



— PRIVATE VINCENT GLIVE CROSBIE —  
— 35<sup>TH</sup> BATTALION A.I.F. —  
Enlisted March 1916  
Killed in action at Villers Bretonneux  
— 4<sup>TH</sup> April 1918. —

Charleston Studios

Newcastle



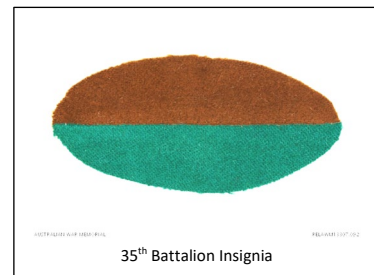
## Vincent Crosbie

Vincent Clive Crosbie was born in Cardiff, NSW on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1897.

The family had moved from Armidale to Cardiff in 1896 after the deaths of four siblings each under one year old between 1890 and 1895. New South Wales was in the grip of a major drought and feeling the remnants of the 1890 depression with banks failing and unemployment rampant. In 1901 they moved to rent in Maitland Rd, Islington so his brothers (16, 15, 13 and 11 years old) could find work. In 1903 his mother Augusta died with his father remarrying in 1905.

Vincent attended St Marys School, Perkins Street Newcastle with his address listed as Dora St, Mayfield and found work training as a butcher.

He served for four years with the Senior Cadets and two months with the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion prior to his enlistment with the AIF on the 4<sup>th</sup> January 1916. When he enlisted his address was 19 Woodstock St, Mayfield and he was allocated to C Company, XII Platoon, 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion, at Broadmeadow Army Camp, Newcastle.



35<sup>th</sup> Battalion Insignia



V.C.Crosbie's British War Medal & Victory Medal

He served at Messines, Passchendaele and Villers-Bretonneux as a Lewis gunner, being shot in the stomach at around 10am 4<sup>th</sup> April 1918, defending Villers-Bretonneux and dying with other wounded troopers being evacuated when their ambulance was hit by cannon shell fire on the rise on the Cachy to Villers-Bretonneux old road. They were buried beside the road.



Vincent went into camp at the Broadmeadow Racecourse with the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion in 1916. Their training was tough while the men/boys there were described as keen and fit. We are told they were well fed and when not at army training engaged in sport and recreation.



On the last day of April 1916, a huge crowd of relatives and friends gathered early in the morning at the Broadmeadow camp where the men of the 35<sup>th</sup> had been in training. Fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, wives, sweethearts and friends all mingled with the khaki clad boys. As the musical regimental call of the 35<sup>th</sup> was sounded followed by 'fall in', some of the crowd gathered outside the parade ground to see the battalion form up and march out from the camp for the last time. As the battalion fell in the men with their overcoats rolled and carrying their white kit bags one could not fail to be impressed with their fine physique. The 35<sup>th</sup>'s colours were cinnamon brown and emerald green which in 1923 became Newcastle City's colours.



A Last Farwell



The short distance from the camp to the station was thronged with people. As the troops moved along, the crowd surged forward until all chance of keeping the ranks intact was futile. Women and girls overcome with a desire to be with their father, brother or sweetheart defied all military order and rushed in amongst the troops. By the time the station was reached, the men of the 35<sup>th</sup> were drifting in through the crush one by one.

The 35<sup>th</sup> entrained from Broadmeadow for Sydney and camped at the Royal Agricultural Show Ground for the night. The next morning, they travelled to the Woolloomooloo Wharf and embarked on board HMAT A24 "Benalla" for England disembarking at Plymouth on the 9<sup>th</sup> July 1916. Vincent and the 35<sup>th</sup> were marched into the 9<sup>th</sup> Training Battalion at Lark Hill on the Salisbury Plains next to Stonehenge. The Battalion settled down to more hard training, under Major General John Monash which included Route Marching, Trench Digging, Bomb Practice, Musketry and General Camp Routine.



C Company 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion, sitting on Old Time Pyramids, Salisbury Plains, 1916.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> July Vincent was admitted to the Australian Convalescent Hospital suffering from pneumonia before being transferred to the Millbank Hospital on the 28<sup>th</sup> of July. Vincent was discharged from hospital and shortly afterwards he was charged with using insubordinate language to a superior officer and was fined 2 day's pay on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 1916.

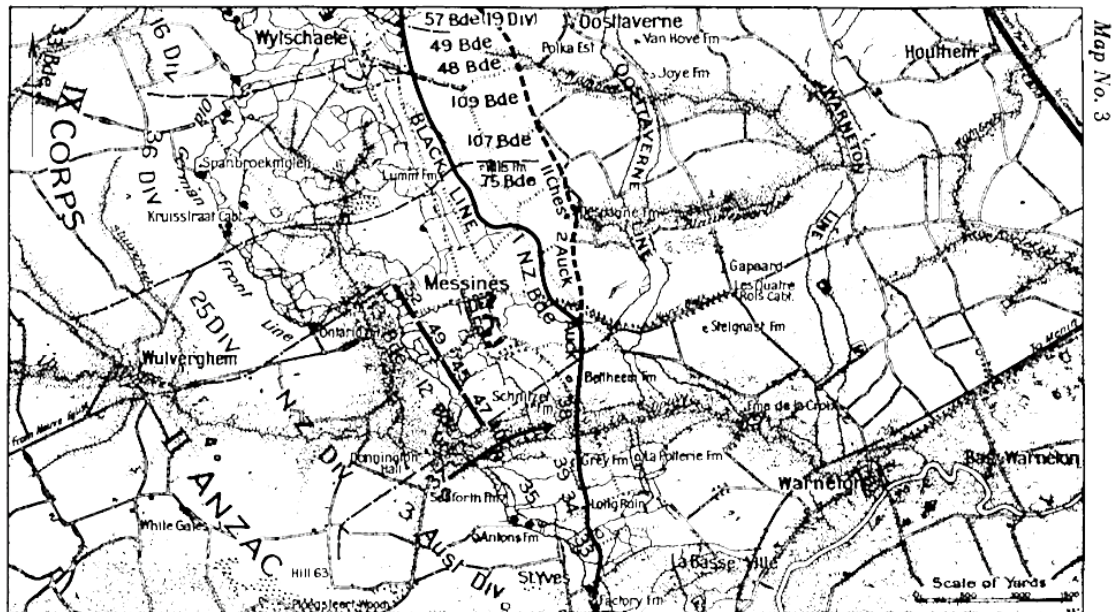
In 1916, the British had planned to clear the Germans from the Belgian coast to threaten their submarine capabilities and disrupt their Northern communications. The Germans had defensive strongholds built and the laying of explosives under them, by the Allies, began in March 1916. The Battle of Messines was an important attack before the major British offensive of 1917, the Third Battle of Ypres. At the time, the Germans held Messines Ridge. This position formed a salient into the British line on the southern flank of the planned Ypres attack. It also gave German artillery observers a good view of the ground west of Ypres, where the British planned to gather their forces for the attack. The ridge had to be captured before the Ypres offensive could start. The plan was for 3 British corps to attack German positions on Messines Ridge, including II Anzac Corps at the southern-most point.

The 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion left on 21<sup>st</sup> November, entrained at Amesbury for Southampton and embarked on the S.S "Arundel". The Battalion arrived at Le Harve, France the next morning and moved into the trenches of the Western Front for the first time on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1916, just in time for the onset of the terrible winter of 1916-17. The 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion, as part of the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, formed part of the II Anzacs under General Godley and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division under Monash.

The Battle of the Messines, 7<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> June 1917, as Arthur Butler outlines “with zero hour at 3:10 am. From 7pm of the 6<sup>th</sup> until 2am of the 7<sup>th</sup> the II Anzac lines of approach were drenched with shell-gas so that the battalions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division reached their lines of take-off barely on time. At 3:10am the mines were set off and a creeping barrage loosed, behind which the first line advanced. Even to the attacking side “the earth seemed to vomit fire” and was shaken as by an earthquake. The air screamed shells and above all was the roar of the guns .... By 8am on the Anzac front, all the first objective had been captured. It was fully consolidated and occupied in force. At 3:15pm the 4<sup>th</sup> Australian Division “leap-frogged” the 25<sup>th</sup> British and the New Zealand divisions and, with the left flank of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, moved on to take by hard hand to hand fighting the final objective of the II Anzacs .... At nightfall the two Australian Divisions held exactly half the whole battle line of Messines and had sustained thirty per cent of the total British casualties in wounded .... The 8<sup>th</sup> brought minor assaults, counter attacks and more heavy casualties. From June 9<sup>th</sup> onwards both Divisions were employed in desultory fighting and consolidation.”

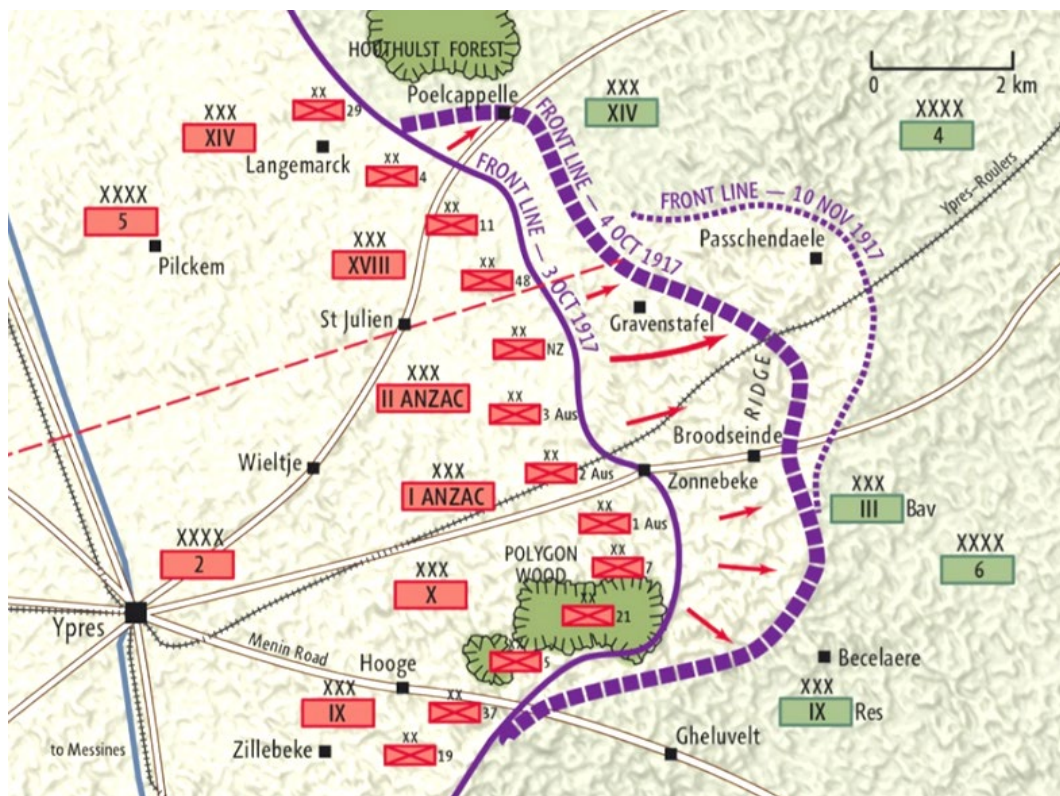
The 35<sup>th</sup> battalion's Messines position can be seen in the following maps.





