

= George Howell (VC) =

George Julian " Snowy " Howell , VC , MM (19 November 1893 ? 23 December 1964) 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 . Howell was decorated with the Victoria Cross following his actions during the Second Battle of Bullecourt , in which he ran along the parapet of a trench bombing the German forces attacking his position through the use of grenades , and thus driving them back .

Born in a suburb of Sydney , New South Wales , Howell was employed as a builder before enlisting in the Australian Imperial Force in June 1915 . Allotted to the force 's 1st Battalion , he served at Gallipoli prior to transferring to the Western Front . Participating in the Somme offensive of 1916 , Howell was wounded at Pozières and promoted to corporal in early 1917 . During an attack on a German held village , he led a rifle bombing section and was awarded the Military Medal for his actions . Severely wounded in his Victoria Cross action , Howell underwent a prolonged hospitalisation period before returning to Australia and receiving his discharge on medical grounds . Settling in Coogee , he gained employment by working on the advertising staff of several newspapers . Following the outbreak of the Second World War , Howell served with the Australian Eastern Command Headquarters but soon sought his discharge and enlisted with the United States Sea Transport Service . Howell died in 1964 at the age of 71 .

= = Early life = =

Howell was born in the Sydney suburb of Enfield , New South Wales , on 19 November 1893 , the fourth son of English @-@ born carpenter , Francis John Howell , and his Australian wife , Martha (née Sweeny) . Howell was educated at Croydon Park and Burwood Public Schools , before receiving an apprenticeship as a bricklayer . Becoming a builder , he was employed in his native Enfield area of Sydney .

= = First World War = =

On 3 June 1915 , Howell enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force for service in the First World War . Allotted to the 7th Reinforcements of the 1st Battalion as a private , he embarked from Sydney for Egypt on 14 July aboard HMAT Orsova . Joining the 1st Battalion at Gallipoli on 1 November , Howell served on the peninsula until the Allied evacuation the following month . Returning to Egypt , the battalion spent several months training in the desert in preparation for service on the Western Front .

The 1st Battalion embarked for France in March 1916 , and by April the unit was entrenched in the Fromelles sector . In the third week of July , Howell was wounded in the Battle of Pozières while taking part in the Somme offensive . Evacuated to a hospital in Sheffield , England , during early August , Howell attended a training school before returning to his battalion on 26 November . Appointed lance corporal on 10 December , he was promoted to corporal on 6 February 1917 .

On 9 April 1917 , Howell took part in the 1st Battalion 's attack on the German held village of Demicourt . During the engagement , Howell led a rifle bombing section at the forefront of his company against the German position . The section was held up several times in their advance due to heavy machine gun fire , but managed to overcome the opposition and continue the advance each time . For his actions during the battle , Howell was awarded the Military Medal , the recommendation of which cited his " ... courage and devotion to duty ... was of great assistance to his company in the capture of its objectives " . The notification of the award was published in a supplement to the London Gazette on 26 May 1917 .

= = = Victoria Cross = = =

In preparation for an attack on the Hindenburg Line at Bullecourt , the 1st Australian Brigade ? of

which the 1st Battalion was part of was attached to the 2nd Australian Division . The attack commenced in the morning of 3 May 1917 , with the 2nd Division lined up in conjunction with thirteen other divisions . Despite some progress made early in the attack , the Australian forces were soon held up by strong opposition , and in the evening the 1st Battalion was entrenched in the old German line known as ' OG1 ' . Three of the battalion 's companies occupied the line , while a fourth was placed in reserve . Their position was such that they occupied a wedge into the German line , while two flanks were in German held territory .

From the initial attack , only the Canadians on the extreme right and the 3rd Australian Brigade on the extreme left were able to capture and hold their set objectives . Over the course of the next three days , severe fighting took place and further troops were drawn in to hold and extend the gains of 3 May . On 6 May , the Germans launched a counter @-@ attack which forced the 3rd Brigade to withdraw from their trenches ; it was during this engagement that Howell was to perform the act which was to earn him the Victoria Cross .

