

Pvt. George B. French – World War 1



On May 11, 1917, my paternal grandfather, George Bradley French (1898-1983) sailed to London as a Private in the American Expeditionary Force assigned to U.S. Army Base Hospital No. 5, referred to as the Harvard University Base Hospital Unit. Base Hospital No. 5 was one

of six American Expeditionary Forces Base Hospitals loaned to the British Expeditionary Forces for the duration of the First World War. Their first post was with the British Expeditionary Forces at Camiers, fifteen miles south of Boulogne on the coast of France. In the six months Base Hospital No. 5 was stationed in Camiers they treated over 15,000 cases, with 3,000 patients in June 1917 alone.

Despite being miles behind enemy lines and clearly marked as a hospital, the Base was not exempt from danger. On the night of September 4th, a Imperial German Air Service heavy Gotha bomber flew over the Camiers area and dropped a succession of seven bombs, five of them being direct hits in Base Hospital No. 5's compound resulting in several deaths and injuries (P. 44 – [The Story of Base Hospital #5](#))

[The Bombing of the Harvard Base Hospital](#) (U.S. National Library of Medicine)

In October 1917, the hospital would move to Bolougne, where it

remained until the end of the war.

FRENCH, GEORGE B., Private, First Class. Enlisted with Unit, Boston,
May 7, 1917. Invalided to U.S. September 23, 1918.
Address: New York City.

From the Story of Base Hospital #5
GEORGE FRENCH *Boston, Mass.*

A young blond chap who helped Ronnie King to run the reception tent for the first months in Camiers. However, the young man set out to capture a record and tried to corral all the P. U. O. bugs in France. So, he spent most of his time in the hospital, and was eventually invalided home.

PUO – Pyrexia Unknown Origin or referred to as trench fever. It took the military months before being able to identify a vector, the louse, which was later proved to transmit the disease. Recovery was slow, often lasting months. According to medical studies, fever associated with PUO had a peculiar characteristic in that it would break after five or six days, but then climb again several days later. This cycle might be repeated as many as eight times. Poor George.



Help Me – Is that George?

This [photograph](#), entitled U.S. Base Hospital No.5 – London, is in the collection of the Littleborough (England) History Centre. On the back of the photograph is an address:

Pte. A Simpson, US Base Hospital Unit 5, c/o Sir Alfred Keough, War Dept, London

I confirmed that Albert E. Simpson was a Private-1st Class in this unit and that in transit to France, the unit was in London. I was able to match the identities of several of the soldiers in the photo with those in the unit history. I think that George is also in the photo, standing to the left of the local man near the top of the stairs. As a comparison, below is a photo of George taken several years later shown from a similar angle (check out the forehead, nose and eyes). I am waiting to see another photo of George in uniform that is in possession of his daughter, Barbara.

Comments/Reviews Appreciated!

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