THE SITUATION AT MESSINES AT 11.30 A.M. ON 7TH JUNE, 1917  
The black and black dotted lines had been captured, and in the II Anzac sector the assembly for the afternoon attack was beginning. The 12th and 13th Brigades (4th Division) were ready to move forward, and the 32nd Battalion (3rd Division) was moving.

The 35<sup>th</sup>'s next major battle was Passchendaele. The First Battle of Passchendaele was on 12<sup>th</sup> October. Heavy rain had deluged the battlefield and thick mud tugged at the advancing troops fouling their weapons. The battle was a disaster for the 35<sup>th</sup>; 508 men crossed the start line but only 90 remained un wounded at the end. Allied troops were exhausted and morale had fallen. After a modest British advance, German counterattacks recovered most of the ground lost opposite Passchendaele. There were 13,000 Allied casualties.



The Second Battle of Passchendaele: The British Fifth Army undertook minor operations from 20–22 October, to maintain pressure on the Germans and support the French attack at La Malmaison, while the Canadian Corps prepared for a series of attacks from 26 October – 10 November. The four divisions of the Canadian Corps had been transferred to capture Passchendaele and the ridge. The Canadians relieved the II Anzac Corps on 18 October 1917 and found that the front line was mostly the same as in April 1915. The Canadian operation was to be three limited attacks, on 26 October, 30 October and 6 November. On 26 October, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division captured its objective at Wolf Copse, then swung back its northern flank to link with the adjacent division of the Fifth Army. The 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division captured its objectives but was forced slowly to retire from Decline Copse, against German counterattacks and communication failures between the Canadian and Australian units to the south.

Little ground was gained and the few men who reached the outskirts of Passchendaele were thrown back by German counterattacks. The exhausted and depleted Australians were relieved by the Canadian Corps, which took Passchendaele on 6 November, bringing a close to the Third Battle of Ypres.

During the winter the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade was stationed under the town of Warneton, 4km west of Messines and participated in the fortification of their areas and miniature warfare training. It was where the German command had retained a strong garrison and no-man's land was particularly narrow. Regularly, Allied bombing of identified chief German posts occurred and small raiding parties were sent out following the bombings. The raiding parties infiltrated posts killing opposing forces, capturing prisoners for interrogation and searching for information. Around Warneton alternate raids were regularly conducted by 10 officers and 225 troops from all the battalions of the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade and 10<sup>th</sup> Brigades.

Vincent was granted leave to Paris from the 23<sup>rd</sup> December to the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1917. He re-joined his unit in Meteren, Netherlands and was marched out to Trois Rois where he remained for the next 3 months. He was again granted leave this time to England from 9<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1918 before re-joining his unit again as the 9th Infantry Brigade made preparation for the advance on Villers-Bretonneux.

Germany had been fighting WW1 on two fronts: East against Russia and on the West against the Allies. In December 1917 they signed an armistice with Russia and moved their forces to the Western front for Operation Michael. On 21<sup>st</sup> March Germany launched their attack to capture Amiens as the railway yards were the centre of Allied supply lines.

Charles Bean outlined *"that Field Marshal Haig (Commander of the British Expeditionary Forces) determined that the salient around Flesquieres that had been won in November 1917 was "unsuitable to fight a decisive battle in" but he wanted to hold onto it to wear out or tire any force who attacked through this area. The Germans did attack on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1918 with weak forces to keep the 5<sup>th</sup> British Army in position while making a concerted attack either side of them at the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> British Armies. The first objective of the Germans in this region was to drive behind the divisions holding the salient, and, if possible, by closing in rear of them, to cut them off.*

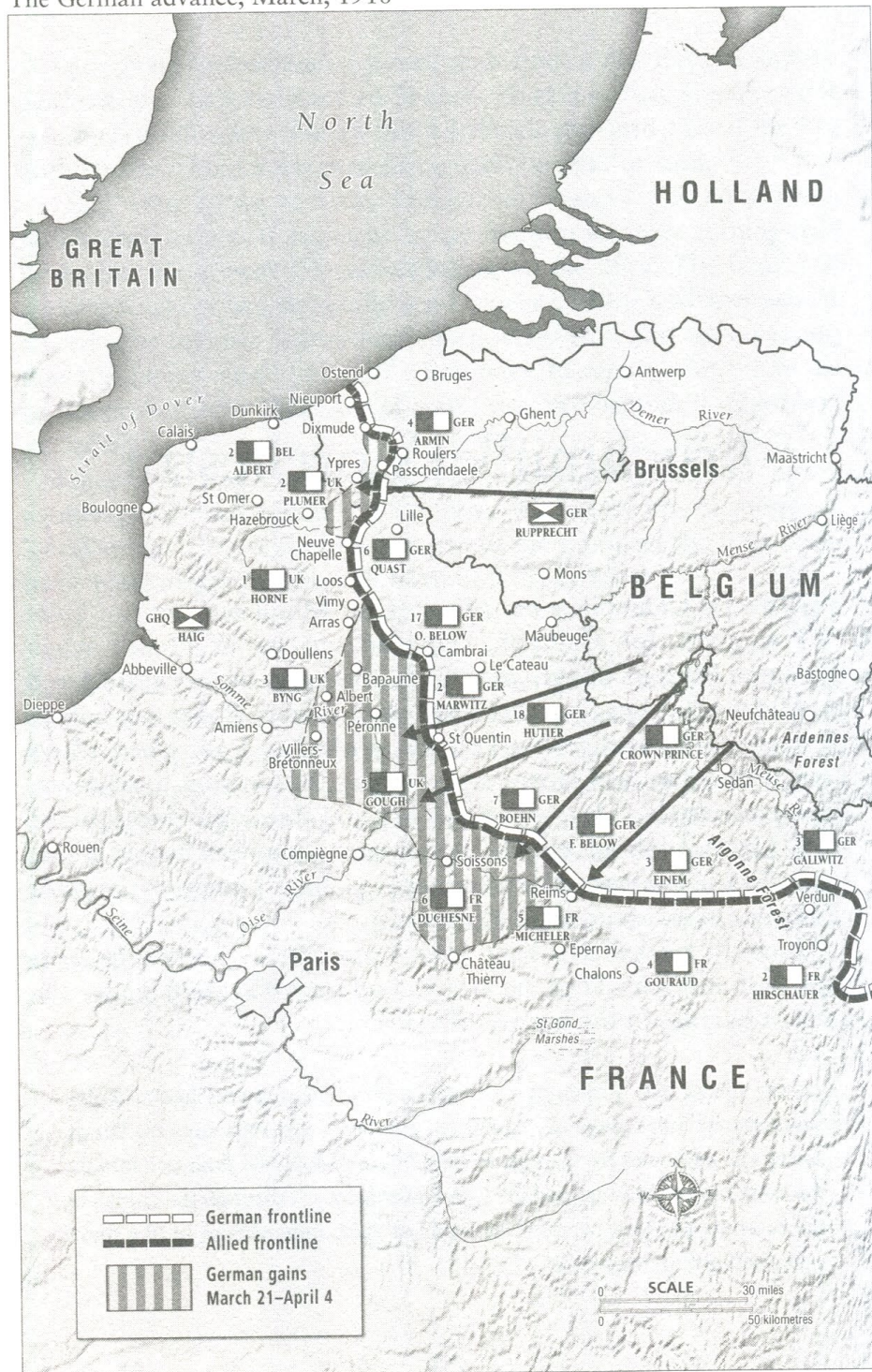
*The salient was held that morning ... but the Germans, here as elsewhere immensely helped by fog ... drove back the 51<sup>st</sup> Division and employed their newly practiced method of penetrating and then spreading out behind the opposing defences. By evening the Germans were driving from the North towards Hermies, in the Battle Zone of the IV Corps."*



Carlyon writes of Operation Michael: “The German 21<sup>st</sup> March offensive saw them capture 21,000 British prisoners on that day and change the balance on the front. On March 23 the Germans began shelling Paris with an 8 inch gun from 75 miles away. Haig was handed control of the Australian 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> divisions and the New Zealand division. These were to be sent south for the Somme.”

The following map outlines the German advances from 21<sup>st</sup> March and the German gains up to 4<sup>th</sup> April.

The German advance, March, 1918



Lieutenant Colonel Henry Goddard, 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion writes in his diary: *"24 March the Brigade embussed for Sercus, arriving 1:30pm and billeted at the Chateau about a mile outside the village. On arrival received orders to entrain on 25<sup>th</sup>/26<sup>th</sup>."*

A major strategy planning conference was taking place at Doullens on 26<sup>th</sup> March at the behest of Haig, with senior French and English politicians and military. Haig asked that a determined French general take control of operations in France. The French commander Petain confirmed that he would protect Paris at all costs in preference to Amiens. Haig knew he could not count on the French support if the German's broke through his own lines protecting Amiens. The French would pull back the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies to defend Paris. There was little trust of emergency support between armies. French General Foch was given supreme control over the Allied armies.