At 06 : 00 , Howell , who was in charge of a post to the right of the line , noticed the battalion on the right flank was being forced out of its trench and was beginning to retire . Immediately alerting battalion headquarters , Captain Alexander MacKenzie who had assumed temporary command of the battalion hurriedly organised a group of non @-@ combatant soldiers from headquarters together with several signallers to form a defensive line along a road bank in order to fend off the expected German advance . A fierce bombing and grenade fight soon ensued , with both sides suffering heavy casualties . Fearing the Germans would outflank his battalion , Howell climbed onto the top of the parapet and began running along the trench line throwing bombs down on the Germans , all the while being subject to heavy rifle and bomb fire . Forcing the Germans back along the trench , Howell was supported by Lieutenant Thomas Richards who followed him along the trench firing bursts from his Lewis Gun . Soon exhausting his supply of bombs , Howell began to attack with his bayonet until he fell into the trench wounded . Howell had been hit in both legs by machine gun fire , and when he was brought into the clearing station some hours later , it was discovered he had suffered at least twenty @-@ eight separate wounds . Due to his actions , the ground which had been lost was soon retaken , and the German attack was later repulsed .

The full citation for Howell 's Victoria Cross appeared in a supplement to the London Gazette on 27 June 1917 , reading :

War Office , 27th June , 1917 .

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

No. 2445 Cpl. George Julian Howell , Inf . Bn . , Aus . Imp . Force .

For most conspicuous bravery . Seeing a party of the enemy were likely to outflank his Battalion , Cpl. Howell , on his own initiative , single @-@ handed and exposed to heavy bomb and rifle fire , climbed on to the top of the parapet and proceeded to bomb the enemy , pressing them back along the trench .

Having exhausted his stock of bombs , he continued to attack the enemy with his bayonet . He was then severely wounded .

The prompt action and gallant conduct of this N C.O. in the face of superior numbers was witnessed by the whole Battalion and greatly inspired them in the subsequent successful counter attack .

= = = Hospitalisation and repatriation = = =

Howell 's multiple wounds at Bullecourt required a prolonged hospitalisation period for treatment , and he was sent to the Norfolk and Norwich War Hospital in England . On 21 July 1917 , Howell was invested with his Victoria Cross and Military Medal by King George V in the forecourt of Buckingham Palace . A photograph of the pair together was taken at this time , and later published in the Times History of the War . Promoted to sergeant , Howell returned to Australia on 31 October . Having not adequately recovered from his wounds , he was discharged from the Australian Imperial Force on 5 June 1918 on medical grounds . Howell 's father and one of his brothers had also served on the Western Front during the First World War ; his father with the 54th Battalion and his brother ,

Frederick , with the 1st Pioneer Battalion .

= = Later life = =

On 1 March 1919 , Howell married Sadie Lillian Yates , a nurse , at St Stephen 's Presbyterian Church in Sydney . The pair settled in Coogee , where Howell was employed on the advertising staff of Smith 's Newspapers Ltd and later the Bulletin Newspaper Co . Pty Ltd . By 1933 , he was the New South Wales representative for the Brisbane Standard and the Queensland Worker .

At the outbreak of the Second World War , Howell once again offered his services and enlisted in the Australian Army on 14 October 1939 . Posted to Eastern Command Headquarters , Paddington , he was granted the rank of staff sergeant , but found staff work to be dull and sought his discharge in February 1941 . In August 1944 , Howell enlisted in the United States Army for service in the United States Sea Transport Service , and was thus able to participate in the invasion of Leyte at the commencement of the Philippines campaign .

In December 1953 , following his wife 's death , Howell moved from Sydney to Western Australia . Accompanied by his grandson , the journey took four days by train before the pair arrived in the Perth suburb of Applecross , where Howell was to live with his married daughter , Norma . He later moved to Gunyidi , via Watheroo , where he was to reside for a few years before returning to Perth . In 1956 , he 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 Victoria Cross .

Howell died at the Repatriation General Hospital , Hollywood , Perth , on 23 December 1964 . He was granted a funeral with military honours , before his body was cremated and his ashes interred at Karrakatta Cemetery , Perth . Howell 's name is commemorated by a plaque in the Western Australian Garden of Remembrance , and his Victoria Cross and other medals are on display at the Australian War Memorial , Canberra .