

The Premier's Anzac Prize 2013



Major Hugh Quinn

Research carried out by Kyle Walsh, Year 10, Kirwan SHS, Townsville

Soldier's Name	Major Hugh Quinn, No. 4108
Regiment/Unit	'C' Company, 15th Battalion
Date of Birth	6 th of May, 1888 at Charters Towers, Queensland
Place of Enlistment	Townsville, Queensland
Age at Enlistment	26
Date of Death	29 th May, 1915
Place of Death	Quinn's Post (Monash Valley)
Cemetery or Memorial	Shrapnel Valley cemetery
Family	Eldest son of John Quinn and Mary Jane (Quinn); unmarried.



Hugh Quinn was a soldier and an accountant, born in Charters Towers on the 6th of May, 1888. Upon graduating from school, he joined the firm of Cummins & Campbell, merchants of Townsville, and later set up his own business as a commission agent.

Quinn's solid build drew him into the sport of boxing and he quickly gained the title of North Queensland champion. In addition to this, he helped organise a boxing team that would go on to tour Tasmania and Victoria. Then, he rose up through the ranks of the Australian Militia, ultimately being promoted to the rank of captain in 1912.

When the Great War began in 1914, he and 500 other men left their regiment in the Militia for a place in the 2nd Infantry, Australian Naval Force. Under the command of Colonel Holmes, they were tasked with seizing control of German possessions in the Pacific. However, due to a number of complications, including their ships stokers going on strike and Holmes deeming his men unfit for active service, Quinn was forced to return to Australia. So, eager to fight for his country, he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F), becoming commander of 'C' Company, of the 15th Infantry Battalion, and embarked for Egypt on the 22nd of December, 1914.

Just one day after the beginning of the Gallipoli campaign, on the 26th of April, 1915, Captain Hugh Quinn landed with his men on the beaches of Gallipoli and led them through treacherous days of skirmishing and trench-digging. After three days of this, Hugh received orders to hold a position at the head of the Monash Valley, an area which would later become known as Quinn's Post. The position was dangerous and exposed, made up of shallow, disconnected rifle pits, drawing ceaseless gun and shell fire from the opposing Turkish forces. This location was vital for our troops to hold because it was the key to Anzac Cove, and it defended the main supply route from the beach. This position was open on two sides, with the rear also being vulnerable to aimed fire, and in some places, our front lines were less than ten metres from those of the Turkish – giving it the infamous reputation as the most dangerous position held by Australia soldiers throughout all wars so far.

Any kind of tactical movement became impossible during daylight hours, with the Crest of the Valley only being occupiable under the cover of darkness. Not only did the Turks have absolute superiority of fire, but they also possessed an extensive supply of bombs and grenades, leaving our men as good as immobile. On 1st May 1915, the Turkish assaults were relentless, sending wave after wave of soldiers, but being driven off every time. Hugh pleaded for bombs and a periscope to aid in their desperate defence, but it was to no avail. That same day he was promoted to major, the rank at which his service would end. Due to the immense pressure on the position, they were briefly relieved and began to alternate positions with the 16th Battalion. However, on the 10th of May, when Hugh and his battalion had returned to the Front, they suffered increasingly heavy casualties from waves of Turkish counter-attacks that put great pressure on the soldiers.

As time passed, with vicious battles still being fought non-stop, the Post gradually became safer with the application of sandbags, roofing, bomb-proofing and the digging of support trenches. Also, the first jam-tin bombs and periscopes were made available.

However, this superiority fell apart on the night of the 29th of May, when Turkish forces detonated bombs that were placed beneath the Australian lines, making it no task for them to move in and occupy sections of the Post. Hugh ordered his men to perform a counter-attack, which allowed us to take back some ground. Seeing this success, Colonel Chauvel gave the order for a further charge by Hugh's company, despite it being broad daylight. However, he firmly believed that further charges would be unsuccessful, so he took it upon himself to perform a reconnaissance of the area. During this time alone, Hugh was shot in the head and killed. His company's eventual charge was a success.

Hugh Quinn was buried in Shrapnel Valley cemetery. Quinn's Post was never taken by the enemy until the evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula.

SOURCES:

- The Australian War Memorial Website
- The Australian National Archives
- The Australian Dictionary of Biography