



Lieut Joe Wilkinson as a young officer at the time of the Soraken Campaign

Honour for distinguished local man

AN Ingham soldier who was awarded the Military Cross for outstanding courage and leadership during the Bougainville Campaign in World War II will be the saluting officer today for the district's Anzac Day Commemoration Parades.

He is Mr Joseph Wilkinson M.C., whose outstanding qualities as an officer won the admiration and confidence of every officer and man in his unit.

Born in Macknade in 1916, Joe Wilkinson was amongst the first of the district's young men to join the Citizen Military Forces in 1936, when a sub-unit of the 31st Battalion The Kennedy Regiment was formed in this district. He served with the 31st Battalion during the early war years and was commissioned as a Lieutenant in 1942.

Following his enlistment in the A.I.F., he was appointed a Platoon Commander with the 26th Battalion, serving in the Torres Strait and other northern areas.

Then followed the Bou-

gainville Campaign, during which the 11th Infantry Brigade (A.I.F.) comprising the 26th Battalion, 31/51st Battalion and the 55/53 Battalion played a notable part during operations in the Northern and Central sectors.

The campaign was marked with much hard and bitter fighting with the Australian troops acquitting themselves with gallantry and distinction.

It was during the course of these operations that the outstanding qualities of Lieut Wilkinson as a leader became evident and whose courageous actions were marked with the award of the Military Cross.

Official records disclose —

"Lieut J.W. Wilkinson has led his platoon with great gallantry and courage through every action of 26 Aust. Inf. Bn (A.I.F.) in Bougainville from 4 January 1945 to 23 June 1945.

"On three and five day patrols through enemy territory in the Central (Numa Numa) sector, this officer's platoon was outstanding and

inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy.

"In the capture of the Soraken Peninsula by the 26th Aust. Inf. Bn. Group, Lieut Wilkinson's aggressive and forceful leadership against a well-armed and determined enemy was responsible for the breaking of several Japanese defensive positions. His was the leading platoon which seized the beach head under enemy fire some two miles north of the Soraken Plantation, on the night 19/20 March, when his company carried out the amphibious operation which resulted in the final collapse of the whole enemy defences on the Peninsula.

"By his cool and courageous leadership, the enemy attacks on the beach head were broken and heavy casualties amongst the remainder of the company prevented.

"During the operations on the Bonis Peninsula on 20 May 1945, this officer led his platoon in an encircling move around a strong enemy position through swampy thickly tim-

bered country. He located the main enemy lines of communication and was digging in when he was attacked. The enemy attacked again and were beaten off with difficulty. One Australian was killed and Lieut Wilkinson himself crawled forward and recovered the body. A further attack was made by the enemy during the night and again failed.

"Lieut Wilkinson, with characteristic tenacity and courage, maintained the position astride the enemy line of communication and resulted in the enemy being forced to abandon their strong defensive position.

"Throughout the six months of strenuous action, Lieut Wilkinson never left his platoon and although suffering severely from dermatitis over the last weeks, refused to be evacuated. In his gallantry and cheerful devotion to duty, he was an outstanding officer and leader and by his self-sacrificing courage, he protected the lives of his men."