

Sergeant 2769 William Cecil Storer CdG, 24th Battalion

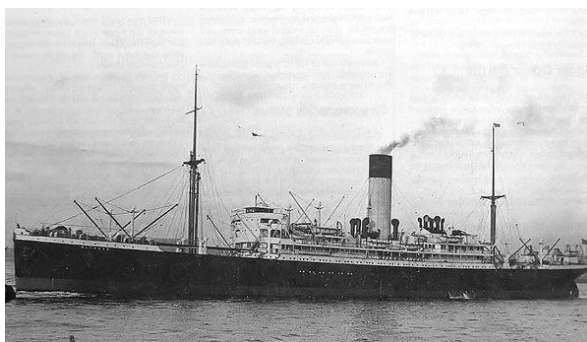
Graeme Hosken, Dubbo.

William Cecil Storer was born in **Branhholme**, in the County of Normanby in Southwestern Victoria. Branhholme is 25 km southwest of Hamilton and 65 km north of Portland, on the Henty Highway. William was the son of Edward Storer and Mary Bridget Storer (nee Harvey), of Wallacedale North via Condah. The village of Condah is 4 km from present day Wallacedale.

William Storer was medically examined at **Hamilton** on 2 July, 1915, by an AAMC (army) doctor. He was recorded as being aged 23 years and seven months, with a height of 5 foot 8 inches and a weight of 173 lb (well above average for the AIF, so he had quite a solid physique). William had dark complexion, brown eyes and brown hair. He gave his religious denomination as Presbyterian. William had two scars, one on his right thigh and another above his right knee; the upper scar was the larger of the two. He gave his occupation as baker. William had no prior military training in cadets or militia.

Fifteen days later, William was in **Melbourne** where he was attested and took the Oath of Allegiance to the King on 17 July, 1915. On 20 July, William underwent a second military examination and was accepted for service in the Australian Imperial Force. He entered **Broadmeadows Camp**, on the northern outskirts of Melbourne, on 3 August and began his training with the Depot Battalion.

On 12 October, 1915, William was allocated to the 6th Reinforcements to the 24th Battalion, which was part of the 6th Brigade of the 2nd AIF Division. He embarked from **Port Melbourne** on board HMAT A34 *Ulysses* [right] on 27 October, 1915. His date of disembarkation in Egypt is not recorded, but he was taken on strength of the 24th Battalion at **Tel-el-Kebir**, Egypt, on 10 January, 1916. It is unlikely that his reinforcement draft served on Gallipoli, due to their late arrival in Egypt and the decision to withdraw the Anzacs from the Peninsula (in December 1915).



At the beginning of February 1916, the 24th Battalion moved to the desert east of the **Suez Canal** to defend the shipping lifeline from Turkish attack. After a train journey to **Ismailia** on the Canal, the battalion crossed the waterway by ferries and pontoon bridges and marched about 20 km to **Sphinx Camp**, east of the Canal. Considerable effort went into building trenches, only for them to be filled with sand during the frequent sandstorms, and patrols were conducted at night for signs of Turkish approach.

In March 1916, the 2nd Division was advised of its transfer to **France**; the news bringing an uplift in spirits of the men. The 24th Battalion underwent an horrendous march back to the Canal, trekking over the desert sands carrying full kit and blankets. Water bottles were soon emptied and the men began to drop out from thirst and exhaustion. The last stragglers arrived at **Ferry Post** around daylight. The battalion crossed the Canal the next day to **Moascar**, where preparations for the departure to France were commenced.

The battalion was transported by railway to **Alexandria** on 20 March, 1916, and William boarded a troopship for the journey to **Marseilles** in Southern France the same day. The three ships carrying the officers and men of the 24th Battalion (the *Lake Michigan*, *Magdalena* and *City of Edinburgh*) departed Alexandria on 21 March and arrived in Marseilles on 26 March. After a train journey of two days, the unit arrived in **Thiennes**, where they detrained and marched to **Robecq** where they would be billeted.

On 10 April, 1916, the 24th Battalion arrived at **Haverskerque** on the banks of the River Lys, where they awaited their first trip to the trenches on the Western Front. The 24th took over the front line at **Fleurbaix** on 15 April. The 'trenches' in this area were actually breastworks, built above ground level from timber and sandbags due to the swampy nature of the soil (brought about by the high water table). Breastworks [right] could be easily damaged by shell fire, and required constant rebuilding and repairs after German shelling.

