



LIVERPOOL CITY LIBRARY  
LOCAL STUDIES FACT SHEET  
Number 3

**JOHN EDMONDSON V.C.**

by John Daley

John Hurst Edmondson (1914-1941), the first Australian to be awarded the Victoria Cross in World War II, was born at Wagga Wagga NSW on 8th October 1914. He was the only child of Joseph William and Maude Elizabeth (nee Hurst) Edmondson.

The Edmondson family's business was in farming. John's first home, at Brucedale (near Wagga Wagga), had been the family's base for many years. But by 1916, a prolonged drought in the Riverina made the family look for other farming sites. Their choice was "Forest Home", between Cabramatta Creek and Caines Hill, and near the Bringelly Road/Camden Valley Way corner. Thus, John's home life was based in a rural environment.

His early education was provided by his mother in the form of home tutoring. At eight years of age he began formal study at Austral Public School, which he attended for 3 1/2 years. His selfless and generous personality was already being noticed by this time.

In 1928 he enrolled at Hurlstone Agricultural High School. He remained there until 1930, obtaining his Intermediate Certificate (the equivalent of today's School Certificate). He was academically of average standard, but was highly regarded through his involvement in the schools sporting and community activities.

His selfless personality was also evident in the life of the community. He was an assistant and official at the annual Liverpool Show from the age of 12. He obtained first-aid qualifications from the Liverpool Ambulance Station.

His main sport was rifle shooting, at which he became quite proficient - no doubt due to his rural upbringing (although he never practiced on live targets). At the age of 18 he won the medal of the National Rifle Association's Club Championships of 1931-32 whilst a member of the Liverpool Cabra-Vale Rifle Club.

After he completed school, John studied wool-classing at Sydney Technical College. He put this knowledge, together with his agricultural studies at Hurlstone, towards assisting with the management of his parents' farm.

Early in 1939, John enlisted as a reserve soldier in the 4th Battalion (The Australia Rifles) Citizen Military Forces. This unit formed the foundation of 2/17 Infantry Battalion Australian Imperial Forces (A.I.F.), to which he transferred.

John trained at army depots at Merrylands and Homebush, qualifying at the latter as a corporal in July 1939.

On the day after war was declared in September 1939, John volunteered for full-time duty. Upon transfer to the A.I.F. early in 1940, he trained at the newly-established Ingleburn Military Camp. This was only a short distance from his beloved home, where he would spend periods of leave entertaining his new mates.

John sailed for the Middle East in 1941. His unit was engaged in the Battle of Tobruk, an action in which he lost his life but gained the Victoria Cross.

The V.C. Honour Roll cites his bravery in the following terms:-

On the night of April 13-14, 1941, a party of [enemy] infantry broke through the wire defences at Tobruk and established themselves with at least six machine guns, mortars and two small field pieces. It was decided to attack them with bayonets, and a party consisting of one officer, Corporal Edmondson and five privates, took part in the charge. During the counter-attack Corporal Edmondson was wounded in the neck and stomach but continued to advance under heavy fire, and killed one enemy with his bayonet. Later his officer had his bayonet in one of the enemy and was grasped about the legs by him, when another attacked him from behind. He called for help, and Corporal Edmondson, who was some metres away immediately came to his assistance and in spite of his wounds killed both of the enemy. This action undoubtedly saved his officer's life. Shortly after returning from this successful counterattack, Corporal Edmondson died of wounds. His actions throughout the operations were outstanding for resolution, leadership and conspicuous bravery.

The posthumous award was approved by His Majesty King George VI in July 1941. It was presented to John's parents at Admiralty House, Sydney on 27th September 1941.

#### MEMORIAL CLOCK

A notable feature of Liverpool is the John Hurst Edmondson VC Memorial Clock, standing in the centre of Liverpool at Library Plaza, just outside Liverpool City Library. This monument was erected through donations from all parts of Australia.

Public action for a memorial began in September 1941, when Nepean Shire Council (at that time the local Council) organised a public meeting in support of that action. That meeting envisaged that the Memorial would honour other local residents who answered the call to defend Australia as, in the terms of the meeting's minutes, "it was felt that the late Corporal Edmondson would like the names of the other Enlistees of the Shire associated with this Memorial".

The meeting originally supported the idea of a watering trough for horses and dogs placed near "Forest Home", as John's father indicated "that his son was particularly fond of animals and would have liked the suggestion." Regrettably, however the Memorial idea lapsed.

It was revived again in 1955, with Liverpool Municipal Council's assistance. The Memorial appeal gained wide publicity, and sufficient funds were raised for the acceptance by Council in November 1955 of tenders for a Memorial clock and granite stand.

The completed Memorial was unveiled by the then Governor of New South Wales, Lieutenant General Sir John Northcott, on October 1956.

The clock stood at the corner of Macquarie Street and Memorial Avenue in central Liverpool until 1987 when it was dismantled for major restoration. It was then re-erected at its present location and re-dedicated in September 1988. It also honours local residents who served in both World Wars and the Boer War - fulfilling the wishes of those who attended the first public meeting for the Memorial in 1941.

#### REFERENCES

Joanne Kirby et al., A biography of John Hurst Edmondson V.C. (Glenfield, NSW: Hurlstone Agricultural High School, [198-]).

Various papers and newspaper clippings in the Local Studies Collection of Liverpool City Library.

Copyright (C) 1991 Liverpool City Council

Printed: January 1991