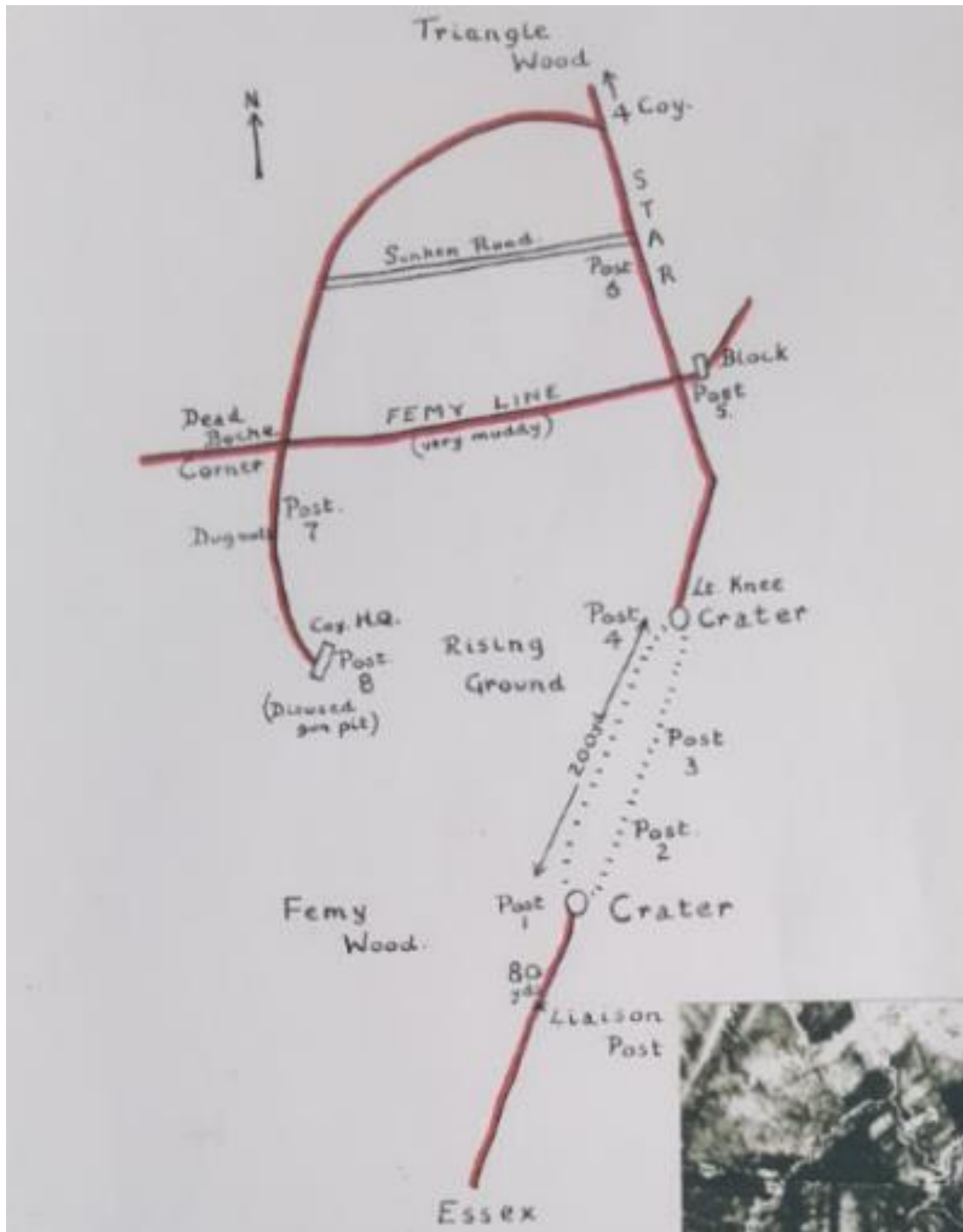


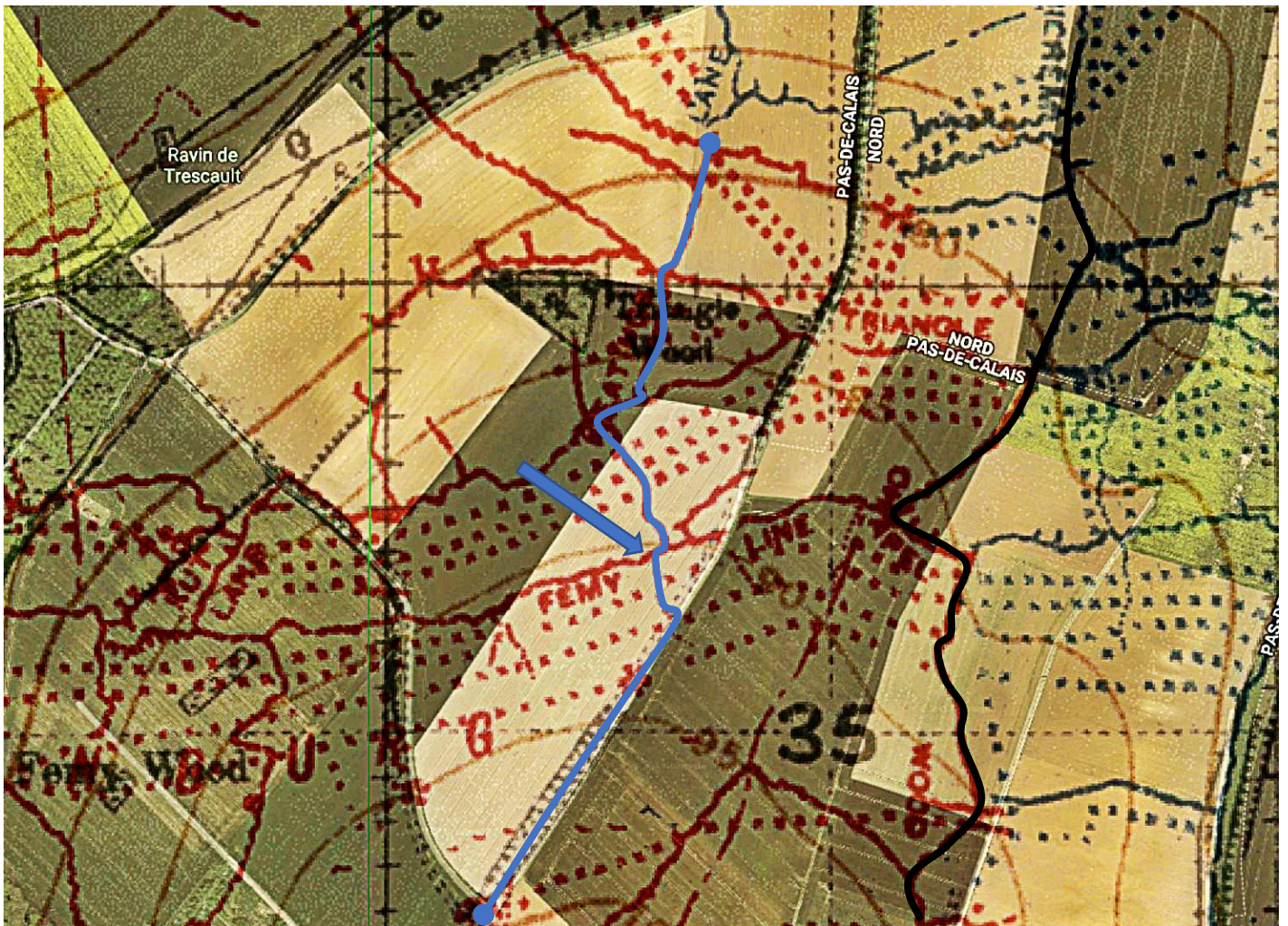
Frank Young VC – 18<sup>th</sup> September 1918

