

NX 6925 Sapper Bert Beros

Sapper Bert Beros served in both World War 1 and World War 11.

He wrote the now famous "Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels" poem at 4.00 a.m. one morning on the Kokoda Trail after having been on stand-to.

It may never have been printed but for the fact that an officer sent a copy home to his mother and she was so impressed that she had it published in the "Brisbane Courier Mail".

The mother knew only Bert Beros' regimental number and a war correspondent who traced him to a Convalescent section was the first to tell him of the general acclaim for the poem in Australia.

Later, on the very last day of leave, Bert managed to get a publisher to print a book of his verse. The Publishers' Forward to the book said:

"Men of action are not usually men of words; the soldier is rarely able to give expression to the things he feels. But Sapper Beros is one who can bridge the void between perception and revelation. He is a graduate of the school of hard knocks, knows and loves his fellow man, and writes with sympathetic understanding of human qualities.

"Some of these verses were penned in the stress and ordeal of hard campaigning; others are reflection put to paper during the resting periods and journeyings that punctuate the more dramatic experiences of soldiering. In his clear – often profound – observations, we sense the warrior's innermost thoughts and feelings.

"The Digger is in many ways unique – a devil-may-care fellow who jests grimly with Fate. But Beros shows us a softer nature beneath the vaunted swashbuckling arrogance; every Digger loves his mother.

"Heroism, pathos, humour, tragedy, hunger of soul and body, alternate in these pages. Throughout there is the unmistakable stamp of reality. Sapper Beros' verses are a fitting record of the Australian fighting man."

The following poems are extracts from that book which was presented to me by his grandson, Ian Beros, when he trekked with me a decade ago.

A SOLDIER'S FAREWELL TO HIS SON

I stand and watch you, little son,
Your bosom's rise and fall,
An old rag dog beside your cheek,
A gayly coloured ball.
Your curly hair is ruffled as you
Rest there fast asleep,
And silently I tip-toe in
To have one last long peep.

I come to say farewell to you,
My little snowy son.
And as I do I hope that you will
Never slope a gun,
Or hear dive-bombers and
Their dreadful whining roar,
Or see or feel their loads of death
As overhead they soar.

I trust that you will never need
To go abroad to fight,
Or learn the awful lesson soon
That might to some is right,
Or see your cobbles blown to scraps
Or die a lingering death,
with vapours foul and filthy
When the blood-flow chokes the breath.

I hope that you will never know
The dangers of the sea.
And that is why I leave you now
To hold your liberty,
To slay the demon War God
I must leave you for a while
In mother's care – till stars again
From peaceful heaven smile.

Your mother is your daddy now,
To guard your little ways,
Yet ever I'll be thinking of you both
In future days.
I must give up your tender years,
The joys I'll sorely miss,
My little man, farewell, so long,
I leave you with a kiss.

WX UNKNOWN

We knew he came from the Western State,
Though to us he remained unknown;
For the WX was marked in his hat -
The rest a mortar had blown.

We buried him there, on the mountain spur,
where the trees are draped in moss;
We thought of his mother, no news for her
of that irreplaceable loss.

Just a boy he looked, with his snowy hair,
As we laid him down in the clay;
The padre's voice was low and clear,
No others had words to say.

Yet we knew a mother would watch and wait,
for a letter sent by her boy,
How she would dream of the things he did,
How his first words caused her joy

And as he went off to school or game,
he'd wave her fond goodbyes.
Just as he did when the great call came,
And the hot tears hurt her eyes.

Perhaps she will know in some unknown way,
Of that little rugged cross,
The remains of her hero beneath it lay,
Where the trees are draped in moss.

We cursed the foe, who stripped the dead,
No pity on them can be shown.
We marked his cross so it can be read,
"WX" Unknown."

