

Lance-Corporal George Frederick Lane

George was the third son of Charles Henry Lane and his wife Elizabeth. Charles was born in Trimley, Suffolk in the autumn of 1853.ⁱ When Charles arrived in Birmingham is not known, but on 9th March 1879, the Banns of Marriage between him and his future wife Elizabeth Fowler were read out at St Paul's Church, Balsall Heath.ⁱⁱ They married soon after. Elizabeth was the daughter of John Fowler, a farmer from the parish of Oxhill, Warwickshire and his wife Sarah.

In 1881, Charles and Elizabeth lived at 70 Conybere Street, Deritend, Birmingham. Charles' occupation was recorded as a 'beer retailer and bricklayer' in the census,

By 1991, the couple had moved to 26 Woodbridge Road, Moseley, Birmingham with their six children: Charles Henry (born 1882), Elsie (born 1884), Louie (born 1886), William (born 1887), George Frederick (born 1889) and Edith (born 1891). Charles' occupation was recorded as a bricklayer. Living with them was Charles' brother Edward, a house painter.



Figure 1: 26 Woodbridge Road (Wacaden) now demolished

The 1901 census recorded Charles, a building repairer, and Elizabeth still resident at 26 Woodbridge Road with the addition of four more children; Gertrude Emily (born 1893); Herbert Edward (born 1895); Clarice (born 1897) and Frank (born 1899).

By 1911 Charles and Elizabeth and their family had moved to 97 Trafalgar Road, Moseley. Charles had set up his own building business. Their third son, George, aged twenty-two, was a plumber.

George was a keen cricketer. He played friendly cricket but was also a member of the Birmingham and District League, the oldest club competition in the world, beginning league matches in 1888. There were initially seven clubs including Kings Heath Cricket Club for whom he played. Kings Heath Cricket Club moved to 'The Reddings' ground, joining with Moseley Cricket Club (and taking on that name).ⁱⁱⁱ George also played for Mitchells and Butlers at their ground in Portland Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham.^{iv}

George was married to Violet (née Pearce) in the autumn of 1913 in West Bromwich.^v They had two children Dorothy and Joan born in 1914 and 1917 respectively.^{vi} The family lived at the previous Woodbridge Road home of his parents.^{vii}

George was conscripted in 1916 and initially joined the Royal Warwickshire Regiment as Private G F Lane, No 25091. He was then transferred to the Machine Gun Corps (MGC), taking a new serial number 116587. It is likely that he arrived in France in 1917 where he was attached to the 6th Battalion MGC. By 1918 George had been promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal.^{viii}



Figure 2: An MGC gun team with their Vickers machine gun.

The Vickers Machine Gun was the British Army's primary machine gun from 1912. When the Lewis Gun was adopted as a light machine gun and issued to infantry units, the Vickers guns were redefined as heavy machine guns and withdrawn from infantry units. They were then given to the new Machine Gun Corps to operate in 1915. By early 1918 there were four MGC's in each division.^{ix}

On 11th September 1918, the 6th MGC marched from Baiseux to Corbie where they came under orders of the 9th Corps and the command of General Henry Rawlinson, Commander-in-Chief of the Fourth Army. Their billets were described as 'excellent, but left a little dirty.'

The following day the battalion were hard at work practising among other things, 'barrage drill' and 'fire direction'. On 13th September all four companies of the 6th MGC were taken by bus to Monchy-Lagache in the Somme region, south of Peronne. This was in readiness for an attack with the French on the right flank and the Australians on the left with a view to secure a good position over the main Hindenburg Line ready for an attack on 18th September (Battle of Épehy) to remove the German outpost positions in front of the Hindenburg Line.