In the early afternoon of 18<sup>th</sup> September 1918 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Hertfordshire Regiment found themselves occupying the frontlines with a series of 'posts', slightly to the southwest of the French village of Havrincourt. The Herts utilised a two company frontage (No 4 on the left and No 3 on the right), with the other two companies in support and reserve (1 & 2).

The Disposition of the leading companies can be seen in the following sketch by Lieut H.J Knee, a Platoon commander with No 3 Company:



When superimposed onto a modern Satellite image, the Battalion line can be accurately mapped on modern ground.



The boundary between the two frontline companies was a 'barricade block' at the junction of the Battalion line and 'Femy Line' (arrow). No 4 Company, commanded by Frank Young, occupied the area north of this line, with No 3 Company occupying the area south of the line. German's held trenches to the east, their main line being in Chapel Wood Switch (black line). Unusually, as the line occupied by the Herts and the Germans opposite had been part of the same system (German Hindenburg Line), the two trenches were still linked by communication trenches, hence the Herts using a barricade block on the 'Femy Line'.

As previously seen, the positions occupied by the Herts at this time did not consist of a single line, but of dedicated posts. The southern posts hinged on two large mine craters (40 feet across and 20 feet deep) about 200 yards apart. Beyond the right-hand crater (southern end of the Herts line) was a Liaison Post between the Herts and the 1<sup>st</sup> Essex Regiment on their southern flank. To the north, with Frank Young's company, the line ended with a junction just to the East of Triangle Wood in 'Star Trench' which joined to a Battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers.

The unofficial Battalion history, written after the war but never published by Colonel B J Gripper, records the following on the afternoon of 18<sup>th</sup> September:

At 15.15 hrs. the enemy put down a heavy bombardment on the Artillery of the 37th. Divn. and Northwards along the line of the Canal du Nord.

At 16.35 hrs. the bombardment of the Artillery positions commenced to slacken and the shelling was shortened eastwards through Havrincourt Wood.

About the same time the enemy bombarded the front line with increasing intensity up to 17.15 hrs. when it lifted to Trescault and the valley North of that village.

As the barrage lifted from the front line the enemy attacked advancing across the open from Chapel Wood Switch and up to

the trenches of the Hindenburg front system. up 19  
The left of the attack was about 400 yards S. of Plush Wood Trench and the right immediately North of Triangle Wood.

At 17.20 hrs our artillery S.O.S. barrage came down in response to the signal, about 200 yards East of the front line, in addition to the M.Guns. Lewis Guns and rifles which were then firing.

The enemy succeeded in penetrating the front line posts on the road East of the Northern Edge of Havrincourt Wood, overrunning some of the posts.

One under Corp. Smith 1st. Herts, in a crater held out throughout the attack, and inflicted severe casualties on the enemy.

Parties of the enemy penetrated as far as Kut Lane and Femy Trench (? on East edge of H. Wood) where they came under cross rifle and Lewis gun fire and were killed.

Astride the Hindenburg Line the enemy completely failed to reach our front line.

North of Triangle Wood the enemy penetrated the front line, but was immediately ejected, with the loss of several prisoners by a counter attack led by Lieut. Young 1st. Herts, who was captured but escaped after knocking two of the enemy down with his fists, whereupon he organised and led a second counter-attack. He was last seen fighting in the trench against considerable odds, and was subsequently killed.

This most gallant officer was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

The following is the record of this gallant act published in the London Gazette.

2nd. Lieut. Frank Edward Young, late 1st. Bn. Herts R. (S.F.)  
"For most conspicuous bravery, determination and exceptional devotion to duty on 18th. Sept. 1918, south-east of Havrincourt, when during an enemy counter-attack and throughout an extremely intense enemy barrage he visited all posts, warned the garrisons and encouraged the men. In the early stages of the attack he rescued two of his men who had been captured, and bombed and silenced an enemy machine gun. Although surrounded by the enemy 2nd. Lieut. Young fought his way back to the main barricade and drove out a party of the enemy who were assembling there. By his ~~extraordinary~~ ~~exertions~~ further exertions the battalion was able to maintain a line of great tactical value, the loss of which would have meant serious delay to future operations. Throughout four hours of intense hand-to-hand fighting 2nd. Lieut. Young displayed the utmost valour and devotion to duty, and set an example to which the company gallantly repented. He was last seen fighting hand to hand against a considerable number of the enemy.

The report here suggests that Frank Young's incredible bravery occurred north of 'Triangle Wood'. His Victoria Cross citation meanwhile states only 'south-east of Havrincourt'.

All we know at this point is that somewhere in the confused fighting, Frank was last seen fighting against "a great number of the enemy".

The following letter, written by a Batman of one of Frank's fellow Officers many years after the war in 1979, provides further information:

Mr. E. J. Harrison  
32, Greenway  
Campton  
N. Bedford.  
Beds

Dec. 15/79

Dear Mr. Young

It was a B of a shock  
But pleased to hear from you.  
It may interest you that I knew  
your Grandfather who was in charge  
of the local Branch of the Hert  
Territorial & Drill Hall being at  
The Bottom of Whinbush Road in  
The early 1900's. I have often felt  
that I would like to visit the spot  
where we were when your Uncle  
won the V.C. I was in the  
Imperial War Museum. Early this  
year and was shown his photograph  
I gave them writing of my experience  
which they value.