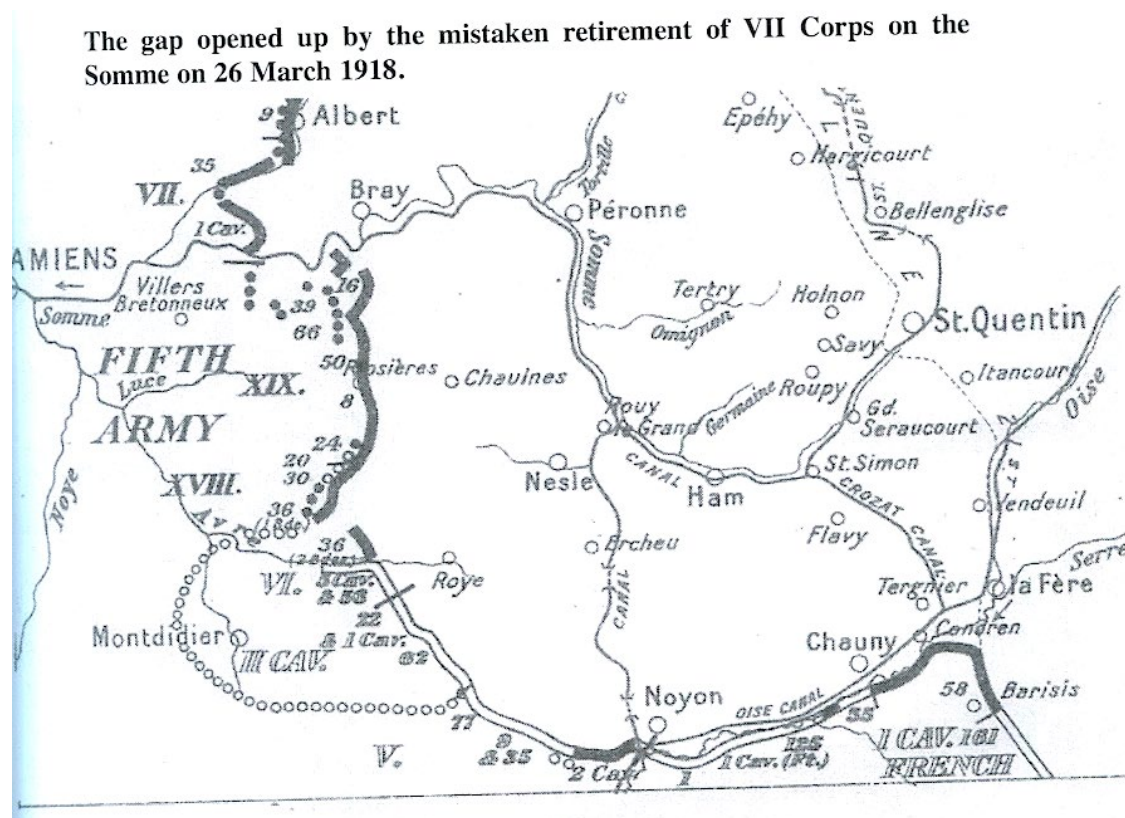
Monash brought his 3<sup>rd</sup> Division by train to Doullens on 27<sup>th</sup> March. Bean continues: *"Outside Doullens station, which had been heavily bombed by aircraft during the night and was bombed again while some of the battalions were near, almost all the trains were delayed for several hours. Here, as elsewhere on that day, the unloading Australians found themselves unexpectedly plunged into an atmosphere of panic. ... This was due to the alarmist report of the arrival of German cavalry at Colincamps ..... Just before noon the first train of the 9<sup>th</sup>, after being held for three hours outside Doullens, was brought into Doullens station .... Monash himself received a general direction to concentrate his division in this allotted area and await further instructions .... Monash drove to Montigny for instructions .... The 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade .... was to embuss as soon as possible, followed by the 10<sup>th</sup>. The 9<sup>th</sup> would move early next morning"....* to guard the bridges around Corbie and be held in reserve for General Byng.

Goddard writes of the arrival at Doullens: *"the night is black and bitterly cold .... frozen snow falling. The train started punctually to time. It was bitterly cold in the train and we were travelling light. Was glad when daylight came and early in the morning the train was stuck up .... was able to walk on the platform and get some approach to circulation. The enemy had been shelling the railway station and town with very heavy stuff, it was utterly wrecked. We reached Doullens at about 11am .... Our train was broken in half, the horses and vehicles and machine guns in one half and the personnel in the other. Our half had not come to a standstill when a British Major came into the carriage asking; are you the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, what troops do you have? I told him a Brigade Headquarters, 100 fatigued men, a Machine Gun Company and Light Trench Mortar Battery. He told me that our line was broken and the Germans were coming onto the town and that their cavalry are now approaching it. That I was to proceed with what troops I had immediately and hold them. It was an extraordinary order – considering the total troops I had in my hands were not more than 200 to be asked to face an enemy that had the Fifth Army on the run. I told him I was prepared to go if he would assist me in getting the trucks with the machine guns and horses alongside the ramp .... The wounded were pouring into the station in their hundreds. Hun prisoners were carrying the bad cases from the ambulances to the hospital trains .... We were ready to move off within an hour and the advanced guard was well on the road before the orders were cancelled."*

Bean continues: *"The 9th Brigade was a very interesting force. In common with the rest of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division it possessed a degree of orderliness beyond that of most Australian troops – the result of General Monash's careful handling; but it exhibited the weakness of that Division, the absence of any tradition forcing commanders personally to supervise in certain crises of battle."* It was over the next few days that Monash reorganised his command with Brig Gen Rosenthal taking over 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade command from Brig Gen Jobson.

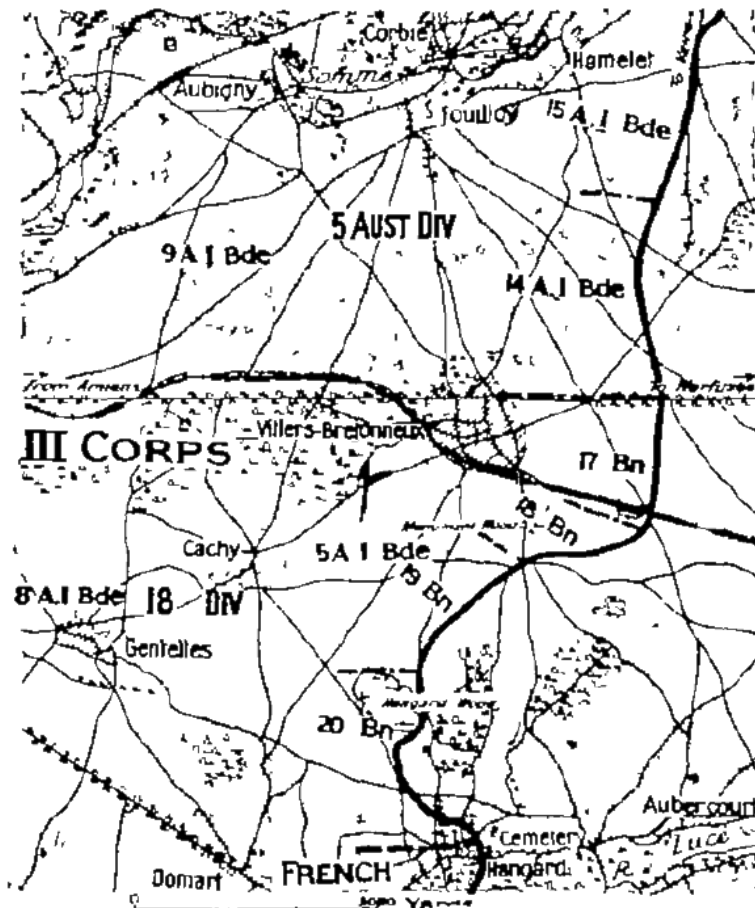


Soon after the Doullens Conference Haig was embarrassed to learn the Amiens defence line from Salley-le-Sec on the Somme to the Ancre River was embarrassingly left undefended. (1<sup>st</sup> map below) This was due to misinterpretations of orders by the VII Corps abandoning Bray and swinging behind the Ancre. The front was a mess and it was impossible for the Australians to ascertain where the British front line lay on the other side of the river. The problem of where to obtain reserves had been worrying the corps and army commanders all day. It was decided at GHQ to move the AIF 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1918, then guarding the Somme river crossings, to move to the front of Villers-Bretonneux, south of the Somme. While this direction was being given to Monash by General Congreve, General Byng communicated that the 9<sup>th</sup> was better left where it was, and the matter referred to Haig. Bean outlines that Haig decided *"as the old French defences in front of Villers-Bretonneux were manned, even by tired troops, and the French reserves to the south were increasing, it would be wasting a good brigade to send it out that hour on a night march. By his direction the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade was allotted the task of defending the Third Army's right and was not to be employed in any other way without the leave of army headquarters."*



*"The brigade became army reserve; and the need for another reserve to be available near the V and VII Corps, if required, was met by sending the 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Division down to the Senlis Area, to arrive by 8 o'clock next morning. The panic among the civilians in the V Corps area had not yet ceased, and the 5<sup>th</sup> Division marching down thither was given by the villagers the same flattering reception that had met the earlier brigades."*

On the Somme, throughout the night of March 28<sup>th</sup>, it was still uncertain whether the Germans had broken through the remnant of the Fifth Army. At 10pm numerous men of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> Divisions, remnants of its previously surrounded left flank, of which till then little had been heard, came straggling over the bridges guarded by the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade at Corbie and Aubigny. The brigade was ordered to station stragglers' posts to collect them. Next morning it was found that the Fifth Army's line south of the 3rd Division still held. ....



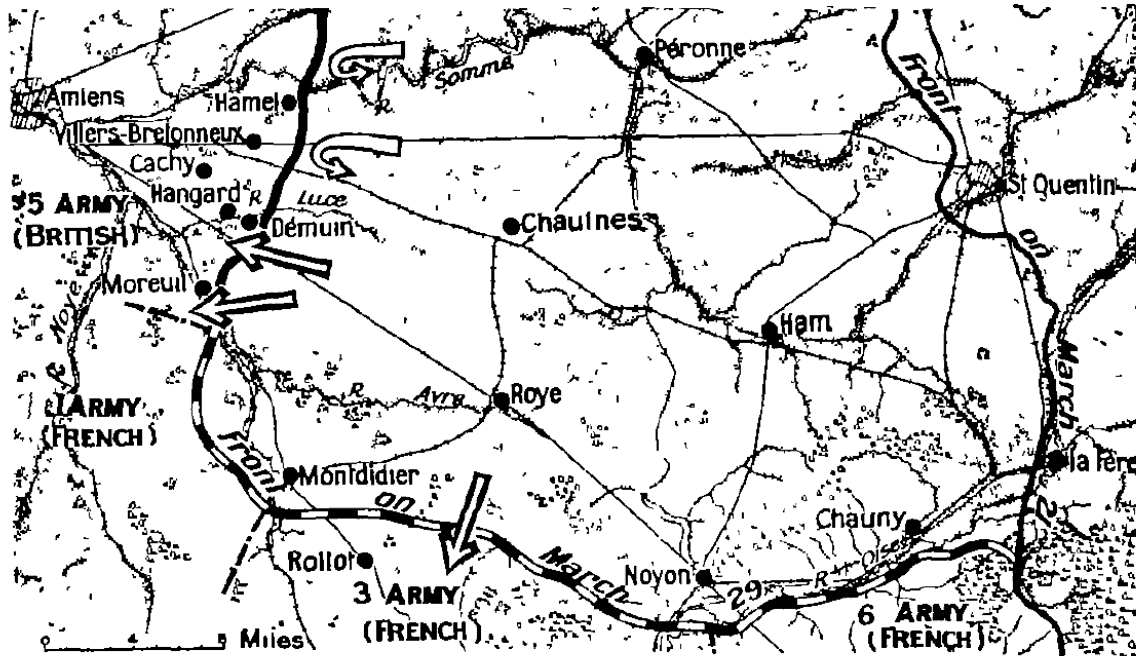
On 27<sup>th</sup> March the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade is moved to become the 5<sup>th</sup> Division's Reserve.