THE FUZZY WUZZY ANGELS

Many a mother in Australia,
When the busy day is done,
Sends a prayer to the Almighty
For the keeping of her son,
Asking that an Angel guide him
And bring him safely back
Now we see those prayers are answered
Up on the Kokoda Track,
Though they haven't any halos,
Only holes slashed in the ears,
And with faces worked with tattoos,
With scratch pins in their hair,
Bringing back the wounded,
Just as steady as a hearse,
Using leaves to keep the rain off
And as gentle as a nurse.

Slow and steady in bad places,
On the awful mountain track,
And the look upon their faces,
Makes us think that Christ was black,
Not a move to hurt the wounded,
As they treat him like a Saint,
It's a picture worth recording,
That an Artist's yet to paint.
Many a lad will see his Mother,
And the Husbands, wee ones and Wives,
Just because the Fuzzy Wuzzy
Carried them out to save their lives.

From mortar or machine gun fire,
Or a chance surprise attack,
To safety and the care of Doctors,
At the bottom of the track.
May the mothers of Australia,
When they offer up a prayer,
Mention those impromptu Angels,
With the Fuzzy Wuzzy hair.

A MOTHER' S REPLY

We, the Mother's of Australia
As we kneel each night in prayer
Will be sure to ask God's blessings
On the men with fuzzy hair.

And may the Great Creator
Who made us both black and white
Help us to remember how they
Helped us to win the fight .

For surely He, has used these
Men with fuzzy wuzzy hair
To guard and watch our wounded
With tender and loving care.

And perhaps when they are tired
With blistered and aching back
He'll take the Yoke On himself
And help them down the track.

And God will be the Artist
And this picture He will paint
Of a Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel
With the Halo of a Saint.

And His presence shall go with them
In tropic heat and rain
And he'll help them to tend our wounded
In sickness and in pain.

So we thank you Fuzzy Wuzzies
For all that you have done
Not only for Australians
But for Every Mother's Son.

And we are glad to call you friends
Though your faces may be black
For we know that Christ walked
With you - on the Owen Stanley track

FEARLESS FRANKIE FORDE

Mr F.M. Forde, Minister for the Army, visited Papua New Guinea in September 1942. When he returned to Australia he announced that he had climbed the Kokoda Trail to within approximately five and a half miles of the enemy.

John Quinn, a Digger on the Kokoda Track, penned the following response:

A bunch of Nips were whooping it up down the old Kokoda Track
And things were looking grim for us with our boys falling back,
So a call went out for a superman to halt the enemy horde,
A message was sent to Canberra, "Send Fearless Frankie Forde."

And Fearless Frank flung down his pen and he donned his old topee,
He crammed a brief case full of reports and up the Track strode he.
Up through the mud and slush and rain he climbed on that fateful day,
'Till he reached a point where the enemy were a short five miles away.
And he stood on the Track with his hat turned back and boldly shouted, "Shooo!"
And all that stood between him and the foe was a fighting Brigade or two.

That was the end of things for the Japs the men who fought there tell,
How the infantry heard the sound of the "Shooo!" and each man muttered "Hell!"
So they closed with the Sons of Nippon and sent them reeling back,
In disarray and sad dismay up the old Kokoda Track.
"We'd rather fight," said the Infantry, "than stand around and be bored"
"By a sheaf of reports and a two-hour speech from Fearless Frankie Forde."

PRIVATE BRUCE KINGSBURY V.C.

Let the poet speak for their valiant kind:

*'Gashed with honourable scars,
Low in glory's lap they lie.
Though they fell, they fell like stars,
Streaming splendour down the sky.'*

Private Bruce Kingsbury VC was one of the many heroes of the Kokoda campaign. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross (the highest award for bravery) during the battle for Isurava on 26 – 30 August 1942.

Kingsbury was born in Melbourne in 1918 and lived in Armadale and Preston. At Hawksburn State School he won a scholarship, and studied for two years at the Melbourne Technical College. He worked in real estate in Melbourne for a time, and then tried farming in the Mallee, station work at Boundary Bend, and a variety of work in New South Wales. Prior to his enlistment he was working in his father's real estate agency in Northcote and playing cricket for Jika-Jika. His closest mate from childhood was Private (later Lieutenant) Alan Avery, M.M.