Your Uncle came  
to us with 12 other Officers. I saw  
him as he arrived. My close pal  
was his Batman. I became Batman  
to one of the others he was also  
killed. We were in outposts the  
German side of Havrincourt Wood  
Myself. The remaining Officer and  
several more were in one post.  
Your Uncle and my close pal in  
another. 2 stretchers B carriers in  
another. The Germans attached.  
The Fusiliers on our right retreated  
shells dropped near us. But as

Luck had it we were missed by  
a few feet, it kept near me  
Had a thumb blown off.  
My Pal, your Uncle Blatman,  
came into our Post when it quieted  
down looking ill and exhausted.  
His Name (Gould) handed me his  
Rifle it was hot. Even he should  
have had a Medal. Lieutenant Young  
made me leave him he said and  
come to our Post. (2) Germans were  
taking our 2 stretchers Bearer prisoners  
from another post. Your Uncle went for  
them shot one and got the other  
in the jaw. Releasing the stretchers  
Bearers they then came to our Post  
one was Paddy Arnold. I forget the name  
of the other. I understood we were  
all considered lost. Your Uncle was  
killed. By a German shell. Engineers  
found his body after we were relieved  
therefor you have now the complete  
story. From the day he came to  
us. I cannot recall. Expedit knee.  
I wonder if he is the third officer.  
I would like to see him if he was  
there at the time. I last year  
went to Hertford but could not  
find the Headquarters or to see  
his V.C. An ...

This fascinating account provides more detail of Frank's heroism that day in releasing two Stretcher Bearers from captivity. However, we are still not sure exactly where this happened along the Herts front lines.

Fortunately, several other accounts exist which can help get a clearer picture of the story and situation that day. The first, and most detailed, comes from the recollections of Lieut H J Knee, of No 3 Company, immediately to the right of No 4 Company, who also wrote about that day some years after the war:

Battalion Headquarters had their dug out in this trench-road. Soon we were ploughing our way northwards but very shortly dropped into a trench which intersected the road and went eastwards through what was known as Femy Wood until we set foot in the great Hindenburg Front Line. The front line here bulged out a bit after rounding the village and our outpost company occupied the most easterly part of the salient. We were support company for a few days and occupied a curious triangular shaped trench, actually two communication trenches connecting Star Trench with Femy Line, with a part of Femy Line for the base of the triangle.

Femy line led up to the outpost system as did Star Trench. The trenches were beautifully constructed with excellent dug outs. Unfortunately the enemy had evacuated his bowels

in the trenches just before leaving and they were therefore somewhat insanitary. The ground rose slightly towards Havrincourt and the Germans on the high ground to the north east of the village, although a mile away, could keep us under observation. Our troops in the outpost, however, held the ridges everywhere and the Boches were at a great disadvantage.

There was much aerial activity. We witnessed the destruction of two of our planes when a squadron returned late one afternoon. Enemy planes got the tail-enders and caused them to crash. We for our part were fortunate enough to bring down a Gotha as it was passing over Havrincourt one night having been on a bombing raid. Caught in the searchlights' rays it was easily discernible and shrapnel could be seen bursting round it. To our great delight a hit was registered and the great bird fell to the ground. We heard afterwards that troops rushed forward as it crashed behind the village and some casualties were caused when the bombs it was carrying exploded.

We moved up into the outpost line which for the most part consisted of a sunken road in which were two immense craters about two hundred yards apart.

Away on the right was Femy Scrub and the Essex were hereabouts for we linked up with them by a liaison post about eighty yards from our right crater. These craters were about twenty or more feet deep and some forty or so feet in diameter - they were pretty big holes, I can tell you. There were two connecting posts well hidden in the sunken road. On the left we held one of those damnable block posts - a good substantial block too - and he was an uncomfortable neighbour in that he threw nasty stick bombs. Another post to the left linked us up with our No. 4 Company.

Down Femy Line, a vile, muddy trench full of corpses, unoccupied and unused, one came to Dead Boche Corner appropriately named by reason of a stiff'un that lay engulfed in the slime where the cross roads met. He lay on his tummy; there was a bayonet wound in his back and he was well and truly trodden on in the dark - I don't know why no instruction was given for his burial. Ugh! it was a nasty foul trench. In one or two spots were to be found fascines dropped by our tanks in November 1917 so that they could surmount the obstacle of a deep and wide trench.

We had a post in a dug out by Dead Boche Corner and had for Company H.Q. a disused Gun Post some hundred yards eastwards and reached by a shallow trench from Femy Line. The ground sloped downwards towards us from the outpost line and we were therefore safe from observation. The Grand Mufti occupied the depths whilst the wallahs located themselves in the disused gun emplacements.

The weather was now set fair . . . . well, there we were all compact and comfortable but a bit doubtful about the position on our right. We had a difficult outpost line to hold, too.

The mist soon rose on high and a bright day followed. About three o'clock enemy artillery began a very heavy strafe of the back areas and before very long our support companies were catching a packet. Then at four he started to bump us, such an intense bombardment that we were properly shaken up and fearful of what would ensue. We all took cover but realizing that there was no officer in the outpost line, Blake - I think it was really his turn - and I made a bolt for the left crater and were getting along well when Blake, his nerves frayed by the bombardment, dropped in a shell-hole saying that it was useless going forward. I expostulated saying it was no good staying there, we must either go on or go back. It was certainly pretty hot but we might just as well have risked going on as brave the dangers of running back. But Blake said "Back!" and away we hared to be told afterward that the odds against our arriving safely were thought to be as high as 100 to 1.

We reached safety properly shaken up. How I have wished since that we had gone on! Medals would have been pinned to our manly bosoms for that day's work for the crater held out and the Sergeant in command had a rare time encouraging his troops to beat back the oncoming enemy.

Now enemy planes appeared and began to sweep our line with M.G. fire. They soared and zoomed overhead and forced us to take cover. There was a large chalk mound just outside the mouth of the dug out and a sentry was posted here to give the alarm when the Boche appeared. Poor devil! It's a wonder he

wasn't smashed to atoms. Shells burst all round him. Once he was tumbled over when a direct hit was registered on the mound and pieces of chalk and fids of shell pinged and zipped everywhere whilst acrid fumes assailed the nostrils. Dazed and terror stricken as he was the lad stuck it out.

By 4.30 p.m. all our wires had been cut and we could only get messages back by runners who behaved splendidly. I forget their names although I think Long - young Long, as we called him - a wee chubby faced boy of nineteen, did good work as did also a lance corporal, a tall thin lad, who was awarded a M.M.