During the 29<sup>th</sup> March, General Monash asked whether the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade might be directed, as well as watching the Corbie and Aubigny bridges, to guard his flank as far forwards as Sailly-le-Sec. The reply – from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army – was that the situation on the 5<sup>th</sup> Army's front was too critical; and at 5.34 GHQ, reversing the previous day's decision, took this brigade from him, and ordered it to march immediately to the rear of the XIX Corps, Fifth Army. To guard the bridges, a brigade of the 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Division, the 15<sup>th</sup>..... would be brought at once to Corbie"

Carlyon outlines: "Villers-Bretonneux in early April was the most important town in the war. It offered the Germans the best approach to Amiens. The town lay on a low plateau that looked down on the spire of the great cathedral of Amiens, ten miles away. A railway line and a Roman road both ran west to east through Villers-Bretonneux. About a mile north-east of the town the plateau rose to a point called Hill 104. From here one not only had a better view of Amiens but also the lazy loops of the Somme to the north, to Corbie and Sailly-le-Sec on the river itself and to the little village of the Hamel to the east. Hill 104 would be the German's best observation point. Even if they didn't take Amiens, they could destroy its railyards by artillery directed from here."



On 30<sup>th</sup> March the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion is moved to Cachy at 2am and billeted in the aerodrome vacant sheds. At 9:00 am it assembled for counterattack at Hangard Woods (De Blangy Bois) and remained in formation as reserve until 5:00 pm then returned to their billets. At 10:00 pm they received instruction to move into the line. (Lieutenant Colonel Henry Goddard's Diary, 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion)



*The German attack on March 30.*

Bean describes what followed: "The events of March 30 had shown that the 61<sup>st</sup> Division was in extreme need of rest .... On March 30<sup>th</sup> the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion was ordered to take over that night the whole sector of the 61<sup>st</sup> Division then held mainly by three tired squadrons of yeomanry from the neighbourhood of Marcelcave to the Roman Road. (see maps page 14 and 15) The troops understood that it had been found necessary to give twenty-four hours rest to some tired units which, when rested, was to take over the line again. But, as often happened, their tour in the line proved to be much longer; the 61<sup>st</sup> Division's headquarters itself was relieved the next day, the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion and its front passing to the command of the neighbouring division on the right, the 18<sup>th</sup>. The weather was wet and the tenure of the newly dug posts in the fields was a trying experience; but troops to relieve the 35<sup>th</sup> could not be found until another British division, the 58<sup>th</sup> (London) began to return from the French front. On April 3<sup>rd</sup> the first two battalions of this division, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> London, arrived at Amiens station and were lent to the 18<sup>th</sup> Division, which ordered the foremost of them, the 6<sup>th</sup>, to move that night into Villers-Bretonneux with the intention that it should take over the line from the 35<sup>th</sup> on the night of the 4<sup>th</sup>.

*It thus happened that an Australian battalion was at the beginning of April responsible for the vital front, 2800 yards in length, immediately protecting Villers-Bretonneux. That village was everywhere recognised as a crucial position, in as much as on its western edge the northern part of the tableland between the Somme and the Avre ended; and, although the southern part of the plateau reached back past Cachy and Gentelles for another four and a half miles, into the angle between the rivers, the view from Villers-Bretonneux showed, beyond the flats, the city of Amiens spread wide about its lofty Cathedral. Of all the points between Albert and Moreuil at which the German thrust had approached Amiens, this offered the most direct approach and best observation; and, as the German effort in its last stages tended to concentrate itself upon seizing – or at least destroy by gun-fire – the Amiens*

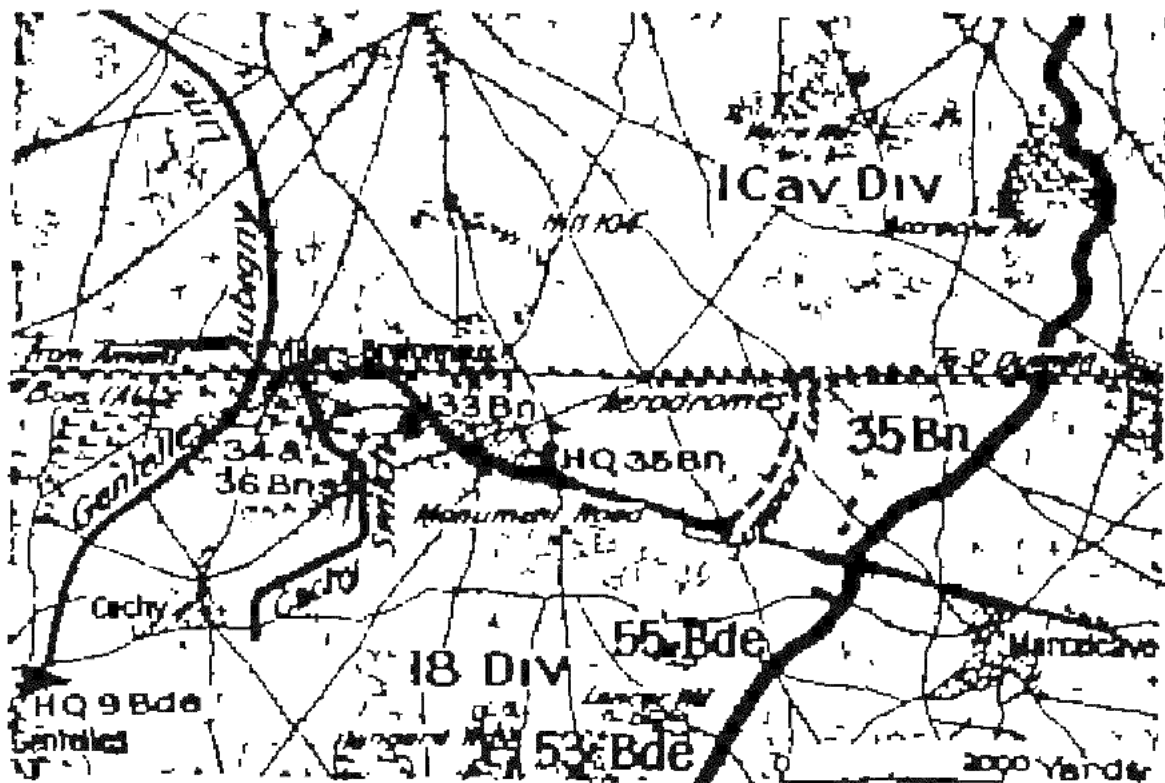
railway junction, so Villers-Bretonneux received an increasing share of not only military but public interest. On April 1<sup>st</sup> Haig himself pointed out to Clemenceau the importance of the position for covering not only the British right but the French left.

Actually the high, bare shoulder (Hill 104) of the plateau three-quarters of a mile north-east of the town, overlooking the joint villages of Neuville, Corbie and Fouilloy, astride the Somme-Ancre junction, was more important than Villers-Bretonneux itself; and the 1<sup>st</sup> cavalry Division, between the Roman Road and the Somme, was therefore as much responsible for the defence of the vital point as was the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the plateau south of the road. The right flank past lancer wood to Hangard and the Luce was almost as important, since the Germans penetrating there could easily have reached Villers-Bretonneux from the south. The area behind the 35<sup>th</sup>'s line, like that ahead of it, was level and almost completely bare. The young crops were just springing like a short grass. The only prominent features ahead of the 35<sup>th</sup> were the spreading villages of Marcelcave and Warfusee, half a mile in front of the battalion's right and left flank respectively, and a couple of copses close to the front line. Behind the 35<sup>th</sup>, about halfway to Villers-Bretonneux, there stood out from the level immediately south of the Roman Road the large empty hangars of two abandoned British aerodromes. Behind the lines of the British on the right, on the slope towards the Luce, lay Lancer and Hangard Woods; and behind the British on the left, on the slope towards Hamel and the Somme, two other large woods, the Bois de Accroche and the Bois de Vaire, were correspondingly situated. But there were few prominent landmarks in the 35<sup>th</sup>'s sector – it was the Roman Road and, farther south, the Chaules-Amiens railway, converging like two blades of a slightly open scissors, that furnished the most important features of it, and indeed marked off between them the greater part of the ground which the battalion had to defend. The southern company, however, extended a quarter of a mile south of the railway and the northern company had to keep one post on the northern side of the Roman Road, the ground there being hidden by the slight road embankment.

When first coming up to the line on the night of March 30<sup>th</sup>, the companies of the 35<sup>th</sup>, after filing though Villers-Bretonneux in the dark, had been guided to several headquarters, close behind the front line. One of these – a battalion headquarters in the cemetery, close behind a small wood several hundred yards north of the railway – became the headquarters of the centre company under Major Carr, the senior company commander. His men came upon the British front-line garrison out ahead and took over its string of little half platoon posts some 50 – 100 yards apart. But the right company, under Captain Coghill (C Company and Vincent's) moving along the railway – which there emerged from the cutting and ran along an embankment – found only five junior British officers, crouched in a burrow in the side of the embankment, an exposed and strongly shelled position, and covered by a waterproof sheet. They said that their men were "out there", indicating the plain south-east of the embankment; but Coghill's company, proceeding cautiously towards Marcelcave with a line of scouts ahead, found no occupied line of posts....a few British soldiers were found in a position similar to that of the officers, in the side of the embankment; when the scouts approached the enemy position, the sections behind them were set to dig in, five or six in each post under an NCO. Most of them had dropped their entrenching implements during the heavy going over the wet fields, and, when Coghill told them that their only safety lay in digging themselves out of sight before dawn, some had only their bare hands with which to burrow....Their security was much increased...by picking up abandoned Lewis guns and panniers which lay around...the same thing happened along most of the 35<sup>th</sup>'s line, and although the front was no less than 2,800 yards long, and the three companies holding it had only one man to seven yards, their Lewis guns and machine guns .... rendered the defence a formidable one.

Ahead of the 35<sup>th</sup> – close on the north and distant on the south, lay the part of the old French defence line lost by the British on March 28<sup>th</sup>, but north of this line was still held. The 35<sup>th</sup>'s own posts were unprotected by wire-entanglement, and the troops were told to keep low in them by day in order to prevent the Germans from detecting them. No carrier or messenger could reach them by day; contact

with them only to be had by night. For the supports there was at first no shelter nearer than Villers-Bretonneux, and the first action of the battalion commander, Lt Col Goddard, after relieving the last fraction of yeomanry and other units under the 61<sup>st</sup> Division, was to order the digging of a support line a mile or more back in front of the aerodrome. A reserve line now existed two and a half miles in rear of this behind Cachy, general Gough having ordered its construction when the front came back to the old French system, which was at the time the last reserve trench-line. This new reserve trench ran from Fouencamps on the Avre northwards between Gentelles and Cachy – well behind Villers-Bretonneux – to Aubigny, west of Corbie, on the Somme. Sectors of it were allotted to divisions newly arrived or just relieved from the line. On April 2<sup>nd</sup> the resting battalions of the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade were ordered to dig a new forward loop of it (known as the Cachy Switch), so as to include Cachy and the Bois l'Abbe. The 34<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> Battalions, working all April 3<sup>rd</sup>, made good progress with the digging, but the supply of barbed wire was short.