In the actions which resulted in Kingsbury being posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery at Isurava, Sergeant Bob Thompson had been sent forward with a party from the Headquarters Company and Signal Platoon to try to relieve the pressure. Corporal Lindsay Bear and Privates Alan Avery, Bruce Kingsbury and O'Connor attached themselves to this party, which resisted further enemy attacks. However, the Japs captured parts of the area and seriously threatened Battalion Headquarters. The whole of the Battalion position was endangered by this break-through, and immediate counter-attack was necessary.

Private Kingsbury, who had already performed prodigies of valour during this and the preceding day's fighting with 9 Platoon, volunteered to join the counter-attack. In the words of his citation:

"He rushed forward firing his Bren light machine-gun from the hip, through terrific machine-gun fire, and succeeded in clearing a path through the enemy for the platoon; a courageous action which made it possible for us to recapture the position. He continued on, still sweeping the enemy positions with his Bren light machine-gun and inflicting an extremely high number of casualties on the enemy, but he was killed by a sniper hiding in the timber.

"Private Kingsbury displayed a complete disregard for his own safety. His initiative and superb courage made it possible for my platoon to re-take the position, which undoubtedly saved Battalion Headquarters and at the same time inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy. His coolness, determination and devotion to duty in face of great odds was an inspiration to my men to which they could not but respond"

The first person to reach Kingsbury after he was hit by the sniper was his life-long mate, Alan Avery.

The following poem, "What do you say to a dying man", was written by Sergeant Bede Tongs who served with the 3rd Battalion, AIF:

WHAT DO YOU SAY TO A DYING MAN?

What do you say to a dying man,
Do you call him Bob, or Digger, or Mate?
As you look down at the face you knew so well,
And the look in his eyes says, "It's late",
You remember your first hand-shake,
On a troop train going to war,
Training in various military camps,
Wallgrove, Greta, Ingleburn, Bathurst and more,
To have tired muscles,
To go hungry. Thirst
And the pub – the Duke of York
Where we had our last beers
Before leaving Australia's fair shores.

A fleeting sad glimpse of his loved ones,
You knew that from being his friend,
And you know that if you happen to survive this onslaught,
They will surely ask you of his life's end.
Just three minutes ago he was so full of life,
Firing his bren from the hip,
The platoon attacking as it had many times before,
When all of a sudden – he's hit!
A Japanese sniper, so deadly,
Fires from a dark weapon pit,
And my best mate falls close to my feet.

"Tell them I tried" he said,
My words of goodbye froze on my lips.

THE GIFT OF YEARS

Well old mate, here I am,
I told you I'd be back.
But as usual mate, I'm bloody late,
It's 75 years down the track.
And for the last time here I stand,
In this familiar foreign land,
Back with the mates I left behind,
Fixed forever in their time.

Of all the ghosts of all the boys
Who haunt this lonely place,
Only one of them wears your cheery grin
And your Queensland joker's face.
When I drown in old and bloody dreams
Of helpless young men's dying screams,
I feel your hand give my arm a shake,
And your voice say, "Steady mate".

The country that you died for mate,
You would not know it now.
The future that we dreamed of mate,
Got all twisted up somehow.
The peace that we were fighting for,
The end to stupid, senseless war,
So it couldn't happen to our kids,
Well, old mate - it did.

But thank you for the gift of years
And the flame that brightly burns.
For the time you bought and the lessons taught,
Though often wasted and un-learned.
'Lest We Forget' cry the multitudes,
As if I ever, ever could.
So forgive an old man's tears -
And thank you for the years.

Eric Bogle

Diggers Quotes reflecting the Spirit of Kokoda

Chester Wilmot, war correspondent on the Kokoda Track:

"They must be going through hell on this track – specially those with leg wounds. Some have been hit in the foot and they can't even get a boot on, but they're walking back over root and rock and through mud in bare feet, protected only by their bandages. Here's a steep pinch and a wounded digger's trying to climb it. You need both hands and both feet, but he's been hit in the arm and thigh. Two of his cobbers are helping him along. One goes ahead, hauling himself up by root and branch. The wounded digger clings to the belt of the man in front with his good hand, while his other cobbler gets underneath and pushes him up. I say to this fellow he ought to be a stretcher case, but he replies "I can get along. "There's blokes here lots worse than me and if we don't walk they'll never get out."

