

handmade bombs, often made from jam tins stuffed with metal and explosives. The Turks were using cast iron balls with external fuses, and these gave a skilled bomb thrower time to hurl them back. A report of Leonard's VC award in the *Jewish Chronicle* gives a clue to his aptitude for this dangerous job: "of sturdy build, a keen athlete and an enthusiast for all outdoor sports, excelling in particular in cricket, football and rowing."

"To his comrades' astonishment, Leonard was able to catch Turkish missiles"

Tracing ANZACs

How to find Commonwealth hero records

The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZACs) fought in the Gallipoli Campaign from 1915-16 suffering heavy losses. You can search WWI service records and view original Australian personnel records without subscription at www.naa.gov.au. You can search NZ names for free at www.archway.archives.govt.nz, then order a digitised copy of personnel files. You can find the letters and diaries of over 2,000 Australian nurses at www.anzacsite.gov.au.

The Australian War Memorial has digitised some Army HQ war diaries and those for infantry battalions will be available at www.awm.gov.au. Other Army diaries, Air Force ops books and Navy logs can be viewed in person at the Australian War Memorial or National Archives of Australia in Canberra. The Auckland Memorial Museum site (www.aucklandmuseum.com) has information on NZ soldiers.

TROOPS

New Zealand

Over 103,000 New Zealand troops served overseas in WWI. Almost 3,000 were Maori or Pacific Islanders, and 550 nurses also served overseas

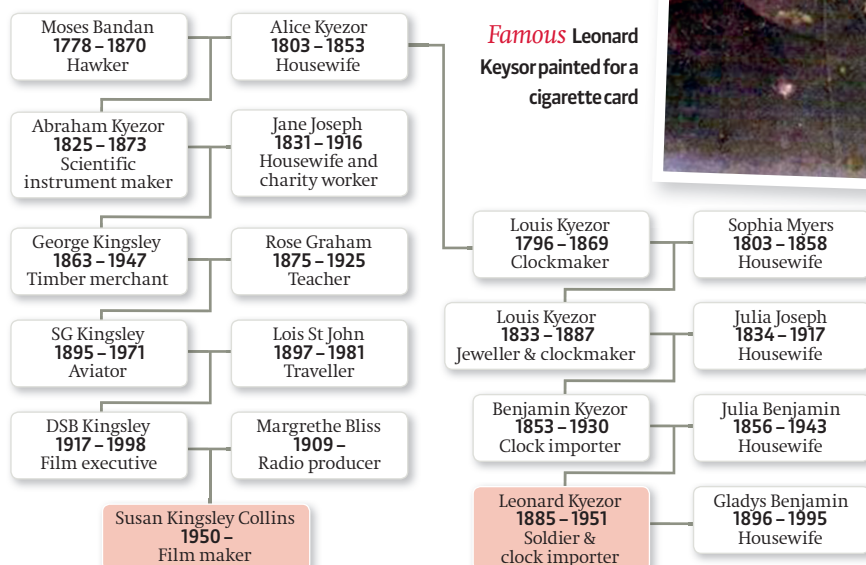
On the morning of the 7 August, the 1st Battalion moved in to support the 2nd Battalion at Lone Pine – so named because of a single pine tree that stood between them and the enemy. In the fighting that followed, the Colonel of the 2nd was killed and many were wounded.

Undeterred, Leonard continued to hurl dozens of 'jam tin' bombs at Turkish lines. To his comrades' astonishment, he was also able to catch Turkish missiles in flight and bowl them straight back. Those he couldn't return, he smothered with sandbags. Though wounded on his right cheek, Leonard secured an important position. The next day, he held the trench until he was wounded again. He refused hospital treatment, instead volunteering for another company who'd lost their bomb throwers. He was injured twice in 50 hours. It was deemed one of the most spectacular individual feats of the War.

