

## Issy Smith

Ishroulch Shmeilowitz (also recorded as Israel) was born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1890. His parents, Eva and Moses Shmeilowitz were French citizens and of Russian descent. Moses worked as a clerk with the French consular services<sup>1</sup>.

At the age of 11 for reasons unknown, Ishroulch stowed away on a ship bound for London, where he enrolled himself in a local school (either the London County Council School, or the Berner Street School). Outside school hours, Ishroulch earned pocket money by delivering fish in the East End<sup>2</sup> which at the time was an impoverished slum in which Yiddish was the dominant language<sup>3</sup>.

Ishroulch Shmeilowitz joined the British army in 1904 at the young age of 14 where he became a private in the Manchester Regiment. It was at this time that he adopted the pseudonym 'Issy Smith' at the request of the recruiting sergeant. After he completed his army training, Smith served in South Africa and India with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Manchester Regiment. During his service Smith played football and competed in boxing matches, winning the British Army middleweight championship. In India, Smith was awarded the Delhi Durbar medal for participation in the Imperial Parade<sup>4,5</sup>.

Having served eight years with the Regiment, Smith was discharged in 1912 and resided in London briefly before immigrating to Australia. Smith lived in Ascot Vale in Melbourne and took employment at the city gas company. Not having completed 12 years' service, on his discharge, Smith was listed as a reservist, and at the outbreak of the war in 1914 was mobilised by the British army, sailing from Melbourne on the 'Miltiades' on the 21st of October 1914.

The first Manchester Regiment sailed from India to France on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 1914<sup>6</sup>, arriving at the end of September and deployed to the front on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October<sup>7</sup>.

On re-joining his Regiment Smith served at the battles of Givenchy, Neuve Chapelle and the 'Second Battle of Ypres'. Beginning on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 1915, it was at Ypres that Smith sustained temporary injury due to chlorine gas inhalation<sup>8</sup>.



A CORPL. ISSY SMITH, V.C., 1ST BN.



<sup>1</sup> Price, J. E., *Australian Dictionary of Biography: Issy Smith 1890-1940*, Volume 11, 1988

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Alderman, G., *Modern British Jewry*, UK, Clarendon press 1998, pp.149-150

<sup>4</sup> Price, 1988

<sup>5</sup> This places Smith in India in 1911, as the Durbar was only held three times, in 1877, 1903 and 1911

<sup>6</sup> James, E.A. *British Regiments 1914-1918*, UK (1988): Naval & Military Press, p.96

<sup>7</sup> Mileham, Patrick, *Difficulties Be Damned: The King's Regiment – A History of the City Regiment of Manchester and Liverpool*, Fleur de Lys, p.85

During a counter attack on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April 1915, Smith voluntarily moved towards the German lines in order to care for a severely wounded soldier, carrying him to safety while being exposed to gunfire. This act of bravery, and citation for bringing in a number of other wounded men on the day, resulted in Smith being awarded the Victoria Cross. Following recuperation in Ireland Smith returned to service in 1916, with the rank of Sergeant, serving in the Middle East. Through his service during WWI. Smith was wounded 5 times and in addition to British service medals, was awarded the Tsarist medal of St George (4<sup>th</sup> class) for rescuing Russian soldiers and the Croix de Guerre in France<sup>9</sup>.

Smith was demobilised in 1919 and returned to London, where he married Elsie McKenchie at the Camberwell registry office<sup>10</sup>. It appears that following the war Smith worked in a variety of roles, but continued connections with his former Regiment and carried out roles as a VC recipient, including attending a function at Buckingham Palace.

Issy Smith returned to Australia in 1925 with his wife and daughter Olive, settling in the suburb of Moonee Ponds where the family remained until after Smith's death. Smith became a pillar of the Jewish community in Melbourne and worked for the British International Pictures, the Dunlop Rubber Company and the civil aviation board at Essendon airport<sup>11</sup>. In 1927, Issy received medals for bravery (pictured below) at the ANZAC Day March. In 1930 Issy Smith was appointed as a Justice of the Peace, and sat on the City Court bench.

Smith remained in touch with his fellow Imperial Reservists through a social group, 'The 1914 Imperial Reservists of Australia', in which he was elected to the position of President at the inaugural meeting in 1935.

Smith suffered consistent illnesses after his service, with medical records showing many visits to the hospital for respiratory complaints linked with the gassing sustained during battle<sup>12</sup>. Smith died suddenly of coronary thrombosis in 1940 at the age of 50, leaving behind his wife Elsie, daughter Olive and son Maurice (pictured above wearing Issy's medals). Issy Smith was buried in the Hebrew section of the Faulkner cemetery in Melbourne<sup>13</sup>, with full military honours.



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<sup>8</sup> Wyrall, Everard. *The History of the King's Regiment (Liverpool) 1914–19*, UK (2002): Naval & Military Press Ltd, p.122

<sup>9</sup> Price, 1988

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>12</sup> National Australian Archives, *Smith, Issy repatriation commission Hospital file: Ex Imperial Soldier*, accessed 13<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Price, 1988