I suppose we had about 20 men round by Coy. H.Q. and two L.G.s and we were determined to give a good account of ourselves if the enemy did come over. At length he was seen on the sunken road and up went our S.O.S. but I doubt if it was observed for there was no artillery response; it went to no height either and was probably obscured by the smoke that hung over us like a pall.

Our L.G.s chattered away and there was spasmodic rifle fire. His rush down the slope was checked and he stopped on the road. Meanwhile his guns almost ceased barking but as a result of a shell exploding some forty yards away a fid ricocheted to where I was standing at the dug out mouth and caught me on the os humerus. I yelped and thought I'd got abesuty. They lugged my tunic off when it was found that I'd only got a flesh wound although the biff had somewhat paralysed my arm and rendered it useless for the time being. I was bandaged up and a sling made for my limb.

The details were panicky so we sang to cheer them up. Our voices tremoloed, you may bet. The enemy appeared to have wiped up the small posts in the sunken road and although there was not the slightest doubt but what he had captured our right crater there seemed to be no enemy movement from the left strong point although L.G.s were speaking hurriedly - and heavy rifle fire was heard. On our immediate left flank there was something doing and we had a feeling that he had penetrated down Pemy Line. Then came a strong attack launched from the right crater but it melted away before our fire "like snow upon the desert's dusty face." Several times he made the attempt but each time he retired to the vasty depths of the crater. Then he tried pushing forward a couple of men at a time but he was at a disadvantage as we could detect the slightest movement and bring our guns to bear on these rushes. A M.G. opened fire from the right crater but we were well covered and suffered no casualties.

He soon had enough and gave up attempting the impossible. Then all was quiet and there came the task of reorganising and endeavouring to find out just what parts of our line the enemy occupied. Fortunately we were assisted in this delicate operation by the arrival of a small party from our left crater with the good news that victory was with them and their casualties few. The two small posts had withdrawn to them and they had three Lewis Guns in action. There was, however, no news to be had of our right crater and our block post No. 5.



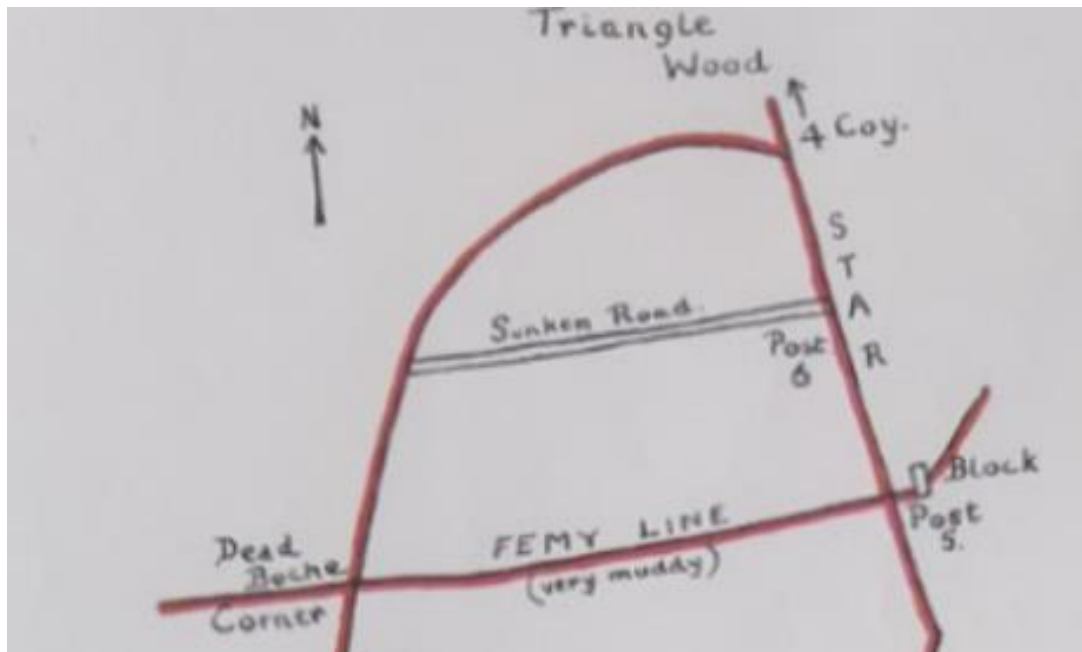
A patrol was sent out to get in touch with the Essex on our right but failed. The enemy were again active in the right crater and tried to get forward but were stopped. Up came some reinforcements but we didn't think it advisable to launch a counter-attack until the position on our right was determined. However, before we tackled this we decided to clear up the vagueness of the position on our left flank. Preceded by a bayonet man and followed by a quartette of good lads I pushed off, arm in sling, revolver in left hand, somewhat fearful of meeting lively opposition. We pushed across to Star Trench and reached the point where a narrow road ran at right angles to join the Femy Line. Here the Trench Mortars hung out and we bumped into a few Tommies - for which we thanked Heaven! - and also a lone Fritz who was finding his way down. (We learnt afterwards that this unfortunate had been successful in putting the wind up a stretcher party taking down a wounded sergeant. So startled were they at meeting Fritz that they dropped their load and took to their heels, imagining that more Fritzes lurked in the background. The wounded sergeant, likewise scared stiff, toddled after until his strength gave out). We directed "grey coat" as best we could and pushed along Star Trench up to No. 4 Coy. Gosh! - he had made a mess of that "communication"! - smashed and pounded it so that we had to walk on top.

Following this summary, we have the single most authoritative testimony of the actual location that Frank was in that day:

