

= Joseph Maxwell =

Joseph " Joe " Maxwell , VC , MC & Bar , DCM (10 February 1896 ? 6 July 1967) was an Australian recipient of the Victoria Cross , the highest decoration for gallantry " in the face of the enemy " that can be awarded to members of British and Commonwealth armed forces . Often described as Australia 's second most decorated soldier of the First World War , he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on 8 February 1915 , and served at Gallipoli before being transferred to the Western Front . In just over twelve months he was commissioned and decorated four times for his bravery .

An apprentice boilermaker before the war , Maxwell returned to Australia in 1919 and worked as a gardener . In 1932 , he published *Hell 's Bells and Mademoiselles* , a book written in collaboration with Hugh Buggy about his war experiences . Attempting to enlist for service during the Second World War , Maxwell was rejected on the grounds of his age before enlisting under an alias in Queensland ; his identity was discovered , and after a short period in a training position , he sought discharge . In 1967 , aged 71 , he died of a heart attack .

= = Early life = =

Maxwell was born in the Sydney suburb of Forest Lodge , New South Wales , on 10 February 1896 to John Maxwell , a labourer , and his wife Elizabeth , née Stokes . A member of the Senior Australian Army Cadets for three years , he worked as an apprentice boilermaker at an engineering works near Newcastle upon leaving school . For two years , he served as a member of the Citizens Military Forces , and on 6 February 1915 , he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force enticed by the prospects of better pay .

= = First World War = =

= = = Training , February 1915 to Western Front , May 1917 = = =

Having received his initial training at Liverpool Camp , Maxwell was allotted to " B " Company of the 18th Battalion as a lance corporal , and embarked for Egypt aboard HMAT Ceramic on 25 May 1915 . The 18th Battalion trained in Egypt from mid @-@ June until mid @-@ August , before proceeding to Gallipoli , where they landed at Anzac Cove on 22 August . The battalion fought its first battle on the same day , staging an attack on the Turkish @-@ held Hill 60 . The engagement lasted until 29 August , with half of the battalion becoming casualties , and Maxwell briefly assuming the duties of a stretcher bearer .

Maxwell served at Gallipoli with his unit until 2 December , when he was admitted to 5th Field Ambulance and evacuated from the peninsula suffering from jaundice . Admitted to 3rd Auxiliary Hospital , Heliopolis , he remained there until 11 December , when he was posted to a convalescent camp at Ras el Tin . He rejoined the 18th Battalion on 5 January 1916 , which had been evacuated from the Gallipoli Peninsula on 20 December the previous year and posted to Egypt . On 4 February , Maxwell was admitted to the Australian Dermatological Hospital , Abbassia with venereal disease . He returned to his battalion four days before it embarked for France , and the Western Front on 18 March .

Arriving in Marseilles , France , Maxwell was admitted to 7th Australian Field Ambulance and then transferred to the 3rd Canadian General Hospital following wounds sustained during battle . He was moved to the 1st Convalescent Depot on 2 May , and then discharged to Base Details eleven days later . He was later found guilty of breaking ranks at the 07 : 30 parade on the same day and being absent without leave from 08 : 00 until 13 : 00 on 24 May ; for this transgression , he was reduced to the ranks . Rejoining his battalion on 1 June , he took part in the Battle of Pozières and received a promotion to sergeant in October .

Suffering synovitis to his right knee , Maxwell was hospitalised for two days and posted to a training

battalion in England on 28 November 1916 . He stayed there for five months before embarking for France on 9 May 1917 and rejoining the 18th Battalion five days later . Maxwell was only briefly in France before being selected for officer training . Shortly after arriving in England , he attended a boisterous party with a group of soldiers . The military police raided the party and called the local police for assistance after confronting Maxwell 's group . Maxwell was fined £ 20 and sent back to his unit for his actions .

= = = Western Front : May 1917 to August 1918 = = =

Maxwell was again selected for officer training , and on 5 July , he was posted to No. 6 Officers ' Cadet Battalion . He was promoted to company sergeant major on 7 August , before rejoining the 18th Battalion on 11 September . Nine days later , he was engaged in action near Westhoek during the Third Battle of Ypres when he performed the deeds that earned him the Distinguished Conduct Medal . In the battle , the commander of a platoon was killed ; Maxwell took command and led it into attack . Noticing that one of the newly captured positions was under heavy fire , Maxwell dashed to it and led the men to a safer and more tactically secure position , thus minimizing casualties .