The 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion line, the 35<sup>th</sup> HD, the Aerodrome and the 33 Bn shown above 3<sup>rd</sup> April.

As the digging of the support line in addition to the holding of so extensive a front was taxing the 35<sup>th</sup> beyond reasonable limits, Gen Rosenthal obtained leave to send the 33<sup>rd</sup> to Villers-Bretonneux to support it. When the support line was finished, the 33<sup>rd</sup> would hold it and the 35<sup>th</sup> could send its own fourth company to the line. Meanwhile all the 33<sup>rd</sup> and the reserve company of the 35<sup>th</sup>, as well as a section of machine-gunners (four guns) had to be held in the villas and cottages of Villers-Bretonneux itself, two miles in the rear of the line. Owing to his distance from that town, and the constant smashing of the telephone lines, Rosenthal placed the whole force there under Col Goddard of the 35<sup>th</sup>, a leader not physically robust, and marked in the past for his kindness and courtesy more than virility of his methods, but nevertheless brave, devoted and of long experience both in the militia and at Quinn's Post, which he commanded during the last months in Gallipoli.

Villers-Bretonneux was now entirely a soldiers' town, the inhabitants, except a very few old folk, having fled .... The town, which had been particularly well stocked with wine, and, when the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade went in, some steps were taken by it, in accordance with orders from above, to destroy the wine and clean



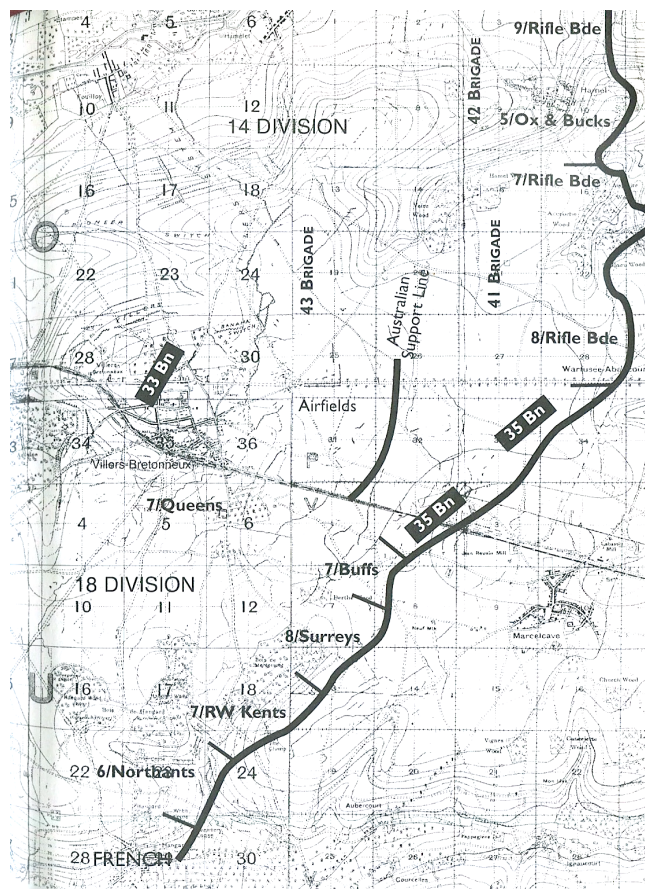
up the place. The fulfilment of these orders, however, varied according to the strictness or lenience of the regimental command. For the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion, whose troops were spending miserable days in their rain-soaked trenches, the one great comfort was a hot meal which reached them every night from their cooks near company headquarters. This meal was supplemented by extras from Villers-Bretonneux, and on one occasion at least at least a few bottles of champagne reached company headquarters with the rations. The British commanders were particularly afraid of drunkenness among the Australians .... But, although Australians were stationed in the town in many subsequent months, there was no instance of serious indiscipline or breach of military duty.

Gen Rosenthal had been informed by the 18<sup>th</sup> Division that the 9<sup>th</sup> Australian Brigade would be responsible for the village. That the Germans would attack it, was practically certain. Although their general effort had now for the first time ceased, their local attempts to thrust towards Amiens had continued."

Goddard outlines in his diary; "10pm 3 April: I have placed my Vickers Guns well forward. Owing to very flat country and the advantage this gives them for dealing with advance of enemy with direct fire. I think this risk should be taken"

Monash notes in his personal files on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1918 "35<sup>th</sup> Battalion in line from PSS – V2. All Companies in the line supplying their own support. 33<sup>rd</sup> in reserve E of Villers-Bretonneux, 34<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> digging switch line"

Carlyon muses about the next morning; "Richthofen and his "flying circus" were in the air."



From Villers-Bretonneux  
"Somme"

III Corps' dispositions around Villers-Bretonneux at dawn on 4 April 1918.

Bean continues; *"On April 3<sup>rd</sup> German aeroplanes flew low over the front line, and, judging by their behaviour, Major Carr, commanding the front line of the 35<sup>th</sup>, assured Goddard's staff office, Cpt Connell, who came round the battalion's line after dark, that the enemy would attack in the morning. On the left Cpt Sayers' company had just been replaced by the former support company (D) under Cpt Light, a less experienced soldier. Major Carr walked along the line and impressed him with his own conviction that an attack was coming. In the small hours of April 4<sup>th</sup>, the 7<sup>th</sup> Buffs, on the right of the 35<sup>th</sup> captured a prisoner who said that the enemy was about to attack. This last warning came too late to reach many parts of the line; but when at 5:30am a heavy bombardment descended on all the villages behind the line and on the front itself, an attack was generally expected.*

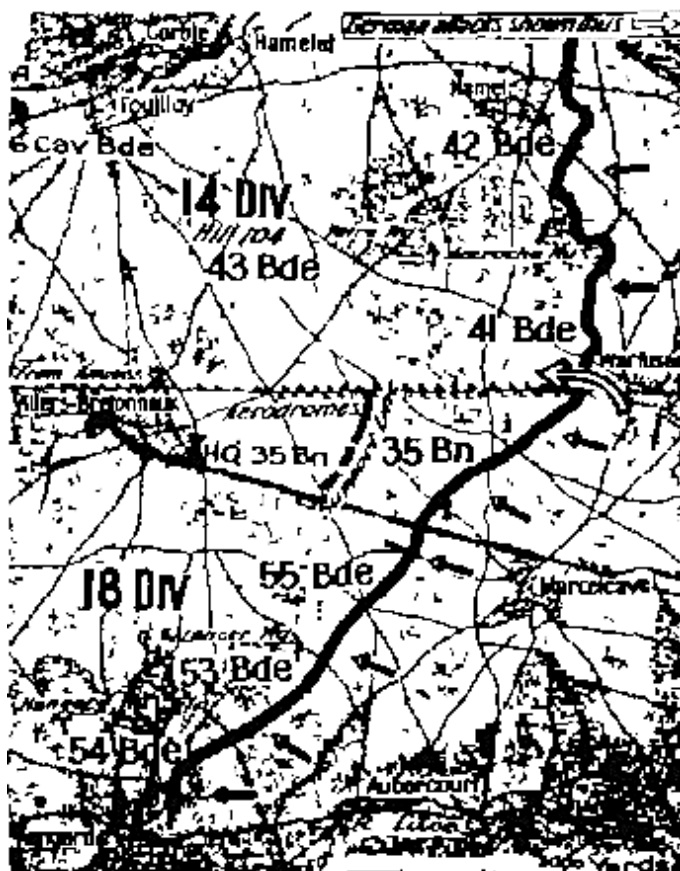
*The bombardment extended as far as could be seen to the southward. Immediately to the north, where the newly arrived front-line brigades of the 14<sup>th</sup> were just settling into the old French defence-line, it was intense, those trenches being by now well ranged by German artillery. About the scattered newly dug posts of the 35<sup>th</sup> battalion and of the 55<sup>th</sup>, 53<sup>rd</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup> Brigades (18<sup>th</sup> Division) to the south the shelling, though severe, was less accurate. Carr, standing with his second in command, Cpt Hawkins, in their trench at the cemetery, noted that the shells were passing over even company headquarters and therefore entirely missing his front line. After three quarters of an hour the barrage thickened upon the forward area, but at 6:30 it eased. The morning was dull with fine rain at intervals; but, as the shell-smoke cleared away, the 35<sup>th</sup> saw ahead of them parties of Germans, each about a platoon strong, assembling just this side of the back-gardens of Warfusee and Marcelcave, and climbing out of a sunken road between the two.*

*In the right company (C Company and Vincent's) Cpt Coghill, after a tiring night, had just finished a breakfast of chicken and champagne, somehow provided by his batman, when the first German salvo flew over. As the railway embankment hid each half of his line from the other half, he told Lt Warden to take charge of the northern half of his troops, while he directed the southern. He had been rendered anxious by the condition of the British infantry on his right and had been across to see their officer – a fine leader, by name Ferguson – and had arranged with him that neither company would retire without first informing the other. Coghill was convinced that, with a line so thin as that of his company, the only chance of resisting a strong attack was to let the Germans come very close and then to deliver such a blow that they would not attempt to go to ground and stalk his posts but would fall back in rout. If they rallied and advanced again, he would repeat the process.*

*After the bombardment there occurred here a puzzling lull during which no attack came. But presently the mist lifted, and, against the light of a burning house in Marcelcave, could be seen masses of Germans coming out of the village, the companies deploying one after the other, their officers directing them left or right. Coghill ran along his section of the line giving the order that no shot must be fired until he raised his arm. He then stood on the embankment where both flanks could see him. The sections waited in the posts with fixed bayonets. Presently, the fog thinning again, the enemy appeared much nearer, advancing in platoons in close order. Coghill, intensely anxious that they should not deploy and take cover, repeated his order. "All right, Captain," said the nearest platoon commander, Lt Browne, looking up from the trench below him, "but Christ couldn't make me stand up there." When the nearest Germans were forty yards away, Coghill raised his arm holding the map case. He was at once shot through the arm, but there broke upon the Germans a fire of Lewis guns and rifles so deadly that panic caught them, and they fled. Two or three times their officers managed to stop the retreat, spread them out again, and led them forward. Each time when advancing they gradually bunched together as if for companionship. Each time Coghill, running from post to post, allowed these bunches to come close to his line before fire was opened. Each time, when so fired on, the Germans fled.*