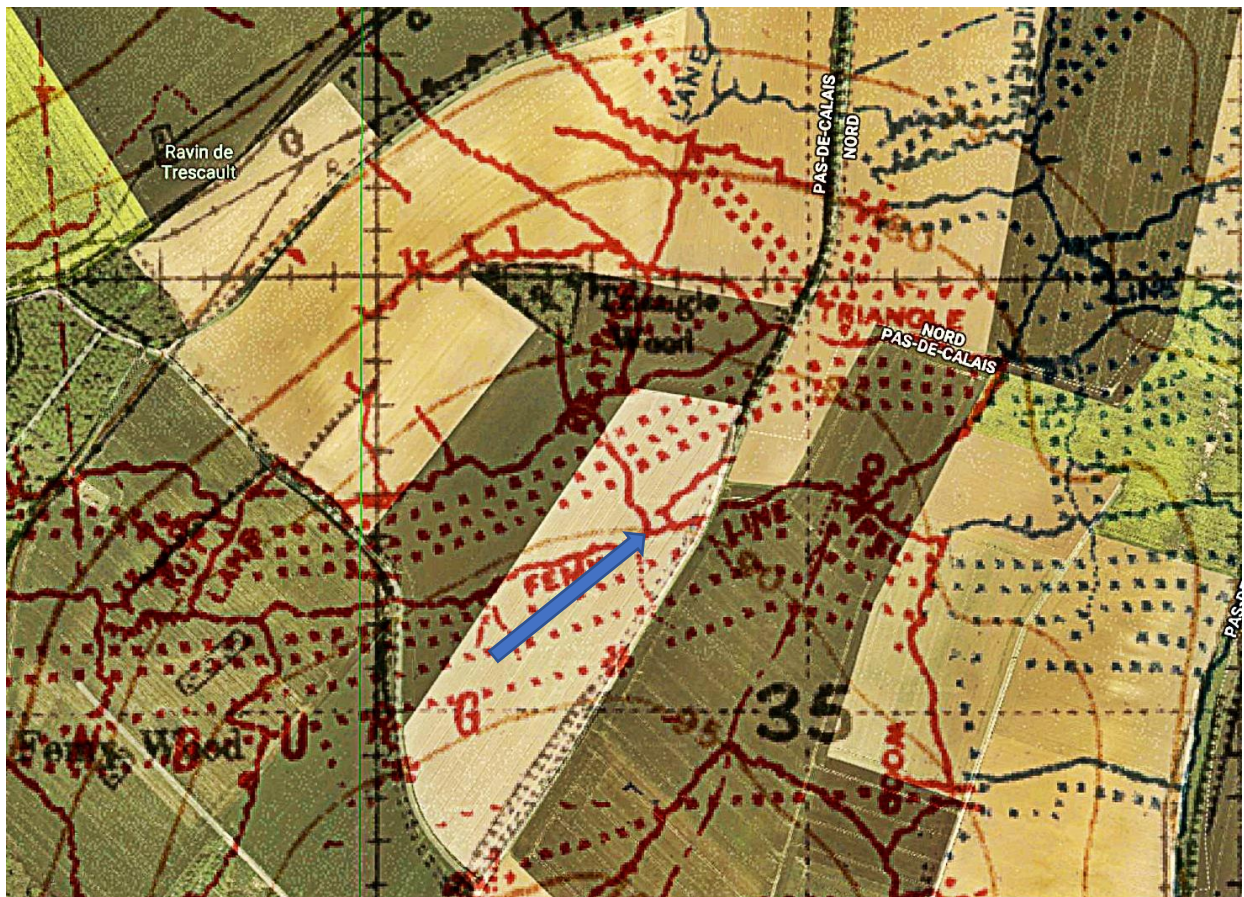
No. 4 Company had taken many prisoners. Casualties were small and they had had very good shooting practice. Our post in Femy Line had been overwhelmed at the first onslaught. Some of its occupants had been taken prisoner but two of them had had a remarkable escape. Lieut Young, son of my first Co. Commander at Tring, and a fine upstanding chap, had scented the danger to our rear if the Boche should be successful in taking our left post. True, Femy was full of glutinous mud, and was not used by us, but still it was not impassable to a determined foe. Young therefore took his stand at the point where the short trench from "Star" joined "Femy", that is, soon after the initial assault.

As I was saying, two of our men, having bunked down Femy Line for a short way, fell into the hands of a couple of Boches and were being piloted back when, as they passed the junction Young sprang out, shot one, bashed the other in the jaw and rescued the No. 3 men who dashed off. On went Young, bombed his way successfully into our captured post, went over the barricade, bombing as he went, and was some forty yards past it before he was most unfortunately shot through the head and killed. His was a very gallant action and had he been supported he could have held our post and saved many valuable lives which were lost later. Dulce et decorum. His body was recovered some days later and was buried at Hermies. The Battalion was honoured when he was posthumously awarded the greatest honour bestowed for gallantry in action. This was the second V.C. won by a Herts man.

Armed with this new information, we can return to the various maps, including one drawn by Knee himself.