The battalion moved to **L'Halle-o-Beau**, southwest of Armentieres, in May and began to improve the defences in that part of the Armentieres sector.



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Typical fatigues (out-of-line duties) included trench digging, laying communication cables, erecting gun screens and barbed wire entanglements and carrying rations and ammunition. On 28 May the battalion moved to **Bois-Grenier**.

The 24th Battalion entered the front line at **Chapelle Armentieres** on 23 June, 1916. On 29 June the battalion took part in a highly successful raid by the 6th Brigade. The four brigade battalions each contributed around 50 men to the raiding party; all were volunteers and either Anzac veterans or 'thoroughly reliable soldiers' [unit history]. The object of the raid was to 'shock' the Germans in that part of the line and secure prisoners and booty for intelligence purposes. At 12.10 am the raiders began their dash across the 300 yards of No-man's land and entered the German trenches. The 24th captured five Germans and killed about 50. Five of the men from the 24th were killed and several wounded.



William Storer is recorded as being a member of the raiding party on the night of 29/30 June, and on 30 June he was admitted to the 6th Field Ambulance and then the 2nd Casualty Clearing Station with a gun shot wound to the knee. Later that day, William was admitted to the 2nd Australian General Hospital at **Wimereux**. Private Storer was placed on Hospital Ship *St Denis* [left] at **Boulogne** for transfer to England on 2 July, 1916, and later that day admitted to the Norfolk War Hospital. Following treatment at **Norfolk**, William was transferred to No. 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital at **Harefield**, Middlesex, on 5 August, 1916, for convalescence.

On 19 August he was transferred to No. 2 Command Depot at **Weymouth**. Most of the men sent to Weymouth Depot were returned to Australia, but William must have passed a medical board examination and been considered fit to return to duty at some time within three months.

Right: Inside the gymnasium at No. 2 Medical Command Depot at Weymouth.

On 11 October, William marched in to **Perham Downs** No. 1 Command Depot. Two days later he was transferred to No. 3 Command Depot at **Bovington**, near Wool. His next move was to No. 4 Command Depot at **Wareham** on 3 November, 1916.

Five months later, on 12 April, 1917, William marched out to No. 2 Command Depot at **Weymouth**, a sign that his knee was not recovering as expected and thoughts were again being given to his repatriation to Australia. However, William was given a reprieve and allocated to duty with the Australian Army Veterinary Corps Details at **Parkhouse**, England, on 7 May. He proceeded to **France** on 16 May and was taken on strength of the Australian Veterinary Hospital at **Calais** on 17 May. (It is likely that William had experience working with horses while growing up on his family's farm in Victoria.)



It seems that William's knee wound had now healed, as he was transferred to the 2nd Australian Divisional Base Depot at **Havre** on 16 July, 1917, to await his return to the 24th Battalion. On 8 August, William was taken on strength of the 24th Battalion while it was training at **Wardrecques**, near Arques and St Omer in France. The men undertook training, drilling and route marches during the day, then spent time in the estaminets (cafes) in the evening. Divisional sports were also held to keep the men fit and entertained.

The 24th Battalion then moved into Belgium to take part in the Third Battle of Ypres (better known as 'Passchendaele'). The first involvement for the 24th would be the **Battle of Menin Road** on 20 September. The battalion did not attack on the opening day of the battle but was used to carry ammunition and other materials to those units in the captured positions. On 23 September the battalion returned to **Devonshire Camp**.

The 24th Battalion was one of the assaulting units in the **Battle of Broodseinde** on 4 October, 1917. They would continue the advance by moving through the 22nd Battalion and capture the final objective, known as the 'blue line'. If William was in one of the first three platoons of each company, he would have

carried his Lee Enfield .303, 220 rounds of small arms ammunition, two Mills bombs, four sandbags, two days' rations, one iron ration, and two full water bottles.

'A' Company led the advance, moving off at 4 am into position. The attack would be launched at 6am. While lying on the jumping-off tapes awaiting zero hour, the German artillery opened up on the Australian positions and caused numerous casualties. Finally, the men were able to rise from the mud and shell holes and advance over the boggy ground at **Zonnebeke** and then up the slope of the **Broodseinde Ridge**.

