

Percy George Stafford

**1st & 2nd Light Horse,
47th & 48th Battalion, AIF
Service number: 1485**

Born: abt January 1894, Castlereagh, NSW

Died: 26 February 1919, Charleroi, Belgium

Percy George Stafford was born in Castlereagh NSW, in 1894. Percy's brother Private William Alexander Stafford (6091) enlisted on 6 March 1916, served with the 3rd Light Rail Operating Company, and returned to Australia on 5 November 1919.

Stafford enlisted on 10 May 1915 in Brisbane, Queensland and was assigned to the 11th reinforcements, 2nd Light Horse Regiment. His unit sailed from Sydney aboard *A47 HMAT Mashobra* on 4 October 1915. In January 1916, Stafford was taken on strength with the 1st Light Horse Regiment at Heliopolis. Stafford's service with the AIF was incident packed.

Stafford failed to come to terms with the rigours of military life and spent much of his time in custody or escaping from lawful custody! On 9 February 1916, Stafford was fined 1 day's pay (10/-) for being absent from parade. On 2 March he was absent from guard and forfeited one day's pay. In April 1916, he was absent from defaulters parade for 2 days and awarded 14 days confinement to barracks. Stafford was absent without leave (AWOL) from 13-15 May and was awarded 21 days punishment. The following month he was awarded a further 21 days for escaping from custody while undergoing the former sentence.

In July 1916 a court martial was convened on the escaping from custody charge and the sentence was 120 days hard labour and dismissal from His Majesty's Service. The sentence of dismissal was inoperative as there was no such sentence under the Army Act in the case of a regular soldier. On 7 July he was admitted to prison and released on 9 October 1916. He was released early from his sentence and returned to duty on 26 October 1916.

On 27 April 1917, Stafford was admitted to the Shellal Hospital and transferred to the 14th Australian General Hospital in Cairo on 1 May 1917. He was then sent to a convalescent depot before being taken on strength by the 1st Light Horse Regiment on 8 June 1917. Stafford was AWOL on 3-4 June and forfeited 14 days ordinary pay for the offence. He was charged with being out of bounds and AWOL from 16-20 June and awarded 10 days punishment.

Stafford finished this period of detention on 3 July and transferred to the 2nd Light Horse Regiment on 6 July 1917. In August 1917 Stafford was again hospitalised. Stafford was convicted of absenting himself from hospital and fined 3 days pay. On 5 November 1917, Stafford was awarded 168 hours punishment for the charge conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline "in that he at Moascar on the afternoon of 5 November did not rejoin the party after being given permission to go to the latrines."

In December 1917, Stafford was transferred to Infantry Details and was sent to Alexandria for embarkation to England aboard the *Volumnia*. In January 1918, he was taken on strength of the 47th Battalion and undertook training at the 12th Training Battalion, Codford. Between 31 January and 4 February 1918, Stafford was again AWOL and was picked up by the

Military Police in Belfast! On 2 March, Stafford forfeited 8 days pay for this offence. Undeterred, two weeks later Stafford was awarded four days forfeiture of pay for disobeying an order and insolence to an NCO.

He marched out to France on 1 April 1918 and on 25 May was transferred to the 48th Battalion. Two days later Stafford was posted AWOL and was arrested on 7 July. On 17 July he was posted AWOL and was rearrested on 4 August. On 20 August he again went AWOL and was posted an illegal absentee. On 7 November 1918, he was arrested in Paris and rejoined his unit on 11 November.

A court martial held on 9 December 1918 charged Stafford with the following offences: escaping from confinement on 10 July 1918 and AWOL from 19 August until 4 November 1918. He was found guilty on both counts and sentenced to 18 months imprisonment plus the rest of the unfinished sentence from 1916. On 2 January 1919, Stafford went AWOL for the last time. On 26 February 1919, the 48th Battalion was notified that Stafford was believed to be in Charleroi. Two members of the Battalion, Lieutenant Reginald Roy Shanks and Lieutenant Herbert William Mott were sent to arrest Stafford who was described as being a “desperate criminal armed with a revolver, who had on the previous day threatened an officer of the 48th Battalion with a revolver, and was suspected of the murder of a Frenchman in Brussels... a man with whom no chances could be taken.”

After arriving in Charleroi, Mott and Shanks began to search the cafes near the river. Stafford was sighted in the second cafe dressed in a soft trench cap and a British warm (a knee length overcoat, close fitting at the waist, worn by mounted troops and officers) which gave the impression that Stafford was an officer. The two officers attempted to arrest Stafford who failed to put his hands in the air although being ordered to several times. When Stafford realised that he was going to be arrested, he attacked Lieutenant Shanks and was shot dead by Lieutenant Mott. All medals and awards obtained by Stafford during his service were forfeited.

Memorial Details:

- Memorial 147, 330 Charleroi Communal Cemetery Belgium and on the Penrith Roll of Honour.

Sources:

- Australian War Memorial First World War Nominal Roll
- Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour
- NAA: B2455, STAFFORD P G
- AWM27: 363/18