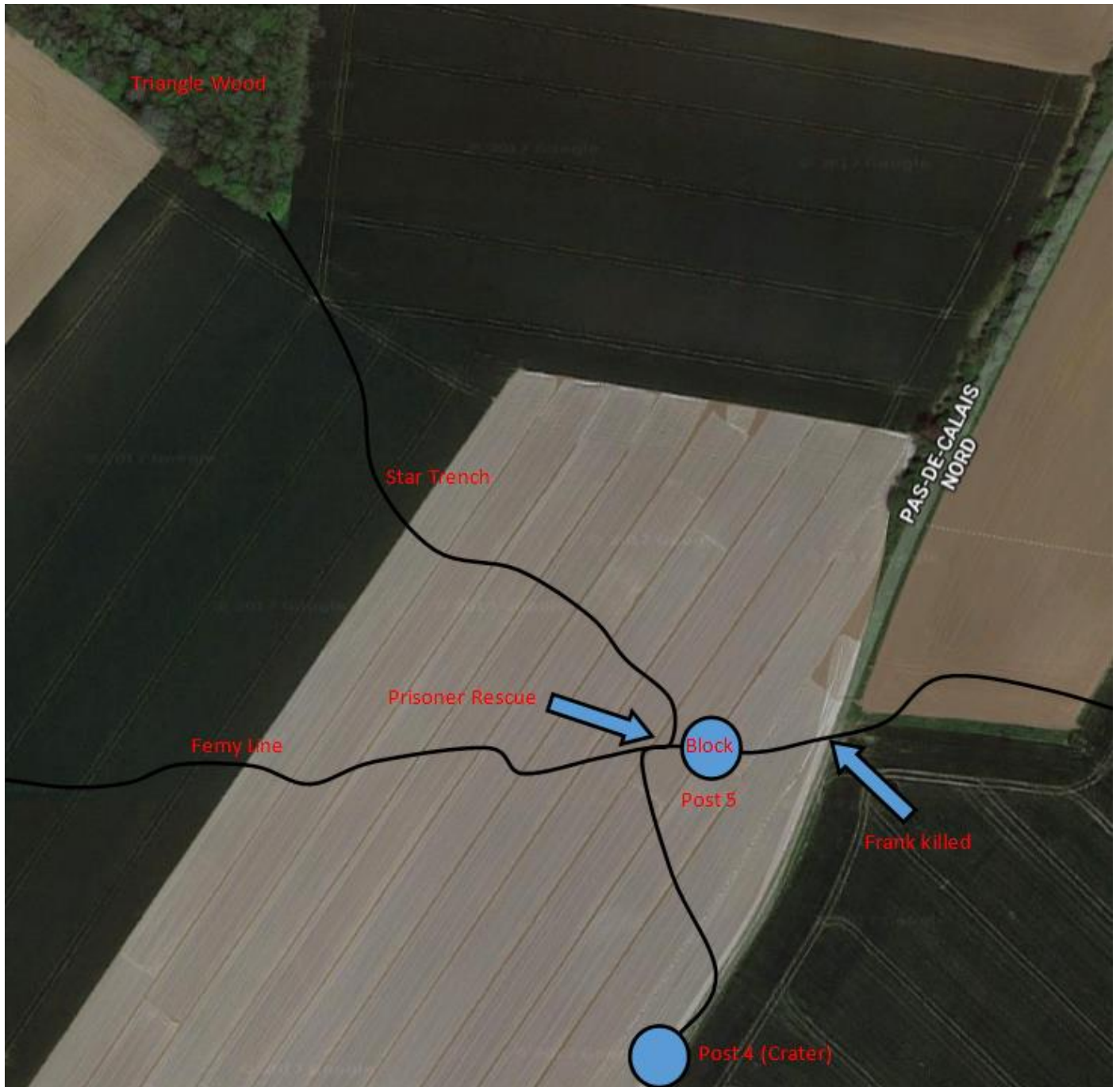


Here, we clearly see the junction between Femy Line and Star Trench, as well as the block over which Frank climbed to continue his counter-attack. It seems likely that the two stretcher bearers were being led eastwards down Femy Trench, back towards the block, when Frank surprised them.



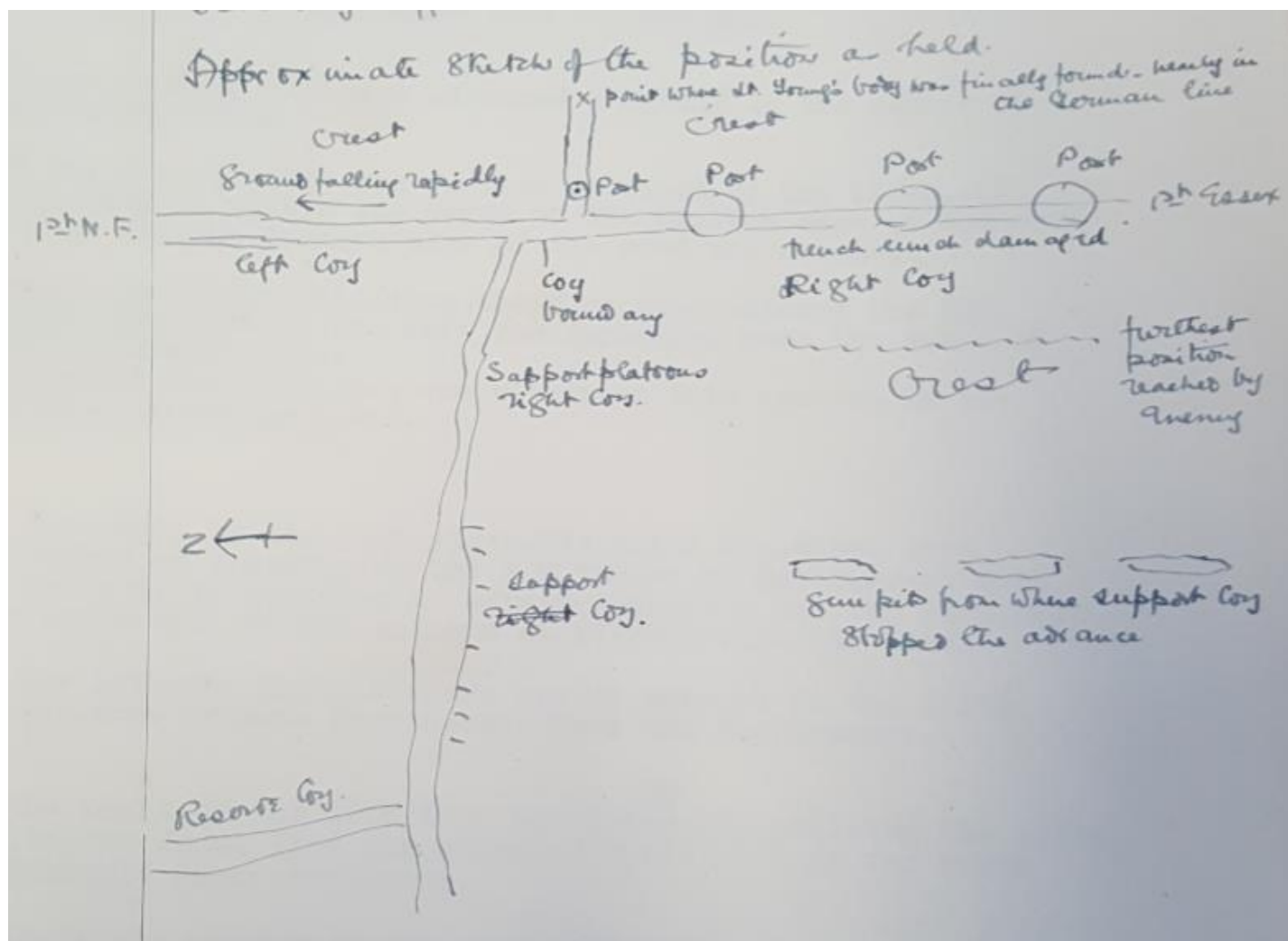
On the previous trench map/satellite overlay, we can identify the correct junction between Femy Line and the (unnamed on the map) Star Trench – blue arrow.

Furthermore, we can take the relevant information contained in the witness testimony and project the trench lines onto a zoomed in version of a modern satellite image and thus identify the location, both of Frank's rescue of the prisoners and probable site of his death.



With the information at hand, it would seem that the above is the most accurate account of Frank's last moments.

Helpfully, and after the previous map had been compiled, a sketch map drawn up by Captain Whitfield, 1<sup>st</sup> Herts, provides the following information. His maps is drawn from the view that the Herts themselves had (north to left, south to right):



The small note towards the top of the page reads 'X point where Lt Young's body was finally found – nearly in the German line'.

This corresponds directly to a position slightly beyond 'Post 5', the barricade block that Frank had leaped prior to his death. With this information at hand, and various corroborating sources, we can finally pinpoint, with certainty, the exact spot where Second Lieutenant Frank Young was killed.



