

George Francis Robinson DCM

Private (Pte) 3914 George Francis Robinson enlisted in the 22nd Infantry Battalion in the 6th Infantry Brigade of the 2nd Australian Division in Melbourne on 12 July 1915. He embarked overseas on 8 February 1916 and disembarked in Egypt in early March.

He embarked for France on 21 March and landed at Marseilles six days later, where he joined the 2nd Division Base Depot at Etaples for training. He was formally taken on strength of the 22nd Battalion, in the field at Sausage Valley, near Pozieres, on 31 July, one of 157 reinforcements received that day.

On 22 August, the 2nd Australian Division, including the 22nd Battalion, entered the line in front of Mouquet Farm, a heavily fortified enemy structure that had already held up the advance in front of Pozieres for several weeks. The 2nd Division attacked on 26 August and was repulsed with the loss of over 1,200 casualties. Although held in reserve on the day, the 22nd Battalion sustained 44 casualties, one of whom was Pte Robinson, who received a gunshot wound to his right knee.

He was evacuated to the 5th General Hospital at Rouen from 28 August – 7 September and eventually rejoined the 22nd Battalion on 4 October 1916. Just a week later, he was treated for tonsillitis at the 15th Casualty Clearing Station between 11 – 19 October.

He was promoted to Lance Corporal (L Cpl) on 1 February 1917 and the battalion moved to the Somme, where they spent several short stints in the front line near Gueudecourt and Le Sars, in atrocious conditions, for the loss of 27 casualties (three killed).

On 24 February, word filtered through that the Germans were in the process of evacuating their lines, and the battalion was tasked with sending out a patrol east of Le Sars. At 1:00 am the next morning, the patrol moved forward. The battalion diary noted that, "*the remarkable quietness was extraordinary...and the night was intensely dark and so foggy that keeping direction was a most difficult task.*" They occupied the German line without incident, but later that day were ordered to attack the next line of trenches. As the troops were tired, and the ground was still difficult to move across, the attack failed at the cost of 60 casualties.

As a result of the poor conditions, L Cpl Robinson came down with scabies and psoriasis, for which he was treated at several local medical facilities between 23 March – 14 May 1917. He spent a further two months at the 2nd Division Base Depot at le Havre before he rejoined the 22nd Battalion on 31 July.

On 12 September, the 22nd Battalion moved north to Belgium to take part in the 1st and 2nd Australian Division's assault at Menin Road, east of Ypres. The dawn attack on 20 September 1917 was successful and the Australians advanced 1,500 metres and captured their objectives, albeit at a cost of over 5,000 casualties. The 22nd Battalion, held mostly in reserve, nevertheless lost 33 men killed and 63 wounded.

Following the action, L Cpl Robinson was promoted to Corporal (Cpl) on 25 September.

On the night of 3 October, the 22nd Battalion moved up into the front line positions near Zonnebeke, Belgium in readiness for their involvement for the next phase of Third Ypres.

The Australians, including the 22nd Battalion, rose from their shell holes at 6:00 am on 4 October and ran headlong into a German attack that had also just commenced. The Battle of Broodseinde Ridge continued and was a great success. The Germans were routed, and the newly captured ground was consolidated, at a cost to the battalion of 239 casualties, including 82 killed.

Although heavy rain had been falling constantly since the success at Broodseinde, the British nevertheless decided to launch another attack toward Passchendaele, this time from Poelcapelle, on 9 October. At 5:20 am, the 2nd Australian Division (including the 22nd Battalion) advanced and held the right flank in front of Broodseinde for a time, but inevitably, the whole attack eventually floundered in the mud and cost the battalion 56 men.

Like the bulk of the AIF, the 22nd Battalion remained in the Ypres and Messines area during late 1917 and early 1918 recovering and re-organising after Third Ypres, which is also where Cpl Robinson was promoted to Lance Sergeant (L Sgt) on 23 March.

Following news of the Spring Offensive in late March 1918, the 22nd Battalion was rushed south and arrived at Dernancourt on 7 April, although the main enemy attack had petered out by the time they arrived.