*After three or four efforts the Germans previously attacking along the railway swerved to the south and concentrated their effort upon the line of posts of the 7<sup>th</sup> Buffs beyond Coghill's right flank. After the first of these attacks the Buffs got out of their trenches and withdrew. Coghill, leaving his platoon commanders in charge, went some 500 yards across the fields until he found Lt Ferguson who said that his troops had withdrawn because the enemy had penetrated on their right. Coghill stressed the resulting danger and asked whether they would come back if he gave them covering fire from his Lewis guns. Ferguson agreed, and his men showed themselves willing. "We'll stand by you Anzacs," they said. Coghill had already arranged for covering fire; the Buffs went forward under it; and, having seen them again established in their line, Coghill returned. The German machine gun fire was now strong, and he ran the whole way. When he had done three quarters of the distance he looked around and saw the line of the Buffs again retiring. Himself, as he said afterwards said, "flat out" after his run through the mud, he could do no more than to place a Lewis gun to cover the vacant flank and trust the Germans had been sufficiently battered to weaken their efforts.*

*The centre and left companies of the 35<sup>th</sup> (A and B) had opened with machine gun, and rifles at long range, as soon as the enemy appeared. As on the right, the Germans were stopped but reassembled, and were again met with fire and stopped. After this had happened several times, at 7 o'clock the whole German line was seen to advance. The S.O.S. signal had been fired, and, on the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion's front, the barrage of the British artillery now fell fairly upon the approaching forces, and combined with an intense fire of small arms, sent to ground. Farther south the advance was similarly checked. North of the Roman road, however, on the front of the newly arrived 14<sup>th</sup> Division, through a misunderstanding some of the cavalry's machine-guns had not stayed on with the infantry. The bombardment here was fiercer, the advancing Germans were not stopped, and the right battalion of the 14<sup>th</sup> Division broke.*



The German advance  
can be seen at left, 7am,  
with their breakthrough



*The 35<sup>th</sup> south of the road could see the enemy crossing to the northern side of the road, but not what happened there. The enemy ahead passing through the old French wire was slaughtered, and the first intimation to Light's company that anything was wrong was the appearance of Germans attacking from the British front on the immediate left, and of others advancing through the area abandoned by the 14<sup>th</sup> Division towards the aerodrome, where lay the still unfinished and unoccupied support line for the 35<sup>th</sup>.*

*Finding the Germans in rear of the left flank, the company officers on that flank ordered a withdrawal to the second line; but previously, when the barrage began, Lt Thomson, of Light's company, had gone round his posts and reminded them that the order for the defence of Villers-Bretonneux was "to hold on at all costs," and half of his platoon under Sergeant Harrison, not receiving the subsequent order to withdraw, fought on. Thomson, superintending the withdrawal of the rest of his men, was killed just as he reached the support position. The Germans on the left arrived at the alignment of this trench almost as soon as the Australians and continued on; and the left of the 35<sup>th</sup> fell back farther – indeed, many of the troops did not see the support trench or even know that one existed. The four attached machine-guns of the 9<sup>th</sup> Company covered them steadily. One machine-gun crew on the left, remaining to fire until its ammunition was exhausted, found, on retiring, that the Germans were already behind it. The officer, Lt Lockhart and sergeant, Lawton were last to leave. Germans were within a few yards; Lawton was shot and, though Lockhart carried him for a while, was eventually captured, as was L-Cpl Mackie, who tried to save the gun." (Bean's footnotes advise that Lockhart, Lawton and Mackie were part of the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade machine gun company. Sgt Harrison and his isolated post, after firing till their ammunition was exhausted, found the enemy all round them, and, though they "tried to make a show with their bayonets," were captured.)*

*Major Carr and Cpt Hawkins of the centre company (A) were watching the British barrage apparently completing the defeat of the German attack on their front, and congratulating themselves that the offensive had failed, when they observed a stream of men passing rearwards over the plateau immediately behind them. The stream came from their left flank, and at first sight they assumed that the men seen were captured Germans, but a second glance showed that they were Light's company (B) retiring. Carr sent a runner to inform Coghill, the commander of the right company, (C) and ordered Lt Barlow of his left platoon to form a flank. Then, as the retirement on the left continued, he brought back the rest of his line slowly up the gently sloping plateau towards Villers-Bretonneux, halting for a while on the way, and eventually settling down south of the hangars of the aerodrome.*

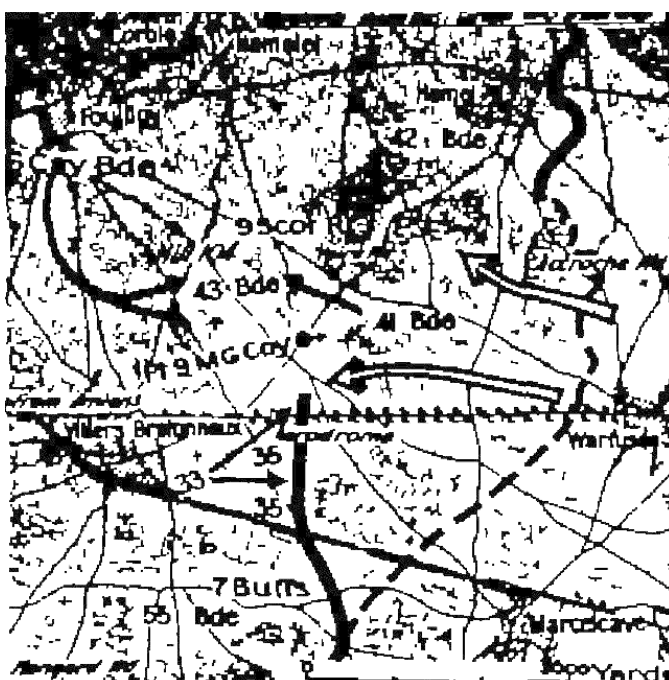
*On the right Coghill was greatly disturbed by Carr's message, believing, as he did, that any retirement of the Australians would mean a retirement of the whole British line to the south of them. Shortly afterwards he observed Carr's company falling back in a big semi-circle across the plateau to his left rear, but he resolved to hold on if possible. The Germans on his front had crept up to the culvert under the railway embankment from which they enfiladed with a machine-gun the line from the south. Coghill called for volunteers to go out and suppress the gun. At this stage of the war, unless new drafts were present, volunteers for a dangerous task were not usually obtained without some pressure – it was obvious that a man could not volunteer many times and survive. Coghill had to intimate: "If you don't volunteer, I'll bloody well have to do it myself" whereupon one of his corporals, Wilson, said, "I'll go, Captain." Another man offered to accompany him, and, crawling on their stomachs with rifles and bayonets fixed, in view of the whole right flank, they reached a point south of the railway from which they shot the machine-gunnery and then rushed the post. Unfortunately, they tried to bring in the gun, and, while doing so, Wilson was badly wounded, and his mate was killed. Coghill with one of his men went out and pulled Wilson in.*

*By the time the Germans following the retirement of the centre company had seized the copse of Coghill's left, which had been defended by an advanced Lewis gun post and had passed through it to*

the cemetery where Carr's headquarters had been. From here they enfiladed Coghill's left half company under Lt Warden and being now far ahead of the line on either flank, Coghill, after consulting Warden, decided to withdraw to the support line. This they did by platoons, the Germans firing at them but not immediately following. Lt Lewis, however, and his runner, Pte Lack, staying behind to give covering fire while their platoon withdrew, found themselves under close-range machine-gun fire, and were captured when trying to get clear. The flank of the 7<sup>th</sup> Buffs, which had retired previously, as described, now made touch, and Coghill, who had again been hit – this time in the knee, through a shell burst – waited till his company was firmly settled in the support position, and then made his way to the aid post which Cpt Thomas insisted on maintaining under the railway bridge south-east of the town, in spite of an order to retire; thence Coghill went to Colonel Goddard's headquarters and explained the position. Goddard ordered him out of the line.

To the south the attack upon the centre and right of the 18<sup>th</sup> British Division had been defeated, but northward, in the sector of the 14<sup>th</sup> Division, there was much confusion. The Germans who had broken through its right made for the two woods down the slope, overlooking Hamel. The 14<sup>th</sup> Division had one of its three brigades, the 43<sup>rd</sup>, in close support on the vital height, Hill 104, north-east of Villers-Bretonneux, and this brigade now sent forward the 9<sup>th</sup> Scottish Rifles, to hold, if possible, the nearer of the two woods (Vaire Wood). But the retirement of the 41<sup>st</sup> Brigade immediately north of the Roman road was precipitate; .... It became quickly clear that the cavalry must again be called upon if disaster was to be averted. The 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade was accordingly summoned up, mounted, from Fouilloy and Bois LI'Abbe to the open valley just to the north of Villers-Bretonneux, from which its regiments could climb Hill 104, if necessary, in a few minutes.

Meanwhile, at the first news of the attack, Colonel Goddard ordered the 33<sup>rd</sup> (Battalion held in reserve behind the 35<sup>th</sup>) to send two companies to take up a support position north of the railway. Captain Fry and Smith led their companies forward at once and reached a point 1,200 yards east-south-east of the town and south of the first aerodrome, where they found the 35<sup>th</sup>, which had just fallen back, part of it under major Carr lying on their northern flank, and the rest of their southern flank beyond the railway. It was then about 8 o'clock. At 8:15 Goddard sent up a third company of the 33<sup>rd</sup>, was only 50 strong; and at 9, as the left was dangerously weak, he ordered Morshead to despatch his last and strongest company, nearly 150 strong, with seven Lewis guns, under Captain Duncan, a first-rate fighting leader.