The Australians soon found out the reason for the enemy barrage, as they came across Germans advancing towards their positions – the Hun had planned an attack at the same time. The three 6th Brigade battalions got stuck into the Germans with the bayonet and soon put them to rout.



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The 24th Battalion were held up by machine-gun fire from **Romulus Wood**, but with the help of the 7th Battalion the enemy was overpowered in hand-to-hand fighting. The 24th arrived at its objective on the downward slope of the ridge at around 9.30 am and quickly dug in to prepare for the expected counter-attacks. To gain the blue line the 24th had to capture numerous enemy pill-boxes, which involved heavy fighting at close quarters.

Left: The Headquarters of the 24th Battalion, established in a dugout on Broodseinde Ridge, the day following the capture of the Ridge.

William survived the Battle of Broodseinde and was appointed a lance corporal on 8 October, 1917, to complete establishment. The next day, 9 October, he was appointed corporal, replacing **Corporal 4154 Lewis Rowland Mace MM, MID**, 24th Bn, who had been killed in action. On this day the exhausted and weakened 24th Battalion took part in an attack on **Daisy Wood**, which was only partially successful.

William proceeded on leave to the **UK** on 16 March, 1918, and returned to his unit on 3 April. While he was in England he was promoted to temporary sergeant, replacing **Sergeant 2868 AC Cooper** who had been evacuated. William's appointment to sergeant was made permanent on 22 June, 1918.

While William was in England, the Germans launched their major Spring Offensive on 21 March, 1918. The 24th Battalion were moved from Belgium to the **Somme region** of France on 1 April. The battalion moved into defensive positions around **Millencourt** and prepared to meet the advancing Germans. The 24th then moved back to **Warloy** on 2 May for a short rest. One week later they moved back to the front line near **Buire**.

On 19 May, 1918, the 24th Battalion was involved in the capture of the village of **Ville-sur-Ancre** on the northern bank of the Somme River.

Sergeant Storer was wounded in action on the second occasion on 8 August, 1918, on the first day of the **Battle of Amiens**. William was relayed to the 8th Australian Field Ambulance with a gun shot wound to the chest. He was conveyed to the 8th Stationary Hospital at **Wimereux** on 9 August and transported to **England** on 13 August.

William was admitted to the King George Hospital, Stamford Street, **London**, on 13 August with 'gun shot wound to the left chest, severe'. After initial treatment, he was transferred to the 3rd Auxiliary Hospital at **Dartford** on 2 September, 1918. The next day he commenced two weeks sick leave and was told to report to Littlemoor Camp, **Weymouth [right]**, on 17 September. He arrived at Littlemoor (part of No. 2 Command Depot) on 19 September, but escaped censure for his lateness.



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On 1 October, 1918, William marched in to No. 1 Command Depot at **Sutton Veny**. His next move was to the Overseas Training Brigade at **Longbridge Deverill** on 16 October, 1918. He proceeded back to France on 30 October and rejoined his unit on 3 November. When the Armistice was signed on 11 November, the 24th Battalion was resting at **La Chaussee**.

On 23 November, 1918, the 24th Battalion began its move towards **Germany** to form part of the army of occupation. They moved through **Vignacourt**, **Amiens**, **Villers-Bretonneux**, **Peronne** and **Cambrai**. The battalion spent two nights at **Busigny** before moving to **Bohain**. On 26 November the unit was at **St Souplet**, and on the 28th the men arrived at **Boulogne-sur-Helpe**, where they would rest for a fortnight. The 24th next moved to the **Charleroi** area in Belgium on 17 December, 1918. Finally, the battalion arrived at its destination of **Nalinnes**, about 11 km from the city of Charleroi. Their 'march to the Rhine' ended here, as it was decided that the Australians would not enter Germany, but be demobilised and the men sent home as soon as ships could be made available.

Leave was granted to **Brussels** and England, the battlefield of Waterloo, Paris and Antwerp. Education schemes were commenced to prepare the men for a return to civilian life.

While at Nalinnes, William incurred the only blemish on his service record. He was charged on 6 February, 1919, with: (1) Neglect to obey General Routine Order No. 1297 (killing of game); Alternative (2) Committing an offence against the property of an inhabitant in the country in which he is serving; Trespass. William was tried in a field general court martial and found not guilty of charge (1) but guilty of charge (2). His punishment was to forfeit three months seniority of rank, but this was later worded 'to take the rank and seniority as if his appointment to rank of sergeant bore date 11/9/18'. As he originally rose to the rank of sergeant on 22/6/18, this punishment placed him in seniority behind any sergeants promoted between those two dates.