On 19 May 1918, the 6th Brigade attacked the village of Ville-sur-Ancre to straighten out the front line around Morlancourt. The 22nd Battalion was heavily involved in the assault which was considered a complete success with 330 German prisoners and 45 machine guns captured. Overall battalion casualties totalled 195 (including 30 killed).

For his actions during the above assault, L Sgt Robinson was recommended for, and later awarded, the Distinguished Conduct Medal (second only to the Victoria Cross). The citation read:

“For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty during the attack on VILLE-SUR-ANCRE on the morning of 19th inst. This N.C.O, who had charge of a platoon, displayed great personal bravery. While advancing under heavy fire, all his Lewis gunners became casualties. He at once seized the Lewis gun, and moving forward with the gun at the hip, silenced an enemy gun which was inflicting heavy casualties on our line. On reaching the objective, he reorganised his men and led out a post to cover the work of consolidation. On returning to the line where his men were digging in, although subjected to heavy sniping fire, he personally supervised the work being carried out. That night he took one man and a Lewis gun into NO MAN’S LAND and engaged and silenced an enemy M.G. and brought two men who had been wounded during the attack safely back with him.”

Resting after the battle, L Sgt Robinson was promoted to Sergeant (Sgt) on 23 May 1918.

By mid-July the 22nd Battalion had moved to the Aubigny area and while here it was subjected to several prolonged German gas bombardments. While Sgt Robinson reported suffering the effects of gas poisoning on 10 July, after a brief treatment at the 6th Field Ambulance, he returned to full duty the next day.

But the effects of gas poisoning could in fact take several days to manifest themselves, and Sgt Robinson was evacuated sick with a disorderly action of the heart just ten days later. He was initially treated at the 3rd General Hospital at Abbeville from 27 July – 18 August, then transferred to England, where he was admitted to the Bermondsey Military Hospital between 20 August – 16 September.

He returned to duty at the Sutton Veny Camp on 21 October but obviously suffered from the effects of the gas for some time, as he was invalided home to Australia on 31 March 1919.

Sergeant 3914 George Francis Robinson DCM disembarked in Melbourne on 21 May, where he was medically discharged from the AIF a year later, on 11 June 1920, which suggests he spent time undergoing further medical treatment after he arrived back in Australia.



Sgt George Robinson's WWI medal set

Name: Robinson, George Francis	
Service Number	3914
Date enlisted	12 July 1915
Place enlisted	Melbourne, Victoria
Rank on enlistment	Private
Initial Unit	22 nd Infantry Battalion
Previous military service	70 th Infantry Battalion, CMF – 18 months
Date and ship embarked for overseas	8 February 1916 HMAT A69 <i>Warilda</i>
Stated age/DOB (if known)	19 years 6 months
Place of birth	Geelong, Victoria
Marital status	Single
Occupation	Labourer
Religion	Roman Catholic
Next of kin and address	Robinson, Mr John, father, 48 The Strand, Newport, Victoria
Permanent address	Newport, Victoria
Appearance	Fresh complexion, light brown hair, blue eyes, height – 5 feet 8 ³ / ₄ inches, weight – 11 stone, 4 lbs, chest measurement – 35/38 inches
Final Rank	Sergeant
Final Unit	22 nd Infantry Battalion
Theatres of war served in	Egypt, France, Belgium
Fate	Returned to Australia
Date and place wounded	26 August 1916 Mouquet Farm, France
Nature of wounds	Gunshot wound to right knee
Date and place wounded (2)	10 July 1918 Aubigny, France
Nature of wounds (2)	Gassed
Date and ship embarked for Australia	31 March 1919 HT <i>Khyber</i>
Date discharged	11 June 1920
Nature of discharge	Medically Unfit (wounds)
Honours/medals	Distinguished Conduct Medal, British War Medal, Victory Medal
Notes	Brother of Henry, John and Leo Robinson. Attended St Leonards State School. Died 30 March 1948 (due to war service). Remembered on the St Leonards Honor Roll.