Commissioned in the field as a second lieutenant on 29 September 1917 , Maxwell took part in the engagements around Poelcappelle , Belgium , the following month . He earned promotion to lieutenant on 1 January 1918 and was admitted to the 7th Australian Field Ambulance on 10 January suffering scabies . Having been discharged from the hospital , he rejoined the 18th Battalion on 17 January .

On 8 March 1918 , Maxwell commanded a scouting patrol that was operating to the east of Ploegsteert . Having obtained the required information , he ordered the patrol to withdraw . He and three of his men were covering the withdrawal of the main body when he noticed about thirty Germans nearby . Recalling the patrol , he led an attack against the party , which had sheltered in an old trench ; the Germans quickly withdrew , leaving three dead and one wounded prisoner of war . Maxwell was awarded the Military Cross for his actions during this engagement , news of which was published in a supplement to the London Gazette on 13 May 1918 .

Throughout the spring of 1918 , the 18th Battalion was involved in operations to repel the German offensive . Maxwell took part in these actions until he was granted leave and went back to England on 17 July . He returned to France and rejoined the 18th Battalion on 1 August , before taking part in the Battle of Amiens where he was to earn a Bar to his Military Cross . On 9 August , the battalion was preparing to attack near Rainecourt . Maxwell took command of the company after all of its other officers became casualties . Under his leadership , the company was able to attack on time , despite being subjected to heavy fire . A tank that preceded the advance immediately became the object of enemy fire and was knocked out by a 77 mm gun . Maxwell , who was in close proximity , rushed over and opened the hatch , allowing the crew to escape . After escorting the tank commander to safety , Maxwell returned to lead the company in the attack , which succeeded in reaching and consolidating their objective . The award of the bar was published in a supplement to the London Gazette on 1 February 1919 .

= = = Victoria Cross , October 1918 to repatriation , August 1919 = = =

On 3 October 1918 , the 5th Brigade ? of which the 18th Battalion was part ? became engaged in its last battle of the First World War when breaching the Hindenburg Line close to Beaurevoir and Montbrehain . While taking part in this battle , Maxwell was a member of the attacking party along the Beaurevoir @-@ Fonsomme line when he performed the acts for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross .

Early in the advance , Maxwell 's company commander was severely wounded , resulting in Maxwell assuming control . Reaching the German barbed wire defences under intense machine @-@ gun fire , the company suffered heavy casualties , including all of the officers except Maxwell . Pushing forward alone through a narrow passageway in the wire , Maxwell captured the most dangerous machine gun , killed three Germans and took another four as prisoners ; thereby

enabling the company to move through the wire and reach their objective . Shortly afterwards , it was noticed that the company on their left flank was held up and failing to advance . Gathering a party of men , Maxwell led the group in an attempt to attack the German force from the rear . They soon came under heavy machine gun fire , and , single @-@ handedly , Maxwell dashed forward and attacked the foremost gun . Firing his revolver , he managed to shoot five of the crew and silence the gun .

Later in the advance , Maxwell learnt from an English @-@ speaking prisoner that a group of Germans in the adjacent post wished to surrender , but were afraid to give themselves up . Accompanied by two privates and the prisoner ? who was to act as an interpreter ? Maxwell approached the post . The three Australians , however , were immediately surrounded by a group of twenty German soldiers and disarmed . They seemed set to become prisoners themselves , before an artillery barrage fell on the position . Taking advantage of the resulting confusion , Maxwell pulled out a concealed revolver and shot two of the Germans before escaping with his men under heavy rifle fire ; one of the privates was subsequently wounded . Organising a party of men , he immediately attacked and captured the post .

The full citation for Maxwell 's Victoria Cross appeared in a supplement to the London Gazette on 6 January 1919 , it read :

War Office , 6th January , 1919

His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of the Victoria Cross to the undermentioned Officers , Non @-@ commissioned Officers and Men : ?