### TRIBUTES OF BROTHER OFFICERS.

We have given above some of the details, in addition to the brief official story, which brother officers have furnished of the happenings in which 2nd-Lieut. Young lost his life and gained the premier military distinction of our Army. The letters of his fellow officers also contain tributes to the young officer's general military and personal worth.

The Commanding Officer of his Battalion, Lieut.-Colonel Heselton, writes:— "He set the finest example of an officer I ever met, and died gloriously fighting to the last."

Major Clerk, D.S.O., M.C., writes:— "All the men of No. 4 Company say that they have never seen anything finer than Frank's work yesterday afternoon. He was magnificent. Always the best bomber of No. 4 Company, he showed that he had not lost his skill. He had impressed everyone during the few days that he was with us."

Major Barber, Quartermaster of the Battalion, writes:— "He had been here only a few days, and it is none the less true that he has left a name that will live for all time in the remarkable records of a very gallant battalion."

Another officer writes:— "There is no doubt that he displayed (as we all knew he would) the greatest coolness and courage in the most trying circumstances, and by his gallant behaviour and example rallied his men and turned a determined Hun counter-attack into a great local British success."

In the annals of the Herts. Regiment, at least, the name of this supremely gallant young man ought to live as long as there is a Herts. Regiment in being.

With the question of where Frank was killed now concluded, we come to the equally difficult question of what happened to Frank's body.

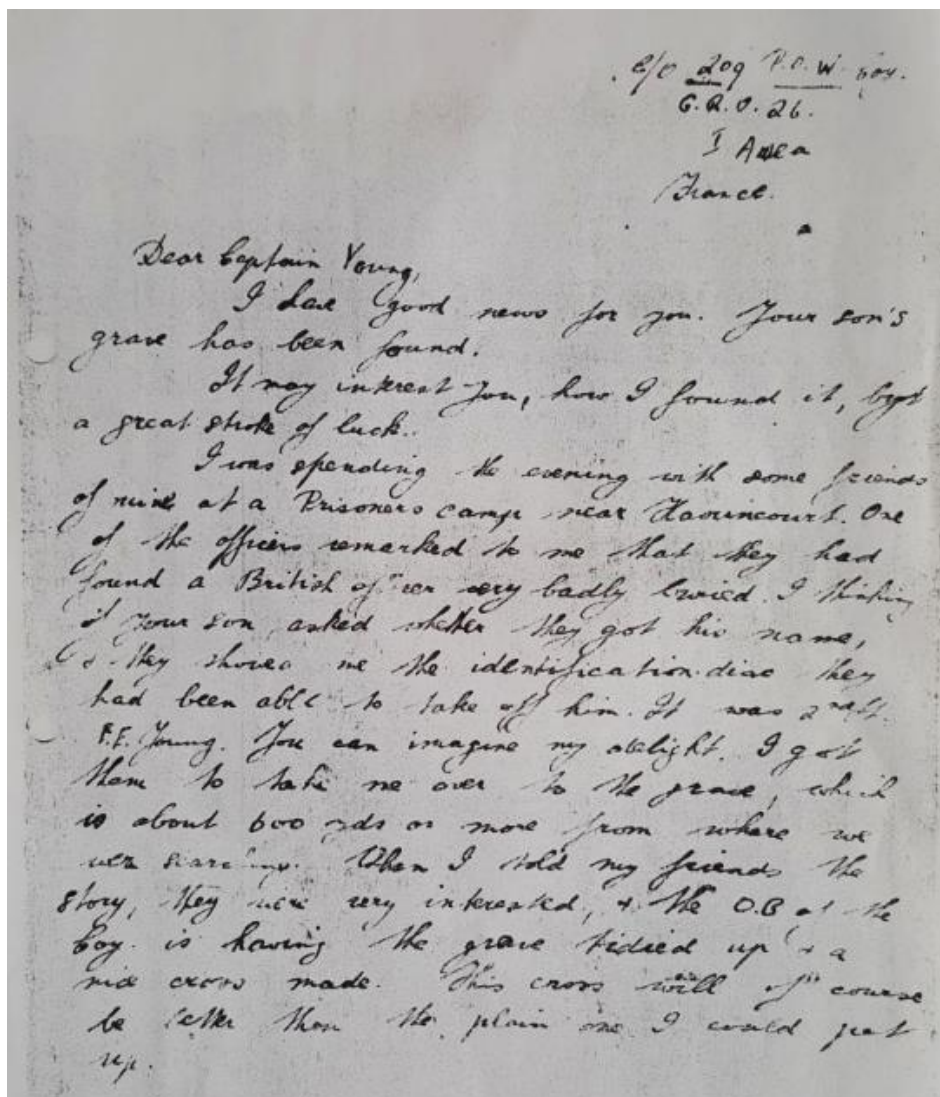
Various sources exist detailing the discovery of Frank's body. Private Harrison stated in his letter in 1979 that Frank's body "was later found by Engineers". What we do know is that initially Frank's body was not seen. Despite the fact that the ground lost had been re-taken within a few days, the uncertainty seems to have continued.

A report states that:

*On 27.09.1918 a party of men from the 1/5<sup>th</sup> Manchester's found Franks body on the edge of Havrincourt Wood. He had been killed by shrapnel wound in the head and his death must have been instantaneous. The party buried the body where they found it and a rough cross was placed over the grave, having identified him from correspondence in his pockets. Those who knew him were not surprised when they heard of his valiant and distinguished end on the battlefield. He was a man not given much to speech but he had a certain quality of simplicity and directness.*

*Whilst it is not known whether it was a unit of Engineers or 1/5<sup>th</sup> Manchesters who first found Frank's body, it was believed to be on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1918. It is however, almost certain that Frank's body had already been moved at this time.*

It appears that at some unknown time Frank's body had been moved, possibly by the Manchesters or by others unknown, to a position further in the rear of the British lines (around 1 mile west). Despite indicating that a cross had been put on Frank's grave, it appears that his identity and burial location had been lost for a period of time until a family friend, an Officer in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Wiltshire Regiment, presumably searching on the request of Frank's father, wrote the following letter to Frank Young Sr:



c/o 209 F.O.W. Coy.  
G.R.O. 26.  
I Area  
France.

Dear Captain Young,  
I have good news for you. Your son's grave has been found.  
It may interest you, how I found it, but a great stroke of luck.  
I was spending the evening with some friends of mine at a Prisoners camp near Havrincourt. One of the officers remarked to me that they had found a British officer very badly buried. I thinking of your son, asked whether they got his name, & they showed me the identification disc they had been able to take off him. It was 2nd Lt. P.E. Young. You can imagine my delight. I got them to take me over to the grave, which is about 600 yds or more from where we were standing. When I told my friends the story, they were very interested, & the O.B. of the boy is having the grave tidied up & a nice cross made. This cross will of course be better than the plain one I could put up.

