

A repeat hero

Keith Arnold Acreman MC, BM

Born: 12 September 1920, Brisbane

Died: 28 July 2010, Brisbane

‘Stand over there, old man,’ the gunman in the Stafford Heights, Brisbane bank gestured, ‘and the rest of you lie face down on the floor ... now!’ he shouted. Next moment, 73-year-old Keith Acreman jumped on the man and wrestled him to the floor. The gun discharged. People screamed. Keith sat on top of the wounded gunman until the police arrived. For this courageous act, retired Lieutenant Colonel Keith Acreman was awarded a Bravery Medal in 1994 to add to his Military Cross.

Born at Wooloowin in Brisbane Keith was educated at the Wooloowin State and Brisbane State High Schools before joining the Queensland Public Service.

However, his thirst for some excitement in his life led to his enlisting in the Citizens Military Forces. The 5th Field Brigade, Royal Australian Artillery (Militia) at Kelvin Grove became his second home. Life did become exciting—bivouacking at Fraser’s Paddock, Enoggera and live firing the unit’s 18-Pounder guns west of Ipswich at Mount Walker.

Keith was a bright young bloke and advanced through the ranks accordingly. When the Second World War began, there were longer periods of training. He was sent to a potential officers’ course and graduated as a lieutenant in March 1941.

Never one to hold back, Lieutenant Acreman volunteered for a new unit being formed—the 101st Anti Tank Regiment. Then the Japanese entered the war and Keith’s unit moved north as part of the defences of Townsville in May 1942. When volunteers were sought for an anti tank battery to serve overseas, Lt Acreman was one of the first to step forward.

On 28 August 1942, Keith’s battery was in support of the 61st Infantry Battalion from the 7th Brigade at Milne Bay, New Guinea when the Japanese landing parties attacked in force with at least four tanks. Lt Acreman was sent forward with two guns to stop a threatened breakthrough.

The enemy advanced rapidly and, after expending all gun ammunition and losing one man killed in action, Acreman removed the guns’ firing mechanisms and withdrew the remainder of his troop to safety. He then arranged a defensive position with his troop and some American engineers at an airstrip. As the Japanese attacked, he personally directed fire from the battalion’s mortars and forced the enemy to withdraw leaving behind some 200 bodies. Keith then led a follow-up party and recovered his two guns.

For these actions, Lieutenant Acreman was awarded the Military Cross.

Next, Keith volunteered for a secret field unit examining Japanese ships and aircraft for advances in radar and radio technology. He served off the New Guinea coast, in Hollandia and the Philippines.

When the post war Citizen Military Forces were raised, Keith Acreman was one of the first to volunteer. He progressed through the ranks in the expanding CMF of the 1950s, was awarded the Efficiency Medal and rose to command 12th Light Regiment RAA at Bulimba by 1955.

Meanwhile Keith had also risen in his public service job in the Department of Trade and in 1958 was posted to London as the state government’s Trade and Publicity Officer. This forced Lieutenant Colonel Acreman to resign his appointment and he never returned to the CMF.

Acreman became president of the 101st Tank Attack Regiment Association when it was formed in 1970 and, though this was disbanded with fading numbers in 2003, he continued to lead 101's veterans in Brisbane ANZAC Day Marches till forced to ride in a Jeep.

Keith was a very active supporter of the Hammond, Wurlitzer and like organ recital groups till ill health curtailed his mobility. He entered Masonic Care earlier this year with lung problems and passed away on 28 July.

Acreman married Edna Boucaut in 1989 and they lived at Chermside, Brisbane. He is survived by Edna and children from both sides of the marriage.

RAAHC