

= Percy Statton =

Percy Clyde Statton , VC , MM ( 21 October 1890 ? 5 December 1959 ) 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 . Serving as a sergeant during the First World War , Statton was awarded the Victoria Cross in 1918 following his assault on four German machine guns . With three men , Statton rushed the posts armed with only a revolver and succeeded in capturing the first gun . Moving to the second , he killed the crew of five himself before the two remaining gun crews were forced to retreat .

Born in Tasmania , Statton was married and working as a farmer when he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force during 1916 . Posted to the 40th Battalion , he was shipped to England where he spent three months training . Arriving on the Western Front in 1917 , Statton was awarded the Military Medal during the Battle of Messines while leading carrying parties to the frontline under heavy artillery and machine gun fire . Wounded twice during the war , Statton returned to Australia in 1919 and was discharged the following year . In 1934 , he took part in rescue work aiding families isolated by severe bushfires in the Derwent Valley . Following a period of service during the Second World War , Statton died of stomach cancer in 1959 .

= = Early life = =

Statton was born in Beaconsfield , Tasmania , on 21 October 1890 to Edward Statton , a miner , and his wife Maggie Lavinia ( née Hoskins ) . He was educated at Zeehan State School , before gaining employment as a farmer in Tyenna . Giving his age as twenty @-@ one , Statton married Elsie May Pearce in a Methodist ceremony on 12 September 1907 ; the couple later had a son and two daughters .

= = First World War = =

Despite his wife 's disapproval , Statton enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on 29 February 1916 , and was allotted to the newly raised 40th Battalion as a private . Appointed lance corporal on 22 May , Statton embarked from Hobart aboard HMAT Berrima on 1 July , bound for England . The troopship disembarked at Devonport a little over seven weeks later , where the 40th Battalion spent the next three months training .

Promoted to corporal on 19 November 1916 , Statton embarked along with the rest of the 40th Battalion for France and the Western Front four days later . Initially posted to Le Havre , the battalion was transferred to Flanders in Belgium during early 1917 . Statton was promoted to temporary sergeant on 16 January 1917 , which was made substantive from 26 April . In June , the 40th Battalion took part in the Battle of Messines .

Over a three @-@ day period during the engagement at Messines from 7 ? 9 June , Statton was placed in charge of supervising and leading carrying parties to the frontline . Throughout this work , he was subject to heavy German artillery and machine gun fire , and on several occasions the party was decimated by shellfire . Despite this , the parties managed to reach the frontline on every occasion . For his actions throughout this time , Statton was later awarded the Military Medal , the recommendation of which cited his " exceptional fine work and gallant conduct " . The notification of the award was published in a supplement to the London Gazette on 16 August 1917 .

On 12 October 1917 , Statton was involved in operations during the First Battle of Passchendaele when he suffered a gunshot wound to his right shoulder . First admitted to the 22nd General Hospital , Douane , Statton was then transferred to the VAD Hospital , Tonbridge , as the wound required treatment in England . Having sufficiently recovered after a period of hospitalisation at the Fort Pitt Military Hospital , Chatham , and 3rd Auxiliary Hospital , Dartford , Statton was granted two weeks leave from 28 January 1918 . Returning to duty , he was attached to the Overseas Training Brigade at Longbridge Deverill prior to re @-@ embarking on 1 May for France , where he rejoined the 40th Battalion twelve days later .

While in action around the village of Villers @-@ Bretonneux on 10 June , Statton was wounded in a gas attack on his position . Initially admitted to the 10th Australian Field Ambulance , he was transferred to the 40th Casualty Clearing Station six days later , before returning to the 40th Battalion on 24 June . Beginning on 8 July , Statton was placed on a five @-@ day attachment to a demonstration platoon at the 10th Brigade Headquarters . Returning to his battalion , he was attached to the American 3rd Battalion , 130th Regiment , for service over a seven @-@ day period later that month . He rejoined the 40th Battalion on 27 July .

= = = Victoria Cross = = =

Between 10 ? 12 August 1918 , the 3rd Australian Division ? of which the 40th Battalion was part ? was ordered to attack from an easterly direction against the southern bank of the Somme River , and advance along the road past Proyart . On 12 August , the 40th Battalion was tasked with the objective of seizing and holding a valley to the south of the Proyart ? Chuignes road . The advance entailed moving the battalion across approximately 1 @,@ 300 metres ( 1 @,@ 400 yd ) of open ground , while under the direct observation of German forces on high ground to the east of Proyart . At the same time , the 37th Battalion was to move through the village of Proyart itself , and proceed to a line just beyond the railway to the north of the Proyart ? Chuignes road . It was during this action that Statton was to earn the Victoria Cross .

The 40th Battalion began its attack at approximately 07 : 30 , and by 08 : 30 had successfully advanced 800 metres ( 870 yd ) . It was at this point , however , that the unit came under an intense barrage from German artillery , and were prevented from moving further forward . With assistance from a Lewis Gun team under Statton 's command , the battalion 's A Company managed to reach the centre of Proyart village an hour later . The remainder of the 40th Battalion attempted to follow , but soon became subject to heavy machine gun fire . With his Lewis Gun , Statton engaged two German machine gun posts and thus enabled the remainder of his battalion to continue its advance . The battalion was later able to reach its objectives .

