

= Percy Cherry =

Percy Herbert Cherry , VC , MC (4 June 1895 ? 27 March 1917) 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 the British and Commonwealth armed forces . The award was granted posthumously for Cherry 's actions during an attack on the French village of Lagnicourt which was strongly defended by German forces .

Born in the Australian state of Victoria , Cherry moved to Tasmania at the age of seven when his family took up an apple orchard . Becoming an expert apple packer , he was also a skilled rifle shot and member of the Franklin rowing club . In 1913 , he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the 93rd Infantry Regiment , Citizens Military Force , and served as a drill instructor at the outbreak of war . Enlisting in the Australian Imperial Force in March 1915 , he served at Gallipoli before transferring to the Western Front . In early March 1917 , Cherry was decorated with the Military Cross following an attack on Malt Trench , in which he led a party in capturing two German machine gun posts . He was killed by a German shell the day following his Victoria Cross action .

= = Early life = =

Cherry was born on 4 June 1895 at Drysdale , Victoria , to John Gawley Cherry and his wife Elizabeth , née Russel . When he was seven years old , the family moved to Tasmania and took up an apple orchard near Cradoc . Cherry attended the local state school until he was thirteen , after which he received private tuition . He worked with his father and became an expert apple packer ; at fourteen he won a local case @-@ making competition at the Launceston Fruit Show by packing thirty @-@ five cases of apples in an hour . Joining the Australian Army Cadets in 1908 , Cherry soon became a sergeant and later a second lieutenant , where he used to drill cadets in four different districts . At the age of sixteen , he won the President 's Trophy and Gold Medal for being the best shot at the rifle range in Franklin . He also rowed with the Franklin rowing club , played the cornet in the Franklin brass band and sang in the Anglican church choir . In 1913 , Cherry joined the Citizens Military Force and was commissioned into the 93rd Infantry Regiment as a second lieutenant .

= = First World War = =

= = = Enlistment , March 1915 to Western Front , March 1917 = = =

At the outbreak of war , Cherry was sent to Claremont Camp and assumed duties as a drill instructor . On 5 March 1915 , he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force and was allotted to the 26th Battalion , where he qualified as an infantry officer , but was considered too young for a commission in the Australian Imperial Force and was instead made a Quartermaster Sergeant . On 29 June , the battalion embarked from Brisbane for Egypt with Cherry aboard HMAT Aeneas . On arrival , the battalion spent several months training in the desert , where Cherry was promoted to company sergeant major in August . On 12 September , the battalion landed at Gallipoli and played a defensive role at Courtney ? s and Steele ? s Posts , and Russell ? s Top .

On 1 December , injured by bomb wounds to his face and head , Cherry was evacuated to Egypt , where he was commissioned as a second lieutenant on 9 December . Three days later , the 26th Battalion was withdrawn from Gallipoli and evacuated to Egypt where Cherry rejoined them in preparation for service on the Western Front . Remaining in Egypt during this time , Cherry was selected to attend a machine gun course in March 1916 . After completion of this , he was transferred to the 7th Machine Gun Company in France .

He commanded the company 's 1st Battery at Fleurbaix , Messines and on the Somme until 5 August , when he was wounded in a duel with a German officer at Pozières . He and a German officer ? who was leading an attack against Cherry 's position ? were exchanging shots from

neighbouring shell @-@ holes . Eventually , they both rose , firing simultaneously . The German officer hit Cherry in the neck but was mortally wounded by Cherry in return . Cherry approached the dying man , who pulled a package of letters from his pocket , and asked Cherry to have them censored and posted . Cherry promised to do so and the German handed over the letters , with the words ; " And so it ends " . He died shortly afterwards . As a result of his wounds , Cherry was evacuated to England for treatment .

Promoted to lieutenant on 25 August 1916 , Cherry returned to his unit on the Somme in November . The following month he was made a temporary captain and transferred back to the 26th Battalion as the commanding officer of C Company . His rank was confirmed on 14 February 1917 , and on 1 ? 2 March he was involved in the battalion 's actions around the village of Warlencourt . At 03 : 00 on 2 March , Cherry led his company in an attack on the German held position of Malt Trench , situated between the villages of Warlencourt and Bapaume . Artillery fire had failed to adequately cut the barbed wire lines for the advancing troops , and Cherry led a section of men along the wire until he found a break in it . Once through the gap , he rushed two machine gun posts , capturing one single @-@ handed , and turned one on the fleeing Germans before being wounded himself . For his actions during the engagement , Cherry was awarded the Military Cross , the notification of which was published in a supplement of the London Gazette on 26 April 1917 .