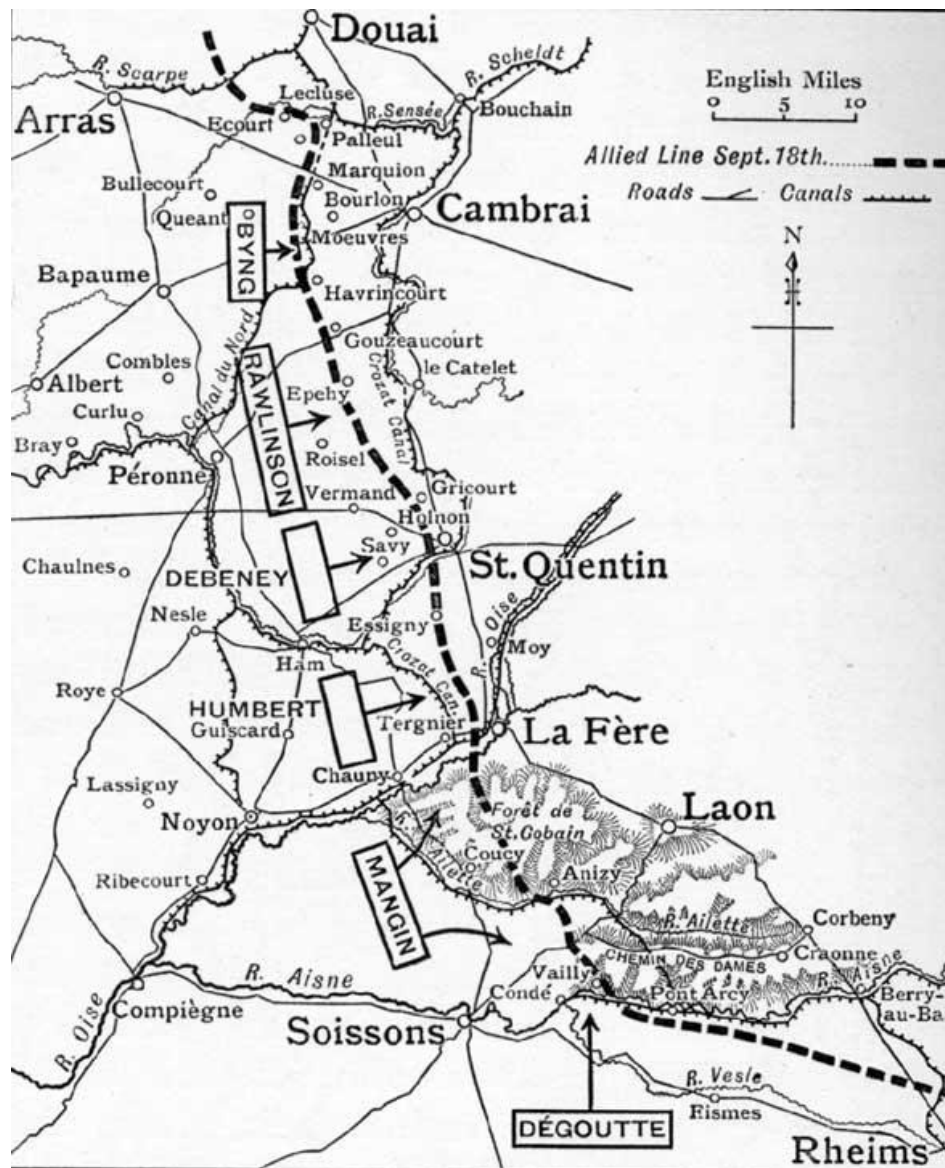
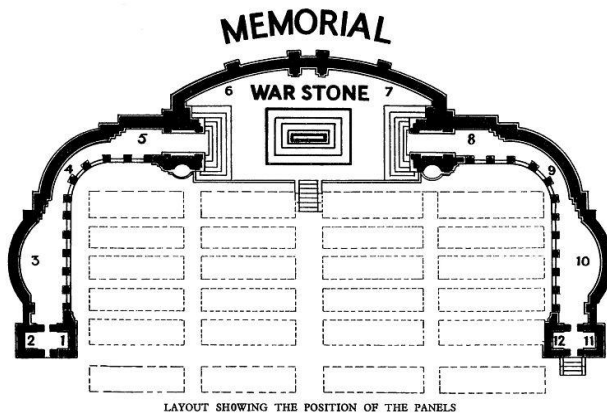


Figure 3: Map showing the area of attack under General Rawlinson on 18th September 1918

In preparation for the battle, each of the four MGC's was attached to a Brigade. 'B' Coy was sent to the 18th Infantry Brigade to make ready a jumping off line on the 17th September for the other MGC's to move forward by bounds to successive positions from which to support the advance of the Brigades and to cover its front by direct and indirect fire. One 'Other Rank' was recorded killed on the day of the attack. That man was George. Fifty-five 'Other Ranks' were injured on the day and three officers wounded.^x George was 29 when he was killed.



His body was never found. He is commemorated on the Vis-en-Artois Memorial. It commemorates 9,847 Allied officers and men who were killed in the period from 8th August 1918 to 11th November 1918 who have no known grave. The battle period is known by the Allies as the "Advance to Victory". This was a series of battles fought in Picardy and Artois during the last months of the war, when the Allied Forces successfully pushed the German Army eastwards as far as Mons over the Belgian border.



George is also commemorated on the WW1 memorial at St Mary's Church, Moseley and his name is on the Roll of Honour at Birmingham's Hall of Memory,



Figure 4
(Above) Vis-en-Artois Memorial and plan of panels
(Left) St Mary's Church, Moseley WW1 memorial

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Endnotes

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- i England & Wales Births, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1853, ¾, 4A, 505
1891, 1911 census names Trimley as Charles' place of birth
 - ii Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937, Charles Henry Lane of the Parish of St Paul's, Balsall Heath
 - iii Birmingham and District League
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birmingham_and_District_Premier_League
 - iv *Birmingham Daily Post*, 9th October 1918
 - v England & Wales Marriages, 1837-2005, 1913, West Bromwich, ¾, 6B, 1643
 - vi England & Wales Births 1837-2006, Kings Norton (mother's name Pearce)
 - vii Absent Voters List, 1st October 1918
Birmingham Daily Post, 9th October 1918
 - viii Soldiers Died in the Great War.
 - ix Machine Gun Corps
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Machine_Gun_Corps
 - x War diary 2/5 Royal Warwickshire Regiment, National Archives Ref WO 95/1601/2.3, pp 1, 2, 12-14

Illustrations

Figure 1 Woodbridge Road,
<http://www.birminghamforum.co.uk/index.php?topic=3081.363>

Figure 2 Vickers Machine Gun
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Machine_Gun_Corps

Figure **Error! Main Document Only.** The Long, Long Trail
<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/battlefields/campaign-and-battle-maps-for-the-british-army-1914-1918/>

Figure 4 *Vis-en-Artois Memorial*
<https://www.ww1cemeteries.com/vis-en-artois-memorial.html>