The German advance can be seen at left, at 8am, with their breakthrough and pushing the 35<sup>th</sup> back lest they be outflanked. The 33<sup>rd</sup> Companies are dispatched to strengthen the front and at 9:30am the Australia front is "fairly secure"

*Carr had put Farleigh's company on his own left, and Duncan, moving up his men in fours, extended them still farther left, across the Roman road, 250 yards into the sector of the 14<sup>th</sup> Division. The two machine guns that had successfully withdrawn from the front line were in this new alignment, and at 8 o'clock Lt-Col Goddard had put in eight of the twelve remaining machine-guns; four crews were to take up the support positions dug on the previous day, but, finding these already in the enemy's hands, went into the line; the other four under Lt Ross, were to safeguard the left, and for that purpose stationed themselves with some of the 14<sup>th</sup> Division's troops far out in its area, about 1,000 yards from Vaire Wood. (Located south of Hamel)*

*The Australian front was thus by 9:30 am made fairly secure, but the Germans were still pouring into the sector of the 14<sup>th</sup> Division, and the British hold on Hamel and on all the plateau north of the Roman road was obviously in danger. The British infantry next to Ross's machine-guns withdrew and the guns' crews were left by themselves, but they held on and fought actively." .....*

*North of the Roman road, where the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion's other flank lay, a newly arrived British division broke. Now both Australian flanks were open. The northern end of the line began to fall back, then the centre. Coghill at the southern end tried to hold on. His men were now being shot at from behind. They pulled back gradually towards the support position, lest they be cut off. Coghill was hit again, this time in the knee. He waited until his company was in the support trenches before going to the aid post.*

*Morehead's depleted 33<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was sent up to help the 35<sup>th</sup>. By 9.30 am the new Australian line was reasonably strong, but the British line to the north was being rolled back. The village of Hamel seemed likely to fall."*

*"The British 14<sup>th</sup> Division held the line north of the Roman road, past Hamel and on to the Somme. The division had performed poorly on the first day of Operation Michael and its commander had been sacked. ...The division, under its third commander in a fortnight, now couldn't hold the north line of the Roman road. Some of its troops seem to have simply fled. Men from Monash's division on the river saw Germans creeping into Hamel. Monash wrote home: "These Tommy divisions are the absolute limit, and not worth the money it costs to put them into uniform ... bad troops, bad staffs, bad commanders.'*

*At noon Hill 104, behind the front where the 14<sup>th</sup> Division had been routed and offering the best view of Amiens, was in danger of falling.*

*In the afternoon the two remaining battalions of Rosenthal's brigade, the 34<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup>, were thrown into the battle to hold Villers-Bretonneux. The 33<sup>rd</sup> and the 35<sup>th</sup> still held the frontline just south of the Roman road. The 35<sup>th</sup> was on the southern end of the line and many of the men were so tired they were starting to fall asleep. Then, about 4pm, they saw the British line to the south of them retreating. And now the Australian line became a shambles. A lieutenant at the southern end of the line ordered his men to fall back and form a defensive line. The Australians to the north thought the whole battalion was pulling back and the rout began. Two officers tried to steady the troops and failed. They ended up standing in the line alone, watching the Germans advancing towards Villers-Bretonneux. Much of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Battalion to the north also fell back as part of the chain reaction.*

*Colonel Henry Goddard, the commander of the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion, was also in charge of the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade's forward headquarters. His post was in Villers-Bretonneux. Around 5pm he discovered that his two front battalions had fallen back in disorder. His headquarters was now the most forward Australian position. Panic now broke out here as well. Goddard ordered the 36<sup>th</sup> Battalion, which was south of the town, to counterattack.*



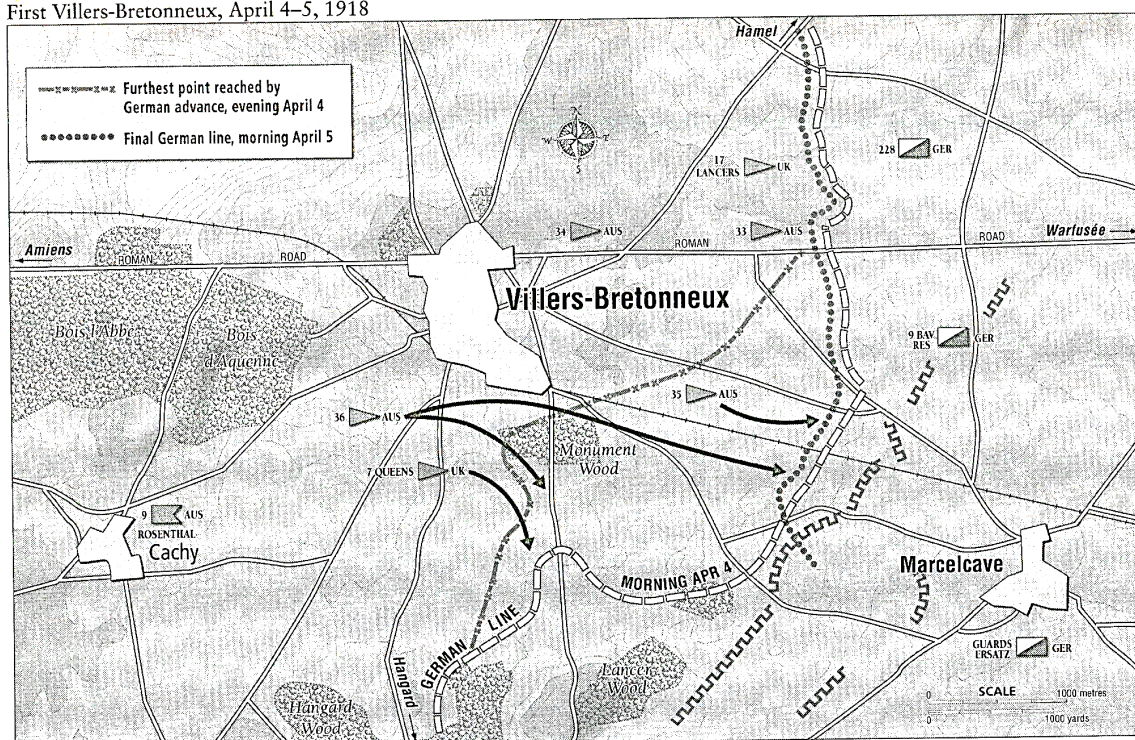
Colonel John Milne ran much of the way to his 36<sup>th</sup> Battalion to arrange the counterattack ordered by Goddard. His men were south of the town, near Monument Farm. Milne arrived breathless and began issuing orders. The battalion would counter-attack due east towards Monument Farm and the wood of the same name just past it. One company commander asked "How far should we go?"

Go 'till your stopped," Milne said. He walked along the lines of the men shedding their overcoats and other gear they wouldn't need in the counterattack. "Goodbye boys," said Milne. "It's neck or nothing." The men set off in a jogtrot. Soon they saw Germans pouring out of Monument Wood. The Germans saw them and returned to the wood and opened fire. The Australians fell thickly, particularly the officers, but they began to push the Germans back. When it was over Milne's men had advanced a mile at the northern end of their front line and half a mile at the southern end.

On the other side of the railway line a company of the 35<sup>th</sup> had also gone forward strongly. The captain in charge jumped into a shell hole occupied by three Germans. He hit one over the head with the man's coal-scuttle helmet and strangled a second. The third German escaped. Further north again, Morehead's 33<sup>rd</sup> battalion was falling back in some disorder when the 17<sup>th</sup> Lancers cantered up. The Australians turned back towards the enemy. According to Morehead, the sight of the cavalymen – all their panoply, the drawn sabres and lances – inspired the Australians.

Villers-Bretonneux had been saved for now but the Germans had edged closer and Rosenthal's brigade had lost 665 men. The counterattack by Milne's 36<sup>th</sup> Brigade had made the difference."

First Villers-Bretonneux, April 4–5, 1918



The above map shows German the advances to late afternoon 4<sup>th</sup> April and then where the Australians pushed them back to by morning of 5<sup>th</sup> April.

Pederson in 'Villers-Bretonneux' details the German 18<sup>th</sup> Division's experiences: *"Heavy fire was heard around 6.30am. Unable to push C Company 35 Battalion off the railway, 11 BRIR had shifted the axis of attack southward against 7/Bufs, who held at first but then left their positions, probably realizing the Germans would try again. Struck earlier by how worn they looked, Captain Coghill floundered 500 yards through the mud to find the closest company commander, Lt DG Ferguson, who readily agreed when Coghill asked him whether his men would return if C Company's Lewis guns covered them. Saying 'we'll stand by you Anzacs', the men seemed willing and reoccupied the line, only to retire again. Ferguson's company had gone back to the railway bridge where C Company joined them an hour later."*

The fields and trenches were rain sodden and covered in squelching mud. Goddard reports during that morning; *"Clogged with mud – in many case unserviceable - rifles and Lewis guns were quickly cleaned. 6/Londons generously exchanged six of the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion's dirty Lewis guns for six of their clean ones, a gesture of considerable help"*.

The desperate nature of the fighting at this time is revealed by the fact that the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion suffered nearly 70 per cent (291) casualties during these operations. The battle of 4<sup>th</sup> April was Vincent's last. He was wounded by a bullet to his stomach while repositioning his Lewis gun at around 10am. The Germans looked to overrun Villers-Bretonneux, so all casualties were being sent from the 9<sup>th</sup> Aust Field Ambulance to the Clearing Station at Cachy and while being transported with other casualties the ambulance was blown up on the high spot on the old Cachy to Villers-Bretonneux Road by a direct cannon hit. It came up from the lower road and was exposed while crossing the ridge. The incident occurred on the same road and about 600 metres from where the first ever Tank battle occurred on 24<sup>th</sup> April, twenty days later.

Following are statements from Vincent's "Killed in Action Record" from the Australian War Memorial:

From Corporal J Hills, 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion: *"Crosbie was in my Company. He was an old hand like myself. He came from the Newcastle district. I think he was a butcher. At Villers Bretonneux on 5<sup>th</sup> April Crosbie got wounded and while being taken down in the ambulance a shell landed on it and he was killed with the others in it. His remains were buried just outside of Villers Bretonneux on the roadside and the grave marked. Corporal Holliday, a Pioneer of HQ, told me about it. He said he and two other men attended to the burials."*

From Pt. T Collins, 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion C Company: *"I saw him wounded at Corbie, near Amiens, when he was hit by a bullet through the stomach and was in pain. He was conscious when taken to the dressing station to which I assisted to carry him. He left no messages. The casualty happened about 10am on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1918. He was a Lewis Gunr and was changing over positions at the time of the casualty. We left him at the 9<sup>th</sup> Aus. Fld. Amb. about 11am when he was still conscious, and I believe he died soon afterwards. I do not know anything about his burial. I myself was wounded the same morning while returning."*