A short distance from the grave is the position which your son so well defended with the bombs. My friends are going to take a photo of the grave as soon as it is fixed, & also of the bombing position. <sup>They will send you copies.</sup>

I should not have told everybody now badly your poor son was buried, but as you yourself are an officer, I thought it was best to give you facts. Perhaps it is a blessing in disguise that your son was buried badly, as otherwise, we could not have got at the identification disc, which I am enclosing in the letter.

You may rest assured, that within a day or two, the grave will be in a good condition.

If you should be thinking of coming out again, please let me know, & call on me a Kilm, which was the place where I got out of the car, when you were here last.

Yours very sincerely

J. H. Schlund & staff  
Wilt's Bay

Intriguingly, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission recently published files that relate to the burial and re-burial of fallen servicemen, including concentration reports. In Frank's case the report leaves several questions.

Also, notable in previous accounts is that to date, it has been believed that Frank died as a result of a Shrapnel wound to the head. With the new information available, we can fairly confidently say that Frank was in fact shot in the head, not hit by shrapnel, although, of course, this cannot be certain.

HERMES 10.39.E.

CONCENTRATION OF GRAVES (Exhumation and Re-burials).

SUNIAL REVIEW.

Name of Cemetery of Re-burial HERMES HILL BRITISH CEMETARY. 27.10.19.

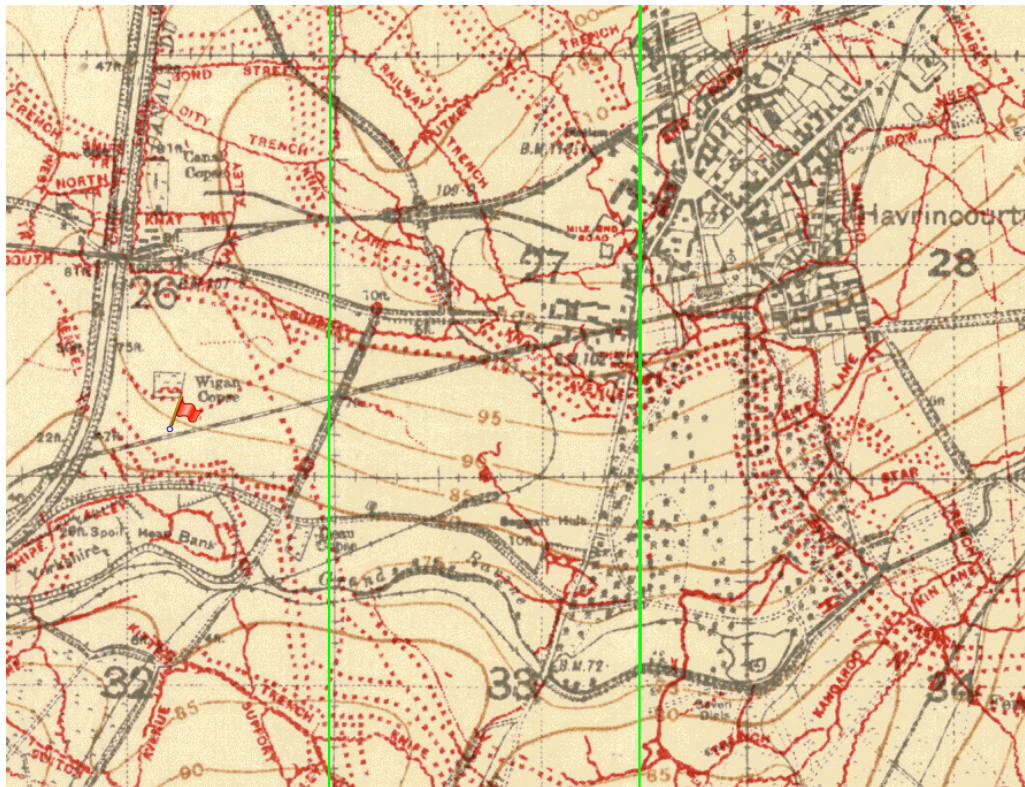
| Plot | Row | Grave | Map Reference where body found. | Was cross on grave? | Regimental particulars.                  | Means of Identification | Were any effects forwarded to Base? |
|------|-----|-------|---------------------------------|---------------------|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 3.   | B.  | 4.    | K.26.d.3.2.                     | No.                 | UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER.                 | Uniform.                | No.                                 |
| "    | "   | 5.    | -do-                            | Yes.                | 2/Lieut Young. "VC". Herts Regt.         | Cross.                  | "                                   |
| "    | "   | 6.    | E.30.c.5.4.                     | No.                 | UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER.                 | Uniform.                | "                                   |
| "    | "   | 7.    | -do-                            | "                   | UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER <sup>s</sup>     | -do-                    | "                                   |
| "    | "   | 8.    | -do-                            | "                   | UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER. R.W.F.          | -do- Funerals.          | "                                   |
| "    | "   | 9.    | -do-                            | "                   | UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER. K.L'pool, Regt. | -do-                    | "                                   |

**CANCELLED BY CERTIFIED REPORT**

Initialed o.g.

10/39 E

This report identifies the exact location of the discovery of Frank's body by a Graves Registration unit. It gives reference K.26.D.3.2 as the location. It also states that he was identified by a cross marking his grave. The location can be traced today to this spot (red flag):





The discovery of Frank's body at this location (at least a mile from where he was killed) is somewhat surprising, and poses questions that today we cannot answer about this movement. Without first-hand accounts, this information could also raise questions about the actual location at which he was killed. Fortunately, the weight of evidence helps us to avoid the possibility, as we can be almost certain that Frank died just beyond the barricade he defended so well. Whatever the reason for the move, we do know that his body was once again discovered, this time by Lieutenant Males of Stevenage, who by now was aware that Frank had earned the Victoria Cross, decided he would like to repatriate Frank's body. His letter to Frank Young Senior states:

"I sought and obtained permission to remove the remains to a more fitting resting place in a certified British Cemetery. This was done by a selected party of our men under my personal supervision. The remains were removed on a limber covered with a Union Jack and re-interred with all the respect due to our gallant Hertfordshire hero in Hermies Hill British Cemetery. The original cross was replaced at the head of the grave and this noble and well-loved officer and soldier now rests in a sacred plot of British ground in the centre of France, surrounded by others of his fellow countrymen"