= = = Victoria Cross = = =

On 26 March 1917 , the 7th Brigade ? of which the 26th Battalion was part ? was tasked with the capture of Lagnicourt . It was during this engagement where Cherry was to earn the Victoria Cross . An artillery barrage opened up on the village at 05 : 15 and continued for twenty minutes , allowing the infantry to close in . The plan was that Cherry 's company would storm the village itself while the battalion 's other companies encircled it . For the assault , Cherry split his company into two sections ; he commanded one section himself and placed the other under Lieutenant William Frederick Joseph Hamilton .

The company was soon in action . Cherry 's section captured a large fortified farm on the edge of the village . As they entered the muddy main street , the Australians came under heavy fire from the houses lining the road and from an adjacent stable yard . Cherry " rushed the stable yard " and a fierce firefight developed , before the Germans surrendered . As Cherry and his men moved through Lagnicourt , they found the main resistance coming from a large chalky crater , " spotted with white chalk " , at the crossroads in the village centre . The Germans ' stout defence was holding up the advance and Cherry sent a messenger back for more Stokes mortars . Becoming impatient at the delay , Cherry decided to rush the position under the cover of Lewis Gun and rifle grenade fire . Capturing the crater , he found Lieutenant Harold Hereward Bieske at the bottom wounded . Bieske had taken over command of the second section when Lieutenant Hamilton was wounded , and it had now been reduced to six men .

After capturing the crater , Cherry pushed on through the village , where his party emerged from among the buildings on the far side . Another stiff fight ensued with a group of Germans in dug @-@ outs by the side of the road , before the company was able to meet up with its fellow units which had bypassed the village and were already established to the north and east of the area . Cherry 's orders were to fall back into reserve , but he disregarded them as he sensed a counter @-@ attack was forthcoming . At 09 : 00 on 27 March , the Germans launched a very strong counter @-@ attack under heavy artillery fire . At one point , Cherry noticed that the Germans were firing yellow flares to pinpoint Australian positions to their gunners . He found some of these flares , and fired them away from his position . The German attempts to retake Lagnicourt ? at a cost to the 7th Brigade of 377 casualties ? raged all day before they abandoned the counterattack .

= = = Death and legacy = = =

In the afternoon of 27 March 1917 , a shell burst in a sunken road to the east of Lagnicourt , killing Cherry and several other men . He was buried in Quéant Road Cemetery , Buissy , Plot VIII , Row C

, Grave 10 . The full citation for Cherry 's posthumous award of the Victoria Cross appeared in a supplement to the London Gazette on 11 May 1917 , reading :

War Office , 11th May , 1917

His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of the Victoria Cross to the undermentioned Officers and Man : ?

2nd Lt. (temp . Capt.) Percy Herbert Cherry , M.C. , late Aus . Imp . Force .

For most conspicuous bravery , determination and leadership when in command of a company detailed to storm and clear a village .

After all the officers of his company had become casualties he carried on with care and determination , in the face of fierce opposition , and cleared the village of the enemy .

He sent frequent reports of progress made , and when held up for some time by an enemy strong point he organised machine gun and bomb parties and captured the position . His leadership , coolness and bravery set a wonderful example to his men .

Having cleared the village , he took charge of the situation and beat off the most resolute and heavy counter @-@ attacks made by the enemy .

Wounded about 6 @.@ 30 a.m. , he refused to leave his post , and there remained , encouraging all to hold out at all costs , until , about 4 @.@ 30 p.m. , this very gallant officer was killed by an enemy shell .

Cherry 's Victoria Cross was presented to his father by the Governor of Tasmania , Sir Francis Newdegate , in Hobart during October 1917 . In 1932 , a photograph of Cherry was unveiled at the headquarters of the 26th Battalion , Australian Imperial Force , at Dinnerley , Brisbane . His Victoria Cross is currently on display at the Australian War Memorial along with his other medals .