



LORD ASHCROFT'S
"HERO OF
THE MONTH"

Captain Percy Herbert Cherry

VC, MC

LEADERSHIP

AGGRESSION · BOLDNESS
INITIATIVE · SACRIFICE
SKILL · ENDURANCE

The many Victoria Crosses and George Crosses in the Lord Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum in London are displayed under one of seven different qualities of bravery. Whilst Captain Percy Cherry's award is not part of the collection, Lord Ashcroft feels that it falls within the category of leadership:

"Charismatic, strong, inspirational, the natural leader not only takes command, but also infuses all those around them with confidence and hope. They exude calm and resolve. They are a tower of strength."



TOP RIGHT:
The original caption to this image states that it shows 'two Australian soldiers, probably of the 1st Machine Gun Battalion, stand in the arched doorway at the site where Captain P.H. Cherry won his Victoria Cross'. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; P03137.007)

PERCY HERBERT CHERRY was born in Murradoc, Drysdale, Victoria, Australia, on 4 June 1895. The son of John Cherry and his wife Elizabeth (née Russell), he was educated at Cradoc State School, Huon, Tasmania. His choice of school was dictated by the fact that his family had moved to Tasmania to run an apple orchard when young Percy was just seven years old.



RIGHT:
A studio portrait of Captain Percy Herbert Cherry VC, MC. Note how the two medals have been superimposed on the image. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; P02939.012)

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, he became an expert apple-picker, winning competitions for his fruit-picking skills. After 1908, Cherry's education was completed by private tuition. A talented singer and musician, he played the cornet in the brass band at Franklin. He was also an accomplished rower and fine shot: he won a contest for being the best shot at the Franklin rifle range.

Aged 13, he enrolled as a school cadet, becoming a sergeant and, later, a second lieutenant. In 1913, he was commissioned in the 93rd Infantry Regiment and on 5 March 1915, seven months after the outbreak of the Great War, he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). He was posted to the 26th Battalion (Queensland and Tasmania) but, aged 19, was considered too young for a commission. He was, nevertheless, praised by his CO for his devotion to duty and honesty. On 1 May 1915, just a month before his 20th birthday, Cherry was promoted to quartermaster sergeant.

On 29 June 1915, Cherry sailed for Egypt with his regiment and, on 13 September of that year, he was promoted to company sergeant major. He reached Gallipoli, Turkey,

in September and served there until he was wounded on 1 December and then evacuated to Egypt. Due to a shortage of officers, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant on 8 December, despite still suffering from his injuries.

In March 1916, and having by now recovered from his wounds, he completed a machine-gun course in Egypt before arriving in Marseilles, France, with the 7th Machine-Gun Company. He served on the Western Front at Armentières, Messines and on the Somme. On 5 August 1916, he was badly wounded at Pozières when he was shot by a German sniper. Apparently, the two men had fired at each other simultaneously and the German soldier was killed by Cherry's bullet. Cherry was Mentioned in Despatches for his courage in battle that day. After being evacuated to the UK, Cherry was promoted to substantive lieutenant on 25 August 1916.

After recovering from his second series of injuries, Cherry was appointed adjutant of Wareham camp in Dorset, before returning to the 26th Battalion in France, serving as a company commander with C Company from 1 December 1916. He



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 had died in battle aged 21, unaware that he had been awarded either his VC or his earlier MC. He was buried at Quéant Road Cemetery, Buissy, France. Many people wrote to Cherry's parents, praising their son's skill and bravery. In one letter a fellow soldier described him as "the bravest man I had ever met".

Cherry's citation lists his rank incorrectly as "2nd Lt. (temp. Capt.)": at the time of his death he was, in fact, a substantive captain. On 6 October 1917, Cherry's VC was presented to his father, John Cherry, by Sir Francis Newdigate, the Governor of Tasmania, in Hobart. A photograph of Cherry was unveiled at the headquarters of the 26th AIF in Brisbane in 1932. He is remembered

was promoted to temporary captain on 9 December 1916 and his rank was confirmed on 14 February 1917.

Cherry showed great courage on 2 March 1917 when he was wounded during the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line. His bravery, along with his injuries, came when the 7th Australian Brigade attacked the Malt Trench between Warlencourt and Bapaume. Having found a small gap in the wire after an attack on the German lines, Cherry charged two enemy machine-gun posts, capturing them both. It was for this gallantry that Cherry was awarded the Military Cross (MC).

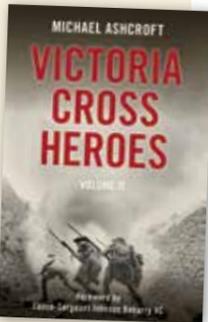
On 26 March 1917, the Australian 2nd Division attacked Lagnicourt, where the enemy position helped guard the approaches to the Hindenburg Line. Over 12 hours of close quarter and hectic fighting, Cherry showed such repeated bravery in capturing the village that he was awarded the VC.

His citation, announced on 11 May 1917, stated: "For most conspicuous bravery, determination and



VICTORIA CROSS HEROES II

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His sixth book on gallantry, *Victoria Cross Heroes Volume II*, was published in November. For more information, please visit: www.victoriacrossheroes2.com Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collection is on public display at Imperial War Museum, London. For more information visit: www.iwm.org.uk/heroes. For details about his VC collection, visit: www.lordashcroftmedals.com For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit: www.lordashcroft.com. Follow him on Twitter: @LordAshcroft



TOP LEFT:
Captain Cherry's original wooden grave marker at Lagnicourt in France. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; P04232.001)

LEFT:
The memorial plaque in honour of Captain Percy Herbert Cherry VC, MC at Château d'Hendecourt. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

at several memorials including at the Hall of Valour, Australian War Memorial (AWM), Canberra. His name is also on the VC memorial at Hobart, Tasmania, and the Central Dome area, Queen Victoria Building, Sydney. Furthermore, an image of him, carved in wood, has been erected at his home town of Cradoc.

I do not own Cherry's medal group and his VC is on display at the AWM, Canberra. ☉

BELOW:
Captain Cherry's headstone in Quéant Road Cemetery, Buissy, France. The Cemetery was made by the 2nd and 57th Casualty Clearing Stations in October and November 1918. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