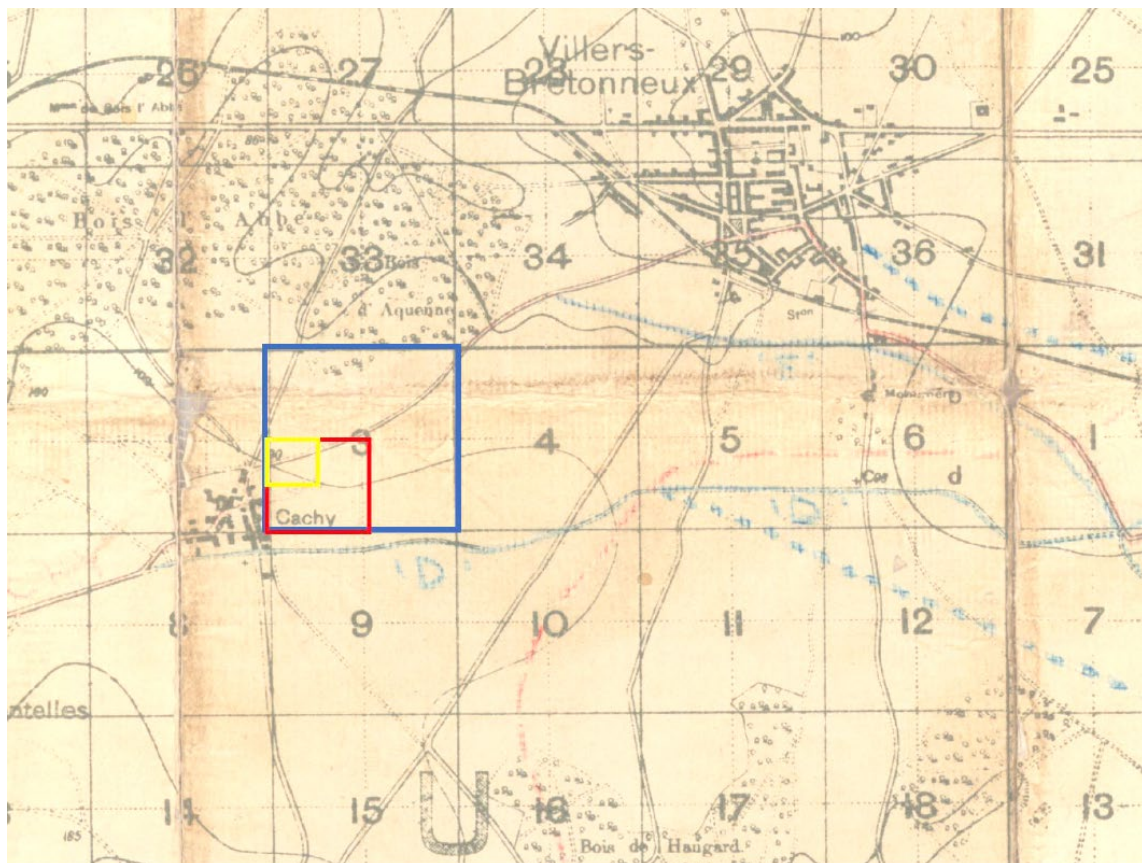
From Lt W.W. Warden, 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion: *"I heard Cpl Holliday telling Lt. Barlow that Crosbie had been killed by a shell while he was being carried away after being wounded at Villers-Bretonneux. The ambulance was struck by a shell. Crosbie was buried at Cachy and Lt Barlow went and saw him buried. He was his cousin."*

Letter from Lieutenant Cecil Barlow, 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion D Company: *"re my cousin 748 V. C. Crosbie, he was badly wounded by a shell, in the bombardment previous to the attack by the Huns on the 4<sup>th</sup> April at Villers Bretonneux. His wounds were dressed at our regimental aid post by Captain Thomas our RMO. He was then sent away in a motor ambulance to a casualty clearing station. While on the way a shell struck the ambulance and knocked it almost to pieces. It was quite by chance I saw it. As I was coming*

*out of the line after being relieved, I saw the ambulance and went over to have a look at it. You can imagine what my feeling were when I saw my cousin on a stretcher. The shell that struck the ambulance had finished him off. I asked Captain Osborne, our Padre, to bury him. I asked some of his pals to dig a grave and we buried him on 6<sup>th</sup> April in a ploughed field off the road about half a mile from Cachy, which is near Villers Bretonneux. I have written to his mother about it and our padre has also written.....I made no mistake about his identity but his description roughly is, as far as I can remember - height about 5'8" – hair brown, eyes blue or grey – complexion fair, ...."*

From Cpl Holliday's notebook, 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion: "Buried 7<sup>th</sup> April 1918 on Cachy and Villers-Bretonneux Road. I helped bury him."

His grave was marked with a cross. (Map ref sheet 62 D.S.W.0.3.a) Following is the map reference as the grave was described within the yellow square and at about half a mile from Cachy, along the old road.





The remnants of the old Bretonneux – Cachy Road can be seen as a shadow running under the red A29 icon below – the road was moved when the A29 was constructed.



Vincent was officially killed in Action at Villers Bretonneux on the 4th April 1918 and buried on the 6<sup>th</sup> April.

The incident was mentioned by Charles Bean: "Volume 5, The AIF in France during the Main German Offensive 1918" Chapter XI page 331 firstly from a soldier's diary "As we walked from Cachy towards the overturned lorry<sup>50</sup> on the V. Bretonneux Rd, we noticed men in small numbers coming up the road towards us" and then as the footnote: "<sup>50</sup>. This was a motor ambulance which had been running in the morning to clear wounded from Villiers-Bretonneux. The road was exposed and it had been hit by a shell."

Following is Goddard's diary of 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade troops known killed at Villers-Bretonneux. Vincent is recorded on 4<sup>th</sup> April with four others from the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

- Les Clouten from Dora Creek, buried in the Adelaide Cemetery Villers-Bretonneux;
- Percy Harold Monk from Rockhampton, no known grave, (from his Aust. Red Cross file #6838, he was a Lewis gunner in A Company, 3 Platoon - shot in the head around noon, had to be left behind when the Germans were streaming through and later buried near the Aeroplane hangars)
- Walter Harold Walker from North Sydney, no known grave (from his Aust. Red Cross file #4301A, he was in A Company, 3 Platoon - shot and had to be left behind when the Germans were streaming through and later buried near the Aeroplane hangars at P.31.B.Central map location)
- Edgar Ormond Barlow from Blacktown, Sydney on the same day, buried Adelaide Cemetery, Villers-Bretonneux.

<del>Men Killed</del>		Killed in		Killed on	Killed in
Killed in		Killed in			
3326	Seanderson H. G.	3. 4. 18	22	} shot 22	D
2018	Quinn. J.	2			
402	McCormick J.	3			
6915	McDonnell C. P.	4			
6850	McPherson D. D. W.	3	4		
3252	Amiel J.	6			
2828	Moore H. R.	4			
2421	Clouet L.	4			
746	Crosbie V. C.	1			
1478	Redman W.	6			
6853	Williams R. M.	1			
3339	Lowe G. W.	31. 3			
1469	Beardall J.	7. 4			
2425	Fitness C. L.	7			
2867	O. Brady J.	10			
2495	Gallagher P. J.	10.			
2167	Warington C. J.	6			
3266	Buckley S. G.	6			
7305	Reid T. J.	31 3.			
366	R. S. M. Campbell J. A.	15. 4			
6818	Jennings V. R.	15			
7444	Barlow G. A.	15			
4301	Wacker W. M.	15			
-	Monk P. H.	4			

Goddard's  
Diary records  
known deaths

His family were told by a returning ANZAC that Vincent "was an artist and used to draw, amusing the soldiers when resting in the trenches. He used something white to draw the horses."

The Argus (Melbourne, Victoria)

LONDON, July 17. 1918.

S.S. BARUNGA SUNK. ON WAY TO AUSTRALIA. Passengers and Crew Saved.

The steamer "Barunga" has been sunk while on a voyage to Australia. Only one casualty has been reported. Former German Steamer the Navy Office announced yesterday that the Barunga was torpedoed in English waters on July 16. The passengers and crew, it was added, have been landed, so far as could be ascertained, without casualties. The Barunga was formerly the Sumatra, a well-known unit of the German Austrian Line. She was launched in June 1913, at Flensburg, Germany, and was one of a group of steamers which at that time were regarded as being unsurpassed in the world as cargo carriers, each of them having a capacity for 12,000 tons of general freight and possessing engines capable of developing a speed of over 13 knots. When the war broke out the Sumatra was discharging at Sydney and was seized by the Commonwealth authorities. She was renamed the Barunga and since has been employed continuously as a transport and a cargo carrier.

Trove Article

Vincent's personnel affects were on board the "Barunga" as they were being sent home to his parents at Woodstock Street, Mayfield via Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia.

### Sources:

- Australian Red Cross Society Missing and Wounded Enquiry Bureau files
- John Monash Personal Files, Book 18, 28 March to 20 April 1918.
- National Archive of Australia – Discovering ANZACS
- The Australian War Memorial:
  - H A Goddard, Official Diary
  - <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U51475>
  - Volume 2, Official History of Australian Medical Services 1914 – 1918, The Western Front, 1940. (1<sup>st</sup> Edition 1940) Arthur Butler.
  - Volume 4, Official History of Australia in the War of 1914 – 1918, The AIF in France, 1917. (11<sup>th</sup> Edition 1941) Charles Bean.
  - Volume 5, Official History of Australia in the War of 1914 – 1918 ,The AIF in France during the Main German Offensive 1918 (8<sup>th</sup> Edition, 1941), Charles Bean.
- Villers-Bretonneux to Hamel, Australians on the Western Front 1918.
- The Great War, Les Carlyon, 2006.
- The Harrower Collection 9th Infantry Brigade Aif | Online Research Library & Membership site:
  - <https://harrowercollection.com.au/2022/05/>
- Trove
- University of Newcastle – Living Histories
- Victory at Villers-Bretonneux, Peter Fitzsimons, 2016.
- Villers-Bretonneux, Somme by Peter Pedersen.
- Webmatters, Carte de Route, First World War, Villers-Bretonneux, by Simon.
- Written by: Mark Crosbie, [mgcrosbie57@gmail.com](mailto:mgcrosbie57@gmail.com)



**Vincent's name appears on several memorials:**

- 1 Waratah War Memorial Gates, Platt St, Waratah West, Newcastle, built in 1921:





2 Leichardt War Memorial, Pioneers Memorial Park, Norton St, Leichardt, Sydney:





The Australian National Memorial

### VILLERS-BRETONNEUX MILITARY CEMETERY

Villers-Bretonneux became famous on 23 April 1918, when the German advance on Amiens ended in the capture of the village by their tanks and infantry. On the following day, the 4th and 5th Australian Divisions, with units of the 8th and 18th British Divisions, recaptured the village, and some say turned the tide on the First World War. On 8 August 1918, the 2nd and 5th Australian Divisions advanced from its eastern outskirts in the Battle of Amiens.

The Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery was established after the Armistice when graves were brought in from other burial grounds in the area and from the battlefields.

There are more than 2,100 Commonwealth servicemen of the First World War buried or commemorated in this cemetery, of whom more than 600 remain unidentified.





4 Australian War Memorial Honour Roll, Treloar Crescent, Canberra.



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## CROSBIE, Vincent Clive



[Personal Details](#) [Service History](#) [Personal Stories](#)

**Service Number:** 748

**Enlisted:** 4 January 1916

**Last Rank:** Private

**Last Unit:** 35th Infantry Battalion

**Born:** Cardiff, New South Wales, Australia, 26 July 1897

**Home Town:** Mayfield, Waratah, New South Wales

**Schooling:** Not yet discovered

**Occupation:** Butcher

**Died:** Killed in Action, France, 4 April 1918, aged 20 years

**Cemetery:** No known grave - "Known Unto God"

**Memorials:** Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour, Leichhardt War Memorial, Villers-Bretonneux Memorial (Australian National Memorial - France), Waratah Memorial Gates

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