On 12 February, 1919, the 24th Battalion moved to **Marcinelle**, a suburb of Charleroi, as their dwindling numbers awaited their next move back to the UK. William marched out from Marcinelle on 7 April and left Havre for Southampton on 11 April. He marched in to No. 1 Command Depot at **Sutton Veny** on 12 April.

William Storer embarked from England on board the *Rio Negro* at **Devonport** on 29 May, 1919, and disembarked at **Melbourne** on 22 July. His date of discharge from the AIF is not recorded. William was entitled to the three general service medals: the 1914/15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

On 3 March, 1920, Base Records Office in Melbourne wrote to William's father, Edward, informing him that his son had been listed in the 'London Gazette' of 26/11/19, relating to William's 'conspicuous service rendered' and that William had been awarded a Croix de Guerre by the President of the French Republic. William's award appeared in the 'Commonwealth Gazette' on 19 February, 1920. The CdG medal was received in Australia on 25 February, 1920, and despatched to Edward's address soon after.

William had, in fact, been originally recommended for a French Medaille d'Honneur. The recommendation came from **Brigadier General J Robertson**, GOC 6th Brigade AIF, who wrote:

This NCO has rendered much consistent good service as a platoon commander with the [24th] Battalion. When the battalion was hurriedly brought down to the Somme in April 1918, Sgt Storer was Scout NCO for his Company. In this capacity he showed much daring, and was largely instrumental in dominating No-man's land on our immediate front. At Ville-sur-Ancre on 19 May 1918, Sgt Storer was in charge of a platoon which had the task of advancing along the northern bank of the River Ancre. By personal example he was able to lead his men forward to the final objective with only one casualty. Sgt Storer quickly selected positions for his section posts, and by the skilful handling of the Lewis guns inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy retreating from the village. Whilst the battalion was adjoining the French forces, this NCO aided the smooth running of the international posts in his capacity as liaison NCO. Sgt Storer continued his good service until severely wounded soon after the commencement of the advance on 8 August 1918.

William applied for a Repatriation Department pension in 1931. A newspaper report shows William Cecil Storer as a maize farmer in Upper Barron on the Atherton Tablelands, Qld, in 1937, and a dairy farmer in the same place in 1947. It is likely William drew a soldier-settler block in the area. He passed away on 8 April, 1971, at the age of 79 years, and is buried in the Atherton Cemetery.

Notes:

(1) William's attestation paper states that William was born in Branhholme, England. The only Branhholm [sic] in the UK is in Scotland. The confusion may have come from the County of Normanby; Normanby being a suburb of Middlesbrough in Northeast England. There is little doubt he was born in the County of Normanby, Victoria.

(2) It is not known what 'game' William had illegally hunted in February 1919, but the most likely target was a pheasant.

(3) The Wallacedale Honour Roll was unveiled in June 1917 and features the name of *Cecil* Storer; indicating that William may have been better known in the district by his middle name of Cecil. The honour roll also carried the name of a George Storer, who was a labourer from Condah Swamp, Vic. George gave as his next of kin Mrs Margaret Storer. George may have been a cousin of William.

(4) The notice at **right** appeared on the website below, date unknown:

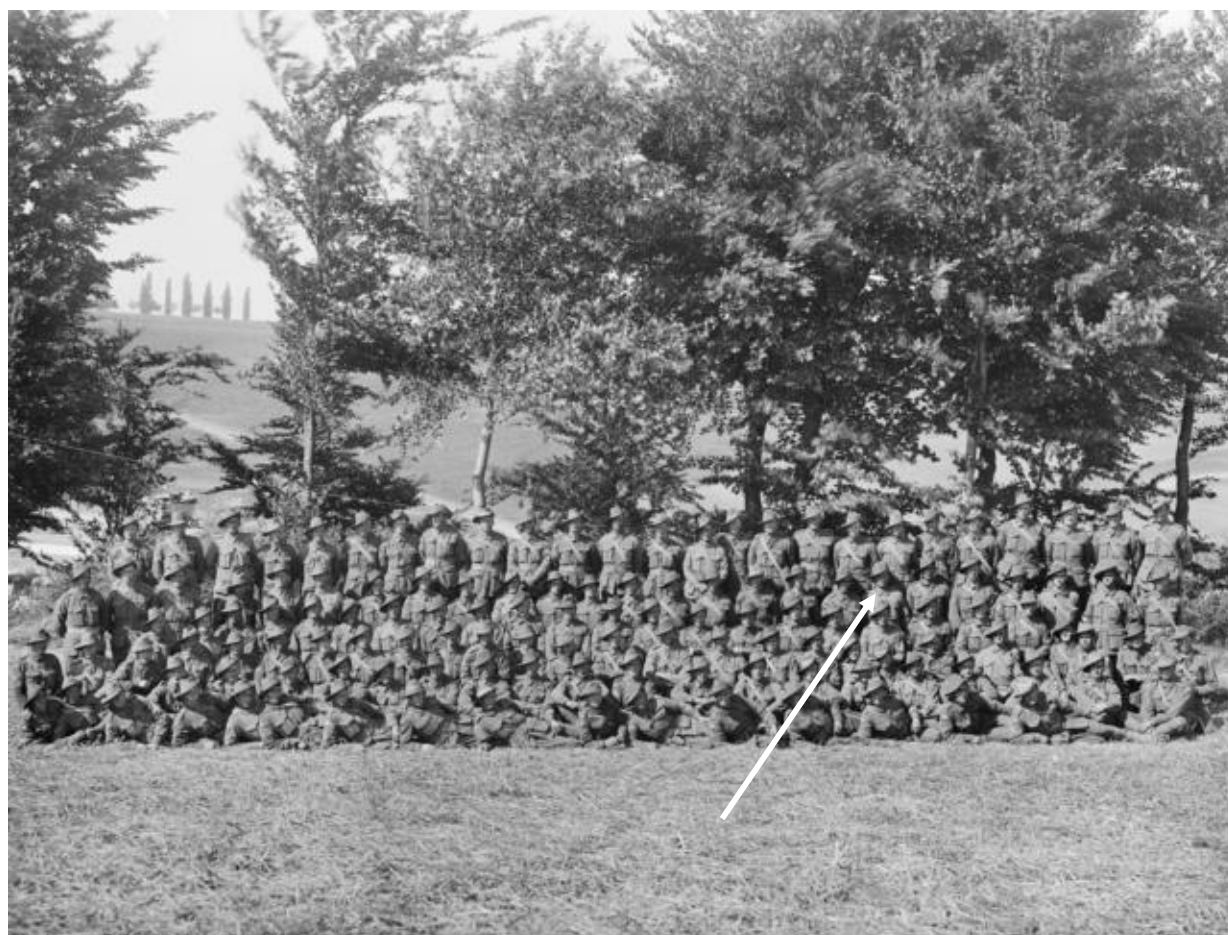
<https://www.medalsgonemissing.com/MissingMedals/14.html>

(5) William had a tree planted in the Digby Avenue of Honour by Mrs PR Thomas on 11 August, 1917. The Avenue was restored on 27 January, 1991. William's tree was No. 7 on the west side when travelling north to south. Digby is a village 50 km west of Hamilton.

(6) William Storer is in this photo of NCOs of the 24th Battalion, taken at Querrieu, France, on 27 June, 1918. He is standing seventh from the right in the third row from the front.

	W.C. STORER
	Medal Type: WW1 - WW1 Trio + Croix De Guerre
	Service No: 2769 Unit No: 24th Battalion
	Corps/Service: Country: Australia

My family is searching for the missing war service medals of William Cecil STORER. The medals were lost upon Cecil's death in North Queensland in 1971.



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EO 2573

(7) Wallacedale has a pictorial roll of honour for its district servicemen. There may be a photo of William Storer in this frame. Other rolls are found nearby in Condah and Branhholme, which may also list William.

Not set

Before they arrived at Cairo two Diggers had heard much about "Jimmy's" – the famous St James restaurant. They made up their minds that they would have at least one real good meal there. This they proceeded to do on the first night in Cairo. Everything went along grand and at last in came dates, fruits, etc. and accompanied by a beautiful chaste glass finger bowl. Bill gathered up the bowl, and tried to attack it with fork and then spoon. Then he called up the waiter. "Take this blanky jelly away," he ordered. "The damn thing hasn't set yet." – Bill's Pal.

Source: *It happened in the AIF*, 'Sporting Globe', 17 February, 1940. Edited by Jack Rohan, late 34th Bn AIF.