Lt. Joseph Maxwell , M.C. , D.C.M. , 18th Bn . , A.I.F.

For most conspicuous bravery and leadership in attack on the Beaulieu @-@ Fosse line near Estrees , North of St. Quentin , on the 3rd October , 1918 .

His company commander was severely wounded early in the advance , and Lt. Maxwell at once took charge . The enemy wire when reached under intense fire was found to be exceptionally strong and closely supported by machine guns , whereupon Lt. Maxwell pushed forward single @-@ handed through the wire and captured the most dangerous gun , killing three and capturing four enemy . He thus enabled his company to penetrate the wire and reach the objective . Later , he again dashed forward and silenced , single @-@ handed , a gun which was holding up a flank company . Subsequently , when with two men only he attempted to capture a strong party of the enemy , he handled a most involved situation very skilfully , and it was due to his resource that he and his comrades escaped .

Throughout the day Lt. Maxwell set a high example of personal bravery , coupled with excellent judgment and quick decision .

The 18th Battalion was training away from the frontline when the Armistice was declared on 11 November 1918 . On 8 March 1919 , Maxwell was invested with his Victoria Cross by King George V in the ballroom of Buckingham Palace . He headed for Australia on 1 May aboard HT China , disembarking at Melbourne on 8 June and proceeding to Sydney , where he was discharged from the Australian Imperial Force on 20 August .

= = Later life = =

Following demobilisation , Maxwell worked as a gardener in Canberra , Moree and the Maitland district . Having described himself as a reporter , Maxwell married 19 @-@ year @-@ old tailoress Mabel Maxwell (unrelated) in a Catholic ceremony at Bellevue Hill , Sydney on 14 February 1921 . The marriage produced a daughter , Jean , before being dissolved in 1926 upon Mabel 's instigation .

On 11 November 1929 , Maxwell attended the New South Wales Dinner for recipients of the Victoria Cross in Sydney , and 1932 saw the publication of Hell 's Bells and Mademoiselles , a book written in collaboration with Hugh Buggy about his experiences in the war . At the time , Maxwell was working as a gardener with the Department of the Interior in Canberra . The book was a success , but Maxwell soon spent what money he made from it . In the late 1930s , he wrote the manuscript for a second book entitled From the Hindenburg Line to the Breadline . The book was

never published and the manuscript was lost when it was lent to someone to read .

In 1933 , Maxwell acted as a defence witness in the trial of Alfred Jamieson , who was accused of housebreaking . Maxwell was Jamieson 's former platoon commander and testified that Jamieson had been of good character but had been strongly affected by the war .

After the outbreak of the Second World War , Maxwell made several attempts to enlist , but was unsuccessful due to his age , and deteriorating health . He eventually travelled to Queensland , where he enlisted under the alias of Joseph Wells on 27 June 1940 . However , his identity was soon discovered and he was given a training position ; dissatisfied , he took his discharge on 9 September 1940 .

In 1952 , Maxwell joined the contingent of Victoria Cross recipients invited to the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II . On 6 March 1956 , describing himself as a journalist from Bondi , Maxwell married widow Anne Martin , née Burton , in Sydney . Three years later , he attended the Victoria Cross centenary celebrations in London , before later re @-@ visiting the battlefields in France . In 1964 , together with his wife , Maxwell attended the opening of the VC Corner in the Australian War Memorial , Canberra . He was determined that his Victoria Cross would not wind up in the collection , believing that the award would be devalued by " lumping " them together .

On 6 July 1967 , Maxwell collapsed and died of a heart attack in a street in his home town Matraville , New South Wales . He had been an invalid pensioner for some time . His funeral service took place with full military honours at St Mathias Anglican Church , Paddington . Having been cremated , his ashes were interred at the Eastern Suburbs Crematorium in Botany . Anne Maxwell presented her husband 's medals to the Army Museum of New South Wales at Victoria Barracks , Paddington , and subsequently the medals , together with a portrait and a brass copy of his VC citation , were unveiled by the Minister of Defence , Allan Fairhall . In 2003 , Maxwell 's medals were presented to the Australian War Memorial on a permanent loan basis .