Laurie Howson, 39th Battalion:

"The days go on. You are trying to survive, shirt torn, arse out of your pants, whiskers a mile long, hungry and a continuous line of stretchers with wounded carried by 'Fuzzy-Wuzzies' doing a marvellous job. Some days you carry your boots because there's no skin on your feet. but when I look around at some of the others p hell! They look crook! Then I have seen the time when you dig a number of holes in the ground and bury your dead. Nothing would be said, but you think 'maybe it will be my turn next."

Major Steward, Regimental Doctor, 2/16th Battalion:

"My saddest sight, at Butcher's Hill was that of a 23 year old former golf professional. He had a ghastly, gaping wound of the throat, and although my eyes could only see darkness and death, his saw light and hope. The were asking me something with all the mute urgency that eyes can convey. Eyes, the windows of the soul, show every facet of the inner feelings – love, joy, hope, fear, guilt, pity, hatred, and even bodily sickness or health. Looking as dispassionately as possible at that man's throat, I hoped he couldn't sense the lump in mine. Emotion clouds calm clinical judgement, but the hardest thing is not to flinch from the gaze of the man you know is going to die."

Captain Katekar, 2/27th Battalion:

"The wounded, God only knows, were in purgatory, hungry and in great pain. Some of our natives began to desert, meaning that our men had to replace them as bearers. 'Doc' Viner-Smith allowed

the maggots to remain on the wound in order to eat the rotting flesh and so prevent gangrene. That night we were still short of Nauro. I found it a great mental strain and so did the Commander and other officers, with that great responsibility of not only saving our wounded but of saving ourselves from starvation.”

Lieutenant Doug McLean:

“The Japs were in deep dugouts protected with thick logs at ground level separated by other logs just to allow the weapons to protrude . . . providing a field of fire for the one hundred and eighty degrees facing the scrub. Now our troops as they attacked were hit in the lower leg and body . . . and I later found some of my boys lying against enemy positions with unexploded grenades in their hands. They were riddled with wounds but struggled as they died to get to the enemy . . . if ever blokes had earned a decoration . . . one lad was shot twice in the same action . . . flesh wounds . . . ‘Sir’, he said crying, ‘Every time I move some bastard shoots me!’ . . . he was only eighteen.”

ANZAC DAY

*I saw a boy marching, with medals on his chest,
He marched alongside Diggers, marching six abreast,
He knew it was Anzac Day, he marched along with pride,
And did his best to keep in step, with the Diggers by his side,
And when the march was over, the boy looked rather tired,
A Digger asked, "Whose medals Son?" to which the boy replied,
"They belong to my Dad, but he didn't come back,
"He died in New Guinea, up on the Kokoda Track.
The boy looked rather sad - a tear came to his eye,
But the Digger said, "Don't worry Son - I'll tell you why.
"Your old Man marched with us today, all the bloomin' way,
"All us Diggers knew he was here, it's like that on Anzac Day.*

*The boy looked rather puzzled, he didn't understand.
But the Digger went on talking and started to wave his hand.
"For this great land we live in, there's a price we have to pay,
"To keep Australia free, and fly our flag today,
"Yes we all love fun and merriment, in this country where we live,
"But the price was that some soldier, his precious life must give,
"For you to go to school my Son, and worship God at will,
"Somebody had to pay the price, so our Diggers paid the bill.
"Your old Man died for us my Son, for all things good and true,
"I hope you can understand, these words I've said to you.*

*The boy looked up at the Digger, and after a little while,
His face changed expression, and he said, with a beautiful smile,
"I know my Dad marched here today, this our Anzac Day.
"I know he did. I know he did.
"All the bloomin' way!"*