

George spent the late winter and early spring of 1917 on the Somme and other places nearby, where he captured some photos of the area.



Duckboards stretching through  
a vast expanse of mud



Barbed wire and sandbags  
covered in snow



Bare trees and snowy ground



A British Mark I male tank



Train tracks in the snow



George (on horseback) and his company on review

In March of 1917, the Germans retired to the newly established Hindenburg Line, abandoning the town of Bapaume and leaving it booby trapped for the advancing soldiers.



Soldiers of the 30th Battalion AIF pause for a photo outside the ruins of Bapaume.

George was part of the advance on Bapaume, until a shell exploded nearby sending metal fragments into his chest. George's injuries were so severe that one of his commanding officers reported at one point that his life was despaired. He again spent his healing and recovery at No. 5 Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Digswell House in Welwyn, Hertfordshire, UK. Here are some photos that he took from his time there.



George reading in a sitting room at Digswell



George, Capt. Laing, Lt. Bingle  
Lt. Christian, Lt. Thorn, Capt. Fairley, Lt. Mills



A fancy dress ball at Digswell



Recreation room at Digswell



The grounds at Digswell



A group shot of patients and nurses at Digswell



George and fellow officers  
relax on the porch at Digswell



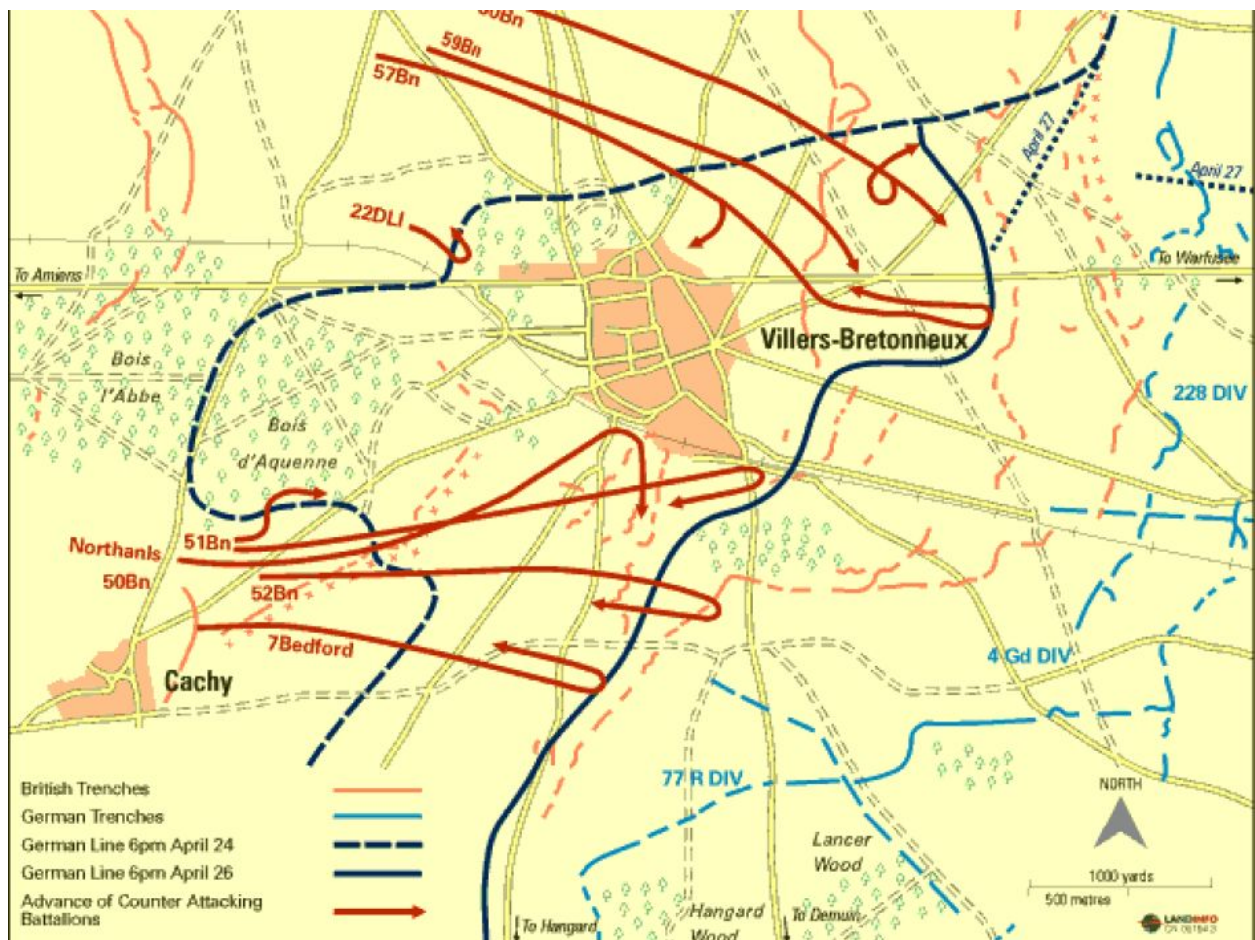
George (centre front) and 3  
other officers pose for a photo

Villers-Bretonneux is a small town in the north of  
France.



Villers-Bretonneux

On the 24th of April, 1918 the Germans captured the town from its exhausted British defenders, using tanks and infantry. This operation was part of the German Spring Offensive, which took back other key towns along the Western Front. The British commanders immediately formulated a counterattack plan that involved 2 Australian brigades and 3 British battalions. They used the 13th and 15th Brigades of the Australian Imperial Force, and on the night of the 24th/25th took back the town.



The 59th Battalion was tasked with attacking from the northwest, and coming to the backside of the town. During the

fighting, George led his company through a hail of machine gun fire, to well enforced positions, which he was able to capture. He was awarded the Military Cross for his actions, which aided in the success of the operation. His company killed or captured 90 of the enemy, and took 10 machine guns.

**Captain GEORGE STEWART SMITH, 59th Battalion.**

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. During a night attack he led his company to the assault in the face of intense machine-gun fire with such dash that he dislodged and either killed or captured ninety of the enemy, and six machine guns were taken. His leadership on this and previous occasions has been of a very high order.

Excerpt about George winning the  
Military Cross from the Commonwealth  
Gazette, No. 15 - 4th February, 1919

The people of Villers-Bretonneux were extremely grateful for what the Australians had done, and multiple memorials can be seen around the town. The Australian flag flies alongside the French flag, the Australian National Memorial built just outside of town commemorates all Australians who lost their lives on the western front, and each year a small ANZAC day service is held. After the war, children from schools across Victoria donated money to Villers-Bretonneux to help rebuild the destroyed school. The school is called the Victoria School, and above each blackboard the words "Do not forget Australia" are inscribed.



The aftermath of the battle for Villers-Bretonneux.



Girls from Villers-Bretonneux lay flowers on the graves of fallen Australians. In all roughly 2400 Australians gave their lives in the capture of the town.



The church in Villers-Bretonneux was completely destroyed when the Australians and British recaptured the town.



A view of the railway cutting near Villers-Bretonneux, where brigade quarters was located.



A view of Villers-Bretonneux from a window.

## Discharge and Later Life

In the last months of the war George was promoted to major. He boarded a troopship on the 5th of July, 1919 and arrived in Melbourne on the 29th of August. He was discharged on the 28th of October, 1919 and died on the 31st of July, 1924 of wounds received during the war.