Leonard's service record shows that on 3 October 1915, he was diagnosed with enteric fever (typhoid), which was rife in the unsanitary conditions. He was shipped home and admitted to the General Hospital in Chelsea. His VC citation was announced in the *London Gazette* on 15



THE KEYZOR/KINGSLEY FAMILY TREE





NEWSPAPER

Jewish journal

You can search Jewish Chronicle archives from 1841 at www.thejc.com. A trial search is free, but only pre-paid subscribers (£40 annually) can open pages

Above The 3rd Australian Field Hospital where Leonard was treated
Right The Victoria Cross showing the 'For Valour' inscription

October 1915 "for conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty in Lone Pine trenches in Gallipoli Peninsular" (www.london-gazette.co.uk). Because the *Gazette* spelled his name with an 's' instead of a 'z', he later changed it by deed poll to match!

Lieutenant, he returned to France and was wounded twice more, including a gunshot wound to his arm.

After another short stay in hospital, he rejoined his unit in May. Within three weeks, he was wounded by a gas shell. Yet again, he was transferred through field hospitals, casualty clearing stations and an ambulance train, to London. In October, he boarded the *HT Medic* to make the voyage to Sydney, and was finally discharged as medically unfit in December 1918.



"It's even rumoured that Madame Tussaud's had a waxwork of Leonard!"



Back to the Front

Leonard was well enough to personally receive his VC from King George V at Buckingham Palace on 15 January 1916, but his war was far from over. His record shows that he transferred to the 42nd Battalion and by November was deployed to the Western Front. He was injured again and returned to England for recuperation. In February 1918, now promoted to

Distinguished Leonard Keyser

Coming home

After the War, Leonard came back to Britain, arriving at Southampton on 19 March 1919. Perhaps a certain young woman prompted his return voyage, as *The Times* announced his marriage to his first cousin, Gladys Louise Benjamin at the Liberal Synagogue in Dorset Square, on 8 July 1920.

Leonard's fame, and that of other VC recipients, was much celebrated. It's even rumoured that Madame Tussaud's had a waxwork of him! In the 1920s, he met up with the filmmaker GB 'Bertie' Samuelson to make a film about his exploits, in which Leonard would actually throw the bombs. Filming of *For Valour* started at Isleworth Studios, but incredibly Leonard was to have another dance with death. *The Times* of 28 November 1928 gives an account of the resulting court case. It seems Samuelson, dissatisfied with an 'exploding' Turkish bomb, instructed the studio electrician to rig another charge. Leonard maintained that he was unaware of this. When it ignited, he had no time to dive for cover and it exploded in his face. He lost eight teeth

and the sight in one eye – worse than all his wartime injuries. He won the case and £675 in damages. Samuelson was forced to sell the studio.

Leonard seems to have settled into a quiet life in London with Gladys and their daughter Joan, born in 1922. *The Times* records him attending court functions and Remembrance services and he regularly laid a wreath on behalf of Jewish veterans. In an interview he gave for BBC Radio in the 1940s, he described himself as a "common or garden clock importer" and that his war experiences were "the only adventure I ever had". In a 1916 article I found in the *Manchester Guardian* (<http://archive.guardian.co.uk>), he wrote, "What I did wasn't anything special. Others did more, only nobody saw them. I had the luck to be noticed".

Researching his life has been a privilege and I appreciate why my great-grandfather displayed his photograph so proudly. ■

Keeping it in the family

Relationships between cousins was common

Marriage between cousins was, and is, common in many cultures, including Jewish families. One reason for inter-family marriages was to protect property and business interests, but many were love matches. There are numerous examples in the Old Testament, with no religious law prohibiting them.

Since 1983, Roman Catholics have needed Papal dispensation to marry their first cousin. Prior to that, this applied to second cousins, and before 1917, to third cousins. In the 11th century, it applied up to sixth cousins! Protestant churches have never objected to this: Albert Einstein, Queen Victoria, Franklin D Roosevelt and Charles Darwin all married their first cousins.

CONTACTS

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