At 18 : 00 , the 40th Battalion received a message that the 37th Battalion was about to attempt to advance from the village to its own objective . From his position , Statton observed a line of German machine gunners firing on the 37th Battalion and preventing its advance . He turned his Lewis Guns on them in an attempt to assist a party of men from the 37th as they attacked . Having failed , a party of thirteen men were assembled and rushed the position soon after , but the group was wiped out before they reached the first gun . Gathering Corporal Upchurch and Privates Styles and Beard , Statton worked his way along under the cover of the Chuignes road embankment . Reaching within 75 metres ( 82 yd ) of the machine gunners and armed with only a revolver , Statton led the three men as they rushed across the open ground towards the German strongpoint . Reaching the position , the party was able to dispose of the first gun and its crew before moving onto the second , where Statton personally shot four of the five crew members and bayoneted the fifth with his own rifle . Seeing this , the two remaining gun teams began to retreat but were killed by Statton 's Lewis Gunners .

Soon after , another German machine gun opened up , killing Private Styles and wounding Corporal Upchurch . With Private Beard , Statton began to crawl back to his own lines , while the inspired 37th Battalion continued its advance and cheered the pair as they went past . Later that evening , Statton , while under heavy machine gun fire , went out and retrieved the badly @-@ wounded Upchurch and the body of Styles . By 20 : 00 , both battalions had reached and consolidated their positions , and were relieved by the British 17th Division the following day .

At 09 : 00 on 27 September 1918 , the 40th Battalion was ordered onto parade by the unit 's Commanding Officer , Lieutenant Colonel John Lord . Addressing the assembled crowd , Lord announced that that same day , the name of Sergeant Percy Statton would appear in the London Gazette announcing that he had been awarded the Victoria Cross . Described by the battalion 's history as a " reluctant hero " , Statton was granted three cheers before he was carried shoulder high through the ranks while the battalion band played . The full citation for Statton 's Victoria Cross appeared in a supplement to the London Gazette later that day , reading :

War Office , 27th September 1918 .

His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of the Victoria Cross to the undermentioned Officers , N.C.O. ' s and Man : ?

No. 506 Sjt . Percy Clyde Statton , M.M. , A.I.F.

For most conspicuous bravery and initiative in action when in command of a platoon which reached its objective , the remainder of the battalion being held up by heavy machine @-@ gun fire . He skilfully engaged two machine @-@ gun posts with Lewis gun fire , enabling the remainder of his battalion to advance .

The advance of the battalion on his left had been brought to a standstill by heavy enemy machine @-@ gun fire , and the first of our assaulting detachments to reach the machine @-@ gun posts were put out of action in taking the first gun . Armed only with a revolver , in broad daylight , Sjt . Statton at once rushed four enemy machine @-@ gun posts in succession , disposing of two of them , and killing five of the enemy . The remaining two posts retired and were wiped out by Lewis @-@ gun fire .

Later in the evening , under heavy machine @-@ gun fire , he went out again and brought in two badly wounded men .

Sjt . Statton set a magnificent example of quick decision , and the success of the attacking troops was largely due to his determined gallantry .

= = = Later war service = = =

From 20 October 1918 , Statton was granted ten days leave to Paris . Returning to the 40th Battalion , he was sent to Amiens the following day and attached to 4th Army Guard for special duties over a three @-@ day period . Briefly re @-@ joining his battalion , Statton was shipped to England on 5 November for special duties . During this time , the Armistice was signed officially declaring the war 's end , and Statton was granted two weeks leave in December .

Returning to France on 27 January 1919 , Statton was attached to the Headquarters of the Australian Base Depot from 25 March . Shipped to England in June , Statton attended an investiture ceremony in the Quadrangle of Buckingham Palace , where he was presented with his Victoria Cross by King George V. During his time in England , Statton undertook a course at the Motor Training Institute in preparation for non @-@ military employment , before he was granted a month 's leave . Returning to duty on 24 September , Statton boarded HT Pakeha twelve days later and departed for Australia . The troopship arrived in Tasmania on 26 November and Statton was discharged from the Australian Imperial Force on 19 January 1920 .

= = Later life = =

Following his discharge , Statton settled in Fitzgerald , Tasmania , where he gained employment in the timber industry . True to her word that she would leave him if he went off to war , Statton 's wife divorced him on 1 October 1920 . Five years later , on 21 December 1925 , he married Eliza Grace Hudson ( née Parker ) at the Registrar General 's Office , Hobart . In 1934 , severe bushfires broke out in the Derwent Valley , and Statton took a prominent role in rescue work aiding families isolated by the fire .

During the Second World War , Statton enlisted for service with the Volunteer Defence Corps of the Australian Military Forces . Commissioned as a lieutenant on 18 June 1942 , he served throughout the war with the 5th Battalion , Volunteer Defence Corps , until his discharge on 9 January 1946 . Statton 's wife died in 1945 , and on 16 December 1947 , he married Monica Enid Effie Kingston ; the pair later had a son . The couple lived at Ouse , where Statton worked as a commercial agent and was a member of the local council .

In 1956 , Statton joined the Australian contingent of Victoria Cross recipients who attended the parade in London 's Hyde Park to commemorate the centenary of the institution of the award . At the Repatriation General Hospital , Hobart , on 5 December 1959 , Statton died of stomach cancer . Accorded a full military funeral , Statton was cremated and his ashes interred at the Cornelian Bay

Cemetery . His Victoria Cross is currently on display at the Australian War Memorial .